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## We Should Mind Iraq's Business

By Laurie Mylroie

**T**he Bush Administration's attitude toward a successor to Saddam Hussein in Iraq is mistakenly vague, creating the impression that the Arab coalition partners have been left to sort it out with the Iraqis. The U.S. has even avoided the usual platitudes about the desirability of democracy. This suggests that deference is being paid to the undemocratic sensibilities of the Saudi monarchy and that the preferred outcome is another, though tamer, military regime in Baghdad. More urgently, the lack of a clear American stand is only making it easier for Saddam Hussein, despite defeat, to resume the brutal repression of his own people.

The Administration needs to state its preference clearly, and that should be a transition to democratic government. We won the war; why shouldn't we have a say in the peace? That does not mean military intervention, but rather a U.N. role in overseeing a change of political

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Use the U.N.  
to promote  
democracy.

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systems. To declare, as a State Department spokesman, Richard Boucher, did yesterday that "questions of

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government and the future of Saddam Hussein are for the Iraqi people to decide" is a heartless expression of diplomatic diffidence, given that Iraqi Kurds and Shiites are being killed by Republican Guards.

Not only is support for a democratic transition the most principled position but it holds out the most practical prospect for containing Iraq's strong tendencies to come apart — forces that any dictatorship in Baghdad will find hard to control.

Saudi Arabia and Syria are promoting their favorite figures among the diverse Iraqi exiles. Some names raised as Saudi-backed candidates for Iraqi leader are laughable. Among them is Ibrahim Daoud, the gullible army officer who led the 1968 coup that brought Mr. Hussein's Baath Party to power. His fellow conspirators immediately ousted him, and he has lived in exile ever since.

The unrest among the Shiites in the south and the Kurds in the north raises the question of whether any dictator can rule Iraq for long. Though the Republican Guards may be putting down the insurrection in the south, it remains to be seen whether the Iraqi ruler commands enough loyal troops to suppress the Shiites and Kurds simultaneously.

Iraq could conceivably split into three sectors, with Baghdad controlling only the center of the country. Some Arab members of the allied coalition fear this would create a perilous power vacuum. The U.S. response should be to call for U.N. help in overseeing elections in Iraq.

If Baghdad's authority in the north collapses, the Kurds are well-positioned to administer the area as an autonomous region. Even the Turks, fearful of Kurdish nationalism, may not oppose this, so long as the area is part of an Iraqi federation.

Southern Iraq is more worrisome. The Shiite rebellion appears sponta-

neous, affected only marginally by Iran. Many Shiites are anti-Persian, and the uprising is more against Mr. Hussein than a call for Islamic rule. Still, Iranian-backed Iraqi fundamentalists could assert authority solely because they are organized.

If rebellions in Iraq cause the country to split into autonomous regions run respectively by Shiites, Kurds and Baghdad Sunnis, the forces that emerge should be considered transitional regimes whose purpose is to maintain order for a fixed time. The U.N. Security Council consensus that authorized the gulf war could be maintained to help reconstitute Iraq. Economic aid could be conditioned on the establishment of some form of constitutional government in each area and eventual federation of the three regions.

By itself, the U.S. is scarcely able to control the results of this war. But making it clear now that democracy is essential may help avert disaster later. □