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OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Neighbors at the Table

By PAUL D. EATON

THE Army has given President Bush an opportunity to salvage something from the Iraq situation. I regret that he continues to fail his troops, plodding ahead on a failed strategy. He has not brought to bear the great economic and diplomatic power of our nation.

The State Department's civilian provincial reconstruction teams were supposed to deliver medical, educational, agricultural, engineering and military skills to the Iraqis. But they have been underfinanced and undermanned; people involved will tell you that the State Department and the administration failed to appropriately support them. The teams are an economy-of-force effort, and yet we did let them deliver America's economic power.

So, what to do on the diplomatic front?

First, the administration should ask the former United Nations ambassador Richard Holbrooke and Gen. Wesley Clark to do for Iraq what they did for Bosnia. They wouldn't have to negotiate in Dayton, Ohio, this time — perhaps Amman, Jordan, would do. (Disclosure: I have endorsed Hillary Clinton and advised her campaign.)

This would mean seriously engaging the interested parties in the region — Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey. The United States would play the intermediary role; Baghdad must always be a robust participant in regional talks and share in leadership.

The most straightforward place to start would be northern Iraq, bringing to the table Iran, Syria, Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish leaders Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani. It is madness that the United States allowed the Kurdish terrorists from Turkey to get so out of hand that our allies in Ankara felt compelled to send troops into Iraq.

The United States has the power — economically, diplomatically and militarily — to drive regional negotiations. We have, unfortunately, not demonstrated the intellectual subtlety to do this. I hope the next president will be more willing and able.

PAUL D. EATON is a retired Army general who was in charge of training the Iraqi military from 2003 to 2004.

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