

# War Goals for the West

Nov 15, 1990



Brief Analysis

**W**ith war in the Gulf increasingly probable the time has come to consider war goals with a long-term focus. Realization of such near-term objectives as military victory, decapitation of Iraq's military, restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty and creation of a new security structure may actually accelerate radical processes in the Middle East. The result could be a situation even more malignant than Iraq's current occupation of Kuwait.

Effective war goals must correspond to fundamental regional realities. The Middle East is a region in turmoil. It is comprised of modernizing societies coping with their search for a new Islamic self-identity. It is a region with difficult demographic pressures, economic disparities, and ethnic and national conflicts.

In today's Middle East, no status quo can be considered viable and no existing situation can be stabilized for the long-term. Any attempt to operate in a Congress of Vienna mode will fail. Instead, the effort should be made to impose limits on turbulence, in order to reduce the potential of the Middle East to damage itself and other regions. This effort can succeed.

Limiting damage from the Middle East involves absolute prevention of nuclear proliferation. The dangers that a nuclear Iraq could pose in today's crisis provide sufficient justification for stern measures. Chemical weapons, biological weapons research and advanced delivery vehicles also pose dangers, and ideally should be eliminated. But nuclear weapons pose the most serious threat, and international efforts should concentrate on this critical factor.

Damage limitation should also focus on development of a global oil and energy policy. Such a policy could reduce the impact of supply disruptions. The Gulf crisis may provide an opportunity for a commodity agreement between oil producers and consumers, under UN auspices, limiting oil price fluctuations and establishing a mechanism to control market behavior. Any agreement should include an explicit understanding that use of oil as a weapon will be considered an act of aggression justifying use of force. However, even if such an agreement is realized, finding alternatives to Mideast oil will still be vital because of inherent regional instability.

A third way to limit the damage potential of the region will be to build effective Western rapid deployment capabilities while making it clear that aggression against Western friends will be punished. Such a deterrence posture will be preferable to formal security arrangements and a major Western presence in the region. Indeed, a significant Western presence could increase the prospects for regional radicalization. Moreover, the West must realize that, even if Iraq is punished and a less violent global regime fostered, the Middle East will continue to experience violence stemming from its own internal processes and not controllable by external security arrangements.

Beyond limiting damage, the United States should try to influence change in desirable directions by developing broad post-crisis policies. For example oil income should be shared by all Arab countries, through means of an agreed tax based on oil income divided by population. The accumulated funds could facilitate educational, social and economic investments for countries which limit their military spending. Intense efforts should also focus on achieving a comprehensive peace between the Arab states and Israel, including a solution of the Palestinian

problem. Such steps can help attack the root problems of regional instability and guide the Middle East to a more peaceful future. ❖

Policy #34

---

## RECOMMENDED

---



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Farzin Nadimi

[\(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

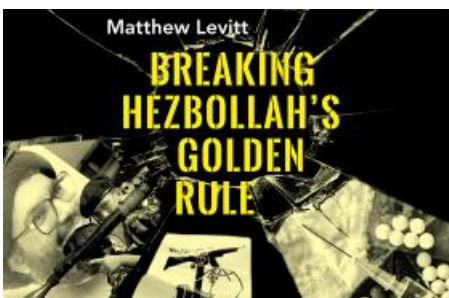
### [Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

### [Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule](#)

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule)

## TOPICS

U.S. Policy (/policy-analysis/us-policy)

## REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iraq (/policy-analysis/iraq)

Gulf States (/policy-analysis/gulf-states)