

FORGING A NEW SECURITY ORDER FOR THE PERSIAN GULF

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Past approaches to regional security in the Persian Gulf have failed. Therefore, new approaches and policy options must be duly considered and given equal weight to the status quo. The goal of this article is to lay out the broad parameters for more effective bilateral and multilateral security policies within the region, as well as policies of external powers toward the region.

IMPORTANCE OF GULF SECURITY

In large part due to U.S. political leadership and the growth of transportation, finance and information technologies since World War II, global, regional and national security issues are impossible to separate. Oil and natural gas are the primary drivers of the entire global economy, both in the developing and developed worlds. Regional security in the Gulf is therefore inherently tied to socioeconomic development throughout the world. And insofar as socioeconomic development has become a preeminent global security issue in the post-9/11 world — under the heading of preventing terrorism through treating “root causes” — Gulf security is inherently a global security problem. Gulf security is of

primary concern for all poorer countries that are attempting to become middle powers, and all middle powers such as Brazil or India trying to become great powers. Regional security in the Persian Gulf constitutes a global public good.

STABLE SECURITY ORDERS

The primary goal of any security strategy, framework, alliance or institution — unilateral, bilateral or multilateral — is to provide order in what is otherwise an inherently anarchic international environment made up of individual nations and groups with conflicting as well as overlapping interests, values and ideologies. The principal factor in any enduring security order is that it is perceived as providing cultural, material, psychological and even spiritual goods: justice, freedom, prosperity, respect for one’s identity or culture by others, a general sense of safety, and other such intangible but very real factors in human life. An order that is not seen as providing any of the aforementioned intangible goods to individuals, groups and states, and that provides only the minimum goal of an end to armed violence, is simply a tyranny that will ultimately break down under the weight of its own unjust prac-

tices. Order connotes a sense of permanence, at least across several decades and even generations. A durable and lasting order is one that is seen as maximally inclusive, that assimilates (in whatever form) diverse values, political goals, security agendas, state interests and so on.

Thus, in pragmatic security discussions, the idea of security orders is often opposed to any one side's winning a competition through the achievement of all their interests via threats, coercion and violence against their competitors. After all, a security order is ultimately constructed through compromise — and compromise is usually thought of as an agreement in which all sides get some of what they want, but no one gets everything they desire.

FAILED SOLUTIONS: VICTORY, HEGEMONY, BALANCE OF POWER

There have been multiple variations on two central themes in the approach to security by both local Gulf states and the United States as an external security guarantor for the region. One such theme is simply peace through “victory,” whether defined as local hegemony, global hegemony, unconditional surrender of an opponent during war, or transformation of societies and political regimes in favor of one version of state interests and values. The other theme is peace through a rough balance of power.

In the Cold War years (1950s–70s), the United States focused almost completely on building up strong local allies (pillars) to dominate the region without taking account of the domestic side of security in the Gulf. Increasingly through the '60s and '70s, the United States relied on a strategy of “local hegemony” via

support for the Saudi Arabian monarchy and the shah of Iran. This strategy failed when the Iranian coup of 1979 ejected the shah from power, and later when the rise of transnational terror groups with Saudi citizens as active members resulted in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Both of these failures were brought about in large part by domestic developments within Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In the 1980s, the United States and local Arab Gulf monarchies tried to create a pure balance of power to keep the peace. This included U.S. intelligence and financial aid to Iraq in its war with Iran, which kept both countries from growing too powerful and thereby provided immediate security to neighboring Arab regimes. However, this strategy allowed Iraq to build up offensive military power and turned a blind eye to the human-rights transgressions of Saddam Hussein as well as to his use of chemical weapons against Iran.

In fact, the Iran-Iraq War did not validate the balance of power, but rather destroyed the natural Persian Gulf balance of power through the exhaustion and hollowing out of the region's two largest states. The “northern” half of the Persian Gulf has been steadily enervated by so-called balance-of-power policies. When Saddam's Iraq was precipitously weakened economically by the exhaustive battle with a theocratic Iran, it eventually reacted through the invasion of Kuwait to secure more oil revenues and stop Kuwait's price-busting policies on oil production.

To right the imbalance of power, America and others reacted by following an eminently realist script. They banded together to support a largely U.S. operation that pushed Saddam back within his own borders, freeing Kuwait. But this righting

of the balance of power only weakened and enervated Saddam's Iraq even more, followed by over a decade of economic sanctions that by 2003 had already gutted the once-powerful Iraqi state — again, all in the name of balancing potential future aggression by an unpredictable Iraq.

Thus, American and Arab efforts to solidify a balance of power in the 1980-88 and 1991 Persian Gulf wars eventually led to the complete destruction of that very balance, in part through Iraqi pursuit of regional hegemony. Even if the United States had not invaded and occupied Iraq in March 2003, the ability of Gulf states to provide their own indigenous balance of power lay in tatters — perversely, in large part due to earlier attempts to keep that balance firmly in place.

Looking beyond superpower foibles, the largely pointless war between Iran and Iraq from 1980-88 also speaks against peace through armed victory in the region. In 1980, Saddam thought he could secure valuable geostrategic territories at the head of the Gulf waterway — as well as overall political, ideological and military hegemony throughout the Gulf — via a decisive defeat of an Iran that was internally weakened by its ongoing revolution. Saddam's dream was to become the indisputable leader of pan-Arabism and the natural geopolitical arbiter in conflicts between Arab states in the Gulf (and perhaps beyond). Predictably, in response to Saddam's provocations, Iran's idealistic, Islamist leadership believed that it could secure a just, religiously based regional order via absolute Iranian victory and the spread of its theocratic ideals throughout the Middle East.

Like America's earlier Cold War travails in Korea and Vietnam, the Iran-

Iraq War in 1988 ended without any real change in the status quo but with millions dead and with hollowed-out economies. The cost of this conflict still haunts Iran's leadership today in the form of apathetic youth, economic stagnation, military weakness and a deteriorating oil infrastructure. The costs of the war eventually drove Saddam toward his attempted annexation of Kuwait's oil fields, again with lasting consequences for his country and the larger region.

PEACE THROUGH U.S. GLOBAL HEGEMONY

Many regional experts and analysts — as well as U.S. Middle East experts — are confused by the seeming lack of strategy in the current U.S. approach to the Persian Gulf, an approach based on a failing occupation in Iraq alongside bilateral military arrangements with Gulf Arab monarchies and the complete isolation of Iran. In fact, the United States does have a strategy: a military-based counterproliferation approach based upon a flexible mix of deterrence, coercive diplomacy, global military superiority, and the preventive or preemptive use of military force, alongside the spread of U.S.-defined democratic and free-market values.

Since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the Bush administration has also sought to link the counterproliferation approach — which stresses the threat of “rogue states” like Iran — with a “war on terrorism” or counterterrorist approach that stresses the future threat of transnational terrorist cells to the U.S. homeland. A broad counterproliferation counterterrorist strategy involves several aspects:

- Dissuasion of competing military buildups by potential state adversaries like China, Iran, Russia or others through the solidification of indefinite U.S. global military superiority. This will presumably convince rising middle powers in key regions to embrace U.S.-style liberal democracy and forgo military expansion in their own spheres of influence.

- Deterrence of those rogue states or future “near-peer competitors” who manage to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or significant conventional forces that challenge U.S. hegemony at the regional level in the Middle East, Persian Gulf, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia.

- Preventive/preemptive military strikes, or the threat of such strikes through coercive diplomacy, in the event that dissuasion and deterrence are not feasible or desirable.

In turn, the presumed universality of U.S. values, culture, political institutions, economy and global military power will act together as a combined package to convince others to embrace secular, liberal, capitalist democracy for their own future development and forgo threats to U.S. leadership in key regions of the world.

As defined operationally by the U.S. government since the early 1990s, counterproliferation consists of technology-denial methods directed at the developing world (export controls) as well as new methods of deterrence, defense and preemption (precision-guided and more lethal conventional munitions alongside the existing nuclear arsenal). Security is seen in cooperative, multilateral or mutual terms only with regard to friends and allies who band together in their economic and

military relations to defend against intractable and potentially irrational enemies. Both ideological and resource competition are seen as endemic to international relations and as an unavoidable reality that necessitates improved methods of control to minimize uncertainty in relations with potentially hostile actors. Security is a fungible good that can (and should) be divided among opposing camps. Moreover, according to this approach, the sovereign nation-state is still the primary actor, insofar as transnational terror networks are thought to be produced, guided, funded, encouraged and equipped by rogue states like Iran or failed states like Afghanistan.

In the end, current U.S. counterproliferation policy subsumes regional security under a grander global vision of spreading liberal democracy and preventing the rise of a strategic competitor, whether defined technologically, militarily or ideologically. This is the context within which WMD takes on so much importance. Only WMD, and especially nuclear weapons, can pose a traditional, cross-border, interstate strategic threat to the preeminent U.S. position within the global system. Implicitly, if not explicitly, it is this global preeminence (in political/ideological as well as military terms) that the Bush administration is defending in its policies toward the Persian Gulf and Greater Middle East.

But, there is a problem. This approach has failed to reach all the primary goals enunciated by the Bush administration. The hoped-for transformation of Iraq through a “war of choice” has resulted in a potential civil war based on a complex mixture of transnational terror groups, local insurgencies, ethnic and religious divides, and tense exchanges between independent armed militias. The present debacle in Iraq

shows the folly of trying to create Middle East peace through “transformation” of an entire region’s culture, economics and politics toward U.S. and Western ideals — an attempt that has potentially long-term, devastating effects on both U.S. global leadership and domestic economic health.

Meanwhile, the attempt to stop Iranian nuclear proliferation through coercive diplomacy — involving economic isolation, diplomatic pressure and even veiled threats of conventional military strikes — has utterly failed to do more than cause a temporary halt to Iranian pursuit of a fully-indigenous fuel cycle via uranium-enrichment facilities. If

anything, these coercive techniques, alongside a U.S. refusal to formally recognize the legitimacy and sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran, have simply hardened the resolve of conservative Iranian

leaders to secure a nuclear-weapons option. Moreover, U.S. pressure and threats are even turning the issue of a peaceful nuclear-energy program into an issue of national pride for all Iranians, liberal, moderate and conservative alike.

Finally, this U.S. combination of traditional counterproliferation with transnational counterterrorism efforts mischaracterizes the very nature of the terror threat. The United States is not under attack for its values and freedoms, for how Americans live their lives on their own home soil. And the threat of catastrophic terrorism on the order of 9/11 does

not come from all of Islamic civilization, but rather from radical fringe elements who have perceived defensive goals toward the United States based on a militant reading of Islamic texts and hatred and fear of the incremental extension of U.S. culture abroad through globalization and through the forward-basing policies of the U.S. military. In sum: these radical transnational groups do not really care what Americans may do in Fargo or Memphis, but they care a great deal about U.S. cultural and military influence half-way around the globe and are willing to commit terrorist acts to lessen that foreign influence over their own societies.

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Yet to hear some of the statements out of the White House and popular press, 9/11 represents an attack on America’s very cultural identity and values, at home as well as abroad. And the U.S. government

seems to be going down the path of fighting a global war based on this understanding of the threat — on the belief that all authoritarian, autocratic leaders of Islamic societies, and all non-state Islamic terrorist groups, are working together to bring down the entire West.

If the United States acts upon this crude and grossly inaccurate definition of the terror threat, it will be in grave danger of creating exactly the kind of civilizational war that the current fringe Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda desire. It will, in short, empower the most radical groups by giving them regional legitimacy where none

existed prior to U.S. interventions. This has already happened in the case of Iraq, which has become a geopolitical magnet for disenfranchised and alienated Islamic insurgents of all nationalities and ethnic persuasions.

NEW EFFORTS TO RESTORE A BALANCE OF POWER

Despite the debacle of balance-of-power politics in the 1980s and '90s, traditional notions of *Realpolitik* continue to inform the dominant thinking and practice among Gulf states. Regional governments continue to rely on outsiders to ensure a rough balance of power to protect their sovereignty, domestic identity and regime security. Extensive contributions from external powers (the United States, China, Russia) have been used to construct and maintain this balance of power. These have

sometimes taken the form of imported weapons technology (missiles to Iran, advanced conventional weapons to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states), while in other instances, they have taken the form of actual U.S. military deployments or "forward defense" measures.

But, while political and security elites in Gulf countries are trying to perfect an international power balance in the region, the entire Middle East is undergoing a sociopolitical transformation that is largely

bypassing traditional forms of *Realpolitik*. Amid the hyperbole regarding Iran's nuclear program and Iraq's continuing chaos, a much larger and potentially more explosive phenomenon has been steadily developing from Northern Africa to the Persian Gulf: the transition from authoritarian, controlled states to more open societies, alongside a population boom that could lead to high rates of unemployment and economic stagnation throughout the region over the next several years.

For perhaps the first time in history, a group of societies in the earliest stages of nation-state development is facing the

challenges of an increasingly transnational world. State leaders throughout the Middle East are trying to build up state power, governmental prerogatives and national sovereignty in a regional security environment characterized by news and information that

are inherently transnational and uncontrollable.

Because of these transitions, there is an increasing contradiction between regional development and the character and methods of superpower policies in the region, including attempts to provide a rough balance of power. Middle Eastern states are quickly becoming interdependent in terms of the flow of political arguments, information and ideologies, even as they stay purposefully apart in terms of elite-

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level foreign policies, military affairs and diplomacy. And the primary guarantor of the stable flow of oil for the global economy (the United States) is now almost universally mistrusted, misperceived and even feared by the Middle Eastern citizenry themselves, from business, academic and media elites to average citizens.

This global and regional security situation is inherently unstable and probably cannot continue indefinitely. The increasing contradiction between top-down state-building and bottom-up globalization in a strategically important region is already having negative effects on the ability of the United States to keep military deployments in the region. Although nearly all high-level Gulf Arab political leaders expect the United States to continue its role as “external balancer” in the region indefinitely, popular support within the region for this “security environment” does not exist. And, given the rapid growth of international, transnational and domestic media in the Middle East, this situation is unlikely to get any better without a strong reassessment of current policies by regional governments, the United States and other external powers.

Because of these pressures, the greatest danger in the Gulf is not a nuclear Iran or a traditional threat of conventional invasion, but rather internal socioeconomic and political changes that might be increasingly hard for leaders to direct or control. Regionally, the greatest threat is not strategic WMD attacks, but the fragmentation and weakening of the central Saudi state, Iraqi civil war and dissolution, and growing radicalism via violent forms of politicized Islam in Gulf Arab states, including increased levels of transnational violence and terrorism.

In this environment, a policy solution may achieve one goal (for instance, strengthening the national state) while either failing to reach other desired outcomes or even undermining them (for instance, liberalizing the political system for maximum domestic legitimacy). In particular, policy solutions meant to combat strategic-level, traditional interstate threats — such as the latent Iranian desire for regional hegemony — may require reliance on outside powers by Iran’s neighbors, including military and troop deployments as well as local basing agreements. However, such strategic-defense solutions may exacerbate other types of non-state, non-strategic threats such as economic deficits and transnational extremist movements, and may result in a failure to open up the political system to groups that are critical of the strategic-level policies.

POWER BALANCING FALLS SHORT

As it happens, traditional power-balancing strategies also fail to solve the primary problem they are meant to address: old-fashioned interstate competition and aggression. In the Gulf, interstate competition has overwhelmed power-balancing efforts in the past and will do so in the future.

To give one of the most prominent examples, consider the Abu Musa island dispute, which has territorial, defense, cultural and sovereignty-based overtones. Abu Musa is one of the preeminent strategic territories in the Gulf, situated within the narrow Hormuz Strait about equidistant from both Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). As with many post-colonial situations, the exit of the colonial power (Britain) has led to a legal

dispute in which each side (Iran and the UAE, backed by GCC allies) has advanced arguments with historical and legal validity. Neither side is prepared to back down and accept the other's principles.

For Iran, the territorial separation is an accident of British interventions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries — interventions that were by nature illegitimate because they involved an outside power. Further, Iran believes that the emphasis on this issue by Gulf Arab monarchies next door is an accident of their recent empowerment by another external hegemon: the United States. Finally, the high sensitivity of this issue is an accident of threat-based relations between the United States and Iran. Once U.S.-Iran relations improve, the dispute will largely disappear and Iran's current occupation of the disputed territories will be accepted as a simple historical reality.

Meanwhile, Arab Gulf monarchies point out that both historically and today, external powers are often by default local powers. This is true whether one is talking about the naval presence and contributions of Portuguese, Dutch and British imperial forces to the security of coastal tribal networks in past decades and centuries, or whether one is considering the current American economic and security agreements (and military deployments) in regard to states in the Gulf over the past few decades. Whether as tribes or states, coastal Arab leaders have purposely relied on "security-economic trades" with external powers that have ensured a modicum of authority and order for local elites while meeting the larger, more global concerns of great powers who wish to keep sea lanes open and access to natural resources predictable.

These competing legal principles and security perceptions have gradually evolved to the point where the dispute is not just a legal argument, but an existential issue involving the security of the Arab and Persian sides of the Gulf. In sum: every step the Arab monarchies take to bolster their claim to the island leads to suspicions of malign, long-term strategic intent in Tehran, and vice versa, so that one side's defensive efforts look wholly offensive and aggressive to the other. If the UAE or other GCC states invite U.S. forces or buy advanced conventional weaponry from the United States, this convinces Tehran that it is encircled by hostile forces and that the Arab states are complicit in threatening the Islamic Republic's existence. However, the GCC states continue to see such moves as prudent, pragmatic, defensive and deterrent in nature — as solidifying a balance of power and not as supporting U.S. hegemony against Iran.

Meanwhile, everything Iran does to hold onto Abu Musa as a strategic territorial asset (for potential defense of the homeland) convinces the United States and the GCC states that Iran is intent on regional hegemony and the export of its own values abroad. Thus, each side is caught in a vicious circle, where steps seen as pragmatic by one side are seen as aggressive by the other, with no clear end in sight and no obvious solution that meets the defense and deterrent requirements of every nation simultaneously.

“NONTRADITIONAL” SECURITY THREATS

An additional wrinkle is the nontraditional threat perceptions of Iran's neighbors. In off-the-record, nonattributed international dialogues in the region spon-

sored by the Stanley Foundation, we have found that Iranian nuclear weapons capabilities may play a distant second to immediate Arab fears about the Russian construction of Iran's Busheir plant and the reliability of Busheir's safety and security measures. Indeed, senior Kuwaiti analysts and former officials have voiced fears about the so-called "Chernobyl scenario," named after the catastrophic failure of safety containment measures and widespread dispersion of radioactive particles across Eastern Europe by Russia's nuclear power plant in Chernobyl in the 1980s. In the view of these Arab experts, such an environmental catastrophe could shut down Gulf oil shipments and result in environmental crises within affected Arab countries causing economic collapse. For these analysts, potential Iranian "worst practices" in running its plants, poor Russian construction, and the troubling fact that Busheir is located right on top of an active earthquake fault line could all be much more dangerous and damaging than an Iranian nuclear weapons capability.

POWER AND SOCIOECONOMIC CHANGE

Despite the aforementioned problems with traditional security concepts, the Washington policy debate is trying to salvage "power approaches" to security in the region via the Holy Grail of domestic reform. The belief in the applicability of Western-developed political and social processes underlies most U.S. policies, both military and non-military. Translated into the regional context, this has sprouted into a Washington cottage industry describing and recommending how Middle East peace can come about through the eventual domestic liberalization of all Middle

East polities. Indeed, there is a hope that if regional states can simultaneously become politically liberal (free speech, free press, free elections), socially liberal (gender equality, tolerance of religious and ethnic minorities), and economically liberal (free-market policies internally and externally), then the huge gap between the policies of regimes and the wishes of the common Gulf citizen can finally be reconciled in a way that strengthens and legitimates the U.S. role in the region.

Unfortunately, the solution of domestic reform is plagued by its own problems of logic and empirical realities. Internal state-based reform does not necessarily imply harmony between strong forms of trans-state identity in the Gulf and larger Middle East. Such forms of identity remain as strong as ever, even if they are not currently channeled effectively or consistently via existing political regimes. Pan-Arabism, moderate political Islam, extreme forms of political Islam (such as fundamentalist Salafism), tribal networks, and the macro-level split between Shia and Sunni Islam all collide and overlap in extremely complex forms in areas such as Iraq.

Second, international peace is about states coexisting with each other, not just about internal reform. Just because neighbors become relatively free, capitalist polities does not mean they automatically trust each other or share common ideologies or interests. Each state will continue to enunciate its own strongly nationalist version of liberalization, often in competition with its neighbors.

This is currently happening with bilateral U.S. foreign-trade agreements, in which the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait are all signing their own non-transparent deals with the United States

and trying to build their economies apart from each other via economic reliance on an external power, rather than transforming economic relations with each other via the GCC. And all five countries are signing these strictly bilateral deals in a way that radically disempowers Saudi Arabia as the reigning local hegemon, essentially taking away its once-dominant regional role on matters of trade and finance with its Arab neighbors in the Gulf. Thus, liberalization does not end interstate competition, at least not within the foreseeable future as each state follows its own particular national development trajectory.

Finally, liberalization as a cure-all does not admit the fact that the West requires reasonably strong and authoritative state structures throughout the Middle East to play a mediating role between Western and Middle Eastern cultural norms and religious practices. Western and Middle Eastern societies remain largely alien to one another despite strong penetration of global capital in Gulf societies and the fast-track modernization drives by nearly all Arab Gulf leaders. Unfortunately, U.S. policy makers are still at a loss for how to deal directly with Arab nationalism, Persian nationalism and various forms of political Islam in the region. The current experience in Iraq, for instance, would seem to show that the United States is ineffectual and confused when it comes to dealing with tribal networks and religious-ethnic divisions that do not mirror anything seen within the U.S. polity.

Nor do rising economic powers such as Japan, China, India or Malaysia have a lock on dealing directly with these regional cultures. Looking beyond U.S. relations, the simple fact is that strong (but not necessarily authoritarian) regimes are

needed, in some form or other, to mediate between Arab-Islamic culture, Persian-Islamic culture and the norms and processes of the globalized world as a whole. While GCC states could certainly benefit from further political openings, more free press, greater gender equity, and more toleration of minorities such as the beleaguered Shiites, this does not erase the fact that currently, none of these states could be succeeding as much as they have in integration with the global financial system without the presence of strong tribal and bureaucratic elites leading the governments in question.

A NEW MULTILATERAL SECURITY ORDER

Reconceptualization of the War on Terror

As argued earlier, the current U.S. strategy implicitly and explicitly assumes that all anti-U.S. terrorist groups are funded, guided, equipped or encouraged by sovereign “rogue states.” However, the evolving nature of fundamentalist terrorism is that it threatens all states and societies throughout the Gulf, not just U.S. friends and allies. The new type of transnational terrorism responsible for the November 9, 2005, attacks on three hotels in Amman, Jordan, does not discriminate between Sunni and Shia, secular and religious, Persian and Arab. It opposes all forms of moderate political Islam and all current regimes throughout the Middle East, Iran included.

This points to a cold, hard fact that has gone unreported by the Western media: although Iran aids Shiite groups in Lebanon and the West Bank that use terrorist methods, it fears the same transnational, anti-globalization, anti-U.S., Sunni terrorist

groups that Washington is battling on the global scene. Al-Qaeda and its variants around the globe are every bit as much an ideological enemy of Shiite Iran as they are of the United States.

Saudi Arabia, as well, has come to the belated but accurate realization that its primary enemy is not radical Shia Islamic groups supported through covert interventions by a theocratic Iran — the threat that galvanized Saudi support for Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq War. Instead, in the twenty-first century, the primary threat to Saudi stability — including the reliability of its oil infrastructure — comes from domestic Sunni terrorist groups that

subscribe to a more purist version of Wahhabi Islam than the Saudi government itself does. These groups, which are populist in nature and which challenge the authority of government-sponsored clerics, question the

legitimacy and ruling practices of the entire Al Saud family, including its positive relations with the West and its overall economic-political openings to the outside world. It is these groups, and not Iranian-aided Shia factions in Saudi Arabia, that have been responsible for a series of well-planned and bloody attacks on malls, Western residential compounds and government ministries since spring 2003.

Conflict Management to Support Liberalization

Given the true nature of transnational

terrorism in the Persian Gulf, both the United States and all regional states have common interests that should allow strong bilateral and multilateral security cooperation. For instance, geopolitically, Iran and the United States share interests in stabilizing oil supplies and prices, curbing the regional drug trade, and stemming the flow of arms and extremists across borders from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

This brings us to some enduring and heartfelt European assumptions about the end of the Cold War that unfortunately have not percolated to the top of the U.S. post-9/11 debate. Throughout Europe, there is a profound belief in the historical

value and necessity of the Helsinki process, or the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, in bringing about the bloodless transition to a free Europe when the communist empire finally fell. The Helsinki process

involved serious dialogue and eventual negotiated agreement on prickly issues such as conventional arms balances and human-rights violations, even as the Cold War between Western and Eastern blocs continued unabated.

The key to this larger process, in the European view, was that it crossed ideological and territorial divisions and was truly integrative in its overall approach in terms of both participants and issues involved in the talks as opposed to NATO and the Warsaw Pact, which were part and parcel of the Iron Curtain that divided

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Europe. NATO and the Warsaw Pact underwrote and enforced that divide; their very purpose was founded in the threat-based logic of political, social and economic conflict between liberal capitalism and centralized communism. They therefore could not serve as instruments for transcending that same divide in the name of mutual security.

Another key in this process was the idea that mutually beneficial international interactions could have a proverbial “trickle down” effect and lead to positive domestic evolution in authoritarian states. This guiding assumption of Helsinki has been all but lost in the current Washington debate about the War on Terror, in which it is assumed that all positive attempts at international engagement with rogues are tantamount to treason because they “reward” recalcitrant and evil regimes that employ unsavory domestic practices. The unstated assumption of current Washington hyperbole is that the causal arrow of political change only flows “up” — that changing immoral domestic regimes will result in beneficial foreign policies toward the rogue’s neighbors, but that the reverse will never happen. Integrating authoritarian regimes into cooperative international endeavors will have absolutely no effect on their dubious domestic practices. These ingrained assumptions implicitly denigrate the German and larger European interpretation of why the Bloodless Revolution occurred without a shot being fired.

In the New World, these rigid Washington assumptions, rather than those of the Europeans, are starting to look naïve and idealistic. Liberal domestic political elites and institutional practices cannot be immediately manufactured through a clever mix of foreign financial-aid packages, trade

incentives, security agreements, punitive sanctions and military force. Instead, better domestic governance will take decades, if not centuries, to build up. Given the inherently long-term scale of this grandiose global development project, multilateral approaches at the international level are central to pushing forward the domestic liberalization of authoritarian regimes—a core U.S. foreign-policy goal.

This should not be too alien an idea, since Europe now lives in a regional environment defined by mutual respect, mutual prosperity and a constantly negotiated balance of interests and obligations via bilateral diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy and common institutions based on shared as well as competing interests. However, the important point is not that other regions should copy Europe per se (an arrogant and impractical notion), but rather that the United States should commit itself to creating this constant process of positive-sum negotiation in other regional environments, according to the specific sets of interests, ideologies and values of differing geopolitical contexts.

For another relevant example, consider the positive evolution of East Asia since President Richard Nixon’s visit to China in 1972. In the past 33 years, a complex set of international and transnational business, cultural, monetary and even security ties has steadily enveloped a rising China in a dense regional network involving almost all nations in southeast and northeast Asia. These very tangible relationships effectively constrain any aggressive impulses on the part of a potentially boisterous Beijing, whatever path its domestic politics may take in the coming decades.

Although the multilateral and cooperative Association of Southeast Asian Na-

tions (ASEAN) is still fairly limited in addressing hard security issues, ASEAN is no longer a creature of just one Asian subregion. It has become more involved in northeast Asia as its dialogue on common threats and security challenges has evolved. Under the rubric of "ASEAN + 3", China, Japan, and South Korea are being incorporated into the expanding norms, rules and common expectations constituting Asia's experiment in cooperative development and security.

What the European and Asian experiences show is that security does not come solely from piecemeal, case-by-case internal development. It also necessarily comes through international diplomacy, treaties, defense pacts, confidence and security-building measures, international norm-building, trade, finance and cultural exchanges. International trust and mutual interdependence between nations must increase alongside domestic reforms and vice versa. One does not exist without the other.

Multilateral Conflict Management¹

A new security order should be created in the Gulf by building additional layers to the current security system with a greater emphasis on multilateral cooperation. U.S.-Gulf-state bilateral cooperation and the GCC would serve as the base layer. But these relations should be strengthened for tighter coalition-based military integration, which should be fully institutionalized by the time the U.S. forces in the region move to an "over-the-horizon" posture that involves far less personnel and equipment based in the region.

With a smaller U.S. troop presence, regular command-post exercises and military maneuvers using prepositioned

equipment will become more important to Gulf security. The GCC should enhance efforts for joint operations through a better command, control and communications infrastructure and facilitate greater information and intelligence sharing for early warning of potential threats. This enhanced capability should also be leveraged to address a broad range of transnational threats. Enhancement of the GCC collective security system will aid the integration of individual Gulf military forces with those of the United States.

The second layer would be the broadest and most multilateral in nature. It would involve setting up a new security organization that could notionally be called the "Gulf Regional Security Forum (GRSF)." Southern and northern Gulf states, without exceptions, would be the core members, together with extraregional states and organizations with vested interests in the Gulf. It would have its own unique features, but should draw from the experiences of other multilateral regional forums, particularly the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Initial goals for the GRSF would be promoting an environment in the Gulf based on dialogue, with the goal of reducing tensions and enhancing cooperation against transnational threats. Shipping safety, oil cleanup, earthquake-hazard mitigation, avoidance of incidents at sea, the safety and security of nuclear fissile materials (for any states pursuing nuclear power plants), and impeding drug trafficking are just some of the issues for the forum's agenda. To establish norms on Gulf relations, a code of conduct or charter for security cooperation should be consid-

ered. The forum should seek to expand military-to-military confidence-building measures that have been pioneered between Oman and Iran, as well as other measures to enhance trust.

As Gulf cooperation on specific functional issues progresses, the GRSF may add others to the forum as needed. This might involve Gulf neighbors such as Afghanistan, Turkey and Pakistan when focusing on inter-regional issues such as terrorism, water distribution, drug trafficking or nonproliferation of WMD.

This layered security system would wrap the Gulf parties in a web of interlinked security arrangements that could be adapted or expanded as necessary. Regional parties themselves would principally determine the degree of formality of each layer. As we have seen in the development of the ARF and OSCE, it is better to start out small and with flexible arrangements rather than hardened, formal structures. More important, the new order will increase the interactions between parties in the region, thereby building new bureaucracies and constituencies within each state to support cooperative multilateral initiatives. Such interactions are useful for developing the institutional capacity that can oppose policies advocating confrontation or inertia.

Eventually, this forum could engage in changing the “hard security” milieu by managing conventional armament proliferation, so that destabilizing imbalances in the quality and quantity of conventional arms do not occur and act as stimulants to aggressive behavior and pursuit of more unconventional weapons. The final, long-term goal would be a security environment in which every state feels its core security interests and development goals are being

respected by all its neighbors.

Gulf Security and Extra-Regional Parties²

Involving extra-regional states with a stake in a peaceful and stable Gulf — most notably the United States, Europeans, South Asians and Chinese — will be important for achieving long-term stability. Their geographical proximity to the Gulf, growing dependence on Gulf oil, importance to counterterrorism and nonproliferation, and abiding proclivities to be a partner with the United States on global problems all point to the need for including them in a stable structure in that subregion. The Europeans can be particularly instrumental in fostering multilateral cooperation as a new layer to the Gulf security system. On the ground, these include patrolling the Gulf as part of the Global War on Terrorism and Proliferation Security Initiative, nation-building assistance to Iraq, outreach to Iran, and promotion of free trade and investment.

This is not to say, however, that rising Asian powers such as Japan, China or India, or the EU as a whole, can and should act as the new “security guarantors” for the Persian Gulf, essentially replacing the U.S. Central Command, the U.S. Fifth Fleet, and other U.S. military services in the region. At a September 2005 Stanley Foundation-sponsored international dialogue in the UAE, Chinese, Japanese, Indian and European participants were very clear in stating that they cannot embrace the overall military security roles of the United States any time soon for domestic political as well as military reasons. Instead, these external powers want a better-defined, balanced and equitable U.S. leadership role (as opposed

to U.S. hegemony) that creates a stable regional environment for European and Asian foreign direct investments, new energy projects (such as pipelines through Central Asia), trade, cooperation on transnational security concerns (crime, drugs, terrorism, WMD networks), and the provision of aid for domestic political development in the region.

Wider Middle East Issues³

Not all threats or opportunities facing the GCC states, Yemen, Iraq and Iran are located within the Gulf itself. The continued war of attrition in the West Bank, broadcast over the airwaves of newly independent Arab media outlets, directly fuels resentment in

Gulf populations against their own governments for cooperating with the United States. Further, Israel's unsafeguarded nuclear program and long-range missile delivery systems are regarded as a direct threat or

security concern to some Gulf states, and silence about Israel's programs illustrates the selective character of the current nonproliferation regimes, in which tremendous pressure is put on Iran and Arab states not to acquire WMD. Finally, Levant subregional security is connected to Gulf security via enduring Iranian threats to the existence of Israel, including annual aid for violent anti-Israeli organizations in the West Bank.

These wider Middle East security

concerns of the Gulf Arab states should not be dismissed as excuses by these regimes to oppose concerted domestic reforms, just as Israeli concerns about Iranian aid should not be viewed as an excuse to continue its occupation of the West Bank. Both cross-regional concerns are legitimate.

Indeed, even while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict simmers and often erupts in the Levant, the Gulf Arab states have embarked on programs of domestic reform because they have seen this to be in their own interest. But they prefer to undertake such reforms in a stable domestic atmosphere. Palestinian issues, particularly the status of Jerusalem, resonate deeply in the body politics of all Arab states. Daily

images of the conflict on al-Jazeera satellite network and other Arab media outlets have also deepened ties between Gulf Arabs and the Palestinian cause. Many Gulf Arab citizens and leaders alike use treatment of

Palestinians by

Silence about Israel's programs illustrates the selective character of the current nonproliferation regimes, in which tremendous pressure is put on Iran and Arab states not to acquire WMD.

Israel as a broad, abstract indicator of Western treatment of Arab-Islamic identity, culture and religion as a whole. For better or worse, U.S. respect for Palestinian concerns is often used as a litmus test for U.S. respect for pan-Arab concerns in general, including the Arab-Islamic focus on communitarian forms of social justice. Even if these ties between the Levant and Gulf are largely symbolic or psychological in nature, they still have a real impact on domestic stability and socioeconomic

development in Gulf Arab monarchies.

So as the United States focuses on the Gulf, it should continue to work forthrightly on this fundamental security problem in the wider Middle East. Meanwhile, U.S. engagement of Iran on Gulf-specific, common strategic concerns must also include the urgent need to end Iranian support for groups that oppose the very existence of the Israeli state.

One other issue is the establishment of a WMD-free zone, which would necessarily encompass all three subregions of the Greater Middle East: Northern Africa, the Levant and the Gulf. Such a zone would incorporate tighter international monitoring of Iran's nuclear program, further verification of Libya's corroborated efforts in getting out of the WMD business, and the ferreting out of Pakistan's extensive black-market operations in nuclear trade. Finally, Israel's responsibilities to support a new regional security system would also have to be incorporated, since all states in the wider Middle East strongly argue that Israel should not be given a pass by the United States when it comes to proliferation.

All Middle East states — U.S. enemies as well as U.S. friends — have endorsed in principle the establishment of such a zone. This includes Syria and Iran. It also includes Israel, which has stated that it is prepared to deal with the issue “in the context of a comprehensive, lasting and stable peace” and together with Jordan codified this endorsement in their 1994 peace treaty. Of course, the ongoing crisis with the Palestinians has made most Israelis more cautious about giving up the nuclear option (roughly 75 percent of those polled remain committed to it). Nevertheless, changes in the Gulf and North Africa

offer a unique opportunity to explore “preconditions” for negotiating a WMD-free zone and even taking embryonic steps towards one.

Stronger Involvement by the IAEA

Alongside the above negotiating track, the United States, Europe and all Asian states with strong economic interests in the region should work together to ensure an ever-more-prominent role for Mohamed ElBaradei's mission of nuclear safety and security. In particular, the IAEA should not be solely concerned with inspecting Iranian facilities for weaponization activities — a task it is already performing, with some difficulty due to continued Iranian refusal to release a truly comprehensive and accurate report of all its nuclear activities over the past two decades. In addition to these straightforward nonproliferation goals, the IAEA should also be concerned about the overall safety and security of peaceful Iranian nuclear-energy activities.

It is unrealistic to assume that anyone but the IAEA can address the serious concerns of Iran's Arab neighbors about the safety of various Iranian nuclear facilities. IAEA monitoring, technical advice, and reporting on the operations of nuclear plants such as Busheir could act as a bilateral confidence-building measure between Iran and individual Gulf Arab monarchies, all of whom have normal relations with Iran but are currently shut out of Iran's internal nuclear-policy debates. ElBaradei is the best available mediator and shuttle diplomat on these non-traditional, environmental security concerns that go well beyond the U.S. counterproliferation view of the Iranian nuclear threat.

Conclusion:

U.S. leadership, not hegemony

The primary problem is quite simply to create a new order in the Gulf that involves forms of mutual security among actors with common and conflicting interests, given that there is no longer any such thing as purely “national” security isolated from regional and global realities. The approach, in short, will have to be one of managed competition based on a balance of interests and values, which leaves out the extremes of “victory” of one set of interests over another as well as the Utopian vision of perfect harmony among groups that all share the same core goals.

Only the United States has the diplomatic, economic, and military capital to seek and create this balance of national interests and value systems in the Persian Gulf. But, for the United States to play this role of honest broker, it must abandon its obsessive focus on maintaining its strategic position via nuclear superiority and the dominance of U.S. values. U.S. planners must incorporate other security goals, requirements and threats into a larger strategic vision that has the stated purpose of legitimizing the regional security system for all states, including enemies such as Iran.

While the United States might make purely tactical, short-term gains by thwarting nuclear proliferation to Iran — possibly through preemptive military strikes — long-term strategic goals may suffer. These goals include the following:

- Creating a reliable and low-priced supply of oil and natural gas to fuel the continued growth of the global economy;
- Preventing a complete breakdown of the Iraqi state that would invite outside

intervention by all of Iraq’s neighbors;

- Securing Iraq’s porous borders against transnational criminals and terrorists;

- Preventing the evolution of a new regional, cross-border schism between Shia and Sunni groups that could threaten both development goals and oil supplies throughout the Middle East and possibly cause new tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran based on developments within Iraq;

- Acquiring the needed intelligence on the political positions of important sects and tribes within Iraq so as to allow a new political solution to emerge;

- Combating transnational drug networks and terrorism on a comprehensive regional basis;

- Providing security guarantees and reassurances to Arab states about Iran’s ultimate nuclear intentions, while also providing reassurances to Iran that it is not existentially threatened by the United States;

- Defining new “regional roles” for the historical hegemons of the Gulf (Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia) that support rather than undermine a new cooperative security order;

- Providing reassurances to Gulf monarchies that Iran does not seek regional hegemony, whether military, political or religious;

- Preventing Iranian weaponization of its latent nuclear capabilities;

- Mitigating potentially deadly bilateral nuclear crises between a nuclear Israel and a nuclearizing Iran through confidence-building measures aimed at reducing the existential threat perceptions;

- Preventing the emergence of conventional arms races between states;

- Mitigating the worst consequences of

territorial disputes;

- Contributing to a viable and equitable Israeli-Palestinian solution;
- Addressing environmental threats effectively;
- Supporting the long-term domestic liberalization of Gulf polities through the steady creation of an international environment of peace and stability among sovereign states.

To paraphrase the late President Ronald Reagan (speaking about bilateral U.S.-Soviet nuclear war): “A war of civilizations cannot be won and must never be fought” — whatever ambitious scenarios are spun by a Pentagon enamored of the fruits of military transformation.

The road to Gulf security is not paved with programs for radical reshaping of other societies along lines reflecting U.S. values and institutions. Nor will it be guaranteed by maintaining global military primacy. Instead, a peaceful Persian Gulf is one in which large regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia coexist with all their smaller neighbors in a mutually beneficial set of relationships based on prosperity and respect rather than fear and domination. Only by jettisoning the failed strategies of local hegemony, global hegemony, armed victory and pure power politics can the United States help construct a new security order that is seen as equitable by all states in the region — ultimately to the benefit of U.S. national security goals.

¹ Much of this section is directly excerpted, with permission, from an article written by Michael Yaffe, director of studies, National Defense University Near East-South Asia Center, Washington, DC, titled “The Gulf and a New Middle East Security System,” in a special issue of *Middle East Policy*, fall 2004, edited by Michael Kraig. See www.stanleyfoundation.org/initiatives/gsi/ or www.mepec.org for the full text of Yaffe’s article.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.