

# Intelligence and the Middle East:

## What Do We Need To Know?

by [Ellen Laipson \(/experts/ellen-laipson\)](#)

Apr 1, 1995

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Ellen Laipson \(/experts/ellen-laipson\)](#)

Ellen Laipson is a distinguished fellow and president emeritus at the Stimson Center, where she directs the Middle East/Southwest Asia Program.

---



In-Depth Reports

## Preface

In the post-Cold War era and with the emergence of new security challenges to U.S. interests around the globe, the U.S. intelligence community has come under intense scrutiny. Indeed, the principal mission of the newly-established Presidential Commission on Roles and Capabilities of the U.S. Intelligence Community -- whose ranks include two members of The Washington Institute's Board of Advisors, Chairman Les Aspin and Ambassador Paul Wolfowitz -- is to define exactly what the intelligence community should be charged to do in the twenty-first century and how it can best do it.

Nowhere is the urgency for re-thinking intelligence requirements and methods greater than in the Middle East. With its longstanding U.S. allies, critical natural resources, and strategic waterways, the security of the Middle East is vital to U.S. national interests. However, the combustible combination of the virulent anti-Western ideology that has taken hold in much of the region, huge stocks of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, and rogue leaderships in a number of regional states makes the Middle East one of the most volatile regions of the world. Analyzing and understanding the impact of such complex phenomena as the Arab-Israeli peace process and the spread of radical fundamentalism needs to be at the top of the agenda for the U.S. intelligence community.

To provide a framework for reviewing the intelligence community's work on the Middle East, The Washington Institute convened a special Policy Forum panel discussion on February 16, 1995. Participants included regional experts and intelligence officials from the National Security Council, the Department of State and the Defense Intelligence Agency. Their presentations, edited for publication, are published herein.

Together, the panelists underscored the need for a renewed emphasis on regional expertise as a prerequisite for understanding the complex changes- political, economic, social, religious, military, and environmental-now underway in the region. In so doing, they highlighted the opportunity that the end of the Cold War now provides for the intelligence community to benefit from non-governmental institutions-"think tanks" and universities-whose contributions on many topics are needed to supplement the government's own efforts.

Providing research and analysis to the policy-making community is the main mission of The Washington Institute.

This special Policy Forum report is presented as part of our continuing effort to promote informed debate and scholarly research on U.S. interests in the Middle East.

- **25 Pages**



---

## RECOMMENDED

---



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

### [The Arab Approach to Mediation—Reshaping Diplomacy in a Multipolar World](#)

Spring 2024



Nickolay Mladenov

(/policy-analysis/arab-approach-mediation-reshaping-diplomacy-multipolar-world)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Tracking Anti-U.S. Strikes in Iraq and Syria During the Gaza Crisis](#)

May 13, 2024



Michael Knights,  
Amir al-Kaabi,  
Hamdi Malik

(/policy-analysis/tracking-anti-us-strikes-iraq-and-syria-during-gaza-crisis)

ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

### [On Israel, Biden Is No Reagan](#)

May 10, 2024



Michael Singh

(/policy-analysis/israel-biden-no-reagan)

TOPICS

[Military & Security \(/policy-analysis/military-security\)](/policy-analysis/military-security)

[Proliferation \(/policy-analysis/proliferation\)](/policy-analysis/proliferation)

[Terrorism \(/policy-analysis/terrorism\)](/policy-analysis/terrorism)

[U.S. Policy \(/policy-analysis/us-policy\)](/policy-analysis/us-policy)