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Winning the War**But don't forget the rules of the strange conflict!**by Victor Davis Hanson
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If we look back at the war that started on September 11, there have emerged some general rules that should guide us in the next treacherous round of the struggle against Islamic fascism, the autocracies that aid and abet it, and the method of terror that characterizes it.

1. *Political promises must be kept.* Had the United States postponed the scheduled January elections in Iraq — once the hue and cry of Washington insiders — the insurrection would have waxed rather than waned. Only the combination of U.S. arms, the training of indigenous forces, and real Iraqi sovereignty can eliminate the vestiges of hard-core jihadists and Saddamites.

Given our previous record — allowing Saddam to survive in 1991, restoring the Kuwaiti royals after the Gulf War, subsidies for the Mubarak autocracy, and a moral pass given the Saudi royals — we must bank carefully any good will that we accrue if support for democracy is going to be a credible alternative to the old realpolitik. Reformers with no power in Egypt or the Gulf, who oppose such “moderate” autocracies, must, despite all the danger that such a policy entails, be seen in the same positive light as those dissidents in far more peril in Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. Consistency and principle are the keys, and they will be worth more than a division or an air wing in bringing this war to a close.

2. *Any warnings to use force — much less unfortunate unguarded braggadocio — should be credible and followed through.* The efforts of the terrorists are aimed at the psychological humiliation and loss of face of American power, not its actual military defeat. Appearance is as often important as reality, especially for those who live in the eighth rather than the 21st century.

After the horrific butchery of Americans in Fallujah in late March 2004, we promised to hunt down the perpetrators, only to pull back in April and May, and allow the city a subsequent half-year of Islamic terror, before retaking it in November. The initial hesitation almost derailed the slated elections; the subsequent siege ensured their success. Nothing has been more deleterious in this war than the promise of hard force to come, followed by temporization. Either silence about our intent or bold military action is required, though a combination of both is preferable.

3. *Diplomatic solutions follow, not precede, military reality.* Had we failed in Afghanistan, Musharraf would be an Islamic nationalist today, for the sake of his own survival. Withdrawing from Iraq in defeat would have meant no progress in Lebanon. Some hope followed in the Middle East only because the Intifada was crushed and Arafat is in paradise. The Muslims scholars of Iraq talk differently now than a year ago because thousands of their sympathetic terrorists have been killed in the Sunni Triangle. The would-be Great Mahdi Moqtada Sadr is more buffoon than Khomeini reborn since his militia was crushed last year.

A quarter century, from the Iranian hostage-taking to 9/11, should have taught us the wages of thinking that an Arafat, bin Laden, assorted hostage-takers, an Iranian mullah, Saddam, or Mullah Omar might listen to a reasoned diplomat in striped pants. Our mistake was not so much that appeasement and empty threats made no impression on such cutthroats. The real tragedy instead was that onlookers who wished to ally with us shuddered that the United States either would talk to, or keep its hands off, almost any monster or mass murderer in the Middle East — if such accommodation meant sort of a continuation of the not so bothersome status quo. In contrast, that bin Laden and Mullah Omar are in hiding, Saddam in chains, Dr. Khan exposed, the young Assad panicking, and Colonel Khadafi on better behavior will slowly teach others the wages of their killing and terrorism and that the United States is as unpredictable in using force as it is constant in supporting democratic reformers.

4. *The worst attitude toward the Europeans and the U.N. is publicly to deprecate their impotent machinations while enlisting their aid in extremis.* After being slurred by both, we then asked for their military help, peace-keepers, and political intervention — winning no aid of consequence except contempt in addition to inaction.

Praise the U.N. and Europe to the skies. Yet under no circumstances pressure them to do what they really don't want to, which only leads to their gratuitous embarrassment and the logical need to get even in the most petty and superficial ways. The U.N. efforts to retard the American removal of Saddam interrupted the timetable of invasion. Its immediate flight after having its headquarters bombed emboldened the terrorists. And a viable U.S. coalition was caricatured by its failed obsequious efforts to lure in France and Germany. We should look to the U.N. and Old Europe only in times of post-bellum calm when it is in the national interest of the United States to give credit for the favorable results of our own daring to opportunistic others — occasions that are not as rare as we might think.

5. *Do not look for logic and consistency in the Middle East where they are not to be found.* It makes no sense to be frustrated that Arab intellectuals and reformers damn us for removing Saddam and simultaneously praise democratic rumblings that followed his fall. We should accept that the only palatable scenario for the Arab Street was one equally fanciful: Brave demonstrators took to the barricades, forced Saddam's departure, created a constitution, held elections, and then invited other Arab reformers into Baghdad to spread such

indigenous reform — all resulting in a society as sophisticated, wealthy, free, and modern as the West, but felt to be morally superior because of its allegiance to Islam. That is the dream that is preferable to the reality that the Americans alone took out the monster of the Middle East and that any peaceful protest against Saddam would have ended in another genocide.

Ever since the departure of the colonials, the United States, due to its power and principled support for democratic Israel, has served a Middle Eastern psychological need to account for its own self-created impotence and misery, a pathology abetted by our own past realpolitik and nurtured by the very autocrats that we sought to accommodate.

After all these years, do not expect praise or gratitude for billions poured into Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, or Palestine or thanks for the liberation of Kuwait, protection of Saudi Arabia in 1990, or the removal of Saddam — much less for American concern for Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Somalia, the Sudan, or Afghanistan. *Our past sins always must be magnified as much as our more recent benefactions are slighted.*

In response, American policy should be predicated not on friendship or the desire for appreciation, but on what is in our national interest and what is right — whose symbiosis is possible only through the current policy of consistently promoting democracy. Constitutional government is not utopia — only the proper antidote for the sickness in the Middle East, and the one medicine that hateful jihadists, dictators, kings, terrorists, and theocrats all agree that they alike hate.

The events that followed September 11 are the most complex in our history since the end of World War II, and require far more skill and intuition than even what American diplomats needed in the Cold War, when they contained a nuclear but far more predictable enemy. Since 9/11 we have endured a baffling array of shifting and expedient pronouncements and political alliances, both at home and abroad. So we now expect that most who profess support for democratization abroad do so only to the degree that — and as long as — the latest hourly news from Iraq is not too bad.

One of the most disheartening things about this war is the realization that on any given day, a number of once-stalwart supporters will suddenly hedge, demand someone's resignation, or bail, citing all sorts of legitimate grievances without explaining that none of their complaints compares to past disappointments in prior successful wars — and without worry that the only war in which America was defeated was lost more at home than abroad.

Yet if we get through all this with the extinction of Islamic-fascist terrorism and an end to the Middle East autocracy that spawned and nurtured it — and I think we are making very good progress in doing just that and in less than four years — it will only be because of the superb quality of the American military and the skilful diplomacy of

those who have so temperately unleashed it.

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