

# U.S. diplomacy turned on its head

**KRAUTHAMMER** from Page 4

Which is exactly why the mullahs are swallowing their hatred for the Great Satan and offering to deal. (The mullahs, also desperate for money, are demanding \$500 million in frozen assets and U.S. help in raising oil prizes.) After six years, they are just short of toppling Iraq. Any marginal boost to their war effort could be decisive.

For the United States, preventing Islamic fanaticism from sweeping through the Persian Gulf is a crucial national interest. And yet, as a ransom for hostages and protection money against future terrorism, we are considering altering our policy, tilting toward Iran, and thus jeopardizing that interest. (And more than just considering. The Washington Post reported Thursday that the release of three

American hostages from Lebanon has followed a secret series of shipments of military cargo to Iran.) Such a capitulation would constitute an appalling act of dereliction.

Easy for me to say. What if I had a loved one being held hostage in Beirut? Wouldn't I be screaming for the government to do anything necessary to get the hostages back? Of course, I would.

Which is why hostage families should not make foreign policy. Victims' families don't decide the punishment of domestic criminals. Courts do that. Courts were invented so that the general interest (it is "The People" — not "The Victim's Family" — v. John Doe) would replace private vengeance. Diplomacy was invented to secure the general safety of the nation, not the safety of individuals.

Why has our diplomacy been turned on its head? To a certain extent, all societies are concerned about rescuing individuals. (The urge is particularly compelling, and most justified, when the individuals are POWs and others captured in service to country.) All the more so in America, where individualism is a uniquely powerful creed. But these are still insufficient explanations for the rescue fixation of American foreign policy of the last 15 years.

The power of television is, of course, one factor. On video, abstractions like national interest or collective security have no meaning. They cannot be represented in pictures. A grieving family can.

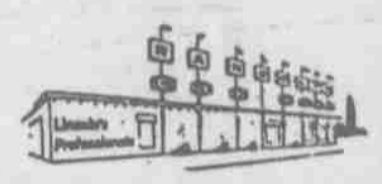
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Krauthammer is a senior editor of The New Republic magazine.

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