



Actions, Not Just Attitudes

A New Paradigm for U.S.-Arab Relations

David Pollock

with Cole Bunzel and Curtis Cannon

Policy Focus #104 | June 2010

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Front cover: Sheikh Maher Hammoud watches broadcast in Sidon, Lebanon, of U.S. president Barack Obama delivering his “new beginnings” speech at Cairo University, June 4, 2009. (AP Photo/Mohammed Zaatari)

Contents

Tables and Illustrations iv

About the Authors v

Acknowledgments vii

Author’s Note ix

Executive Summary xi

Introduction 1

Part I. Sources and Methodology

1. Explanation of the Arab Behavioral Index 7

2. Explanation of the Arab Reform Index 11

3. Methodological Issues 15

Part II. Major Findings

4. Arab Behavioral Index: Broad Regional and Subregional Trends 19

5. Arab Behavioral Index Trends by Category 21

6. Arab Reform Index: Trends and Analysis 25

7. Country Graphs 29

Part III. Special Topics

8. Anti-American Demonstrations: Serious or Scattershot?. 53

9. Arabs and U.S. Consumer Goods: Boom or Boycott?. 62

10. Defense, Security, and Counterterrorism: Cooperation or Conflict?. 65

11. Saudi Arms Purchases: Feast or Famine?. 67

Part IV. Conclusion

12. Lessons from Bush, Lessons for Obama 73

Tables and Illustrations

Table 1. U.S. Approval Rating: Gallup Polls 2005–2009.	2
Table 2. U.S. Approval Rating: Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2002–2009	2
Table 3. World Bank Institute Governance Indicators: Political Reform and Voice/Accountability.	12
Table 4. World Bank Institute Governance Indicators: Economic Reform and Regulatory Quality.	13
Table 5. Relative Trends, 2000–2009	26
Table 6. Foreign Military Sales Deliveries.	68
Table 7. Foreign Military Sales Agreements.	68
Table 8. Foreign Military Construction Sales Deliveries	68
Figure 1. Arab Popular Ties Trend	19
Figure 2. Arab Official Ties Trend	19
Figure 3. Arab Political Reform Average	25
Figure 4. Arab Economic Reform Average	25
Figures 5–24. Country Graphs (see page 29).	30
Figure 25. Arab Anti-American Protests	54
Figure 26. Dateline of Protests, 2008–2009	55
Figure 27. Arab Anti-American Protests by Year.	56
Figure 28. Anti-American Protests, 2000–2009.	56
Figure 29a. Protests by Size and Year.	57
Figure 29b. Protest Magnitude	57
Figure 29c. Average Protest Magnitude by Region	58
Figure 29d. Average Protest Magnitude	58

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Acknowledgments

I WOULD LIKE to dedicate this study to the memory of my father, Dr. Jack Pollock of New York City. As a teacher, public high school principal, community leader, and most of all as a father, he set a shining, lifelong example of working to promote understanding and cooperation among people of all faiths and nations, while remaining absolutely true to his own identity.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the Keston family for their vision and commitment in establishing Project Fikra. This study would not have been possible without their generous support.

Author's Note

This study features four online appendices that provide complete statistical data for the indices, along with case studies of select countries. Links to this material can be found at:

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=331>

Executive Summary

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM is completely wrong about U.S.-Arab relations during the past decade. Measured by objective behavioral criteria, relations with almost all Arab governments—and almost all Arab publics—improved steadily and strongly after the Iraq war’s first year.

In many cases, the numbers show that key aspects of bilateral ties were at least as good or even better—in both the official and popular levels—in 2006–2008, under President Bush, than in 2000, under President Clinton. This is true even though Arab opinion polls suggest a sharply lower U.S. public “image” during that decade.

President Obama’s first year demonstrates continuity, not change, in this trend. Moreover, behavioral measures show that internal Arab political and economic reforms made more progress when they were actively promoted by the Bush administration in 2003–2005—precisely when the U.S. “image” in Arab countries was at its lowest.

The polls and the media tell us that Arabs liked Bill Clinton, hated George W. Bush, and have, or at least had, high hopes for Barack Obama. Likewise for the United States itself: as of 2008, favorable views of America were down in the twenties, teens, or even single digits in the handful of Arab countries polled. In 2009, in sharp contrast, the new president enjoyed majority Arab approval ratings, up forty or even fifty points over Bush, while the overall U.S. image in those countries had also improved significantly. The American and Arab media, and official rhetoric on both sides, anticipated a new beginning in U.S.-Arab relations.

But this project is not about polls, pundits, or public opinion. Rather, it starts with a simple question: Over the entire past decade, from Clinton through Bush to Obama, what has been the record of actual Arab behavior toward the United States?

This very basic question can be subdivided into a few distinct, and quite quantifiable, subsidiary questions for research.

For example:

- As attitudes soured, did Arab states cut their overall trade ties with the United States or their purchases of American weapons?
- Did Arab publics turn away from traveling or studying in the United States or buying American brands?
- Did Arab streets explode with anti-American demonstrations?
- Did Arab countries turn against political or economic reform when such reforms were promoted by Washington?
- And today, have the much higher Arab approval ratings for President Obama and the country as a whole translated into any concrete improvements in Arab interactions with America?

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that the answer to all of these questions is “no.” Analysis of the hard data behind these highly counterintuitive findings constitutes the bulk of the report. In fact, these findings suggest that we need a new paradigm for understanding U.S.-Arab relations—one that emphasizes actions much more than attitudes.

This new paradigm is a work in progress, subject to continual correction, updating, and refinement. It does not pretend to be the whole truth. But it does aspire to add an important yet neglected dimension to our understanding, one that should complement other, more qualitative approaches or those focused more on mere attitudinal data.

This summary answers four questions: What is this new paradigm? What does it show about U.S.-Arab relations? How can we explain these surprising findings? And, finally, what does it all mean, for U.S. policy in general and for President Obama in particular?

A New Paradigm

The main idea behind the new paradigm is deceptively simple. First, put aside all the polls, all the media coverage and commentary, and all the official statements and diplomatic rhetoric. Then, find a way to quantify many different kinds of actual Arab behavior, particularly those kinds relevant to U.S.-Arab relations—in short, what Arabs do, not what they say. Make sure you do this for both government and popular behavior. For the former, use inputs like United Nations votes, arms purchases, and overall bilateral trade; for the latter, focus on travel and study in the United States and consumer purchases of American brands. Then, get all the data related to these behaviors for twenty different Arab countries over the past ten years, tracking down every single confirmed report of an anti-American demonstration as well. Next, figure out how to validate, weight, adjust for inflation and other distortions, aggregate, analyze, and present all that data, while also comparing it with Arab ties to other countries besides the United States. Finally, try to make sense out of all this evidence, focusing on trends over time and relating it to the real world—and call it the Arab Behavioral Index (ABI).

In addition to the ABI, the authors came up with a new way to quantify changes in Arab political and economic reform over the past decade: the Arab Reform Index (ARI). Clearly, such changes are only an indirect measure of U.S.-Arab relations. But since political and economic reform were major declared U.S. objectives for the region during this past decade, it is important to examine what progress or regression actually occurred in each country, and when, and whether it is linked to the United States in any significant way.

No statement of methodology is complete without a few caveats, of course. First, some important aspects of U.S.-Arab relations cannot be quantified: atmospheric changes, personalities, particular diplomatic episodes or security issues, and others. Second, any generalization about Arab countries is inherently problematic; there are too many important individual variations. Third, while our data is the best available, it is not perfect, and the methods we use to weight, adjust, and aggregate it are not the only ones that could

reasonably be employed—we are open to suggestions for improvement.

Nevertheless, many important things can be quantified, and some important generalizations can be made. And, regardless of methodological minutiae, one lesson from this exercise is very clear. As with any group, Arab attitudes can be very different from Arab actions. From now on, any serious assessment of how the United States is faring among Arabs should inquire not just about their attitudes, but also about their actions. We should henceforth insist on finding some solid evidence and saying something meaningful about what Arab governments and Arab publics actually do, not simply what they say.

The Arab Behavioral Index

The ABI does show a sharp decline in U.S.-Arab relations in nearly every category during the first two years of the Bush presidency, reaching a low point in 2003. Arab enrollment in educational institutions in the United States dropped, overall visa rates fell dramatically, Arab states voted with the United States less often at the UN, and U.S. arms deliveries to the region declined, in both absolute and relative terms. By some measures, even overall bilateral trade suffered slightly at first. Anti-American demonstrations in many countries also escalated precipitously as the Iraq war commenced.

Yet in nearly every category, a quick and often dramatic recovery occurred. This was true at both the official and popular level. Anti-American protests dwindled considerably after 2005—even as anti-Israeli protests spiked during the Lebanon and Gaza wars in 2006 and early 2009, respectively, and protests over purely domestic issues increased in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Kuwait, and elsewhere. At the outset of the Iraq war, more than 3 million Arabs across the region participated in anti-American demonstrations, an impressive 1 percent of the 300 million Arabs in the region. But the average for each other year in the past decade was closer to half a million, with a steep decline in recent years.

The story is similar concerning the number of protest demonstrations. From 2000 through 2005, there were 539 significant anti-American protests across the region, averaging around six per country per year, with

Iraq leading the pack. By contrast, from 2006 through 2009, only 132 such protests were reported—an average of just two per country per year, with Iraq still in the lead.

In the economic category, after 2003, the growth in U.S. exports to Arab countries was spectacular, skyrocketing from \$18.2 billion in 2000 to \$46.3 billion in 2008, in constant dollars. This growth was especially impressive among clearly identifiable American consumer brands. Sales of American cars in Saudi Arabia grew fivefold, and in the United Arab Emirates tenfold, between 2003 and 2008. Sales of other consumer goods increased by more than 50 percent across the region, even after adjusting for inflation. Procter & Gamble proudly points out that its products are used in nine out of ten Egyptian households. Kraft Foods cited increased demand in the region as a key factor in its worldwide growth in 2006 and 2007. Even when Arabs say they dislike “Brand America,” they like American brands.

Similarly, Arab student enrollment rates in the United States bottomed out in 2005 but have now climbed past the high point set at the start of the decade, even as American schools have set up satellite campuses around the region. The figures for Arab visitors to the United States have also swung upward since 2003, with some countries now above their pre-September 11 levels. In other words, Arabs from nearly every country in the region have been traveling and studying in America—and, on a much more massive scale, buying American brands—in ever larger numbers at least since 2005, despite their general disapproval of the U.S. president, U.S. policies, and the United States itself, according to all the polls. This does not mean that Arabs are hypocritical, just human.

As for Arab governments, most actually upgraded their diplomatic, economic, and security ties with Washington from 2004 through 2008, long before Obama won the presidency. U.S. arms sales, often a reliable indicator of overall security cooperation, increased considerably with nearly every Arab government, the sole exceptions being Syria, Sudan, and the Palestinian Authority. Overall trade with almost every Arab country grew considerably as well. The U.S. market share relative to other exporters generally held steady or even

improved in some cases, including Tunisia, Oman, Mauritania, Iraq, and Libya.

During those same Bush years, the United States also enjoyed enhanced military or counterterrorism cooperation with nearly every Arab country except Syria—whether traditional friends such as Egypt, Gulf Cooperation Council members, and Jordan or other countries such as Algeria and Yemen. And a complete turnaround occurred in relations with Libya, which transformed from pariah to partner (as did Iraq, albeit at a very heavy price). Against all this, though, Arab voting patterns at the UN lagged behind: Arab states have voted with the United States less than 8 percent of the time since 2005.

Beyond these broad regional trends, individual countries deserve closer examination. A particular geographic bright spot, often overlooked but important, is the Maghreb. From 2003 through 2008, U.S. diplomatic, security, and economic ties improved noticeably with every country in this subregion: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania, and, in some respects, even Sudan. The same was largely true of ties with Maghrebis at the popular level, as measured in students, travelers, and consumer behavior.

Another key group of countries is the oil exporters. Here the data demonstrates that exports to the United States from most Arab producers, even when measured in volume rather than volatile dollar terms, remained steady or rose during this period, regardless of various political tensions. An unusual counterexample, however, is Yemen. That country’s oil exports to America languished to the vanishing point in 2008, with the state’s declining overall exports flowing elsewhere—even as bilateral political and security ties generally improved.

In short, regardless of what Arab opinion polls or media say, overall relations with the United States—official and popular—improved steadily in many respects throughout the second term of the “profoundly unpopular” Bush administration. According to some objective measures, by 2007 or 2008, these ties eclipsed the earlier levels set under President Clinton.

None of this is to say that Bush administration policies, particularly the war in Iraq, had no cost in terms of U.S.-Arab relations. In fact, the data shows a

real rough patch from late 2001 through 2003. But, as noted, it also shows a rapid, solid, and sustained recovery in many important aspects of those relations. A wide and growing discrepancy between Arab attitudes toward the United States, as measured in opinion polls or media coverage, and Arab actions regarding the United States, as measured in the behavioral indicators highlighted in this study.

Given this reality, we may wonder why President Obama called for “a new beginning” in the U.S.-Arab relationship during his June 2009 speech in Cairo. He said the relationship should be “based on mutual interest and mutual respect.” The evidence suggests, however, that interests will ultimately trump respect.

The Arab Reform Index

Very briefly and broadly, the ARI shows a pattern of modest progress in political reform across the region, concentrated in 2003–2006. As for economic reform, the pattern is more uneven: we see modest progress in many countries, followed by some regression, and then a rebound toward the end of the decade.

Looking more closely at the ARI, both year by year and country by country, suggests some interesting conclusions. First, economic and especially political reforms were most successful, at least in relative terms, among those Arab governments more or less friendly to the United States. Second, the heyday of Arab reform in the past decade (again, roughly 2003–2006) was also the period when Washington was most actively promoting this agenda in the region, at both the rhetorical and, to some extent, practical levels. Conversely, when U.S. pressure for such reforms abated beginning in 2006, they actually slowed or regressed in many countries. Indeed, this retrenchment seems to stem, at least in part, from regime pushback against electoral openings or other reform initiatives actively supported by the United States from 2003 to 2006.

Another, more unexpected finding is that in some key cases, little connection seems to exist between reform and other issues on America’s bilateral agenda with certain Arab countries. Take Egypt, for example: little in the trade, arms sales, or other statistics suggests that those aspects of U.S.-Egyptian relations suffered

from Washington’s push for reform. To be sure, at the diplomatic and symbolic levels, most informed analysts agree that President Hosni Mubarak’s anger over this push contributed to his refusal to visit the United States from 2004 until 2009. But little evidence supports the notion that these sentiments altered the underlying dynamics of U.S.-Egyptian cooperation or controversy on any other issue, whether diplomatic, economic, or military.

None of these findings imply a simple or even a significant causal connection between U.S. policy and regional reform. In some cases, as in Kuwait, significant political reforms since 2006 have owed very little to U.S. policies on this issue. Yet overall, the regional pattern does suggest that American support for reform may help promote it, at least on the margins.

Equally important, and more surprising, is the finding that controversial U.S. policies on other issues, such as Iraq or Israel, appear to do little or nothing to retard internal Arab economic or political reform. In fact, such reforms were most successful precisely when official and popular dissatisfaction with U.S. policies on Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Guantanamo Bay, and other issues was at its worst. This brings us to the study’s next major purpose: accounting for the vast apparent gap between Arab attitudes and actions toward the United States.

Explaining These Surprising Findings

First, at the official level, there are four plausible explanations for the large gap between supposedly widespread anti-American attitudes and actual Arab behavior:

1. Most Arab governments are not democracies directly accountable to their own publics.
2. Most Arab ruling elites want good relations with the United States and also privately approve of some key U.S. policies in the region. Ironically, based on the behavioral record we have examined, the desire for good relations might even propel these elites to go along with some U.S. policies they actually oppose, such as internal political reform. But if an Arab government believed further reform would seriously threaten

its stability, then it would almost certainly pull back support regardless of Washington's wishes. In such a case—again, based on the behavioral record—Washington would probably pull back as well.

3. Some Arab governments are masters at obscuring their extensive cooperation with the United States behind a media mask of anti-Americanism. Egypt and Qatar spring readily to mind.

4. Even Arab publics who do not like the United States or some of its policies accept the value of good government-to-government relations. And they actually approve of some crucial U.S. policies, such as confronting Iran. Arab governments are aware of these inclinations.

In June and November 2009, polls commissioned for this study tested this assertion regarding Arab approval of U.S. policies. In Jordan, just one-quarter of respondents expressed even a “somewhat favorable” view of the United States. But more than twice as many (53 percent) said it was important for Arab governments to maintain good relations with Washington. In Egypt, the corresponding figure was around 40 percent—not great, but good enough for government work. At the same time, around 40 percent of Egyptians and Jordanians, and 57 percent of Saudis, voiced support for the U.S. suggestion of stronger sanctions against Iran if it does not accept new limits on its nuclear program.

These factors help account for Arab government cooperation with the United States. We can now ask why popular behavior has also turned relatively favorable—in terms of study, travel, buying habits, and street protests—even as attitudes appear to lag so far behind.

Again, several factors are probably at work:

1. For most Arabs, most of the time, political relations with the United States are simply not an important priority—their states' economies are. The same polls that show widespread dissatisfaction with America also show (if one knows where to look) that U.S. policy is simply not central in most people's minds.

2. More speculatively, in the words of the young Jordanian scholar Walid al-Tell, the Arab street now has to compete with “the Arab sofa.” In this paradox, greater media freedom and creature comforts might tempt some Arabs to watch politics on television or blog about it rather than taking action.

3. Arab publics may now be making a clearer distinction between the United States and Israel, or between certain U.S. policies and American education, business, and other opportunities. Maybe this tendency helps explain why anti-Israeli demonstrations in 2006 or 2009 did not turn into anti-American ones, and why, on a more unequivocally positive note, Arab students and others have resumed their travels to the United States.

4. The relative liberalization of some Arab regimes, and their greater reluctance to use deadly force against striking nationals or other domestic demonstrators, may have turned some protests in an inward rather than anti-American direction.

Finally, a few words about consumer behavior are in order. Plenty of anecdotes tell of why so many Arabs keep drinking Starbucks coffee or eating McDonald's hamburgers even when they say they hate America. More systematically, in this study's June 2009 Jordanian survey, nearly three-quarters of respondents voiced an unfavorable overall view of the United States, but only one-quarter said they would be less likely to buy an American product for political or religious reasons. Clearly, commercial appeal heavily outweighs political attitude when it comes to actual behavior.

This finding was even clearer in Egypt, with a market fifteen times as large as Jordan's. Just 15 percent of Egyptians said they would probably avoid American products for political or religious reasons. Remarkably, twice as many said they would actually be more likely to buy an American product for reasons of style, value, prestige, past experience, or personal recommendation. This was the case even though a slim majority (54 percent) also voiced at least a somewhat negative attitude toward the United States.

Complicating the picture, people in both countries showed considerable confusion about which products are even American. Fewer than a third in either country identified Xerox as an American brand. In Jordan, this was true of Crest toothpaste as well. A majority in Egypt (57 percent), where Crest is very popular, knew of its American origin, but just as many stated that a completely fictitious label called “George’s Sportswear” was American. Conversely, only about a third of respondents knew that Nescafé is not an American company. Plainly, the general public in these countries would have a hard time boycotting American products even if they wanted to—and most of them don’t want to.

What Does It All Mean?

This analysis outlined in herein offers five general lessons:

1. The behavior of most Arab governments can be compatible with U.S. interests over the medium term in many areas—particularly economic and security ties—even when popular attitudes are hostile.
2. Surprisingly, this is also true of most Arab publics. Even when they disapprove very widely of the United States and its policies, they tend to maintain their personal, educational, and economic ties with America. They have also, for the most part, increasingly refrained from participating in anti-American demonstrations and supporting anti-American terrorism.
3. Policymakers should keep this dichotomy between interests and attitudes in mind when determining U.S. strategy in the Middle East. Arab governments, like most governments, will act in their own interests, and Arab citizens will do the same.
4. Regarding reform, U.S. officials should recognize that previous efforts have produced some positive results even when tensions on other issues were at their highest. At the same time, the behavioral indicators

show that reform can be a double-edged sword. Political reform in some countries has unleashed perceived threats to stability, producing a government backlash. And economic reform has opened up new avenues for corruption as well as growth. There is no magic formula for navigating these shoals, so caution is required.

5. Whether or not the previous points are correct, more research is required. But what kinds of research? Less about attitudes, more about actions! Each time you see an analysis of Arab attitudes, stop and ask: But what about their actions? What evidence is given, if any, about their behavior? And what connection exists, if any, between those attitudes and actions?

Finally, regarding President Obama, this report does present some Arab behavioral data from his first year in office, but it is still too early to judge the weight of any “Obama effect” on U.S.-Arab relations. Slogans notwithstanding, preliminary indications suggest continuity rather than change. In one sense, the president said it best on the eve of his June 2009 Cairo speech:

What I do believe is that if we are engaged in speaking directly to the Arab street, and they are persuaded that we are operating in a straightforward manner, then, at the margins, both they and their leadership are more inclined to work with us....Then they are maybe a little less likely to be tempted by a terrorist recruiter.

The key phrases here are “at the margins” and “maybe a little less likely.” To hope for any more of a link between attitudes and actions would be foolhardy.

But now that the Arab and American media are expressing some disappointment in the results of President Obama’s approach to Arab and broader Muslim audiences, we may have grounds for hope of another kind. After all, the behavioral record of the past decade, as revealed in this study, strongly suggests that common U.S. and Arab interests will probably prevail even if Obama does not deliver on the lofty aspirations for a new beginning that he proclaimed in Cairo.

Introduction

THE TYPICAL NARRATIVE regarding U.S.-Arab relations over the past decade follows a particular logic: polls show that America's image has declined in the Arab world, so Arabs will oppose U.S. policies in the region more actively, making it more difficult for the United States to ensure its interests there or even its security at home. At the extremes, this logic seems to hold true: the deadly attacks of September 11, 2001, are the most vivid example of the kind of damage anti-American attitudes can produce. But the next step in this logic is far from self-evident: al-Qaeda is anti-American, but does anti-American sentiment create more recruits for the organization? After all, the very same polls cited to prove Arab anti-Americanism also demonstrate that Arab publics have turned decisively against al-Qaeda, even as their views of the United States remain largely negative.

In short, major problems surround this reliance on Arab public opinion polls to capture anti-American sentiment and forecast Arab behavior. First, the polls themselves are often methodologically suspect, with loaded questions, biased interpretations, and unreliable figures. Second, even if the numbers were consistently reliable, they would tell us almost nothing about the actual behavior of Arab publics. Conventional wisdom presumes that anti-American attitudes somehow have a direct impact on American interests and security, but polling efforts thus far have not indicated whether such attitudes among Arabs correlate to specific anti-American actions. Third, the numbers tell us almost nothing about the policies or longer-term political prospects of Arab governments, which are without exception autocratic and only dimly or indirectly attuned to public opinion.¹

The most complete (though hardly conclusive) data on Arab attitudes toward the United States can be pieced together from various articles and press

releases based on Gallup polls. Unfortunately, these materials never answer the crucial question of just how Gallup manages to conduct politically oriented polls in repressive countries such as Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, or Tunisia without crippling regime interference from the regime. Moreover, these polls usually ask a kind of hybrid question that is difficult to understand and makes it impossible to disentangle attitudes toward the U.S. president from views on America in general. Specifically, Gallup typically asks respondents to rate "the job performance of the leadership of the United States." For what they may be worth, the reported findings for favorable ratings in each country are presented in table 1.

The Pew Global Attitudes Project uses a more straightforward question: respondents are asked to rate their "opinion of the United States" as "very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable." The resulting statistics are given in table 2.

Beyond their methodological limitations, recent polls have produced results that are even more inconsistent than in the past, suggesting that the Arab views being tallied are ephemeral, contradictory, impossible to measure accurately, or all three. For example, in spring 2009, a Zogby poll showed a startling 79 percent favorable view of President Barack Obama in Saudi Arabia, but an Ipsos poll conducted during the same period found only 53 percent holding that view—a 26-point spread. The spread was even greater in Jordan—and in the opposite direction. According to Zogby, a mere 31 percent of Jordanians thought Obama would have a positive effect on the region, while the Ipsos figure was 64 percent. Clearly, then, Arab polling data is inconclusive when tracking attitudes toward the United States and the White House, though it does indicate a general improvement in such sentiments in 2009.

1. For more on this subject, see David Pollock, *Slippery Polls: Uses and Abuses of Opinion Surveys from Arab States*, Policy Focus no. 82 (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2008), <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=244>.

TABLE 1. U.S. Approval Rating: Gallup Polls 2005–2009

	2005	2007	2008	March 2009
Algeria		18%	25%	47%
Egypt			6%	25%
Jordan	15%	18%	9%	
Lebanon	40%	31%	25%	22%
Palestinian Territories	15%	12%	13%	7%
Qatar				22%
Saudi Arabia			12%	29%
Syria			4%	15%
Tunisia			14%	37%

Behavioral Approach

To supplement the usual attitudinal approaches, this study proposes a new methodology for examining trends in Arab behavior toward the United States in a number of different areas. Some of these trends relate to Arab publics, while others relate to their governments. Specifically, the authors looked at a variety of topics for which hard data exists, such as visa issuance rates, Arab student enrollment in American universities, consumer behavior, street protests, overall trade ties, voting patterns at the United Nations, and weapons deliveries. Using the year 2000 as a baseline, the study traces how these indicators have changed over the course of the decade.

The resulting Arab Behavioral Index (ABI) begins with a detailed look at all of these indicators, combining them to produce a statistical and graphical summary of changes in U.S. relations with each of the world's twenty major Arab societies. The study also incorporates a new Arab Reform Index (ARI), which examines how regional states have progressed in response to (or regardless of) U.S. and international calls for political and economic reform over the same 2000–2009 period. The following chapters offer detailed explanations of the ABI and ARI's methodology and sources, in-depth discussions of their major findings, and numerous graphical illustrations of the trends they uncover. For information on accessing the full indices themselves, see the Author's Note at the beginning of the study.

Combining Quantity and Quality

Some important indicators could not be included in the indices, whether due to a lack of consistent, detailed public data, a fundamentally unquantifiable nature, or both. Major examples at the official level include various security and counterterrorism issues as well as diplomatic and practical cooperation or conflict on Iraqi and Israeli-Palestinian issues. At the popular level, metrics on broad, longer-term cultural patterns are also “missing,” including on issues such as English-language study, use of American media (whether for information or entertainment), and active engagement with civil society and political organizations, U.S.-oriented or otherwise.

Anecdotal evidence regarding such important questions seems mixed. On security issues, for instance, one U.S. diplomat with great experience in the region offered feedback that tempers this study's largely positive behavioral data. Specifically, he noted that he and his colleagues have felt the tension and defensive posture fostered by anti-American attitudes in various Arab countries, along with regular threat reports or actual incidents. Similarly, the dramatic improvement in U.S. ties with Iraq has come at a terrible and tragic price in lives, dollars, and the American image; the statistics presented here make no claim to measure, let alone judge, the magnitude or merits of that crucial and highly exceptional case.

At the same time, neither behavioral data nor official statements or media coverage adequately document

the extensive, quiet U.S.-Arab cooperation on counterterrorism and counterradicalization—especially after terrorism hit home in one Arab capital after another from 2003 through 2006. Similarly, broader strategic cooperation on Iran, Afghanistan, and other regional threats continued with some Arab states throughout the decade, picking up with others once the shock and dismay of the Iraq war began to fade.

Furthermore, conversations with direct participants in diverse aspects of U.S.-Arab relations during the past decade often reveal an unexpectedly positive experience, or at least one well insulated from superficial political turbulence. For example, the U.S. ambassador in one important Arab state enthusiastically endorsed the notion that bilateral relations were much stronger in action than they were in either media or polling

(to a lesser extent) Madeleine Albright during the Clinton years, had no ministerial-level U.S. visits after 2003. And Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and Saudi King Abdullah avoided visits to the United States after 2005. In contrast, Condoleezza Rice made two tours of North Africa (including an unprecedented trip to Libya), which had previously been neglected in terms of U.S. official visits. Rice also met with Gulf Cooperation Council counterparts as a group twice a year beginning in 2006; previously, such meetings had been more sporadic, despite regular bilateral visits with the Saudis. In return, the presidents of Algeria and Yemen visited the United States three and four times, respectively, during the Bush years. The only time either head of state had previously made an official visit was in 2000, when Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh came to

TABLE 2. U.S. Approval Rating: Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2002–2009

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Egypt					30%	21%	22%	27%
Jordan	25%	1%	5%	21%	15%	20%	19%	25%
Kuwait		63%				46%		
Lebanon	36%	27%		42%		47%	51%	55%
Morocco			27%			15%		
Palestinian Territories		0%				13%		15%

reports, as did a senior U.S. diplomat in another key country.² And a United Arab Emirates cabinet minister opined privately that although America’s Arab friends had a “hard time explaining their position” in recent years, the relationship had withstood the test and remained solid.³

In the realm of high-level diplomatic symbolism—which is more anecdotal than systematic by nature—bilateral relations improved with some countries but soured with others. Syria, which had been a regular stop for secretaries of state Warren Christopher and (to a

Washington. And in November 2007, when President Bush finally convened an Arab-Israeli peace conference in Annapolis, Maryland, most Arab governments sent representatives, including Syria. A rare and ironic exception was Kuwait, whose leaders felt the state was already behaving in sufficiently “pro-American” fashion on Iraq, and was one of the very few Arab governments facing serious opposition in a freely elected parliament to any sign of normalization with Israel.

In the economic arena, political differences intruded only on the margins. Several key

2. Author interviews in Amman and Cairo, February–March 2009.

3. Private group discussions in Washington, D.C., April 2009.

sources—including the International Monetary Fund’s senior expert on the region, a leading international authority on sovereign wealth funds, and an entire panel of Arab investors and financial experts—concurred that market conditions, not political factors, shaped most of the major Arab economic transactions with the United States and other countries throughout the past decade.⁴ These conditions included capital flows, energy prices, production levels, development contracts, and other significant matters of this nature.

This study’s quantitative focus, while admirably suited to dissect many important trends, is admittedly ill-suited to examine such inherently ambiguous, episodic, or confidential questions. In recompense for this shortcoming, the data is supplemented by detailed treatments of four special topics (street protests; consumer boycotts; defense and counterterrorism ties; and U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia) and by a series of individual country case studies found in the online appendices (see Author’s Note), all of which attempt to put the numbers in wider perspective.

4. Presentations at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., and at the Arab Bankers Association of North America annual conference, New York, March, May, and June 2009.

Part I

Sources and Methodology

1 | Explanation of the Arab Behavioral Index

THE ARAB BEHAVIORAL INDEX (ABI) is divided into two broad sections: popular ties and official ties. In both cases, the index measures changes in behavior over the past decade (2000–2009) rather than absolute quantities or rankings. The latter type of data can be found in the country case studies included in the online appendices (see Author’s Note for information on accessing these materials).

The emphasis on trends over time derives from a simple fact: there is no meaningful fixed standard for most of the behaviors measured in this study (e.g., no “normal” number of Arab travelers to the United States). For some of the variables, it might be possible to establish a scale of some kind, perhaps based on deviances from the median of all countries or some relevant subset. That, however, would still be a relative rather than absolute measurement. Moreover, the emphasis on changes in behavior provides a better way of comparing behavioral data with trends in attitudes or other developments during the same timeframe.

The *popular ties* indicators include the following:

- Arab student enrollment rates in the United States
- statistics on U.S. visas for Arabs
- Arab imports of American consumer goods and automobiles

The *official ties* indicators encompass the following:

- UN voting practices
- bilateral trade
- defense and security cooperation, as measured by U.S. arms deliveries

In each case, the presentation emphasizes trends over time. Each of the six areas is assigned a ratio in

comparison to the year 2000, so in all areas the index base is 1. In other words, a ratio of 1.5 reflects a 50 percent improvement or increase compared to 2000, while a ratio of 0.5 represents a 50 percent decrease. For many purposes, long-term trends are better expressed in logarithmic rather than percentage terms. For ease of presentation, however, this study uses simple percentages; the various algorithms do not produce different findings for the direction of change, but for its apparent magnitude. In most cases, because the changes are relatively modest, the apparent differences in magnitude yielded by logarithmic versus simple percentage calculations are also relatively small.

The beginning of the decade was chosen as the baseline because, while recent enough to offer a meaningful comparison, it also reflects what could be considered the end of a more favorable (though certainly not ideal) era in U.S.-Arab relations: that before the second Palestinian intifada, September 11, the Iraq war, and the Bush administration. And the Obama-era data at the close of the period under study, while still incomplete, gives some preliminary indications about that the administration’s first year in office and whether or not it actually constitutes a new era.

This study’s method of selecting, adjusting, weighting, and aggregating the data used to produce the ABI is not the only possible one, of course. It is offered as an exemplar, not an imperative. For this reason, the study includes all the inputs to the index (available in the online appendices), not just its results. Others may wish to suggest alternative ways of handling or interpreting the data. Whatever the case, the very idea of analyzing U.S.-Arab relations with real data rather than hearsay and speculation is both new and potentially quite powerful. In many ways, the facts speak for themselves.

At the same time, beyond purely technical issues, the ABI is admittedly an imperfect means to examine U.S.-Arab relations. Attempting to quantify something so subtle, diverse, and complex is bound to be problematic. As mentioned earlier, some important aspects

resist quantification, including certain kinds of security and counterterrorism ties, diplomatic cooperation or conflict on various regional controversies (especially Iraq, Iran, and Israel), and broad, long-term cultural interactions and preferences.

Nevertheless, the ABI does reveal much new and interesting information. In the aggregate, its strength lies in highlighting some longer-term, deeper trends in U.S.-Arab relationships. It portrays a notably more nuanced and complex view of these relations, outlining general upward trends in many areas amid a high degree of country-specific variation.

To arrive at the ABI number for each of the six different categories measured, the authors used several processes as explained in the text that follows. Generally speaking, the three *popular ties* categories are averaged to produce an overall number, and the same is done for the three *official ties* categories. The two numbers are then used to calculate a combined average.

This is not a flawless system, of course, and the data is subject to differing interpretations. We have attempted to be fair in our methods, however, pointing out nuances, uncertainties, and discrepancies in order to produce a more complete picture.

Popular Ties

Student enrollment rates. Statistics were taken from the Institute of International Education's "Open Doors" database on student enrollment.¹ The Students in U.S. figure in the ABI tables is self-explanatory. The index number for a given year is derived by simply taking the number of U.S. enrollees from a given country that year and dividing it by the number of enrollees from said country in 2000.

The study also shows the numbers of students from each country enrolled in French, British, and Australian schools. These numbers are not incorporated into the index in any way; they are presented for comparative purposes for 2000–2007 (data was not yet available

for the year 2008). The numbers for these indicators were taken from the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's Institute for Statistics.²

Visas issued. Statistics were taken from the U.S. State Department's "Report of the Visa Office,"³ specifically the annual sections on nonimmigrant visas. The ABI figure is based on the number of visas issued in a given country and year divided by the number issued there in 2000.

Consumer imports. These numbers were taken from the U.S. Census Bureau's Foreign Trade Statistics.⁴ Exports to each country are divided into seven broad categories identified by an end-use code. The ABI uses end-use categories 3 (automotive vehicles, parts, and engines) and 4 (consumer goods) because they best represent what an average person might buy and their brands are the most likely to be thought of as American brands. Each category encompasses the following goods:

- **Automotive vehicles, parts, and engines:** Passenger cars, new and used; trucks, buses, and special purpose vehicles; engines and engine parts (carburetors, pistons, etc.); bodies and chassis for passenger cars; tires and tubes; other parts and accessories.
- **Consumer goods:** Apparel and household goods (textile and nontextile); sports apparel and gear; pharmaceutical preparations; books and other printed matter; toiletries and cosmetics; manufactured tobacco; writing and art supplies; furniture and similar household goods; glass and chinaware; cookware, cutlery, tools; household appliances; rugs; pleasure boats and motors; toys and games; musical instruments; televisions, VCRs, and similar electronics; stereo equipment; records, tapes, and disks; collectible coins; jewelry and gem diamonds; artwork; antiques; stamps; nursery stock.

1. Institute of International Education, *Open Doors Report 2009: Information and Data Tables*, <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org>.

2. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics, "Table 18: International Flows of Students at the Tertiary Level," <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableView.aspx>.

3. U.S. Department of State, Report of the Visa Office 2009, http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/statistics/statistics_4594.html.

4. U.S. Census Bureau, "Country and Product Trade Data," <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/country/index.html>.

The ABI number for each country is the sum of the two categories for each year divided by the same sum for 2000. The study also includes the separate numbers for interest's sake. In most countries, passenger car sales represent the large majority of growth in the consumer category, both in absolute and relative terms, though other goods have seen strong growth as well.

Official Ties

UN voting patterns. This indicator is calculated from the percentage of time that a given country's UN votes agreed with those of the United States. It does not include "unanimous resolutions" upon which there was no disagreement. As with other indicators, the ABI uses the year 2000 as a baseline, so the index number for each subsequent year is a percentage of a percentage. Raw data on voting patterns can be found in the "Voting Practices in the United Nations" reports posted on the State Department website.⁵

Overall bilateral trade. The index number for this indicator is an average of three different inputs, all adjusted for inflation:

1. The Imports from U.S. input is the dollar amounts of imports from the United States for a given country, using 2000 as the baseline year for comparisons.
2. The U.S. Market Share input takes the Imports from the U.S. as a percentage of total imports from around the world for a given year. Using this relation helps account for growing trade levels worldwide. Once again, 2000 is used as a baseline year for tracking U.S. market share in a given country. For interest's sake, the report also includes Arab state imports from the European Union and China, though these numbers are not factored into the index number itself.
3. The Exports to U.S. input is measured in different ways depending on the country in question.

For major oil exporters—i.e., Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen, whose hydrocarbon sectors account for more than 80 percent of total national exports to the United States—we have used the quantity of oil in barrels as the indicator in order to eliminate dollar growth resulting from price increases. The index number is calculated by dividing the quantity of oil in a given year by the year 2000 baseline. This helps to discount the impact of high prices on inflated trade numbers. For all other countries, we have used the dollar amount of exports to the United States, again with 2000 as the baseline. Import and export amounts, in dollars, were taken from the International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) "Direction of Trade Statistics" database.⁶ Annual figures for barrels of oil were taken from the U.S. Energy Information Administration's "U.S. Imports by Country of Origin" database.⁷

Due to lack of data, one important dimension of bilateral economic ties could not be included in the index: capital and investment flows. Information on these indicators—especially for the very substantial sovereign wealth funds and other financial instruments used by Arab energy exporters—is not publicly available in sufficient detail. Yet most expert judgments and other evidence suggest that these capital flows were very largely a function of market returns and conditions, independent of other aspects of bilateral relations with the United States. Wide swings in the valuation of such assets mostly reflected global market boom or bust cycles rather than political or even deliberate economic decisions. In 2008, for example, the IMF's director for the Middle East and Central Asia opined that while the Dubai Ports World controversy temporarily "threw a scare" into some Arab investors, "the sheer size of the U.S. economy" kept them from decelerating their U.S. exposure.⁸ Similarly, remarks at the 2008 conference of the Arab Bankers Association of North

5. See, for example, U.S. Department of State, Voting Practices in the United Nations 2009 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, March 31, 2010), <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/139470.pdf>.

6. IMF, "Direction of Trade Statistics Online," <http://www2.imfstatistics.org/DOT/>.

7. U.S. Energy Information Administration, "U.S. Imports by Country of Origin," http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/dnav/pet/pet_move_impcus_a2_nus_ep00_im0_mbbbl_m.htm.

8. Mohsin Khan, remarks made at a Center for Strategic and International Studies roundtable, Washington, D.C., November 2008.

America suggested that none of the participants linked investment allocations to political issues.⁹

Arms deliveries. This index number combines two inputs. The first is the sum of direct commercial sales (DCS) and foreign military sales (FMS) to Arab countries as reported in the Department of Defense Security Cooperation Agency's 2008 *Historical Facts Book*.¹⁰ DCS statistics were unavailable for 2008, but because they are generally much smaller than FMS figures, overall trends were not significantly affected. The authors then took a rolling three-year average of total arms deliveries as a way of showing longer-term trends and removing dramatic spikes from year to year. The

baseline is the average for 1998–2000; the index number is determined by comparing the three-year averages for successive years.

The second input is the U.S. government's share in the arms market. Numbers are taken from the rolling four-year total reported in the annual Congressional Research Service report *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations*.

These two inputs—overall arms sales and comparative sales—are then averaged to produce an overall arms-delivery index number. The comparative figure was not included in the overall average for ten of the twenty Arab governments under study (see chapter 2).

9. This conclusion is based on answers to questions posed by the author while at the conference, which was held in New York City in April 2008.

10. Defense Security Cooperation Agency, *Historical Facts Book*, <http://www.dsca.mil/programs/biz-ops/factsbook/FactsBook08.pdf>.

2 | Explanation of the Arab Reform Index

THE ARAB REFORM INDEX (ARI) is only an indirect measure of U.S.-Arab relations. Clearly, though, economic freedom, human rights, and democratization were major U.S. policy objectives during the period 2000–2009, so it is important to determine whether Arab states progressed or regressed on these fronts, and whether said changes can be linked to the United States.

Internal Arab governance was not a high priority for the Clinton administration. The Bush administration, in sharp contrast, made its “Freedom Agenda” for the region a major policy objective in the aftermath of September 11, and especially after the invasion of Iraq. Beginning in 2006, however, Washington began to pull back from this endeavor in the wake of Islamist electoral successes and escalating pushback from friendly Arab governments. And the Obama administration seems inclined to revert to the earlier U.S. policy of relegating the entire issue to the diplomatic back burner.

Clearly, reform is a domestic rather than a foreign policy issue for Arab governments—in almost every case, the United States plays at most a modest role in influencing internal political and economic matters. Iraq is an obvious exception to this rule, as is the Palestinian Authority, albeit in a more limited and plainly much more peaceful way.

Nevertheless, the issue of internal reform assumed such a high profile in U.S. policy discussions during the past decade that it must be considered in some depth here. Three aspects of this broad topic are most relevant to this study:

1. How much political and economic reform actually took place in each country from 2000 to 2009, and how can we measure it?
2. Did U.S. policies exert any influence on the course of these reform movements?

3. What impact did the reform issue have on the larger canvas of U.S. relations with various Arab governments and peoples?

As a useful point of departure for this discussion, we present a selection from the World Bank Institute’s relevant *governance* indicators in tables 3 and 4.¹ From the institute’s six indicators, we have chosen the two that seem to correspond most closely to political and economic reform (as distinct from the more value-neutral concepts of *political stability* and *government effectiveness*, and from the narrower concepts of *rule of law* and *control of corruption*). These indicators reflect an impressive amount of research and intellectual effort to compile, create, aggregate, and analyze the best available quantitative metrics for the elusive processes and outcomes of political and economic governance. The global scale established by this parallel research effort presents reform trends as a ratio, from “most positive” (+2.5) to “most negative” (–2.5), with the median set at zero. This formulation has the advantage of measuring trends over time and in any given year with regard to some defined standard.

The complex details of the World Bank Institute’s methodology are beyond the scope of this report. The ARI presents a simpler alternative method for calculating a political and economic reform index suitable for the Arab world—one that yields generally similar findings, but with somewhat greater clarity or precision in certain key instances. For starters, however, the indicators in tables 1 and 2 have the virtue of deriving from an independent inquiry based on a very wide spectrum of sources, and with no attempt to assess the American role in the region.

A comparison of the World Bank index and the ARI suggests that the two indices tend to support each other regarding overall trends in regional reform. Unfortunately, those trends point to a large and disappointing

1. For more on these indicators, see the “Governance Matters 2009” section of the World Bank website (http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/sc_country.asp).

TABLE 3. World Bank Institute Governance Indicators: Political Reform and Voice/Accountability*

	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2000	1998
Algeria	-1.05	-1.00	-0.96	-0.74	-0.79	-1.05	-1.02	-1.25	-1.37
Bahrain	-0.82	-0.84	-0.76	-0.73	-0.58	-0.68	-0.68	-0.92	-1.04
Egypt	-1.19	-1.20	-1.27	-0.92	-0.96	-1.00	-1.02	-0.78	-0.85
Iraq	-1.26	-1.31	-1.37	-1.38	-1.63	-1.60	-2.03	-2.00	-1.93
Jordan	-0.71	-0.68	-0.60	-0.49	-0.57	-0.68	-0.77	-0.26	-0.75
Kuwait	-0.53	-0.52	-0.20	-0.31	-0.36	-0.44	-0.38	-0.28	-0.27
Lebanon	-0.40	-0.45	-0.45	-0.34	-0.37	-0.67	-0.74	-0.29	-0.34
Libya	-1.90	-1.96	-1.91	-1.86	-1.75	-1.77	-1.79	-1.60	-1.60
Mauritania	-0.92	-0.75	-0.81	-0.98	-1.21	-0.89	-0.65	-0.76	-0.76
Morocco	-0.70	-0.70	-0.61	-0.64	-0.55	-0.63	-0.37	-0.34	-0.22
Oman	-1.07	-1.06	-0.83	-0.73	-0.63	-0.92	-0.74	-0.66	-0.65
Qatar	-0.77	-0.73	-0.59	-0.40	-0.47	-0.67	-0.62	-0.54	-0.75
Saudi Arabia	-1.74	-1.62	-1.62	-1.32	-1.41	-1.63	-1.64	-1.49	-1.50
Somalia	-1.85	-1.88	-1.82	-1.89	-1.76	-1.56	-1.47	-1.86	-2.03
Sudan	-1.77	-1.68	-1.73	-1.70	-1.68	-1.55	-1.52	-1.71	-1.75
Syria	-1.75	-1.77	-1.74	-1.51	-1.52	-1.57	-1.57	-1.53	-1.47
Tunisia	-1.26	-1.27	-1.18	-0.99	-0.81	-0.93	-0.96	-0.71	-0.76
UAE	-0.98	-1.00	-0.86	-0.68	-0.78	-0.82	-0.72	-0.58	-0.56
West Bank/Gaza	-0.94	-0.87	-1.09	-0.75	-1.02	-1.29	-1.21	-1.09	-0.99
Yemen	-1.18	-1.08	-1.03	-0.99	-0.89	-1.05	-1.20	-0.92	-0.77

* No statistics are available for 1999 or 2001 because the indicators were produced biannually prior to 2002.

degree of stagnation over the past decade, albeit with some exceptions.

At the same time, the ARI has several advantages. First, it is both much simpler and more methodologically transparent than the World Bank index. Second, it appears to do a better job of capturing key transitions in individual societies during certain years, such as: the measured political liberalization in Morocco during much of the decade following the accession of King Muhammad VI in summer 1999; the Cedar Revolution and end of Syrian military occupation in Lebanon in 2005; the signs of democratization in the Palestinian Authority in 2005–2006, after Yasser Arafat's death; and Kuwait's extensive and unprecedented

popular protests, concrete steps toward women's empowerment, and electoral reforms in 2006. Third, by capturing such moments, the ARI allows analysts to correlate them with changes in U.S. policies toward the region, and with regional perceptions of and reactions to those policies.

The ARI tracks two different areas of reform for each country: political and economic. Each area has two inputs that are converted scores from other reform indices. The two inputs are averaged to give an overall rating for each area. For political reform, the index used the ratings from Freedom House's annual *Freedom in the World* report (available for 2000–2009) and the World Economic Forum's annual *Global Gender*

TABLE 4. World Bank Institute Governance Indicators: Economic Reform and Regulatory Quality*

	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2000	1998
Algeria	-0.79	-0.66	-0.66	-0.56	-0.59	-0.57	-0.69	-0.76	-1.01
Bahrain	+0.88	+0.89	+0.76	+0.75	+0.85	+0.77	+1.00	+0.91	+0.80
Egypt	-0.17	-0.31	-0.46	-0.46	-0.48	-0.51	0.50	-0.30	-0.28
Iraq	-1.09	-1.35	-1.47	-1.59	-1.73	-1.42	-2.21	-2.41	-2.76
Jordan	+0.34	+0.35	+0.39	+0.25	+0.36	+0.22	+0.09	+0.32	+0.47
Kuwait	+0.04	+0.29	+0.43	+0.53	+0.60	+0.38	+0.41	-0.05	-0.02
Lebanon	-0.20	-0.21	-0.20	-0.19	-0.12	-0.19	-0.33	-0.28	-0.12
Libya	-0.93	-0.93	-1.28	-1.29	-1.23	-1.60	-1.66	-1.82	-2.20
Mauritania	-0.59	-0.36	-0.29	-0.17	-0.05	-0.08	-0.25	-0.41	-0.55
Morocco	-0.03	-0.11	-0.15	-0.33	-0.22	-0.18	-0.11	0.00	+0.01
Oman	+0.65	+0.63	+0.74	+0.66	+0.66	+0.67	+0.75	+0.20	+0.14
Qatar	+0.66	+0.55	+0.38	+0.33	+0.31	+0.28	+0.31	+0.10	+0.21
Saudi Arabia	+0.17	-0.10	-0.18	+0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.09	-0.09	-0.18
Somalia	-2.77	-2.72	-2.7	-2.34	-2.32	-2.14	-2.15	-2.5	-2.45
Sudan	-1.36	-1.25	-1.16	-1.25	-1.13	-1.20	-1.18	-1.32	-1.35
Syria	-1.17	-1.22	-1.32	-1.12	-1.02	-0.76	-0.94	-1.12	-1.17
Tunisia	+0.11	+0.15	+0.14	-0.07	+0.09	+0.08	-0.05	+0.07	+0.08
UAE	+0.58	+0.70	+0.71	+0.42	+0.84	+0.82	+1.07	+0.69	+0.60
West Bank/Gaza	-1.12	-1.38	-1.17	-1.03	-0.71	-1.10	-1.01	-0.97	-0.94
Yemen	-0.70	-0.71	-0.75	-0.79	-0.87	-0.91	-0.82	-0.65	-0.52

* No statistics are available for 1999 or 2001 because the indicators were produced biannually prior to 2002.

Gap Report (available for 2006–2009). For economic reform, the ARI draws from the Heritage Foundation's *Index of Economic Freedom* (available for 2000–2009) and Transparency International's "Corruption Perceptions Index" (available for 2003–2009). Explanations of the conversion process follow.

Political Reform

Freedom House. In its *Freedom in the World* reports,² Freedom House assigns each country a score of 1 to 7 in two different categories, *civil liberties* and *political rights*,

with 1 indicating the highest degree of freedom and 7 the lowest. The ARI combines these scores (2–14), with each point in the Freedom House scale having a value of 0.15 points on the ARI scale. Thus, an improvement from a 10 to a 9 on the Freedom House scale would result in an ARI input of 1.15, while a decline to 11 would result in an input of 0.85. Of course, many countries start out at 14, which means there is nowhere to go but up. And some countries did not improve or decline significantly over the course of the decade; Algeria's input, for example, remained at 1.00.

2. Freedom House, "Freedom in the World," <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15>.

Global Gender Gap Report. This World Economic Forum report uses a scale combining political empowerment, educational opportunities, economic empowerment, and health statistics, measuring the gap between males and females.³ The scale runs from 0 to 1, where 1 is perfect equality and 0 indicates the greatest possible gender gap. The ARI uses a conversion scale of .1 = 1, meaning that a gain of .1 in the World Economic Forum figure translates to a jump from 1 to 2 in the ARI input. Between 2006 and 2008, for example, Algeria improved from 0.6018 to 0.6111, a gain of 0.0093 points or 0.09 on the ARI scale.

Economic Reform

Heritage Foundation. The *Index of Economic Freedom*⁴ combines a variety of economic factors (investments, trade barriers, freedom of labor movements, etc.) into a single score of 0 to 100, with the following breakdown in ratings: 80–100 = free; 70–79.9 = mostly free; 60–69.9 = moderately free; 50–59.9 = mostly unfree; and less than 50 = repressed. The ARI uses a conversion ratio of 1.0 Heritage index points = 0.10 ARI points, with the year 2000 score representing the 1.00 baseline. Thus an improvement of 10 points on the Heritage index would result in a final ARI input of 2.0. For example, Algeria moved from a 57.3 in 2000

to a 56.6 in 2008, a decrease of 0.7 points, so its ARI input declined from 1.00 to 0.93. In addition, any Heritage index decreases greater than ten points from the baseline would result in an ARI input of 0.

Transparency International. The “Corruption Perceptions Index”⁵ measures “the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians,” assigning a score to each country on a ten-point scale. Although the ARI presents these scores for reference, they are not used to calculate the ARI input for economic reform—Transparency International uses different questions each year to generate the scores, so it was not appropriate to compare one year against another. Instead, the ARI uses the organization’s country rankings. Specifically, each country’s annual ranking is compared to the total number of countries ranked that year, generating a percentile indicating the proportion of other nations that are rated as less transparent than the given country. Using 2003 as a baseline,⁶ the ARI then measures changes in this percentile, with a simple conversion factor of 0.01 = 0.01. For example, between 2003 and 2008, Algeria’s percentile jumped from roughly 34 to 49, a 15 percent increase in the number of countries it outranked; accordingly, its ARI input improved from 1.00 to 1.15.

3. Ricardo Hausmann, Laura D. Tyson, and Saadia Zahidi, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2009* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2009), <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2009.pdf>.

4. Heritage Foundation, *Economic Opportunity & Prosperity: The 2010 Index of Economic Freedom*, <http://www.heritage.org/index/>.

5. Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index 2009,” http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009.

6. Prior to 2003, ratings were done on a much smaller set of countries that did not include most of the Arab world.

3 | Methodological Issues

Arab Behavioral Index

Human behavior and international relationships are difficult to quantify, so any attempt to do so leaves much room for improvement. The Arab Behavioral Index's (ABI's) quantitative analysis is no exception—it misses several major issues in U.S.-Arab relations, including behavior related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Fatah-Hamas rift, U.S. forces in Iraq, and the Iranian nuclear issue. At the same time, the index does reveal longer-term, underlying patterns of behavior that media outlets and pollsters may miss. This study is therefore intended to complement and inform other analyses, not replace them.

In addition, many technical problems arise when attempting to combine incommensurate inputs in a meaningful way. In many cases, the detailed statistics that are combined to generate each country's final ABI number, as well as the qualitative analysis of those statistics, are more meaningful than the single index number itself. Other methodological issues include the following:

- Weighting the index is a somewhat subjective process. For example, what is more important to a bilateral relationship: the number of U.S. visas issued or the number of American cars sold? An increase in U.S. exports or a decline in U.S. market share? The methodology applied here includes the best available quantifiable inputs aggregated in a fair, transparent, and reasonable manner. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that this calculus is not uniquely determined, and that the numbers are subject to interpretation.
- ABI ratios place more weight on increases than on decreases. The maximum amount of relative decrease in a number is, by definition, 100 percent. However, the potential for increase as a ratio is infinite, and the impact of this increase grows accordingly as the absolute number gets larger. Thus, if U.S. visas issued in a country were to increase from 10 to 100, the result

would be a 900 percent increase—from a ratio of 1.0 to 10.0 in the ABI. But a decrease in visas from 100 to 10 would result in only a 90 percent decrease—from a ratio of 1.0 to 0.1. That is, the increase appears to be ten times larger than the decrease.

- The ABI also places more weight on inputs that vary most widely in scale. For example, arms sales, oil exports, and automobile sales carry more weight simply because, for some countries, the changes in those factors have been orders of magnitude greater than in other factors. Where such discrepancies were so large as to risk distorting the findings, the “outlier” factors—such as the “infinite” increase in arms sales to Libya over the year 2000 baseline of zero—were removed from the index calculation.
- Discrepancies in information are an issue as well. Statistics may vary depending on source, and sometimes contradictions surface even within the same source. This study generally opts for consistent use of quality sources rather than exhaustive investigation of possible errors or contradictions. Such discrepancies are duly noted when large enough to warrant explanation, however.

Arab Reform Index

Readers should bear several issues in mind when looking at the final Arab Reform Index (ARI) numbers for each country:

- **The double baseline.** Each reform area in the ARI includes one input that begins with the year 2000 and a second input with a different baseline (2003 for Transparency International's economic input, and 2006 for the World Economic Forum's political input). To account for the staggered starting points, an adjusted ratio is used whereby the baseline for new inputs is set as equal to the ratio of preexisting inputs. For example, if the Heritage Foundation ratio for a country is .30 in 2005 and the Transparency

International input begins that year, the Transparency ratio is also set to .30; this ratio then serves as the baseline for comparing other Transparency figures.

- **Relative standards.** Since the ARI, like the ABI, begins with the year 2000 baseline rather than an absolute standard, the index compares each country with itself over time. The advantage of this approach is that it highlights changes clearly. Yet the countries that made the most progress on political or economic reform tended to be those with the worst starting position. Readers may therefore be interested in how a particular country rated in a given year compared to a fixed standard or to other countries in the region; as in the ABI, the ARI tables provide these absolute inputs in addition to the final index number.

To cite one example, Libya's improvement on economic reform should not be overstated: though its Heritage index score jumped from 34

to 43 between 2000 and 2008, it was still rated as a "repressed" economy. In fact, by a large margin, it was still the least free country in the region by a large margin. Low starting points also explain Syria and Yemen's economic gains, as well as Saudi Arabia's large jump in the *Gender Gap Report*. Meanwhile, a relatively high starting point caused Morocco and the United Arab Emirates to show large declines in economic reform.

- **Incomplete data.** The World Economic Forum's *Gender Gap Report* did not rate Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, the Palestinian Authority, or Iraq at all, and its 2006 figures did not include Syria, Qatar, or Oman. The Heritage Foundation did not rate Sudan or the Palestinian Authority, or Iraq after 2001. Transparency International rated the Palestinian Authority from 2003 to 2005 only, and Mauritania from 2006 to 2008 only. Ratings for Somalia are also incomplete.

Part II

Major Findings

4 | Arab Behavioral Index: Broad Regional and Subregional Trends

AS THE INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY graphs in chapter 7 show, the years 2002–2003 saw general signs of decline in the U.S.-Arab relationship in nearly every category measured by the Arab Behavioral Index (ABI). Arab student enrollment rates dropped, visa issuance rates fell dramatically, Arab countries voted with the United States less often at the UN, and U.S. arms deliveries to the region declined, both in absolute and relative terms. By some measures, even bilateral trade suffered slightly.

Since then, however, trends in nearly every category have been recovering across the region, as seen in figures 1 and 2. U.S. exports to the region have grown precipitously. Visa applications and arms deliveries have increased steadily since their 2003 lows. Student enrollment rates continued to decline until 2005 but have since been growing. UN voting patterns remain dismal, however, as Arab nations have sided with U.S. votes less than 8 percent of the time since 2005.

This is only a broad summary of happenings in the Arab world, of course—each country showed significant variations from these very general trends. Accordingly, the ABI is perhaps best studied on a country-by-country basis (keeping in mind that egregious statistical outliers can occur even within individual country statistics, and that some data points—such as the sixty-two-fold increase in overall U.S. trade with Iraq—have therefore been excluded from the final index calculation).

The broad Arab trends graphs were generated by adding up all of the data for each of the six *popular/official ties* inputs and assessing change based on these aggregate sums.¹ For example, a total of 180,760 visas were issued to Arabs in 2008, or 70 percent of the year 2000 baseline total of 258,047. The associated 2008 ABI ratio for this input (i.e., the y-axis on the Arab trends graph) is therefore 0.7. This aggregate-sum method is used in

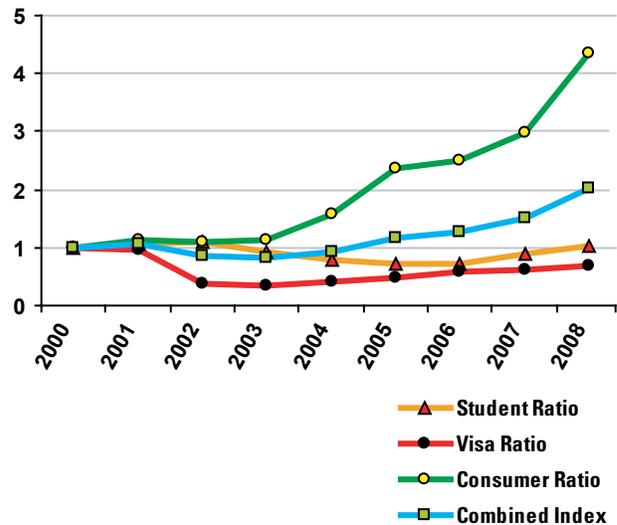
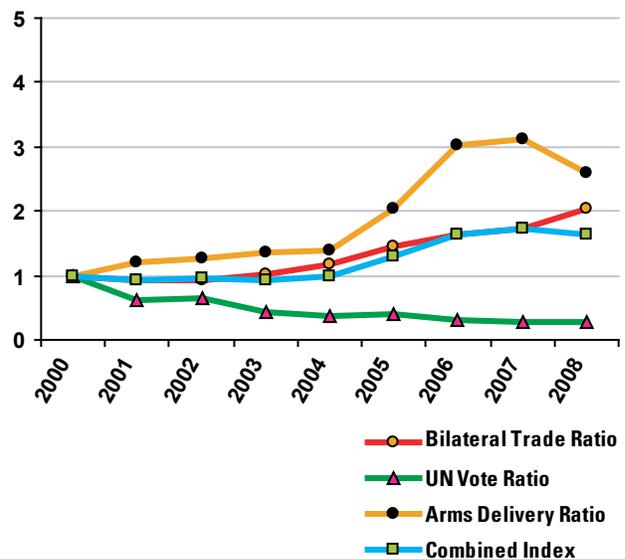


Fig. 1. Arab Popular Ties Trend



* Arms transfers to Saudi Arabia are excluded from this total since they constitute so large a share of the arms trade with Arab countries.

Fig. 2. Arab Official Ties Trend

1. The exclusion of certain key outliers (e.g., Saudi arms deliveries) are indicated in the notes accompanying both the general Arab trend graphs and the country-specific graphs that appear later in the chapter.

order to avoid generating regional averages that give disproportionate influence to smaller countries.

Between the broader Arab trends and the indicators for individual countries, it should be noted that the often-overlooked but important Maghreb (North Africa) subregion proved to be a particularly bright spot in many respects. U.S. security and economic ties, including consumer trade in American brands, improved greatly with almost every country (Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, and, in some respects, even Sudan). Ties with Tunisia showed less of an upward trajectory, but only because they had always been solid.

To a significant extent, the Maghreb's trajectory reflects the subregion's lower starting baseline compared to other Arab countries. And as noted in the

Special Topics section on popular protests that appears later in the study, some of the largest demonstrations against the Iraq war and in response to the Arab-Israeli conflicts in Lebanon and Gaza were recorded in North Africa (specifically, Morocco). But these facts should not obscure the reality of significant advances at a time of negative popular attitudes toward the United States and high-level political disagreement over Iraq, Israel, and internal reform. The Maghreb's geographic distance from some of the Middle East's most acute conflicts likely played a part in this development. To help illuminate these and other intriguing cases, readers should consult the individual country indices, tables, and case studies presented in the online appendices (see Author's Note for information on accessing these materials).

5 | Arab Behavioral Index Trends by Category

Student Enrollment

Rates for Arab enrollment in schools in the United States followed a similar pattern in most countries: a slight increase in 2001 or 2002 over the baseline academic year 1999–2000, then a large decline for several years, followed by gradual recovery. The most extreme case, in both percentage and duration, was the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which saw a drop from a high of 2,659 students in 2000–2001 to a low of 885 in 2006–2007.

In some countries, the numbers have climbed back to levels appreciably higher than the 2000 baseline. Enrollment of Saudi students, for example, nearly tripled between the 2005–2006 and 2007–2008 academic years thanks to scholarships provided by Riyadh, greatly exceeding the previous peak of 2001–2002. Libya and Iraq saw significant overall increases as well, albeit from much lower baselines. The total for all countries was 22,264 students in 1999–2000 and 27,092 in 2008–2009.

These numbers may be more illuminating when seen in comparative terms. First, as reflected in the Arab Behavioral Index (ABI) data tables, many Arab students have gone to other countries to study. Over the past decade, the number of North African and Levantine students in France has increased dramatically, while the Gulf Cooperation Council countries have doubled the number of students they send to Britain and increased the number sent to Australia tenfold.

Second, comparing the Arab numbers to overall foreign student enrollment in the United States is illuminating. While the number of students coming from Arab states dropped dramatically between 2001 and 2003, total foreign enrollment in American schools (an indicator not reflected in the ABI) actually increased, from 475,000 in 2001 to 586,000 in 2003. On average, this figure has remained roughly the same since then. In other words, the drop in Arab students coming to the United States early in the decade was a globally unique phenomenon.

Visa Statistics

Similar to student enrollment rates, the number of visas issued to Arabs plummeted between 2001 and 2003 but has been steadily climbing since then. In most cases, the figures have not yet rebounded to 2000 levels, though there are exceptions to this trend as noted in the passages that follow. For the region as a whole, 210,892 visas were issued in 2009 compared to 258,047 in 2000.

In several Gulf countries, including Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar, more visas were issued in 2008 than in the baseline year of 2000. The same was true on a considerably larger scale in Libya, which had just 445 visas in 2000, dropped to a low of 260 in 2003, and then leapt to more than 5,000 in 2008.

Of course, a more accurate reflection of Arabs' desire to visit the United States would have been visa application or rejection numbers rather than visa issuance numbers. After the September 11 attacks, obtaining visas became much more difficult for Arabs as a result of new U.S. government standards and procedures. But the earliest available rejection rates are from 2006. Moreover, this data tends to vary widely from country to country, usually according to per capita gross domestic product (poorer countries have higher rejection rates, richer countries have lower rates). For example, in 2007, citizens of Bahrain or Qatar had their applications rejected a mere 2–3 percent of the time, while the rate was 34 percent for Egyptians and Syrians and more than 64 percent for Yemenis.

In light of these factors, the ABI uses visa issuance rates alone. According to author conversations with State Department officials, however, rejection rates have not changed significantly. Thus, we assume that the drop in issuance rates reflected in our statistics is indicative of fewer people applying for visas, not more people being turned away. Future research efforts may find it useful to compare visa issuance statistics for Arabs seeking to visit countries besides the United States, a topic that was beyond the scope of this study.

Consumer Imports

Almost every country under study saw large growth in consumer imports, a trend impelled by huge increases in automobile parts and passenger cars. To highlight this driver's statistical impact, the ABI tables separate each country's overall consumer import data into two categories: *automotive vehicles, parts, and engines* and *consumer goods*. In most countries, imports of U.S. automotive vehicles and parts increased several times over, but other consumer imports (e.g., household appliances, jewelry) increased by a more modest 50 percent from 2000 to 2008. Unfortunately, we do not have comparative statistics for consumer imports from other countries, so unlike overall trade (discussed in the next section), U.S. consumer market share cannot be calculated systematically. The result is that the absolute growth in U.S. automobile exports affects the ABI's *popular ties* index figure for each country considerably.

Preliminary evidence suggests this growth in U.S. imports was part of a broader international expansion: the overall automobile import market in most Arab countries has seen dramatic growth, which suggests that the huge increase in imports of American cars results from increased overall demand. For example, although U.S. exports of automobiles and related accessories to Saudi Arabia jumped from \$800 million to \$3.7 billion between 2000 and 2008, the kingdom's car market is still dominated by Japanese cars. According to TNS, a British market research firm, America's share of the Saudi auto market dropped modestly from around 34.5 percent in 1998–2000 to 29.5 percent 2004–2006.¹ This should be kept in mind when examining the large increases in the ABI's consumer-imports ratios.

Overall Bilateral Trade

Without exception, overall U.S.-Arab trade has increased over the past decade, sometimes dramatically. Much of this can be explained by a general worldwide increase in trade through 2008, even after accounting for inflation. This background shift is factored into

the ABI's trade ratio, which in turn is factored into the index of official ties. The mechanism for incorporating those shifts is the U.S. market-share input, which measures the percentage of each country's imports coming from the United States each year. In general, this input shows a fairly stable (or, in some cases, modestly declining) trend. The interesting exceptions are Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, and Tunisia, where trade with the United States grew much more quickly than trade with the rest of the world.

The specific amounts of growth in overall U.S. trade with the rest of the world are vast: U.S. imports increased from \$1.2 trillion in 2000 to \$2.1 trillion in 2008, while exports jumped from \$770 billion to \$1.3 trillion. The total growth in trade worldwide was even larger. For comparative purposes, the ABI's data tables include each Arab country's imports from the European Union, China, and the world as a whole. With this information, other analyses could be performed in order to illuminate the factors behind various regional trends. For example, one could determine an Arab country's market share within the United States by comparing the ABI's Total Exports to U.S. indicator with data on overall U.S. imports. Other comparisons could illuminate what percentage of a country's exports is bound for the United States, or what percentage of U.S. exports is being sent to a given country.

In sum, when looking at these bilateral trade numbers, it is sometimes difficult to evaluate how much of the growth is a byproduct of global increases and how much is due to some kind of shift in bilateral relations with the United States. What is clear, however, is that the decline in U.S. approval ratings (whether measured in polls or anecdotally) has not led to a decline in U.S. trade with Arab countries over the past decade. On the contrary, bilateral trade has flourished.

In dollar terms, the increase in Arab exports to the United States is mostly due to price increases for oil, natural gas, and other fuel products, which accounted for 92 percent of the more than \$116 billion in total exports to America in 2008. This is why barrel volumes

1. Nihal Pinto, "The Saudi Arabian Automobile Market," AMEinfo.com, April 22, 2007, <http://www.ameinfo.com/117436.html>.

or similar figures are used in place of dollar values to calculate the ABI ratios for certain countries (i.e., those whose exports to the United States are consistently concentrated in the fuel sector). Hydrocarbon products aside, other exports increased significantly, from less than \$5 billion in 2004 to around \$7 billion in 2008 (excluding goods reexported to the United States). Morocco, Libya, and Yemen all saw a continual yearly increase in non-oil exports during this period.

Regarding crude oil and other energy products, many analysts argue—without evidence—that this trade follows the market rather than the “flag.” In other words, Arab energy exports are market-driven and therefore not a useful indicator of bilateral ties. The ABI’s findings suggest several responses to this argument. First, the data presented in this study is precisely the sort needed to empirically test the validity of such theories. Whether oil exports to the United States do or do not correspond to other aspects of Arab attitudes or behavior can be tested by the ABI. And the data does in fact demonstrate that exports from many Arab oil producers, even when measured in volume rather than volatile dollar terms, remained steady or increased during this period despite various political tensions with Washington. In certain other cases, like Yemen, oil exports to the United States languished to the vanishing point while declining overall oil exports flowed elsewhere—even as bilateral political and security ties generally improved. But either way, these are points that must be established, not simply assumed.

Second, international energy flows are not entirely a free market phenomenon. For example, the United States has at times sanctioned oil imports from individual countries; Libya and Iraq are major cases in point. Conversely, Saudi Arabia and other countries have at times appeared to adjust production levels or even direct oil to specific destinations, including the United States, for policy reasons. In yet other important cases, as in Kuwait, the level and direction of oil or gas exports may be related to the role of U.S. companies (or lack thereof) in developing those resources—a factor that reflects political drivers at least as much as economic ones.

Oil is not the only economic input in the ABI’s official bilateral ties ratio, of course. Rather, the indicator

covers bilateral trade as a whole, including other Arab exports, U.S. exports to each country, and U.S. market share. This combination of inputs provides a reasonable measure of overall economic ties at the government level.

Regarding the other side of bilateral trade, imports from the United States have increased tremendously in every Arab country. The most dramatic growth occurred in the UAE, whose imports rose from \$2 billion in 2000 to more than \$15.7 billion in 2008. Such growth has been concentrated in a few different areas in each country. Egypt’s imports, for instance, increased from \$2.6 billion to more than \$6 billion between 2003 and 2008, and two-thirds of this growth came from food products, industrial machinery, and steel-making materials. In some of the Gulf states, by contrast, automobile imports were a major factor, accounting for a third of the growth in Saudi Arabia and 43 percent in Bahrain.

Some of these increases can be attributed to the establishment of various trade agreements. For example, Washington has signed free trade agreements (FTAs) with Jordan, Morocco, Bahrain, and Oman during the past decade. In addition, it has concluded Trade and Investment Framework Agreements—sometimes a step toward FTAs—with Algeria, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, the UAE, and Yemen. Egypt and especially Jordan also benefit from Qualifying Industrial Zones, where goods that have a certain amount of Israeli content can be exported duty-free to the United States.

UN Voting Patterns

The most straightforward input was that, today, Arab countries across the board vote with the United States much less often than they used to. To be fair, almost every UN member state showed a decline in voting coincidence with the United States after 2003, but the Arab countries’ decline was much more dramatic. In 2000, Arab votes matched U.S. votes 25–30 percent of the time, in line with the overall UN average of 26 percent (though below the NATO member average of 46 percent). By 2007, however, Arab voting coincidence had plummeted to 5–8 percent, compared to

the overall UN rate of 18 percent and the NATO rate of 41 percent.

On votes deemed “important” by the State Department, the rate of coincidence fluctuated more widely among Arab countries. Collectively, though, the Arab world still voted well below the UN average and even further below the NATO average. The pattern was similar on Middle East issues, with some notable exceptions. For many Arab states, the early part of the decade (2001–2002) saw a large increase in voting coincidence on regional issues, including resolutions related to the new post–September 11 focus on counterterrorism. Kuwait was the most notable case, voting with the United States nearly 40 percent of the time. Beginning in 2003, however, the run-up to the Iraq war altered that pattern drastically, with voting coincidence running very low across the board. By 2007, not a single Arab country was voting with the United States on issues pertaining to the Middle East.

Arms Deliveries

The input involving arms deliveries is difficult to aggregate because of its major variance from year to year. The variation is due primarily to technical contracting or logistical issues, which result in major purchases being stretched out over several years. For example, the UAE bought \$7 billion in arms from U.S. firms in 2000, then less than \$100 million in each of the next two years, followed by nearly \$4 billion again in 2004. Occasionally, political considerations likely play a part in uneven purchasing patterns, as in the Saudi case described in detail below. For these reasons, the ABI’s data tables and calculations reflect rolling multiyear averages rather than simpler but sometimes misleading or erratic annual figures.

Generally, U.S. arms sales increased in every country except Syria, Sudan, the Palestinian Authority, and Lebanon. Certain factors bear special mention, however. First, Saudi indicators were so surprising and so much larger than most others that they are treated

separately in the Special Topics section. Second, in some cases the growth in arms sales was so dramatic as to render it almost unmanageable as an input into the index (e.g., when a given country had no arms relationship with the United States to begin with). Such cases are noted in the index and relevant charts; Algeria, Iraq, and Libya are examples.

As a region, the Middle East (including Israel) has dominated U.S. arms exports, accounting for nearly 75 percent of such sales in 2000–2003 and nearly 62 percent in 2004–2007. Among Arab states, the largest recent customers are the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, and Algeria. Iraq appears poised to move into this category as well. Overall, the substantial U.S. arms sales to a wide array of Arab governments throughout the decade indicate a continuing, even growing, relationship in this important dimension of official bilateral ties—in many cases contrary to political differences.

One interesting trend was the increase in direct commercial sales, which are arms sold by private U.S. companies as opposed to the government. The ABI tables include separate numbers for commercial and government sales for each country. The UAE leads in the commercial category, while Saudi Arabia leads in government-to-government sales. The sum total of these categories is used to calculate each country’s final index number, however.

Where possible, the ABI balances the overall level of arms sales with comparative numbers from Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports. The CRS reports in question typically round their numbers to the nearest \$100 million, however, so anything less than \$50 million is not even measured, resulting in no information for countries that have relatively small arms markets (Tunisia, Lebanon) or that rely almost exclusively on commercial sales from U.S. firms (Algeria, Qatar). In addition, certain Arab countries are simply not included in the CRS reports (Sudan, Mauritania, the Palestinian Authority).

6 | Arab Reform Index: Trends and Analysis

ALTHOUGH THE REGIONAL averages for Arab political and economic reform (see figs. 3 and 4) combine what appear to be apples and oranges, the magnitude and direction of change in most countries were roughly commensurate. In other words, the averages do not simply obscure vast differences that cancel out when combined.

These very general findings show a pattern of steady but modest regional progress in political reform, concentrated in 2004–2006. On the economic front, the pattern is more uneven, with modest reform followed by regression, and then a rebound toward the end of the decade. With some differences in detail, these patterns are broadly similar to those developed from the World Bank Institute’s governance indicators for approximately the same period (1998–2008; see chapter 5 for more information on these indicators).

Graphs showing the detailed, country-by-country trends calculated in the Arab Reform Index (ARI) for 2000–2009 are presented in chapter 7. As mentioned previously, separate tables in the appendices provide all the year-by-year raw input data used to produce the ARI, along with the resulting index values (see Author’s Note for information on accessing this material). Overall, comparing 2009 with 2000, the relative trends in individual countries’ final ARI score can be summarized as shown in table 5.

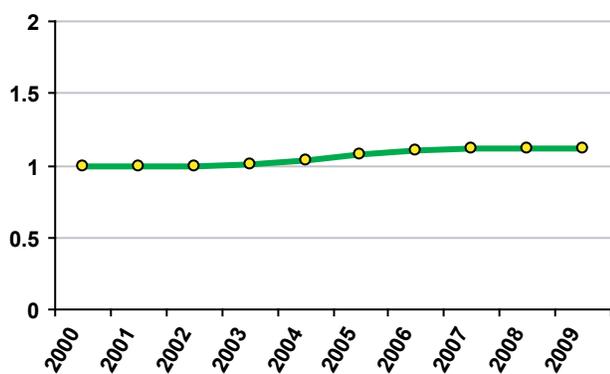


Fig. 3. Arab Political Reform Average

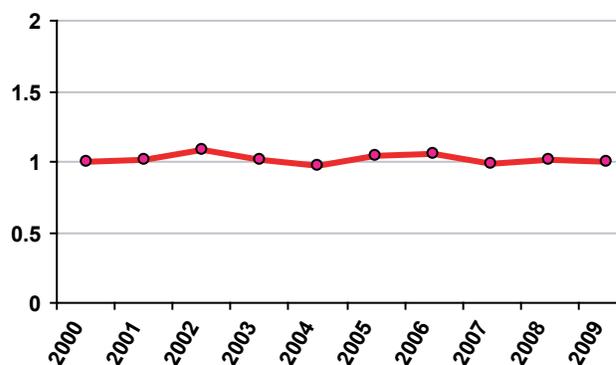


Fig. 4. Arab Economic Reform Average

This approach—comparing just beginning and ending years to establish a medium- or long-term trend—is the most common for analyses of this sort, but it is also problematic. First, the entire thrust of the analysis depends on the baseline year, which is usually arbitrary and may or may not be typical or significant in some other way. When only two data points are used, simply selecting a different baseline year could easily produce a completely different apparent trend.

Second, even if the trend is legitimate, it could obscure intermediate shifts in either direction—in other words, progress or regression in reform from one year to the next that is significantly different from the multiyear result. Alternatively, a long period of stagnation could be followed by a sudden upswing or downturn at the end. In either case, year-by-year data would give a more accurate picture of events than a longer-term trend.

As mentioned previously, a closer look at the ARI’s findings, both year by year and country by country, suggests some surprising conclusions. First, economic and especially political reform were most successful among Arab governments that are considered friendly toward the United States. Second, this success peaked precisely when official and popular dissatisfaction with U.S. policies on Iraq, the Palestinians, Guantanamo Bay, and other such issues was at its worst.

TABLE 5. Relative Trends, 2000–2009

POLITICAL REFORM	
Improved more than 0.2 points	Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia
Improved less than 0.2 points	Algeria, Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Syria, UAE, Yemen
No change	Libya, Sudan
Declined less than 0.2 points	Palestinian Authority, Somalia, Tunisia
Declined more than 0.2 points	Jordan
ECONOMIC REFORM	
Improved more than 0.2 points	Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Qatar, Syria, Yemen
Improved less than 0.2 points	Algeria, Bahrain
No change	Saudi Arabia
Declined less than 0.2 points	Jordan, Oman
Declined more than 0.2 points	Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, UAE

This finding tends to refute the academic argument about Arab government behavior, namely that regional leaders feel compelled to crack down rather than open up politically for fear of popular backlash against cooperation with Washington on hot-button issues. That argument ignores the reality that some of the regimes most closely tied to the United States remain among the most politically liberal (e.g., Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Morocco), while the least friendly regimes (e.g., Syria, Sudan) are among the least liberal. Furthermore, recent political retrenchment in certain areas (e.g., Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, Bahrain) is at least partly rooted in regime pushback against U.S.-supported electoral initiatives and other reform proposals from 2004 to 2006.

Other observers have alleged an inverse correlation between U.S. support for Arab reform and other American objectives in the region. According to this view, Arab governments will respond to the former by

curtailing their cooperation on the latter. Respected scholar and former U.S. official Michele Dunne offered a potential rebuttal to this argument in her assessment of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's diplomatic calculus:

Mubarak shares Washington's interests in preventing the emergence of a permanent Hamas state in Gaza, in promoting a peace agreement between Palestinians and Israel, and in containing Iran's nuclear ambitions. He will work toward those ends and cooperate with the United States accordingly—as he did even at the height of the Bush administration's democracy promotion efforts in 2004 and 2005.¹

Certainly there is little in the trade, arms delivery, or other statistics to suggest that those aspects of U.S.-Egyptian relations suffered as a result of Washington's push for regional reform. At the presidential and symbolic levels, however, most informed analysts agree

1. Michelle Dunne, "A Message for Mubarak," *Washington Post*, August 17, 2009.

that Mubarak's anger over the reform issue contributed to his refusal to visit the United States from 2005 until 2009, possibly forfeiting opportunities for even greater cooperation on certain matters.² Yet it also seems reasonable to argue that Mubarak would probably not have provided much active support for U.S. policy in Iraq no matter what understandings he had with Washington on other issues, including internal Egyptian matters.

Regarding popular reactions to U.S. policy objectives in the region, one leading scholar wrote that "many hear President Bush's rhetoric about 'democracy' as a coded way of saying accept Israeli hegemony or of saying abandon Islamic values." In another passage, however, he acknowledged that the evidence is ambiguous: "When George W. Bush issued a mild condemnation of regime-backed violence against Egyptian protesters in late May 2005, for example, every major regional Arab media outlet ran lead stories celebrating his statement."³

A few analysts, such as James Zogby, have even used public opinion polls to argue that Arab publics do not want U.S. support for political reform in their countries. His argument is based on flawed evidence, though: a single loaded survey question implying that this U.S. policy is not really "important" and offering respondents the convenient middle option of saying that the United States is "going about it in the wrong way." Most other survey responses, including to some of Zogby's own polls, indicate that Arabs generally admire U.S. political and civil liberties in principle and believe that "Western-style democracy" could work in their countries.

Still, the optimal test of a real-world connection between U.S.-Arab ties and internal Arab reform lies not in the realm of public opinion polls, but in actual behavior. In fact, the heyday of Arab reform in the past decade, roughly 2003–2005, was also the period when the U.S. government was promoting the agenda

most actively in the region, at both the rhetorical and practical level. Conversely, when U.S. pressure for Arab reform abated in 2006, such reform actually slowed or even regressed in many countries.

None of this is meant to imply that there is a simple, unique, or even significant causal relationship between U.S. policy and regional reform. But it does suggest that U.S. support for such reform may help promote it, at least on the margins—and that controversial U.S. policies on other regional issues, such as Iraq or Israel, do little or nothing to retard reform. Further tests of this linkage loom on the near horizon, with a number of Arab societies due for national elections in the next year or two.

With regard to reform, the World Bank Institute governance indicators reveal a surprising pattern—one that is highlighted and lamented in the UN's 2009 *Arab Human Development Report*, authored by an all-star cast of experts on Arab affairs. Namely, for all the talk of political or economic reform in various Arab countries, the overall picture of the past decade is nearly static or, at best, one of modest progress followed by regression. Even more surprising, and unmentioned in the UN report, is this finding: out of all the Arab countries, Iraq alone has shown what the World Bank Institute deems "significant" improvements over the past decade, scoring gains on three out of six governance indicators: *voice and accountability* and *regulatory quality* (see tables 3 and 4 in chapter 2) as well as *government effectiveness*. Improvements were also seen in two other Arab states that are not usually cited as models of reform. Algeria showed significant progress on *government effectiveness* and *political stability/absence of violence* (though the latter indicator is not necessarily a good measure of democratic reform, of course). Libya improved on both the *stability* measure and *regulatory quality*.

According to the World Bank Institute, these improvements by Iraq, Algeria, and Libya were the

2. In addition to numerous media accounts on the subject, this interpretation is supported by the author's interviews with senior U.S. and Egyptian officials in Cairo in March 2009.

3. Marc Lynch, "Anti-Americanisms in the Arab World," in *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics*, ed. Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane, pp. 203, 218 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

sole significant Arab advances in governance during the past decade. It is important to note several caveats about this conclusion, however. First, the World Bank's numbers measured political and economic governance issues, not other relevant indicators such as macroeconomic policy, aggregate national income, and so forth. In some cases, such as Egypt, financial sector reforms and related macroeconomic measures appear to have facilitated substantial increases in overall growth during this period—a contribution that is not reflected much in statistics regarding regulatory quality, anti-corruption efforts, or rule of law. Second, the extent of progress or regression obviously depends on what baseline year is chosen for comparison. The World Bank Institute focused on 1998–2008, but it might have reached different conclusions had it applied the same measures to another set of years. Third, judgments about how much progress or regression is “significant” are debatable even when based on statistical measures.

Two countries regressed in the World Bank's view: Mauritania and Lebanon each registered “significant” declines in both *political stability/absence of violence* and *government effectiveness*. All other Arab states showed no significant changes in any of the six governance indicators from 1998 to 2008. That means no Arab country at all—including the trio of Iraq, Algeria, and Libya, which improved considerably in certain categories—showed substantial improvement in the areas of *rule of law* and *control of corruption*, although a

few did make modest gains in these two areas over the past decade.

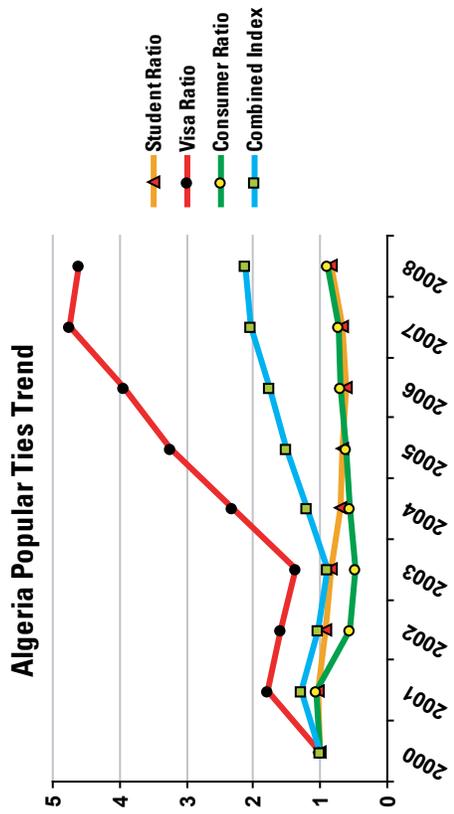
The U.S.-government-funded Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) uses several of these World Bank indicators, along with other measures, to create a different standard of good governance for low- and middle-income countries. This standard emphasizes not progress over time, but rather standing relative to other countries in the same income group. Specifically, it measures whether each country has generally stayed at or above the mean level for its income group in three broad areas: *ruling justly*, *investing in people*, and *promoting economic growth*. By performing well on these measures, Morocco and Jordan have qualified for substantial U.S. aid under the terms of an economic growth/poverty reduction “compact” with this relatively new quasi-governmental entity.

Looking ahead, with hundreds of millions of dollars in potential aid at stake for each country, the MCC could become a major mechanism for U.S. engagement on Arab reform. At present, however, the MCC is in effect for just two of the Arab League's twenty-two member states—and it does not apply even in principle to any of the higher-income, oil-rich countries. Might the prospect of qualifying for MCC status spur other low- or middle-income Arab countries to engage in greater reform efforts? The Obama administration would be wise to explore this important question as it considers its future direction in the region.

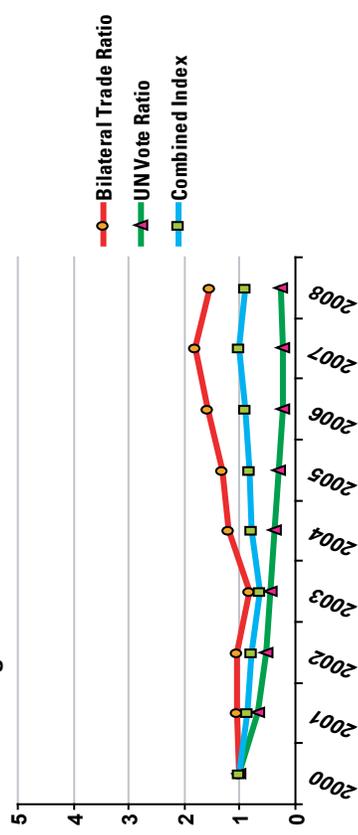
7 | Country Graphs

Fig. 5. Algeria . . . . .	.30
Fig. 6. Bahrain . . . . .	.31
Fig. 7. Egypt . . . . .	.32
Fig. 8. Iraq . . . . .	.33
Fig. 9. Jordan . . . . .	.34
Fig. 10. Kuwait . . . . .	.35
Fig. 11. Lebanon . . . . .	.36
Fig. 12. Libya . . . . .	.37
Fig. 13. Mauritania . . . . .	.38
Fig. 14. Morocco . . . . .	.39
Fig. 15. Oman . . . . .	.40
Fig. 16. Palestinian Authority . . . . .	.41
Fig. 17. Qatar . . . . .	.42
Fig. 18. Saudi Arabia . . . . .	.43
Fig. 19. Somalia . . . . .	.44
Fig. 20. Sudan . . . . .	.45
Fig. 21. Syria . . . . .	.46
Fig. 22. Tunisia . . . . .	.47
Fig. 23. United Arab Emirates . . . . .	.48
Fig. 24. Yemen . . . . .	.49

Fig. 5. ALGERIA

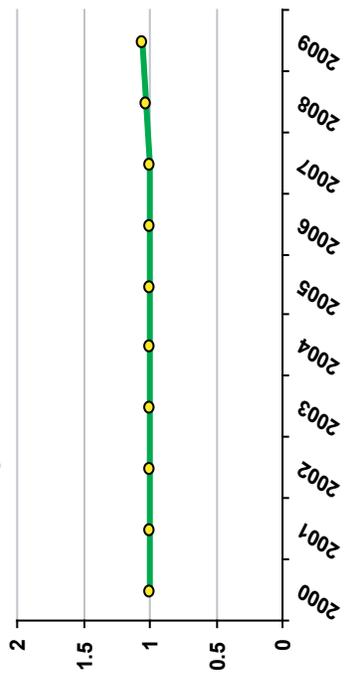


Algeria Official Ties Trend*

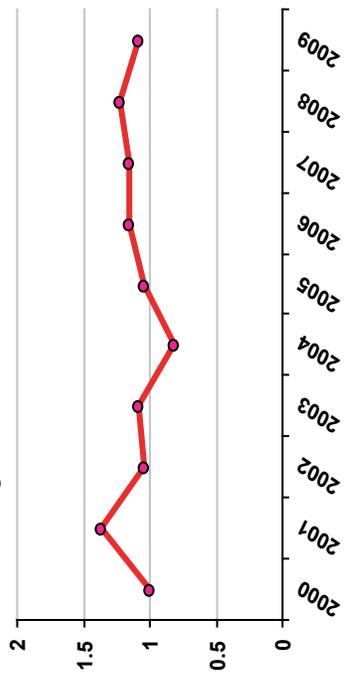


* U.S. arms sales to Algeria grew from \$0 in 2000 to more than \$250 million each year in 2005–2006. Because of the scope of this difference and because the starting point was essentially \$0, the arms ratio has not been included in the index.

Algeria Political Reform Trend



Algeria Economic Reform Trend



Algeria Anti-American Protests

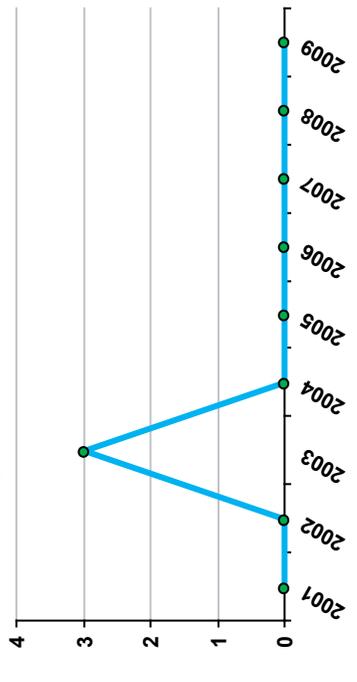
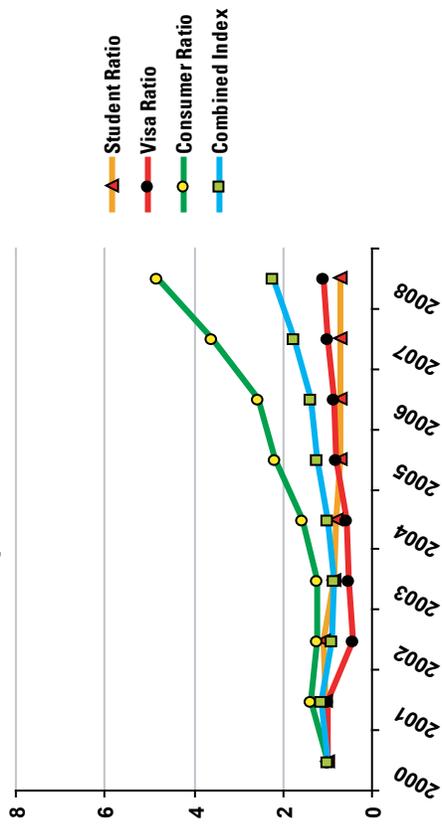
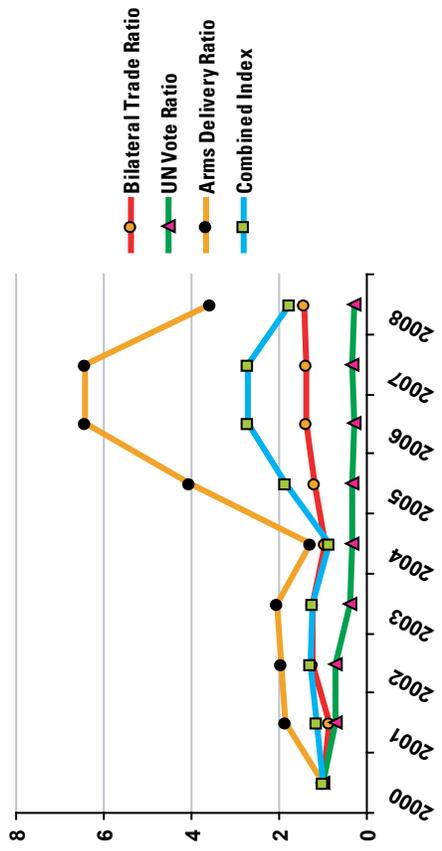


Fig. 6. BAHRAIN

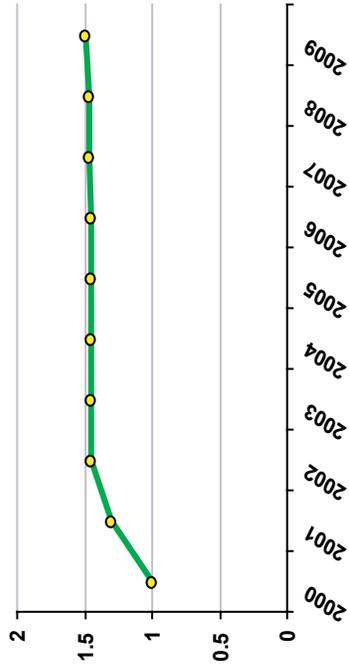
Bahrain Popular Ties Trend



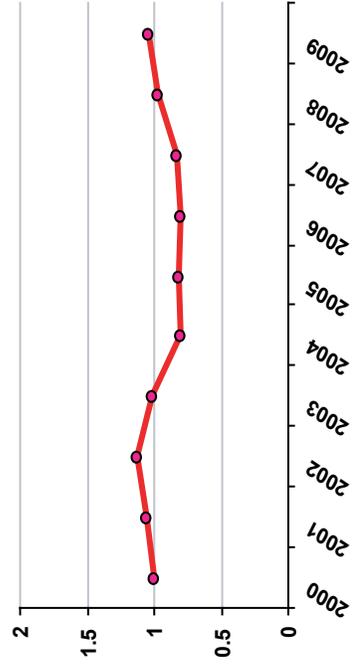
Bahrain Official Ties Trend



Bahrain Political Reform Trend



Bahrain Economic Reform Trend



Bahrain Anti-American Protests

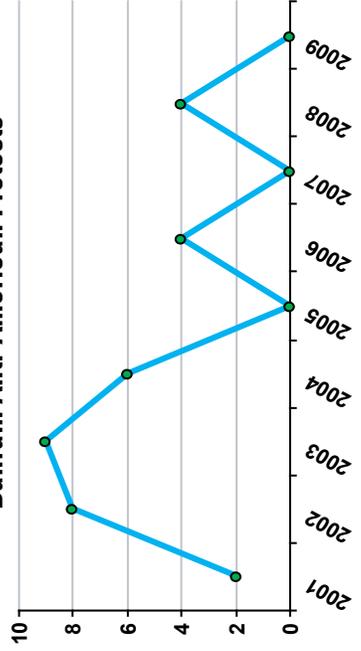
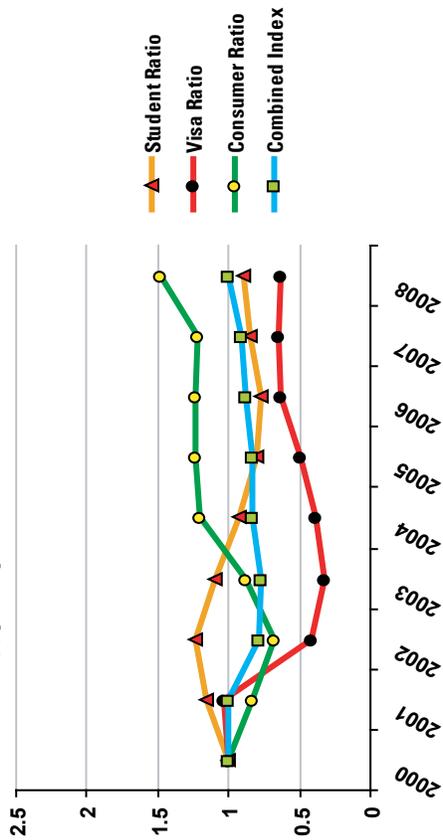
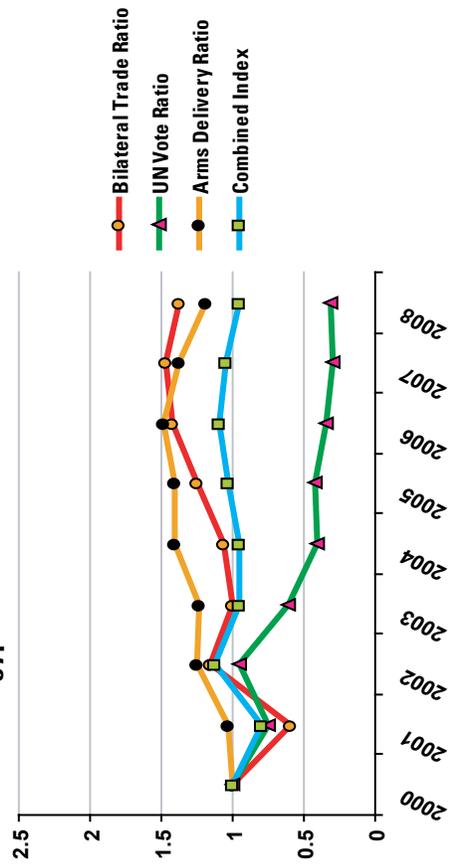


Fig. 7. EGYPT

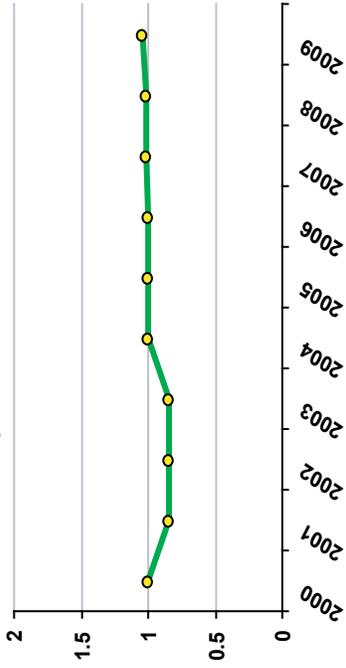
Egypt Popular Ties Trend



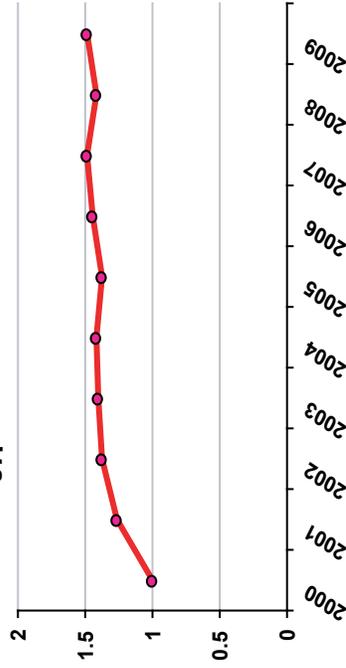
Egypt Official Ties Trend



Egypt Political Reform Trend



Egypt Economic Reform Trend



Egypt Anti-American Protests

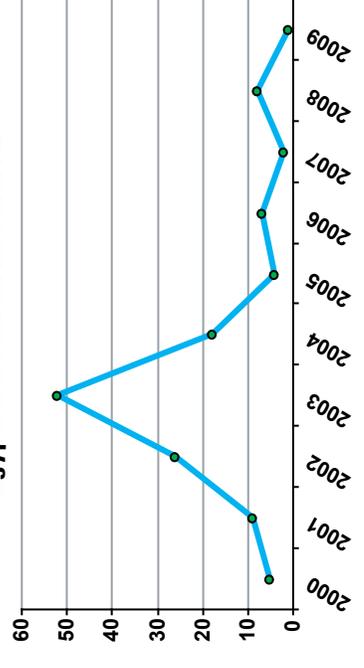
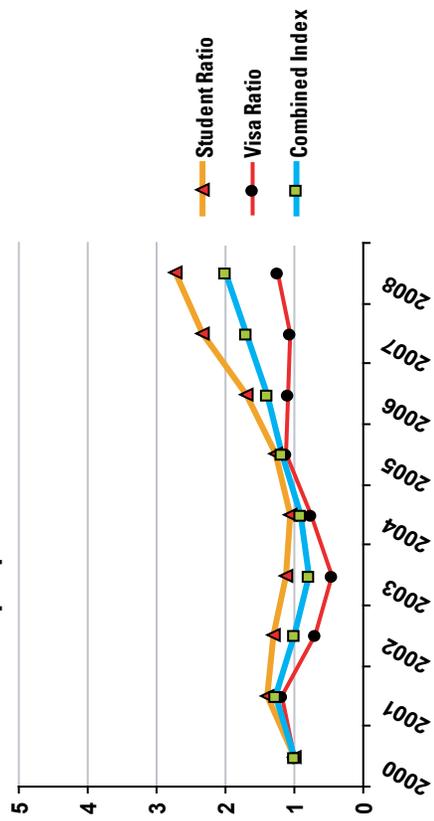


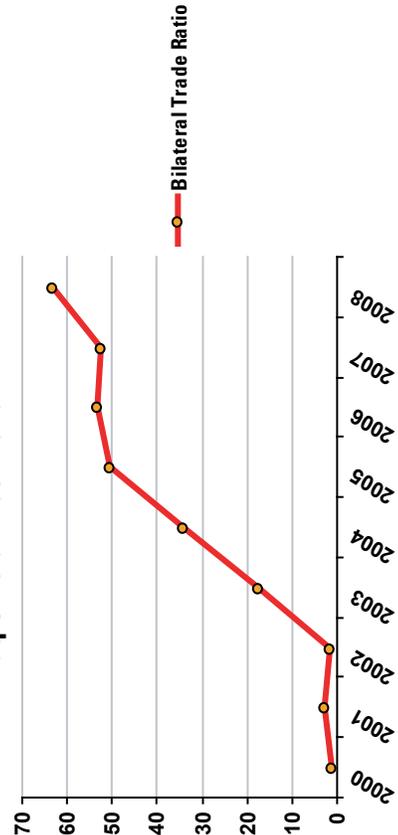
Fig. 8. IRAQ

Iraq Popular Ties Trend*



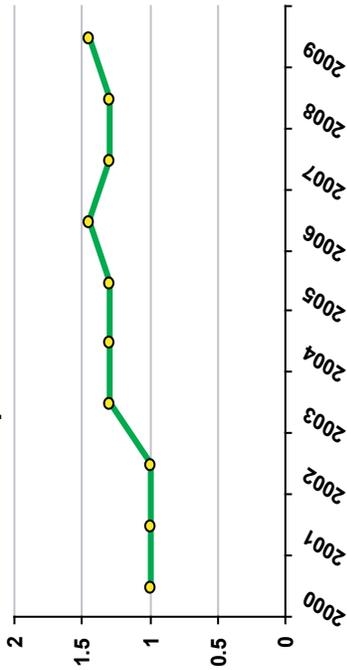
*Consumer imports to Iraq went from \$0 in 2000 to nearly \$250 million in 2008. Because of the difference in scope, the consumer imports ratio was not included for Iraq.

Iraq Official Ties Trend*

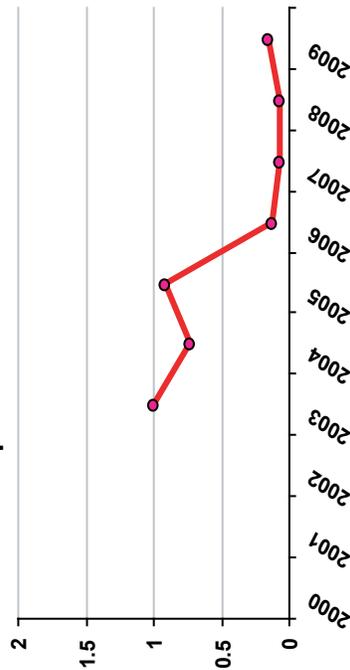


*Iraq did not register votes at the UN between 2000 and 2003. Therefore there is no UN vote ratio relative to 2000. Arms sales from the U.S. to Iraq went from \$0 to over \$1 billion. Because this difference is of an entirely different scope and the starting point was essentially 0, the arms ratio has not been included in the index.

Iraq Political Reform Trend



Iraq Economic Reform Trend*



* Heritage Foundation data for Iraq is unavailable; this graph reflects only the Transparency International data.

Iraq Anti-American Protests

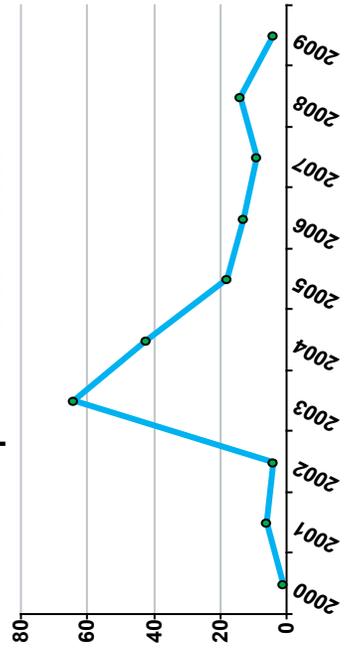


Fig. 9. JORDAN

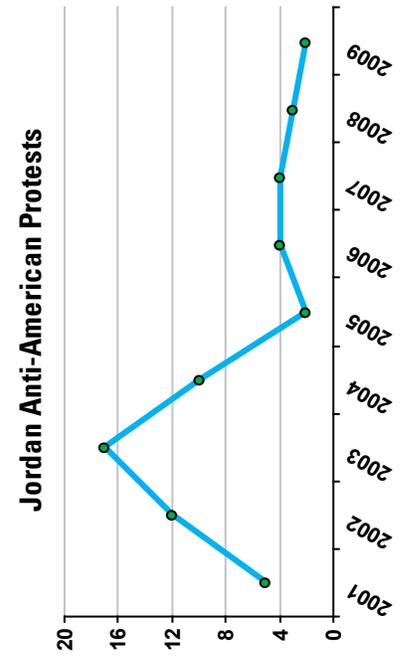
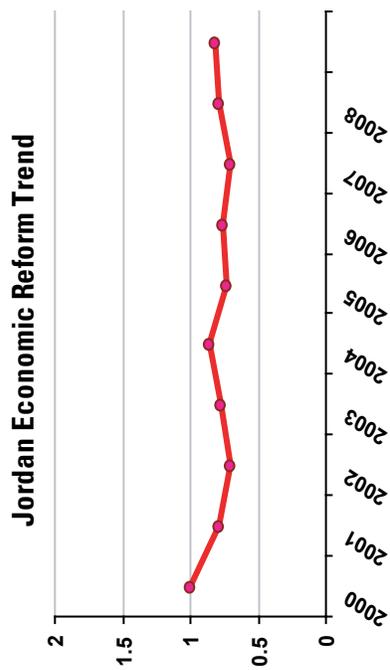
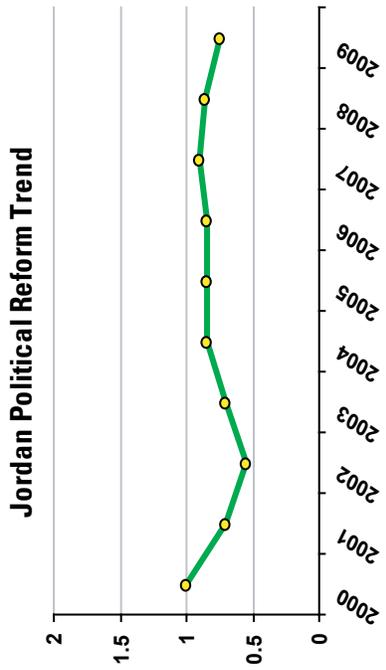
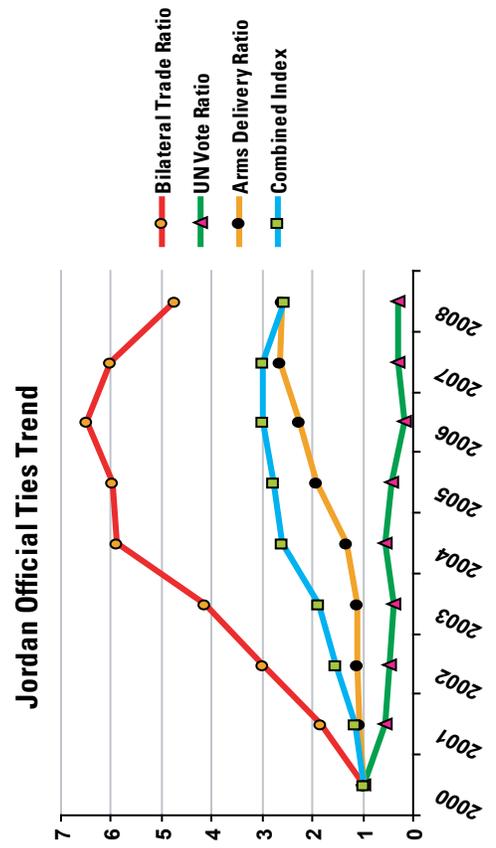
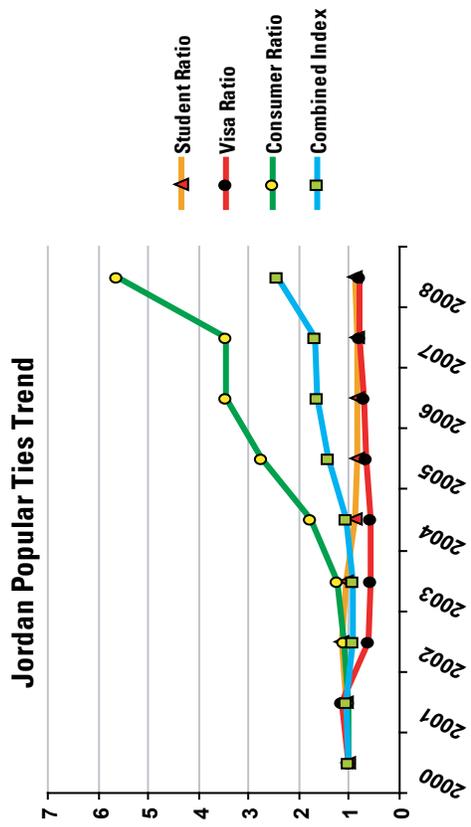
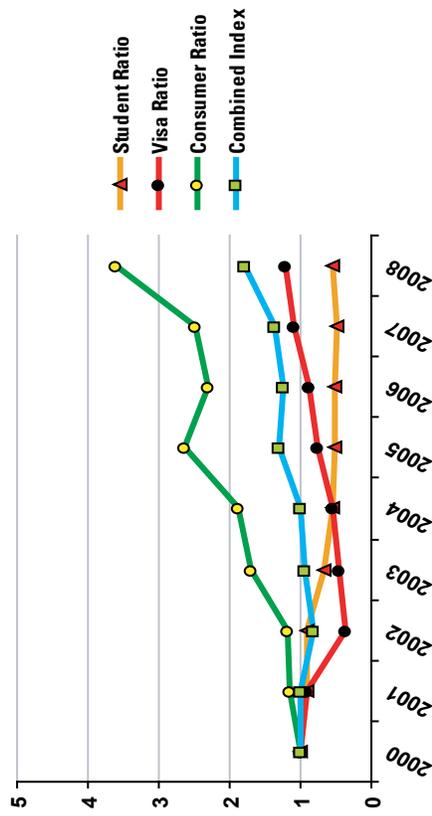
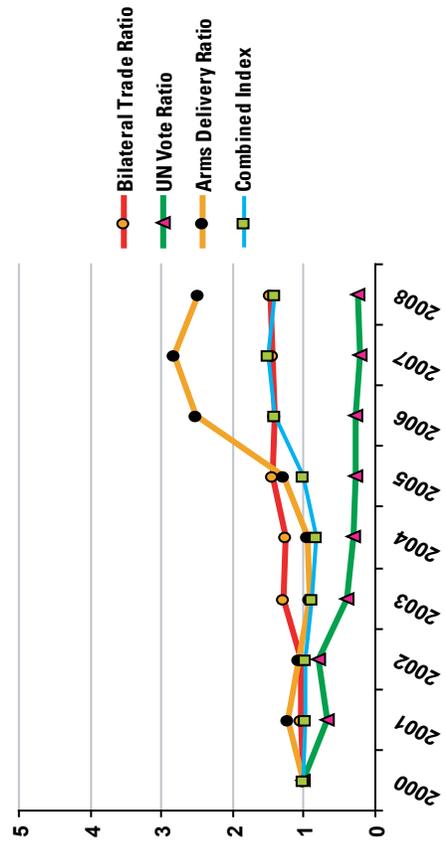


Fig. 10. KUWAIT

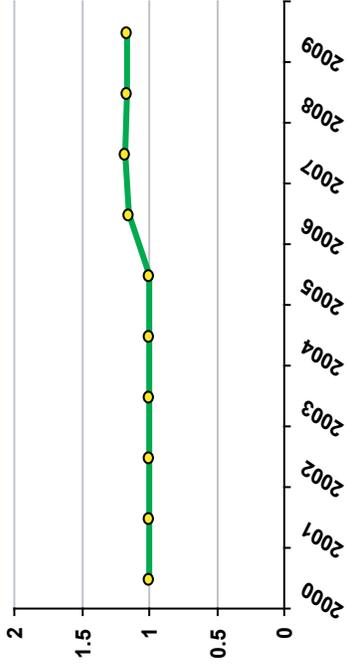
Kuwait Popular Ties Trend



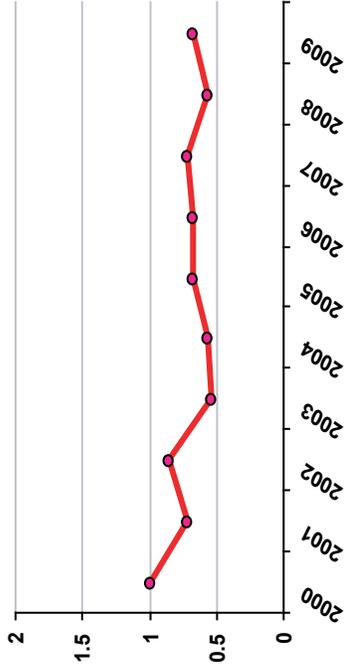
Kuwait Official Ties Trend



Kuwait Political Reform Trend



Kuwait Economic Reform Trend



Kuwait Anti-American Protests

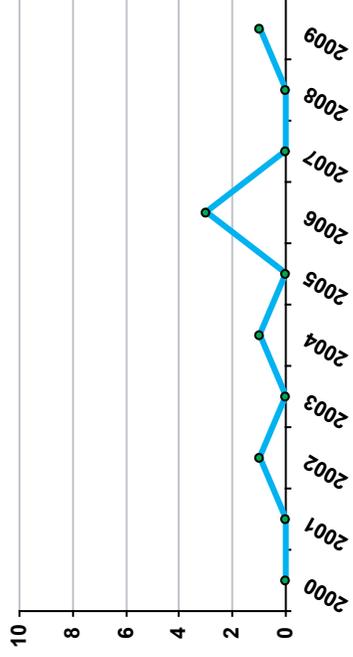
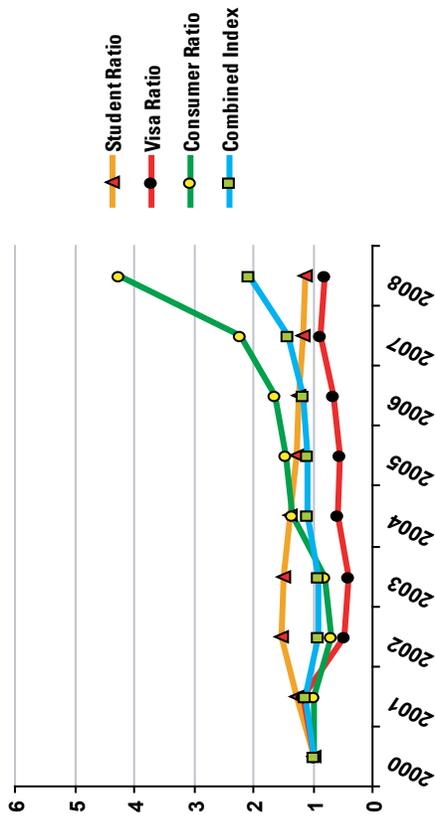
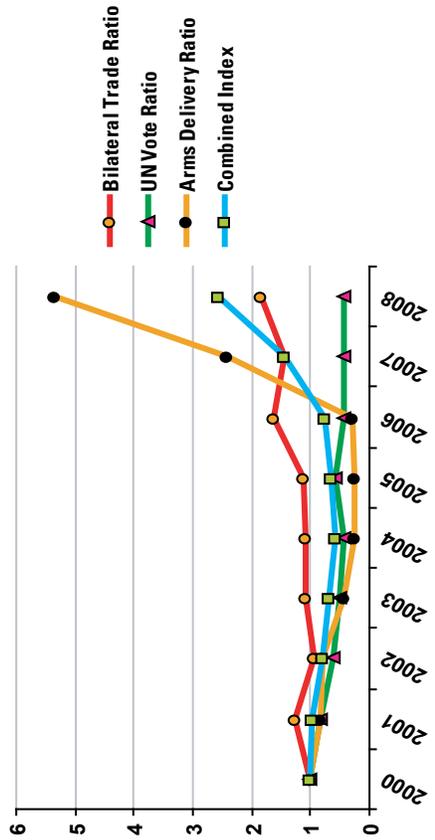


Fig. 11. LEBANON

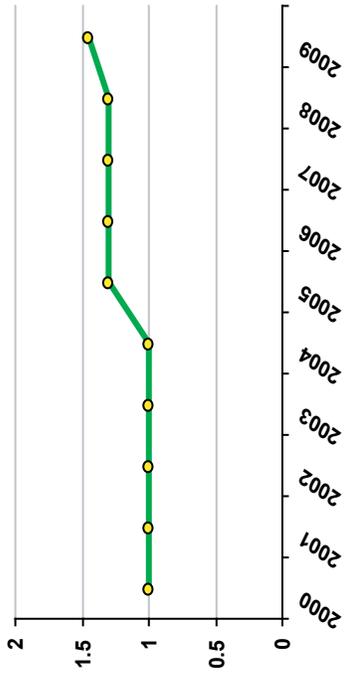
Lebanon Popular Ties Trend



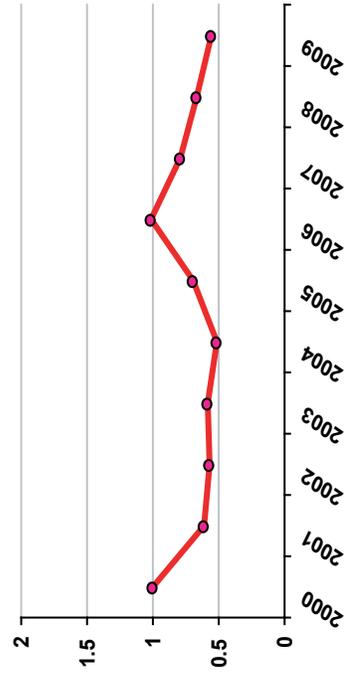
Lebanon Official Ties Trend



Lebanon Political Reform Trend



Lebanon Economic Reform Trend



Lebanon Anti-American Protests

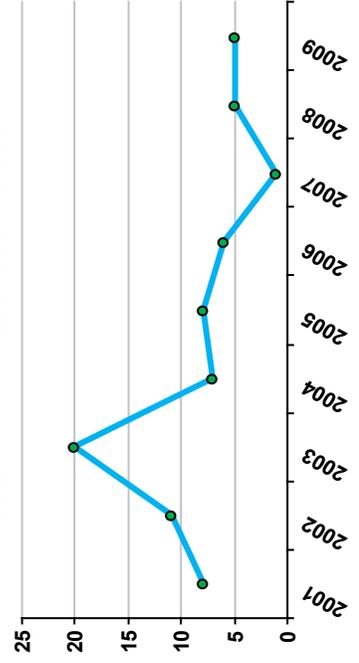
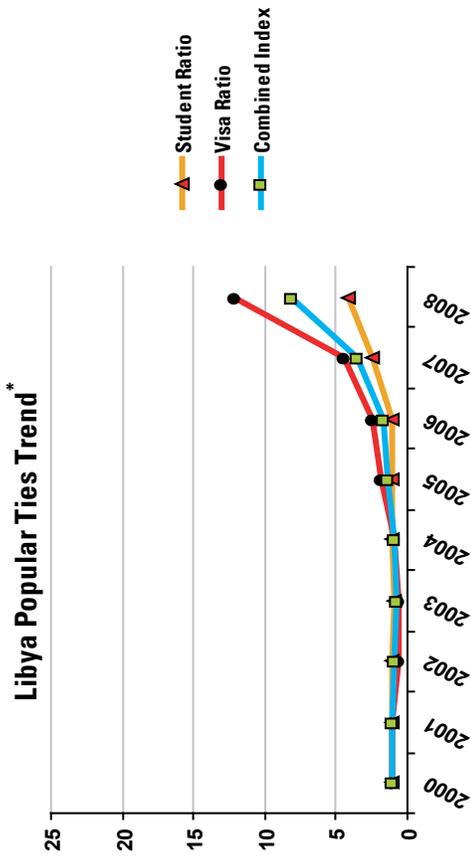
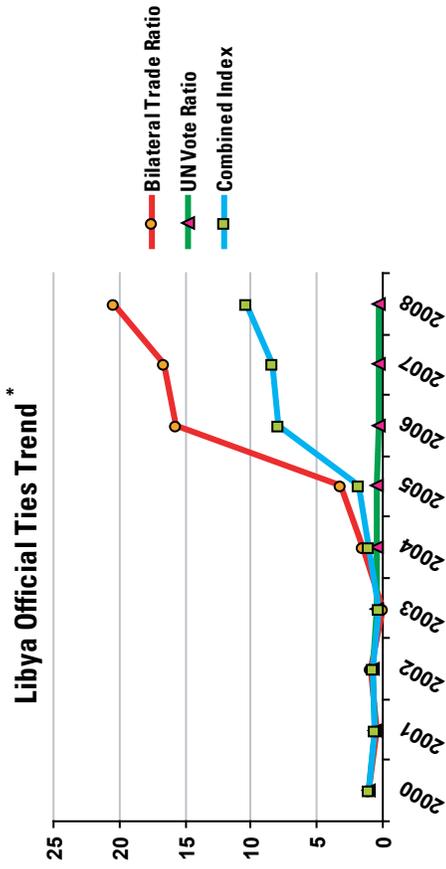


Fig. 12. LIBYA

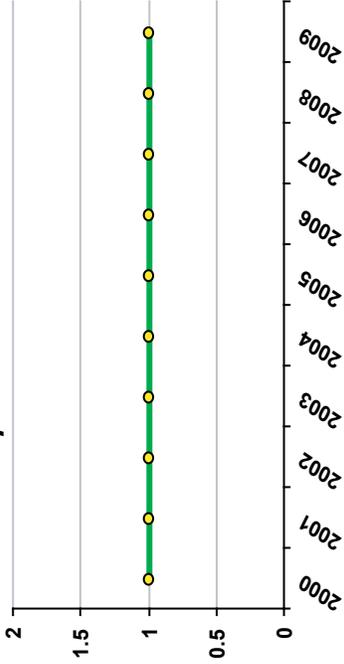


* Consumer imports went from \$0 in 2000–2002 to \$154 million in 2008. Because of the scope of this difference and because the starting point was essentially \$0, consumer imports data has not been included.

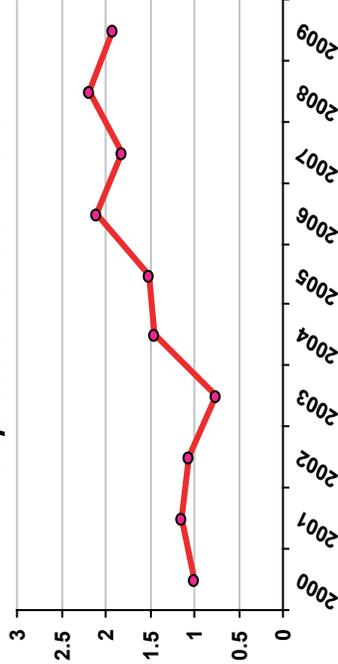


* The bilateral trade ratio does not include an exports input because exports to the United States were \$0 in 2000. The arms delivery ratio could not be included because arms deliveries were essentially \$0 from 2000 to 2006.

Libya Political Reform Trend



Libya Economic Reform Trend



Libya Anti-American Protests

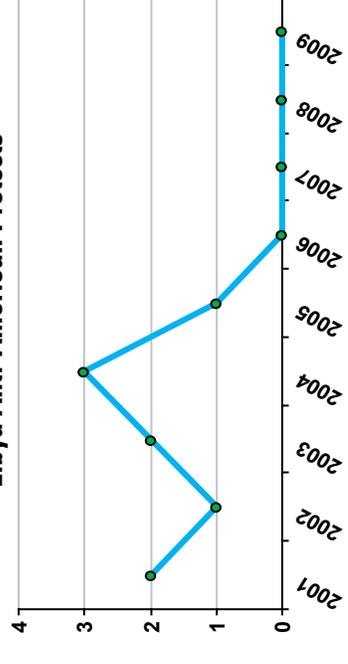
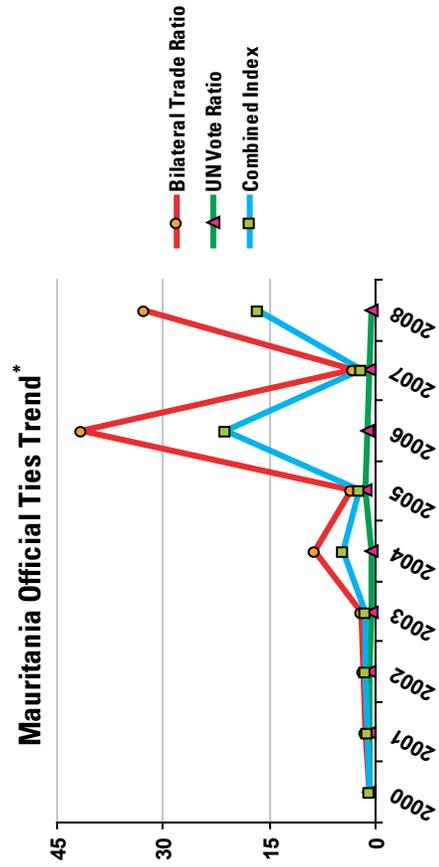
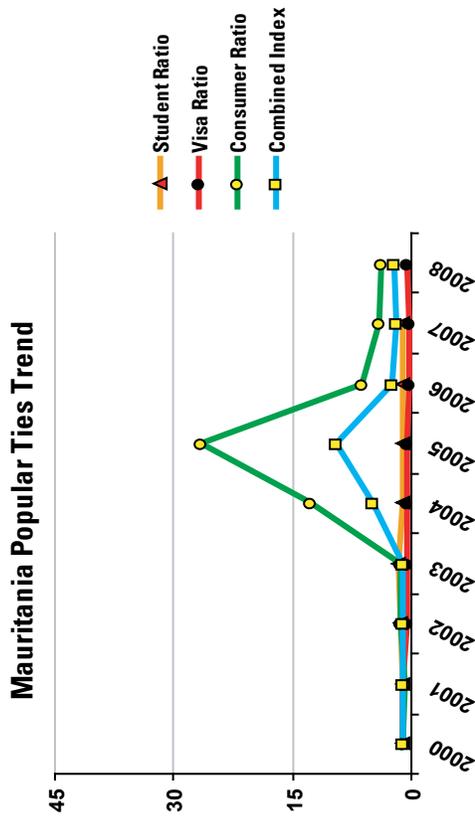
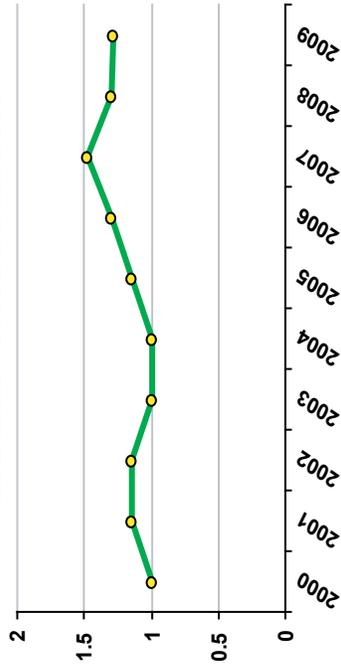


Fig. 13. MAURITANIA



* U.S. arms deliveries to Mauritania were \$0 from 2000 to 2002, and between \$0 and \$1 million thereafter. Comparative arms deliveries data for Mauritania is not available.

Mauritania Political Reform Trend



Mauritania Economic Reform Ratio

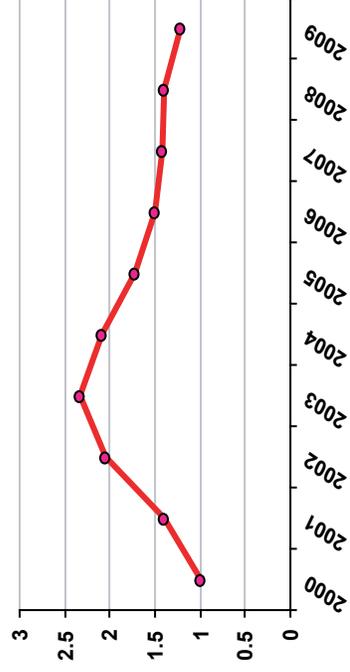
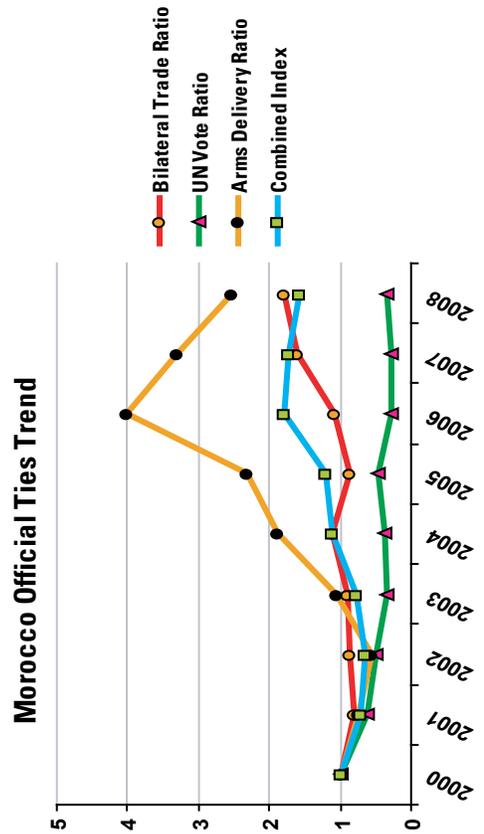
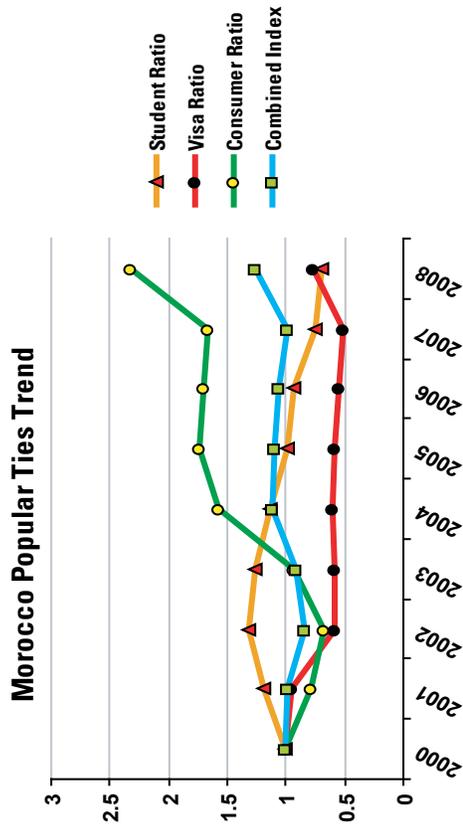
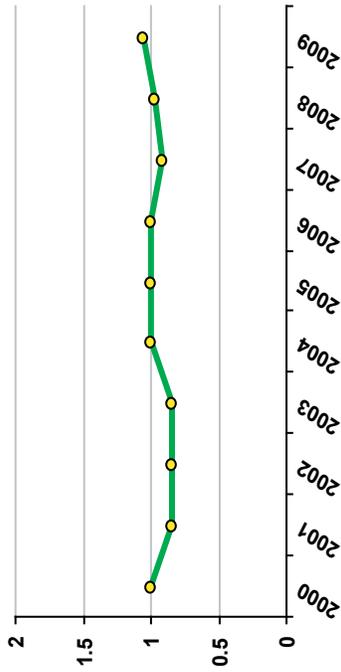


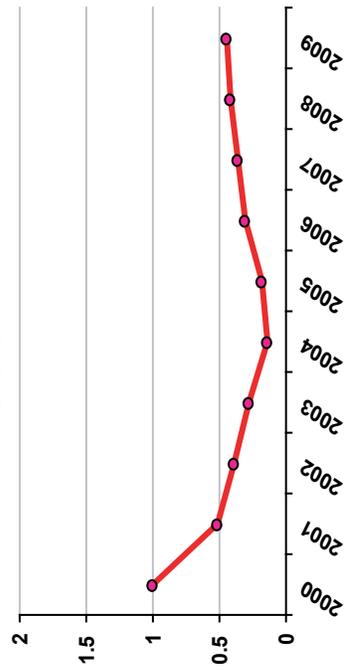
Fig. 14. MOROCCO



Morocco Political Reform Trend



Morocco Economic Reform Trend



Morocco Anti-American Protests

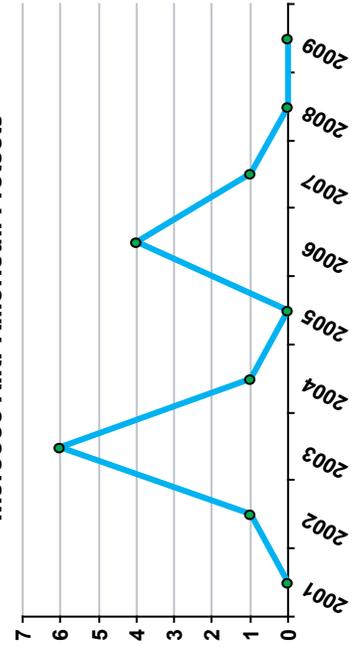
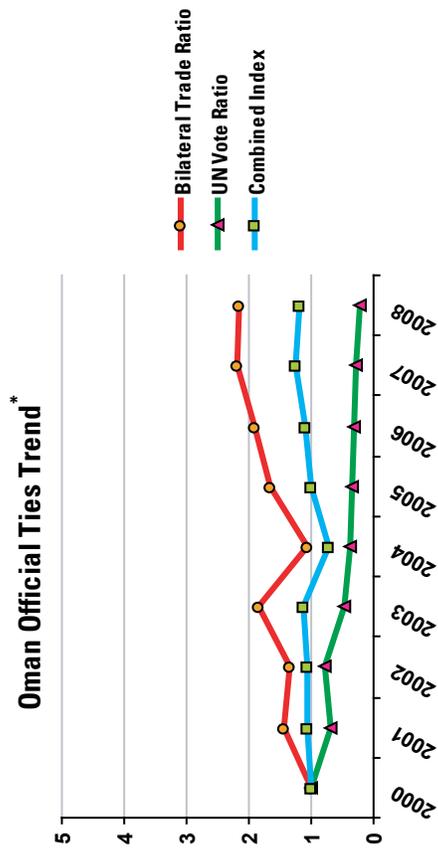
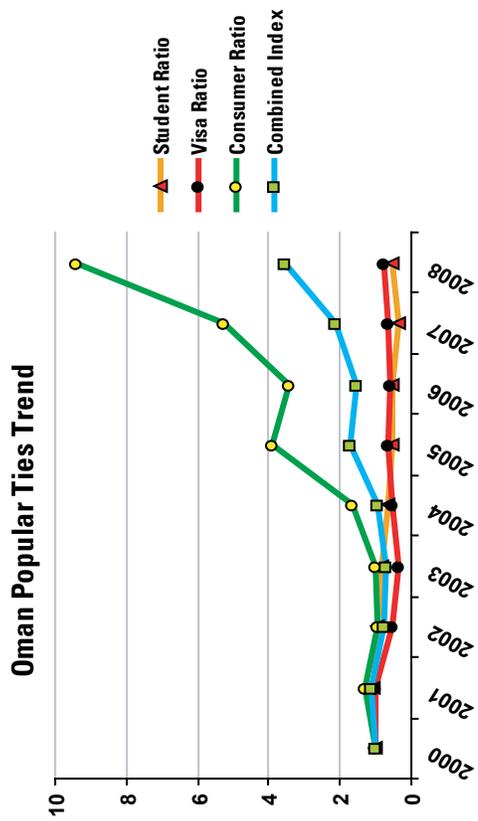
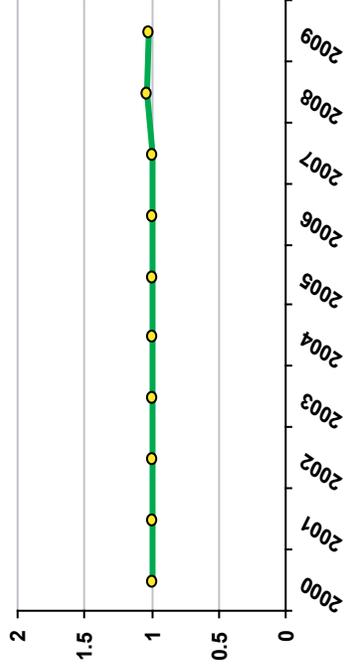


Fig. 15. OMAN

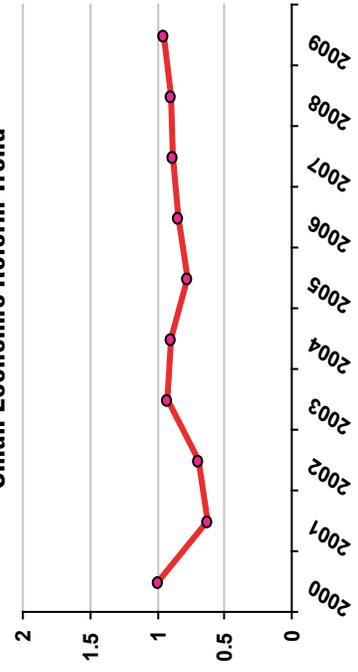


* U.S. arms deliveries to Oman grew more than a hundredfold. Because of the scope of this difference and because the starting point was essentially \$0, the arms ratio has not been included.

Oman Political Reform Trend



Oman Economic Reform Trend



Oman Anti-American Protests

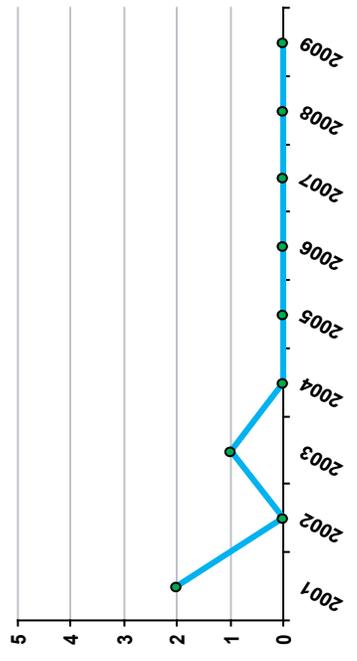
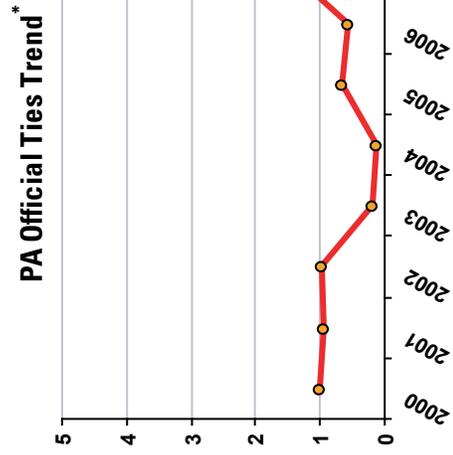
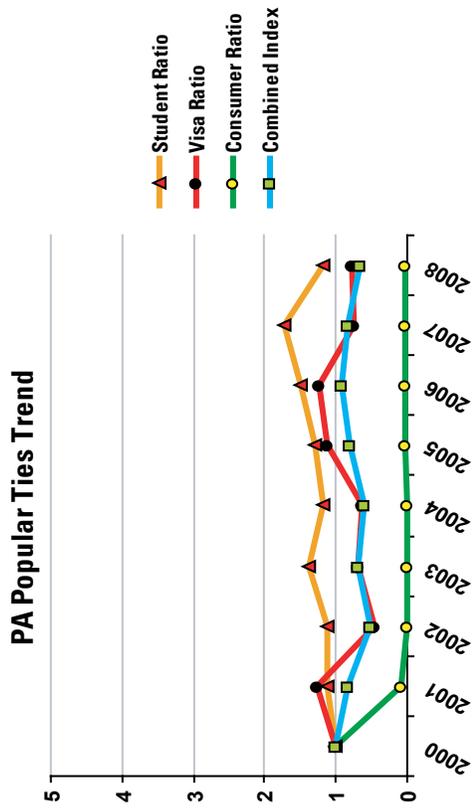
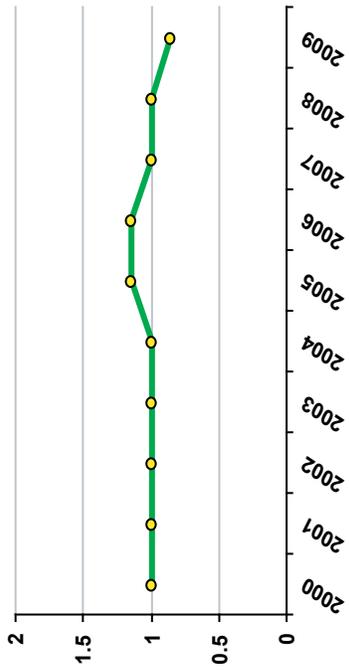


Fig. 16. PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

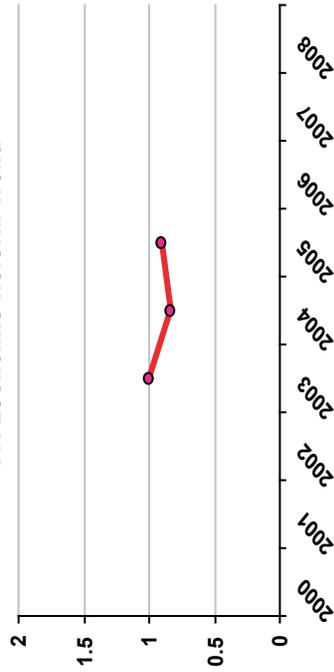


*Data for the UN votes and arms deliveries does not exist.

PA Political Reform Trend



PA Economic Reform Trend*



*Transparency International data is available for the Palestinian Authority only from 2003 to 2005.

PA Anti-American Protests

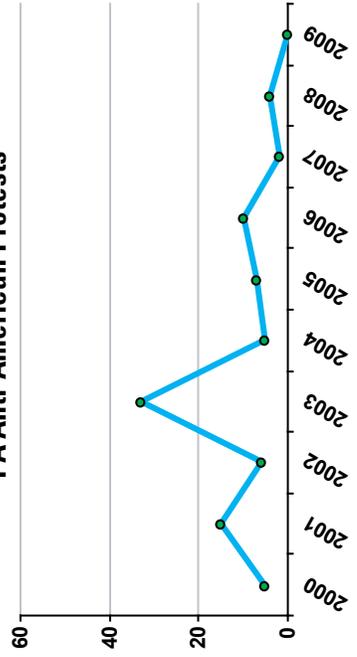
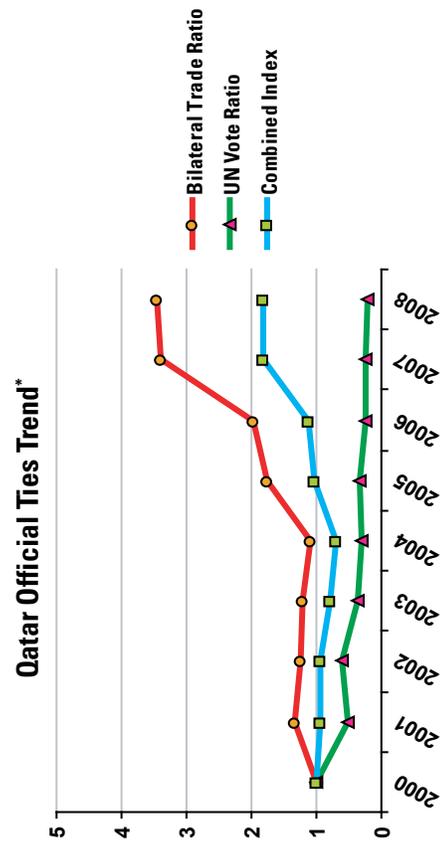
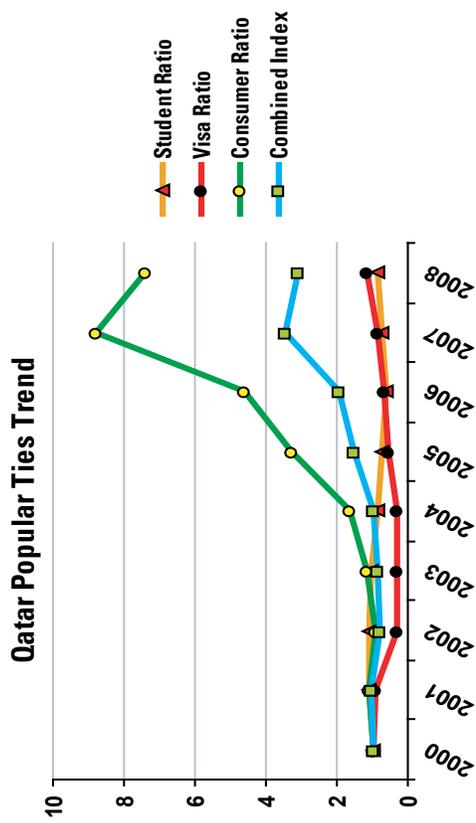
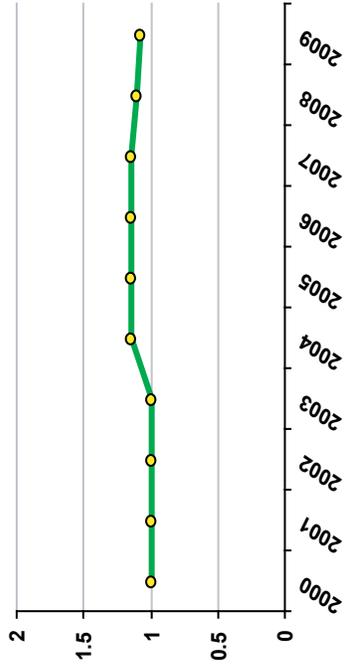


Fig. 17. QATAR

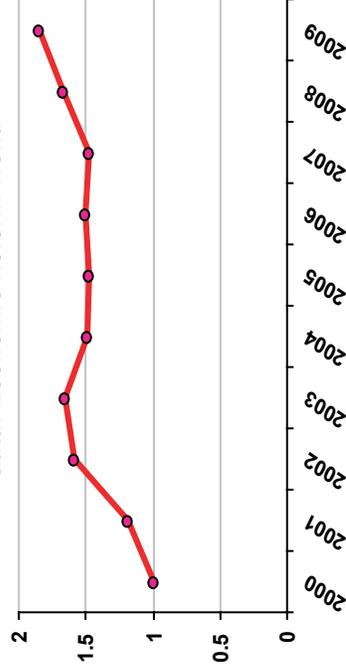


* Arms deliveries are not included due to scale. Growth jumped from essentially \$0 to more than \$300 million, though since this consisted mostly of commercial sales, comparative statistics are unavailable.

Qatar Political Reform Trend



Qatar Economic Reform Trend



Qatar Anti-American Protests

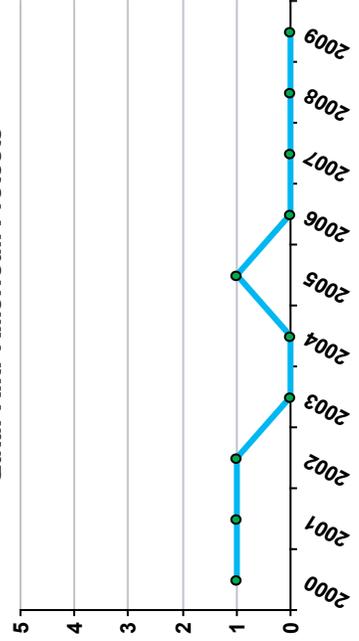
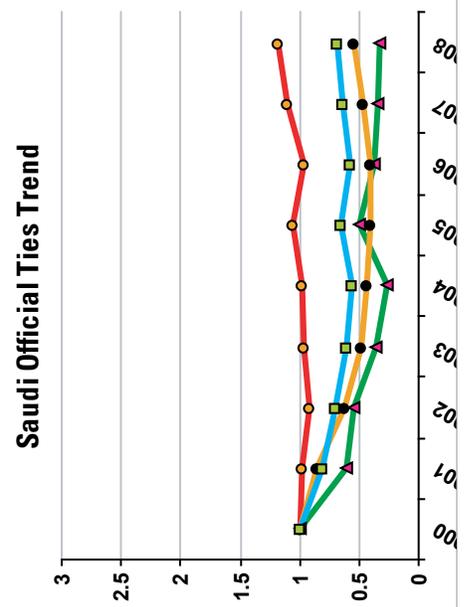
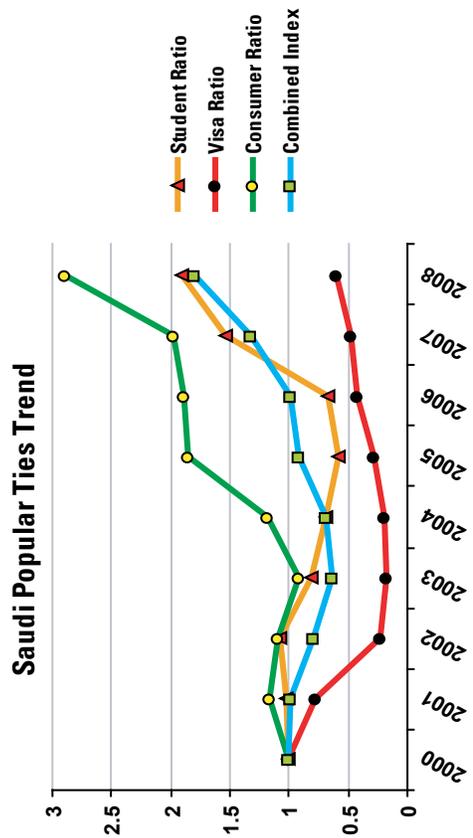
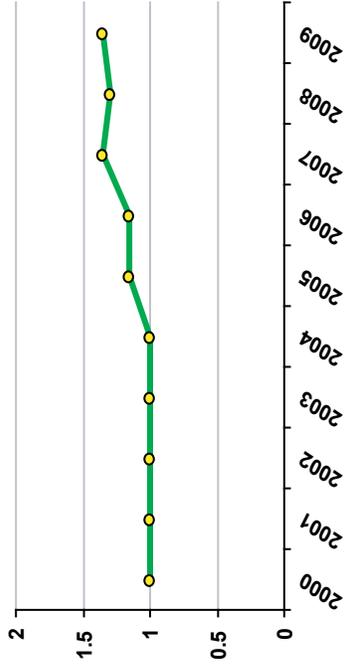


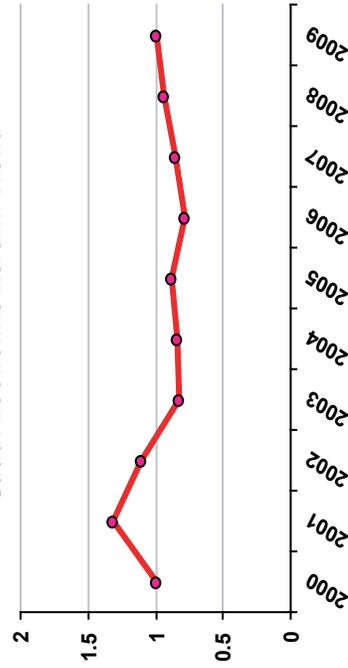
Fig. 18. SAUDI ARABIA



Saudi Political Reform Trend



Saudi Economic Reform Trend



Saudi Anti-American Protests

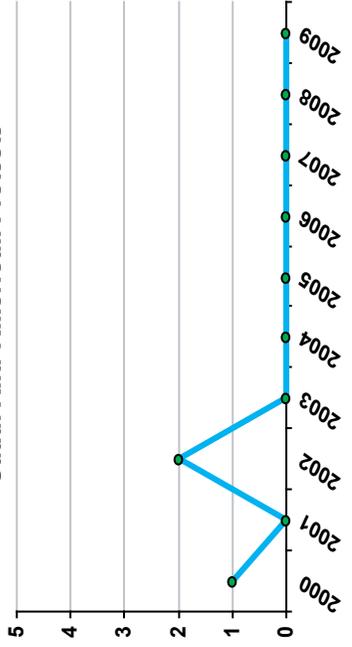
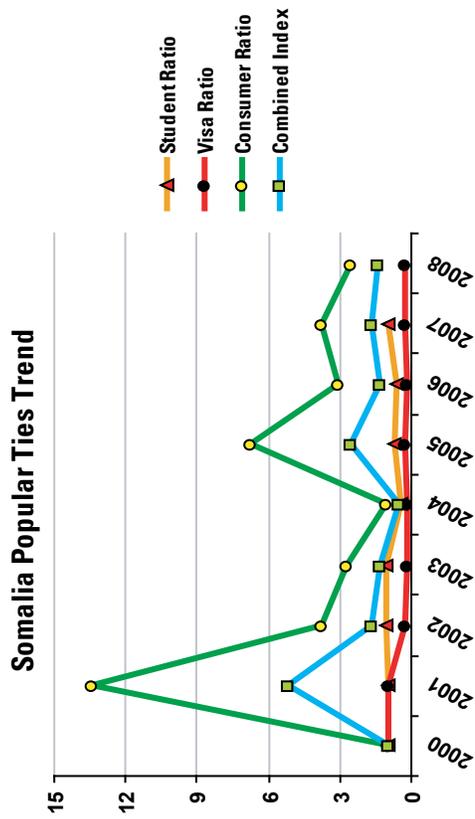
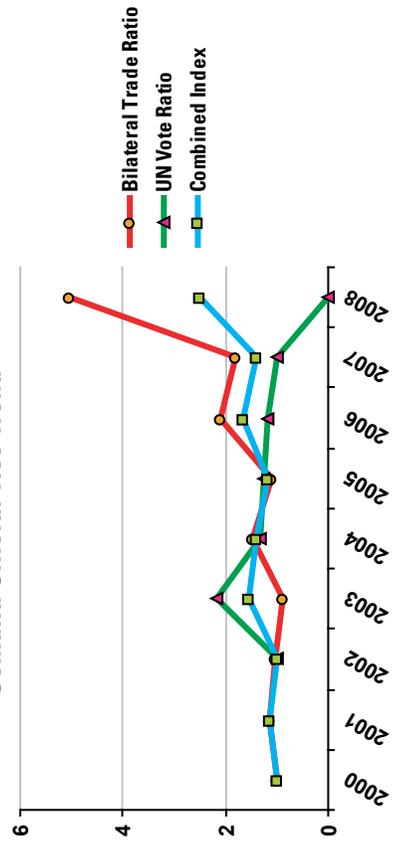


Fig. 19. SOMALIA



Somalia Official Ties Trend*



*From 2000 to 2001, Somalia did not vote at the United Nations. An adjusted UN voting ratio is used, beginning with 2002. Somalia did not receive arms shipments from the United States between 2000 and 2008.

Somalia Political Reform Trend

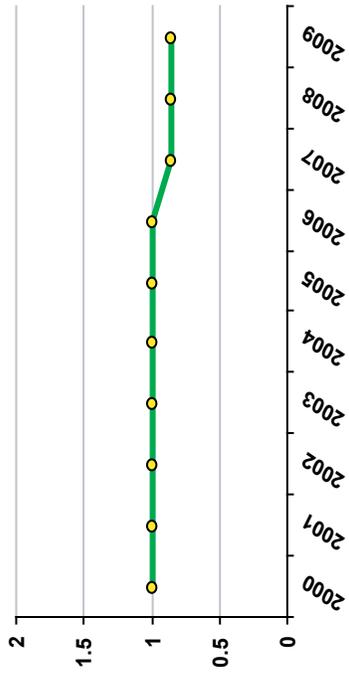
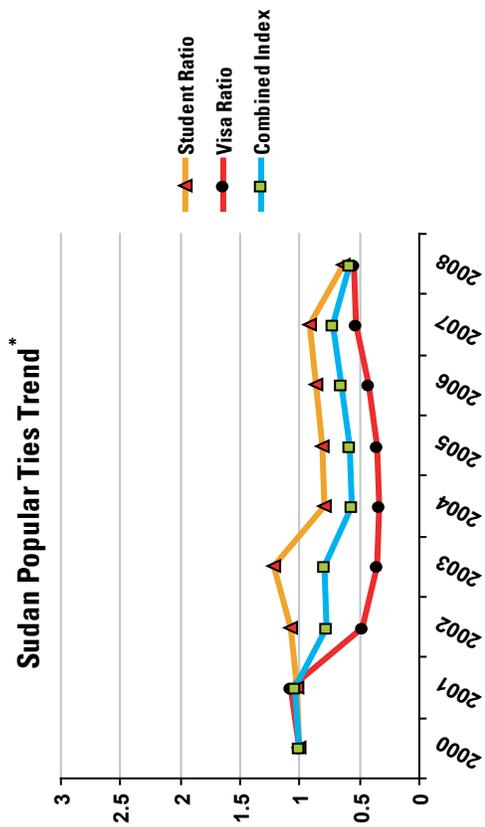
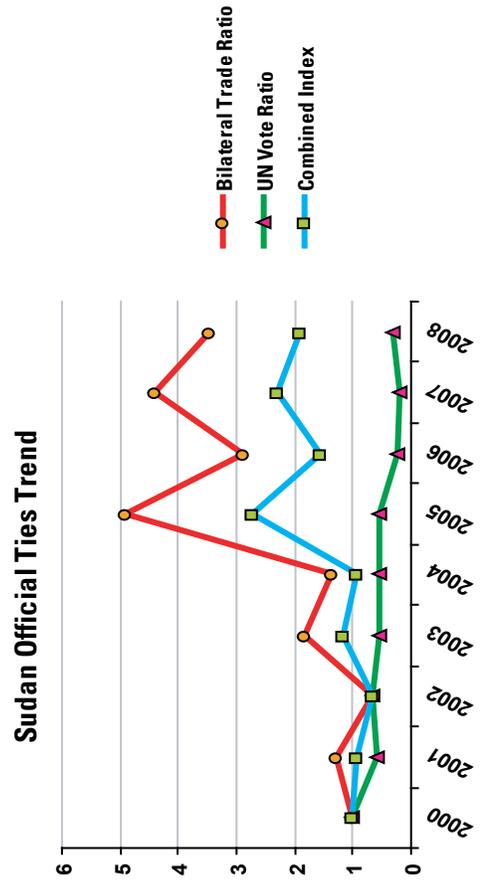


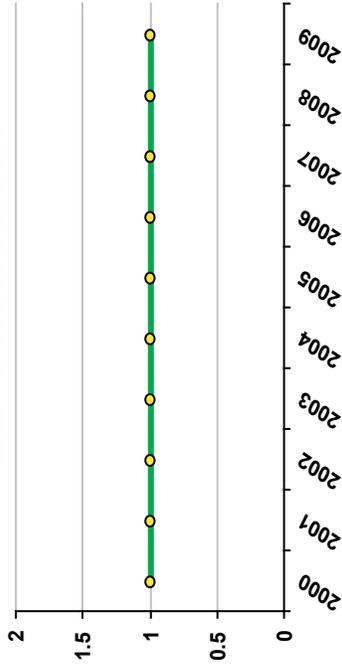
Fig. 20. SUDAN



*Consumer imports were too small and erratic to be included.



Sudan Political Reform Trend



Sudan Economic Reform Trend

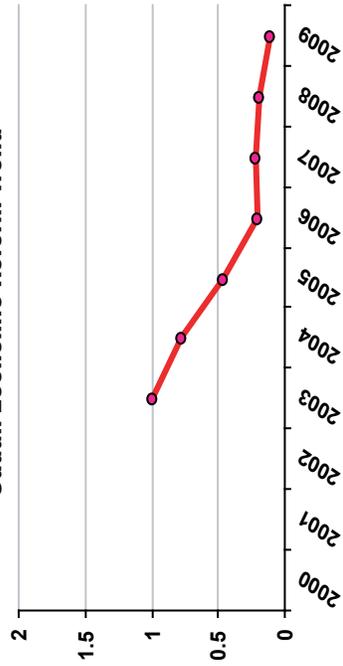
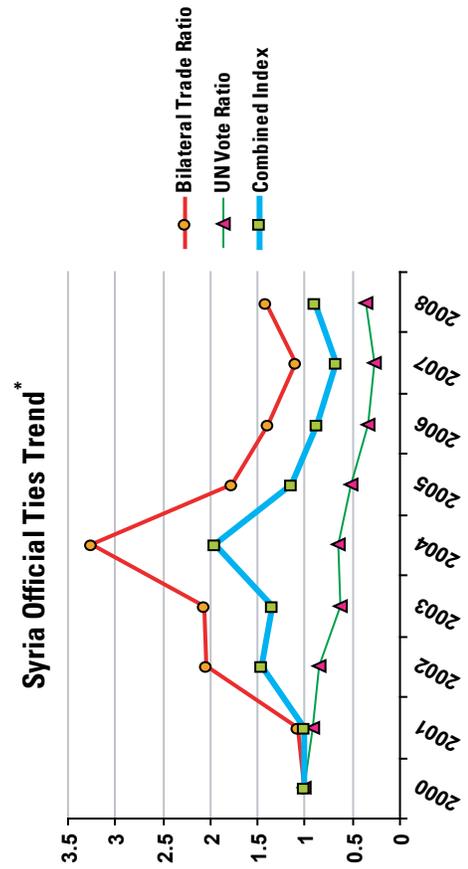
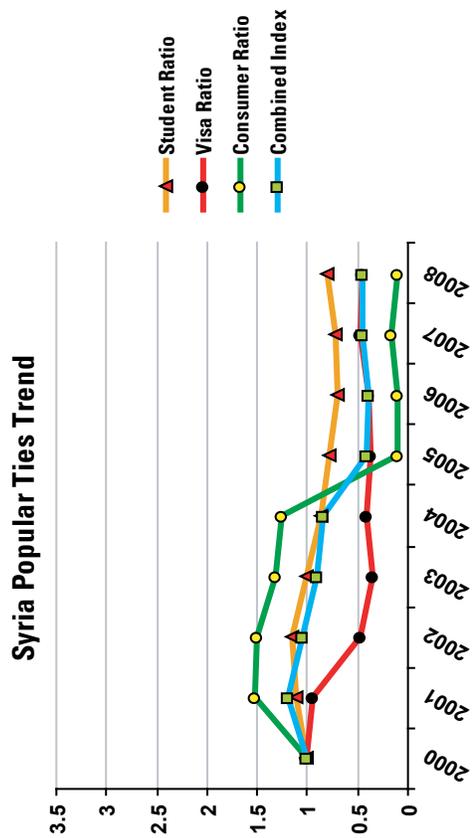
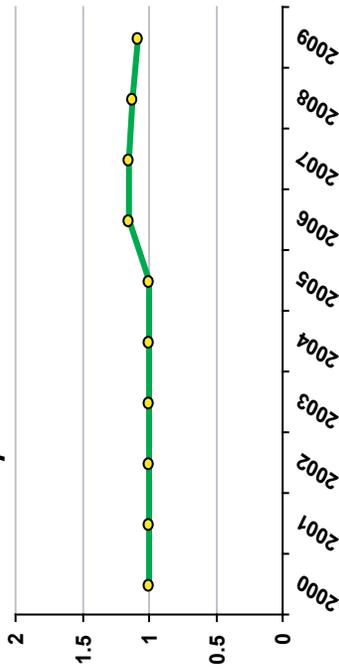


Fig. 21. SYRIA

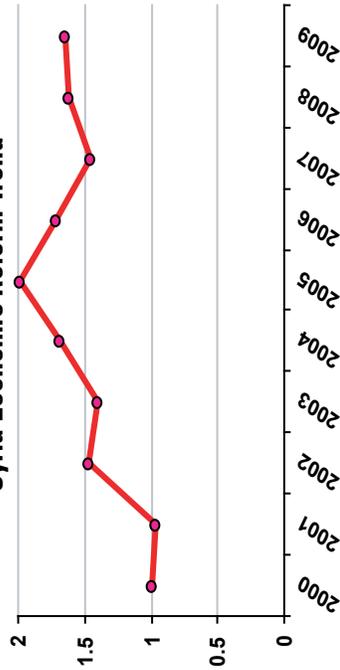


*There were no arms deliveries to Syria between 2000 and 2008.

Syria Political Reform Trend



Syria Economic Reform Trend



Syria Anti-American Protests

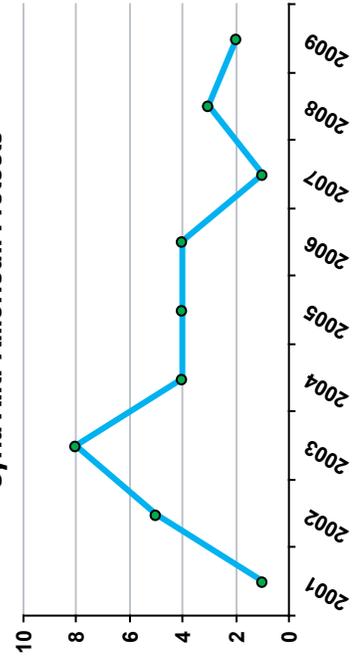
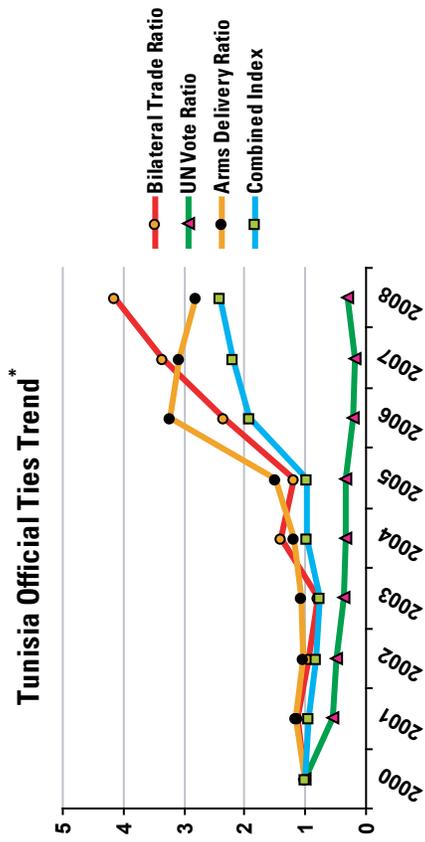
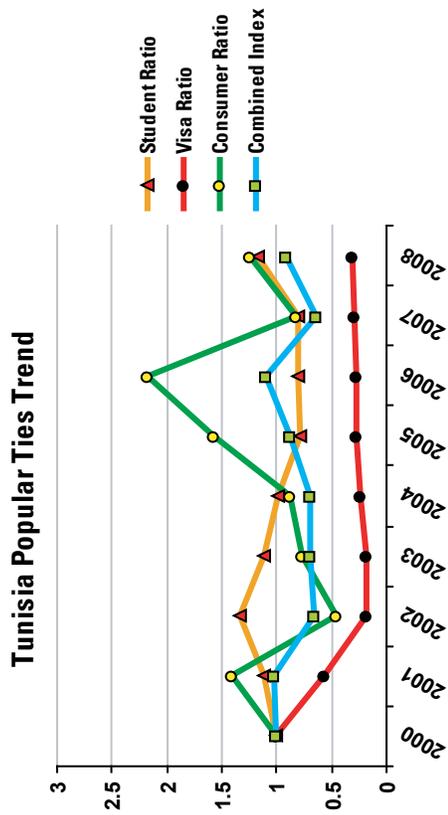
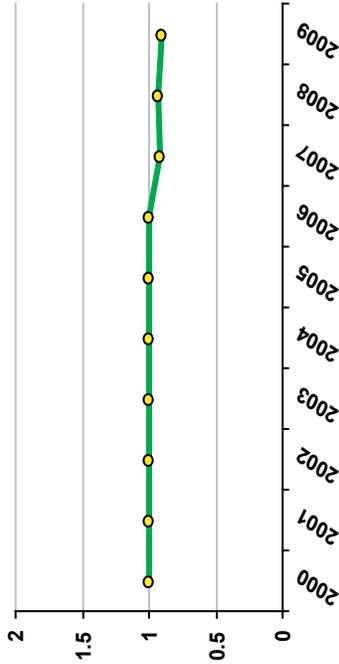


Fig. 22. TUNISIA

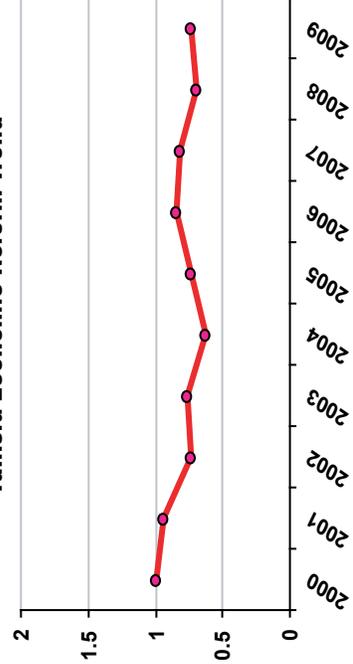


*Because arms deliveries to Tunisia were less than \$50 million in most years, comparative data is not complete and therefore not included in the index. The arms delivery ratio depicted above reflects only total arms deliveries.

Tunisia Political Reform Trend



Tunisia Economic Reform Trend



Tunisia Anti-American Protests

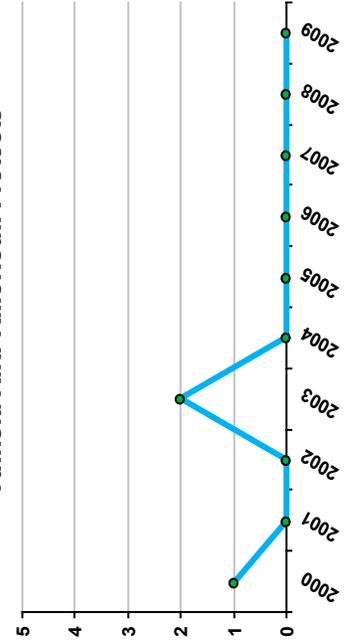
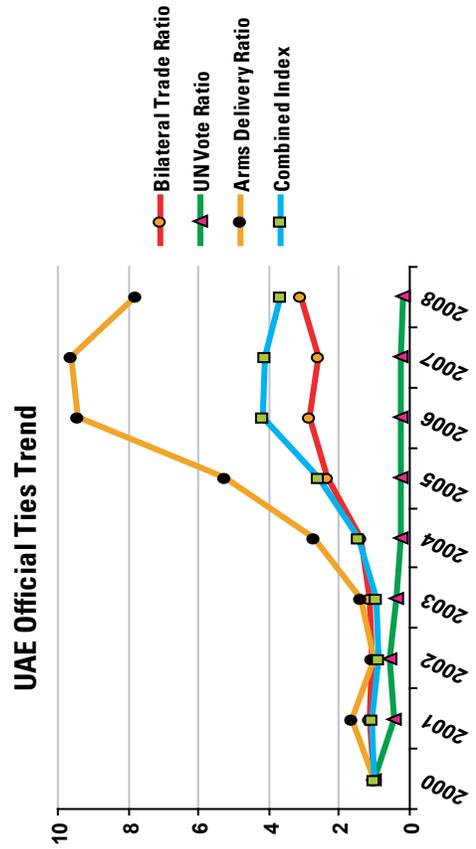
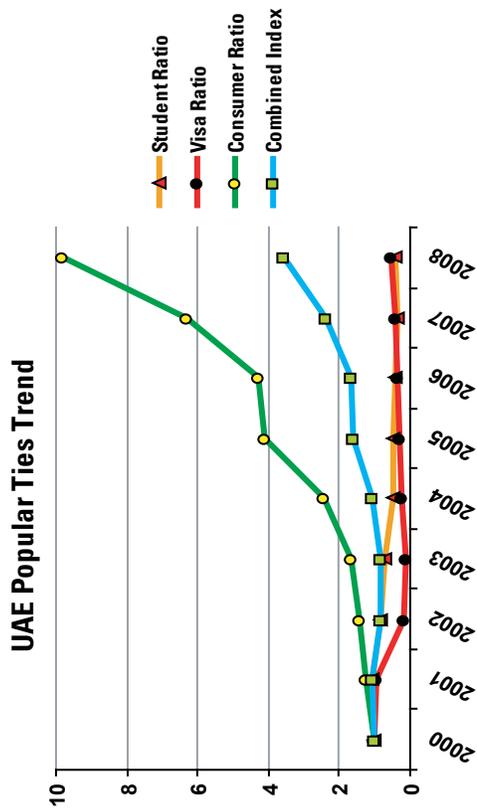
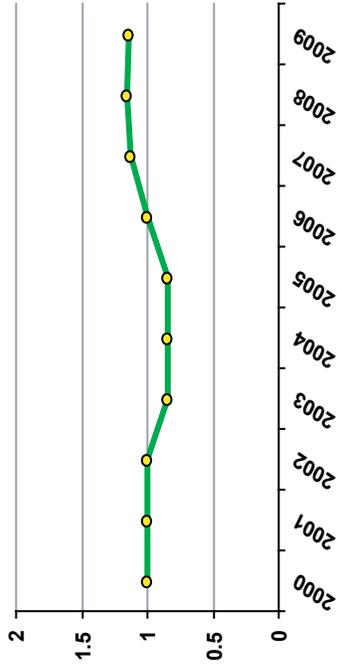


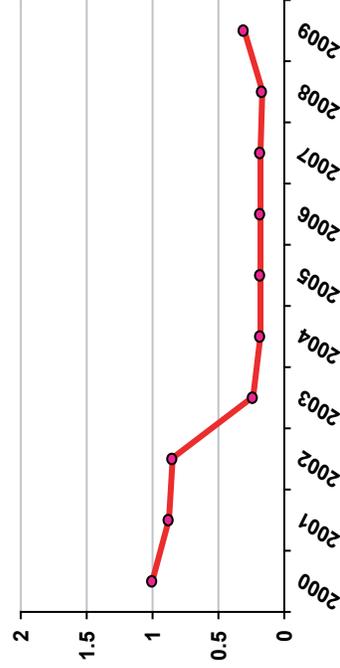
Fig. 23. UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



UAE Political Reform Trend



UAE Economic Reform Trend



UAE Anti-American Protests

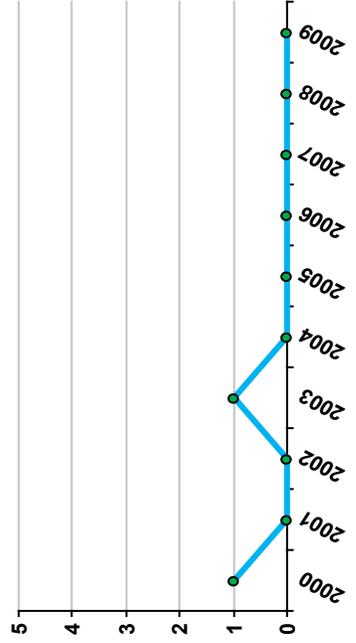
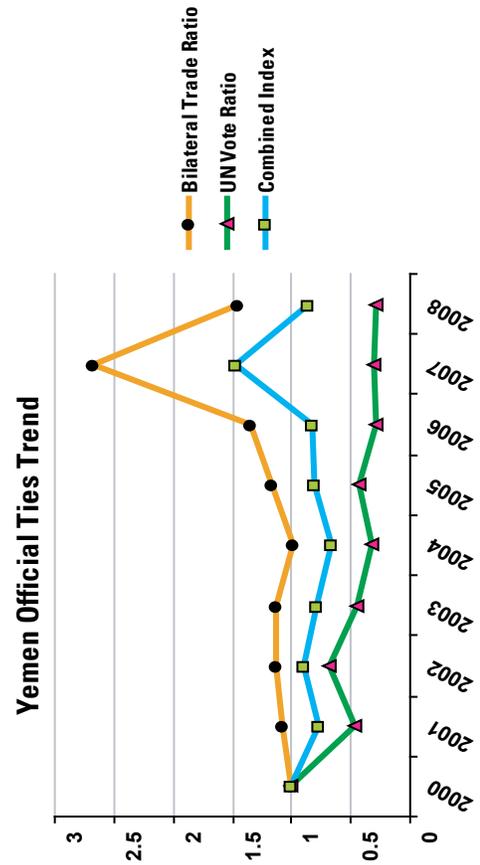
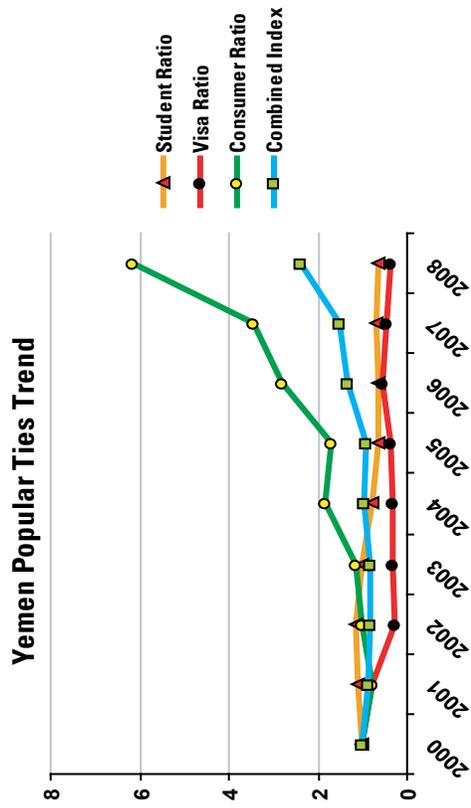
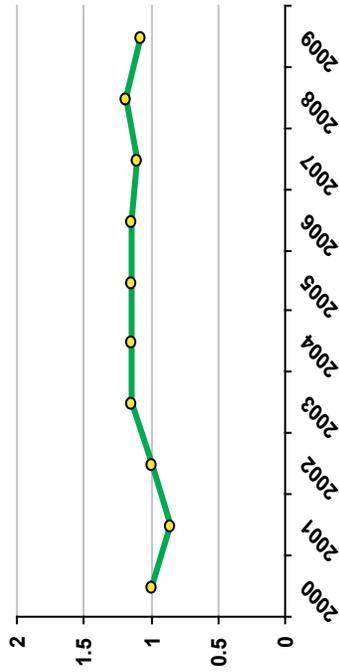


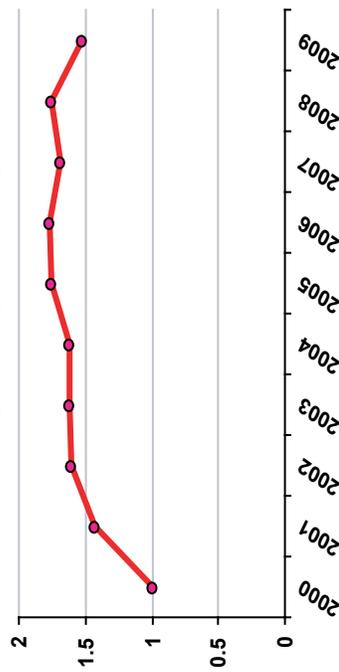
Fig. 24. YEMEN



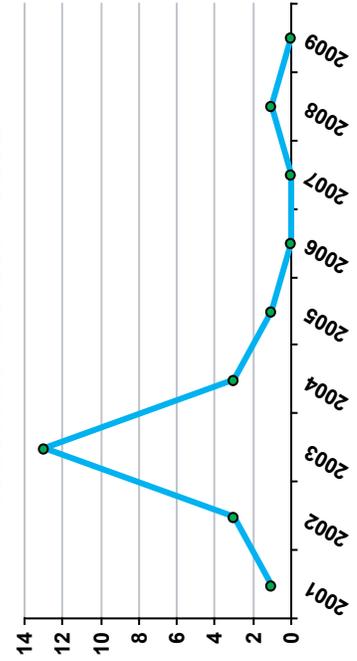
Yemen Political Reform Trend



Yemen Economic Reform Trend



Yemen Anti-American Protests



Part III

Special Topics

8 | Anti-American Demonstrations: Serious or Scattershot?

EXAMINING THE INCIDENCE and scale of anti-American protests in the Arab world is an obvious way of tracking Arab popular behavior toward the United States. Yet while protests are clearly a useful indicator, some difficulties prevented our using them in the Arab Behavioral Index (ABI). First, exact numbers of protesters and other characteristics of such events are difficult to document authoritatively, consistently, or precisely. Second, previous research suggests that significant anti-American protests are surprisingly few and scattered, across both time and region, rendering their inclusion in a long-term quantitative index impractical. Third, laws, practices, political cultures, and other factors related to protests vary drastically from country to country and, to some extent, over time. In Syria, for example, anti-American demonstrations are usually state sponsored, with flags and propaganda freely distributed to participants. In Saudi Arabia, however, public protest of any kind is generally illegal and extremely rare. Similarly, Iraq—where protests are legal and usually tolerated—sees far more of such events than in other countries where protests are not permitted. Overall, anti-American protests declined steeply after 2005 (see fig. 25), perhaps in part because of changes in public security protocols. At the same time, demonstrations in response to domestic problems and Israel actually increased in several countries in subsequent years.

Despite the limitations, examining anti-American protests remains valuable. Therefore, this study includes an update to a 2006 Washington Institute report that established a database of anti-American demonstrations in Arab countries from 2000 through 2005.¹ In general, the findings from 2006–2009 reinforce previous conclusions while illuminating new trends.

Popular anti-American political protest has been even more rare and sporadic over the past four years (see figs. 26 and 27). Various graphics in the previous sections of this report present evidence for this quite striking finding, both country-by-country and year-by-year, and also in broader regional and subregional terms. The full data supporting these statistics can be accessed in the online appendices (see the Author's Note for more information).

The 2006 study made two key observations about protest trends in the Arab world. First, the total number of significant anti-American protest incidents was lower than expected. Only 539 such events were reported in seventeen countries between 2000 and 2005, or fewer than six protests per country per year. Even fewer occurred between 2006 and 2009—a total of 132 in the same seventeen countries, or fewer than two per country per year. All told, 671 newsworthy protests were held from 2000 to 2009, at a rate of roughly 5.6 per month (see fig. 28). The estimated total number of participants in these protests was 10.5 million, out of a seventeen-country population of about 304.5 million (excluding Somalia, Mauritania, and Sudan, for which consistent data was not readily available). That is, the equivalent of approximately 3 percent of these countries' populations participated in an anti-American protest at some point over the past ten years.

Another key finding is that the timing of these protests was heavily concentrated in just a few short periods. In 2003, when the Iraq war began, around 1 percent of all Arabs in the countries under review participated in anti-American protests. For comparison's sake, if these protests had been held in the United States—the population of which matches the combined Arab state

1. Robert Satloff, Eunice Youmans, and Mark Nakhla, *Assessing What Arabs Do, Not What They Say: A New Approach to Understanding Arab Anti-Americanism*, Policy Focus no. 57 (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 2006), <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=244>. It should be noted that Dr. Satloff's report, like this update, does not claim to present an exhaustive accounting of all protests; instead, it focuses on those that garnered significant media attention. Specifically, each protest had to be mentioned in at least two media reports, at least one of which was Western. A spot check of selected countries and timeframes suggested that this methodology probably accounted for most significant protests. See the report for further discussion of the database's methodology and findings from the first half of the decade.

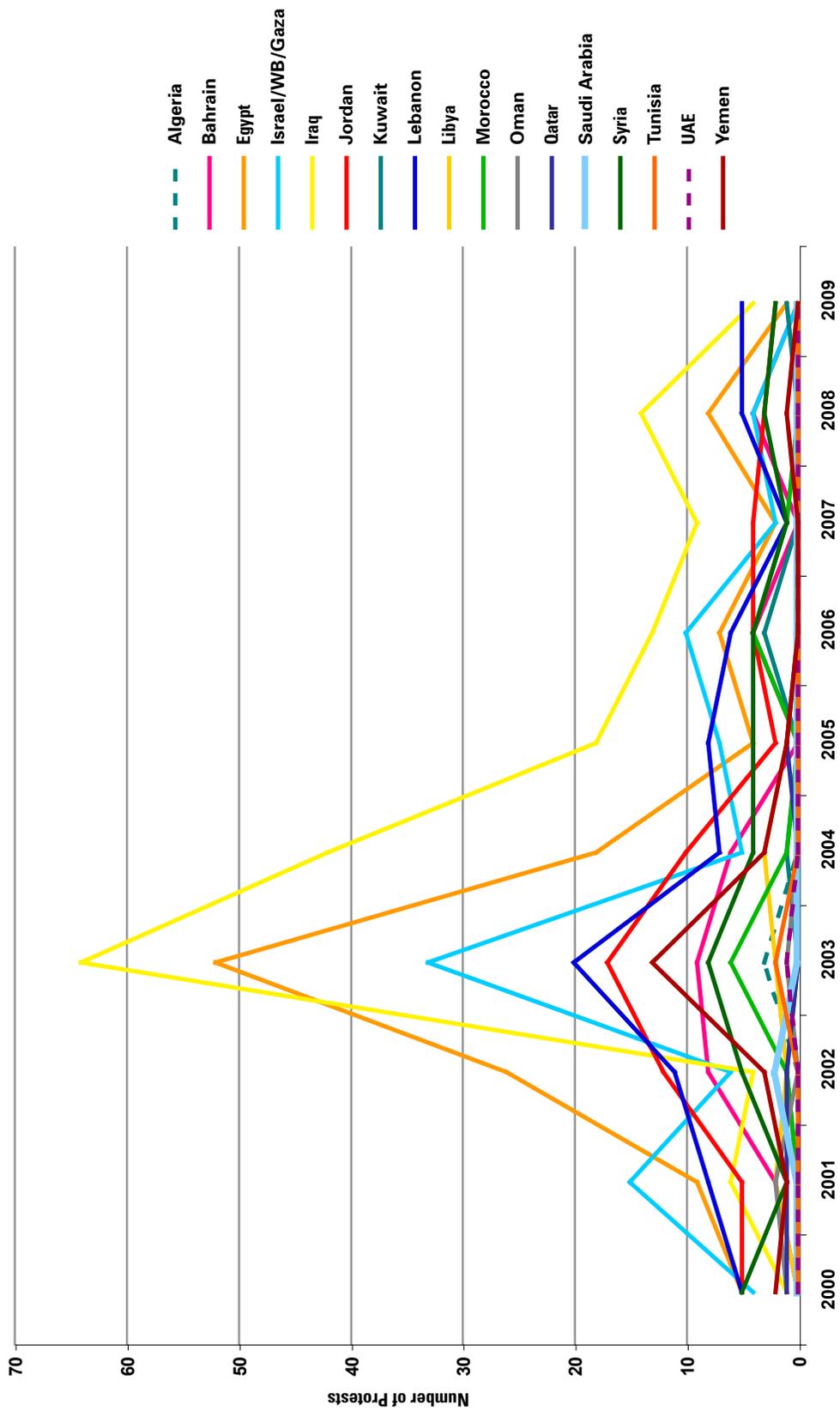


Fig. 25. Arab Anti-American Protests

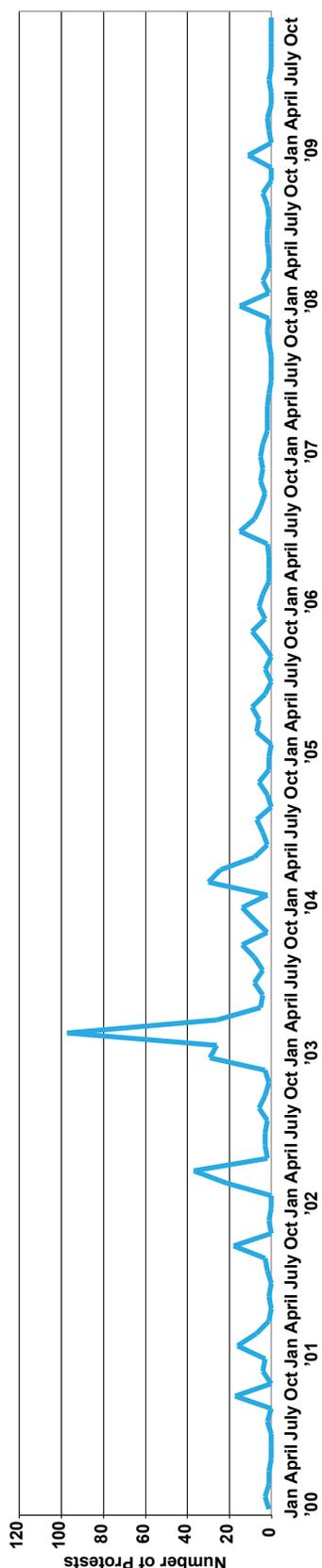


Fig. 26. Dateline of Protests, 2000–2009

total—they would have drawn three million people, probably the largest total on record. One U.S. diplomat serving in Casablanca, home to some of the largest demonstrations, recalled that he was constantly on alert for signs of anti-American behavior on the street during that time.²

Apart from 2003, total Arab participation in anti-American protests during the decade averaged just a quarter of a percent. Moreover, the total number of such protests decreased by 75 percent during the latter half of the decade, although the average magnitude of individual protests increased (see figs. 29a–d).

These findings led to the 2006 study’s second key observation: anti-American protests were event driven and episodic, not arising continuously without provocation. As noted, the Iraq war spurred the greatest numbers of Arabs to demonstrate against the United States. Anti-Israeli protests were also related to specific events, such as the killing of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in 2004, with such protests often featuring anti-American symbols. Protests arising from pointed incidents were often swift and popular but subsided almost immediately afterward.

This trend of protest activity surging quickly, then abating, continued in 2006–2009, during which the main triggers were events such as the Danish cartoon controversy, the 2006 Hizballah-Israel war in Lebanon, the December 2008–January 2009 Israeli incursion into Gaza, and (in certain countries) visits by senior Bush administration officials. Anniversaries sparked demonstrations as well, with yearly spikes occurring in March to mark the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Likewise, scattered annual protests were timed to commemorate the execution of Saddam Hussein (although the statistics may be misleading because some of those protests probably took place also in response to Israeli actions occurring at the same time). Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Day also brought some people into the streets, with anti-Americanism occasionally apparent.

2. Nabil Khoury, remarks made during the panel presentation “Understanding 300 Million Arabs: Attitudes vs. Actions” (The Washington Institute’s Weinberg Founders Conference, Lansdowne, VA, October 17, 2009). An audio recording of the panel is available online at <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=498>.

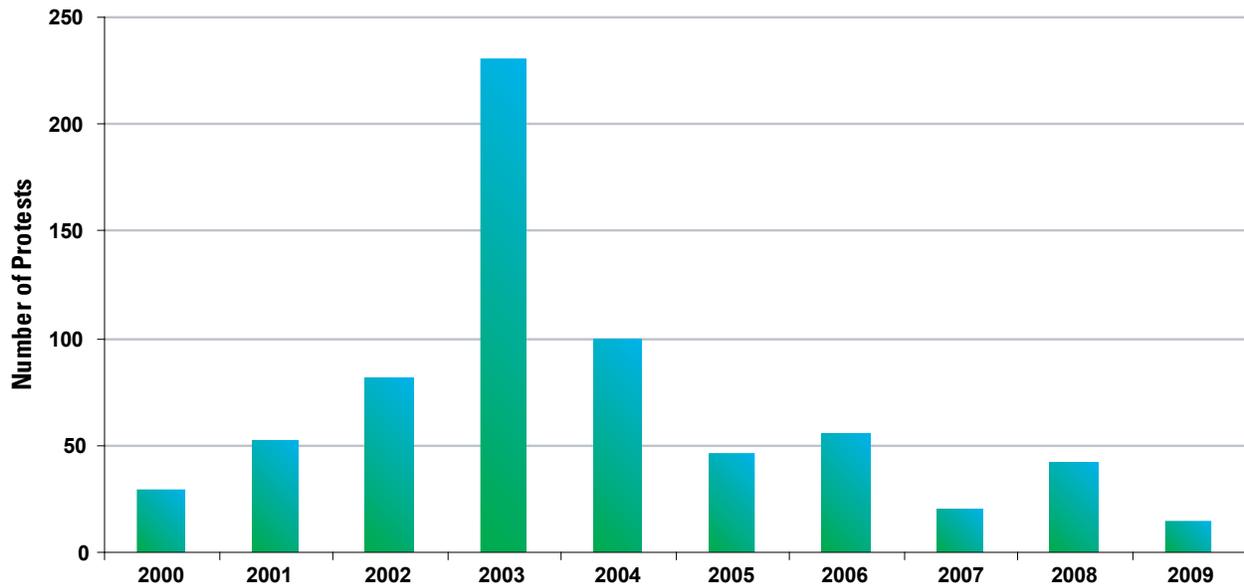


Fig. 27. Arab Anti-American Protests by Year

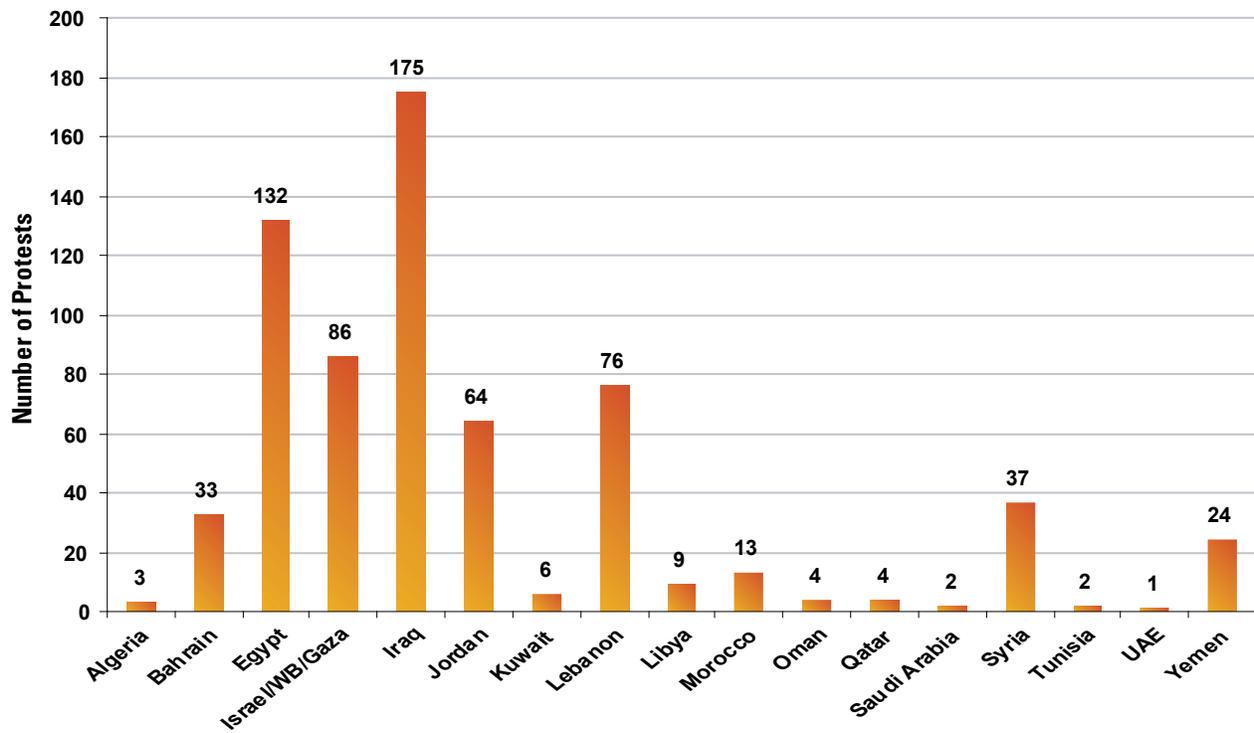


Fig. 28. Anti-American Protests, 2000–2009

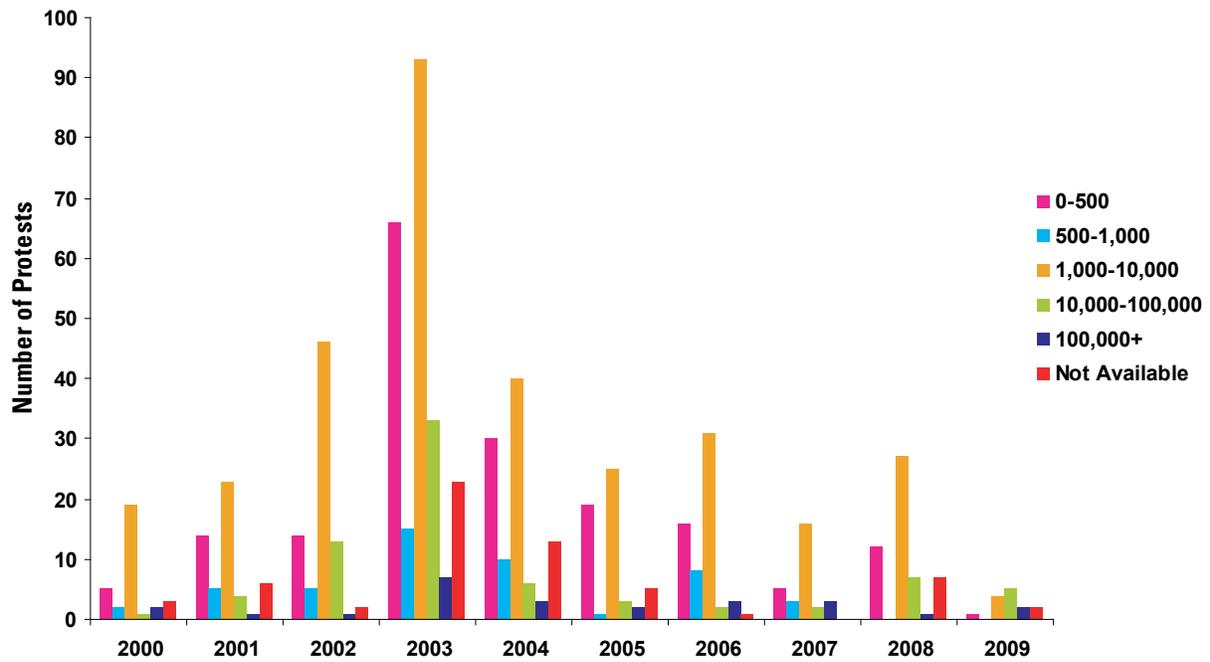


Fig. 29a. Protests by Size and Year

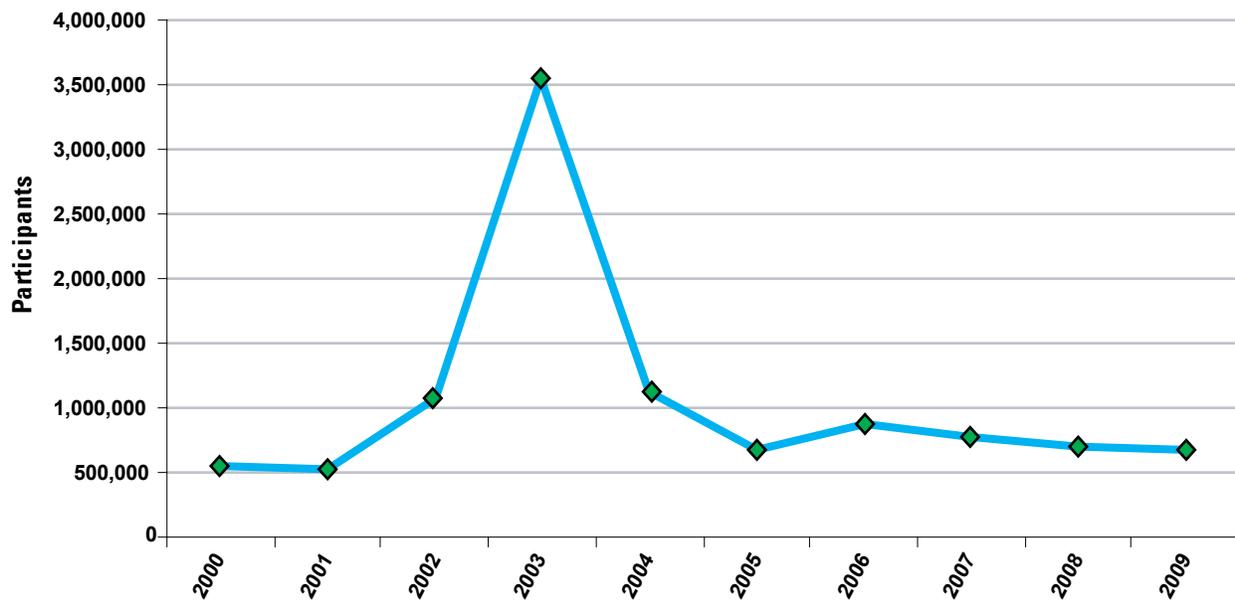


Fig. 29b. Protest Magnitude

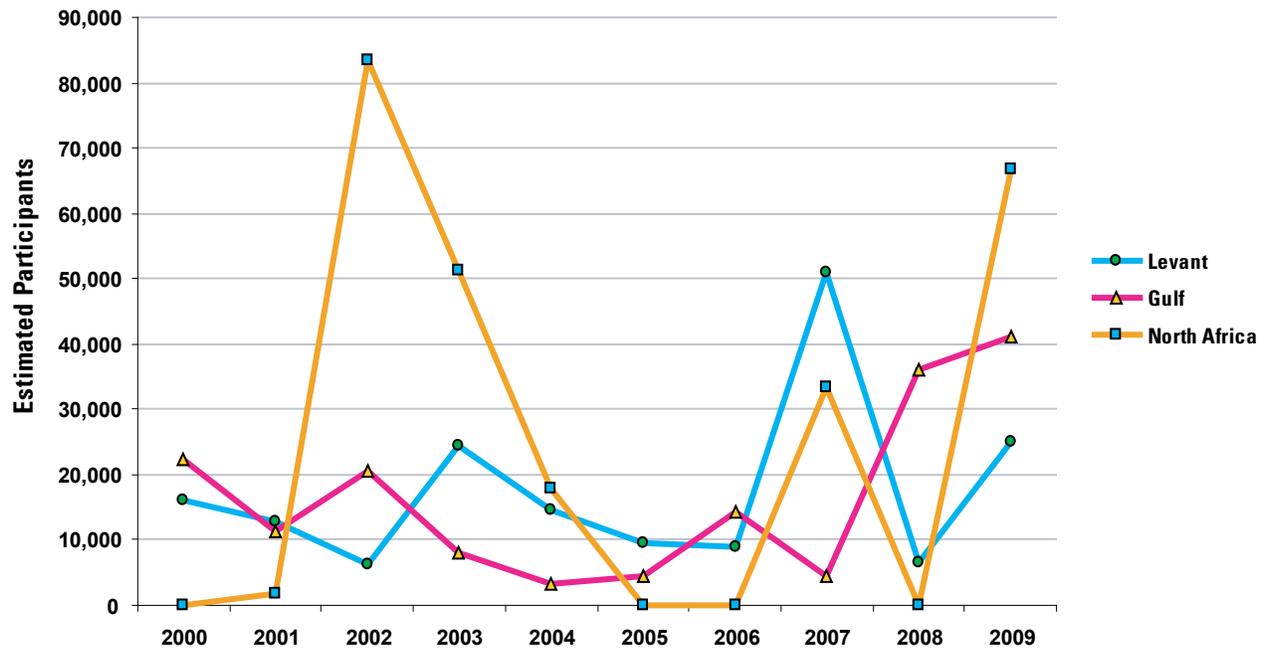


Fig. 29c. Average Protest Magnitude by Region

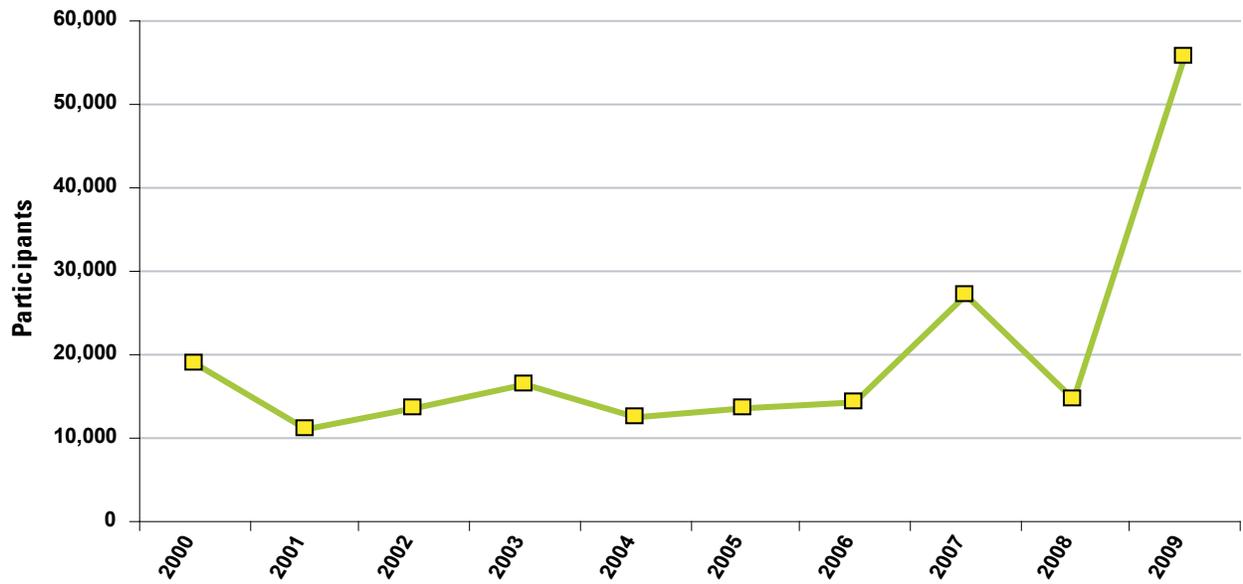


Fig. 29d. Average Protest Magnitude

As in 2000–2005, Iraq saw the most reported anti-American protests of any Arab country from 2006 to 2009, with 40 in 2006–2008 alone. Still, this was a sharp drop from the 124 protests held in the country from 2003 to 2005, including more than 60 in 2003 alone.

In addition, some countries witnessed many other protests over the latter half of the decade that did not target the United States, at least as reported in media coverage. For example, although many demonstrations were held in response to Israel's Gaza incursion, very few were marked by anti-American sentiment; according to news reports, most of the protesters were critical of Israel and sympathetic to the people of Gaza, with some directing their ire at Arab governments as well. In Egypt, for example, more protesters took aim at the Mubarak regime for its putative complicity in the incursion than at the United States. Cairo was portrayed as furthering the crisis by keeping its Rafah border with Gaza closed. Public opposition to Egyptian policy had already been stirred earlier in 2008, when Cairo sealed the Gaza border after Hamas forces briefly breached the frontier wall at Rafah. That decision provoked scattered protests across the region against both Israel and Egypt. By the end of 2008, the Egyptian government was lumped together with Israel as the main target of protests, both at home and abroad.

Whether the shift away from anti-Americanism resulted from less-direct U.S. involvement, the election of the new American president, or some other factor is unclear. Nevertheless, throughout the Arab world, citizens have increasingly preferred to protest their own governments' policies when given the opportunity. Egypt is a case in point. The growing number of strikes and sit-ins there indicates rising popular unrest over issues such as food subsidies and wages, following a flurry of more explicitly political protests in 2005. According to the Egyptian daily *al-Masri al-Youm*, more than 800 sit-in strikes occurred in 2008, compared to 222 in 2006. The goals of these demonstrations were explicitly economic, with the protesters hoping to cash in on promised raises and bonuses.

This period of labor unrest coincided with a drop in the number of anti-American protests—beginning in 2005, the annual number of such events in Egypt shrank below pre-2001 levels.

The timing of these trends suggests a possible inverse relationship between anti-American protests in a given Arab country and that state's progress toward political liberalization. For example, as Egyptian politics opened up somewhat in 2005—partly in response to U.S. efforts—some citizens arguably seized the opportunity to protest against problems closer to home rather than against Washington. And once Cairo cracked down again on opposition movements that seemed to be gathering momentum, its repressive efforts became the new focus of popular protest.

To be sure, the circumstantial evidence presented here cannot prove or disprove this hypothesis concerning the relationship between protests and state liberalization. Nor does the turn away from anti-Americanism and toward domestic issues necessarily mean that progress toward political liberalization will continue. Indeed, some Egyptian analysts argue that the failure of democratic reformers to capitalize on the labor movement shows their lack of broad grassroots appeal; others even accuse Cairo of deliberately diverting protesters away from politics and toward economics.³ The large-scale, spontaneous protests against Israel's Gaza campaign in January 2009 testified to the persistent potency of foreign policy crises, even when the United States was not directly implicated.

And yet many observers believe that the November 2009 Egyptian "soccer riots"—against such sites as the Algerian embassy in Cairo—were initially encouraged and then abruptly terminated by Egyptian officials, as a way to stimulate and channel nationalist sentiment without allowing it to get out of hand.

Protest patterns in other countries indicated a shift from foreign to domestic concerns as well. For example, from a per capita perspective, Bahrain witnessed some of the region's more intense anti-American protests in 2000–2005, but its largest protests by far centered on domestic issues, when the majority Shiite population

3. Ibid., Mohamed Abdelbaky remarks

called for constitutional reform. In 2005, 80,000 protesters—around 12 percent of the total population—took to the streets demanding greater power for the elected lower house of parliament to counterbalance the monarchy-appointed upper house. This should not be mistaken for a sweeping popular tide toward full democracy, however. Previous demonstrations in the emirate had revolved around the controversial 2002 decision establishing women's suffrage, which Islamists protested in substantial numbers.

A similar trend unfolded in Morocco, but on a much larger scale. Both the Iraq war and Israel's Gaza incursion sparked a handful of major demonstrations in 2003 and 2009, respectively. But even larger demonstrations, with participants numbering in the millions, were held early in the decade both for and against women's rights. In Kuwait, much smaller but more sustained demonstrations were held in 2005–2006 in support of women's suffrage and other electoral reforms; anti-American demonstrations among that uniquely pro-American Arab population were almost unheard of.

Trends in Egypt and elsewhere also point to the importance of internal security measures as an often-overlooked variable in the frequency, magnitude, location, and triggering of Arab street protests. In April 2008, for example, Cairo organizers hoped to march in solidarity with textile strikers in al-Mahalla al-Kubra. Although many citizens closed their stores in support, the planned march never occurred due to a strong police presence throughout the capital. A month later, activists attempted another demonstration on President Hosni Mubarak's birthday to protest rising food costs and corruption in the subsidized bread industry. As before, this plan was foiled by a massive police presence and arrests that stretched into the cyber world, with authorities using the social networking tool Facebook to find the organizers. In April 2009, the author witnessed yet another failed attempt at a general strike and accompanying street protests in Cairo; once again, a large and very visible police presence was almost certainly a key factor in the outcome.

Domestic security conditions have prevented public protests in other countries as well. Saudis, for instance, rarely demonstrate against the United States or any other entity due to strictly enforced laws prohibiting such behavior. The kingdom did witness a couple of small anti-American protests in the lead-up to the Iraq war. Some sources also reported demonstrations in support of Hizballah and Hamas, though Riyadh has denied these rumors.

In Lebanon, a different sort of security situation sometimes impeded protests. For example, in summer 2006, Israel's campaign against Hizballah in southern Lebanon provoked a number of relatively large protests around the region. Some protesters chanted anti-American slogans, urging the United States to end the bloodshed caused by its close ally. Inside Lebanon itself, a number of demonstrations had been held immediately before the campaign, with protesters railing against Israel's actions in Gaza after Hamas kidnapped one of its soldiers. When the offensive turned to Lebanon, however, protests came to a halt; although anti-Israeli sentiment presumably still ran high, the security situation prevented people from coming out to voice their opinions as Israeli warplanes flew overhead.

Even when Arab protests were avowedly anti-American, their significance as a measure of overall popular attitudes or behavior toward the United States is open to question. As one leading scholar of the contemporary Arab "public sphere" wrote:

Marching crowds of protestors burning American flags tell us little about their motivations or the real depth of anger (protests could be manufactured by regimes for their own purposes, or they might be veiled protests against the regime itself).... Despite [its] close relations [with Washington], the Egyptian government both tolerates and encourages anti-Americanism.... In March 2003, the regime even offered official sanction for a massive anti-U.S. protest.... In Syria, anti-Americanism came from the top down.... Large protests against the United States, including at one point the sacking of the ambassador's residence, were far from spontaneous.⁴

4. Marc Lynch, "Anti-Americanisms in the Arab World," in *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics*, ed. Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane, pp. 196–226 (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006).

This problem of interpretation is only compounded when protests that could be classified as anti-American take on a more composite nature. At the decade's outset, the majority of such protests examined in this study were directly prompted by U.S. actions, particularly the Iraq war. Specifically, from 2000 to 2005, 73 percent of protests that involved significant anti-Americanism were triggered by U.S. policy, while only 20 percent were set off by Israeli actions. This dynamic changed after 2005, however. From 2006 to 2009, 58 percent of such protests were triggered by Israeli policy and only 41 percent by U.S. policy alone. Indeed, the only significant spikes in protest activity during 2006–2009 coincided with Israeli military actions (Lebanon in July 2006 and the Gaza siege in December 2008–January 2009).

It should also be noted that some protests during this period had a religious trigger. In 2006, the publication of a cartoon in Denmark depicting the Prophet Muhammad as a terrorist with a bomb hidden in his

turban caused a brief but fairly intense uproar in a number of Arab states (and an even stronger response in other predominantly Muslim but non-Arab countries). Directing their anger at Denmark, protesters torched Danish flags—in Syria, a mob set fire to the Danish embassy. Other protests tended to target the West in general, but some focused on the United States, with occasional burning of U.S. flags. Later in 2006, when Pope Benedict XVI quoted a fourteenth-century text claiming that Islam spread through violence, certain Arab countries witnessed another short-lived burst of anti-Western protests, only a few of which had a reported anti-American slant.

These findings do not prove that Arab opinion toward the United States shifted for the better after 2005. They do, however, show a distinct and widespread move away from anti-American protests and toward protests against either Israel or internal conditions—an important aspect of recent Arab behavior as regards the United States.

9 | Arabs and U.S. Consumer Goods: Boom or Boycott?

AT THE VERY TOP of the American Political Science Association's 2009 report *U.S. Standing in the World*, the following *Seattle Times* headline appears as an epigraph: "Troubled U.S. Standing Starting to Affect Business Overseas."¹ Curiously, previous research by many of the same experts who contributed to that report shows almost no such effects—a fact documented in great detail in the 2007 compendium *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics*.² Although that volume focused heavily on Europe and Asia, similar conclusions can be drawn from the best available data about U.S. businesses in the Middle East.

As the Arab Behavioral Index (ABI) demonstrates, little or no evidence suggests that anti-American attitudes or organized boycotts have hurt U.S. sales in the region, either at the elite or popular level. The normal dominance of price, prestige, and quality of goods as determinants of consumer behavior, along with a fair amount of uncertainty or confusion about the national origins of various products, ensures that most Arabs will continue to buy U.S. goods, whatever their sentiments toward the United States or its policies. Boycotts are rare, seldom sustained, and of very limited apparent impact.

Directly measuring the economic impact of Arab attitudes is difficult, of course. Most multinational firms do not release their revenue figures for individual countries or even for the region as a whole. Coca-Cola's Middle East division, for example, is part of its "Eurasia & Africa Operating Group," so the 10 percent sales growth it reported for that vast area in 2008 could include Russia as well as Arab countries.³ Nevertheless, other statistics, including those referenced in the ABI, show

clearly that U.S. sales of consumer goods in Arab markets have enjoyed large and sustained increases over the past decade, even at times of the most palpable political tension. This section briefly explores the reasons behind this striking disjuncture between attitudes and popular behavior. As with other issues, however, these buying tendencies are not a peculiarly Arab phenomenon: whatever Americans may think about China's policies or values, for example, they are unlikely to alter their massive purchases of Chinese goods accordingly.

On several occasions during the past decade, the media tended to focus on the negative impact that anti-Americanism could have on U.S. brand names overseas, and some regional actors did in fact call for boycotts. For example, during April 2002 protests in Cairo criticizing Israeli reoccupation of the West Bank, "protesters explicitly equated the U.S. with Israel, burning American flags, boycotting American products, and smashing up at least one Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise."⁴ Such scenes recurred several times in 2003–2004, shortly before and after the U.S. invasion of Iraq and subsequent reports of abuse at Abu Ghraib prison and elsewhere. Some brands reportedly experienced sales declines and were even targeted by violence at the time—one McDonald's in Saudi Arabia was burned to the ground. Similarly, in February 2009, just after major hostilities in Gaza, an Egyptian journalist reported on renewed local efforts to organize boycotts of selected American products. A Facebook group named "I won't support Starbucks, I won't give the Israelis the money to kill us" claimed nearly 9,000 members, while another group, "Boycott McDonald's for helping Israel kill innocent people," claimed more than 2,000.⁵ Although

1. Task Force on U.S. Standing in World Affairs, *U.S. Standing in the World: Causes, Consequences, and the Future* (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 2009), p. 1, http://www.apsanet.org/content_59477.cfm.
2. Katzenstein and Keohane, op. cit. See, for example, the final "Consequences and Conclusions" section by the editors, p. 299: "We conclude that reports of consumer anti-Americanism damaging sales of U.S.-based firms in Europe are highly exaggerated."
3. See the company's 2010 release "Eurasia & Africa Operating Group: 2009 at a Glance" (<http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/ourcompany/ar/pdf/2009-operating-group-eurasia-africa.pdf>).
4. Lynch, "Anti-Americanisms," p. 208.
5. Nadia Amer, "Boycotts: Peaceful Protest or Shooting Ourselves in the Foot?" *Daily News* (Cairo), February 10, 2009, <http://www.thedailynewsegyp.com/printerfriendly.aspx?ArticleID=19667>.

these are not trivial numbers, they are of course just a tiny fraction of Egypt's population of 80 million.

American businesses have tried to counter this pressure on their own. Their tactics have included everything from showing sensitivity to local customs (McDonald's introduced a "McArabia" sandwich in 2003 and, later, a Ramadan *iftar* meal⁶), to advertising how they benefit the local community (Coca-Cola and Pepsi sponsor many athletic teams and publicize the jobs they create⁷), to explicitly denying support for Israel (during the early 2009 Gaza hostilities, a notice appeared on the Starbucks website following demonstrations in front of several Beirut franchises⁸).

Anecdotal and statistical evidence suggest that these business tactics have been largely successful. Whatever the initial impact of boycotts, it was not sustained. The targeted companies quickly recovered and, particularly after 2003, saw steady growth in the region. McDonald's, to cite one conspicuous case, continues to operate in ten of the twenty Arab countries considered in this study: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).⁹ Asked to explain his company's continued growth in this challenging environment, regional chairman Mithqal Abu Nasser said simply that McDonald's is "a leader in quality, service, cleanliness and value."¹⁰ Executives from other firms were a bit more expansive: "Informally, business

leaders report that although anti-Americanism makes business harder to conduct, there are ways to alleviate it, whether through brand names that do not suggest American ownership or by putting Palestinian employees rather than Americans on al-Jazeera."¹¹

The failure of consumer boycotts may also reflect second thoughts among some opinion leaders originally sympathetic to the tactic. As one Egyptian professor put it,

You have to be careful because sometimes it is the locals who are disadvantaged and not the big companies. The U.S. companies provide precious local employment and boycotting these companies in Arab countries can affect the local infrastructure and not the U.S. economy.¹²

This concern may help explain the reaction to one of the decade's more prominent consumer controversies. When a rumor about the Coca-Cola logo containing "secret" anti-Islamic messages spread wildly in Egypt in 2000, the country's Grand Mufti at the time, Sheikh Nasr Farid Wassel, felt prompted not only to declare that the rumor was false, but also to announce that it could hurt valuable Egyptian jobs with the company.¹³

The discussion so far applies mainly to a handful of unusually high-profile, mass-market American products. To find out more about these dynamics on

6. Regarding the McArabia, see Mohammed Alkhereiji, "McDonald's Launches McArabia," *Arab News*, March 5, 2003 (<http://archive.arabnews.com/?page=1§ion=0&article=23313&d=5&m=3&y=2003>). The sandwich remains on the menu; see, for example, the company's Egyptian website (<http://www.mcdonaldsegypt.com>). Information regarding the *iftar* meal is from the author's own experiences in Egypt.
7. Regarding Coca-Cola's job creation claims, see "Rumor: Coca-Cola Runs Advertising That Is Offensive to Muslims," a page in the "Myths & Rumors" section of the company's website (http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/contactus/myths_rumors/middle_east_false.html). See also "Coca-Cola Leverages Corporate-Community Partnerships to Support Women's Progress Conference," CSRMiddleEast, November 23, 2007 (http://www.csrmiddleeast.org/News_Nov07.html). Pepsi's "Our Business" webpage describes its local bottling and warehouse facilities in the Middle East (<http://www.pepsico.com/Purpose/Sustainability/Sustainability-Report/Our-Business.html>). See also "PepsiCo International in Partnership with the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD)," *AlBawaba.com*, May 17, 2009.
8. As of this writing, a version of the notice is still available on the website in English and Arabic (<http://news.starbucks.com/about+starbucks/myths+facts>). The current version appears to be a form reply issued in response to previous inquiries and demonstrations. For more on this incident, see "Boycott Israel? Which Companies?" *TheRealTerrorist.info* (blog), April 17, 2009 (<http://sites.google.com/site/thepalestinetruth/Home/allnews/boycottisraelcompanies>).
9. See the "International Franchising Information" page on the company's website (http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/mcd/franchising/international_franchising_information.html).
10. Quoted in Peter Cooper, "McDonald's," *AMEinfo.com* company profile, www.ameinfo.com/news/Detailed/25009.html.
11. Katzenstein and Keohane, p. 299.
12. Amer, "Boycotts."
13. For the mufti's official statement and Coke's response to the controversy, see "Rumor: Anti-Muslim Messages Appear in Graphics (No Mohammed, No Mecca)," a page in the "Myths & Rumors" section of the company's website (http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/contactus/myths_rumors/middle_east_subliminal.html).

a wider scale, this study included some specially commissioned questions embedded in a June 2009 commercial research survey in two Arab markets: Egypt and Jordan.¹⁴ The results are very revealing and help explain much more about the success of American brands in the region even when “Brand America” seemed greatly tarnished.

In Jordan, for example, nearly three-quarters of the survey respondents voiced an unfavorable view of the United States, but only one-quarter said they would be less likely to buy an American product for political or religious reasons. In fact, a third of respondents said they tuned in to American music and television shows at least a few times each week, and a startling 55 percent said they watched American movies at least that often.

In Egypt, with a market several times larger than Jordan’s, only 15 percent of respondents said they might avoid American products for political or religious reasons. Remarkably, twice as many said they would actually be more likely to buy an American product for various reasons related to style, value, prestige, past experience, or personal recommendations. This was the case even though a narrow majority (54 percent) expressed at least a somewhat negative attitude toward the United States. One Egyptian

observer described the potential calculus underlying such attitudes:

Boycotting of products is a useful tool of protest in the Arab world, where demonstrations can often result in violence and people may be too scared to express their opinions. But you have to be realistic; cutting yourself off from all U.S. products is cutting yourself off from the world. What about hi-tech goods?¹⁵

Another finding from the commercial survey—namely, the considerable confusion about which products are American in the first place—cannot be overlooked either. For example, fewer than a third of the Jordanian and Egyptian respondents identified Xerox copiers as American. Jordanians were similarly mistaken about Crest toothpaste. A majority (57 percent) of Egyptian respondents seemed to be aware of Crest’s American origins, perhaps because it is a very popular brand in their country, but just as many of them believed that a completely fictitious label called “George’s Sportswear” was American as well. Conversely, only about a third knew that Nescafe, also very popular in Egypt, is not American. Clearly, the Jordanian and Egyptian publics might have a hard time boycotting American products even if they wanted to—and a large majority have no desire to do so.

14. Pechter Middle East Polls, private communication to the author (available upon request). Nationally representative samples of 1,000 respondents were surveyed in each country, yielding a nominal statistical margin of error of approximately 3 percent.

15. Amer, “Boycotts.”

10 | Defense, Security, and Counterterrorism: Cooperation or Conflict?

ALTHOUGH A FULL DISCUSSION of defense, security, and counterterrorism with respect to U.S.-Arab relations is beyond the scope of this study, some brief comments are in order about attitudes and actions in this area during the past turbulent decade. One important issue that the study does not explore in depth is the supposed connection between anti-Americanism and terrorism. The September 11 attacks are the most devastating example of the kind of damage that anti-American attitudes can produce. The correlation seems self-evident: if Arabs express anti-American sentiment, and al-Qaeda is anti-American, then an increase in anti-American sentiment will lead to more recruits for al-Qaeda.

But the reality is not that simple. For one thing, terrorist groups are generally on the fringes of Arab society. For another, those individuals who actually participate in such groups are probably out of reach of any American public diplomacy campaigns. Nor are they likely to pay much attention to Arab public opinion: if more Saudis had a positive view of America, for instance, Usama bin Laden would not lay down his weapons. Regarding popular Arab support for such groups, it should be remembered that the problem is not anti-American sentiment per se, but the extremist ideologies and actions that might accompany such sentiment.

As the previous chapters demonstrate, nearly every Arab country assessed in this study showed a sharply negative turn in popular attitudes toward the United States at one point during the decade. The record-low U.S. approval ratings in mid-2003 and 2004, the testimony of survey respondents about their reasons for this low rating, and the vociferous Arab media outcry at the time all plainly point to one cause for this shift:

the war in Iraq. This single development provoked a sharp spike in the frequency and magnitude of protests against the United States. It also provided a new rationale and target-rich environment for terrorist attacks against Americans and, according to various surveys, a wave of popular support for such attacks.

Yet only in a very few societies (e.g., Jordan and the Palestinian territories) was the invasion of Iraq followed by a measurable surge in popular support for al-Qaeda, and even then only for a year or two. Moreover, in every Arab country polled since 2005, such support has declined drastically, as has popular sympathy for attacks on Americans. Crucially, this trend held true even as popular esteem for the United States, its policies, and its president remained at record-low levels. Clearly, the sharp drop in expressed Arab support for anti-American terrorism was not caused by any increase in support for the United States. Rather, the timing in particular cases suggests strongly that this change was caused by al-Qaeda-style terrorism hitting home, against innocent citizens in Amman, Casablanca, Riyadh, and other Arab cities. As a result, increasing popular opposition to al-Qaeda and its terrorist tactics—in contrast to changes in Arab government policy—bears special weight in understanding shifts in mass Arab behavior toward the United States during this period.¹

As noted in the previous paragraph, the incidence of anti-American demonstrations in the region dropped precipitously after 2005 and has remained at very low levels ever since. Moreover, outside Iraq, terrorist or other attacks against American targets in Arab countries became very rare. To be sure, this was due in part to the elaborate and expensive precautions taken to prevent such incidents. Nevertheless, the outcome

1. For a more detailed discussion of these and related points, see David Pollock, *Slippery Polls: Uses and Abuses of Opinion Surveys from Arab States*, Policy Focus no. 82 (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2008), pp. 34–39, <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=244>. See also Marc Lynch, “New Muslim Public Opinion Survey,” Abu Aardvark blog, April 25, 2007, http://abuaardvark.typepad.com/abuaardvark/2007/04/new_muslim_public.html. According to Lynch, a “narrowly defined war of ideas—focusing specifically on delegitimizing the use of violence against civilians for political ends—was very winnable. These [survey] results demonstrate this quite graphically. But this ‘narrow’ success doesn’t necessarily translate up to a higher political plane.”

offers reasonable grounds for concluding that the threat was probably limited. And perhaps most significantly, the rate of protests and violence dropped even though views of the United States, its president, and its policies hardly budged at all from the record lows of 2003–2004. Based on the facts, then, it would be very difficult to argue for a clear causal connection between broad anti-American attitudes in the general population and violence or demonstrations against American targets.

In the sphere of official security ties between the United States and its Arab counterparts, the record is uneven. In the first few years after the September 11 attacks, counterterrorism cooperation apparently improved with several unfriendly regimes (e.g., Syria, Sudan) but was stymied to some extent with traditionally friendly countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). At the same time, some Arab states (e.g., Qatar, the UAE) provided significant if low-profile logistical support for the war in Afghanistan.

The Iraq war added another layer of complex and occasionally contradictory security issues to this mix. Kuwait provided consistent and massive logistical support for the war effort but remained very quiet about doing so.² Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and a few other states provided more limited logistical support, also quietly. At the same time, Saudi Arabia and others tolerated some flow of anti-American militants into Iraq. Syria went much further, providing safe haven and passage to Iraqi and other insurgents and terrorists. Following the war, Arab states, even friendly ones, made almost no positive diplomatic or economic contribution to the struggling new Iraqi government, with some debt

relief and other gestures forthcoming only in late 2007.

By that point, however, Arab security cooperation with the United States had improved on other fronts, with many governments striving to reposition themselves as allies against terrorism. The Gulf monarchies tightened restrictions on terrorist fundraising and money laundering. Qatar and Saudi Arabia began cutting back on the flow of donations to Hamas. Jordan offered training and facilities for Iraqi and Palestinian security forces sponsored by the United States.

Most countries in the region also modestly increased their participation in the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program and other U.S. counterterrorism and security arrangements. The exceptions have been Libya, Syria, and Sudan, though the departing Bush and incoming Obama administrations requested \$350,000 in IMET funding for Libya in both 2008 and 2009.³ Iraq was the obvious IMET standout, with no participants prior to 2003 and large numbers of officers trained since then.

The United States has also maintained resident defense attachés in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. And the U.S. Navy enjoyed regular ports of call or more substantial facilities in half of them (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, the UAE, and Yemen). Altogether, despite some major policy differences on Iraq, Israel, and other issues, and despite widespread anti-American attitudes at the popular level, the United States and most Arab governments managed to maintain a robust level of military cooperation during this difficult decade.

2. For a detailed discussion, see David Pollock, *Kuwait: Keystone of U.S. Gulf Policy*, Policy Focus no. 76 (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 2007), <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=283>.

3. J. Peter Pham, "Libya as an African Power," *World Defense Review*, March 16, 2010, <http://worlddefensereview.com/pham031610.shtml>.

11 | Saudi Arms Purchases: Feast or Famine?

NOTE: This chapter was authored by Ashley Damron, The Washington Institute's National Defense Fellow.

HISTORICALLY, SAUDI ARABIA is one of the largest procurers of arms among developing countries. The United States began its security assistance relationship with the kingdom in 1953 with the establishment of the U.S. Military Training Mission to Saudi Arabia. To date, Washington has provided more than \$84 billion in defense equipment and construction services, almost all through the government-to-government Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Foreign Military Construction Sales programs.¹

U.S.-Saudi arms deals are unusual not just for their size but also for their “boom and bust” cycle over the past two decades. Accordingly, the Saudi arms case does not fully make sense in the Arab Behavioral Index (ABI), which incorporates statistics on arms deliveries rather than sales. In the FMS program, governments generally make purchases that call for arms to be delivered over a period of years, hence the stark difference between statistics regarding purchases (or sales) and deliveries in a given year. Such deliveries often stretch over five to ten years; the ABI presents deliveries figures as three- or four-year rolling averages (depending on the source). Although this methodology is intended to account for the cyclical nature of arms deals, it creates an exaggerated impression of decline regarding Saudi activity during the past decade, without accounting for a huge prospective increase due to deals signed in the past two years. The straight year-by-year accounting of both deliveries and deals, as presented here, provides a more accurate picture.

The Saudi arms purchasing pattern has roughly resembled the proverbial seven fat years followed by seven lean ones. The major drivers appear to be a

combination of technological, economic, and manpower issues—sometimes with a dose of politics mixed in. The remainder of this section analyzes these underlying factors in greater detail. It concludes that while a political chill likely set in over the U.S.-Saudi military relationship in the immediate aftermath of September 11 and the invasion of Iraq, other longstanding factors played a greater role. Moreover, this substantial dimension of bilateral ties was moving back on track by the latter half of the decade.

Recent History

In the early 1990s, Saudi arms purchases burgeoned due to the Iraq war and its aftermath. During this period, the United States sold the kingdom a \$14 billion Emergency Arms Package² as well as the Phase I Arms Package.³ The Saudi air force subsequently purchased seventy-two F-15S aircraft for \$9 billion. Military construction and infrastructure development costs also constituted a large portion of Saudi defense spending. By the mid-1990s, these large expenditures pushed the kingdom's debt to more than \$25 billion.

By the late 1990s, however, several factors led to a reduction in new Saudi procurements and severe underfunding for current systems. Typically, countries go through defense procurement cycles; after large purchases like the Saudis' early 1990s deals, they focus on training and sustainment for some years before upgrading current equipment or making new purchases. In Riyadh's case, subsequent expenditures were even lower due to periods of weak oil markets, internal redistributions of resources away from defense spending, and a 1997 royal decree to halt new equipment purchases. The final delivery of F-15 aircraft in July 2000 was the last major arms delivery for almost a decade.

1. All information in this section is based on author communications with Defense Department officials.

2. This package included 150 M-60 tanks, 200 stinger missiles, 3,600 rounds of depleted uranium tank ammunition, and 24 F-15 aircraft.

3. This package included 200 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles, TOW IIA missiles, 12 Apache and 8 UH-60 MEDEVAC helicopters, 315 M1A1 tanks, 9 Multiple Launch Rocket Systems, 6 Patriot missile batteries, and 18,000 tactical wheeled vehicles.

TABLE 6. Foreign Military Sales Deliveries

	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08
Amount (in \$ U.S. billions)	1.97	1.88	1.31	1.01	1.22	0.99	0.98	1.02	0.90
Delivery ratio compared to FY00	—	0.95	0.66	0.51	0.62	0.50	0.50	0.52	0.46

TABLE 7. Foreign Military Sales Agreements

	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08
Amount (in \$ U.S. billions)	0.65	0.71	0.84	0.66	1.80	0.74	0.80	1.67	6.07
Sales ratio compared to FY00	—	1.09	1.29	1.02	2.77	1.14	1.23	2.57	9.34

TABLE 8. Foreign Military Construction Sales Deliveries

	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08
Amount (in \$ U.S. billions)	0.08	0.11	0.09	0.06	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.02
Sales ratio compared to FY00	1.00	1.38	1.13	0.75	0.25	0.38	0.63	0.50	0.25

The September 11 attacks led to a cooling of bilateral relations and further contributed to the downward trend in arms sales. Most deliveries from 2001 to 2007 were sustainment for existing programs only, hence the sharp decrease compared to statistics from the 1990–2000 timeframe. In 2003, both countries realized the need to address the situation and began a program of senior military exchanges aimed at rebuilding the relationship over the next few years. In 2006, the U.S. Air Force conducted an across-the-board review of the Saudi air force, recommending enhanced sustainment of U.S. weapon systems in the kingdom's inventory. As the other military branches followed suit, Riyadh submitted requests for new equipment and signed new agreements with the United States beginning in 2007.

The dramatic increase in closed deals, especially in fiscal year 2008 (FY08), indicates that delivery numbers for the next three to five years will increase as well (see tables 6 and 7). Unofficial numbers show that the

delivery total more than doubled from FY08 to FY09 (though military construction sales deliveries have remained consistently low during the past five years; see table 8). Moreover, the number of Saudi military personnel traveling to the United States for training continues to increase—a dramatic change after many years of stagnation. In fact, such training requests have outstripped the limited number of available U.S. slots (although many candidates are refused course entry when they cannot pass the required language exam).

Significant recent agreements include reengining the Saudi F-15S fleet and upgrading it with radar enhancements and sniper pods; upgrading several missile systems and helicopters; and procuring additional light armored vehicles. Several other large deals are currently under negotiation. For example, the kingdom is interested in purchasing eighty-four F-15SA aircraft and making upgrades to its current systems. Similarly, the Eastern Fleet Modernization Program,

valued at \$30–35 billion, is a proposed upgrade that would include comprehensive training, logistics, maintenance, and infrastructure improvements.⁴

Internal factors continue to affect the kingdom's behavior as well. For example, due to significant unemployment among males aged nineteen to twenty-seven, Riyadh enacted several job-creation programs in the defense sector and elsewhere. As a result, sustainment activities are increasingly being handled by Saudi nationals rather than U.S. government or commercial contractors. This shift further reduced the dollar value of U.S. arms deals with Saudi Arabia in the first half of the decade.

Additional Considerations

Riyadh continues to view Washington's commitment to maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge in the region as a disadvantage, as it hinders the kingdom's

efforts to acquire cutting-edge technology and offensive weaponry. For example, Israel has expressed significant reservations about U.S. plans to sell the upgraded F-15SA to the Saudis.

Should the United States decide not to sell certain systems to the kingdom, other countries such as Russia, China, France, and Britain would fill the gap without regard for Israeli concerns. Therefore, Saudi Arabia would continue to diversify its arms sources. Even beyond primarily technological issues, the Saudi leadership likely views this diversification as useful political insurance. Most recently, it purchased seventy-two Typhoon aircraft from Britain to replace air defense variant Tornados and F-5s. It is also conducting negotiations with Russia to procure 150 F-90 tanks, a potential \$1 billion sale. Finally, the kingdom has procured various systems from France, Russia, and China to augment the arms it buys from the United States.

4. Regarding the deal to purchase eighty-four F-15SAs and enhance seventy F-15Ss, Riyadh is currently asking for additional capabilities above and beyond the U.S.-proposed package. Regarding the Eastern Fleet program, the deal would also include twelve Apache Block II Longbows. In addition, the Saudi Arabian National Guard may procure twenty UH-60 and eight AH-64D aircraft in the future.

Part IV

Conclusion

12 | Lessons from Bush, Lessons for Obama

THIS STUDY AIMED to answer two key questions: What is the record of official and popular Arab behavior toward the United States over the past decade? And what is the record of Arab action on political and economic reform during this period, especially at times when the United States was actively promoting such change? Based on the detailed answers provided in the previous chapters, the following sections offer some concluding thoughts about two related questions: What is the connection between anti-American attitudes, as typically measured by public opinion polls or media analysis, and actual Arab behavior? And how does anti-American public opinion, or the perception thereof, influence Arab governments and policymakers?

The conventional wisdom regarding the past decade of U.S.-Arab ties—namely, that the years 2001–2008 were an unmitigated disaster and that something drastic must be done to rectify “Brand America” in the Arab world—has been seriously overstated. Despite a UN voting record that suggests the contrary, most Arab governments have actively sought good relations with the United States, especially when it comes to security. Economic ties have remained strong as well. And measures of popular behavior such as visa statistics, student enrollment rates, consumer trends, and protest incidents suggest that the relationship has been improving since 2003.

The Arab Behavioral Index (ABI) shows some of these underlying trends, but readers should bear in mind that the statistics therein simply shed light on one facet of a complicated issue—in other words, the quantitative approach can only be taken so far. In some cases, for example, it is obvious in a qualitative way that statistics do not quite get it right: the United States has a much better relationship with Kuwait than the numbers would suggest, and a much worse relationship with Syria. Similarly, the relationship with Egypt has been under serious strain at the highest levels of government. To balance the numbers, the authors have explored certain qualitative factors in the accompanying case studies. In Egypt and other countries,

for example, anti-American rhetoric may be used as a way to blow off steam that otherwise might have been directed at the domestic leadership. In turn, regimes use anti-U.S. rhetoric to distract from their shortcomings. In some cases these sentiments might be real, while in others they provide a mask.

Ultimately, however, interests matter more than sentiments. In spite of the prevailing rhetoric and images, many Arab citizens still want to visit America, study in America, and buy American products. Most Arab governments are as cooperative with the United States as they have ever been, and the growing threat of a nuclear Iran will likely push them even further in America’s direction.

This is not to say that, behind the cloud of anti-American rhetoric, the past eight years of U.S.-Arab relations have been bright. In some ways the U.S. relationship with many Arab publics, and with some Arab governments, did suffer. As mentioned previously, voting patterns at the UN have been unusually divergent in recent years, and the first half of the decade saw significant drops in the number of Arab tourists, business travelers, and students visiting the United States. Similarly, Arab countries’ trade relations with the United States have been growing more slowly than their trade with the rest of the world. Nevertheless, even the bleakest interpretation of these statistics does not support the view of raging anti-American behavior caused by the Bush administration’s policies—notwithstanding the rock-bottom American approval ratings in regional polls, the incessant media palaver surrounding such results, and the conventional wisdom of most academic Arabists on the subject.

Arab Attitudes and Behavior in Global Perspective

The Arab world’s orientation toward the United States is, of course, just one broad dynamic in a global set of such relations. As such, valid generalizations about a gap between attitudes and behavior elsewhere in the world might apply to Arab states as well. Indeed, this study’s

findings, surprising as they may be, often corroborate the conclusions of another major recent research effort focused on U.S. ties with other regions of the world. At the end of their 2007 compilation on anti-Americanism, Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane wrote:

Our analysis suggests that even high levels of expressed anti-Americanism do not translate readily into government or individual action.... Consumers do not boycott the products of American corporations even when they say they do. International travel shows no more than a faint correspondence to variations in anti-American views. Governments cooperate with the United States on counterterrorism in various ways, and, despite upsurges in anti-American views at home, they are maintaining ordinary diplomatic relations across a variety of policy domains.¹

Some of these cautionary notes are echoed in the American Political Science Association's 2009 report *U.S. Standing in the World*, presented by a panel of political scientists convened by Katzenstein and Jeffrey Legro, a professor of world politics at University of Virginia. Despite the report's overall message that this "standing"—defined as a combination of credibility and esteem—matters, a closer reading paints a decidedly ambiguous picture. For example, in its introductory section "Why Does Standing Matter?" the report states the following:

Diminished standing *may* [emphasis added] make it harder for the United States to get things done in world politics.... Conversely, increased standing has benefits...such as encouraging the 'win-win' Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate.... It has intrinsic value, including in Americans' self-image, even when it has no readily observable behavioral implications.²

A later section begins with the admission that "we grasp only imperfectly the sources and impact of U.S.

credibility and esteem in the world," but then goes on to say that "standing is a matter of consequence for U.S. foreign policy."³

If the impact of anti-American attitudes or diminished U.S. standing is so unclear in Europe, Asia, or Latin America, why should it be any clearer in the Arab world? In fact, as the same report states, Middle Eastern governments are often "diametrically opposed" or at least indifferent to such attitudes, while in Europe, by contrast, "democratically elected governments by and large express the sentiments of the citizenry."⁴

Particular Arab Factors

The previous paragraph points to one key reason for the gap between Arab attitudes and actions toward the United States, at least at the official level: the dearth of democracies in the Middle East. As Shibley Telhami has noted, most Arab governments can "ignore public opinion on important issues without obvious penalties."⁵ As examples, he cites the "ability of many Arab states to provide military, intelligence, and logistical support for the Iraq War even as their citizens strongly opposed it, and the gap between governments and the public during the fighting in Lebanon in 2006."

Another reason for the "say/do" gap in Arab behavior toward the United States is the divide between rulers and the ruled when it comes to foreign policy preferences. In the words of the *U.S. Standing in the World* report:

In the Middle East, authoritarian regimes are often quietly more supportive of American policy than they can say publicly.... Policies that improve American standing with Arab governments, such as being tough on Saddam Hussein's Iraq or on Khameni's [sic] Iran, tend to please rulers and irritate public opinion. Likewise, many Arab leaders were happy to see Israel bomb Hamas and Hezbollah, but the attacks infuriated Arab publics.... Arab leaders may respect U.S. loyalty

1. Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane (eds.), *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006).

2. Task Force on U.S. Standing in World Affairs, *U.S. Standing in the World: Causes, Consequences, and the Future* (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 2009), p. 7, http://www.apsanet.org/content_59477.cfm.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

5. Shibley Telhami, "America in Arab Eyes," *Survival* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2007), p. 115.

to Israel, which is anathema to Arab publics. U.S. support for a loyal ally such as Mubarak may seem like a contradiction of the support for human rights favored by Egyptian citizens.⁶

Despite these differences, new surveys specially commissioned for this study indicate that a surprising proportion of some Arab societies support their governments' close ties to Washington, unpopular as the United States may be. In Jordan, only one-quarter of respondents in a June 2009 poll expressed even a "somewhat favorable" opinion of America, but more than twice as many (53 percent) still believed that "Arab governments should have close ties with the United States." This combination of attitudes may be pragmatic rather than contradictory.

In Egypt, by contrast, these numbers were much more closely aligned, at just under 40 percent in response to both statements. Meanwhile, just over half of Egyptian respondents expressed an unfavorable view of the United States and opposed close Arab government relations with Washington. These responses are all the more noteworthy because they were taken in the immediate aftermath of President Barack Obama's June 4, 2009, speech in Cairo, which a slim majority (55 percent) of Egyptians said would "help the situation in the region" at least "to some extent."⁷

This internal "elite versus street" fault line points to a third reason for the attitudes/actions gap at the official level: the tendency of some Arab governments, as in Egypt and Qatar, to disguise their extensive cooperation with Washington behind a media mask of anti-Americanism. In some respects, this strategy merely creates an impression at odds with reality, allowing the regimes to pursue their own interests while appeasing their citizens with mere rhetoric. Yet such an environment—where the gap between rhetoric and reality is increasingly apparent—could spur Arab publics to be

more anti-American and estranged from their own leaders than they otherwise might be, even if they do not or cannot act on those attitudes.

That brings us to the reasons for the attitudes/behavior gap at the popular level. One plausible explanation is that the whole question of political links with (or protests against) the United States is simply not a high priority for Arab publics. In this regard, analysis of trends from James Zogby's 2002 and 2005 polls conducted in six Arab states is highly instructive.⁸ Asked to rank nine different topics according to "how important each...is in your life," respondents in 2005 answered as follows:

As in 2002, issues very close to home dominate the rankings, with 'family,' 'work,' and 'marriage' ranking #1, #2, and #3. 'Political issues facing Arab nations,' 'leisure time,' and 'domestic political issues' remain at the bottom of the list.

Even when survey questions are limited to politics, Arabs' prioritization of internal versus external issues can vary significantly, as can their views on foreign policy issues related to Israel, Iran, or the United States. In 2009, for example, several polls reported that various Arab publics had come to view Iran's nuclear program as a threat rather than a boon for the region—the first time such views had been registered on a large scale. In addition, nearly half of the respondents said that Arabs should support sanctions against Iran if it refuses to restrict its nuclear activities. In this key area, Arab streets may now be less at odds with elites than is commonly supposed.

The apparent popular acceptance of U.S.-Arab ties amid sharp political differences may also be attributed to the notion that "the Arab street has been replaced by the Arab sofa," as one astute Jordanian observer put it.⁹ In other words, while Arabs clearly have strong views on various political issues, they tend to keep their

6. Task Force on U.S. Standing in World Affairs, pp. 9, 24.

7. Pechter Middle East Polls, private communication to the author.

8. James Zogby, "Attitudes of Arabs 2005: An In-Depth Look at Social and Political Concerns of Arabs," Arab American Institute, Washington, D.C., December 12, 2005, p. 6, http://aai.3cdn.net/6e38e45846c8ce7df5_k0m6be9di.pdf. For more on these surveys, see also David Pollock, *Slippery Polls: Uses and Abuses of Opinion Surveys from Arab States*, Policy Focus no. 82 (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2008), p. 26, <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=244>.

9. Author interview with Walid al-Tell, director of the Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, Amman, February 2009.

opinions within the realm of private discussion around the television, seldom translating them into action. The reason for this cultural shift may be a combination of greater freedom of speech with the lack of greater freedom of political action, as seen in most Arab countries today. As one leading academic analyst put it, the “new public sphere” could “perhaps even reduce the prospects of effective political action, by allowing people a ‘safe’ outlet for their frustrations and diverting their energies away from concrete political mobilization.”¹⁰

This is not to say, as some have, that Arab publics are insincere or that U.S. policy in the region is completely irrelevant to their attitudes and behaviors. A vivid example of such speculation can be found in the *U.S. Standing in the World* report, in which two top academic dissenters offered the following verdict:

In the Middle East, poll respondents are unhappy about many local things—ethnic and sectarian conflicts, government oppression, lack of economic opportunity, Arab-Israeli and other regional (Iran-Iraq) disputes, and so on. Much of this unhappiness gets displaced onto the United States...regardless of the policies.¹¹

The evidence from both attitudinal and behavioral studies, by comparison, is that Arab publics have mixed reactions to the United States. They generally dislike U.S. foreign policy but admire many other things about America, particularly its products, technology, educational system, opportunities for economic advancement, and democratic political system.

These findings point to probably the most important explanatory factor in this study: Arab publics are generally inclined to differentiate, in both their attitudes and actions, between U.S. foreign policy and other aspects of America. As the data in the previous chapters demonstrated exhaustively, Arabs from every country in the region have been traveling and studying in the United

States and purchasing American brands in ever-larger numbers over the past five years. This does not mean that Arabs are hypocritical—just human.

Looking Ahead: The Obama Factor

The Bush administration’s record suggests that a negative U.S. image in Arab countries does not equal poor relations with those countries, or even with their people, at least in the quantifiable behavioral terms documented earlier. And it will soon be time to test the converse proposition: whether or not a better U.S. image under the Obama administration equals better bilateral ties.

Among the early academic assessments, the *U.S. Standing in the World* report offered a valuable contribution by pointing out that “the disjuncture between confidence in Obama and discontent with U.S. policies is a potentially troubling fault line for the United States and the Obama presidency.” As an example, the report later questions “whether the recent recovery of ‘favorable views of the U.S.’ in some countries will translate into greater support for the United States in the United Nations.” Two dissenters who served in Republican administrations voiced a blunter view: “Obama has raised American esteem but has not produced more European troops for Afghanistan, secured concessions from North Korea, or made any headway with Iran.”¹² One prominent academic blogger echoed these concerns: “[T]he fact that more people around the world have a ‘favorable’ impression of the United States does not mean that their governments are going to roll over and give Washington whatever it wants.”¹³ Such commentary reached a crescendo in October 2009 when it was announced that President Obama would receive the Nobel Peace Prize.¹⁴ His mid-November 2009 trip to China generated skepticism as well, with media headlines such as “China Holds

10. Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 54.

11. Stephen Krasner and Henry Nau, “Dissenting Views,” in Task Force on U.S. Standing in World Affairs, *U.S. Standing in the World*, p. 28.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 20, 29.

13. Stephen Walt, “Nibbled to Death by Ducks?” *ForeignPolicy.com*, July 27, 2009, http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/07/27/nibbled_to_death_by_ducks.

14. See, for example, Michael Gerson, “A Prize for Star Power,” *Washington Post*, October 14, 2009.

Firm on Major Issues in Obama Visit”; “As Weight of Relationship Tilts East, Obama Opts for Nuance and Deference”; and “U.S. Now Bending More to China.”¹⁵ Similarly, few serious policy analysts expected Germany to give Washington much more immediate help on Afghanistan, Iran, Guantanamo Bay, or other controversial issues in 2009—even though “more than 90 percent of Germans had a favorable view of Mr. Obama, an 80 percentage point increase over Mr. Bush.”¹⁶ A nuanced assessment at year’s end concluded that “the verdict on Obama’s policy...is very much still out,” with few definitive achievements but some positive results “starting to come in” regarding Israel, China, Afghanistan, and possibly even Iran.¹⁷

In a similar vein, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, cited “a new openness and a new willingness to listen and respect our positions and our policies, a readiness to cooperate even where in the past we have met resistance”—but without noting any specifics.¹⁸ In a later interview, she cited several Security Council resolutions as evidence that “the change in the nature and tone of our relationships... is yielding concrete and tangible benefits here at the United Nations.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, as Deputy National Security Advisor Denis McDonough conceded, “The fact is that all countries, including our own, are going to act on their own interests.”²⁰ Even White House spokesman Robert Gibbs remarked sardonically that no one expected the president’s “almost two-and-a-half-day visit” to result in a parting of the waters or other large-scale change.²¹

Obama and the Arabs

Based on the handful of 2009 poll numbers available from the region, President Obama enjoyed a bit of a honeymoon in Arab public opinion at the beginning of his term—not as much as in Western Europe, where his personal approval rating hovered in the neighborhood of 80–90 percent, but still mostly in the respectable 50 percent range. This was a steep jump from President George W. Bush’s rating among Arabs, which often measured in the teens or even single digits. Some surveys also suggest that this shift had a positive spillover effect on Arab attitudes toward the United States in general, though only up to the 25–35 percent approval range in most places polled.

In any case, what effect would such attitudinal shifts have on Arab behavior? On the eve of his June 2009 Cairo speech, President Obama told an interviewer that he hoped for modest yet measurable benefits “at the margins,” in terms of reduced terrorist recruitment and increased regional capacity to cooperate with the United States:

What I do believe is that if we are engaged in speaking directly to the Arab street, and they are persuaded that we are operating in a straightforward manner, then, at the margins, both they and their leadership are more inclined to work with us.... [T]hen they are maybe a little less likely to be tempted by a terrorist recruiter.²²

He expanded on this theme during his November 2009 China trip:

I think that we’ve restored America’s standing in the world, and that’s confirmed by polls. I think a recent one indicated that around the world, before my

15. These stories appeared in the November 18, 2009, edition of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.

16. Peter Baker, “Good Will, but Few Foreign Policy Benefits for Obama,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/20/us/politics/20prexy.html>.

17. Jackson Diehl, “A Policy Bears Fruit,” *Washington Post*, December 14, 2009.

18. Michael Shear and Howard Schneider, “Obama’s Worldwide Star Power Finds Limits,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 2009.

19. Edith Lederer, “New U.S. Policy Is Engaging World,” Associated Press, December 25, 2009.

20. Baker, “Good Will.”

21. White House, “Press Briefing by White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs; and Ambassador to China Jon Huntsman; Senior Director for the National Security Council for Asian Affairs Jeff Bader; Deputy National Security Advisor Mike Froman; and Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes,” press release, November 17, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/press-briefing-rob-gibbs-jon-huntsman-jeff-bader-mike-froman-and-ben-rhodes>.

22. Thomas Friedman, “Obama on Obama,” *New York Times*, May 31, 2009.

election, less than half the people—maybe less than 40 percent of the people—thought that you could count on America to do the right thing. Now it's up to 75 percent.²³

In response to a question about running for reelection, however, he predicted that his new policies are “not going to bear fruit just in four years” when it comes to U.S. security interests and foreign policy. From the standpoint of behavioral data, it is indeed far too early to judge the impact of any “Obama effect” on U.S.-Arab relations. For example, among the comparable 2009 data sets available so far are month-by-month trade figures for each Arab country. With only fleeting exceptions, these figures show no increase in trade with the United States, whether in absolute numbers or market share, overall volume or just consumer products. But this stagnation almost certainly reflects the lingering global recession rather than some political statement. One commercial analysis claimed that Obama has moved “Brand America” from seventh to first place among “20 to 40” countries surveyed (Arab and non-Arab), increasing its “intangible” value by \$2 trillion.²⁴ The same analysis, however, implausibly asserted that “the United States has never departed from first place in the eyes of the Muslim respondents surveyed” since 2005, long before Obama assumed office.

Indicators of internal political or economic reform in Arab states have also generally stagnated in 2009, even regressing in a few cases. As previously noted, these indicators are not direct measures of bilateral relations and are at most only partially linked with U.S. policy toward each Arab country. Moreover, because the Obama administration has so far chosen to give this set of issues lower priority, approaching them in a cautious, low-key manner, the fate of Arab reform over the past year is even less relevant for judging the new president's impact.

Regarding other indicators, the number of Arab travelers to the United States continued to increase considerably in 2009, as mentioned earlier. But it is not clear how much this rise was linked to political attitudes rather than visa policies, economic conditions, or other factors. Similarly, the number of Arab students enrolled in American universities continued to grow in the 2008–2009 academic year. And the volume of U.S. arms sales to several Arab states increased as well.²⁵ But again, these figures reflect decisions made before Obama's election and, in any case, simply continue a trend from the preceding four years. Nor is there evidence of major changes afoot in any of the other indicators examined in this study, or of qualitative policy shifts by Arab governments on any major issue.

Beyond atmospheric changes, the major qualitative aspects of U.S.-Arab ties arguably evinced a great deal of continuity in 2009. Despite high-profile U.S. diplomatic shifts, little or no progress was made in securing regional cooperation on the Arab-Israeli peace process, Iraq issues, or engagement with Syria. Yet many Arab governments continued their close security cooperation with Washington regarding threats from Iran, al-Qaeda, or other radical actors (e.g., Cairo's efforts to contain Hamas). Interestingly, National Security Council senior director for global engagement Pradeep Ramamurthy, speaking to the Arab Global Forum in December 2009, urged his audience to avoid evaluating the president's first year in terms of Arab-Israeli or counterterrorism issues, which he described as “way too narrow a focus.”²⁶ Rather, he said, Obama's record in the region is better judged in terms of all the other goals listed in his June 2009 Cairo speech, which bear a striking resemblance to some of the indicators used in this study: exchange projects, joint educational programs, economic

23. Ed Henry, “Obama: ‘We’ve Restored America’s Standing,’” CNN, November 18, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/11/18/obama.henry/index.html>.

24. Simon Anholt, “The \$2 Trillion Man: How Obama Saved Brand America,” *Foreign Policy*, December 17, 2009, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/12/17/the_two_trillion_dollar_man?page=full.

25. Several news articles from November 8, 2009—apparently based on a Pentagon press release or news conference the previous day—provided very partial data on a few “top buyers” of U.S. weapons, including the United Arab Emirates (\$7.9 billion), Saudi Arabia (\$3.3 billion), Egypt (\$2.1 billion), and Iraq (\$1.6 billion). These figures appeared to combine 2008 and 2009 sales, although this is not entirely clear. Complete figures for 2009 will almost certainly be unavailable until well into 2010.

26. Remarks made at “The Arab World in a New Global Context: Challenges, Choices, and Opportunities,” inaugural meeting of the Arab Global Forum, Washington, D.C., December 7–8, 2009.

partnerships, and other evidence of practical, people-to-people cooperation.

In sum, the returns are not in yet, but a preliminary impression is that high hopes have already been replaced by disappointment on both sides. For example, a few days after Obama's Cairo speech, pro-Western parties in Lebanon made somewhat unexpected electoral gains. One leading local commentator called it "a telling case," asserting that it is "no longer relevant for the extremists to use the anti-American card. It does look like the U.S. is moving on to something new."²⁷ A prominent Saudi analyst agreed: "I think the speech of Obama in Cairo more likely played a role in neutralizing anti-Americanism."²⁸ A more cautious Lebanese analysis summed up the discourse: "It is unclear whether pro-Obama sentiment was a significant factor in these elections, although the connection is already being made in the press."²⁹

Within just three months, however, the discourse had shifted noticeably. A typical mainstream U.S. media assessment, echoed by a wide spectrum of the Arab press, read as follows:

As he takes the stage to address the United Nations for the first time...Obama will face world leaders—adversaries and allies alike—whose rebukes of the new American president serve as reminders that the world's differences with the United States transcend who is in the White House.... The frustration has built on all sides...among Arabs, especially Palestinians, over his inability to wrest concessions from Israel, among human rights activists who say his idealism has not been borne out in action...reflecting a broad skepticism among Arabs about whether Obama's overture to the Muslim world would make a difference on the ground.³⁰

Toward the end of 2009, typical Arab editorials on Obama's Nobel Peace Prize included "A Nobel Prize

for Talk" (in the United Arab Emirates' *al-Khaleej*) or this comment in Qatar's *al-Watan*: "Had [the Nobel committee] waited a little bit longer, it would have recanted this decision after he drew up his new strategy in Afghanistan."³¹ And in February 2010, one prominent columnist in a Saudi-sponsored daily lamented:

I do not know if Barack Obama will achieve any successes in his second year, after his first year came devoid of any memorable achievements. There are enormous difficulties facing Obama, both domestically and abroad. If he should succeed, he would have conjured up a miracle of biblical proportions.³²

Perhaps, in the longer term, goodwill, good intentions, or good policies might produce some tangible improvements in U.S.-Arab relations. In this respect, a December 2009 self-selected survey of approximately three hundred participants at the Arab Global Forum may be instructive, at least about the views of American and Arab elites with a long record of contact and cooperation. Looking back at Obama's first year in office, a solid majority (62 percent) thought that he remained popular among Arabs, while an even larger majority (85 percent) said that Arab expectations of him had been too high. Looking ahead, 90 percent expected U.S.-Arab relations to be at least as good or even better in the next two years—even though a mere 20 percent expected any breakthrough on Israeli-Palestinian peace during that time. In any event, the behavioral record of the past decade, as revealed in this study, strongly suggests that common U.S. and Arab interests will probably prevail, even if President Obama does not deliver on the lofty aspirations for "a new beginning" that he proclaimed in Cairo just six months after his inauguration.

27. Osama Safa, quoted in Michael Slackman, "In Beirut Vote, Signs for U.S.," *New York Times*, June 8, 2009.

28. Khalid al-Dakhil, quoted in *ibid.*

29. Lebanon Renaissance Foundation, "Analysis: The Results of the Lebanese Parliamentary Elections," June 8, 2009 (email to the author, available upon request).

30. Shear and Schneider, "Obama's Worldwide Star Power Finds Limits." See also Baker, "Good Will."

31. Obtained from Mideastwire subscription service, December 11, 2009.

32. Jihad al-Khazen, "Ayoon wa azan" [I insist that he will achieve nothing], *al-Hayat* (London), February 8, 2010.

Policy Implications

The first lesson from this study is that the behavior of most Arab governments remains compatible with U.S. interests over the medium term in many areas—particularly economic and security ties—even when diplomatic ties are strained and popular attitudes are hostile. The second lesson involves a similar principle for most Arab publics. Even when they sharply disapprove of the United States and its policies, they tend to maintain their personal, educational, and commercial ties. They have also increasingly refrained from participating in anti-American demonstrations or expressing support for terrorism aimed at American targets.

Policymakers should keep this dichotomy between interests and attitudes in mind when determining U.S. strategy in the Middle East. Arab governments are not very accountable to domestic public opinion and will act in their own interests. Arab citizens will do the same.

In addition, policy analysts should not expect unpopular U.S. policies on one issue—such as Iraq, Israel, or the fight against terrorism—to have much lasting effect on other issues. Indeed, this notion of “linkage” is highly exaggerated. In turn, analysts should not expect a single popular U.S. policy (or president) to have much tangible effect on other contentious regional issues.

The notion of a vast gap between rulers and ruled in the region is also highly exaggerated, at least when it comes to actual behavior toward the United States. Even when Arab publics dislike their leaders and disagree with their political embrace of Washington, they are unlikely to act in ways that would produce major political or policy changes. Just as important, many Arabs have demonstrated that they share key interests with the United States even when they disagree with American policies. The United States should appreciate and cultivate these constituencies. Beyond the ruling elites, business communities, and security establishments, central players include students, political and economic reform advocates, and assorted others who could benefit from exchanges and networking activities with American counterparts.

On a much wider scale, ordinary consumers—indeed, anyone opposed to violent extremism—share certain interests with the United States that could be highlighted and encouraged in concrete ways. Opportunities exist for these kinds of connections even when the overall political environment is inauspicious. And when the climate turns more favorable (as it seems to be doing at present), the opportunities will likely be all the greater.

The precise contours of such connections vary significantly from one country to the other, so there is probably little to gain from broad regional approaches. In fact, the best prospects probably lie in concentrating on issues and interests of the most local salience in each country. Certain countries may offer considerably wider scope for (and greater receptivity to) improved bilateral relations than others—currently, North African states seem to be the most promising in this regard. Washington should therefore devote more effort to maximizing these openings, beyond the usual tendency to focus on problem cases throughout the region.

Regarding reform, U.S. officials should recognize that their previous efforts have helped produce some positive results even when tensions related to other issues were at their highest. At the same time, the behavioral indicators show that reform can be a double-edged sword. For example, political progress has unleashed perceived threats to stability in some countries, producing a government backlash. And economic reform has opened up new avenues not only for prosperity but also for corruption. There is no magic formula for navigating these shoals, so caution is required.

Regarding public diplomacy, U.S. efforts should focus not so much on improving Arabs’ view of America, but on consolidating their growing resistance to extremism of all kinds, whether al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hizballah, Iran, or the Taliban. As a secondary strategy, Washington can help support alternative voices and social projects that reject violent extremism. The overall message should focus not only on mutual respect but even more so on mutual interests, including very practical or personal issues such as education,

employment, business opportunities, travel, access to U.S.-supported local projects, and even shopping. The emphasis should be on each country's national interests, not just on regional issues.

Finally, future research should focus less on general public attitudes and more on behaviors. Additional metrics of this nature should be systematically pursued, with the aim of better understanding the links or disconnects between attitudes and actions. Polling in particular should investigate not only how

people feel but also how they account for specific actions they may take, such as buying or boycotting American products; watching or ignoring American media; honing or shunning English; seeking or avoiding contact with Americans and travel or study in the United States; supporting or staying away from extremist groups; engaging or ignoring various kinds of civil society groups and institutions; and joining or refraining from different forms of political activity, expression, or protest.

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