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RADICAL MIDDLE EAST STATES
AND U.S. POLICY

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREFACE

During the Cold War, the geopolitical struggle raging between the United States and the Soviet Union often played itself out in various local, regional, and ideological conflicts. The two superpower antagonists responded to—and made use of—such local conflicts in different ways: through projecting influence, promoting friendly regional actors, supplying military and economic aid and, at times, resorting to direct military intervention. The Middle East, having great strategic and economic importance to both superpowers, was an arena in which the Cold War was fought through local conflicts.

To our dismay, the end of the Cold War has neither resulted in the end of regional or ideological conflicts in the Middle East or elsewhere, nor decreased the need for the United States, as the sole remaining superpower, to respond to local and regional conflicts which threaten American interests. Rather, in this new world environment, the United States continues to find itself facing genuine challenges to its interests.

Events since the waning of Soviet influence have made it clear that America's long-standing tensions with the radical states of the Middle East—Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria—were not merely the product of strains between the two superpowers. Rather, they were—and still are—primarily the direct result of those states' profound opposition to Western influence in the area—opposition which had in the past been aided and abetted by the USSR. Even without the Soviet Union as an adversary, the United States has found itself fighting a war against Iraq, confronting Libya over the bombing of Pan Am 103, facing an

increasingly militant Iranian military posture in the Persian Gulf and beyond, and—overlooking Damascus' support for terrorism—trying to ease Syria into an agreement with Israel.

In this Policy Paper, Barry Rubin examines the history of these radical regimes' antagonism towards the United States and the specific challenges they pose to U.S. interests. His analysis and prescriptions offer a helpful way of thinking about how Washington can meaningfully address this tangled chapter of the new world order.

Mike Stein	Barbi Weinberg
President	Chairman
June 1993	June 1993

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The challenge posed to the United States by the radical regimes in the Middle East—Libya, Iraq, Iran, and Syria—is one of the most important foreign policy issues facing Washington today. These regimes, although weakened by the demise of the USSR, have by no means been disabled. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the United States currently enjoys a period of ascendancy in the region. However the situation can change in a brief period of time; it is thus incumbent on the United States to establish and implement the foundations of a policy while it retains the upper hand.

Each of the radical regimes follows an agenda based on irrational goals which fundamentally conflict with the long-term objectives of the United States. The basic goal of the radical regimes is regional hegemony. To this end, they pursue ambitious weapons programs (both conventional and unconventional), they promote terrorism, and they cultivate a general antagonism towards the West and Israel. Inasmuch as the United States seeks to maintain stability in the Gulf, promote the Arab-Israeli peace process, and decrease the use of international terrorism, it must effectively block the ambitions of these radical regimes.

In the past, U.S. policies toward these states have not been entirely successful and have left the region far from stable. A less than aggressive U.S. policy of deterrence yielded the following direct results: Iraq invaded Kuwait; Iran held U.S. diplomats hostage for over one year in Tehran, destabilized the region by aiding Islamic revolutionaries, and attacked tankers in the Persian Gulf; Libya assaulted U.S. forces and organized

terrorist attacks; and Syria effectively occupied Lebanon, sponsored terrorism, and has exacerbated the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Past experience shows that the United States cannot transform these regimes into moderates through concessions and appeasement. Without U.S. deterrence, the radical states will continue to provoke conflicts and crises as they work to expel U.S. influence from the region.

Although these regimes are similar in their internal machinery and ideological zeal, they differ on individual objectives and the means to attain their goals:

• **Iran seeks to dominate the Persian Gulf.** This is especially true since Iraq has been greatly weakened from the Gulf War. Through a significant military build-up and an appeal to Islamic revolutionaries throughout the Gulf, President Hashemi Rafsanjani hopes to expunge U.S. influence, gain power over the Gulf monarchies, and initiate an era of Iranian supremacy in the region.

Rapprochement, while conceivable, is ultimately up to Tehran. Before any serious improvement in relations occurs, the United States should demand that Iran change its policies concerning terrorism, the Salman Rushdie affair, its territorial claims in the Gulf, and its unconventional arms buildup. In addition, the Iranians must understand that efforts to upset the Arab-Israeli peace talks will bring a response from the United States.

• **Saddam Hussein's Iraq presents a continued challenge to U.S. interests.** Saddam Hussein has initiated two wars in an attempt to establish dominance in the Gulf and there is nothing to suggest that he has abandoned that goal. Saddam has outlasted George Bush, Yitzhak Shamir, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Turgut Ozal and clearly hopes to take revenge on the United States and its allies in the region. He will certainly work towards rebuilding his military and use every opportunity to test the Clinton administration's resolve.

Although support for the sanctions regime will decrease over time, President Clinton must demonstrate continuity in U.S. policy. Saddam must not be allowed to control the U.S. agenda in the Gulf. Saddam Hussein's behavior has illustrated that nothing is gained from appeasing radical rulers. Rather, an overwhelming demonstration of power and resolve is

necessary to force leaders like Saddam Hussein to abandon confrontation.

• **Libya's behavior is the product of one man, Muammar Qadhafi.** Although he is not thought to pose as serious a threat to U.S. interests as Saddam Hussein, Qadhafi, at the very least, has the ability to destabilize the region.

Qadhafi has stepped up his provocations when the West has shown itself unwilling to confront him; conversely, he has at times curtailed his terrorist activities in response to U.S. retaliation. In doing so, however, he may only be waiting for better opportunities, as he has done in the past. The United States must maintain and intensify the sanctions on Libya in cooperation with European and Arab allies, so as to exploit Qadhafi's current weakness.

• **Syria recognizes Washington's global preeminence and is exhibiting some cooperation with U.S. initiatives, including the Arab-Israeli peace process.** It is not a major change of heart by Syrian President Hafez Assad which is motivating him to lead the country down an outwardly more moderate path, indeed the current path that Assad is taking via the peace process conflicts with his larger political ambitions.

Due to the Gulf War and the demise of the USSR, America now enjoys the upper hand in its relationship with Syria. This being so, the United States should force the Syrians to end their support for terrorism, implement the Taif Accords, and stop their involvement in the drug trade. There should be no trade-off between Syrian cooperation in the peace process and necessary improvements to Syrian policy in other areas. Washington must take a firm stance, showing Syria that it must behave differently than it has in the past.

As the world's sole superpower, the United States enjoys more freedom to set the agenda in the Middle East than ever before. Washington should use its influence to force an end to radical subversion, intransigence, aggression, and terrorism. Reducing the fear of U.S. pressure or punishment will only succeed in damaging the balance of power and the progress of the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Specifically, an assertive U.S. policy can ultimately lead to a decrease in terrorism, the promotion of democracy, and an end to the acquisition of unconventional arms.

Terrorism: All four of these states are main sponsors of terrorism. With the Arab-Israeli peace process in progress and

the possibility of lasting agreements on the horizon, the United States must block state-sponsored terrorist activities.

Democracy: Although there is value to promoting democracy in the Middle East, with regard to the radical states, this issue is presently a non-starter. The leaders of these regimes will hold onto their power with whatever means possible. Thus, while democracy can be used as a slogan, its implementation at the moment is sadly an unrealistic goal.

Unconventional weapons: Because these states are the most likely to use weapons of mass destruction, U.S. policy must prevent the radical regimes from obtaining unconventional weapons. Although there are many loopholes in the international export control regime, this issue cannot be avoided.

Despite the new global environment, none of these states has scaled down its ambitions or long-term goals. These radical regimes still hope to pursue their goals of expansion and aggression by relying on terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The United States cannot transform the radical regimes into moderates; instead it must take advantage of its current situation and aggressively work to deter them.

INTRODUCTION

The dissolution of the Soviet Union, for years America's main rival, has ended the world's leading diplomatic, strategic, and ideological struggle. Many difficult problems, to be sure, still present themselves on the world stage. Yet, the attempt by radical Middle East states to control that region stands as the most likely threat and source of crises for U.S. interests in the new era.[1]

As the world's sole superpower and only conceivable leader of a broad coalition, the United States must face the difficult but unavoidable challenge of deciding how to deal with Middle East radical regimes. The four radical states in the region—Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria—are not global powers, yet their actions have a wide geographic reach. They have dragged the United States into many conflicts: Iran, by holding Americans hostage, backing Islamic fundamentalist revolts, and attacking tankers in the Persian Gulf; Libya, by organizing terrorist attacks and assaulting U.S. forces in the Gulf of Sidra; Iraq, by attacking Iran and invading Kuwait; and Syria, by seizing control of Lebanon, sponsoring terrorism, and intensifying the Arab-Israeli conflict.

These radical regimes lead the world's most intensely anti-American states, are the major sponsors of terrorism, the most determined opponents of the status quo, and the chief source of

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[1] The fate of the former USSR is a potential crisis for U.S. interests but, in the final analysis, is less likely to engage American intervention or military forces than the Middle East.

revolutionary ideology. Communism may be dead but the radical nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism promoted by these dictatorships remains very much alive.

The Soviet bloc's disintegration has had relatively less impact in the Middle East than elsewhere in the Third World. The local powers that challenged U.S. policy and interests in Latin America (Cuba, Sandinista Nicaragua), Africa (Ethiopia, Angola), and Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia, North Korea), were highly reliant on Soviet aid. Without it, they have become timid, collapsed, or have turned to the West for financial support and strategic backing. Marxism's prostration has undermined their own rulers' legitimacy. With the passing of the Soviet Union, several conflicts in those areas have been quickly resolved.

These factors do not hold for the stronger, more independent Middle East radical regimes which have their own national agendas and doctrines. For them, the USSR was never a leader or master. Oil wealth provided an independent source of income. None of these regimes is Communist or even Marxist. Neither Iran nor Iraq was even a Soviet client at the time that it confronted the United States. In sponsoring terrorism and subverting neighbors, neither Syria nor Libya acted as a Soviet surrogate. Moscow's collapse has weakened these regimes without eliminating the problems they present.

Thus, while entwined with the East-West conflict, the radicals' anti-American stances were not a product of the Cold War. In short, these radical mid-level powers can still pursue their ambitions. Their huge armies are comparable to those of Europe in size and high-technology arms—if not necessarily skill in using them. They are the states most avidly seeking unconventional weapons—nuclear, chemical, biological, and ballistic missiles—and the most likely to use them.

It should be remembered that almost all of America's Middle East debacles in the last twenty years took place at the hands of these regimes: hostage crises in Tehran and Beirut, a failed rescue expedition in Iran, the tragic Marine Corps mission in Lebanon, secret arms sales to Ayatollah Khomeini, and the unsuccessful appeasement of Saddam Hussein. They worked hard to block or sabotage any solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Today, in the early 1990s, all these radical states are at their weakest point. The defeats of the USSR, Iran, and Iraq in the

Cold, Iran-Iraq, and Gulf Wars, respectively, have brought an era of U.S. ascendancy to the Middle East. But experience shows that losers rebuild, times change, and new conditions develop. The United States may over time be less active in international affairs; the radicals' race to develop unconventional weapons will alter the balance of power. If Saddam had waited to invade Kuwait until he possessed a nuclear capability, history would have been very different. In short, the current window of opportunity may only be open for a few years.

While these dictatorships do not threaten America's existence, they do endanger its interests, credibility, and diplomatic initiatives. The way the United States chooses to deal with them is a major, perhaps even the main, test of its post-Cold War foreign policy.

This paper will first examine the radical states' pattern of behavior and analyze their motives and goals. Having done so, it will look at U.S. policymakers' best options for dealing with them, taking advantage of America's enhanced power in the region.

I   THE REAL ROOTS OF CONFLICT

   While U.S. involvement in the Middle East was shaped by the Cold War, opposition to the radical states' ambitions served as the foundation of American policy in the region. A very real basis for the U.S.-Israeli alliance was the goal of blocking Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi expansionism or their attempt to sieze regional leadership. When the United States confronted Libya over terrorism, Iran during the hostage crisis and Gulf tanker war, Syrian rule in Lebanon, or Iraq over its invasion of Kuwait, it was fighting regional extremism, not Soviet expansionism. Similarly, these regimes were extremist, aggressive, and sponsored terrorism for their own reasons, with Moscow's help but not at Moscow's urging. They sought aggrandizement for their own benefit, not for the USSR.
   Iran and Iraq stumbled into disaster when they underestimated U.S. will power, pushed it into conflict, then suffered the high cost of its enmity. U.S. policy, however, helped provoke these confrontations by making concessions to show its enemies that the United States was not their enemy. Instead, dictators were convinced that America would not halt their aggression. This happened with Egypt when U.S. policy handed it a victory in the Suez War (1956), Iran in the hostage crisis (1980-81), Syria in the Lebanon conflict (1982-84), and Iraq before the Kuwait crisis (1988-90). The goal of the radicals was regional hegemony, not American friendship. They could only see America as a power whose interests they must respect or as a paper tiger that might be easily and profitably defied.

In short, while American observers may expect the post-Cold War era to force caution on Middle East dictators—a claim wrongly made before—the radical states will continue to provoke conflicts and crises unless the United States deters them. Regimes already in power and well-armed are a greater threat to the West than Islamic fundamentalist opposition movements. Being radical is not the same as being suicidal, thus radical ambitions are often, but not always, trimmed to match radical capabilities. The radicals are presently unnerved by their relative military weakness and lack of a superpower sponsor. Perhaps they will see unconventional arms as their salvation. They will certainly watch U.S. policy closely to see whether and how it will counter their efforts.

While it would seem logical for them to focus on economic development and reducing military spending, Iraq's example is a reminder that this need not happen. The radical states' high military spending has never been merely or primarily a function of the Arab-Israeli conflict. A large armed force soaked up young men who otherwise would have been unemployed and troublesome. A big army provided security against internal threats as well as against aggression from fellow Arab states or Iran. Money devoted to the military establishment was meant to keep happy the institution that was every dictator's key pillar in holding on to power. In this regard, nothing has changed in the radical regimes' priorities. It may be harder for them to acquire certain equipment, but they will make every effort to do so.

The reality, reflected in radical states' policies, is that regional governments are motivated by nation-state nationalism. The decline of pan-Arab nationalism or pan-Islamic fundamentalism does not automatically favor a turn toward moderation. On the contrary, as European history has shown, the passage from universalistic philosophies to nation-state patriotism inflames rulers' ambitions. Europe's biggest wars and imperial expansion took place in the age of national integration and identification with individual countries.[1]

A regime's structure, political culture, geopolitical priorities, and state interests are important predictors of its behavior. In

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[1] Barry Rubin, "Pan-Arab Nationalism: The Ideological Dream as Compelling Force," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 26 (1991), pp. 535-551.

other words, the radical states' designs on neighbors, hostility to the West, and antagonism to the United States are an integral part of their character. At the same time, they have blamed their problems on the United States and their own failures on traitorous neighbors or rivals.[1]

The regimes tightly controlled and mobilized their people by making, not responding to, public opinion. Their oppressive, undemocratic structure made them more impervious to foreign influence and better able to continue costly wars, high military spending, and adventurous policies despite the cost to their citizens.

Unfortunately, no matter how America behaved, its wealth and power inevitably provoked envy and hostility. Even U.S. patronage, as Saddam showed, did not persuade the radicals to abandon their policies. It simply made them more confident of success. The only way the United States could prove itself innocent of their charges of imperialism was to let Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Libya overthrow America's own tested friends and thereby expel its own influence.

Ideologically, the radicals saw the United States as inevitably evil, hating its cultural and political influence for its Westernizing influence on Arab and Muslim society. On a practical level, they opposed America as the defender of both Israel and of the weaker Arab states—like Saudi Arabia and Jordan—that were their intended victims. Like the USSR during the Cold War, they cannot be reconciled or made allies.

The U.S. experience with Iraq between 1988 and 1990, after the Iran-Iraq War, provides a perfect illustration of this point. Despite Iraq's crimes against U.S. laws and a State Department report calling Baghdad's human rights record "abysmal" and "unacceptable," the Reagan and Bush administrations, in an effort to foster better ties with Iraq, blocked Congress from

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[1] As the historian Hisham Sharabi has put it, the Arabs made the West their scapegoat, blaming it for their own repressive societies, separate states, faltering modernization, communal conflicts, and the self-serving rule of small elites. Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 98-101, 130-36. See also Barry Rubin, *Modern Dictators: Third World Coup Makers, Strongmen, and Populist Tyrants* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987).

putting pressure or sanctions on Iraq for its murderous treatment of the Kurdish minority. Immediately after the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam forcibly moved as many as 500,000 Kurds to camps and razed 700 villages in order to create a depopulated security zone along the Iran-Iraq border. Amnesty International reported that hundreds of children had been imprisoned, tortured, or murdered. British and American doctors found symptoms in Kurdish refugees showing that chemical weapons had been used on them. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Schifter estimated that chemical attacks on Kurdish towns had killed about 8,000 people.[1]

In September 1988, the House of Representatives voted by a margin of 388 to 16 to invoke economic sanctions on Baghdad at a time when U.S. credits to Iraq were around $1 billion annually. But the White House called the sanctions "terribly premature and counterproductive [endangering] billions of dollars" of business for U.S. companies. The late Senator John Heinz of Pennsylvania said, "Getting tough on the use of chemical weapons by Iraq [was just being] tough on certain U.S. exporters." The administration succeeded in having this proposal so watered down in the Senate that Iraq merely had to promise not to use chemical weapons again in order to obtain Export-Import Bank credits. There were no restrictions on agricultural credits.[2]

Washington's responses to Saddam's actions and threats served to convince Baghdad that America was weak. Saddam interpreted U.S. attempts to avoid conflict as proof that America feared confrontation with him. Each act of appeasement only increased Iraq's boldness without persuading it that the United States wanted to be its friend. The Americans "are out to hurt Iraq," one of that country's top leaders claimed. The problem was not that U.S. actions alienated Iraq, but that the nature of

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[1] *Los Angeles Times,* July 12, 1989; *Washington Times,* August 16, 1989; *New York Times* and *Washington Post,* March 1, 1989; February 8, 1989 State Department briefing transcript; *Le Monde* (Paris), November 10, 1988.

[2] *Washington Times,* October 17, 1988; *Washington Post,* October 12, 1988; *New York Times,* May 23, 1990; letter from Marshall Wiley, *Washington Post,* October 20, 1988.

Iraq's regime inevitably made it antagonistic toward the United States.[1]

Allowing Saddam to threaten the United States without reacting also made other Arabs see Baghdad as a winner and let Iraq think it could get away with seizing Kuwait. No less an authority on this matter than Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister Nizar Hamdoon—albeit in reference to Iran—explained, "Aggressors thrive on appeasement. The world learned that at tremendous cost from the Munich agreement of 1938... How could the German generals oppose Hitler once he had proven himself successful?"[2] If America did not stop Khomeini or Saddam, their neighbors and underlings would certainly not try to do so.

Iran's Planning and Budget Minister Mas'ud Zanjani, doubting U.S. intervention to defend Gulf shipping from Iran's attacks in 1987, expressed the type of thinking about America that lured Middle East dictators and extremists into more than one confrontation with it. The United States would never fight in the Gulf, explained Zanjani, because its forces were so vulnerable, the American people and their European allies opposed intervention, and the Americans would quickly retreat if they suffered casualties.[3]

Like the Iranians—and other past dictators in Japan, Germany, and the USSR—Saddam underestimated America as he played the dangerous game of exaggerating outside menaces to justify his incompetence at home and aggression abroad. The Zionists and other enemies—a category including Iran, Syria, and the United States—were said to be so frightened and jealous of Iraq's victory over Iran that they were

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[1] *Washington Post*, October 4, 6, and 12, 1988; Taha Yasin Ramadan, *al-Anba* (Kuwait), October 8, 1988 (*Foreign Broadcast Information Service* [hereinafter cited as *FBIS*], October 12, 1988, pp. 27-30).

[2] Nizar Hamdoon, "The U.S.-Iran Arms Deal: An Iraqi Critique," *Middle East Review*, Summer 1982, pp. 35-36.

[3] *Kayhan* (Tehran), October 20, 1987 (*FBIS*, November 4, 1987, p. 54).

conspiring to block its rightful leadership role by economic warfare and military attack.[1]

The radical states attacked America not out of misunderstanding but because it blocked their ambitions. Since fundamental U.S. interests ran directly counter to what the militant regimes wanted, there was no way that U.S. concessions would transform them into moderates. They sought to expel its influence from the area and competed to prove themselves sufficiently militant and anti-American.

Radical regimes and forces were more antagonized, not mollified, by U.S. efforts to peacefully resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Libya long opposed a diplomatic solution because they rightly expected that it would strengthen U.S. regional influence and guarantee Israel's survival. These countries sponsored terrorist attacks not as a protest to urge the United States to do more but in order to block peace when they feared diplomacy might make some progress.[2]

Yet perseverance, despite blunders and setbacks, made the U.S. position in the area stronger in the 1990s than ever before. Today the United States enjoys better relations with more Arab states than at almost any time in its history, along with a continued strong alliance with Israel. U.S. policy finally managed to bring about direct Arab-Israeli negotiations on favorable terms. Similarly, when on various occasions U.S. intervention has forced Iran, Iraq, or Libya to scale back their aggressive moves, other Arabs or Muslims did not respond with the firestorms of rebellion predicted by many observers. It is true that local powers friendly toward the West, like Saudi Arabia and Jordan, have often advocated appeasing the radicals, wanting to see which superpower or local state would win a contest before committing themselves. But when threatened by their local brothers—as in Jordan's 1970 "civil war," the Gulf tanker war, and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait—these

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[1] Saddam Hussein's speech to Arab lawyers, November 28, 1988, (*FBIS*, November 30, 1988, pp. 21-26); *Financial Times*, April 18, 1989; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 17, 1989.

[2] The Arab radicals worked together, for example, to isolate Egypt after the Camp David Accords of 1979; to force Saudi King Fahd to water down his peace plan in 1981-82; and to block the 1982 Reagan Plan and the 1985 Jordanian peace proposals.

same rulers asked for U.S. help to save them from Iran, Iraq, Libya, or Syria.

History has not led the region's radicals to abandon their ambitions, even if they have found it hard to realize them. In the wake of both the Cold War and the Gulf War, Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria have not become status quo or pro-American powers. The radical states will not become moderates, democracies, or friends of the United States. The loss of Soviet support weakens them but does not tame them. They are only awaiting a better time to continue their programs of expansion, aggression, and subversion. U.S. policy must act to deter them; it is not about to transform them.

Reevaluating U.S. policy in this context is an urgent task. To continue appeasing radical regimes is an unnecessary mistake for which the United States could pay dearly in the future.

II THE RADICAL STATES: POLICIES AND INTERESTS

IRAN

Iran's 1979 revolution aimed to spread Islamic revolt throughout the Middle East. Though Tehran's actions were more cautious than its rhetoric, like Stalin's USSR, its priority on preserving the revolution at home did not stop it from making mischief abroad through propaganda, terrorism, and help to insurgent groups trying to subvert the area's rulers.

The new Islamic regime argued that all the existing states should be subsumed in a Tehran-based Islamic empire. "Islam does not recognize Iran and Iraq as such," said the powerful Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri in 1979. Arab nationalism and the existing states had no legitimacy in Iran's Islamic ideology.[1]

The rich Gulf states, owning much of the world's oil reserves, were particular targets. In 1986, then Prime Minister Mir-Hussein Musavi ridiculed the monarchies' defensive Gulf Cooperation Council as, "The council for cooperation with the United States." He asked Gulf rulers, "Do you not realize that you are facing a revolution that has roots in all countries, and that the populations of your countries are less than that of Tehran alone?"[2]

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[1] Radio Tehran, May 19, 1979, (*FBIS*, May 20, 1979).

[2] *Iran Times*, March 14, 1986.

In short, Iran wanted to stir revolt and gain power over the Gulf monarchies, aiming in the words of Tehran radio in 1985, "to rob them of their wealth by all available means." These regimes must be destroyed, it was said, to be replaced by "the establishment of the government of Islam on its ruins."[1]

Since the United States was the defender of these intended victims, especially Saudi Arabia, Iran wanted to drive America out of the Gulf. Naturally, the Iranian revolutionaries expected that U.S. policy would work to destroy their power and they were thus determined to break American influence within Iran once and for all. There was simply no way that the United States could assuage this antagonism, while the radicals, convinced that Washington sought to undermine or dilute the revolution, were eager to provoke a conflict. Holding over fifty Americans hostage for fifteen months was an extremely practical act for Iran's Islamic radicals. They used the hostage crisis to displace moderates in the leadership, unite the country around themselves, and deliberately destroy relations with the United States. This situation provides an archetypal case study on the uselessness of concessions in coping with terrorism, where the medium is so often the message.[2]

The Carter administration's efforts at conciliation, therefore, could not succeed. The more it held out the hand of friendship before the hostages were seized, the more suspicious Iran's leaders became. The more U.S. policy played up the importance of the American diplomats being held hostage in Iran, the higher Tehran raised the price for freeing them. By making the hostages their top priority, U.S. negotiators ensured the difficulty of securing their release and the likelihood that more Americans would be kidnapped.

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[1] Tehran International Radio, August 4, 1985, (*FBIS*, August 7, 1985, pp. 1-5). On Iran's strategy of terrorism, see Joseph Kostiner, "War, Terror, Revolution: The Iran-Iraq Conflict," in Barry Rubin, ed., *The Politics of Terrorism: Terror as a State and Revolutionary Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1989).

[2] These episodes are dealt with at length in Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Similarly, Iran's use of terrorism against Kuwait was part of its strategy to gain regional hegemony by overthrowing the monarchies, not an expression of local grievances. Iran employed Lebanese, Iraqi, or Kuwaiti Shi'ites to cloak its own involvement. In December 1983, Iranian-controlled Islamic Jihad terrorists in Kuwait used truckbombs and explosives to strike at the U.S. embassy, a foreign residential complex, the airport, an industrial park, and a power station. Kuwait's imprisonment of the captured terrorists led to another series of kidnappings and hijackings accompanied by demands for their release. In May 1985, Iranian-backed terrorists even dared try to assassinate the emir of Kuwait. Six bystanders died. A year later, Islamic Jihad attacked Kuwait's two main oil refineries.[1]

In Lebanon, too, Iran launched terrorism to foment revolts that would gain power for its followers and expel Western influence. As early as September 1980, Iran's surrogates fired rocket grenades at the U.S. embassy in Beirut. Syria at first refused to let Iran's Revolutionary Guard units into Lebanon to encourage Shi'ite revolutionaries and attack Israel, so Tehran acted covertly. In 1981, Iranian agents attacked Iraq's embassy as an extension of their war, killing thirty people including the ambassador. Iran's front group, Islamic Jihad, bombed the French embassy in May 1982 to punish that country for selling arms to Iraq.[2]

After Israel's invasion, Iran was able to step up its efforts, sending 2,500 soldiers to Lebanon and dispatching its surrogate suicide bombers in bloody attacks on the U.S. embassy, U.S. Marines, French, and Israeli forces in 1983. About 300 Americans were killed in these incidents and U.S. forces were driven from the country. The Iranian-backed Hezbollah attacked Israel from southern Lebanon, took a dozen American hostages, and murdered two U.S. officials. Unlike other

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[1] "The Tuesday Fires," *al-Dustur* (Amman), Vol. 16, No. 435, June 30, 1986, pp. 16-17. There were many other such incidents. For instance, in July 1987, two Kuwaiti Shi'ites were killed trying to bomb a shopping area after returning from sabotage training in Iran. *Arab Times* (Kuwait), July 18, 1987, p. 1.

[2] For a detailed account, see Barry Rubin, "The Uses of Terrorism in the Middle East," in Barry Rubin, *The Politics of Terrorism*, op. cit.

militias, Hezbollah was not disarmed by Lebanon's government in 1991 and did well in the 1992 parliamentary elections. While Hezbollah has no chance of taking over Lebanon, it does represent a significant asset for Iran's radical goals.[1]

Iran sought the same ends in its war with Iraq over control of the Gulf. On that front, however, the deadlock on the battlefield prompted Tehran to trade American hostages for U.S. help in destroying U.S. interests. Having already scored partial victories over America in the 1979-81 hostage and 1982-83 Lebanon crises, Tehran again outmaneuvered Washington during the 1985-86 secret arms and hostages dealings, when the United States yielded too much in trying to appease a radical state.

Unable to win the war and facing economic decline, Tehran was bargaining from a position of weakness. Tehran's difficulty in obtaining arms, largely due to U.S. efforts, pressured it to end the war. By unilaterally easing these constraints, the Reagan administration heightened Iran's arrogance and intransigence, offering it an apparently cost-free escape from the dilemma. To sell anti-aircraft missiles when Iran was suffering from Iraqi air attacks on its oil industry, or anti-tank weapons when Iraq's defensive positions depended largely on tanks, played into the hands of Iran's militancy.

U.S. policy should have been tough and patient, showing Tehran that it must act more moderately or risk destruction. Instead of frightening Iran's rulers, however, U.S. policy taught them that a hard line would bring American favors. Iran's leaders thought they had outsmarted a weak foe. While the United States bullied other states, Rafsanjani said, Iran "is so powerful that they come and beg." Ayatollah Khomeini could persuasively tell his people that the Islamic Republic had confronted and defeated the Great Satan on three occasions.[2]

Iran provoked U.S. military intervention by attacking neutral shipping in the Gulf. When Kuwait asked the United

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[1] See, for example, *New York Times*, October 5, 1984 and Martin Kramer, *Hezbollah's Vision of the West*, Policy Paper No. 16 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1989).

[2] *FBIS*, November 5, 1986, p. 16.

States to convoy its tankers and American forces came to the
Gulf in 1987, Iran was taught a very different lesson. The
convoys went through and American forces did not hesitate to
fire on Iranian ships that tried to interfere. These
confrontations culminated in a U.S. warship accidentally
shooting down an Iranian passenger plane in July 1988.
Ayatollah Khomeini was so shaken by this tough American
response, that fearing further attacks, he quickly accepted an
end to the Iran-Iraq War the following month.

In all, almost 500 Americans have died since Iran's
revolution, as a result of that country's actions. But Iran's
subversive behavior is by no means a matter of history. It
continues even under Prime Minister Ali Akbar Hashemi
Rafsanjani's ostensibly moderate regime. In October 1991,
Tehran held a meeting of militant groups to undermine the
Arab-Israeli peace process and promote Islamic revolution.
When Algeria's secular nationalist rulers barred Islamic
fundamentalists from power in 1991, Tehran assisted the rebels
who engaged in urban warfare. In response, the Algerian
regime, complaining of Iran's ingratitude for its past help,
barred Iranian citizens from entering the country.[1]

Iran also supported Shi'ite and fundamentalist groups in
Afghanistan and even shipped arms to Croatia.[2] But its major
new efforts have been directed toward the six former Soviet
republics with high Muslim populations and Sudan. Iran's
Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati was the first to visit
independent Turkmenistan in late 1991. Tehran rushed to
open commercial and political links with Tajikistan,
Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan, and Kazakhstan. These
governments also seek U.S. aid; most of them are Sunni
Muslims and closer kin to Turkey, which can offer more in
material terms. Still, Iran can gain some influence, especially

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[1] *New York Times,* January 19, 1992. Even more recently, Iran has been
implicated in the March 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos
Aires, Argentina.

[2] *Washington Post,* September 10, 1992.

with growing Islamic fundamentalist opposition movements there.[1]

Sudan is a clearer success story for Tehran. In December 1991, a top-level Iranian delegation—led by the prime and defense ministers, intelligence chief, and Revolutionary Guard commander—signed a mutual defense pact with Khartoum. The two Islamic regimes' cooperation in promoting terrorism and subversion makes other countries nervous. Egypt has warned Iran to stop interfering in its zone of influence. Both the assassin of its parliament speaker and a key figure behind President Anwar al-Sadat's murder had been given refuge there. Algeria accused Sudan of funneling Iranian funds to its Islamic opposition. Tunisia's president called Khartoum the center of a fundamentalist international. Even Nigeria expressed concern. Sudan-based Iranian interference to help a favored faction in Somalia encouraged the warfare that spawned massive starvation there.[2]

Sudan, said a U.S. official, "is the first place" where Iran has found "a regime that's a willing supporter." It gave Sudan $35 million in credits for arms. U.S. government sources estimate $10-20 million more went to promote Islamic radicalism. Revolutionary Guards were dispatched to train extremists. Iran's Ambassador to Sudan, Majid Kamal, had previously helped form Hezbollah in Lebanon. Among other Iranian assets operating from Sudan are the Abu Nidal group, Hezbollah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, and the Islamic Jihad for the Liberation of Palestine. No wonder a U.S. official commented that, "The Iranians have a dangerous program. It's vast. The target is not just the north—Egypt and North Africa—but also the south, into [sub-Saharan] Africa, with the creation of Islamic states being the goal." [3]

Only in Iraq does Iranian subversion, by supporting anti-Saddam Shi'ites, seem to coincide with U.S. policy. But, of course, a Tehran-dominated Iraq—which is extremely

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[1] *Washington Post*, February 14, 1992; *New York Times*, March 22, 1992; *Financial Times*, April 15 and June 23, 1992.

[2] *Washington Post*, March 12, 1992.

[3] *Washington Post*, January 31, 1992.

unlikely—would merely let Iran pose a bigger threat to the area. The U.S. government warned Iran in 1992 not to take advantage of its own pressure on Baghdad to foment a Shi'ite rebellion in southern Iraq.[1]

Rafsanjani is no reckless fanatic dedicated to spreading fundamentalism at the risk of losing power. He has urged "prudence" and, as early as 1985, said Iran would some day renew diplomatic relations with the United States when it showed "repentance for the wrongs it has done in the past."[2] In the April 1992 parliamentary elections, Rafsanjani's faction defeated the more hardline candidates, sometimes barring them from the ballot.[3]

While there are no true moderates in power in Tehran, there are also relatively few fanatics. The rulers couple extreme rhetoric with rather cautious behavior, recognizing the difference between free talk and costly, dangerous acts. They do not hesitate to crush true believers who attack them for being too pragmatic, for rejecting utopian fiscal policies and for refusing to risk war in trying to overthrow neighboring regimes.

Iran's weakness and interests made it refrain from helping Iraq in the Kuwait crisis, despite domestic extremists urging a holy war against Western forces in the Gulf. Instead, Tehran seized the chance to improve relations with Saudi Arabia, resolve commercial and hostage issues with the United States, and seek investment and loans vital for economic development and reconstruction from European states and Japan.[4]

Iran faces many problems. Its economy is in bad shape, suffering from high inflation and unemployment. Yet attracting Western investment and loans is difficult since Iran seems a risky commercial venture. Radicals block privatization and measures needed to improve economic or

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[1] *New York Times*, August 25, 1992.

[2] *Iran Times*, July 12, 1985.

[3] *New York Times*, April 8, 13, 14, 19 and May 10, 1992; *Washington Post*, April 13, 14, and 28, 1992; and *Wall Street Journal*, April 13, 1992.

[4] Iran played both sides; it negotiated a favorable settlement with Iraq as a result of outstanding Iran-Iraq War issues.

political relations with the West.[1] Meanwhile, Iran remains
isolated on a diplomatic level and the dream of spreading the
revolution has largely failed. Few Arabs or foreign Muslims
follow the revolutionary teachings once propagated by
Khomeini; thus far Iranian-backed terrorist groups have failed
to take over their countries.

Iran's potential threat, however, cannot be dismissed by
assuming that the regime has become moderate.[2] First, Iranian
expansionism is motivated by nationalism as well as
fundamentalism. Iran as a nation-state still seeks primacy in
the Gulf. For example, the Shah seized three Gulf islands in
1971 to further his ambitions in this direction. But it was the
Islamic regime that expelled the remaining Arab residents in
1992.[3]

Second, keeping domestic radicals happy has proved more
important to the Rafsanjani regime than rebuilding links to
the West. Continuing Iranian-sponsored terrorism has
included abortive attempts to bomb a U.S. passenger plane in
Europe (foiled by West German police), the 1991 killing of
exiled former Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar and the
murder of a Japanese translator for Salman Rushdie's *The
Satanic Verses*, along with the March 1992 bombing of Israel's
embassy in Argentina, killing twenty-nine and wounding
over 200 people, and an assassination attempt on Rushdie
himself in July 1992.[4]

Third, Iran is working tirelessly to regain its military
strength. It is buying planes, missiles and nuclear technology
from the ex-Soviet republics, China, and North Korea. Robert
Gates, then director of the Central Intelligence Agency,
warned in January 1992 of Iran's "across-the-board effort to

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[1] See, for example, *Washington Post*, October 19, 1992.

[2] For further analysis see Patrick Clawson, *Iran's Challenge to the West:
How, When, and Why*, Policy Paper No. 33 (Washington, D.C.: The
Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993).

[3] *New York Times*, April 16, 1992; *Washington Post*, September 25, 1992.

[4] *Washington Post*, April 21, 1992; *New York Times*, July 25, 1992. See also
CIA Director James Woolsey's testimony to the Senate Judiciary
Committee, on Iran as a leading sponsor of terrorism, April 21, 1993.

develop its military and defense industries [including]...weapons of mass destruction not only to prepare for the potential re-emergence of the Iraqi special weapons threat, but to solidify Iran's preeminent position in the Gulf and Southeast Asia." China sold Iran a small reactor and an isotope separator, though international pressure forced Argentina to cancel an atomic cooperation deal. The head of German intelligence predicted in early 1992 that within ten years Iran could build its own nuclear weapon.[1]

Iranian leaders openly talk of an "Islamic" bomb. For example, Ayatollah Mohajerani, a deputy president, urged Islamic countries to pool their resources toward this end. A new air force is being created, augmented by planes flown from Iraq during the Gulf War, Russian MiG-29s and Su-24s, and Chinese F-7s. Submarines and T-72 tanks are being purchased from ex-Soviet stocks. The *Wall Street Journal*'s prophecy that Iran will be "one of the biggest winners in the 'new world order'" and Rafsanjani's prediction that Iran is "the base of the new movement of the world of Islam" will hinge on how these arms are used.[2]

The key question for Washington is what Tehran will do when it has rebuilt its army and overcome the trauma of defeat in the war with Iraq. U.S. determination to act decisively is going to be a major factor in determining what policy Rafsanjani and his successors will follow.

The issue of normalizing relations with Iran presents U.S. policymakers with a serious problem. The hope may be that a more accomodating U.S. policy can moderate Iran. The danger is that helping Tehran now to escape isolation and restore its battered economy can enable it to pursue radical goals later, including the subversion of other states, terrorist attacks on U.S. targets, and direct efforts to gain hegemony in the Gulf.

IRAQ

Saddam Hussein has launched two wars in an attempt to gain hegemony over the Gulf. There is no sign that he and his

[1] *Washington Post*, February 2, 1992.

[2] Gerald Seib, *Wall Street Journal*, March 18, 1992.

colleagues are going to give up that ambition. At the moment, Saddam is on the defensive. But his objective is to be dangerous again in the future by outwitting international sanctions, rebuilding his army, obtaining unconventional weapons, and being accepted back into Arab ranks. At that point, he will continue trying to expand his power and gain revenge on those who defeated him without destroying him. Despite external pressure and internal problems, Saddam is likely to remain in control and Iraq will probably remain united, but these outcomes cannot be taken for granted.[1]

Iraq's ambition to control the Gulf and rule the Arab world dates back to the 1930s, when ideologists began to portray their country as the Prussia of the Middle East.[2] Saddam has built on—not invented—attitudes already inculcated into Iraq's elite and people. He promoted Iraqi nationalism to unite the country's disparate population of Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim Arabs and Kurds.

Over the years, Iraq's radicalism manifested itself by an alliance with the USSR, a hard line on the Arab-Israeli conflict, support for terrorism, and a drive to conquer the Gulf.[3] While Iraq emphasized militant opposition to Israel, the lack of a common border limited Baghdad's direct part in the conflict. It acted mostly through extreme rhetoric, encouraging anti-Israel terrorism and opposing any diplomatic solution. After

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[1] On Iraq's stability and future prospects, see Laurie Mylroie, *Iraq: Options for U.S. Policy*, Policy Focus No. 21 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993) and Ofra Bengio, *Baghdad Between Shi'a and Kurds*, Policy Focus No. 18 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1992). See also, *New York Times*, June 16, July 6 and 7, and August 27, 1992; *Washington Post*, January 7, February 24, June 19 and 20, August 7 and 23, 1992. On Iraq's hidden unconventional weapons see *New York Times*, April 20, July 31, and November 12, 1991; *Washington Post*, April 20, 1991.

[2] On the history of Iraq's ambitions and radical nationalism, see Barry Rubin, *The Arab States and the Palestine Conflict* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1981), pp. 54-65.

[3] Alliance notwithstanding, Saddam never subordinated himself to the USSR. In 1972, Iraq signed a friendship treaty with Moscow, but in 1978 the regime destroyed the Iraqi Communist party and the following year denounced the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Egypt made peace with Israel, Baghdad, aiming to isolate Cairo, was an active member of the rejectionist front, which included Syria and Libya.

Iraq used terrorism in a variety of ways. It murdered anti-regime exiles who had taken refuge in England, South Yemen, Kuwait, and Sudan. In 1982, Iraqi agents tried to kill Israel's ambassador to London, triggering Israel's invasion of Lebanon.[1]

But the most important Iraqi initiative by far was its 1980 attack on Iran. Saddam invaded his neighbor for both defensive and offensive reasons: fearing Tehran's fundamentalist subversion, but trying to take advantage of Iran's weakness and isolation to seize hegemony in the Gulf. For its part, U.S. policy did not want to push Iran toward its powerful Soviet neighbor, but it had to stop Khomeini from spreading revolution, encouraging terrorism, and destroying U.S. influence in the Gulf. Iran was the greater immediate threat to U.S. interests and therefore during the eight-year-long Iran-Iraq War, U.S. policy tilted covertly toward Baghdad and U.S.-Iraqi relations improved.

Yet, while some U.S. policymakers thought they were moving Baghdad toward moderation, Baghdad's goals and general behavior did not change. When an Iraqi warplane attacked the USS Stark in 1987, killing thirty-seven Americans, the U.S. government accepted Saddam's claim that it was an accident, though Iraq did not cooperate with the investigation. The White House opposed congressional sanctions against Iraq for using chemical weapons on its Kurdish minority. It ignored Iraqi violations of stipulations under which it was allowed to buy U.S. equipment, such as helicopters, and played down Baghdad's drive for unconventional weapons. In short, the United States was teaching Saddam—as it had Iran—that he could get away with radical activities.[2]

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[1] Ian Black, "Iraqi Intelligence Colonel Led Terrorists in Bid to Kill Envoy," *Guardian*, March 7, 1983. Abu Nidal's terrorist group carried out this operation for Baghdad as well as attacks on the PLO and others.

[2] The details lie beyond the scope of this paper, but see for example, Barry Rubin, *Cauldron of Turmoil: America in the Middle East* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992) and Kenneth Timmerman, *Death Lobby: How the West Armed Iraq* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1991).

The Iran-Iraq War ended in 1988, but U.S. policy continued to help Saddam. During the next two years, the United States provided a large amount of credits and loan guarantees to Iraq, while the Bush administration was relatively lax on allowing arms and high technology to flow into Baghdad. Equally dangerous was the U.S. failure to respond to Iraq's growing radical agitation and anti-American threats.[1]

The period leading up to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was yet another cycle of U.S. policy that led Baghdad to think that America was too timid to oppose its expansionist designs. The United States largely ignored Iraq's unconventional weapons' tests, threats against Israel, and ultimatum to Kuwait. Typical of the administration's approach was Assistant Secretary of State John Kelly's May 1990 congressional testimony: "The fundamental goal of U.S. policy towards Iraq is to influence Iraq to play the responsible regional role that its new power requires." He emphasized Iraq's "legitimate security concerns" and called Saddam's belligerent statements, "An attempt to deter what he genuinely fears is an imminent Israeli

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[1] Among the most useful items in the extensive literature on U.S.-Iraq relations between 1988 and 1990 are: *Washington Post*, August 8 and 13, September 16 and 17, 1990, February 25, March 17 and 22, April 29, and May 9, 1992; *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1990; Paul Gigot, "A Great American Screw-Up," *The National Interest*, Winter 1990-1991. Henry B. Gonzalez, "BNL, Iraq and the CCC Program." Numerous internal government documents on these issues were released by the House of Representatives Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs Committee. See, for example, State Department memo "The Iraqi CCC Program," October 26, 1989; *The Economist*, October 27, 1990; State Department report, "Unauthorized BNL Lending to Iraq," August 1989; Report of House Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs Committee, February 3, 1992; Rep. Henry Gonzalez letter to President George Bush, January 31, 1992, statement by Rep. Henry Gonzalez to the House of Representatives on the BNL investigation, January 21, 1993; and Rep. Henry Gonzalez letter to President William Clinton, January 22, 1993. See also House of Representatives Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs Committee, *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL)*, April 9, 1991; *Iraqi and Banca Nazionale del Lavoro Participation in Export-Import Programs*, April 17, 1991; *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro Affair and Regulation and Supervision of U.S. Branches and Agencies of Foreign Banks*, October 16, 1990; *The Banca Nazionale del Lavoro Scandal and the Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation Program for Iraq*, part one, May 21, 1992.

attack...[Iraq] is signaling that it wants to bring U.S.-Iraq relations back to a more positive level... Instead of isolating Iraq we will only wind up isolating ourselves [by imposing sanctions]."[1]

Of course, the United States eventually did oppose Iraq's aggression quite effectively after the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. But at the war's end, the Bush administration's refusal to overthrow Saddam constituted yet another round of "soft" policy toward the Baghdad dictatorship. The underlying premise was to maintain Iraq's unity and basic strength in order to ensure a regional balance of power and to avoid alienating other Arabs.[2]

This philosophy was wrong on two counts: First, the area's stability—and the Gulf monarchies' security—was guaranteed not by an Iran-Iraq balance in which both sides threatened Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, but by U.S. strength at the head of a global alliance committed to defend the Gulf monarchies. Preserving the power of Baghdad and Tehran simply continued a system in which they took turns in subverting regional stability.

Second, the moderate states wanted the threat from Baghdad curbed. Even if Saudi Arabia opposed Saddam's overthrow in February 1991, Riyadh had a different view by

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[1] *Ibid.* See also, *Washington Post*, September 23, 1990. April Glaspie's testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, March 20, 1991; House Foreign Affairs Committee, *United States-Iraqi Relations*, March 21, 1991. For an early critique of administration policy toward Iraq's unconventional weapons programs, see *United States Policy Toward Iraq: Human Rights, Weapons Proliferation, and International Law*, hearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, June 15, 1990.

[2] This is a complex issue whose details lie beyond this paper's scope, but it seems fair to say the United States could have continued the war for a brief time, thus indicating that fighting would continue until Saddam was overthrown. This would have put sufficient pressure on Iraq's elite–or encourage the opposition enough—to unseat the dictator. This strategy would not have required U.S. occupation of Baghdad, long-term presence in Iraq, or many American casualties. Obviously, there is no way to ultimately prove this assertion or the Bush administration's more pessimistic scenario.

the year's end, when it was too late.[1] The Arab states were not rejecting an "infidel" state injuring a "brother" Arab regime, but rather wanted America to protect them from Iraq. A strong, unchallenged American superpower seemed a more attractive ally that would render it unnecessary for them to appease Saddam.

While U.S. policy did not work to bring about Saddam's overthrow at the war's end, it did work hard thereafter to ensure that international sanctions and pressures continued. The Bush administration started to increase its support for the Iraqi opposition and covert anti-Saddam efforts in late 1991. Yet there were still signs of the earlier policy as well. When Iraqi warplanes began flying again in April 1992, for instance, Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams issued a statement saying that—despite the cease-fire rules—the sorties were "technically...not a violation" because of a later UN resolution. Accepting Iraq's action in April required creating a no-fly zone in southern Iraq five months later. While the United States claimed victory in resolving Iraq's refusal to let UN inspectors enter its Agriculture Ministry to search for material on unconventional weapons, Saddam had arguably outmaneuvered his enemies. One could well question whether he still feared a U.S. attack as a credible punishment.[2]

In short, the United States has no reason to go easy on Saddam and Iraq. Once again, the case of Iraq shows that the most dangerous policy idea in dealing with Middle East dictators is to try to moderate radical regimes by being nice to them. What is needed instead is to demonstrate overwhelming power so that ambitious anti-American rulers will avoid confrontations.

LIBYA

Although geopolitical and historical explanations can be adduced for Libya's foreign adventurism, it is in the final analysis the product of one man's will. Muammar Qadhafi's

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[1] *New York Times*, January 19, 1992.

[2] *Washington Post*, April 8, 1992. This has been amplified by the inaction in the wake of the recent alleged assassination attempt of President Bush by Iraqi operators in Kuwait.

political motive is an ambition to lead the Arabs. His grudge against America arises from Washington's assistance to countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Chad—as well as Israel— that Qadhafi wants to conquer. Given his own plans and behavior, Qadhafi—like Assad and Saddam—thinks it only logical that America should be out to get him. While Qadhafi's extremism is menacing, his ineptness and Libya's relative weakness make him vulnerable.

A review of some recent history is in order here. The U.S.-Libyan conflict grew throughout the 1980s. In 1979, a government-induced mob burned down the U.S. embassy in Tripoli. The next year, the United States closed Libya's embassy in Washington. In 1981, U.S. fighters shot down two Libyan warplanes in a clash over the Mediterranean. The following year, the U.S. government banned imports of Libyan petroleum, at a time the United States was still buying 40 percent of Libya's oil. Even so, as late as 1985, U.S.-Libyan exports were almost $1 billion a year.[1]

Terrorism has been Qadhafi's chief forum of confrontation and provocations have escalated when the West refused to confront him in return. Qadhafi told his people in 1980 that emigre opponents "should be physically liquidated" wherever they have sought asylum. Indeed, eleven were killed in 1980-81; five murder attempts occurred in 1985. In March 1984, a bomb planted against Libyan emigres injured twenty-four people in England. The next month, Libyans fired from their embassy in London at a peaceful demonstration by Libyan exiles, killing a British policewoman and wounding eleven emigres. Due to Libyan pressure, those suspected of shooting from the embassy into the street were allowed to leave the country.[2]

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[1] *London Times*, June 9, 1986; *Congressional Quarterly*, "Reagan Tightens Economic Sanctions on Libya," January 11, 1986, p. 59.

[2] Amnesty International, *Political Killings by Governments*, (London, 1983). After two Libyan attempts to murder exiles in Cairo, the Egyptians faked pictures of a successful killing in 1984. When Libya's official media praised the deed, Egypt released tapes of confessions from four arrested Libyan agents on their involvement. Another Libyan hit team planning to attack the U.S. embassy in Cairo was foiled by Egyptian intelligence

Libya often used Abu Nidal as its agent. In December 1985, members of Abu Nidal's terrorist organization launched concurrent attacks at the airports of Rome—twelve killed (including five Americans) and seventy-four wounded—and Vienna—two killed and over forty wounded. Libya's official news agency praised the murders as "heroic." Tunisia reported that the Tunisian passports used by the Vienna terrorists had been confiscated by Libya from workers it had previously deported.

A year later, Libya bombed a West Berlin discotheque frequented by U.S. servicemen, killing two and injuring 230; it was learned that the regime was building a large plant for making chemical weapons; its armed forces fired missiles at U.S. aircraft over the Gulf of Sidra, and Libyan agents bombed a U.S. plane over Greece, killing six people. Qadhafi's attacks on Americans led President Reagan to denounce "armed aggression against the United States under established principles of international law, just as if [Libya] had used its own armed forces." It was necessary "to exact from Qadhafi a high price for his support and encouragement of terrorism."[1]

The United States retaliated with an air raid on Libya in 1986.[2] Predictions that the attack would unite Arabs against U.S. interests in the area were wrong. "Revenge and Anger Resound in Arab World," read the headline in one American news magazine.[3] Yet while Arab governments made ritualistic, rhetorical criticisms of the raid, none of them did anything to help Qadhafi. They were even unable to agree on an agenda or site for a Libyan-proposed Arab summit to discuss the issue. OPEC rejected Qadhafi's call for an oil boycott; Algeria did not delay sending a high-level delegation to Washington to improve bilateral relations. Egypt let a U.S.

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in November 1985. Ihsan Hijazi, "Terror: Americans as Targets," *New York Times*, November 26, 1985.

[1] Text in *Washington Post*, January 8, 1986.

[2] Polls showed that 76 percent of Americans supported the raid and were willing to endorse additional attacks. See, for example, *Gallup Report*, "Americans Sanction More Raids if Libyan Terrorism Continues," No. 247, April 1986, pp. 2-11; *Washington Post*, April 30, 1986, p. A-4.

[3] *U.S. News and World Report*, April 28, 1986.

aircraft carrier transit the Suez Canal and quietly signaled approval, as did other states. In 1989, U.S. planes shot down two more Libyan fighters with similar limited response.[1]

Qadhafi was isolated in the region. But did the attacks affect Libyan behavior? Understanding his vulnerability, Qadhafi stopped supporting terrorist attacks for about two years. At the same time, though, he retaliated by buying British hostage Peter Kilburn from his Lebanese captors and murdering him.[2] In December 1988, Libyan-backed terrorists dramatically blew up an American airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 261 people. Libya was the launching pad for the 1990 attack on Israel that ended with the killing or capture of the terrorists on Nitzonim beach.

All the while, though, Libya's terrorism and subversion yielded it no benefit. As the weakest radical state, Libya lacked a superpower protector or the ability to defend itself from U.S. attacks. Moreover, while U.S. policy had some rationale to court Iran, Iraq, or Syria—in regard to preserving Gulf stability, resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, or limiting Soviet influence—it had no incentive to improve relations with Libya. But fearing a pro-Qadhafi reaction by Arabs and lacking support from West European allies, the United States made no all-out effort to destroy Qadhafi. For example, it trained anti-Qadhafi commandos but never deployed them, ultimately, deactivating the force in 1991.[3]

When, in 1992, Libya refused to extradite two officials indicted by Britain and America for ordering the Lockerbie terrorist bombing and another on a French airliner in Africa in 1989—killing 441 people—the United States led the United Nations to invoke new sanctions.[4] "Terrorists and their state

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[1] *New York Times,* January 5, 1989. See also *Washington Post,* June 19, 1990.

[2] Interviews with U.S. officials.

[3] *New York Times,* March 12 and May 17, 1991; *Washington Post,* March 13 and May 18, 1991.

[4] For a copy of the British indictment, see British Information Services Policy Statement 81/91, November 20, 1991.

sponsors must know there will be serious consequences if they violate international law," said President Bush.[1]

But, again, Qadhafi was more discomfited than imperiled. Like Iran and Iraq, he may only briefly cease extremist activities and make gestures to the West.[2] But as he has done before, he is sure to await better timing and better opportunities to return to his confrontation with America.

SYRIA

Syria's participation in the Gulf War coalition and Arab-Israeli peace talks currently makes it the only radical state that the United States has some incentive to conciliate. Syria's strategic and economic weakness, made deeper by the eclipse of its Soviet patron, forces it to bend to a balance of power favoring America.[3] By no means are the two parties now partners: rather, the United States simply has an upper hand (perhaps temporary) in their long, problematic relationship. U.S. policy may succeed in forcing Syria to make concessions in moving toward peace with Israel and on other issues, but this will happen only if American policymakers take a firm stance, showing Syria that it must behave differently than it has in the past.

Damascus' militant self-image arises from Syria's political culture, the regime's radical ideology, and the dominant Alawite minority's need to prove its nationalist and Islamic credentials to a skeptical Sunni Muslim majority.[4] More than any other state, Syria has exploited pan-Arabism and the

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[1] *Financial Times,* July 23, 1992; *Washington Post,* November 16 and 28, 1991; February 3 and 8, April 3, 1992; *New York Times,* November 16 and 28, 1991; February 1, March 20, June 24 and 28, 1992; *Wall Street Journal,* November 29, 1991.

[2] Judith Miller, "Gadhafi Takes a New Track," *International Herald Tribune,* April 16, 1993.

[3] *New York Times Sunday Magazine,* April 1, 1990.

[4] The Alawites comprise only about 12 percent of Syria's population. On Syria's political culture, see Barry Rubin, *The Arab States and the Palestine Conflict,* op. cit.

Palestinian question for its own interest. Its rationale for expansionism has been its claim to be the guardian of Arabism and that Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank are parts of "Greater Syria." Syria seeks radical change; U.S. interests favor stability. America's friends—Egypt, Israel, Jordan—are long-time Syrian antagonists (or potential targets for intimidation as in the case of Saudi Arabia) and vice-versa.[1]

"Syria's main asset, in contrast to Egypt's pre-eminence and Saudi wealth, is its capacity for mischief," explains Professor Fouad Ajami.[2] Militancy was Syria's main and often sole advantage in the inter-Arab struggle. This asset paid dividends in the form of: dominating war-torn Lebanon; isolating its main rival, Egypt, after the Camp David Accords; intimidating Jordan out of negotiating peace with Israel; splitting the PLO; blackmailing wealthy oil-producing states into giving it money; and excluding Israel, its strongest neighbor, from normal participation in regional affairs.

There are three main issues of contention in U.S.-Syrian relations: terrorism, Lebanon, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Each of them shows the pragmatic roots of Syrian radicalism and the challenge posed to U.S. policy in altering it.

Syria has long been a leading sponsor of international terrorism. Despite some failures, these efforts were relatively fruitful. It encouraged Palestinian terrorism and used Kurdish, Armenian, and Turkish groups to strike covertly at Iran and Turkey.[3] Terrorism was a key tool used by Syria to gain

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[1] On Syria's long-term ideology and goals, see Daniel Pipes, *Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[2] Fouad Ajami, "Arab Road," *Foreign Policy*, No. 47, Summer 1982, p. 16.

[3] See, for example, U.S. Department of Defense, *Terrorist Group Profiles*, (Washington 1988) and U.S. Department of State, *Abu Nidal Organization*, (Washington, 1988). Syria's terrorist assets include the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), the Samir Ghosha branch of the Palestine Liberation Front, the al-Fatah rebels led by Abu Musa, the Palestine Struggle Front, al-Sa'iqa (Palestinian), Abu Nidal's al-Fatah-Revolutionary Council, a branch of (Palestinian) Islamic Jihad led by Ahmad Muhanna, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK, anti-Turkish Kurds). It has significant influence over the Popular Front for

influence over Lebanon. For example, in 1976 it apparently ordered the murder of Kamal Jumblatt, leader of the Druze, for being too independent. Similarly, it killed Christian leader President Bashir Gemayel in 1982 because of his determination to win the civil war and ally with Israel. Syrian forces also let Iranian-backed fundamentalists operate freely in attacking the U.S. embassy and Marine Corps in Beirut during 1982 and 1983.[1]

A second use of terrorism was to fight Israel and prevent a diplomatic solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. At times, this also led Syria to attack the PLO in Lebanon (and to split it in 1983) as a means of controlling the Palestinians or even to attack other Arab states in order to constrain their diplomacy.[2]

During 1982-83 and 1985-86, respectively, King Hussein considered accepting the Reagan Plan and pursuing negotiations with Israel alongside the PLO. In both cases, these efforts broke down due, in part, to Syrian pressure through terrorism. In April 1983, PLO moderate Isam Sartawi was murdered in Portugal by Syrian client Abu Nidal. In October, Jordan's ambassadors to India and Italy were wounded. The following month, a Jordanian security man in Athens was killed and another embassy employee was wounded. In December, an attack in Spain killed one and wounded another

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the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).

[1] See Barry Rubin, "The Uses of Terrorism in the Middle East," in Barry Rubin, ed., *The Politics of Terrorism: Terror as a State and Revolutionary Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1989).

[2] Syria also encouraged al-Amal to attack Palestinian refugee camps in Syria in the 1980s. See, for example, *al-Dustur*, "The Syrian 'peace' following the Israeli 'peace,'" June 3, 1985; *al-Nahar* (Beirut), May 29, 1985. This author has documented the PLO's history and relations with Syria in *The PLO's Intractable Foreign Policy*, Policy Paper No. 3 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1986); *The PLO's New Policy: Evolution Until Victory?*, Policy Paper No. 13 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1989); and *Inside the PLO: Officials, Notables, and Revolutionaries*, Policy Focus No. 12 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1989). See also Andrew Gowers and Tony Walker, *Behind the Myth: Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Revolution* (Great Britain: W.H. Allen, 1990).

diplomat. And through all these events, the possibility of similar actions being applied against them kept Saudi Arabia and Kuwait generously subsidizing Syria.

At the same time, Syria hoped to eliminate relatively moderate PLO officials, like Sartawi, and show that Jordan could not protect moderate Palestinians from Syrian wrath. In December 1984, former West Bank Mayor and PLO Executive Committee member Fahd Kawasmeh, who had taken a softer line on cooperation with Jordan, was killed in Amman. In April 1985, a rocket was fired at a Jordanian airliner taking off from Athens. In July, the Jordanian airline's office in Madrid was attacked and a diplomat was killed in Ankara. In September, a Jordanian publisher was murdered in Athens. The 1986 murders of Palestinian moderate Aziz Shehadeh in Ramallah and Nablus Mayor Zafir al-Masri, on good terms with both King Hussein and Arafat, were traced to PFLP operations from Damascus.[1]

Usually though, Israel was the most important target for Syrian terrorism. Syria stopped attacks directly from its own territory through the Golan Heights since Israel threatened to retaliate. But Syria organized many indirect operations through other Arab states or Europe, and let terrorist groups operate from southern Lebanon. For example, in 1986 Nizar Hindawi convinced his unwitting girlfriend to carry a bomb-laden suitcase on an El Al passenger plane in London. If not discovered by a security man, the explosive would have killed 400 people. Hindawi had come to England on a Syrian government official's passport and his confession implicated Syria's ambassador to Britain, two more Syrian diplomats, and the deputy director of Syrian air force intelligence.[2]

It bears noting that Syria employed terrorism with better results, and at less cost, than its radical counterparts because it used terrorism for limited, well-defined goals, as part of a broader strategy incorporating diplomatic and military leverage. In Lebanon, for example, terrorist attacks served as an adjunct to the Syrian army's presence and to Assad's adroit manipulation of internal Lebanese politics. In addition, Syria

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[1] Barry Rubin, "The Uses of Terrorism," op. cit.

[2] David Ottoway, "Syrian Connection to Terrorism Probed," *Washington Post,* June 1, 1986.

was strong enough in its own right and close enough to the USSR to deter Western military retaliation; Iran and Libya were not under Moscow's protection to the same degree. Syria was also generally more skillful than Libya or Iran in covering its tracks and not boasting about its involvement in terrorism. Since it is hard to find ironclad proof of responsibility for terrorist acts, this policy discouraged Western states from applying sanctions.

Although Syria remains on the U.S. State Department's list of states sponsoring terrorism, President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker went out of their way to exonerate it for the U.S. hostages held in Lebanon and the Lockerbie attack, leading the *Washington Post's* Jim Hoagland to conclude: "Assad has paid a minimal price for improved relations with the West." Shutting down Abu Nidal's operation in Damascus brought back a U.S. ambassador withdrawn in solidarity with Britain after the Hindawi trial. The United States did not closely investigate evidence that Abu Nidal used Damascus airport as a staging point for a September 1986 attack on a Pan American airliner in Karachi, Pakistan, or other cases. After all, what would Washington do if it did find evidence of Syrian sponsorship? Thus, Syria wanted not to be caught in the act, but had little incentive to stop terrorism.[1] After the Kuwait crisis, U.S. leaders claim to have frequently raised the terrorism issue in contacts with Syria. Yet officials admit in private that this was a low priority and did not force Syria to cease its sponsorship of terrorist groups, though operations seem to have decreased for the time being.[2] The conclusion to be drawn here is that Syria may reduce its use of terrorism, but only if U.S. policy really presses it in that direction.

Syria's long-sought dominion over Lebanon now seems more total than ever. Having never recognized Lebanon as an independent state, Syria sent its army into the country in 1975 nominally as a peacekeeping force. But Assad realized that the internecine strife was too complex to resolve and that Lebanon was too fragmented to control completely.

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[1] Jim Hoagland, "A Clean Slate for Syria?," *Washington Post,* September 19, 1987. See this author's article, "Why Assad's Terror Goes Unpunished," *New Republic,* June 2, 1986.

[2] Interviews with U.S. officials.

Instead, Damascus developed three levels of relationships: it created surrogate groups to carry out its will, sponsored clients that would generally support its goals, and used violence to intimidate opponents into appeasing it. The first group included the Syrian Social National party, and the Tripoli Alawite Militia, along with the Palestinian al-Sa'iqa, Abu Nidal, and Ahmad Jibril's PFLP-GC. The 1983 Syrian-backed split in the PLO added new forces to this assortment.

Syria's main clients were the Druze and Shi'ite al-Amal militias plus some smaller Christian groups. Damascus followed a classic divide-and-conquer strategy, seeking to prevent any faction from winning the civil war. Lebanese leaders could choose between generous Syrian subsidies or run the risk of being assassinated by Damascus' minions. Compliance also brought with it arms and the chance to operate in and through the large, Syrian-occupied portion of Lebanon. Damascus used this skillfully-garnered leverage to destroy the May 1983 Lebanon-Israel peace agreement. Later taking advantage of the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, Syria threw Maronite General Michel Awn, its chief local opponent, out of Beirut.[1]

Despite all these activities, though, U.S. policy has been relatively accommodating toward Syrian control in Lebanon since the mid-1980s. In part, U.S. policymakers concluded that they had no alternative. At the same time, though, they believed Damascus also wanted stability there. The 1991 Syrian-brokered Taif Accords greatly reduced fighting by equalizing power between Muslims and Christians, strengthening the central government, and disarming militias. These steps have not reduced Syrian control, however, since the central government remains a virtual puppet. A more serious test of Damascus' intentions was its promise to withdraw from parts of Lebanon by the autumn of 1992, a pledge that Damascus broke. Syria seems unlikely to pull out or give up domination of Lebanon, at least without significant external pressure. Again, the balance of forces and its own weakness may reduce Syria's presence in Lebanon, but only if U.S. policy pushes it to do so.

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[1] Barry Rubin, *The May 1983 Agreement over Lebanon*, FPI Case Studies, 1987.

The same situation is true of Syrian policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict. To be sure, Syria is participating in negotiations, but it will have a difficult time reconciling regime and national interests with a diplomatic settlement.

Syria has long claimed ownership of Israel—and proprietary rights over the PLO—inasmuch as Palestine was part of Syria and of the Arab homeland of which Damascus was champion. Its leaders voiced such ideas since the 1930s, opposing from that time any proposal for Jordan to rule the Arab portion of Palestine. The editor of Syria's official newspaper *Tishrin,* for example, denied the PLO's right to make its own decisions: "We will not tolerate freedom to commit treason or to sell out the cause. Palestine is southern Syria."[1]

When Assad was Syria's defense minister, he oversaw Arafat's arrest in 1966 and refused to aid the PLO in its 1970 war with Jordan. Later as president, he concluded a 1974 disengagement agreement with Israel and closed the Golan to terrorists; he attacked the PLO in Lebanon in 1976, abandoned it when Israel invaded in 1982, and split it in 1983, largely expelling the organization from the country. Syria has always maintained its own puppet anti-PLO groups (including al-Sa'iqa, the PFLP-GC, and Abu Nidal), close relations with some PLO groups (the PFLP and DFLP), and even influential members of Arafat's entourage, like Faruq Qaddumi. Damascus will continue efforts to control the PLO.

Syria, however, helped its own surrogates strike at Israel from southern Lebanon to show that pro-Syrian groups were better fighters than Arafat's PLO. To cite only one example, in July 1985, a twenty-three year-old Lebanese named Haytham Abbas blew up himself and his car at a checkpoint of the Israel-backed South Lebanese Army. The previous day, Abbas had given an interview praising Assad, standing behind his picture, calling the dictator, "The symbol of resistance in the Arab homeland and the first struggler."[2] He belonged to the Lebanese branch of Syria's ruling Ba'th party. Other suicide terrorists also belonged to Syrian-controlled groups.

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[1] Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 348; *Tishrin* (Damascus), July 9, 1983; Rubin, *The Arab States and the Palestine Conflict,* op. cit.

[2] Damascus radio, July 16, 1985 (*FBIS,* July 16, 1985).

Given Israel's strength and Egypt's refusal to fight, Syria was more willing to battle the PLO than the Jewish state. A Syrian-Israeli war remains possible from design or accident, but lacking a reliable superpower or Arab ally, Damascus does not find this an attractive option. Indeed it has carefully avoided such a confrontation by vetoing terrorism across the Golan and keeping its troops out of south Lebanon.

But cautiousness and a fear of war is not in itself a sufficient incentive for Syria to make peace. Syria is participating in direct negotiations with Israel and has even discussed a joint declaration of principles with Israel. For the U.S.-promoted peace process to succeed, however, Syria must believe that a failure to reach a diplomatic solution will result in more isolation, economic hardship, and political pressure. Otherwise, Damascus is likely to keep its cooperation closer to the minimum level needed to avoid punishment from the United States, maintain good relations with U.S. allies, and obtain economic help. If Syria is going to alter its policy, it will result mostly from a U.S. strategy that convinces Assad that change is inescapable.

This point is true because even today—and even in exchange for most or all of the Golan—any peace settlement would be costly for Syrian interests. An Israel that was accepted in the region as a normal power would damage Syria more than ever inasmuch as their interests would still conflict. Israel would try to block Syria's harmful ambitions but under far more favorable circumstances. An Israel aligned with moderate Egypt and Jordan would put Syria in a corner, destroying its hope of ever leading the Arabs. Being unable to use Israel as a threat, Syria would have a hard time persuading the Gulf states to grant it aid. In Lebanon, peace would undermine Syria's rationale for occupation, and Israel could freely compete with Syria for influence there.

Domestic politics also inhibit Syria from reaching a deal with Israel. By making concessions and peace, the Alawite, Ba'thist regime would undermine popular support, letting enemies portray it as a traitor to Arab nationalism and Islam. Nor is Syria's military dictatorship interested in reducing the size of or spending on an army that preserves its rule. Given the country's economic hardships and an uncertain succession to the ailing Assad, resolving the conflict with

Israel would increase the chance for civil war or revolution at home. In short, Syria's hawkishness has been logical.

Syria also has a vested interest in blocking a separate Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian settlement. In the absence of an Israeli-Syrian agreement, such a pact would further isolate Damascus. Syria has always fought against the Palestinians being independent of its influence or Jordan gaining the Palestinian card; it would even want to block an arrangement creating a Palestinian state or a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation. To disrupt a solution, Syria may kill moderate Palestinians, subvert Jordan, and launch terrorism against Israel. Over ensuing years, it would try to dominate a Palestinian or Jordanian-Palestinian policy, indirectly or by force.

Since any diplomatic solution would increase U.S. influence; favor Egypt, Israel, and Jordan over Syria; reduce Syrian influence on the PLO; and make Israel a stronger rival, Syria would be transformed into a second-rate power. In many ways, then, a "no war, no peace" situation—perhaps with new safeguards—would seem more attractive to Syria than a diplomatic resolution capped by a peace treaty and mutual recognition. Syria may not want to fight Israel directly but there are significant restraints to its making peace. At the same time, Damascus does want to ease tensions and remain on good terms with the United States, with the attendant benefits thereof, by taking a more flexible line. U.S. policy must, therefore, convince Syria that the minimum price for its acceptance is to move seriously toward peace.[1]

While U.S. supremacy in the area is a major defeat for Syria, the Kuwait crisis helped Damascus move toward Washington without forcing it to make material concessions.[2] On the eve of Iraq's 1990 invasion, Syria was in dire circumstances. As Moscow's best regional ally, it was the state most hard-hit by the decline of Soviet power. Damascus was on bad terms with all its neighbors, threatened by Saddam's drive

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[1] *Financial Times*, March 18, 1992; *Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 1991. Permitting Syrian Jews to emigrate is an example of Assad's efforts to make gestures to Washington.

[2] This process is documented in Daniel Pipes, *Damascus Courts the West: Syrian Politics, 1989-91*, Policy Paper No. 26 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1991).

for leadership, undermined by the end of Saudi subsidies, bogged down in Lebanon's civil war, and short of money for buying weapons.[1]

The Kuwait crisis, however, allayed most of these problems. The Assad dictatorship, despite its human rights violations and support for terrorism, was now on the side of the "Free World." The U.S. defeat of Saddam weakened Syria's most determined foe and rival for Arab leadership. The coalition which had gone to war to save Kuwait from Iraq turned a blind eye to Syria's solidifying its control over Lebanon. Assad escaped from his isolation in the Arab world. Saudi Arabia gave his economically prostrate government $2 billion, much of which it spent on buying arms from Moscow.[2]

Syria cooperated with the coalition because it, too, was threatened by Saddam's potential control of the Gulf and its oil supplies. Saddam could subvert Syria if he became the Arabs' hero. In August 1990, there were reported pro-Iraqi riots in Syria. Thus, Assad had to ensure Saddam's defeat. Syria urged Iraq's people to overthrow Saddam, encouraged Iraqi opposition groups, and sent its soldiers to help liberate Kuwait. It demanded that Saddam withdraw from Kuwait and restore the monarchy, even hinting it would do nothing if Israel retaliated against Iraq's missile attacks on it.[3]

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[1] On Syria's military strategy and capabilities, see Michael Eisenstadt, *Arming for Peace: Syria's Elusive Quest for "Strategic Parity,"* Policy Paper No. 31 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1992).

[2] On Syria's handling of these problems see, for example, *Washington Post,* January 18 and December 12, 1989; July 15 and 17, August 9, September 11, and November 24, 1990. *New York Times,* January 10, 1989 and July 15, August 9 and 25, and September 11, 1990. On Syria's human rights record, see Middle East Watch, *Human Rights in Syria* (New York, 1990).

[3] *Al-Diyar* (Beirut), August 11, 1990, *(FBIS,* August 14, 1990). See, for example, *FBIS,* August 9 and 30, 1990; *Tishrin,* August 15, 1990; *al-Yawm al-Sabi* (Paris), August 27, 1990; *al-Nahar* (Beirut), August 30, 1990; *al-Hayat* (Beirut), August 31, 1990; *al-Quds* (Jerusalem), August 30, 1990; *Wall Street Journal,* September 27, 1990; *New York Times,* October 11, 1990 and February 10, 1991; and *Washington Post,* November 9, 1990.

Today, Assad's most important priority must be to prevent the region's and indeed the world's strongest power—the United States—from attacking Syrian interests. While avoiding U.S. pressure is in Assad's interest, real moderation can damage the regime's domestic survival and foreign ambitions. The more that Washington accepts Syria's traditional behavior, then, the greater will be the distinction between Damascus' need to keep the United States happy through public relations gestures, and the requirement that Syria really change its orientation.

Another area where Syria will test the limits of U.S. tolerance is in its drive to obtain unconventional weapons. As U.S. forces watched, but did not interfere with, a North Korean freighter carrying missiles to Syria—limiting themselves to insuring they would not go to Iraq—Damascus reacted angrily and asserted it would acquire any arms "according to our needs."[1]

There is an old American tradition of overestimating the reliability of temporary allies who act in U.S. interests from expedience. It happened with Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War and threatens to recur with U.S.-Syrian relations, creating the danger that Syria will become America's Iraq of the 1990s. Perhaps the United States has misunderstood an old Arab proverb which might be better translated as: "The enemy of my enemy is my temporary friend whom I will not trust and will help only on the narrowest points where it is confronting my enemy."

Despite their cooperation on the Kuwait issue, Syria and the United States are not allies or friends. As in the cases of Libya, Iran, and Iraq, their basic interests and goals are still in conflict. U.S. strategy will in large part determine whether Syria discovers that radicalism is too dangerous to pursue in the future.

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[1] *Washington Post*, March 13, 1992.

III THE USES OF SUPREMACY

The United States is currently the world's sole superpower and the Middle East's hegemonic force. This does not mean it can do whatever it wishes, but it does give U.S. policy more freedom to set an agenda than ever before. Discussion of the U.S.' problematic relations with the radical states, therefore, becomes all the more necessary. The key questions include: How actively does the United States wish to intervene in the region? Should it ignore troublesome regimes—on the theory that their threats and hostile acts are tolerable—or try to force them to cease? What priorities will it assign to different interests? How effectively can U.S policy develop a coherent strategy and then coordinate it with European and Middle Eastern allies?

Many observers persist in believing that radical or anti-American forces can be dissuaded from their ideology and ambition by a demonstration of American goodwill. Yet as this paper has shown, these governments are not going to be convinced by kind words or concessions that the United States is their friend. If they fear U.S. power and face its pressure they will be cautious. If they conclude that America is weak, uncertain, or ready to appease them, these regimes will engage in subversion, terrorism, intransigence, or aggression.

Similarly, U.S. policy regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict is not going to transform these regimes. They dislike the United States, not because it is inadequately responsive to Arab sensibilities or Palestinian rights, but because it opposes their respective drives to lead the Arabs (or Muslims) and dominate their neighbors. The conflict is not due to a lack of

communication but rather—at least on the radicals' part—to a correct understanding of the situation. Since they know themselves to be enemies of the United States, they expect the United States to use its power against them.

The above points may seem obvious, but numerous reasons have been adduced for acting otherwise. Appeasement is never presented as such, but rather as a way to avoid unnecessary or unwinnable conflicts, achieve other diplomatic goals, or help American companies and workers gain lucrative business contracts. Qadhafi, Saddam, Assad, and Iran's Islamic regime were thought at various times to be flexible; a U.S. willingness to give ground was said to be a way to reassure them of its good intentions or to compensate them for past American misdeeds.

Offering concessions was portrayed as a way to achieve beneficial dialogue; American pressure, it was said, would invite a similar hardening from the other side, reinforcing the ruler's domestic support, and pushing foreign Arabs or Muslims to support the targeted regime. Building up Iran to counter Iraq, preserving Iraq to counter Iran, tolerating Libya so as not to be "unpopular" with the Arabs, offering real material concessions to Syria in exchange for verbal ones, have not added up to a productive strategy.

The radical regimes have become more cautious, given the U.S. triumph in the Cold War, their loss of a Soviet option, the drubbing Iraq suffered in the Gulf War, and the current, unfavorable balance of forces against them. In this situation, even relatively modest displays of U.S. fortitude can have remarkably salutary effects.

The Kuwait crisis showed again that there is more of a regional constituency for a strong U.S. role than has generally been appreciated. Arabs, Muslims, or even the radical regimes themselves will not unite in outrage to oppose the United States. The radicals cannot mobilize much support outside their own borders. Rather, most Arab regimes prefer to join the winning side and solicit U.S. help to protect themselves from neighbors. Similarly, this experience again showed that a U.S. failure to take a strong stand against aggressive radical states, or against the introduction of new weapons—and open threats to use

them on U.S. allies—will increase, not defuse, the intensity of anti-Americanism and regional conflict.[1]

But the natural temptation for U.S. policy is to return to the kind of balance of power approach which has so frequently led to crises. During the Cold War, of course, this situation was often unavoidable, since the Soviet Union backed the other side in any conflict. Today, however, the United States risks being placed in the ridiculous position of backing both contestants in a quarrel, if not necessarily at the same moment.

This problem is clearest in the Gulf. Historically, the strategic balance there has been a triangle, consisting of Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf monarchies. In the 1970s, U.S. policy supported Iran to deter Iraq; in the 1980s, it backed Iraq to stop Iran. The first round ended with Iran's revolution, the second with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The Bush administration's refusal to destroy Saddam's regime was based partly on the argument that Iraq must be preserved to counter Iran. A U.S. rapprochement with Iran in the near future could be rationalized as strengthening Iran to stop a resurgent Iraq.

Yet Baghdad and Tehran have been nothing more than carnivores competing to see who swallows up Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Since the Gulf monarchies are the real objects of U.S. protection, it would make more sense for the United States to continue helping them directly, in the context of a U.S. position of dominance—for it is Washington, not Iran or Iraq which is the Gulf's protector.[2]

The same basic approach applies to the region's other front. Egypt and Israel are the main U.S. allies there, while Syria, Iraq, and Libya pose potential threats. The PLO, through its own choice, has failed to leave the radical camp. Other intermediate actors—Jordan and the Palestinians—remain timid under

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[1] These issues are discussed in detail in Barry Rubin, *Cauldron of Turmoil: America in the Middle East* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992).

[2] This policy, dubbed "dual containment" was recently outlined by the National Security Council's top Middle East official, Martin Indyk, in a speech to the The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 18, 1993.

tremendous pressure to obey the radicals.[1] They will not quickly or easily change their orientations. Yet while trying to engage Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinians in peace talks, the United States must remember who are its real friends and who are its adversaries.

While remaining a mediator, however, the United States cannot maintain a balance of power that depends on radical states which reject stability in the region. Those who have the power will not keep the balance. Such a symmetry risks setting off wars, since the extremists can decide that the situation offers them enough chances for success to risk subversion and aggression. A policy of U.S. supremacy should strengthen and support U.S. friends in the region—like Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia—giving them the upper hand. In this framework, the moderates, sure of American will and reliability, will not feel it necessary to appease the militants.

U.S. power, then, should be used consistently to cow the regional radicals, forcing them to make concessions and intimidating them away from adventurism. Rather than giving Iran or Syria benefits without pressure, the radicals should be forced to choose between living with steady U.S. pressure or making serious policy changes. Ironically, since these states perpetually accuse the United States of sabotaging them, real U.S. leverage would not change their propaganda line, credibility, or other Arab states' reaction.

Radicals will accuse the United States of being imperialist, something they do in any case. By setting the boundaries of acceptable behavior and by taking an active stand against unacceptable conduct, U.S. policy is more likely to avoid confrontations in the long run. Faced with the certainty of American counter-action, Baghdad and Tehran will keep their hands off the Gulf monarchies, Syria will feel it more necessary to make peace with Israel, and Jordan and the West

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[1] The case of Jordan is particularly complex since King Hussein and his regime are quite friendly to the West despite their radical-sounding statements and pro-Iraqi behavior. Preservation of the Jordanian regime should be a high priority for U.S. policy. Weakening those intimidating it—Iraq, Syria, and the PLO—is, however, the best way to achieve this end. For a helpful analysis see Uriel Dann, *King Hussein's Strategy of Survival*, Policy Paper No. 29 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1992).

Bank Palestinians will want to make progress on resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict.

One of the most significant advantages held by the United States is the radicals' profound disunity. Their mutual conflicts add to the weakness that U.S. policy can exploit. Iran's Persian Islamic fundamentalists cannot find common ground with the secular Arab nationalists of Syria and Iraq. The Iran-Iraq and Iraq-Syria discords will continue because of those respective states' conflicting ambitions, geopolitical contentions, and desire to avenge recent betrayals. Syria also does not want to see Iran become stronger. Libya is too erratic to be trusted by any of the others, and even Qadhafi did not help Saddam during the Gulf crisis.

Iraq and Syria remain rivals, an antagonism fueled by personal antagonism between Assad and Saddam. Each has helped the other's opposition wage armed struggle and attempt coups. Syria apparently backed a 1979 coup attempt against Saddam and has long aided Kurdish rebels; Iraq aided anti-Syrian groups in Lebanon; Damascus and Baghdad have competed for Arab leadership and control of the PLO and goaded each other to greater militancy in the Arab-Israeli conflict.[1]

But while Syria aided Iran somewhat during the Iran-Iraq War, it does not want Tehran to emerge triumphant in the Gulf or in Lebanon. Syria represses its own Islamic fundamentalist opposition, arrests Iranians who try to promote revolution in Damascus, clamps down harshly on pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon that threaten its control there, and

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[1] Iraq shipped arms to anti-Syrian forces in Lebanon. David Butter, "Iraq Challenges Syria for Centre Stage," *Middle East Economic Digest*, October 28, 1988. *Al-Thawra* (Baghdad), April 23, 1989 (*FBIS*, April 25, 1989, p. 29), urged Syrians to overthrow their rulers. On Syrian-Iraqi relations, see Michael Eppel, "Syrian-Iraqi Relations," in Amatzia Baram and Barry Rubin, eds. *Iraq* (currently in press); Amatzia Baram, *Ideology and Power in Syrian-Iraqi Relations 1968-1989* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); and Itamar Rabinovich, "The Changing Prism, Syrian Policy in Lebanon," in Moshe Ma'oz and Avner Yaniv, eds. *Syria Under Assad: Domestic Constraints and Regional Risks* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 127-131; Eberhard Kienle, *Ba'th v. Ba'th: the Conflict between Syria and Iraq 1968-1989* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* op. cit., p. 355; *New York Times*, February 17, 1990; *al-Jumhuriyya* (Baghdad), February 22, 1990.

challenges Iran for influence over Shi'ite opposition forces in Iraq. Although Syria fought Saddam during the Kuwait crisis, it also opposed breaking up Iraq, since it hopes some day to dominate that country.[1]

Though currently reduced to a cold war level, the Iran-Iraq conflict is still very much alive. Both sides regard the 1980-88 battle as merely one round in an on-going struggle, while Iran's rearmament is a direct threat to Baghdad. Iran regards Iraq's regime as un-Islamic, Iraq claims Iran is anti-Arab, and each portrays the other as a servant of U.S. imperialism. They wish to dominate the Middle East, the Gulf, and each other.[2] The Iran-Iraq War settled none of these issues, including their boundary dispute over control of the strategic Shatt al-Arab waterway.

U.S. policy must exploit the radical states' current weaknesses and divisions. The danger for U.S. interests is not that all the radicals will work together, but rather that they would act separately, but parallel, to sabotage Arab-Israeli peace and destabilize the Gulf. A balance of power strategy only makes a worst-case outcome more likely by reducing their fear of U.S. pressure or punishment.

They can be contained—as George Kennan argued correctly in the USSR's case—only if a tough U.S. stand plays its part in a long-term process of persuading them that expansion is impossible and that subversive, extremist behavior endangers them more than it does their enemies. The alternative approach, arguing that the radical states' threat is insignificant, and that U.S. policy can safely disregard them, risks increased regional instability and makes more difficult the task of Arab-Israeli peacemaking.

This is not to say that an increased U.S. military presence or direct intervention is necessary in the Middle East. Such steps may be counterproductive, and are unlikely to appeal to U.S. leaders and a public preferring less activism abroad. As the reflagging episode and Kuwait crisis showed, America's

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[1] Ali Nuri Zadah, "The Clashes of Iranian Tourists in 'The Throbbing Heart of Arabism,'" *al-Dustur* (Amman), Vol. 13, No. 280, April 4, 1983; BBC, *Survey of World Broadcasts*, March 23, 1991.

[2] Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Islam and Arabism: The Iran-Iraq War," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Autumn 1982, pp. 181-188.

strength is not so much the forces actually on the scene but those that can be brought in when necessary. Yet, these facts make all the more important a judicious use of U.S. diplomatic leverage and political pressure to avoid the need for more extreme forms of action at a later date. The best deterrent is to set clear limits of acceptable behavior and the certainty of response if these boundaries are breached.

IV ISSUES FOR U.S. POLICY

American policymakers will find themselves unable to avoid several issues regarding U.S. relations with the radical regimes over the next few years:

U.S.-IRANIAN RAPPROCHEMENT

Detente between Iran and the United States is becoming conceivable for the first time since the 1979 revolution. Financial issues have been settled and American hostages released. Serious problems remain however; including Iran's continued sponsorship of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalist subversion, and unresolved issues, such as Iranian involvement in the Lockerbie attack, the Rushdie affair, as well as antagonistic public opinion in both countries.

Iran does not have to make a fundamental policy choice immediately. Rather, Tehran can work to have its cake and eat it too, pursuing military build-up (including unconventional arms), economic development, and improved relations with Europe and the Gulf monarchies while promoting revolutionary subversion and terrorism at levels just low enough to avoid confrontation. This pattern would be similar to Iraq's behavior in the 1980s. Impelled by its large population and desire to dominate the Gulf—alongside continued ideological ferment—Tehran would await its chance to stage a new advance in a few years.

Iranians hold contradictory attitudes toward the United States. On the one hand, Iran's politicians can be very respectful of U.S. power, which they would prefer to have on

their side. On the other hand, they can readily conclude that America is weak and easily manipulated. The proper approach would be to indicate clearly and unmistakably that the United States will not kowtow to Iran. Rather, it would be very much in the interest of Iranian politicians to be on good terms with the United States to try to win help for themselves and avoid U.S. aid to their rivals.

Since objectively Tehran needs Washington more than vice-versa, there is no sense in the latter's turning a blind eye to Iran's misdeeds in order to gain a rapprochement. Ironically, the disappearance of the Soviet threat on Iran's northern border has deprived Tehran of its best card for winning U.S. support or forbearance. As the Iraqi example demonstrates, it is U.S. sternness rather than softness that will contribute toward Iran's choosing a more moderate path. If Iran is ready to make concessions in order to reestablish relations, the United States can be open to progress, and this may give Rafsanjani an added incentive to repress the extremists at home.[1] But U.S. policy has no compelling interest to give ground in order to improve links to Tehran.

The bottom line is that Iran must know with absolute clarity that aggression or subversion of Saudi Arabia and smaller Gulf states, acquisition of nuclear weapons, terrorist campaigns, or attempts to wreck the Arab-Israeli peace process will bring an appropriate response. U.S. policy must succeed in doing with regard to Iran in the 1990s what it failed to achieve with Iraq in the 1980s.

POLICING AND PUNISHING IRAQ

The U.S. bluff against Iraq has already been called once by Saddam, and American willingness to go to war proved to be no bluff. Yet Saddam remains in power and defies UN resolutions, stopping just short of confrontation. The sanctions against Iraq are still in place; Kurdish autonomy in the north is

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[1] The main opposition is even more radical than the current rulers. At any rate, moderates or exiles are unlikely to take over as Iran is relatively democratic for the Islamic Middle East. Although anti-regime groups are barred from elections, a variety of opinions is represented in parliament thus defusing pressures on the regime. The Rafsanjani regime has managed the armed forces without significant problems.

under international protection. The question is how long this whole structure can be maintained.

Whatever the United States would like Iraq to believe, it seems unlikely that the U.S. military will actually attack under current conditions. Moreover, pressure to reduce sanctions can be expected to grow. Iraq has ample hidden financial reserves and can find sufficient holes in the trade restrictions to survive. With the worst over, Saddam seems able to maintain his power. The United States can hope that officers will overthrow the dictator, but this is more likely than not to be wishful thinking. The situation, in short, is one of deadlock.[1]

If U.S. policy does not find a way to revitalize the pressures on Iraq, time is likely to be on Baghdad's side. Saddam will look for an opportunity to crush the Kurds and reestablish his control over the north. The Arab states and Turkey may waver in their determination to quarantine Saddam. Europeans and Asians, motivated both by the pursuit of profits and misplaced humanitarian concerns about Iraq's people, may push to bring down barriers or simply ignore them.

U.S. strategy must be based not on best-case hopes but on hard decisions: Will it launch a serious covert campaign to overthrow Saddam? How far will it go to ensure that Baghdad destroys its unconventional warfare capacity? Ultimately, U.S. policy may face a situation in which force could be the only way to show Saddam he cannot out-bluff or out-wait the United States. For example, Iraq's resistance to UN inspections, aggression against Kurds, building of nuclear weapons, or sponsorship of terrorism may confront the United States, literally overnight, with another choice between fighting and backing down.

Washington has found it difficult to set a proper priority for the anti-Iraq effort in U.S. policy. To cite two examples: the administration seemed willing to allow Jordan's sanctions-busting activity in order to keep Jordan cooperative in the peace process. During the Iraqi Shi'ite revolt against Saddam, the

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[1] The best chance to overthrow Saddam was at his weakest point, in March-April 1991. He survived due to ruthlessness, U.S. inaction, the opposition's divisions, the elite's solidarity, and the Sunni community's fear of retribution if the regime fell.

White House was more concerned about a fundamentalist takeover than the continuation of the status quo.

A central, but misleading, debate has been whether U.S. policy should support a partition of Iraq. It should be emphasized here that Saddam's fall does not necessarily mean the country will disintegrate. The regime rests on a system, not just on one man. Despite Saddam's highly centralized power, his colleagues or army officers could maintain existing institutions without him. To escape isolation, they would have ample motive to distance themselves from Saddam's policies. Still, after a period of consolidation and caution they would probably eventually return to Iraq's historic quest for Gulf and regional hegemony.

Even a more substantive upheaval would not necessarily mean Iraq's partition. None of Iraq's neighbors has claims on its territory. Turkey's leaders may dream of gaining northern Iraq's oil fields, but they are not eager to acquire a larger Kurdish minority. At most, Iran might take a tiny contested border area.

While Iran and Turkey oppose carving a Kurdish state from Iraq lest it subvert and inspire their own minorities, autonomy within Iraq—which is what the Kurdish groups demand—is very much in America's interest. Creating an internationally guaranteed region where U.S. policy has special leverage would weaken the threat from any Iraqi central government to the countries of the Gulf.

U.S. policy does not need to worry about maintaining Iraqi strength as part of a Gulf balance of power. As long as it is united—no matter who rules it—its geopolitical weight will inevitably be considerable, since the country's combination of large oil reserves, population, and skilled work force gives it an edge over every other Arab and Gulf state. As long as the United States is willing to be guarantor of sovereignty in the Gulf, no local state can take over. Only if U.S. policy fails to deter them can Iran or Iraq try again to conquer their neighbors.

DETERRENCE IN THE GULF

Rather than a strategic triangle based on Iran-Iraq rivalry to protect Gulf monarchies, U.S. policy should combine direct deterrence with building up local allies. Ironically, this

strategy is enhanced by the failure of the U.S. attempt to broker an "Arab solution"—with the Saudis and Kuwaitis using Egyptian and Syrian forces to defend them. Through direct intervention, the United States has informally built the most effective way of deterring aggression in the Gulf since the British withdrew two decades ago.

The historic failure of the balance of power approach is clear. The first stage of U.S. strategy for protecting Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (1972-1980) was to use Iran as the regional policeman against Iraqi aggression. After Iran's revolution, the practical effect of U.S. policy during its second stage (1982-1990) was to make Iraq the Gulf's protector from Iranian aggression. Now, in a third era, the Kuwait crisis and ensuing Gulf War has made the United States itself the Gulf's defender against both Iraq and Iran, what the Clinton administration has termed "dual containment."

The situation cannot be sustained without U.S. power. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait lack the population and technical skill to defend themselves completely. The Gulf monarchies, grouped together in the GCC, also favor a direct U.S. role, knowing they have less to fear from America than from Arab "brothers." They understandably have far more confidence in the U.S. military than in the Egyptian or Syrian armies. Nonetheless, arms sales to the GCC states are important to give them a deterrent and "trip-wire" capacity, in addition to dealing with internal subversion.

Given this second line of defense, the U.S. deterrent force in the Gulf can remain mostly over the horizon. As memories of the recent war fade, U.S. policy cannot let Baghdad or Tehran forget or underestimate its determination to protect the Gulf. If Riyadh or Kuwait doubt American willpower or its ability to project strength there quickly and effectively, they will return to their old policy of building up—and, hence, strengthening—the radicals.

U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS

At present, the United States has better relations with Syria than with the other radical states. But the two countries' goals and interests remain contradictory and conflict can certainly reemerge. It is U.S. power, not a change of heart, that motivates Syria's current, limited cooperation.

But as long as Syria can retain American tolerance, power in Lebanon, Saudi aid, a militant posture against Israel, an unconventional arms build-up, and terrorist assets without making material concessions, Assad has no reason to do more than put on a conciliatory face. If the United States wants Syria to change its behavior on any of those issues, it must deny Assad any palatable alternative by pressing him on all fronts, even if it lets him escape in the end by making concessions only on the peace process.

At best, Assad knows that the United States is not going to be a major arms supplier or strategic patron for him; at worst, the United States can severely damage Syrian interests. Syria can find other sources for weapons but will find it hard to scrape up enough money and equipment to sustain a dominant posture in conventional weapons. Ironically, this dilemma makes a dependence on non-conventional weapons more attractive. A strong U.S. anti-proliferation stance will bring more friction with Syria. But if U.S. policy fails to take a tough position, the result could be additional crises and even more devastating wars.

In order to achieve its own goals, U.S. policy will have to coordinate political and economic leverage on Syria, tying the benefits Assad can receive to shifts in his position. This would require coordination with Russia (on arms), the Saudis (on money), and Lebanon's government (on sovereignty).

Syria perceives a need to remain in the peace process to keep Washington happy and perhaps to escape its strategic and economic dilemmas. Assad may be considering an alternative policy of easing tensions with Israel to better seek influence in Lebanon, Jordan, and among the Palestinians. But only if Damascus concludes that failing to cooperate is more dangerous than standing pat will it cooperate in making progress. In addition to persuading Syria to cooperate in its own bilateral talks with Israel, the United States must also deter it from wrecking an Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian arrangement. This is not a hypothetical. Despite being more forthcoming in direct talks with Israel, Damascus has simultaneously used its influence on Palestinian groups based in Syria—the "Damascus Ten"—to force the Palestinians into a harder line.[1]

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[1] Barry Rubin, *The Arab States and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process*, Policy Focus No. 17 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East

While the United States wants Lebanon to be stable and sovereign, Syria wants the opposite—continued division within Lebanon that it can exploit in order to control the country. Should a viable, legitimate representative Lebanese central government emerge and all militias be disarmed, U.S. and Syrian interests in Lebanon will diverge. Rebuilding Lebanon requires Syrian withdrawal and a truly free government in Beirut. Assad's refusal to live up to his promise for a partial withdrawal by the end of September 1992 as stipulated in the Taif Accords, with no reaction by Washington, is a dangerous sign.

While U.S. policy may decide that Arab-Israeli peacemaking is a higher priority than Lebanon's future, it can still use pressure over Lebanon to gain Syrian concessions in the peace process. U.S. inaction on this issue has three disadvantages: it sacrifices Lebanon, reduces Syria's incentive to appease the United States in the peace process, and teaches Damascus that it can break its commitments without a strong U.S. response—a certain precedent for an Israeli-Syrian agreement.

Policymakers are often reluctant—as with Iraq before August 1990—to exchange apparent bilateral amity for friction. When U.S. leaders make preserving smooth relations a higher priority than deterring radicals they unwittingly sabotage their own policy and sacrifice their strategic goals. The United States must convince Damascus that it will act forcefully if Syria attacks Israel, tries to wreck a U.S.-brokered Arab-Israeli settlement, or is proven to be behind major acts of anti-American terrorism. Further, it must show Syria that failing to make peace with Israel will produce continued isolation, limits on aid and investment, and U.S. opposition to Syrian interests in Lebanon.

Lacking either Soviet or Arab support, Syria would be inclined to back down. Assad knows the United States has overwhelming power in the world and region. A combination of pressure with coordinated constraints—denial of arms, aid, and secure control over Lebanon—is the only thing that might persuade Assad that a dramatic change of course is in his interests. But if Syria is convinced that the United States is too fearful or passive to act, as was Saddam before January 1991, it

Policy, 1992). The nature of Israel-Syria arrangements on the Golan lies outside the scope of this paper.

is more likely merely to stall for time, alter its rhetoric, and offer only limited, cosmetic shifts.

U.S.-LIBYAN RELATIONS

Although Qadhafi's subversive and terrorist activity has varied over time, he has never abandoned his ambition to overthrow neighboring regimes, block Arab-Israeli peace, and conduct terrorism against the West. Despite UN sanctions, Qadhafi shows no sign of extraditing the officials responsible for the terrorist attacks against the U.S. and French airliners.

The main arguments against a harder line are that Libya is not worth the trouble and that U.S. policy and/or public opinion has more important priorities. But, at a time when the U.S. position is at its strongest and Qadhafi is at his weakest, it makes sense to escalate pressure against him and to persuade Arab and European states to cooperate in this effort. Qadhafi habitually claims the West is striving to overthrow him whether it is or is not; this actually works against him and in no way changes his domestic popularity or regional support.

There is a large margin for tightening anti-Qadhafi measures. His oil income derives from Western European firms and subsidiaries of U.S. oil companies. America's European allies—preferring to seek lucrative Libyan contracts and fearing terrorist reprisals—have usually done nothing in response to his provocations. Believing he had survived America's worst over the years, Qadhafi's confidence grew. The USSR and its East European satellites protected him. Arab states did not target him for overthrow or assassination. He was never forced to change course since threats against him always stopped far short of jeopardizing his rule.

Libya has also been protected by its own impotence: the United States, Arabs, and Europeans have not judged Qadhafi's destruction to be a major priority. But he is also potentially easier to intimidate. The debate over whether sanctions strengthen his popularity at home is irrelevant, since Libya's people do not make policy and will not overthrow him. The real task is to show the elite that it must get rid of a liability who might destroy them all. A weaker Qadhafi is an easier target for an internal coup. The Arab states, even the radical ones, will do little or nothing to help Libya though they are not eager to be involved themselves.

TERRORISM

The four radical states are the main sponsors of terrorism, not just in the Middle East, but throughout the world. All have long opposed a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. While Syria now participates in talks, it could use terrorism to sabotage any settlement it does not like. Diplomatic progress on the issue is thus likely to *increase* terrorism on the part of almost all of the radical states, intensifying friction between them and the United States. The U.S. government will have to block such activity if it wants negotiations to succeed and agreements to be implemented.

International terrorism in the region has flourished as a practical tool of radical states seeking a low-cost, low-risk way to wage war against the United States, Israel, and moderate Arabs. They can strike where and when they wish, while the victims cannot easily deter or punish phantoms hiding behind front groups.[1] The sponsoring governments give terrorists orders, money, safe havens, logistical help, training, arms, diplomatic support, and protection against retaliation. The ability to obtain genuine passports, ship arms and explosives via official diplomatic pouches, and enjoy lavish financing allows Middle East terrorists to operate far more effectively than they otherwise would.

Contrary to much received opinion, terrorism cannot be eradicated by addressing its root causes because these root causes include: Libya's dream of deposing moderate regimes and ruling the Arabs; Syria's goal of ruling Lebanon, subordinating Iraq, and blocking Jordan's peace with Israel; and Iran's goal of fomenting Islamic revolt, gaining hegemony over the Gulf, and eradicating Israel. All these forces want to oust U.S. influence in the region. Obviously, the West cannot compromise with these aims.

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[1] To bomb a TWA airliner for Syria, Abu Nidal's group called itself "Arab Revolutionary Cells." Syria's puppet al-Sa'iqa bombed Jewish institutions in Paris as "Eagles of the Palestinian Revolution." Iran's groups are called "Islamic Jihad," "Guardians of the Islamic Revolution," or "Organization of the Oppressed on Earth"; Libyan surrogates used "Egypt's Revolution" among other names.

Thus, U.S. policy has faced a serious dilemma in dealing with such sponsors. It can choose to live with terrorism or to retaliate against perpetrators. In March 1992, President Bush posthumously awarded medals to murdered American hostages, CIA Station Chief William Buckley and Col. William Higgins; yet nothing was done to punish Iran, the murderers' patron and reportedly the hostages' jailer at times.

The first problem in taking counter-terrorist action has been to meet the level of proof demanded by U.S. policymakers, media, and public that would show persuasively that other states are directing attacks on the United States. Even when this standard is met, other political and strategic interests usually restrain U.S. willingness to invoke political, economic, or military sanctions. Lack of cooperation from European allies has been another difficulty. Finally, fear of failure and casualties—leading to ridicule and domestic political defeat— makes politicians reluctant to act. Events in Lebanon over the last decade—ranging from state-backed car bombings of the U.S. embassy and Marine Corps barracks to the holding and murder of U.S. hostages—amply illustrate this situation.[1]

The current leverage of the United States enables it to demand a higher standard of behavior from the radical states. But will it be willing to threaten—which may be sufficient—or punish those states aiding and abetting such attacks?

The very goal-oriented quality of terrorism makes its backers vulnerable to deterrence. Strong action against the sponsors is not futile even if it does not completely end terrorism. Many world problems can only be ameliorated, not eliminated. Applying diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, or a judicious amount of force can reduce the number and effectiveness of terrorist attacks by making it an unprofitable tactic for the radical state sponsors.

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[1] For case studies on how U.S. policymakers responded to these events, see William Cowan, "Intelligence, Rescue, Retaliation, and Decision Making," and Allan Gerson, "Legitimizing International Terrorism: Is the Campaign Over?," in Barry Rubin, ed., *Terrorism and Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

THE DEMOCRACY ISSUE

Whatever value there is in the idea of spreading democracy in the Middle East, it is of limited relevance in dealing with the radical states. U.S. policy cannot be built on the expectation that these regimes will be overthrown by democratic movements or that they will institute a more pluralist society by themselves. Their rulers are armed with modern weapons, state-of-the-art organizational techniques, and the determination to use any amount of force to stay in power. They have no democratic tradition or independent-minded middle class capable of instituting such a direction.

If new regimes emerge, they will, sadly, almost certainly be new radical and ambitious dictatorships. To some extent, for example, Islamic fundamentalists used the Shah's partial relaxation of political constraints to seize power in Iran. In places such as Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria, the cry of free elections and democracy is manipulated and used by forces more extremist and anti-democratic than the current leaders.

Furthermore, it is not altogether clear that states which pay more attention to public opinion—and are thus more open to internal rivalries over power—are more likely to follow moderate policies. If Syria is going to make or maintain peace with Israel, it will do so at the orders of a strongman ruler overriding all objections. A battle among demagogues competing to mobilize public opinion—and, inevitably, support in the army—is not a recipe for a policy involving conciliation or concessions.[1]

If an age of democracy is ever going to come to the Arab world and Iran as a result of internal debates and development, its day has not yet arrived. U.S. policy could try to use democracy as a slogan against radical rulers and such efforts are not likely to do much good or much harm. Indeed, the United States must support human rights the world over. The big danger to American policymakers, however, would be any

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[1] Indeed, inasmuch as the PLO is democratic and pluralist, that factor has sabotaged its ability to make peace with Israel. See, Barry Rubin, *Inside the PLO: Officials, Notables, and Revolutionaries,* Policy Focus No. 12 (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1989).

illusion over the nature and effectiveness of dissident allies. Opposition movements in radical states are often led by anti-democratic forces which would gladly pocket American funds and yet engage in terrorist actions that will embarrass U.S. sponsors. Meanwhile, the incumbents have their own strong, popular bases, and will not be toppled easily. One reason why Alawites in Syria or Sunni Muslims in Iraq support their local dictators is precisely because they receive special privileges and have a realistic fear of being massacred and oppressed if the majority overthrows those rulers.

Support for ethnic/communal groups, most obviously Iraq's Kurds, is a more promising tactic for weakening radical states. Again, though, it is important to think through policy and avoid illusions. On two occasions in recent history, the United States has encouraged Kurdish revolts and then abandoned them to their fate. Thus, a moralistic policy can lead to a most unethical end. The continued existence of de facto Kurdish self-rule in northern Iraq is useful less because of its nature, alleged democratic, but because it puts a check on the dictatorial powers of any central government in Baghdad. For the United States, then, democracy may be of some value, but it should not be relied on as a panacea for the problem of extremist regimes in the Middle East.[1]

UNCONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

In the Middle East, the radical states are those that most diligently seek and are most likely to use unconventional weapons. The United States may hope that anti-proliferation measures will keep such arms out of the Middle East, but it may already be too late. The result may plunge the region into a new round of arms races, escalation, and increased prospects for war.

The radicals already have missiles, chemical weapons, and the ability to build or buy more. Where will the United States draw the line? The problem of enforcing limits on Iraq has been discussed above, but there are no internationally accepted rules applying to the other states. In March 1992, U.S.

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[1] Radicals, too, can use democracy as a weapon, as have Islamic fundamentalists in Egypt, Jordan, and Algeria. See Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

forces shadowed a North Korean ship carrying long-range missiles for delivery to Syria but did not act when it docked in Iran. As long as anti-Iraq sanctions were not violated, the United States had no basis to intervene.

While U.S. policy is to work with allies (as well as with Russia) to control technology more effectively, there are many loopholes for supply, including North Korea, Pakistan, China, criminal elements, and growing indigenous capacity. How far will the United States go in acting to keep advanced arms out of the radicals' hands? What will it do if these states obtain nuclear weapons? Would U.S. policy state an intention, for example, to intervene militarily against a country using atomic, chemical, missile, or bacteriological weapons in aggression? As is so often the case, a strong declaratory position is a vital element in deterrence. These issues cannot be avoided.

CONCLUSION

In a post-Cold War, post-Gulf War world, Washington has more power and responsibility than ever. This situation entails tough choices. If decisive positions are not taken and implemented, the current promising regional situation will worsen and U.S. leverage will erode.

More often than not, U.S. policy in the past conditioned the radical states to expect that it would back down or not act at all. The resulting failure to deter radical states has led to crisis and war. Cold War constraints sometimes gave U.S. policy no choice. But the world is now in a new era. The United States should maintain no illusions about the region's radical dictatorships or their goals. If this cannot be done at the time of greatest U.S. strength, it will be even harder to do so later on.

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