What Kind of Peace? _____

_Daniel Pipes _____

IN THE EXCITEMENT accompa-
nying the liberation of Kuwait,
dramatic issues concerning mili-
tary and diplomatic tactics have eclipsed
larger questions of policy. This results from a
combination of rapidly changing circum-
stances and the euphoria of an unexpectedly
easy victory. But even as Americans cele-
brate, it is important that they prepare for a
less bloody yet possibly more difficult under-
taking—the political struggle to win the
peace. There are two main reasons for believ-
ing that the U.S. government will find it hard
to translate military victory over Iraq into a
lasting political success.

First, traditional American instincts in
time of war militate against the delineation of
a long-term strategy. Americans see war not
as a continuation of diplomacy, but as its
replacement. We tend to believe that war
should be used only as a last resort. (For the
same reason, American generals and admirals
have often preferred to have nothing to do
with policy issues, believing that they have
no role during time of war.) We have a
tradition of wanting total war, regardless of
political considerations. Moreover, our lead-
ers often let emotions hold sway, with expen-
sive consequences. It was gratifying in World
War II to impose unconditional surrender on

_____
Daniel Pipes, director of the Foreign Policy Re-
    search Institute, taught strategy at the U.S.
    Naval War College.

the Germans. But this indulgence extended
the war, cost innumerable lives, and permit-
ted the Soviets to grab Eastern Europe.

The second reason for concern about
American planning regards the specifics of
the war with Iraq. The build-up to the war
included little thinking about long-term
goals. By all accounts, the hurly-burly of
managing the Gulf Crisis—formulating a re-
sponse, building a coalition, holding it to-
gether, exploring diplomatic options, devis-
ing a war plan, and winning domestic
support—prevented the president and his ad-
visers from thinking much about the aims of
the enterprise.

This vacuum became embarrassingly ev-
ident when President Bush addressed the
country just two hours after launching the
war. Speaking to the largest American audi-
ence in television history, he used the occa-
sion only to go over familiar territory, justi-
fying the administration's actions and
explaining why war was necessary. He did
not define U.S. goals or describe the circum-
stances in which American troops would be
brought home. At a news conference on
January 19, the president further revealed the
vagueness of his thinking. Asked what he
hoped the war would accomplish, he replied:
"When this is all over we want to be the
healers, we want to do what we can to
facilitate what I might optimistically call a
new world order." This alarming statement,
heavy with mystical and even New Age

overtones, seemed to confirm an absence of serious political and military analysis.

When the administration finally got around to articulating its goals, the results remained too vague to be operational. On February 5, Secretary of State Baker offered five desiderata for the Middle East—a new security arrangement, an arms-control agreement, a program of economic reconstruction, a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and a reduction of American dependence on Persian Gulf oil—but he offered no specifics and, like Bush, indulged in pie-in-the-sky talk of achieving "real reconciliation based on enduring respect, tolerance and mutual trust" between the Arabs and Israel.[1]

Outsiders offered variant lists of U.S. goals. Marvin Feuerwerger of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy published six points of an "essential framework" to win the peace; Representative Lee Hamilton of Indiana presented a seven-point "agenda" to achieve stability in the Middle East; and so forth. But none of these lists answered the two basic questions: How can the war against Iraq best be made to serve American national interests? And what military strategy best advances those interests?

THE OVERRIDING American interest in the Gulf is stability. The factors which prompted the U.S. engagement—the threat to oil, the build-up of nonconventional offensive capabilities, the unacceptable precedent, the humanitarian catastrophe—point to the need for quiet and security. Once stability is achieved, other desirable goals like low oil prices, a more equitable sharing of the petro-wealth, and democratic elections can be addressed. Translated into specifics, stability implies the territorial integrity of Iraq; as moderate and non-bellicose a government in Baghdad as possible; a balance between Iraqi and Iranian power; the al-Sabah dynasty's return to Kuwait; and the future security of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the other per-capita income giants.

How can the war that began in mid-January lead to stability? The allies' overwhelming military superiority offers a choice from an unusually wide range of options; picking the right one is not easy. After the liberation of Kuwait, what next? Merely reduce Iraq's offensive threat (the huge army and the Republican Guard)? Destroy the nonconventional capabilities (the chemical weapons and missiles, the biological and nuclear facilities)? Topple Saddam Hussein? Eliminate the Ba'ath regime? Establish a democratic government? Occupy Iraq? Divide the country among its neighbors?

The American instinct, honed by over fifty years' experience, is to go for total war, total victory, and military occupation. (This explains why official American thinking often portrayed an orderly Iraqi retreat from Kuwait as a "nightmare scenario.") Occupation entails a complete overhaul of the defeated country's institutions, with American forces staying on until a new leadership has been fostered. To guarantee the defeated country's security, a military alliance is formed with the United States. Germany and Japan underwent this process on the grandest scale; more recently and more modestly, it was the turn of Grenada and Panama. The familiarity and past successes of the total-victory-and-occupation model make it popular; *Time* reported on February 4 that 72 percent of Americans sought an unconditional Iraqi surrender, while 92 percent insisted on Saddam's removal from power. President Bush's semi-explicit goals—unconditional surrender, Saddam's ouster, and the formation of a new government—also pointed to this model.

How would total victory fare in Iraq? Here we leave the lofty heights of strategic planning and confront the hard realities of Persian Gulf politics. The unhappy truth is that a military occupation of Iraq lasting for

---

[1] Nor had anyone else from the administration filled the lacuna by the time of this writing in late February.

more than some months would probably lead to one of the great disasters in American foreign policy.

This dire prediction is prompted by a sense of the region's political culture, especially the attitudes fostered by Islam. Much has been said about Islam's impact on politics and how this shapes attitudes toward American soldiers in the Gulf, but for our purposes three quick points are worth making. First, Islam emphasizes a world divided between Muslims and non-Muslims, with other considerations (language, geography, skin color) being far less important. Second, the law of Islam requires Muslim self-rule; when non-believers have sovereignty over believers, Muslims usually find the situation intolerable and instability results. Finally, Middle Eastern Muslims have exceptionally acute sensitivities about Muslim rulers serving as the agents of Western powers; indeed, the puppeteer's strings are commonly discerned where they do not exist.

For these and other reasons, the Iraqi populace can be counted on to resent a predominantly American occupying force. Occupying troops would find themselves victimized by suicide attackers, car bombers, and other acts of terror; the scene in Iraq would recall, on a much grander scale, the depredations suffered by the multinational forces in Lebanon during 1983–84. The Syrian and Iranian governments would actively sabotage the foreign presence (again, as they did in Lebanon). The populations of Saudi Arabia and Egypt would probably force their governments to turn against their non-Muslim allies. As the ignominy of sniper fire buried the prestige of high-tech military superiority, the famous victory achieved by Tomahawks, Tornadoes, and Patriots would quickly become a dim memory. The brilliant General Schwarzkopf would turn into a humiliated Schwarzkopf Pasha.

Were large numbers of U.S. troops to remain in Saudi Arabia, results would be nearly as bad. Even though President Bush seems to have ruled this out ("U.S. forces will leave as soon as their mission is over"),

the temptation remains. When Secretary Baker first spoke of a "security structure" for the Persian Gulf, it sounded like another attempt at a Middle Eastern NATO. This has been tried before (Eisenhower's Baghdad Pact, Reagan's "strategic consensus") and it has always failed. As Henry Kissinger correctly noted in congressional testimony in November 1990, the contrast with Western Europe and South Korea, where American troops have been stationed for forty years, is profound: "There, American forces contributed to domestic stability; in Saudi Arabia they would threaten it."

The phobia about non-Muslim forces makes the Middle East fundamentally different from other foreign regions in which the United States has fought large-scale wars; it presents the greatest single obstacle to American efforts to stabilize the region. These considerations lead me to conclude that the first imperative of U.S. strategy is not to keep large numbers of American ground troops for long periods in the Persian Gulf region. There must be no American occupation of Iraq, no NATO-like alliance with the Saudis and Kuwaitis, no permanent military bases in their countries.

This said, Muslim antagonism toward non-Muslim powers is far from absolute. Turkey has been a staunch member of NATO for forty years, while a network of discreet alliances tie Muslims from Morocco and Indonesia to Washington. However strong the elemental Islamic antagonism, countervailing influences also exist, and need to be taken into account. Cultural proclivities have their limits as indicators of political behavior; ideologies count too, as do interests. In addition, several other factors are currently important in the Gulf region.

First, a mood of apathy prevails in the Arabic-speaking countries. It has been many years since their populations have been willing to give up their lives for abstract causes; they take matters into their own hands only when an issue is of direct personal concern. Arabs are so prone to riot against currency adjustments, subsidy cuts,

and other austerity reforms—as shown by disturbances in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, the Sudan, and Jordan—that they have earned a reputation at the IMF for an unwillingness to tolerate the most modest economic adjustments. But symbolic causes are another matter. By now, Arabs are a much-disappointed people, stuck in what Hisham Sharabi terms a condition of "paralyzing trauma."

Second, today's regimes have immense coercive power despite their crises of legitimacy. While Iraq has the most notoriously repressive apparatus in the Middle East, comparable institutions exist in nearly all Arabic-speaking countries. Even such apparently fragile governments as those of Saudi Arabia and Jordan engage in what Michael Hudson has dubbed "monarchy by *mukhabarat* [security apparatus]." Their power permits considerable leeway in pursuing unpopular policies.

Finally, there is a deep respect for the winner, indicated in a revealing Arab proverb: "Kiss the hand you cannot bite." Today, that is the American hand. Far from being enraged at Washington's victory over Iraq, Arabs will respect it for doing what it threatened—at least for a while. But this respect will dissipate. It might happen slowly (the West Bank under Israeli rule remained quiescent for twenty years) or quickly (the Israelis received a hero's welcome in southern Lebanon in 1982 and despairingly fled just three years later).

Assuming allied forces prevail, the U.S. government can count on a period of months, but not much more, to stabilize the Persian Gulf. Washington must seize its moment of great but transient influence; it should not squander this opportunity by haring off to another issue. The point bears making, for Western analysts widely agree that the postwar period provides the ideal setting to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Henry Kissinger sees victory in the Gulf as "a historic opportunity" to deal with this issue; the usually sensible *Economist* goes so far as to argue that "America's main job in the post-

war Middle East will be to act as honest broker between Israel and the Palestinians." Douglas Hurd, the British foreign secretary, has promised a return to the Palestinian issue "with renewed vigor" once the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait is over; the French government is even more eager for linkage. Saudi and Egyptian authorities see the Palestinian cause as the ideal vehicle to burnish their national credentials; and, if past patterns hold, the U.S. government will not resist Saudi pressure.[2] Indeed, as early as October 1990, President Bush signaled some willingness to link the two issues.

But this would be a terrible error. A precipitous turn of attention from Iraq and Kuwait to the Arab-Israeli conflict would forfeit a rare chance to overhaul the politics of a key region. It would be like neglecting Germany and Japan in late 1945 to solve the Irish problem. Actually, something like this happened in 1982, when Washington's inability to keep its eyes off the West Bank led to the loss of a unique chance in Lebanon. Here is the story:

ISRAEL had attained its goals in Lebanon by the end of August 1982—getting the PLO out, reducing Syrian military strength, having a friendly government installed. Although these were Israeli achievements, not American ones, Israel's close association with the United States caused U.S. prestige to soar in tandem with Israel's. Washington could have seized that moment to restructure the Lebanese polity by changing the communal balance of the government,

---

[2]Two regimes, those of Saudi Arabia and China, enjoy a uniquely privileged place in American foreign policy. Although both have repeatedly proved themselves unfriendly to U.S. interests and values, Washington illogically feels indebted to them. In the present crisis, such sentiments translate into official U.S. gratitude to the Saudis for allowing American troops on their territory to crush Saddam. This in turn may lead Washington to put the squeeze on Israel.

carefully reducing the Christians' power in favor of the Muslims.[3]

Instead, Washington pushed Lebanese issues to the side. Noting that the Lebanon War "has left us with a new opportunity," President Reagan on September 1, 1982 offered a plan to resolve the West Bank conundrum, suggesting Palestinian association with Jordan. King Hussein of Jordan mulled over the idea for seven months, then decided against it. Rebuffed, Secretary of State George Shultz returned his attention to Lebanon, but by then American diplomacy no longer could prevail. The Syrian military was again strong and a new Lebanese president had taken office. Shultz prodded the Lebanese and Israelis into ending the war between their two countries; but his victory was Pyrrhic. Less than a year after the May 17, 1983 agreement was signed, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad had forced the Lebanese government to renounce it. Washington had missed a fleeting chance to make a difference in Lebanon.

Eight years later, this unhappy episode has sunk down the memory hole. The Bush administration appears ready to travel the same path—skipping from Iraq, the problem of the moment, to the Israeli-Palestinian morass. Yet, it plainly makes no sense to ignore Iraq just as a very costly investment is about to pay off. Moreover, shunting aside the relatively simple problem in the Persian Gulf in favor of the notorious difficulties a thousand miles to the west is illogical. But then, as Irving Kristol has observed, "Whom the gods would destroy they first tempt to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict."

CLEARLY, the U.S. government should concentrate on the Persian Gulf. Planners should consider these specific steps in pursuing American interests:
• Explicitly affirm the territorial integrity of Iraq within its present borders and impress this commitment on potential aggressors (Syria, Turkey, Iran).
• Announce that the U.S. does not intend to

bring down Saddam. This step, however distasteful, has two major virtues: it renders much less likely an American occupation of Iraq and it enables a new ruler of Iraq to establish himself as an independent figure—and not just an agent of the U.S.
• Announce a willingness to deal with the Ba'ath Party. Having liquidated alternative leaderships (with the single exception of the Kurds, who cannot rule Iraq), the Ba'athists cannot readily be replaced. Ousting them probably implies an occupation of Iraq by American and allied forces—or, in their absence, by the Iranians.
• Insist that the Iraqi government reduce its armed forces to about 200,000 soldiers, enough to defend the country from its neighbors but not to act aggressively.
• To assure this diminution of Iraqi power, reach an agreement with allies about maintaining a military embargo after the war. Because the allies might default on their promises, keep the open option of further military action.
• Plan for a speedy reduction of American and other non-Muslim troops from the Persian Gulf. No more than 50,000 or so infidels should remain in the region.
• To deter future Iraqi or Iranian aggression, initiate discussions with Muslim leaders about their forming a multinational force in the Gulf.

Some of these steps are counterintuitive and others are painful or difficult to achieve. But all are necessary if America is to emerge from the Kuwait Crisis with gains commensurate with its sacrifices.□

---

[3]This is what the Syrians eventually pulled off in the Ta'if Accord of 1988. Back in late 1982, when I was working on the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department, I proposed such a plan to the U.S. government. So thoroughly was this idea rebuffed that I readily received permission to publish my idea as an article. (It appeared in the Summer 1983 issue of *Foreign Policy*.)