

in sympathy with Churchill, who was obliged to resign as first lord of the Admiralty when the project failed. I felt that way chiefly because I sensed Churchill was playing straight with his readers. That, as Orwell, no admirer of Churchill's larger politics, once wrote: "In general, Churchill's writings are more like those of a human being than of a public figure."

Then there is the matter of style. Churchill worked on his books, and they deliver, over and over, in passages like this one, concluding the section on Gallipoli:

There was nothing left on land now but the war of exhaustion—not only of armies but of nations. No more strategy, very little tactics; only the dull wearing down of the weaker combinations by exchanging lives; only the multiplying of machinery on both sides to exchange them quicker.

Passages like that occur over and over in Churchill's book, and they do what good writing does—they take over the reader's consciousness. The distance between reader and subject matter vanishes. But those passages don't appear on the page because some "book team" (Clinton's phrase) has engineered them. They come straight from the writer, working hard at his craft. Like this one, in which Churchill writes of the awful Passchendaele battle:

The disappointing captures of ground were relieved by tales of prodigious German slaughter. The losses and anxieties of the enemy must not be underrated. . . . But the German losses were always on a far smaller scale. They always had far fewer troops in the cauldron. They always took nearly two lives for one and sold every inch of ground with extortion.

If it is unfair to compare Hillary Clinton with Winston Churchill, then it is also unfair of her and her "book team" to inflict on readers something like *Hard Choices*. They could have used the money, and their time, on something that would not have been such a waste of ours. Readers deserve better. ♦

Between Iraq and a Hard Place

The Kurds love America. It's time to reciprocate.

BY DAVID DEVOSS

They came from the west through the Syrian Desert, across the Euphrates River, and down off the Nineveh Plain. Mosul, Baiji, Tikrit, Samarra—cities held by the U.S. military just two and a half years before—fell almost without a fight, absorbed into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a prospective terrorist caliphate based on *sharia* law and governed by Salafist militants who make even al Qaeda shudder.



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For the moment, America's \$3 trillion attempt to plant a pluralist democracy in the heart of the Middle East lies in ruins. Trained and equipped at a cost of \$25 billion, Iraq's army is in disarray, the Humvees, tanks, and field artillery it inherited from the United States now in enemy hands. Al Anbar sheikhs like Mohammed Khamis Abu Risha who joined the Sunni Awakening in 2007 at the behest of Gen. David Petraeus are being hunted down and killed. Captured government officials who happen to be Shiite face

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the possibility of summary execution.

No armed foreign intervention will quell the enmity that divides Sunni and Shiites. In Saudi Arabia, Wahhabi disdain for Shiites is such that an inadvertent handshake requires ablutions. Pakistani Sunni disparage fervent Shiites with nicknames like "mosquitoes." In Iraq, where the collision of the Persian and Arab worlds has left a 60/40 Shiite to Sunni divide, American options are limited. "The initial impulse is to take short-term military action, but the problems in Iraq are political," says American Academy of Diplomacy president Ron Neumann, a former U.S. ambassador who served in Iraq with the Coalition Provisional Authority. "Sending in American troops will just redirect all the anger toward us."

Much of the blame for the current chaos goes to Iraq's 64-year-old premier, Nuri al-Maliki, a Shiite who came to power in 2006 after promising George W. Bush and U.S. ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad he would form a government of national reconciliation. After twice building coalitions with Sunni support, Maliki denied Sunni political parties the ministries he had promised. His biggest mistake, however, was dismissing from government service the former al Qaeda sympathizers Petraeus had employed at minimal expense during the surge.

A dour politician, Maliki is no man of the people. Instead of shaking hands with voters, he moves through a crowd head bowed, enveloped by a flying wedge of bodyguards with linked

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arms. "In return for military assistance, Maliki once again has promised to form an inclusive government, but I suspect he will break his promise," says Marina Ottaway, a senior scholar of Middle East affairs at the Wilson Center. "Maliki has no credibility left. There can be no reconciliation as long as he heads the government."

Iraq's constitution requires Maliki, who has already served two terms as premier, to relinquish power. But there is little chance of that happening since last year cronies on Iraq's Supreme Court voided that part of the constitution.

ISIS has no chance of taking over Iraq. The Shiites will fight to the death to protect the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf that lie south of Baghdad. With massive support from Iran, Maliki might even survive politically. Washington's reasons for saving Maliki and befriending Iran are less compelling given the fact the United States has an alternative, alliance with a more prosperous and stable partner in northern Iraq's Kurdish population.

Spend more than a few days in the Kurdish capital of Erbil and you'll hear Kurds say, "We love America but it doesn't love us." From an American perspective, it is hard to see what's not to love. The Kurds have a booming capitalist economy, a functioning court system, two political parties that manage to compromise on most issues, and a regulatory environment that favors Western investment. Though officially part of Iraq, the three Kurdish provinces function as a quasi-independent nation in that they collectively issue visas, control border crossings, and pursue a foreign policy independent of Baghdad. Though largely Sunni in orientation, the Kurds maintain friendly relations with Tehran's Shiite government and close business ties with Ankara.

All this is possible because of oil, a commodity Washington fears might prompt Iraq's Kurds to proclaim independence.

Iraq has 150 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, but 45 billion of those lie in northern Iraq, an area the size of Switzerland with a population of

5.2 million Kurds. Baghdad is responsible for selling Iraq's oil. Kurds should receive 17 percent of the oil revenue. Unfortunately, corruption in Baghdad is so bad that the Kurds rarely receive their full share. Indeed, Iraq's cities often suffer prolonged blackouts because the ministry in charge of oil denies the Ministry of Electricity enough oil to generate power.

Several years ago, Kurdistan began circumventing Baghdad by trucking its oil to Turkey, an industrialized neighbor dependent on Iran and Russia for energy. More recently, the Kurds built a pipeline to move oil directly to the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean. When oil companies frustrated by unacceptable business practices in southern Iraq announced their intention to move north, the U.S. embassy in Baghdad told them to stay put. They went anyway. Today, Exxon-Mobil, Chevron, Total, and Hess have exploration deals in Kurdistan.

Despite Iraq's well-documented shortcomings and Kurdistan's economic growth, the State Department continues to favor Baghdad. As ISIS terrorists began tolling down the Tigris River valley, a freighter loaded with a million barrels of Kurdish oil cruised aimlessly off the coast of Morocco because of U.S. pressure on Europe not to buy Kurdish oil.

"Our most immediate concern is for Iraq's stability," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki told a daily press briefing in Washington. "We've been clear that it's important for all sides to help [Iraq] pull together and avoid actions that might further exacerbate divisions and tensions."

Because of the spiraling cost of oil and the uncertainty of Middle Eastern deliveries, the Turkish broker handling the shipment managed to find a European buyer. Today, two more tankers filled with Kurdish crude are sailing for Europe.

It is reasonable for Washington to try to salvage a relationship with a government in which it has invested more than 4,400 American lives. But who is our real ally in Mesopotamia? Unlike Iraq's army, the Kurdish Peshmerga did not retreat from the ISIS

assault. The Kurds held all three of their provinces, provided shelter for fleeing refugees, and moved into the nearby city of Kirkuk, saving it from terrorist occupation while adding to northern Iraq's oil reserves.

Historically, Kirkuk was an ethnically diverse town inhabited by Kurds, Turkmen, and Arabs. But because it sits atop a huge pool of oil, Saddam Hussein expelled 500,000 Kurds in 1991 and gave their homes to Arabs brought in from the Sunni Triangle. The Kurds' return to the city rights a historical wrong, but it also changes the relationship between Erbil and Baghdad to the point that Baghdad now needs the Kurds more than ever before.

In 2008, George W. Bush told Maliki that Iraq needed a permanent U.S. military presence. Maliki refused, insisting that all American forces leave his country by December 2011. Two years later, Barack Obama reiterated the Bush position, asking only that remaining U.S. soldiers be indemnified against local prosecution. Maliki again rebuffed the offer of continuing assistance. In the present situation, the United States should do what it reasonably can to defend and shelter the people of Iraq, no matter their religion or ethnicity, starting by having the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance help the more than 500,000 refugees from Nineveh Province now in Kurdistan. The Iraqi government as presently configured is not worth another investment of lives and treasure.

It's time for the Pentagon and State Department to admit what they already know: Iraq's Kurdish Regional Government is a true ally and committed friend that shares our values. Working in cooperation with our NATO partner Turkey, Washington should help the Kurds preserve what they have achieved.

The prospect of an independent Kurdistan still troubles Erbil's neighbors. But there is little reason for Iraq's Kurds to change the status quo, given their oil wealth, leverage with Baghdad, and solid business relationship with Turkey. Perhaps it's time for the United States to love the Kurds as much as they love us. ♦