

# After the Storm: Challenges for America's Middle East Policy

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In-Depth Reports

## Executive Summary

**T**he defeat of Saddam Hussein and the elimination of Iraq's offensive capabilities have reestablished a favorable balance of power in the Middle East. But the Gulf War has left in its wake serious challenges to American efforts to establish a more stable regional order. This report focuses on four key elements in this effort: regional security, arms control, economic development and political change.

### I. REGIONAL SECURITY

In the aftermath of Operation Desert Storm, the United States must play a critical role in protecting American interests and promoting regional security in the Middle East. The U.S. should pursue a strategy of deterrence based on the creation of appropriate security structures, maintenance of its long-reach capabilities and a continuing presence in the Persian Gulf region.

Though the security of American friends in the region has been enhanced by the Gulf War, the U.S. must anticipate the emergence of future threats. Looking out five to ten years, these could include Iran, Iraq and Syria.

At present, Iraq provides the only credible military threat -- if a diminished one -- to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Saddam Hussein remains in power and is likely to seek revenge should the opportunity arise. Vigorous enforcement of UN Security Council Resolution 687 will be necessary to prevent the re-emergence of an Iraqi threat and to provide a deterrent to aggression. More broadly, the most promising means of enhancing security against aggression lies with improved U.S. security cooperation with GCC states, the development of a strengthened GCC and enhanced security relations with other U.S. allies in the region.

**America's Role** The United States will play an enhanced role in Gulf security, including increases in multilateral exercises, prepositioning of military equipment, high-level visits and exchanges, and planning with the GCC for future contingencies. The United States today has the opportunity to lay the groundwork for a more rapid return to the region should that be required in a future crisis. Three issues may need to be addressed by U.S. decision-makers in the near term:

- **U.S. Presence.** To enhance deterrence and improve the speed of a future U.S. redeployment, the U.S. will require an enhanced presence in the region as compared to before August 2, 1990. This will include an expanded naval presence, pre-positioning of heavy equipment and munitions, and combined exercises.
- **U.S. Guarantees.** If Gulf states request explicit guarantees of their security, the U.S. should respond positively in order to enhance deterrence.
- **U.S. Arms Sales.** The U.S. should attempt to secure a reduction in conventional arms sales to the region. U.S. arms

sales to Persian Gulf countries should be designed to serve two purposes: initial defense and facilitating the U.S. ability to intervene.

The Roles of Other Regional Powers In the post-Cold War, post-Gulf War Middle East, the United States is fortunate to have three capable and strategically located regional allies that can each reinforce the security arrangements made with the GCC states:

- Egypt. As a leading Arab state with close relations with the U.S. and peaceful relations with Israel, Egypt can do much to counter anti-Western radicalism in the Middle East, previously embodied in Saddam Hussein's threats to the neighborhood. Enhanced strategic cooperation with Egypt can provide an important reinforcement to Gulf security arrangements. If the Gulf states seek a more direct role for Egypt in their security arrangements, the U.S. should encourage this involvement.
- Israel is a stable, capable democratic ally which has shown an ability to take American interests into account. The Gulf crisis demonstrated that the U.S. can benefit from strategic relations with both Israel and Arab friends without compromising either. Israeli-American coordination should be improved and combined planning enhanced. The U.S. should increase its use of Israeli facilities to meet future Mideast contingencies.
- Turkey is another reliable, democratic ally, strategically located on the northern rim of the region. The U.S. should accept Turkey's offers to permit prepositioning, while not pressing for a direct Turkish role in the Persian Gulf.
- Syria's approach to regional security is a test of its orientation toward order in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East. Syria remains a radical state with pan-Arab ambitions and an army capable of threatening its neighbors. We should be skeptical about potential positive Syrian contributions. Thus, the U.S. has no interest in promoting a Syrian military presence in the Gulf, and it should also oppose Gulf state support for Syria's drive toward military modernization.
- Iranian cooperation may be desirable in the short term, but long-term Iranian involvement in security arrangements will depend largely on whether Iran takes a more responsible approach to regional security than it has in the past.
- Europe and Japan should be encouraged to support security in the Gulf and share the burden of such efforts. Economic support will be necessary especially from Japan and Germany, while Europe should be encouraged to develop capabilities for increasing its direct military contribution in future crises.
- The Soviet Union and China. Though the USSR will remain an important player, especially in the UN and the peace process, the Soviets should not be solicited to play a formal role in security arrangements, in large measure because they do not have the necessary relationships of trust with local states. Nonetheless, the U.S. will want to pursue an ongoing dialogue with the USSR -- particularly on such matters as arms control. The U.S. should concentrate on preventing China from selling missiles and other advanced technologies to the Middle East.

## II. ARMS CONTROL

The Bush Administration's Middle East arms control initiative, formally announced in May 1991, marks the first time in more than thirty-five years that the United States has been willing to utilize arms control to promote regional stability.

Despite the importance of the initiative, the obstacles are formidable. Though some elements of the initiative enjoy greater prospects for success than others, implementation will prove difficult. Any significant success will require a

long-term U.S. commitment to an arms control process.

**Special Envoy** In order to coordinate the disparate elements of his arms control initiative, and thus increase its chances for success, President Bush should consider appointing a special envoy to supervise its implementation and coordinate the various U.S. government agencies involved in this multilateral, multi-faceted effort.

**Supplier Constraints** The prospects appear most favorable for strengthened supplier constraints on transfers of unconventional weapons technology. There is considerable international sentiment that existing agreements among suppliers -- the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Australia Group (chemical weapons controls), and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) -- should be bolstered. Specifically, it may be possible to convince suppliers to strengthen existing regulations and broaden the number of states willing to adhere to the agreements.

The adoption of controls on conventional arms transfers appears less likely. There is no existing international consensus on the need to constrain conventional weapons sales. Although the Bush Administration supports a negotiating process intended to create guidelines for arms sales to the Middle East, the extent to which other countries would be willing to accept such constraints is not yet clear. Discussions now taking place between the major arms suppliers represent only an initial step in what may be a lengthy process.

**Global arms control treaties** Middle Eastern states have been reluctant to accept fully the requirements of multilateral arms control agreements. As a result, the effectiveness of these treaties -- the Geneva Protocol, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention, and the Chemical Weapons Convention (currently under negotiation) -- has been cast into doubt. Efforts to constrain proliferation in the region must be accompanied by attempts to strengthen these treaties, including their verification and enforcement provisions.

**Regional Arms Control** Absent political progress and diplomatic contacts between the Arab states and Israel, it will be exceedingly difficult to negotiate regional arms control agreements in the Middle East. There is no apparent way to reconcile the Arab demand that regional arms control begin with unconventional weapons and Israel's insistence that it begin with conventional arms. In the absence of a breakthrough in the peace process, which would provide an opening for discussion of regional arms control issues, attempts should be made to advance less ambitious measures, such as a regional ban on testing of nuclear weapons.

### III. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The United States should focus its economic efforts where it can make a difference: alleviating poverty, promoting regional cooperation, and forcing Iraq to meet its responsibilities.

**Alleviating Poverty** Aid should support sound economic policies and the reforms vital for sustainable development. Foreign aid should aim at improving the economic lot of the whole region rather than the redistribution of wealth. The U.S. should encourage access for Middle Eastern exports to U.S. and European markets, while promoting the redirection of scarce funds from the military to civilian development. The U.S. should support loan guarantees to finance immigration absorption in Israel; prospects for repayment would be excellent.

**Economic Cooperation** Because a Middle East Development Bank would be of little use to the poor Arab countries, which are highly indebted already, the U.S. should take a skeptical stance; it should also insist that Israel be invited to be a full member. The U.S. must concentrate on politically practical projects with clear benefits for participants -- such as the Yarmuk River dam -- rather than grandiose projects which could exacerbate long-term problems.

**Iraq's Responsibilities** Iraq is a potentially wealthy country; in the event that sanctions are lifted, its vast income should be used for reparations and debt service in addition to reconstruction.

- Reparations may help prevent future Iraqi aggression while compensating its victims. However, there is a danger that an excessively-harsh reparations regime could inflame the Iraqi people and contribute to future

instability.

- Special debt relief for Iraq is an anachronism that must be eliminated. Any debt rescheduling should require an IMF program.
- Humanitarian aid to Iraq should be managed by international organizations so that the Baath regime cannot divert funds to other purposes.

#### IV. POLITICAL CHANGE

One of America's strategic goals in the Middle East -- now and in the future -- is the promotion of stable democratic governments. In the aftermath of the war, the Bush administration has expressed support for its democratic allies in the region, Turkey and Israel, and has moved to strengthen Egypt, whose government is relatively tolerant and moving toward greater political participation. Yet the Bush administration has given insufficient attention to the promotion of democracy. This has been an unfortunate error. The U.S. must develop an appropriate vision for the region's future, taking into account the new political forces unleashed by the war, lest the fruits of victory slip away. While the United States should not hector Middle East governments, it can push for more progress, particularly in Kuwait and Iraq.

Kuwait is experiencing intense democratic pressures resulting from the resistance groups who fought and suffered under Iraqi occupation. These groups now demand greater political participation, including restoration of the 1962 constitution and establishment of a national unity government, woman's suffrage and extension of a restrictive franchise.

The U.S. should urge greater democratization and improved human rights in Kuwait. For example, it should support greater political participation, pluralism and expansion of the franchise. Indeed, the U.S. must advocate political reform in Kuwait. U.S. passivity could both erode the U.S. standing in Kuwait and permit Kuwait's internal turmoil to spread to other Gulf states.

Iraq Saddam Hussein's continued rule of Iraq is harming stability in the region. Even after his defeat, Saddam killed thousands in the south and created a massive refugee problem in the Kurdish north. His brutality and ruthlessness may yet find outlets in years to come. The administration is correct to have stated explicitly that it seeks the removal of Saddam Hussein and that the lifting of sanctions against Iraq is directly tied to his ouster. It may be necessary to develop a strategy which makes it possible to sustain this policy for however long it takes to get rid of Saddam.

Just what sort of successor regime should the U.S. support? Some argue that the U.S. should support constitutional government, one that is pluralistic, accommodating of the different sectors of society, and capable of holding the country together without incessant conflict and civil strife. Others argue that a constitutional government would not be able to maintain the territorial integrity of the country. In any case, the U.S. must demand some minimal human rights guarantees for the Iraqi people.

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