

# WHY WE ARE STUCK IN THE SAND

Realpolitik in the Gulf: A game gone tilt  
By *Christopher Hitchens*

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It can be amusing to look up some of Saddam's former fans. Allow me to open for you the April 27, 1987, issue of *The New Republic*, where we find an essay engagingly entitled "Back Iraq," by Daniel Pipes and Laurie Mylroie. These two distinguished Establishment interpreters, under the unavoidable subtitle "It's time for a U.S. 'tilt,'" managed to anticipate the recent crisis by more than three years. Sadly, they got the name of the enemy wrong:

The fall of the existing regime in Iraq would enormously enhance Iranian influence, endanger the supply of oil, threaten pro-American regimes throughout the area, and upset the Arab-Israeli balance.

But they always say that, don't they, when the think tanks start thinking tanks? I could go on, but mercy forbids—though neither mercy nor modesty has inhibited Pipes from now advocating, in stridently similar terms, the prompt obliteration of all works of man in Iraq.

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## In the Sand Trap

Christopher Hitchens, that sly fellow, is up to his usual tricks. He contrasts a 1987 article in which Laurie Mylroie and I advocated support for Iraq with my recent writings arguing that the West stop Saddam Hussein before he becomes an even greater menace. This, Hitchens implies, is inconsistent.

Is it? In 1987 Ayatollah Khomeini was still alive, and his troops were inside Iraq. Had they succeeded in overrunning Baghdad, much of the Middle East could have fallen under the sway of an especially aggressive and intolerant form of Islam. Saddam Hussein, for all his faults, prevented such a disaster.

By 1990, however, the Iran-Iraq war had ended, Khomeini had died, Iranian revolutionaries were absorbed

with domestic problems, and Saddam had gone from invaded to invader. Am I illogical to suppose that changed circumstances permit changed policies? Or would Hitchens have my 1987 views bind me eternally to Saddam?

The same logic, incidentally, would have compelled the U.S. government to refuse to help Stalin against Hitler or to keep subsidizing Moscow into the 1950s and beyond. Times change.

Besides, as a leftist in 1991 figuring out what went wrong, Hitchens knows far more about the subject of unapologetically changing one's views than do I.

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*Christopher Hitchens replies: Mr. Pipes fails to notice that I took care to criticize not the inconsistency but the dismal consistency of his positions, which have always oscillated strictly according to the requirements of power.*