

Chapter 9

The Greater Middle East

The Greater Middle East: Strategic Change

From the 1970s, when the United States first assumed responsibility for the security of the Persian Gulf, through the mid 1990s, the region called the Greater Middle East was relatively stable. Regime change occurred within families, parties, or tribes, was usually orchestrated, and was rarely challenged. Hafiz al-Assad ruled Syria for nearly 30 years, Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq for 35 years, the late King Hussein of Jordan held power for nearly 50 years, and Sultan Qaboos has ruled Oman for almost 40 years. Where leaders died suddenly, as with the assassinations of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981 or Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, the political system did not change. There were two exceptions to this political passivity: the 1979 revolution in Iran that replaced the shah and the monarchy with clerics and an Islamic republic, and the military takeover in Sudan that brought General Omar Bashir to power in 1989.

The region's wars occurred primarily in the Gulf: Iraq invaded Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990; Iraq was defeated by a U.S.-led coalition in 1991. (The second U.S. invasion of Iraq, in 2003, was unusual in that the American military force liberated Iraq from Saddam's grip and destroyed the existing political system, only to begin a long occupation while it tried to reinvent the government, politics, and the civic structure of the devastated country.) The main interests of the United States in this 25-year period primarily were ensuring access to oil and safe passage for shipping, containing the influence of the Soviet Union, supporting Israel, and maintaining a balance of power, especially in the Persian Gulf region. Washington preferred not to engage in the region's wars, including the four Arab-Israeli wars, and used surrogates, such as the shah of Iran and the king of Saudi Arabia, when instability threatened U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf.

Two events propelled the United States to take a much more active and visible role in the region:



U.S. Air Force (D. Myles Cullen)

U.S. convoy passes triumphal arch built by Saddam Hussein to commemorate Iran-Iraq War

Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in 1990, and the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001. In the 1990s, the key security issues driving U.S. policy in the Greater Middle East were to maintain a secure and reasonably priced oil supply, support Israel, limit the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and keep Iraq and Iran—labeled pariah states for their wars, support for international terrorism, and efforts to acquire and use WMD—contained. The events of September 11 moved international terrorism to the top of the list.

Today, U.S. interests remain focused on maintaining access to oil, curbing nuclear weapons proliferation, eliminating terrorism, protecting Israel, and isolating those governments and parties, including Iran, Syria, Hamas in Gaza, and Hizballah in Lebanon, that are deemed pariahs. The region of the Greater Middle East faces many problems, but four stand out as critical issues for U.S. strategic planning and security policy in the decade ahead: the future of Iraq, Iran's regional ambitions and nuclear policy, the lack of an Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli peace process, and the impact of reform—or lack thereof—in the Arab world.

Iraq and Iran: Risks and Opportunities

Iraq and Iran present a complicated and interwoven series of policy dilemmas for the United States. Not a failed state, Iraq's government—the first freely elected in its history—is struggling with sectarian militias at war with each other, and politicians fighting for personal power, wealth, and national independence. Provinces and tribes are not fighting each other, nor are they fighting on the same side as each other. Most seek independence from the United States and from central authority concentrated in Baghdad, which most Iraqis have always opposed. The Shia-dominated government must work out the modalities of political and economic control in a government deliberately designed to be weak, decentralized, and dysfunctional. Comparative suffering is still a measure of citizenship and prevents meaningful moves toward national reconciliation. Yet the political process appears to be working, oil is flowing, the insurgencies have abated, and the central government under Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is trying to assert its authority while it balances the needs and demands of its powerful patrons, the United States and Iran.

Iran, for its part, is also in the midst of political confusion and economic stress, and faces the prospect of tougher sanctions if it does not change

its nuclear policy. Unanticipated oil profits not only eased economic burdens in many oil-producing countries, but they also raised popular expectations in an unstable market. The government in Tehran has not provided promised economic benefits, adequate housing, or jobs sufficient to meet the needs of many Iranians, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won a disputed election in June 2009. The strategic interests of Washington and Iran intersect in Iraq.

Decisionmaking in Iran: Deliberate, Consensual, Ambiguous. The Islamic Republic of Iran is a contradiction in terms to many observers and analysts. It is a republic and the only example of a modern, clerically dominated regime. It is a participatory democracy, yet resembles a totalitarian system in that it proclaims the absolute supremacy of a religion (Islam), as interpreted by a clerical elite, over public and private life. Islam provides the moral compass for political governance and social behavior in Iran. It holds elections in which the people sometimes have a genuine choice, yet all candidates must be screened for ideological correctness. It has multiple sources of power and checks and balances, yet in the end one person, not elected by the people, is the ultimate decisionmaker.¹ The result is confusion. It is difficult to know where real power lies in Iran, how decisions are made, and how informal networks of relationships interact with formal structures of power.

Several trends shape decisionmaking on security issues and foreign affairs under Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the 8th parliament that was elected in March 2008.

First, decisionmaking is institutionalized and state-centered. Ayatollah Khamenei is a powerful and influential force in security policymaking. Unlike his predecessor, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was not a nationalist and avoided identification with political factions, Khamenei is centered in the conservative camp. At times, he appears uncomfortable with policies and pronouncements made by President Ahmadinejad, whose outspoken views on foreign and security issues far exceed his constitutional limitations. Khamenei uses his authority to discreetly offset decisions and appointments made by the president and his more extreme conservative faction. Multiple centers advise the Supreme Leader on security issues and policy options; some are traditional, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while others are appointed by the Supreme Leader to advise him from a perspective other than that of the “official” institutions. Khamenei, for example, created the Supreme

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The World as Seen from Tehran

Iran's ambitions as the preeminent power in the Greater Middle East are longstanding. The quest for regional hegemony began under the shahs and has been continued by the clerics of the Islamic Republic. Iranian foreign policy has always been designed to protect a nation and empire that was long coveted by more powerful neighbors (Ottoman Turkey and Tsarist Russia), and divided into spheres of influence by the Great Powers of the 20th century (the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States). Viewed through this historical prism, these ambitions have little to do with exporting its Islamic revolution or expanding its borders, although occasional reminders to the Sunni Arab-led Gulf Arab states of Iran's territorial claims, and of the Shia and Persian-origin communities within their borders, serve to warn those states of their vulnerability.

Several factors shape Iran's strategic and military priorities:

- The need to secure Iran's territorial and political integrity and recognition of the regime's legitimacy. Iranians under both shahs and ayatollahs are proud of their long history as an empire and nation-state and of the role of Islam in shaping religious and political values. Like their Arab neighbor states, which were created and divided by 19th- and 20th-century European imperialism, they reject all foreign efforts to guide or deny their political, economic, or security aspirations.

- The need to reassert Iran's traditional role of regional hegemon in the Gulf and beyond. Iran's leaders see their country as encircled by real and potential enemies: Iraq, which used chemical weapons against Iranian troops and missiles against Tehran in their 8-year war; the Gulf Arab states, which host the U.S. military presence and are seen as repressing their Shia communities; Pakistan, which is occasionally involved in hostile skirmishes with Iran on their common border and has encouraged anti-Iranian activity in Afghanistan; and Central Asia, once pro-Soviet, now a source of economic opportunity, sectarian risk, and occasional basing for U.S. military forces. Above all, the United States, a virtual neighbor since the occupation of Iraq in April 2003, and Israel are viewed as enemies. Both threaten Iran's nuclear achievements and deplore Iran's efforts to derail any peace process between Israel and the Palestinians or Israel and Syria.



Washington, in particular, is seen as keen to keep the Persian Gulf as its militarized zone, maintain pro-U.S. regimes in Baghdad and Kabul, and marginalize Iran.

- The need for an enhanced capability to defend Iran against any threat of military aggression. Tehran wants independence and self-sufficiency in strategic and tactical terms. It believes that it must build its own military industries, reconstitute a modern military force, and have minimal reliance on foreign suppliers. At the same time, Tehran is seeking to acquire nuclear technology and the capability to produce nuclear weapons, probably as a cost-effective way to compensate for military weakness and relative strategic isolation.¹

Iran's leaders, whether moderate Persian nationalist or conservative Islamist, view the world with a mix of confidence and trepidation. Regardless of where they stand on the political spectrum, they likely share a common view of the threats to the security of the Iranian homeland and regime, and the measures necessary to protect Iranian interests. This consensus includes an assumption that at some point they will fight again and alone, just as they did from 1980 to 1988, and that Iran must be able to defend itself by itself.

NOTE

¹ For further discussion of Iranian ambitions and regional reactions, see Judith S. Yaphe and Charles D. Lutes, *Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran*, McNair Paper 69 (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2005).

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Council on Foreign Relations after Ahmadinejad issued some of his more outrageous policy statements. Issues once negotiated by the Foreign Ministry, such as the nuclear enrichment issue, are now under the control of the president's security establishment. Ahmadinejad did not take power away from the Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader exercises authority behind an opaque screen. Governance in Iran is a push-back system—Ahmadinejad has a strong sense of what authority the president should exercise and has pushed the envelope to see how far he can go before the Supreme Leader pushes back.

Second, strategic decisions are shaped by military security perceptions, not by diplomats or clerics. Policies once fashioned around ideological correctness or export of the revolution have become more purposeful and pragmatic, intended to end Iran's strategic isolation and establish its authority in the region. Discussions on key issues are held in the National Security Council (NSC), with recommendations to the Supreme Leader based on group consensus. No Iranian official would oppose a decision recommended by the NSC and confirmed by the Supreme Leader, especially one citing the need for a strong national defense as the primary reason for developing nuclear power and new weapons systems.²

Third, veterans from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), military, and security services probably have a greater role in decisionmaking than clerics. Once a central feature of the Islamic state, the number of clerics in the parliament has dropped from 140 in the early 1980s to 32 in the latest parliament. Two non-clerics have served as speakers in parliament, and the current president, while religious, is not a cleric. The IRGC was created after the 1979 revolution to be a praetorian guard for the new regime. It reports directly to the Supreme Leader, but over the past decade, it has expanded its role in security issues and provincial government, as well as the government bureaucracy.³ In addition, it has become an economic engine through its investment, job creation, and import-export activities.

The shift in power from the clerics in government to the IRGC began in July 1999, when local conservative militias orchestrated by the IRGC savagely beat students at the University of Tehran. In what is seen by many Iranians as the most serious internal threat to the regime to date, students protesting conditions at the university publicly demanded the ouster of the Supreme Leader. In response, 24 senior IRGC officers published a letter in a leading conser-

vative newspaper, warning that the IRGC “cannot tolerate the situation anymore” and threatening action against the reformist government of then-President Mohammad Khatami. The student riots provided the government the opportunity to further centralize power and limit dissent. The Guard Corps was able to expand its power and influence inside the regime, while the government signaled that it would tolerate what it called a “democratic game,” provided the basic foundation of the Islamic Republic was not challenged.

Despite growing opposition to Ahmadinejad, his contested victory in the June 2009 presidential election dampens immediate hopes for reform in Iran or a more moderate tone in foreign policy. Opposition to Ahmadinejad dates back at least to the parliamentary elections in March 2008.⁴ In that election, his supporters won 70 percent of the 290 seats, but one of his most vocal critics, Ali Larijani, became speaker of the parliament and remains one of the competing centers of power in Iran. Moreover, in the 2009 presidential election defeat of Mir-Hussein Moussavi, many Iranians took to the streets to protest potential election fraud, suggesting an unprecedented degree of disgruntlement over Ahmadinejad. Although Moussavi is by no means a liberal reformer, his apparently softer stance on nuclear issues and concern about Iran's isolation would no doubt have made it easier for outside powers to engage Tehran.

U.S.-Iran: The Legacy of Missed Opportunities. The list of possible opportunities for reconciliation between the United States and Iran is long and often recited as if all the opportunities were real ones. Some were meant seriously by one side and dismissed offhandedly by the other. Most were interpreted as indicating weakness in the other. Few were pursued, and the limited results they achieved were satisfactory to both sides. When Iran offered to cooperate during operations in Afghanistan following the events of September 11 and during the U.S. war on Iraq in 2003, Washington's response was to quietly accept both of Iran's offers and, in the latter case, declare Iran part of the reviled “axis of evil.” When then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright offered Iran security discussions in 1997, Iran heard the Clinton administration deny it legitimacy and recognition by rejecting any dealings with Iran's “unelected” leaders. When the last American held hostage in Lebanon was released in 1991 after 7 years of captivity by Hizballah, Iran asked why the United States was not grateful to then-President Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani.

Both Tehran and Washington were delighted with the collapse of the Taliban and Ba'athist regimes, but neither saw a need to prevent the slide from cooperation, however limited, to confrontation. Iran certainly agreed with short-term U.S. goals in Iraq—a quick war followed by an equally rapid withdrawal of forces and the institutionalization of democratic practices, especially elections. The differences were over longer term issues: a secular democratic state or an Islamic republic; simple and majoritarian, and therefore sectarian, rule, or the protection and participation of minorities in governance. Underlying the differences was a basic shift in how national priorities would be identified: would Iraq remain as the eastern front of the Arab world, as defender of Sunni Arab nationalism against the Persian Shia threat, or would it become part of the western wall of the Iranian Islamic Republic, provider of strategic depth to Iran against threats from the Arabs and Israel? If both sides hoped the new Iraq would serve as a model for emulation and change in the region, what was the model?

In 2003, Iran was in a weakened position, seemingly encircled by the United States, which had pro-American governments and military forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, the Gulf states, and the Central Asian republics bordering Iran. Some Iranians talked of the “Iraqification” of Iran—meaning the takeover of important posts, such as the Justice Ministry, by officials born in Iraq. Others predicted that Iran’s most respected Shia scholars and clerics, many of whom oppose Khomeini-style theocratic rule, would flee to Najaf, where they could freely question the religious legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. Worry about being the next target for American efforts at regime change, and the apparent U.S. rejection of an opening for talks, heightened the paranoia in the Iranian political establishment.

Six years after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the tide has turned. The Iranian regime is stronger and more certain of its ability to shape events in the region, while the United States and its allies are perceived as weakened by years of insurgency and terrorism in Iraq. The regime in Tehran has become more stable, more repressive, and less amenable to foreign pressure than in its earlier decades. Iraq’s new political elite has established close ties with the Iranian regime, and Ahmadinejad used the first visit by an Iranian leader to Baghdad in February 2008 to offer political and economic assistance to Baghdad and advertise their close ties.

What Does Iran Want in Iraq? Iran has key strategic interests in Iraq, many of which are similar to

those of the United States. The 8-year war with Iraq in the 1980s left both countries with high casualties and extensive damage to their economic and military infrastructure. Iraq had used chemical weapons on Iranian territory and was working on acquiring nuclear weapons; Iran had none. Iraq had managed to both heavily subsidize the war and meet civilian needs with \$80 billion in “loans” from the oil-rich Gulf countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar, and arms sales from the United States, Russia, and most European countries; Iran had no loans, no debt, and a badly damaged military. For the next 15 years, as Iraq faced war and crippling sanctions for its invasion and occupation of Kuwait, Iran began carefully reconstructing its image and its regional role.



U.S. Marine Corps (Tyler W. Hill)

Iraqi oil minister tours K3 oil refinery, a main source of income for Al Anbar Province and jobs for Iraqi citizens

The Islamic Republic wants an Iraq that is stable, united, and nonthreatening, and one that is an economic, political, and strategic ally facing common enemies—Israel, the United States, anachronistic Arab monarchies, and obstreperous minorities, such as the Kurds. Iran assumes it is by right the preeminent power in the Persian Gulf and the Greater Middle East region. It has the largest population, largest land mass, largest military, and oldest culture and civilization. It believes it is the economic engine of the region, the most innovative in the application of science and technology, and the leader of the world’s Muslims. Iran would prefer Iraq to be an Islamic state under shariah law similar to its own theocratic façade, but if forced to choose between a precarious Islamic state and a stable unitary state, would almost certainly choose the latter.

Iran's "region" is more than the Gulf or Central Asia. It extends from Afghanistan through the Gulf, Iraq, and Turkey to Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel. As the preeminent power, it expects to be consulted on all issues affecting the region, in much the same sense that Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad interpreted his and Syria's role. Iran believes that the roads to a U.S. exit strategy from Iraq, to a peace settlement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and to stability in the Gulf run through Tehran. Without Iran, the country's leaders believe, there can be no peace, no resolution of conflict, and no "justice."

Iran wants to expand its influence and authority in the region, but it is not interested in territorial expansion. Rather, it seeks to build its clout through a policy of aggressive outreach short of war—by building and supporting surrogate networks throughout the region, providing political support and economic assistance to key actors, bolstering trade and commercial ties with neighboring countries, and signing security and defense agreements. In implementing its strategies, Iran operates on two intertwined principles to build its networks of surrogates, intimidate opponents and critics, and make foreign policy: the first is *plausible deniability*, and the second is *deliberate ambiguity*.

How successful has Iran been in this effort? The question resonates today as it did 25 years ago, when Iran began constructing its Lebanon policy and building Hizballah. How much control does Iran exert over surrogates such as Hizballah and Hamas? Are extremist leaders, such as Lebanese Hizballah's Hassan Nasrallah or Iraqi Mahdi Army head Muqtada al-Sadr, totally subservient to the wishes of Iran's Supreme Leader and the doctrine of clerical rule? Would Hamas do more than pray for Iran if the latter was threatened with imminent attack? Or do they act independently of Iran, as do Lebanese and Palestinian nationalists willing to work within their respective systems of government so long as they can shape them? The answer probably remains the same today as it was in the 1980s: there is great personal loyalty and devotion to the ideals of the Islamic Revolution and to its clerical leaders, but a tendency to pursue self-interest, with or without Iran's approval. Iran may not be consulted on all operations, or if it is, may not approve, but it would not openly oppose actions by Hizballah or Hamas, or risk a breach with its most successful surrogates.

Iraq as Risk and Opportunity. In their 8-year-long war, both Saddam Hussein and Ayatollah Khomeini made certain judgments about the other's country.

Khomeini assumed Iraq's Shia would join the Shia Islamic Republic to defeat the secular, Sunni Arab-dominated regime in Baghdad; Saddam assumed the Arabs of Iran's Khuzistan Province would join Arab Iraq to defeat the mullahs. Both were wrong. Iraq's Shia Arabs fought to defend the state of Iraq from defeat by Persians and were rewarded by Saddam for their loyalty; Iran's Arabs remained loyal to the republic.

The collapse of Saddam's regime in April 2003 gave Iran an unanticipated opportunity. Its primary regional enemy was gone. Iraqi Shia militants who had spent two decades in Iranian exile could now return and demand a role in the post-Saddam government. Iran had created the major exile group—the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)—as an umbrella organization for Iraqi exiles; it was led by members of a prominent pro-Iranian clerical family, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim and his brother Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim.⁵ Iranian pilgrims could now visit the Shia shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala while traders, businessmen, diplomats, investors, security personnel, and intelligence operatives could easily cross the virtually unguarded 900-mile border. Iran called for free elections and democratic institutions in the new Iraq, correctly assuming that the majority Shia population would win any election and, for the first time in history, govern Iraq.

With opportunity, however, comes risk. Iran is pouring money into Iraq in the form of business investment and community reconstruction. It is refurbishing the mosques and shrines of Najaf and Karbala, building community infrastructure, and providing various forms of support—including money, advisors, training, and intelligence—to many of the political factions and government ministries, especially the Interior Ministry, according to accounts told by Iraqis and reported in the press. In early 2008, President Ahmadinejad, on the first visit made by an Iranian leader to Iraq, offered Iraq development assistance, including joint projects for oil, pipeline and refinery construction, and a billion-dollar loan. Iraq turned down the loan offer but signed economic and trade agreements, and issued tenders for construction of a pipeline to Iran. Iran has funded virtually every Shia candidate standing for election to the National Assembly. Some Iraqis claim that the IRGC supports Sunni extremist factions in the center and north of Iraq as well in order to expand its influence and assets there. It expects, in return, a compliant government in Baghdad willing to accede to its vision of the New Iraq. By contrast, some of the oil-rich Gulf states—

once the source of more than \$80 billion in loans to help Iraq defeat Iran—are only now beginning to approve debt relief (Saudi Arabia and the UAE) and nominate ambassadors to Baghdad. They still oppose additional assistance to Iraq.

Economists disagree over the impact Iranian promises of development assistance will have on Iraq. While the assistance may help in the very short term, Iran, they say, cannot give Iraq what it needs most: the advanced technology and capital for industrial, oil, and gas-field development. Iran needs the same help, most of which is unavailable to it under sanctions. Iran's influence in Iraq is probably at its highest point now. Over time, that influence will lessen. Iraq will no longer need the goods and services that Iran now supplies, trade will diminish, and Iraq could become an investor in Iran.

According to interviews with Iraqis, a growing number of Iraq's Shia, Sunni Arab, and Kurdish populations are uneasy with the extent of influence Iran and the IRGC wield in Iraq. They raise several important questions: How extensive is Iranian influence in Iraqi ministries (especially Defense, Interior, and Intelligence)? Have Iranians been involved in targeting Iraqi intellectuals, academics, or military officers for assassination? Are the Iranians, through the IRGC, communicating with or assisting al Qaeda or other extremists in Iraq? Are the Iranian religious scholars in the seminaries of Qom trying to displace those of Najaf from the intellectual and spiritual leadership of Shia Islam, or to join them?

Whether Iran is engaged in all, some, or none of these activities, an increasing number of Iraqis are growing uncomfortable with the pattern of Iranian involvement in their affairs. Iraq's Sunni Arabs have long warned about the influence of the turbans (clerics) in politics, and many label Iraq's Shia Arabs as Persians or Safavids (meant as an insult referring to the 16th-century Persian dynasty that waged and lost several wars with the Sunni Ottoman Empire in Iraq's provinces). More importantly, Iraqi Shia Arabs in greater number reject Iran's efforts to control their country's politics, economics, and security. This includes Iraqis—clerics and government officials—who belonged to clandestine Shia movements under Saddam and did not seek exile and safe haven outside Iraq. These sentiments are expressed discreetly to avoid raising Iranian ire and do not reflect consensus among Iraq's many political elements.

Iraq's government must balance American complaints that Iran is supporting anti-U.S. acts of terrorism in Iraq with Iranian demands that

the United States leave Iraq and the Gulf. Support from both Washington and Tehran is critical to the survival of any government in Baghdad. Thus far, the Nuri al-Maliki government has managed to bring Americans and Iranians together for several meetings in Baghdad, and Tehran appears to have reined in Muqtada al-Sadr by insisting he abide by his ceasefire and draw down his militia. Muqtada is not an Iranian loyalist. That role is reserved for SCIRI (now called the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq), which has proven itself a much more witting tool and ally of Iran. The negotiations between Baghdad and Washington over a treaty defining relations and a status of forces agreement were made more difficult because of Iran's concern that Iraq would agree to allow the United States access to military facilities that could be used to monitor and attack Iran.

The Gulf Cooperation Council: Avoiding Risk, Seeking Opportunity

Since the early 1960s, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman have preferred to have governments outside the region defend them, define their security policies, and provide for their needs. New to acting like states rather than tribes, not yet wealthy from oil, and accustomed to letting tradition determine the governance and institutions of civil society, the smaller Arab states of the Persian Gulf initially followed their colonial protector, Great Britain, to shelter themselves from the Arab and Persian nationalist storms that periodically swept through the neighborhood. The exception was Saudi Arabia, which enjoyed better relations with the United States than with the United Kingdom. When the British decided they could no longer afford to protect the Gulf Arabs and withdrew in 1971, the small and fragile Gulf states turned to the United States to assume the British mantle.⁶ Concerned about possible Soviet encroachments in the Gulf, President Richard Nixon created the Twin Pillars policy, which designated Iran and Saudi Arabia as proxies for a U.S. military presence in the region.⁷ This was followed by the Carter Doctrine on U.S. military engagement in the Gulf and the expansion of the American force presence and operations during the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq war.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, the Arab states of the Gulf faced the hegemonic ambitions of Iran, first under the secular and intensely nationalistic regime of the shah and then under the revolutionary Islamic Republic of Iran, also nationalistic and determined to export its revolution across the Gulf. In between Iranian challenges came Iraqi feints at territorial

acquisition, as well as attempts to gain influence in decisionmaking on Gulf and wider Arab political, economic, and strategic affairs. In 1981, as the Iraq-Iran war continued and Iran broadened its efforts to export its Islamic revolution, the six states formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).⁸ It was not intended to be a political or security organization similar to the European Union (EU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); instead, its members focused on common economic interests, such as forming a common customs union and trade zone and cooperating in local police and security matters.



U.S. Navy (Kirk Worley)

U.S. Navy Inshore Boat awaits permission to dock at Khawr Al Amaya oil terminal as part of security mission in Persian Gulf

Despite a prohibition by Ayatollah Khomeini against relations with the Saudis, today's Iranian government values its expanding ties to Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab regimes. Even the UAE maintains links to Iran, despite their seemingly intractable dispute over ownership of three small islands in the Gulf, the Tunbs and Abu Musa. Iran's outreach extends to Shia communities in Iraq (approximately 55 to 60 percent of the population), Saudi Arabia (10 to 15 percent of the population, concentrated primarily in the oil-rich Eastern Province), Kuwait (approximately 20 percent), and Bahrain (about 75 percent). Iran's approach to neighboring Arab states and their Shia communities has changed over the years. Initially, it consisted of efforts to organize antiregime movements through the local mosques and prayer houses, led by local Shia clerics or Iran-based activists. Since

Khomeini died in 1989, however, Iranian efforts have focused on diplomatic overtures to restore relations with its Gulf neighbors, primarily Saudi Arabia.

The Gulf Arabs' Security Vision

Gulf Arab security policies have traditionally been based on risk avoidance, collective reaction, and reliance on nonregional powers to ensure security and survival. The strategy is to avoid provoking either of the dominant and powerful governments in Baghdad and Tehran, pay for protection, use arms sales as an extension of foreign policy, and above all, maintain a balance of power in the Gulf. Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait in 1990 should have exposed the weakness in this form of strategic thinking, but the Gulf governments still prefer to maintain the kind of balance of power under which they once felt comfortable—a balance maintained by cordial relations with regional powers and backed up by a more distant U.S. presence.

Several developments in the past few years have produced a significant shift in the strategic thinking of the Gulf states. The first was the spread of religious-based terrorist attacks following the al Qaeda attacks of 9/11. Al Qaeda and other extremist elements accuse the Al Sa'ud and other ruling families of being un-Islamic puppets of the United States and have conducted terrorist operations on Saudi and American targets in Saudi Arabia. Saudi youth have been recruited for operations in Iraq, and press reports indicate Gulf nationals have been caught both in Iraq and on their return to the Peninsula states.

The second major development is the rise of political and sectarian movements demanding reform. All of the Gulf states are witnessing the growing political influence of ultraconservative religious, ethnic, and tribal factions. These factions demand a greater role in decisionmaking, constitutional limitations on ruling family power, adherence to a strict version of Islamic law, and an end to corruption in government. In Kuwait, for example, elections for the national assembly in May 2008 saw Islamists and tribal conservatives win nearly half of the seats. These conservative elements are now challenging the ruling Al Sabah family for the right to appoint cabinet ministers and for limitations on the power of the amir.

The collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime and the installation of a non-Sunni government in Baghdad has also had a major impact on the Gulf states, which see risk whether Iraq fails or succeeds. A failed Iraq means more cross-border terrorists entering or returning to the Gulf intent on overthrowing the tra-

ditional ruling elites. It also raises the risk of sectarian or ethnic unrest in countries where significant minority populations have long been discriminated against by Sunni Wahhabi prejudices and Arab nationalist sentiment. If Iraq succeeds in stabilizing under a democratic-leaning, elective form of governance, especially one with a weak central government and strong semi-independent provincial authorities, then the Gulf states worry about the export of “advanced” political ideas, which they say their countries do not need or are not prepared to adopt. Either strategically or tactically, Iraq will no longer be the eastern flank of the Arab world and protector of the Sunni world against the Persian Shia crescent; rather, it will provide strategic depth for a hegemonic-minded Iran.

The Gulf Arab states have only recently begun to express unease with a nuclear-empowered Iran. Loath to provoke Iran by denying its right to nuclear energy capability, the Gulf Arabs now speak openly of their concerns about Iran developing nuclear weapons, its insistence on full-cycle control of uranium enrichment, and its plans for as many as 20 more nuclear powerplants strung out along the northern shore of the Gulf. They deny that Iran would use a nuclear weapon against them, but their fears of weaponization appear at this point to rival their fear of environmental damage from a Chernobyl-style accident or natural disaster (such as an earthquake at a nuclear plant built on or near a fault), and Iran’s lack of responsible planning or preparation for consequence management in the event of a nuclear accident.

Finally, the Gulf Arabs worry that the United States will launch a war against Iran or negotiate security issues with Iran without consulting Gulf friends and allies. Should the United States launch military operations against Iran, it would be the fourth Gulf war in one generation. Gulf rulers would like Washington to consult them before making any overtures—hostile or friendly—toward Iran. Privately, many admit that they would feel compelled to support America, but are uncertain about the willingness of the United States to honor its commitments to their stability and security (meaning their survival).

Response to Risks

The GCC states are consumers and not producers of security. They publicly urge the United States to get out of Iraq—but only after establishing a secure and stable government there. For them, Iraq is the litmus test. If the United States does not stay the course in Iraq, then how strong will its commitments be to the Gulf governments? Their response to

these new risks has been to reconsider their strategic options. The most important shift has been to seek stronger commitments to their security from the U.S. and European governments and from new friends and customers in Asia (China, India, and Japan) who may be willing to extend security guarantees in exchange for assured access to oil, investments, and arms sales. The extent of their discussions with European and Asian governments is unclear, but France, Spain, and Germany have been talking with individual members of the GCC about security issues (France will deploy a 500-man contingent to the UAE). Although China, India, and Japan are increasingly dependent on Gulf oil and gas, none appears interested in contributing to Gulf security or protecting sea lanes and access to those commodities.

In response to Iran’s nuclear aspirations and threat, the Gulf Arab states have announced their interest in acquiring nuclear facilities similar to Iran’s civilian nuclear energy program. Together, the GCC states control nearly half the world’s known oil reserves, but mostly in response to Iran’s nuclear programs, several states have expressed interest in nuclear energy for domestic consumption. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) sent a team of experts to Riyadh in 2007 to discuss building nuclear energy plants. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE seem especially interested, but all declare that any nuclear energy facilities built would be placed under IAEA and Nonproliferation Treaty safeguards.⁹

Underlying these options is the desire to keep the diplomatic door open and maintain correct relations with Iran. In keeping with tradition, the GCC allowed Ahmadinejad to speak at its annual summit in December 2007. Saudi Arabia then welcomed him to make his first hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina required of all Muslims. This was the first appearance by an Iranian at a GCC meeting and the first hajj visit by a sitting Iranian president.¹⁰

Israel and the Arabs: The Price of Peace

Hopes for change in Israel’s relations with the Palestinians and its Arab neighbors rose in 2008. Where once everyone predicted the conflict would stagnate at best or Palestinian society would completely break down at worst, Israel and Palestinians engaged in extensive negotiations, Israel and Syria started indirect talks, and Israel permitted U.S.-led train-and-equip measures to upgrade Palestinian security capabilities.

Syrian President Assad will make no decision until and unless the new leadership in Israel proves

strong enough to deliver on any promises and unless the United States engages actively in the coming months. Indeed, it is widely believed that Assad's motivation for peace talks is to enhance relations with the United States and the West. At the same time, Damascus remains in close contact with Iran, Hizballah, and Hamas, unwilling to risk the certainty of these alliances for the sake of uncertain concessions from Jerusalem. What seems certain is Israel's inability to take any decisive steps soon because of its prolonged domestic political crisis, Syria's reluctance to reenter direct negotiations with Israel without U.S. involvement, and continued infighting among Palestinians for control of a failed state and process. None of the leaders appears able

to gain popular or official support for the far-reaching compromises under consideration.

Resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a vital national security interest of the United States. American attention—or lack thereof—to advancing the peace process by resolving conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians and Israel and its Arab neighbors affects regional perceptions of, and willingness to support, U.S. policies and actions. American approaches to the Palestinian dilemma and Washington's tendency to apply different standards to Israel have been used, in particular, to undercut regional support for the U.S. war against terror and efforts to promote regional security. Governments that have supported U.S. regional security policies in the past have come under increasingly heavy domestic criticism for their pro-American ties. Some may now be focused more on their own internal security issues and new threats from religious extremists and political reformers. For them, the Palestinian issue may be of lesser importance, but the fate of the Palestinians resonates with Arab and Iranian popular opinion and cannot be safely ignored.

The Options

Several plans to restart the peace process are on the table. Their outlines have been discussed since 2000, when President Bill Clinton made an effort to reach a settlement before he left office. At that time, the talks hinted at ways to resolve the most pressing issues, with both sides apparently considering concessions. The Palestinian right-of-return could possibly be settled by limiting the returnees to refugees from the 1948 war, or by allowing Palestinians to "return" not to their previous homes in Israel but to the new Palestinian state. Israel's borders with the new Palestinian state might resemble, but would not be restricted to, the pre-1967 borders, and, as promised in the Oslo Agreement, no new settlements would be established. There also could be agreement that land could be swapped to allow Israel to keep some settlements around Jerusalem and two other areas in exchange for land elsewhere in the West Bank. There was even a hint that the Palestinians might gain control over Palestinian-inhabited areas of East Jerusalem, minus the Old City and the non-Muslim religious sites, which would remain under Israeli control. The talks failed.

Variations have surfaced since then, but the failure of the George W. Bush administration to pursue peace between the Arabs and Israel until its last

U.S. Army (Jim Greenhill)



Israeli soldiers provide security in Jerusalem

Israeli Settlements and Palestinian Refugee Camps on the West Bank



year in office, or to adequately support President Mahmud Abbas, has made resolution nearly impossible. No direct talks were held between 2001 and 2008, and no draft agreement has been presented to either the Arab or Israeli governments or their publics. As in 2000, too much pressure was brought to bear for a quick resolution to the six-decade-old conflict on leaders who lacked the support of their governments and publics for these compromises. Indeed, little has been done to prepare Israelis or Palestinians for the kinds of concessions under discussion since 2000, and both the Israelis and Pales-

tinians are probably waiting to see what a new U.S. administration will offer. Several choices remain:

- Israel appears ready for discussions about the key issues, but will seek assurances of American support for Israel's positions. Israel may be unwilling to freeze settlements or dismantle unauthorized outposts, and may continue to expand existing settlements around East Jerusalem, while also completing the security wall.
- The Palestinians need immediate progress toward a settlement—including an Israeli settlements

Syria: Stabilizer or Spoiler?

Can Syria be a force for stability in the Middle East, or will it always be a spoiler? Since the advent of the Hafez al-Assad regime in 1970, Syria's external actions have been characterized by two mutually exclusive dynamics: on some occasions, Syria cooperated with the American order—the so-called *Pax Americana*—in the Middle East; at other times, Syria was at the forefront of those challenging that order. Despite the appearance of a dichotomy, however, Syrian foreign policy is consistent. The tension between Syria's contradictory modes of behavior is explained by its quest to recover the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel in 1967.

Syria functions as a stabilizing force when its leaders' focus on Syrian interests (that is, the recovery of the Golan Heights) is taken into account. There are multiple examples of Syria's stabilizing actions: its acceptance of the U.S.-brokered 1974 disengagement of forces agreement with Israel following the October 1973 war; its intervention in Lebanon in 1975 to tame the Palestinian Resistance Movement; and its alliance with the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq in 1990. In 1991, Syria accepted Washington's invitation to the Madrid Conference (in fact, Hafez al-Assad was the first Middle East leader to accept that invitation); this conference opened the way to the Oslo Agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, and to the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty. More recently, Syria agreed to attend the Annapolis Conference in November 2007, thereby endowing it with greater legitimacy among the Arabs. The Bashar al-Assad regime agreed to attend on condition that the issue of the Golan Heights was added to the agenda of the conference.

Despite this positive record, however, Syria has also played the spoiler role when its interests were not taken into account. For example, Syria, along with Iraq, mobilized the Arab world against Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's separate peace with Israel; torpedoed the May 17, 1983, agreement that would have established a separate peace between Israel and Lebanon; and, along with Iran, tried to destabilize Lebanon prior to the 2007 Annapolis Conference. Nevertheless, when offered a seat at the table, along with the promise that the Golan would be discussed, Syria joined the negotiations, much to Iran's displeasure.

As evident from this pattern of behavior, the recovery of the Golan is the hinge upon which Syrian foreign policy swings. By extension, Syria's external actions reflect Washington's efforts to help Syria recover the Golan: when the United States actively pursues that goal, Syria cooperates. Conversely, when Washington excludes Damascus from a potential deal between Israel and other Arabs, Syria does what it can to sabotage it, including the use of terrorism. From a Syrian perspective, how Washington acts with regard to the Syrian-Israeli conflict will determine whether Syria is a spoiler or a stabilizer in the Middle East.

This has significant implications for U.S. policy in the region. Peace between Syria and Israel, based on the United Nations land-for-peace formula, is among the requisites for regional stability. Hence, if Syria's grievance is addressed, namely Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights (in return for Syria's recognition of Israel within secure boundaries free from the threat of war), Syria will have no more use for militant anti-Israel groups. Peace between Syria and Israel would then marginalize Hizballah and Hamas. It would also isolate Iran. The onus is thus on Washington.

freeze—if the government of President Abbas is to retain control of the West Bank and counter rival Hamas' hold over Gaza. Abbas needs something tangible to demonstrate his skills at negotiating with the Israelis, and his ability to create and maintain a stable, secure Palestine.

- Hamas wants to consolidate its hold on Gaza and obtain international assistance. It and Israel may have been preparing for contact in July 2008 when a prisoner swap was arranged; some high-value Hamas prisoners held in Israel were to be exchanged for the bodies of two Israeli soldiers and kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit abducted in the 2006 war. Hamas has offered Israel a truce (*hudna*) rather than a permanent negotiated settlement several times. Israel rejected these offers and any dealing with Hamas so long as rocket attacks on Israel continue. They may, however, find it convenient to renew the current ceasefire.

- Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah tabled an Arab peace proposal in 2002 and again in 2007 that offered Israel official recognition, normalization of relations, and secure borders in exchange for its withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders.¹¹ Gulf Arabs have permitted some openings to Israeli business interests and hosted Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni at a trade conference in Qatar in 2008. Abdullah also invited a prominent Israeli Orthodox rabbi to an interfaith religious conference held in Spain in July 2008. The Arab states hope that by no longer questioning Israel's existence and focusing instead on Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 boundaries, all issues can be resolved, thereby allowing the focus to shift to the threat posed by Iran to Saudi and Arab interests.

- Syria has held indirect discussions with Israel through Turkish mediators. As it was in the 1990s, Syria's price for peace is return of the Golan on its terms (pre-1967 lines). At issue is more than the Golan; it is control of the sources of water for most of northern Israel and Jordan. This was one of the reasons for the failure of Hafiz al-Assad's negotiations with Israel in the 1990s.¹²

Will opportunities exist for active U.S. peacemaking in the Arab-Israeli context? If not, can the United States do anything to help create such opportunities? The issues that need addressing are well known—the right of return for Palestinians, secure borders for Israel and Palestine, no new or expanded settlements, divided versus undivided Jerusalem—but the proposed solutions have yet to be officially presented or publicly debated. The Arab initiative can help the peace process by giving Palestinians the confidence

to take hard but necessary decisions to reach a settlement, but it will not be enough for the Palestinians that the Arab states will pay for those decisions. This could present an extraordinary opportunity for U.S. diplomacy to build on this foundation and bring the parties toward the historic tradeoffs and the detailed plans necessary to construct a two-state solution.

The Obstacles

Serious obstacles need to be removed before progress can be made. The trend toward political and religious radicalization is growing not only among Palestinians, but also among some Israelis and their hardline American supporters. A two-state solution has been at the core of Middle East peace efforts, but there are indications that support for it is waning. Hamas' victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections was attributable as much to a failure of the peace process as it was to a rejection of the failed Fatah–Palestine Liberation Organization leadership style, growing disenchantment with secular solutions, growing religiosity, corruption, and mismanagement. Hamas' appeal in 2008–2009 is feeding off similar discontent within Middle Eastern society, especially the conviction that peace with Israel is not possible and thus “Islam is the solution.”

Completion of the security fence separating Israelis from Palestinians may also carry a subtle warning of a shift in Israeli thinking about the viability of a two-state solution. Long before the establishment of the Jewish state, Zionist pioneers, immigrants, and those Jews born in *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel) assumed Israel would fit into and be a part of the Middle East physically and psychologically. Some Israeli strategic thinkers now look more toward Europe for succor.¹³ They and others in the United States talk of Israel as part of a democratic alliance of states that share the same political values and institutions. Israel is one of the six Mediterranean states considered junior partners of the EU and conducts joint training exercises with NATO. Is membership in the EU and NATO in Israel's future? More importantly, do Israelis see a strengthened connection to both organizations as a new security check that would possibly undercut European support for the Palestinians and wean Israel from its long-time dependence on its “special relationship” with the United States?

Several other obstacles could intrude on restarting Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli talks:

- A failed Palestinian state will leave Israel with no partner for negotiations. The authority of the Pales-

tinian Authority and its scope of control have been circumscribed since Hamas' 2007 election victory and takeover of Gaza. Palestinian Authority President Abbas and the PLO-Fatah are losing credibility both among their own people and on the international scene. One of the most critical aspects of a successful peace process is to ensure that the Palestinian Authority does not collapse and remains a partner in negotiations with Israel.

■ The weakness of Israel's governing coalition will stall progress. Israeli governments are almost always drawn from quarrelsome parties with deep divisions and a taste for high-risk political gambling. Israeli leaders often dangle promises of settlement and fears of an existential threat to rally support in an election. The campaign and elections of February 2009 were no different.

■ Isolating Syria would slow but probably not prevent limited progress on Israeli-Palestinian discussions. At issue is Syria's willingness to end its ties to Hizballah, Hamas, and ultimately Iran, in exchange for concessions on the Golan. Engaging Syria would limit its capacity to derail progress on Palestinian-Israeli talks.

■ Another Israel-Hizballah war would almost certainly disrupt if not break down any peace process. Lebanon's internal stability, which in 2008 had not been a priority for Washington, needs attention from the United States and its allies.

What Is to Be Done?

Most U.S. administrations begin their terms expecting to focus on domestic economic issues and stabilizing the Gulf region. Few have relished tackling the Gordian knot of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, but none ultimately has been able to ignore it. Some suggestions for the new U.S. administration, drawn from past experiences, include:

■ Avoid focusing on short-term fixes and delaying discussion of the main issues of Palestinian return, settlements, and borders. All are difficult issues, especially Jerusalem, but baby steps will no longer buy time or ease tensions. Interim or partial agreements usually fail to build confidence on either side and will only breed more distrust.

■ Isolating Syria will not encourage a change in behavior. Damascus will need to succeed in its goal of regaining the Golan if it is to risk altering its ties with Iran and Hizballah.

The Challenge of Political Reform

The period since 2001 has seen the rise and fall of international interest in political reform in the Arab world. Where there once was heady optimism and enthusiasm, there is now increasing pessimism and despair. The current struggle for political reform began

▼ *Continued on p. 206*



U.S. M1A1 tanks move across desert in Kuwait, Operation *Desert Storm*

DOD (Robert Reeve)

Kuwait: Democratic Vanguard or the Next Islamic Republic?

In the years since 1991 and Kuwait's liberation from Iraqi occupation, many states in the Middle East region have instituted political reforms. Some of the changes have been significant, others minimal, intended more as window dressing to impress domestic populations and foreign critics than as real change. Most regional governments now hold elections for a tame parliament or municipal councils. Some monarchies have broadened political participation for nonroyal elites and women. Progress has been uneven at best, with many governments unwilling to move at a faster pace than conservative tribal and religious elements.

Kuwait in many respects has been the vanguard of change in the Gulf. The first state to have an elected parliament (1963) and to dissolve it when it refused to follow government guidance, Kuwait today has the most independent and transparent system in the region. Kuwait also illustrates the limitations of political reform. Twice since 1961, the ruling Al Sabah family suspended parliament indefinitely. After liberation in 1992, however, the family bowed to heavy domestic and American pressure, agreeing to reinstate the National Assembly and call for new elections if it were dissolved.

Kuwait's parliamentarians have ventured into areas of power and politics where few in the Arab world have dared go. They have been encouraged in this by dysfunctional factionalism within the ruling family. Liberals, nationalists, Islamists, and tribal deputies compete with each other and the government for public attention. The result has been a parliament that can block reform when it wishes but cannot take positive action on its own. Moreover, tribal deputies, who are anxious to secure economic benefits for their followers, frequently clash with Islamist deputies who have a different social and economic outlook. Both have a far more conservative social vision than the Al Sabah government, and favor rolling back government decisions, especially on postwar reconstruction and investment issues and educational reform (which they regard as too secular, insufficiently religious, and too permissive of mixed sexes). They oppose votes for women, demand that women wear the *hijab* (headscarf), and oppose women cabinet ministers. They seek the right

to question members of the government, including Al Sabah family members, veto laws approved by the government, form political parties, name cabinet members, and approve the prime minister, who they believe could be a commoner. In response, the government dissolved the parliament in 2008, rejected calls to dismiss officials, and reduced the number of voting districts from 25 to 5 to weaken the conservative Islamist-tribal bloc. The ploy failed. No women have been elected to the National Assembly and the conservative alliance now holds nearly half the seats in parliament, a significant increase over its numbers in the previous parliament.

Elsewhere in the region, democratic reform has taken place, but it has rarely changed the fundamental nature of politics. Bahrain had a parliament briefly from 1973 to 1975. It was not restored until 2002. Shia make up approximately 75 percent of the population but only 17 of its 40-member parliament. The king and tribes from its Sunni Arab minority rule this small, oil-poor state, and the government is criticized for trying to shift the population balance by granting citizenship to foreign Sunnis. Bahrain's Shia parliamentarians demand an end to political, employment, and religious discrimination; all parliamentarians would like the right to question cabinet members. Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have experimented with municipal elections. Only the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has had no elections, though it has adopted an odd step by designating a small number of citizens who may vote when elections are held—in short reversing the normal democratic arrangement by having the rulers pick the voters rather than the other way around. Kuwait, the UAE, and Oman have women in their cabinets, but Bahrain took an even more unusual step in 2008 when it named a Jewish woman as its ambassador to the United States.

The political deadlock in Kuwait has led its citizens to speculate that the ruling family will once again abandon democracy by suspending parliament. Once seen as a positive model for other Gulf states, Kuwait's democratic experiment is currently at an impasse, which critics can now cite as a reason to avoid adopting democratic reforms in their own country.

▲ Continued from p. 204

decades ago, and not just when its lack was identified as a possible contributing factor to the rising popularity of religious extremism. Popular demand for reform is unlikely to disappear, especially as deep political problems related to governance in the Middle East show little sign of abating. Even if the United States scales back on its commitment to regional political reform, as it seems now to be doing, and security concerns appear more pressing for most regional regimes, demands for change in governance will continue and are likely to complicate U.S. security efforts.

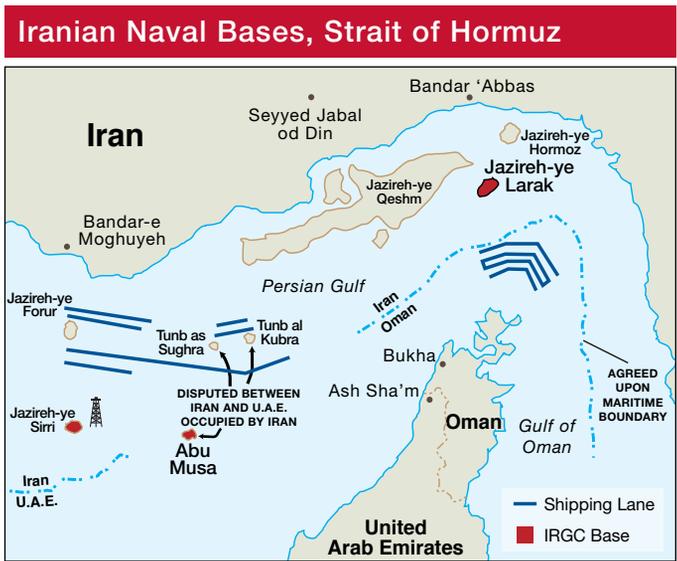
Regional Reform Trends . . .

Middle Eastern societies have changed in some fundamental ways over recent decades, and the pace of change is not likely to slow. Political conflicts and the vicissitudes of high oil prices in consumer states have shifted power and influence in the region. The rapidly growing population in many Middle East societies has created a “youth bulge,” and even though growth rates show signs of slowing, the ripple effects of that bulge will be felt for years to come. The rapid expansion of education has created a literate population in many states, but the quality of that education has left the labor force poorly prepared for a globalized economy. The era after independence saw most regimes make strong commitments to provide for the material needs of their population. Whether socialist or capitalist, republic or monarchy, the state assumed responsibility for providing food, health care, employment, and education to the entire citizenry. In recent years, however, governments have worked hard to

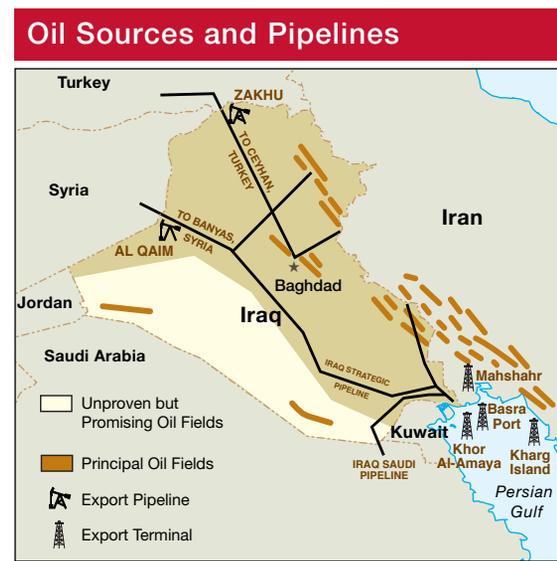
jettison many of these commitments, with uncertain success (even oil-rich states with small populations, such as Kuwait, have shown some discomfort with the level of material benefits they are expected to provide). But with an uneven record at best of participation in a globalized economy, the decline of the welfare state leaves behind social, economic, and political tensions that will be difficult to resolve.

Interstate conflicts will also likely show little sign of abatement. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be moving away from settlement, regardless of the signs of possible truce between Israel and Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon. This and the possibility that Iraq could disintegrate has set off a new round of regional rivalries and tensions. Such conflicts have domestic repercussions because they undermine the legitimacy of existing regimes that seem unable to pursue a clear policy toward, much less address, such conflicts.

In short, regional regimes are likely to appear increasingly unable to meet popular needs and respond to regional challenges. Widespread political cynicism has set in, with existing political elites widely regarded as corrupt, ineffective, and unaccountable. Such cynicism has rarely taken revolutionary form—the stability of existing regimes is remarkable in light of their poor policy performance—and that is unlikely to change because rulers have become adept at suppressing, dividing, and coopting opposition movements. Instead of dramatic upheaval, the region is likely to pass through a period in which rulers are weak but not unstable, continuously fending off pressure to reform but unable to respond effectively to economic and political challenges.



Source: CIA



Source: CIA

... and U.S. National Security Interests

At first glance, domestic debates over the kind and quality of political reform would seem to have little relevance for the security presence and strategic regional interests of the United States, or its relations with friendly governments. If regimes believe that they are not likely to face revolutionary challenges, then it would seem possible for Washington to maintain longstanding stable government-to-government relations. The United States has been careful to mute its rhetoric on the necessity of political reform and the virtues of Western-style democracy, and most rulers appear willing to continue their cooperation with the United States despite popular criticism. If a replay of the 1979 Iranian revolution occurs, however, and a regime hostile to the United States replaces a critical security partner, then U.S. arrangements and relationships will be at serious risk.

If domestic political difficulties are unlikely to pose a dramatic challenge to U.S. security interests, there are some important exceptions. Support for al Qaeda and other extremist movements among dissidents in the Arab world grew with the conviction that the United States was a more important target than their own governments. This popularity reflects an Arab “street” frustrated with the U.S. stance on the Palestinian issue, support for Israel, and protection of rulers seen as corrupt and un-Islamic. Al Qaeda’s leaders argue that the best way to confront domestic political shortcomings is to expel the United States from the region. Al Qaeda was spectacularly successful in 2001, but it has been far less successful in shifting the debate within regional societies. Most Islamist movements remain focused on domestic agendas.

The pressure for political reform will likely confront the United States with more subtle challenges. In a region of unpopular regimes that lack domestic legitimacy, Washington will continue to find that good government-to-government relations aggravate rather than undermine its unpopularity. Moreover, blame for the persistence of regional crises—most notably if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues and should Iraq fail—will be linked directly to U.S. policies. Demands for political reform and the unresolved nature of regional conflicts will not disrupt U.S. business relations with governments in the region, but the United States will continue to be identified with unpopular policies and regimes and unjust regional realities.

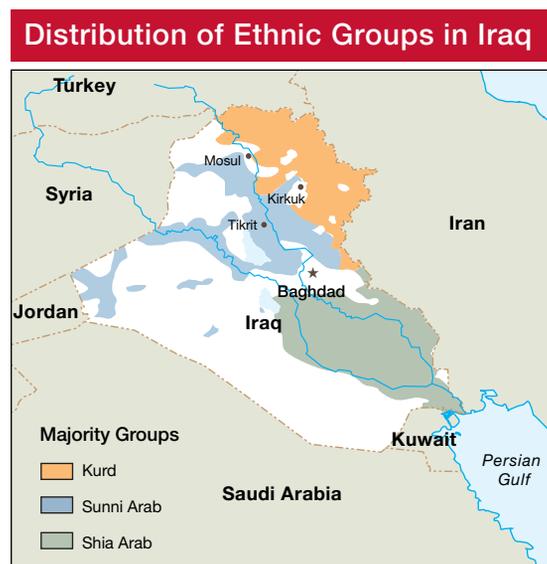
Complicating the U.S. Mission

Given these realities, pursuit of U.S. national security interests in the Greater Middle East is likely to be complicated in three ways:

- Long-term government-to-government security relationships can be pursued, but they could be unpopular and embarrassing to regional governments. Jordan, for example, is one of America’s closest and oldest security partners in the region. Yet Amman strives to obscure the depth of its cooperation from its public. This is likely to be a continuing pattern in the region. It will make bilateral relations sometimes rocky, especially if weak regimes feel compelled to scale back on security ties.

- The United States will become—whether it likes it or not—an unwitting player in domestic politics in the region. Because it has built its security posture on good government-to-government relations, the United States is seen as “propping up” regional autocracies. In some ways, this perception overstates its capabilities; autocracy is very much a home-grown phenomenon, and America’s ability to sustain unpopular regimes, while real, is greatly exaggerated. At a minimum, Washington will find itself a political football; at a maximum, it will be called upon to help support regimes that have lost the confidence of their own people.

- The United States may become involved in governance missions. The wall between security interests and governance issues characteristic of past decades of U.S. regional policy has collapsed. Governance issues, when they were raised in Washington,



Source: CIA

Islamists: Why They Won't Go Away

The challenge of political Islam is often viewed through a security prism, an unsurprising perspective after the attacks of September 11, 2001. But from a regional perspective, Islamist movements are better seen as a long-term political challenge than as a short-term security threat.

Islamist movements are broadly based social movements that encompass a wide variety of activities—social, educational, charitable, missionary, and political. In the second half of the 20th century, the authoritarian political environment in the Arab world actually led many to deemphasize politics: those who wished to build more Islamic societies found opportunities to do so through quieter paths, such as building kindergartens or encouraging students to form religious study groups.

In a paradoxical fashion, this led Islamist movements to become more powerful political actors. No longer are Islamists organized in tightly formed, hierarchical ways that are easier to control or suppress. Instead, they tend to be loosely organized social movements with deep roots and broad constituencies; these are very difficult for governments to contain or root out.

In the 1970s and 1980s, some Islamist movements began to reenter politics. The most radical groups insisted that any regime failing to implement Islamic law was illegitimate and should be overthrown. Such radical movements challenged regimes in Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and other places. But in all cases, they were defeated. Al Qaeda is attempting to unite the remaining fragments of these groups into an international network that turns its attention from overthrowing regional regimes to combating the Western forces that it holds responsible for propping up regional dictators.

But while the radicals have captured the headlines in recent years, they hardly represent the mainstream. Other, far larger groups embarked on a very different path. They continued their efforts to reform society in other realms while taking advantage of whatever political openings occurred to organize more freely, develop political programs, and even run for office. For these groups, the political struggle is only one part of a broader mission of social progress, and they see their role as reformist rather than revolutionary. They aim not to replace the regime but to transform it.

These groups, best exemplified by the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots in various countries, can shift between calls for far-reaching change and more soothing, conservative, and modest reform proposals. The fact that they are Islamist, that they have broad constituencies, and that they share some common origin with the radicals leads many regimes to treat them as security threats. The problem is that such an approach leads to short-term repressive measures that do little over the long term to confront the challenge posed by this strain of political Islam. Regimes find over time that Islamists, because of their deep social roots, cannot easily be suppressed, which has led a few to experiment with political strategies of incorporation by seeking to pull such groups into the system rather than stamp them out. The deep authoritarian streak that characterizes most regimes in the region, however, militates against such a political approach.

were generally addressed through diplomacy and foreign assistance, not through defense and security relationships. That began to change with the 2003 Iraq War and the U.S. military's uncharacteristic role in post-Saddam governance and operations against the endemic insurgencies. On a more modest level, greater attention will be paid by political leaders to the governance implications of security arrangements. U.S. security assistance, for instance, may need to be designed in such a way as to bring issues of civilian control of the military and security forces, political accountability, and respect for human rights to the attention of the recipients.

A general implication of these challenges is an increased likelihood that when regional tensions are highest, and the United States needs security cooperation the most, regional partners will be the least reliable. Even regional actors with a long history of security cooperation with the United States, such as Saudi Arabia, are clearly coming to view the relationship as a problem to be managed as much as it is a source of support. It is increasingly common to hear once-close U.S. allies in the region indicate that they regard the United States much more warily than previously. Many say they now see it more as a source of political instability in the region than a security guarantor.

Coping with Change

After 2003, the United States embarked on an ambitious project of regional transformation. The new administration will be forced to deal with the consequences of that project's shortcomings. This will encompass two related challenges:

- How can we pursue political reform in a less messianic fashion? It is clear that the nature of regional governance will complicate the U.S. posture in the region and that political reform must be part of a long-term strategy. But the tools the United States has used to promote political reform were developed for use in the former Soviet bloc and Latin America—very different places, whose governments (in the 1990s) welcomed U.S. assistance in bringing reform. When the United States turned its attention to the Middle East, it found such tools ineffective, and the attempt to add a new tool (Iraq-style forced regime change) is hardly one that is likely to be used repeatedly. Washington will need to find tools for pursuing political reform that are effective but gradual.

■ How can we balance short-term crisis management with long-term reform? The turn away from political reform since 2006 is marked, but it is not absolute. And the reasons are clear: the press of political crises in the region has made political reform seem like a long-term luxury rather than a short-term need—and indeed, with the strong showing of Islamists in regional politics, it has come to be seen as a long-term luxury that complicates short-term problems. The United States will have to find a way to promote political reform in a manner that balances long-term strategies with short-term crisis management.

Elements of a New U.S. Strategy

When oil sold for \$20 a barrel and Asia was not a major consumer of the world's energy resources, the United States had greater leverage on the Gulf states. And when the United States first entered Iraq in 2003, its influence was at its highest point. Neither lasted long. What, then, are U.S. options for the issues outlined here?

Engagement or Isolation for Iran and Syria?

American administrations since the 1979 Islamic revolution and hostage crisis have believed that the Iranian regime's most important goal was recognition of its legitimacy and that talking to Iranian leaders would be tantamount to recognition and a reward for bad behavior. The tactic may have been effective in the 1980s, when Iran was at war with Iraq and considered a rogue state intent on exporting its extreme version of Islamic revolution to Iraq, Lebanon, and the Gulf. But denial of recognition may no longer be the sole trump card for Washington. Neither Ahmadinejad nor Supreme Leader Khamenei seems intimidated by U.S. refusal to recognize the Islamic Republic. Equally important to Ahmadinejad and most Iranians are recognition and acceptance of Iran's claims as the dominant power in the Gulf region, and a participant to be consulted in matters dealing with the Greater Middle East, including Israeli-Palestinian and Lebanese issues, and the Islamic world in general.

Similarly, offering to hold talks with Iran or Syria does not imply recognition of or approval for bad behavior. It would, however, signal Iran's neighbors and the Greater Middle East region that the United States is willing to revitalize diplomacy and seek areas of common ground. Washington and Tehran have some key interests in common; for example, both have a huge stake in Iraq's survival as a unified state that functions within acceptable parameters and quells

its sectarian unrest. Washington's refusal to talk to Iran has placed the burden of responsibility for failed negotiations on the United States. An offer to enter talks, however, would shift the onus of obstructionism onto Iran.

Other steps the United States could take include an end to the vilification of Iran or Syria as rogue states. Frequent public condemnation of Iran and outraged responses to Ahmadinejad's vituperative statements only serve to enhance his stature among Iranians and the Arab street. Conversely, recognizing Iran's security perceptions and giving it a voice in a regional forum would allow Iran the political, economic, and strategic interaction it seeks, but would also set the agenda and terms of engagement on the basis of Iran's behavior before it tries to make demands based on its nuclear status. Washington could offer to end or eliminate some of the sanctions that preclude economic development in Iran. The sanctions clearly hinder Iran's efforts to develop its economic infrastructure; in July 2008, the French oil company Total pulled out of plans to develop some Iranian oil projects because of political pressure and economic risk. Acquiescence to a pipeline project to carry Central Asian gas and oil through Iran would be an important signal that the United States is aware of Iran's economic needs. It could also defuse potential Iranian dependence on Chinese investment in the energy sector of its economy.

Promote Cooperation or Isolation between Iraq, Iran, and Their Gulf Neighbors?

For the next 10 to 15 years, Iraqis will need to concentrate on reinventing themselves, their identity, their political institutions, and their economic infrastructure. To do so, they will need cooperation from their neighbors to stabilize trade and development plans and maintain secure borders. The United States needs to encourage Iraq's neighbors—especially Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Syria—to assist Iraq in border security and to end arms, narcotics, and human trafficking. In the long term, Iraq could return to challenge Iran for the coveted position of paramount leader of the Gulf region. It could also resume efforts to build up its new military into more than a defensive force and, if Iran has crossed the nuclear weapons threshold, try to acquire WMD again.

Iraq and U.S. friends in the Gulf will continue to move cautiously in developing ties to Iran. Those ties, for now and the foreseeable future, will probably

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The Strait of Hormuz, Iran, and the Risk: A Fact Box

The sea channel that abuts Iran's coastline at the entrance to the Persian Gulf is often described as the world's most important waterway because of the huge volume of oil exported through it daily. The Strait of Hormuz is located at a narrow bend of water separating Oman and Iran, and connects the biggest Gulf oil producers, such as Saudi Arabia, with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. At its narrowest point, the strait is only 34 miles (55 kilometers) across. It consists of 2-mile (3.2-kilometer)-wide navigable channels for inbound and outbound tanker traffic as well as a 2-mile-wide buffer zone.



Some additional facts about the Strait of Hormuz:

- Oil flowing through the strait accounts for roughly 40 percent of all globally traded oil supply, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The figure fluctuates with changing output from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. In May 2007, the International Energy Agency estimated 13.4 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude passed through the narrow channel on tankers. An additional 2 million barrels of oil products, including fuel oil, are exported through the passage daily, as well as liquefied natural gas.

- Exports from the world's largest liquefied natural gas exporter, Qatar, also pass through the strait en route to Asia and Europe, totaling some 31 million tons a year.

- Ninety percent of oil exported from Gulf producers is carried on oil tankers through the strait.

- Japanese officials say 90 percent of their oil imports come from the Gulf. Industry sources report that more than 75 percent of Japan's oil passes through the strait.

- One of U.S. Central Command's key missions in the Gulf is to ensure the free flow of oil and energy supplies. Between 1984 and 1987, a "tanker war"

took place between Iran and Iraq, in which each nation fired on the other's oil tankers bound for their respective ports. Foreign-flagged vessels were caught in the crossfire. Shipping in the Gulf dropped by 25 percent because of the exchange, forcing the intervention of the United States to secure the shipping lanes.

- Iran has admitted to deploying anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles on Abu Musa, an island strategically located near the strait's shipping lanes and claimed by the United Arab Emirates. In 2008, Iran announced the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps naval force would establish a post at the point where shipping enters the Gulf.

- The Energy Information Administration predicts oil exports passing through the strait will double to between 30 million and 34 million bpd by 2020.

- Merchant ships carrying grains, iron ore, sugar, perishables, and containers full of finished goods also pass through the strategic sea corridor en route to Gulf countries and major ports such as Dubai.

- Heavy armor and military supplies for the U.S. Armed Forces in Iraq and other Gulf countries pass through the channel aboard U.S. Navy-owned, U.S.-flagged, and foreign-flagged ships.

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Sources: International Energy Agency, U.S. Energy Information Administration, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, GlobalSecurity.org, U.S. Navy Military Sealift Command, and Clarkson shipping consultancy.

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remain limited to cooperation on trade, commerce, police matters, and sharing of intelligence on drugs and narcotics trafficking. They are not likely to include any significant security pact whose terms express a demand for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. military forces from the region. Gulf governments may prefer to avoid antagonizing their larger and dangerous neighbors, but they also realize that the U.S. presence and commitments to their security allow them the freedom to negotiate with former enemies Iran and Iraq.

Pursue Effective Deterrence and Collective Defense Options at the Same Time?

Continued arms sales to the region are no panacea for countering a nuclear-armed Iran, but two alternatives are frequently mentioned. Both have drawbacks. The first is a regional nuclear-free zone, but neither Israel nor Iran seems interested. The second is to turn the GCC into a regional defense and security organization that would include Iraq, Yemen, and, eventually, Iran. Unfortunately, the GCC would be hard pressed to become the Persian Gulf's or Middle East's equivalent of NATO, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, or the EU. Moreover, pan-regional solutions will not work; they are too broad in scope, and too vague in purpose.

The United States could cooperate with its European partners and those Asian states dependent on the region's energy resources to support the establishment of a subregional security organization as a venue for threat reduction talks, confidence-building measures, and cooperative political, economic, and security unions. This could be a venue to discuss security measures to keep sea lanes in the Persian Gulf open and protect access to and shipment of oil. China, Japan, and India are becoming increasingly dependent on the Gulf states for their energy needs (Japan receives 90 percent of its oil from the Gulf, and China and India meet probably half of their energy needs with Gulf oil). Yet all depend on the United States, and the United Kingdom to a lesser extent, to protect the Strait of Hormuz. A regionwide security venue could encourage them to participate in regional measures to protect the strait and Gulf shipping. Their participation would encourage Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf states to join.

Similarly, Washington should engage Europe, non-Gulf Arabs (Egypt and Jordan), and Asian powers with influence in the region to address

security issues that are not specifically military. Most states in this region share transnational problems: terrorism, religious and nationalist extremism, organized crime, arms smuggling, illegal immigration, environmental pollution, drug and human trafficking, disease, poverty, lack of water resources, and desertification. Turkey, for example, under the Islamist AK Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or Justice and Development Party) has been looking east to the Arab world and Iran for a new role in regional developments and cooperation against common enemies. It has a significant investment in Iraqi reconstruction and trade with Iran, and Ankara cooperates with Iran to contain anti-Turkish PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, or Kurdistan Workers' Party) terrorists sheltered in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Offer the GCC Expanded Security Guarantees and a Smaller Military Presence?

In the face of a nuclear-capable Iran or a rearmed Iraq, the Gulf Arabs are likely to seek expanded U.S. guarantees of enhanced protection and promises to defend them if a confrontation is imminent. This could include advanced missile defense systems or even inclusion under the American nuclear umbrella. They are not likely, however, to support an American policy of preemptive strikes to lessen their Iran problem or to welcome the presence of a substantial U.S. military force on bases or with access to base facilities. Nor will they join Iran in a security arrangement that would preclude a U.S. presence in the Gulf, reflecting in part their understanding that the U.S. military presence allows them to improve relations with Tehran now and Baghdad some day. At the same time, the Gulf regimes are wary of closer ties to the United States, fearing popular protest against the costs of the U.S. presence and dependence on its military for protection that their own governments should be able to provide.

Push Hard on American-style Political Reform or Insist on Timetables for Change?

Even without U.S. pressure, the governments of the Greater Middle East will face daunting challenges over the next decade, including rising demands for an end to authoritarian rule (whether monarchies, ruling families, single parties, or tribes), and greater restrictions on or opportunities for women. There may be problems of overdevelopment and a risk to the fragile Gulf ecosystem from increased tanker traffic, lack of potable water, or a nuclear accident or

Turkey Faces East

After decades of passivity and neglect toward the Middle East, Turkey is once again becoming an active player in that region. For most of its republican history, Ankara did not consider the Middle East a foreign policy priority. The official ideology of the republic, Kemalism, turned its back on the Islamic world and pursued an exclusively Western path. This one-sided orientation began to change with the end of the Cold War. It reflected Turkey's new geostrategic horizons, cooling ties between Europe and Turkey, and perceived threats and opportunities in regions surrounding Turkey. As a result, first under the late Turgut Ozal (prime minister from 1983–1989 and president from 1989–1993), and more recently under the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or AKP) from 2002 to the present, Turkey became more involved in the Greater Middle East. In recent years, Ankara adopted a more active approach toward the Israeli-Palestinian issue, sent troops to support the North Atlantic Treaty Organization mission in Afghanistan, contributed to the United Nations forces in Lebanon, assumed a leadership position in the Organization of the Islamic Conference, attended Arab League conferences, established closer ties with Iran, Iraq, and Syria, and improved its economic, political, and diplomatic relations with most Arab and Muslim states.

Turkey is deeply polarized over its Muslim, secular, and national identities, and Turkish foreign policy is certainly not immune from such divisions. In one camp, secularist critics of the AKP government maintain that Turkey's activism in the Middle East abandons the republic's Western vocation and orientation. These skeptics usually focus on AKP's Muslim political pedigree and tend to see a hidden Islamic agenda behind openings to the Arab world. In the opposing camp are those who argue that such an Islamic agenda simply does not exist, mainly on the grounds that the AKP is the most pro-European Union (EU) political party in the Turkish domestic political scene. Despite its Islamic roots, the AKP has indeed worked much harder than previous Turkish governments to improve Ankara's chances of EU membership. Such efforts were eventually rewarded with the opening of accession negotiations between Turkey and the EU in December 2005. Since neither of the camps is able to convince the other, this polarized debate continues. Ankara's Middle East policy also presents a dilemma for policymakers in Washington, who are often puzzled by Turkey's rapprochement with countries such as Syria and Iran.

What is the rationale behind Ankara's new interest in the Middle East? There are two conflicting drivers of Turkish policy, namely the Kurdish challenge and neo-Ottomanism. Turkey's Middle East policy is increasingly driven by the tension between these two alternative visions and priorities. Neo-Ottomanism seeks to transcend the Kemalist norms of the republic, which define Turkey's preoccupation with its Kurdish challenge. Kemalism considers Kurdish ethnicity and nationalism as existential threats to the national and territorial integrity of the Turkish Republic. Even the Kurdish language and cultural rights for Kurds are deemed dangerous, on the grounds that they make Kurdish assimilation—the official policy of the republic since 1923—much more difficult. The nationalist aspirations of Kurds in Iran, Iraq, and Syria pose a similar challenge for Turkish foreign policy. As a result, when the Kurdish question dominates Ankara's agenda, Turkish foreign policy becomes apprehensive, reactive, and insecure.

Neo-Ottomanism, by contrast, seeks to rise above this Kemalist myopia. Compared to Kemalism, neo-Ottoman instincts are more self-confident and less focused on the Kurdish threat. Neo-Ottomanism embraces a grand geostrategic vision in which Turkey is an effective and engaging regional actor, working to solve regional problems as a bridge between East and West. Rather than pursue a neoimperialist policy aimed at resurrecting the Ottoman Empire, however, neo-Ottomanism is essentially about projecting Turkey's "soft power" as a Muslim, secular, democratic, capitalist force. Similar to French Gaullism, it seeks Turkish "grandeur" and an influential foreign policy. Today, Turkey appears torn between these two alternative visions of foreign relations. While the Kurdish challenge forces Ankara to be reactive, cautious, and sometimes overly insecure, neo-Ottomanism motivates Turkish policymakers to be more audacious, imaginative, and proactive. Needless to say, the secularist Kemalist mindset is uncomfortable with the neo-Ottoman vision, which it perceives as unrealistic, adventurist, and pro-Islamic.

In dealing with the Middle East, the challenge for Ankara will be to balance its Kemalist and neo-Ottoman instincts. The challenge posed by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (known as the PKK) movement plays into the hands of Kemalist hardliners in the military, which means that in the short term, the Kurdish question is likely to remain a central factor in the formulation of Turkey's national security policy. Although Turkey has legitimate concerns about terrorism, military means alone will not solve the Kurdish question. Much hinges on Turkey's success in becoming a more liberal democracy, where cultural and political rights for Kurds are not perceived as a national security threat. Ultimately, whether Turkey can positively engage the Middle East and solve its Kurdish dilemma will require reconciliation between the neo-Ottoman and Kemalist visions, both at home and in foreign policy.

oil fire. The region also faces a challenge to keep its small, rich populations happy and expatriate labor unorganized and isolated (more than 85 percent of the population of Qatar and the UAE is foreign labor, for example). Washington will need to choose its issues carefully, especially since a strong public stance on domestic political reform often triggers local cynicism that the United States does not live by its ideals and that its security is heavily reliant on dysfunctional or unpopular regimes in the region.

The United States has key national security interests and objectives in the Greater Middle East. The U.S. military is likely to be present in the Gulf for some time. The desire to reduce the U.S. military footprint in Iraq and the vulnerability of forward-deployed forces need to be balanced against the diplomatic and deterrent value of a visible U.S. military presence in the Gulf. If friends and enemies no longer see U.S. forces and operations, they may conclude that the Gulf governments are once again vulnerable to intimidation or outright threat and that the United States is less likely to defend its interests and honor its security commitments in the region. As U.S. policymakers approach decisions on the future forward presence posture for the Gulf, several political realities need to be taken into account:

Iraq, Iran, and Syria are not perceived by the Arab states as major and imminent threats to regional security, and most believe the United States needs to shape strategies to engage them positively.

Palestine is important. The fact or perception of Israeli intransigence, as well as divisions within the Palestinian Authority and U.S. reluctance to take the lead in finding a solution, shapes public attitudes and damages U.S. influence in the Greater Middle East to a significant degree.

Political change in Iran may come smoothly or violently, but it will not alter a defense strategy based on the acquisition of a nuclear capability and is unlikely to lead to major reversals in Tehran's foreign and security policies. The 2005 presidential election was fought between conservatives and reformists, but the 2009 battle was waged mainly between the "strict" conservatives loyal to Ahmadinejad and the "pragmatic" conservatives around Mir-Hussein Mossavi.

Is there a Sunni-Shia confrontation ahead? Probably not, although some scholars and leaders in the region predict it, or at least feign concern about it.¹⁴ The Shia-Sunni tensions that wrack the region are, if not unprecedented, certainly impressive in their intensity. They are a consequence of the 2003 war and pose security

problems for the region. Iran's ultimate goal in Iraq is to prevent Iraq from reemerging as a threat, whether of a military, political, or ideological nature. Iraq's failure, its collapse into civil war, or the emergence of independent ethnic or sectarian-defined ministates would have huge implications for disaffected minorities in Syria, Turkey, Iran, and the Gulf states.

Convincing Iran that the United States is not set on regime change there will be very difficult. A major factor in Iran's policymaking calculus is a desire to maintain "strategic depth" in Iraq. Iranian leaders will remain convinced that the United States and Israel will continue to plan on the use of force to stop Iran's nuclear program. The ability to retaliate against U.S. troops in Iraq, as well as against Israel via Hizballah in Lebanon, is seen by Iranian officials as leverage that diminishes the chances of an American attack on Iran. **gsa**

NOTES

¹ Supreme Leader Khamenei was chosen by the circle around Ayatollah Khomeini and serves for life; he is subject only to a yearly approval by the elected Council of Guardians. The president of Iran, however, can serve two terms successively, and then must stand down before he can run again in a general election.

² In a speech before the 2008 Majles election, Supreme Leader Khamenei declared that "Allah would reprimand those voters who failed to support the controversial nuclear power program."

³ IRGC leaders must have favored the election of one of their own as president. Ahmadinejad joined the paramilitary basij as a youth and fought in the Iran-Iraq war as a member of the IRGC.

⁴ In the March 2008 parliamentary elections, 4,500 of 7,200 registered candidates ran for office. Most of those disqualified by the Council of Guardians were reformists, but a grandson of Ayatollah Khomeini was also rejected on the ground that "he lacked loyalty to Islam and the constitution."

⁵ Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim was the spiritual leader of the movement; he was assassinated in August 2004 outside the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf. Abd al-Aziz was in charge of the SCIRI militia, the Badr Brigade, and fought with Iranian forces against Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war. He currently heads the organization. Apparently at the suggestion of the Iranians, SCIRI changed its name to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq in 2007.

⁶ For a short history of the U.S. military engagement in the Persian Gulf, see Richard Sokolsky, ed., *The United States and the Persian Gulf: Reshaping Security Strategy for the Post-Containment Era* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2003).

⁷ The United States first entered the Gulf with a small naval presence—the U.S. 5th Fleet—in 1947 in Bahrain and a U.S. Air Force presence in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, from the 1940s through the early 1960s.

⁸ In 2001, the GCC extended a special status to Yemen but is reluctant to extend full membership to Yemen, Iraq, or Iran.

⁹ Other nations that have said they plan to construct civilian nuclear reactors or have sought technical assistance and advice from the IAEA, the Vienna-based United Nations nuclear watchdog agency, in the last year include Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen, as well as several North African nations. See Bob Drogin and Borzou Daragahi, “Arabs make plans for nuclear power,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 2007.

¹⁰ Iranian sources claim the GCC invited Ahmadinejad to speak, but Gulf officials say the Iranian invited himself to Doha for the summit. He reportedly spoke about a 12-point plan for regional security, but no further information has been made available.

¹¹ See <www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/league/peace02.htm>.

¹² Details on these and other meetings are available at the following Web sites: for Clinton 2000, see <www.prospectsforpeace.com/Resources/Plans/Clintonpeace.doc>; for the 2001 negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians in Taba, see <www.peacelobby.org/moratinos_document.htm>; for the nonofficial Israeli-Palestinian Geneva Initiative in 2003, see <www.geneva-accord.org/mainmenu/english>; and for the Ayalon-Nusseibeh principles agreed in 2003, see <www.7th-day.co.il/mehumot/ayalon.htm>.

¹³ See Ronald D. Asmus and Bruce P. Jackson, “Does Israel Belong in the EU and NATO?” *Policy Review* (February and March 2005), 47–56; and Uzi Eilam, *Israeli Membership in NATO: A Preliminary Assessment*, Tel Aviv Notes No. 99 (February 11, 2004).

¹⁴ See Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: Norton, 2006); and statements by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and King Abdallah II of Jordan warning of the danger from a resurgent Iran and Shia community.

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