



The Stanley Foundation

# Policy Analysis Brief

Innovative approaches to peace and security from the Stanley Foundation

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## Forging a New Security Order for the Persian Gulf

### Summary

This brief rests on one basic assumption: past approaches to regional security in the Persian Gulf have failed. Inherently, new approaches and policy options must be duly considered and given equal weight to the status quo. The goal of this brief is therefore to lay out the broad parameters for more effective bilateral and multilateral security policies within the region, as well as policies of external powers toward the region.

This brief includes:

- The nature of stable security orders.
- Failed solutions to Persian Gulf problems.
- The basic elements of a new, multilateral security order.

### Future Activities

Stanley Foundation work on the Persian Gulf will continue into 2006 with further discussion of Gulf security based on Stanley Foundation conference results and original research. See [www.stanleyfoundation.org](http://www.stanleyfoundation.org) for more information.

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### The Importance of Persian Gulf Security

In large part due to US political leadership and the growth of transportation, finance, and information technologies since World War II, regional, global, and national security are impossible to separate. Oil and natural gas are the primary drivers of the entire global economy, both in the developing world and in the First World. Regional security in the Gulf is therefore inherently tied to socioeconomic development throughout the world. And insofar as socioeconomic development has become a preeminent global security issue in the post-9/11 world—under the heading of preventing terrorism through treating “root causes”—Gulf security constitutes a *global public good*.

### The Nature of Stable Security Orders

The primary goal of any security strategy, framework, alliance, or institution—unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral—is to provide *order* in what is otherwise an inherently anarchical international environment made up of individual nations and groups with conflicting as well as overlapping interests, values, and ideologies. And the principal factor of any enduring security order is that it is perceived as providing cultural, material, psychological, and even spiritual goods: justice, freedom, prosperity, respect for one’s identity or culture by others, a general sense of safety, and other such intangible but very real factors in

human life. An order that is not seen as providing any of the aforementioned intangible goods to individuals, groups, and states—and that provides *only* the minimum goal of an end to armed violence—is simply a tyranny that will ultimately break down under the weight of its own unjust practices. Inherently, *order* connotes a sense of permanence, at least across several decades and even generations. And a *durable and lasting order* is one that is seen as maximally inclusive, that assimilates (in whatever form) diverse values, political goals, security agendas, state interests, and so on.

Thus, in pragmatic security discussions, the idea of security orders is often opposed to any one side winning a competition through the achievement of all their interests via threats, coercion, and violence against their competitors. After all, a security order is ultimately constructed through compromise—and compromise is usually thought of as an agreement in which all sides get some of what they want, but no one gets everything they desire.

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### **Failed Solutions in the Persian Gulf: Victory, Hegemony, and Balance of Power**

There have been multiple variations on two central themes in the approach to security by both local Gulf States and the United States as an external security guarantor for the region. One such theme is, simply, peace through victory, whether that “victory” is defined as local hegemony, global hegemony, unconditional surrender of an opponent during war, or transformation of societies and political regimes in favor of one version of state interests and values. The other theme is peace through a rough balance of power.

In the early-to-mid Cold War years (1950s-1970s), the United States focused almost completely on building up strong local allies (pillars) to dominate the region without taking account of the domestic side of security in the Gulf. Increasingly through the 1960s and 1970s, the United States relied on a strategy of “local hegemony” via support for the Saudi Arabian monarchy and the shah of Iran. This strategy failed when the Iranian coup of 1979 ejected the shah from power, and later when the rise of transnational terror groups with Saudi citizens as active members resulted in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Both of these failures were brought about in large part by domestic developments within Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In the 1980s the United States and local Gulf Arab monarchies tried to create a pure balance of power to keep the peace. This included US intelligence and financial aid to Iraq in its war with Iran, which kept both countries from growing too powerful and thereby provided immediate security to neighboring Arab regimes. However, this strategy allowed Iraq to build up offensive military power and turned a blind eye to the human rights transgressions of Saddam Hussein as well as to his use of chemical weapons against Iran.

In fact, the Iran-Iraq war did not validate the balance of power, but rather destroyed the natural Persian Gulf balance of power through the exhaustion and hollowing out of the two region's largest states. The "northern" half of the Persian Gulf has been steadily enervated by so-called balance of power policies. When Saddam's Iraq was precipitously weakened economically by the exhaustive battle with a theocratic Iran, it eventually reacted through invasion of Kuwait to secure more oil revenues and stop Kuwait's price-busting policies on oil production.

To right the imbalance of power, America and others reacted by following an eminently realist script. They banded together to support a largely US operation that pushed Saddam back within his own borders, freeing Kuwait. But this righting of the balance of power only weakened and enervated Saddam's Iraq even more, followed by more than a decade of economic sanctions that by 2003 had already gutted the once-powerful Iraqi state—again, all in the name of balancing potential future aggression by an unpredictable Iraq. Thus American and Arab efforts to solidify a balance of power in the 1980-1988 and 1991 Persian Gulf wars eventually led to the complete destruction of that very balance.

#### **Current Practices: Peace Through US Global Hegemony**

Many regional experts and analysts—as well as US Middle East experts—are confused with the seeming lack of strategy in the current US approach to the Persian Gulf, an approach that is based on a failing occupation in Iraq alongside bilateral military arrangements with Gulf Arab monarchies and the complete isolation of Iran. In fact, the United States does have a strategy: a militarily focused counterproliferation approach based upon a flexible mix of deterrence, coercive diplomacy, global military superiority, and the preventive or preemptive use of military force.

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Bush administration has also sought to link the counterproliferation approach—which stresses the threat of "rogue states" like Iran—with a "war on terrorism," or counterterrorist approach, that stresses the future threat of transnational terrorist cells to the US homeland. A broad counterproliferation/counterterrorist strategy involves several aspects. First, the United States will "dissuade" competing military buildups by potential state adversaries like China, Iran, Russia, or others through the solidification of indefinite US global military superiority. This will presumably convince rising middle powers in key regions to embrace US-style liberal democracy and forgo military expansion in their own spheres of influence. Further, if dissuasion fails, US military superiority will deter those rogue states or future "near-peer competitors" who manage to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or significant conventional forces that challenge US hegemony at the regional level in the Middle East, Persian Gulf, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia. If deterrence

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also fails (or looks like it might fail), the United States can use coercive diplomacy—i.e., threats of preemptive military strikes. Finally, the presumed universality of US values, culture, political institutions, economy, and global military power will act together as a combined package to convince others to embrace secular, liberal, capitalist democracy for their own future development and forgo threats to US leadership in key regions of the world.

As defined operationally by the US government since the early 1990s, counterproliferation consists of technology-denial methods directed at the developing world (export controls) as well as new methods of deterrence, defense, and preemption (precision-guided and more lethal conventional munitions alongside the existing nuclear arsenal). Security is seen in cooperative, multilateral, or mutual terms only with regard to friends and allies, who band together in their economic and military relations to defend against intractable and potentially irrational enemies. Both ideological and resource competition are seen as endemic to international relations and as an unavoidable reality that necessitates improved methods of control to minimize uncertainty in relations with potentially hostile actors. Security is a fungible good that can (and should) be divided among opposing camps. Moreover, according to this approach, the sovereign nation-state is still the primary actor, insofar as transnational terror networks are thought to be produced, guided, funded, encouraged, and equipped by rogue state actors like Iran.

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In the end, current US counterproliferation policy subsumes regional security under a grander global vision of spreading liberal democracy and preventing the rise of a strategic competitor, whether that competition is defined technologically, militarily, or ideologically. This is the context within which WMD takes on so much importance. Only WMD, and especially nuclear weapons, can pose a traditional, cross-border, interstate strategic threat to the United States’ preeminent position within the global system. Implicitly, if not explicitly, it is this global preeminence (in political/ideological as well as military terms) that the Bush administration is defending in its policies toward the Persian Gulf and Greater Middle East.

The problem is that the current strategy has failed to reach all the primary goals enunciated by its supporters. The hoped-for transformation of Iraq via a “war of choice” has resulted in a potential civil war based on a complex mixture of transnational terror groups, local insurgencies, ethnic and religious divides, and tense exchanges between independent armed militias. The present debacle in Iraq shows the folly of trying to create Middle East peace through “transformation” of an entire region’s culture, economics, and politics toward US and Western ideals—an attempt that has potentially long-term, devastating effects on both US leadership globally and US economic health domestically.

Meanwhile, the attempt to stop Iranian nuclear proliferation through coercive diplomacy—involving economic isolation, diplomatic pressure, and even veiled threats of conventional military strikes—has utterly failed to do more than cause a temporary halt in Iranian pursuit of a fully indigenous fuel cycle via uranium enrichment facilities. If anything, these coercive techniques, alongside a refusal by the United States to formally recognize the legitimacy and sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran, have simply hardened the resolve of conservative Iranian leaders to secure a nuclear weapons option in the form of an indigenous fuel cycle. Moreover, US pressure and threats are even turning the issue of a peaceful nuclear energy program into an issue of national pride for *all* Iranians, liberal, moderate, and conservative alike.

Finally, this US combination of traditional counterproliferation with transnational counterterrorism efforts mischaracterizes the very nature of the terror threat. The United States is not under attack for its very values and freedoms, for how Americans live their lives on their own home soil. Although the United States does indeed have a huge popularity gap throughout the Islamic world, this does not translate into a collective wish of all Muslims to assault US society; enslave its citizens; teach Arabic and the Koran; dismantle McDonalds, baseball, and other cultural icons; and remake political institutions in Washington, DC.

The threat of catastrophic terrorism on the order of 9/11 does not come from all of Islamic civilization, but rather from radical fringe elements who have perceived defensive goals toward the United States based on a militant reading of Islamic texts and hatred and fear of the incremental extension of US culture abroad through globalization and through forward US military basing policies. In sum: these radical transnational groups do not really care what Americans may do in Fargo, North Dakota, or Memphis, Tennessee, but they care a great deal about US cultural and military influence halfway around the globe and are willing to commit terrorist acts to lessen that foreign influence over their own societies.

Yet to hear some of the statements out of the White House and popular press, 9/11 does represent an attack on America's very cultural identity and values, at home as well as abroad. And the US government seems to be going down the path of fighting a global war based on this understanding of the threat—on the belief that all authoritarian leaders of Islamic societies and all nonstate Islamic terrorist groups are working together somehow and in some way to bring down the entire West.

If the United States acts upon this crude and grossly inaccurate definition of the terror threat, it will be in grave danger of creating exactly the kind of civilizational war that the current fringe Islamic groups such as Al Qaeda desire. It will, in short, empower the most radical groups by giving them regional

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legitimacy where none existed prior to US interventions—as has already happened in the case of Iraq, which has become a veritable geopolitical magnet for disenfranchised and alienated Islamic insurgents of all nationalities and ethnic persuasions.

### **The Insufficiency of Balance-of-Power Policies**

Despite the debacle of balance-of-power politics in the 1980s and 1990s, traditional notions of realpolitik continue to inform the dominant thinking and practice among Gulf States. Regional governments continue to rely on outsiders to ensure a rough balance of power to protect their sovereignty, domestic identity, and regime security. But while political and security elites in Gulf countries are pursuing the perfection of an international power balance in the region, the entire Middle East region is undergoing a sociopolitical transformation that is largely bypassing traditional forms of realpolitik. Amid the hyperbole regarding Iran's nuclear program and Iraq's continuing chaos, a much larger and potentially more explosive phenomenon has been steadily developing throughout the Middle East region, from Northern Africa to the Persian Gulf: the transition from authoritarian, controlled states to more open societies, alongside a cross-country boom in population that could lead to high rates of unemployment and economic stagnation throughout the region over the next several years.

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In the Persian Gulf today, transitioning societies in the earliest stages of nation-state development are facing the challenges of an increasingly transnational world. Central state leaders throughout the Middle East are trying to build up state power, governmental prerogatives, and national sovereignty in a regional security environment characterized by news and information that are inherently transnational and uncontrollable in nature.

Because of these transitions, there is an increasing contradiction between regional development and the character and methods of superpower policies in the region, including attempts to provide a rough balance of power. Middle East states are quickly becoming interdependent through the flow of political arguments, information, and ideologies, even as they stay purposefully apart in terms of elite-level foreign policies, military policies, and diplomacy. And the primary guarantor of the stable flow of oil for the global economy (the US) is now almost universally mistrusted, misperceived, and even feared by the Middle East citizenry themselves—including business, academic, and media elites as well as average citizens. Although nearly all high-level Gulf Arab political leaders expect the United States to continue its role as “external balancer” in the region indefinitely, popular support within the region for continuing this arrangement simply does not exist. This security situation is inherently unstable, and it is unrealistic to believe that it can continue indefinitely.

Because of these pressures, the greatest danger in the Gulf is not a nuclear Iran or the traditional threat of conventional invasion, but rather internal socioeconomic and political changes that might be increasingly difficult for leaders to direct or control. Regionally, the greatest threat is not strategic WMD attacks, but Saudi fragmentation and weakening of the central state, Iraqi civil war and dissolution, and growing radicalism via violent forms of politicized Islam in Gulf Arab states—including increased levels of transnational violence and terrorism.

An additional wrinkle is the *nontraditional threat perceptions* of Iran's neighbors. In off-the-record, nonattributed international dialogues in the region sponsored by the Stanley Foundation, Arab experts have argued that Iranian nuclear weapons capabilities may play a distant second to immediate Arab fears about the Russian construction of Iran's Bushrer plant and the reliability of Bushrer's safety and security measures. Indeed, senior Kuwaiti analysts and former officials have voiced fears about the so-called "Chernobyl scenario," named after the catastrophic failure of safety containment measures and widespread dispersion of radioactive particles across Eastern Europe by Russia's nuclear power plant in Chernobyl in the 1980s. In the views of these Arab experts, such an environmental catastrophe could shut down Gulf oil shipments and result in environmental crises within Arab countries themselves, essentially causing economic collapse. For these analysts, potential Iranian "worst practices" in running its plants, poor Russian construction, and the troubling fact that Bushrer is located on top of an active earthquake fault line could all be much more dangerous and damaging than an Iranian nuclear weapons capability.

## **Basic Elements of a New Multilateral Security Order in the Gulf**

### **Reconceptualizing the Terrorism Threat**

As argued earlier, the current US strategy implicitly and explicitly assumes that all anti-US terrorist groups are funded, guided, equipped, or encouraged by sovereign "rogue states." However, the evolving nature of fundamentalist terrorism is that it threatens *all* states and societies throughout the Gulf, not just US friends and allies. The new type of transnational terrorism responsible for the November 9, 2005, attacks on three hotels in Amman, Jordan, does not discriminate between Sunni and Shia Muslims, secular or religious, Persian or Arab. It opposes all forms of moderate political Islam and all current regimes throughout the Middle East, Iran included.

This points to a cold, hard fact that has gone unreported by the Western media: although Iran aids Shiite groups in Lebanon and the West Bank who use terrorist methods, it fears the same transnational, antiglobalization, anti-US, Sunni terrorist groups that Washington is battling on the global scene.

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Al Qaeda and its virulent variants around the globe are every bit as much an ideological enemy of Shiite Iran as they are of the United States.

Saudi Arabia, as well, has come to the belated but accurate realization that its primary enemy is not radical Shiite Islamic groups supported through covert interventions by a theocratic Iran—the threat that galvanized its support for Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq Persian Gulf war from 1980-1988. Instead, in the twenty-first century, the primary intranational threat to Saudi stability—including the reliability of its oil infrastructure—comes from domestic Sunni terrorist groups who subscribe to a more purist version of Wahhabi Islam than the Saudi government itself does. These groups, which are populist in nature and which challenge the authority of government-sponsored clerics, question the legitimacy and ruling practices of the entire Al-Saud family, including its positive relations with the West and its overall economic-political openings to the outside world. It is these groups, and not Iranian-aided Shia factions in Saudi Arabia, who have been responsible for a series of well-planned and bloody attacks on malls, Western living compounds, and government ministries since spring 2003.

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#### **Conflict Management *Between* States to Support Liberalization *Within* States**

Given the true nature of transnational terrorism in the Persian Gulf, the United States and regional states have common interests that should allow strong bilateral and multilateral security cooperation. For instance, geopolitically, Iran and the United States share interests in stable oil supplies and prices, curbing the regional drug trade, and stemming the flow of arms and extremists across borders from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

And this brings us to some enduring and heartfelt European assumptions about the end of the Cold War that unfortunately have not percolated to the top of the US post-9/11 debate. Throughout Europe, there is a profound belief in the historical value and necessity of the Helsinki Process, or the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, in bringing about the bloodless transition to a free Europe when the Communist Empire finally fell. The Helsinki process involved serious dialogue and eventual negotiated agreement on prickly issues such as conventional arms balances and human rights violations, even as the Cold War between Western and Eastern blocs continued unabated.

The key to this larger process, in the European view, was that it *crossed ideological and territorial divisions and was truly integrative in its overall approach*, both in terms of participants and in terms of issues visited in the talks—as opposed to NATO and the Warsaw Pact, which were part and parcel of the Iron Curtain that divided Europe. These traditional collective security pacts (similar in nature to US-Arab bilateral defense pacts today) were founded in



the threat-based logic of political, social, and economic conflict between liberal capitalism and centralized communism and, as such, could not serve as instruments for transcending the ideological divide.

Another defining idea was that mutually beneficial international interactions could have a proverbial “trickle down” effect and lead to positive domestic evolution in authoritarian states. This guiding assumption of Helsinki has been all but lost in the current Washington debate about the war on terror, in which it is assumed that all positive attempts at international engagement with rogues are tantamount to treason because they “reward” recalcitrant and evil regimes that employ unsavory domestic practices. The unstated assumption of current Washington hyperbole is that the causal arrow of political change only flows from domestic to international—that changing immoral domestic regimes will result in beneficial foreign policies toward the rogue’s neighbors, but that the reverse will never happen: integrating authoritarian regimes in cooperative international endeavors will have absolutely no effect on their dubious domestic practices.

In the New World, these rigid Washington assumptions, rather than those of the Europeans, are starting to look naive and idealistic. Liberal domestic political elites and institutional practices cannot be immediately manufactured through a clever mix of foreign financial aid packages, trade incentives, security agreements, punitive sanctions, or military force options. Instead, better domestic governance will take decades to build up. Given the inherently long-term plan for of this grandiose global development project, multilateral approaches at the *international* level are central to pushing forward the *domestic liberalization* of currently authoritarian regimes—a core US foreign policy goal.

This should not be too foreign an idea, since Europe now lives in a regional environment defined by mutual respect, mutual prosperity, and a constantly negotiated balance of interests and obligations via bilateral diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy, and common institutions. However, the important point is not that other regions copy Europe per se (an arrogant and impractical notion), but rather that the United States commit itself to creating this constant process of positive-sum negotiation in the Persian Gulf, according to the region’s existing interests, ideologies, and values.

To give another relevant example, consider the positive evolution of East Asia since President Richard Nixon’s visit to China in 1972. In the past 33 years, a complex set of international and transnational business, cultural, monetary, and even security ties have steadily enveloped a rising China in a dense regional network involving almost all nations in Southeast and Northeast Asia. These very tangible relationships effectively constrain any

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aggressive impulses on the part of a potentially boisterous Beijing, whatever path its domestic politics may take in the coming decades.

What the European and Asian experiences show is that security does not come solely from piecemeal, case-by-case internal development; it also necessarily comes through international diplomacy, treaties, defense pacts, confidence- and security-building measures, trade, finance, cultural exchanges, and international norm-building. *International trust and mutual interdependence between nations must increase alongside domestic reforms and vice versa.* One does not exist without the other.

### **Multilateral Conflict Management in the Gulf**

A new security order should be created in the Gulf by building additional layers to the current security system, with a greater emphasis on multilateral cooperation. US-Gulf State bilateral cooperation and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) would serve as the base layer. But these relations should be strengthened for tighter coalition-based military integration, which should be fully institutionalized by the time the US forces in the region move to an “over-the-horizon posture” that involves much fewer troops and equipment based in the region.

With a smaller US troop presence, regular command-post exercises and military exercises using prepositioned equipment will become more important to Gulf security. The GCC should enhance efforts for joint operations through a better command, control, and communications infrastructure and facilitate greater information and intelligence sharing for early warning of potential threats. This enhanced capability should also be leveraged to address a broad range of transnational threats. Enhancement of the GCC collective security system will aid the integration of individual Gulf military forces with those of the United States.

The second layer would be the broadest and most multilateral in nature. It would involve setting up a new security organization that could notionally be called the “Gulf Regional Security Forum (GRSF).” Southern and Northern Gulf States, without exceptions, would be the core members, together with extra-regional states and organizations with a vested interest in the Gulf.

Initial goals for the GRSF would be to promote an environment in the Gulf based on dialogue, with the goal of reducing tensions and enhancing cooperation against transnational threats. Shipping safety, oil cleanup, earthquake hazard mitigation, avoidance of incidents at sea, nuclear fissile materials safety and security (for any states pursuing nuclear power plants), and counter-drug trafficking are just some of the issues for the forum’s agenda. Establishing norms on Gulf relations, a code of conduct, or a charter for security cooperation should be considered. The forum should seek to expand

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military-to-military confidence-building measures that have been pioneered between Oman and Iran, as well as other measures to enhance trust.

As Gulf cooperation on specific functional issues progresses, the GRSF may add others to the forum as needed. This might involve Gulf neighbors such as Afghanistan, Turkey, and Pakistan when focusing on interregional issues such as terrorism, water distribution, drug trafficking, or WMD nonproliferation.

This layered security system would connect the Gulf parties in a web of interlinked security arrangements that could be adapted or expanded as necessary. Regional parties themselves would principally determine the degree of formality of each layer. As we have seen in the development of the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, it is better to start out small and with flexible arrangements rather than hardened, formal structures. More importantly, the new order would increase the interactions between parties in the region, thereby building new bureaucracies and constituencies within each state to support cooperative multilateral initiatives. Such interactions are useful for developing the institutional capacity that can oppose policies advocating confrontation or inertia.

Eventually, this forum could engage in changing the “hard security” milieu by managing conventional armament proliferation, so that destabilizing imbalances in the quality and quantity of conventional arms do not occur and act as stimulants to aggressive behavior and pursuit of more unconventional weapons. The overall goal would be a security environment in which every state feels its core security interests and national development goals are being respected by all its neighbors.

#### **The Role of Wider Middle East Issues**

Not all threats or opportunities facing the GCC states, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran are located within the Gulf itself. The continued war of attrition in the West Bank, broadcast over the airwaves of newly independent Arab media outlets, directly fuels resentment in Gulf populations against their own governments for cooperating with the United States. Further, Israel’s unsafeguarded nuclear program and long-range missile delivery systems are regarded as a direct threat or security concern to some Gulf States, and silence about Israel’s programs illustrates the selective character of the current nonproliferation regimes, in which tremendous pressure is put on Iran and Arab states not to acquire WMD. Finally, Levant subregional security is connected to Gulf security via enduring Iranian threats to the existence of Israel, including annual aid for violent anti-Israeli organizations in the West Bank.

These wider Middle East security concerns of the Gulf Arab states should not be dismissed as excuses by these regimes to oppose concerted domestic reforms, just as Israeli concerns about Iranian aid should not be viewed as an

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excuse to continue its occupation of the West Bank. Both cross-regional concerns are legitimate.

Indeed, even while Israeli-Palestinian conflict simmers and oftentimes erupts in the Levant subregion of the Middle East, the Gulf Arab states have embarked on programs of domestic reform because they have seen this to be in their own interest. But they prefer to undertake such reforms in a stable domestic atmosphere. Palestinian issues, particularly the status of Jerusalem, resonate deeply in the body politics of all Arab states. Daily images of the conflict on Al-Jazeera satellite network and other Arab media outlets have also deepened ties between Gulf Arabs and the Palestinian cause. Many Gulf Arab citizens and leaders alike use treatment of Palestinians by Israel as a broad, abstract indicator of Western treatment of Arab-Islamic identity, culture, and religion as a whole. For better or worse, US respect for Palestinian concerns is often used as a litmus test for overall US respect for pan-Arab concerns in general. Even if these ties between the Levant and Gulf are largely symbolic or psychological in nature, they still have a real impact on domestic stability and socioeconomic development in Gulf Arab monarchies.

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So as the United States focuses on the Gulf, it should continue to work forthrightly on this fundamental security problem in the wider Middle East. Meanwhile, US engagement of Iran on Gulf-specific, common strategic interests must also include the urgent need to end Iranian support for groups that oppose the very existence of the Israeli state.

One other issue is the establishment of a WMD free zone, which would necessarily encompass all three subregions of the Greater Middle East: Northern Africa, the Levant, and the Gulf. Such a zone would incorporate tighter international monitoring of Iran's nuclear program, further verification of Libya's corroborated efforts in getting out of the WMD business, and the ferreting out of Pakistan's extensive black market operations in nuclear trade. Finally, Israel's responsibilities to support a new regional security system would also have to be incorporated, since all states in the wider Middle East strongly argue that Israel should not be given a pass by the United States when it comes to nuclear proliferation.

Interestingly, all Middle East states—US enemies as well as US friends—have endorsed in principle the establishment of such a zone. This includes Iran and Syria, and it also includes Israel, which has stated that it is prepared to deal with the issue “in the context of a comprehensive, lasting, and stable peace,” and together with Jordan codified this endorsement in their 1994 peace treaty. Of course, the ongoing crisis with the Palestinians has made most Israelis more cautious about giving up the nuclear option (roughly 75 percent of those polled remain committed to an Israeli nuclear

weapons option). Nevertheless, changes in the Gulf and North Africa proliferation scenes offer a unique opportunity to explore “preconditions” for negotiating a WMD free zone and even taking embryonic steps toward such a zone.

### **Stronger Involvement by the International Atomic Energy Agency**

External powers should work together to ensure an evermore-prominent role for Mohamed ElBaradei’s mission of nuclear safety and security. In particular, the IAEA should not be solely concerned with inspecting Iranian facilities for weaponization activities—a task it is already performing, with some difficulties due to continued Iranian refusal to release a truly comprehensive and accurate report of all its nuclear activities over the past two decades. In addition to these urgent nonproliferation goals, the IAEA should be concerned with the overall safety and security of peaceful Iranian nuclear energy activities.

It is unrealistic to assume that anyone but the IAEA can address the serious concerns of Iran’s Arab neighbors about the safety of various Iranian nuclear facilities. IAEA monitoring, technical advice, and reporting on the operations of nuclear plants such as Bushrer could act as a bilateral confidence-building measure between Iran and individual Gulf Arab monarchies, all of whom have normal relations with Iran but who are currently shut out of Iran’s internal nuclear policy debates. ElBaradei is the best available mediator and shuttle diplomat on these nontraditional, environmental security concerns that go well beyond the US counterproliferation view of the Iranian nuclear threat.

### **Conclusion: US Leadership Rather Than Hegemony**

The primary challenge is to create a new order in the Gulf that involves regular management of interstate competition based on a rough balance of interests and values. Such a security regime would avoid the extreme of “victory” of one set of interests over another as well as the utopian vision of complete harmony between groups. Neither of these extremes is realistic.

Only the United States has the diplomatic, economic, and military capital to seek and create this balance of national interests and balance of value systems in the Persian Gulf. But for the United States to play this positive mediating role as an honest broker, it must abandon its obsessive focus on maintaining its global strategic position via nuclear superiority and dominance of US values. US planners must incorporate other security goals and threats into a larger strategic vision that has the stated purpose of legitimizing the regional security system for all states, including enemies such as Iran. While the United States might make purely tactical, short-term gains by stopping nuclear proliferation to Iran—possibly through preemptive military strikes

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against Iranian facilities—long-term strategic goals may suffer. These strategic goals include:

- Ensuring a reliable and low-priced supply of oil and natural gas to fuel the continued growth of the global economy.
- Preventing a complete breakdown of the Iraqi state that would invite outside intervention by Iraq's neighbors.
- Securing Iraq's porous borders against transnational criminals and terrorists.
- Preventing the evolution of a new regional, cross-border schism between Shia and Sunni groups that could threaten both development goals and oil supplies throughout the Middle East, including new tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran based on developments within Iraq.
- Acquiring the needed intelligence on the political positions of important sects and tribes within Iraq, so as to allow a new political solution to emerge.
- Successfully combating transnational drug networks and terrorism on a comprehensive regional basis.
- Providing security guarantees and reassurances to Arab states about Iran's ultimate nuclear intentions, while also providing reassurances to Iran that it is not existentially threatened by the United States.
- Defining new "regional roles" for the historical hegemons of the Gulf (Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia) that support rather than undermine a new cooperative security order.
- Providing reassurances to Gulf Arab monarchies that Iran does not seek regional hegemony, either militarily, politically, or in religious terms.
- Preventing Iranian weaponization of its latent nuclear capabilities.
- Mitigating potentially deadly bilateral crises between a nuclear Israel and a nuclearizing Iran through confidence-building measures aimed at reducing the existential threat perceptions currently dominating each side's debates.
- Preventing the emergence of conventional arms races between states.
- Mitigating the worst consequences of territorial disputes.

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- Contributing to a viable, just, and equitable Israeli-Palestinian solution.
- Addressing environmental threats effectively.
- Supporting the long-term domestic liberalization of Gulf polities through the steady creation of an international environment of peace and stability between sovereign states.

To paraphrase former President Ronald Reagan (who was speaking about bilateral US-Soviet nuclear war): “A war of civilizations cannot be won and must never be fought”—whatever ambitious scenarios are spun by a Pentagon enamored with the fruits of military transformation. The road to Gulf security is not paved with programs for radical reshaping of other societies along lines reflecting US values and institutions. Nor will it be guaranteed by maintaining global military primacy. Instead, a peaceful Persian Gulf is one in which large regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia coexist with all their smaller neighbors in a mutually beneficial set of relationships based on prosperity and respect rather than fear and domination. Only by dumping the failed strategies of local hegemony, global hegemony, armed victory, and pure power politics can the United States help construct a new security order that is seen as equitable by all states in the region, ultimately to the benefit of US national security goals. ■

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