BALANCE OF POWER AND THE NEW MIDDLE EAST

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**Balance of Power and the new middle East**   
Prepared By: Professor Michel G.Nehme   
Academician and researcher

President George H. W. Bush’s formation and direction of an international coalition to drive Iraq out of Kuwait in 1990 and 1991 had the trappings of both unilateral determination and multi-lateral cooperation. In his victory speech of 6 March 1991, Bush called for a “new world order” that would enable the United Nations to fulfill its obligation to provide for the collective security of the weaker nations, and for a U.S. program that would assist in stabilizing the Middle East.

Bush’s statement generated much discussion in the months thereafter, but skeptical voices were quickly heard. Henry Kissinger, now a political theorist, commented on President Bush’s building of a coalition to defeat the Iraqi aggression, but he disapproved the notion of a new world order. “The problem with such an approach is that it assumes that every nation perceives every challenge to the international order in the same way”, he wrote, “and is prepared to run the same risks to preserve it. In fact, the new international order will see many centers of power, both within regions and among them. The power centers reflect different histories and perceptions.” In Kissinger view, the essential thrust of the new American approach should be the recognition of regional balances of power to establish order. “History so far has shown us only two roads to international stability: domination or equilibrium. We do not have the resources for domination, nor is such a course compatible with our values. So we are brought back to a concept maligned in much of America’s intellectual history that is the balance of power.”

Kissinger has always pointed to Americans(2) complicated relationship with the balance of power, but it was also true that the nation’s leaders had often, and especially after 1945, consciously sought the equilibrium he propagated for. The 1990s witnessed numerous regional, ethnic, and nationalistic struggles; U.S. officials, finding few of these conflicts fundamentally threatening to the global equilibrium, stayed out of most of them. When they did intervene, humanitarian concerns were a key motivation. The American military and economic response to such episodes as upheavals in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo were aimed in large measure at reducing human suffering and restoring local political stability. Even then, intervention happened at least in part because Washington policymakers determined that these upheavals, if allowed to spread, could in fact upset the regional balance of power.

The balance of power appears at first sight a simple concept. It has been defined as a phrase in international law for such a “just equilibrium” between the members of the family of nations as should prevent any one of them from becoming sufficiently strong to enforce its will upon the rest. Yet the phrase has always been of more use in political polemic than in political analysis. Like other phrases with a strong academic appeal it is vague, and it would loose its validity if it were more precise. Its obscurities are several, but the most important is that it blends the descriptive and the normative. The condition is one, the term “balance” implies, toward which international life is forever tending. That is the descriptive element. But the condition is also one that may be upset, and right-thinking statesmen should constantly be on the alert to preserve or restore it. That is the normative element. These two elements reinforce one another. Because such a balance will be established in any event, it is sensible and moral to work toward it. Because people work toward it, it will be more readily established. Difficulties arise if either element is weakened. At what point is it right to abandon an old balance and accept a new one? Can a balance exist if people are unconscious of the need to maintain it?

Behind all the interpretations of the balance of power lies the appeal to realism in the conduct of international affairs. Realism remains the best, perhaps the only persuasive, argument for restraint; and it is common ground that the doctrine of the balance of power is a device to promote restraint, whether it is argued that lack of restraint is wrong, or dangerous, or ultimately bound to fail. In that sense the balance of power in international affairs is clearly related to the idea of checks and balances within a government, which is equally a device to impose restraint on men who might otherwise, seduced by power, abandon it.

**Balance of Power: First Half Of The Twentieth Century**

When World War I broke out, although all parties made some play with the need to maintain or protect the balance of power (which, of course, they interpreted variously), none of them could argue that governments, or princes, were behaving in the way that one would expect. German apologists had to contend that Germany was surrounded by malevolent foes and that the survival of Germany was at stake. The allies had to contend not merely that Germany was too powerful for comfort, but that German militarism threatened a European civilization that would otherwise be peaceable. The argument, in short, could not be cast in terms of the balance of power.

Americans were presented with a dilemma. It was not, in the first instance, a dilemma of policy. Clearly the United States was not immediately threatened. The great growth of American power during the nineteenth century, if it made the policy of fortress America less necessary, made it no less appealing. It was hard to argue that the victor in the European war, whatever the outcome, would turn on the United States. Americans were therefore forced toward moral judgments about the merits of the war. Some indeed argued that what was going on was an old-fashioned struggle for the balance of power, of a sort that revealed how politically backward even the most advanced European states were, and of a sort with which the United States had no concern. Others accepted the argument that German militarism was the root of the trouble. Historians will long continue to debate the causes that finally brought the United States into the war, and their merits, but it is clear that no balance of power argument would have sufficed. A balance of power argument would have kept the United States neutral. With the advantage of hindsight it might be argued that since the United States was the beneficiary of a balance of power in Europe likely to be upset, the proper American course was to intervene delicately to tip the balance back to the point at which it had been that is no less and no more. Yet because the balance was bound to shift, war or no war, as the whole history of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s was to show, that kind of intervention could not have been temporary and would have required a degree of anxious vigilance over the long term, which could have been neither sustained nor justified. Neutrality, defended on grounds of self-interest and its morality, or intervention, defended on moral grounds, were the only serious alternatives and the only alternatives debated.

The decision for war was President Woodrow Wilson’s, and in taking it he was much moved by the realization that if the United States did not participate in the war, it would have no voice in the settlement that followed it. As part of the settlement Wilson was determined to establish an international concert known as the League of Nations, which would bring about a better world order. Wilson’s hostility to the balance of power was intense, and it was widely shared by Americans of his day. In an address at the Guildhall, London, on 29 December 1918, Wilson stated that the center and characteristic of the old order was that unstable thing which we used to call the “balance of power”, a thing in which the balance was determined by the sword which was thrown in the one side or the other; a balance which was determined by the unstable equilibrium of competitive interests; a balance which was maintained by jealous watchfulness and an antagonism of interests which, though it was generally latent, was always deep-seated.

Wilson made an automatic connection between the balance of power and spheres of influence, to which he was equally opposed. That connection is characteristic of much American thinking on the subject; its consistency with adherence to the Monroe Doctrine is clearer to Americans than to others.

The approach of World War II presented Americans with a dilemma of a different sort. The Great Depression diverted attention from international affairs, but increasingly Americans could not avoid being drawn into efforts to mitigate both the depression itself and the political consequences that seemed to follow. The whole structure of reparations and war debts set up at Versailles would alone have required American involvement. The rise of aggressive regimes in Italy, Germany, and Japan, together with the long-cherished hope that they might be rendered more moderate by well-calculated economic concessions, or by democratic strength and solidarity, or a combination of these, ensured it. By contrast with the years before World War I, few Americans doubted on which side their sympathies lay. Whatever their fears of communism, the Soviet Union were quiet, and the actions of the Nazis deprived their claim to be a bulwark against communism of all appeal. Secretary of State Cordell Hull (1933–1944) shared Wilson’s dislike of the balance of power, and had learned it in the same school; but such views, although they became influential again later, were irrelevant in the 1930s, when it became ever clearer, and that is certainly to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, that the important contest was not among rival states but between dictatorship and democracy.

Paradoxically, the desire of Europeans, especially the British, that the United States should become part of the balance of power, and that the New World should be called in to redress the balance of the Old, and in addition the fact that Americans had little doubt on which side their sympathies lay, did almost nothing to make policy decisions easier. The arguments, both within the American government and between Americans and British, are a fascinating and complex field, on which much work remains to be done. But in essence a dispute developed among the allies, that is, even before the alliance was formed, over who should contribute how much to the common cause. The residue of American security, which was very great, together with well-founded doubts as to whether the interests of the United States might not be better served if some accommodation were reached in Europe without American intervention, in other words, doubts shared by some European statesmen, such as Neville Chamberlain, meant that American activity was diplomatically ineffective. A slow process of economic support for the Western democracies did begin, and might in time have drawn the United States into the war, but Hitler had the good sense to avoid the mistakes of his predecessors, and he was at great pains to avoid giving the United States an occasion for belligerency. That occasion was, of course, provided by Japan.

Some exponents of balance of power theory have argued that the theory requires that nations should match, if need be by war, any increase in a rival’s power, actual or foreseen, even in the absence of any aggressive act. But all the evidence suggests that even when nations have adequate cause for war, they do not go to war unless they also have an occasion for war. The occasion, the indicator that the right moment for war has arrived, is vital. Of course, occasions for war can be manufactured when they are needed; but they are hard to manufacture, or even to identify, for a nation that disposes of such great reserves of security as the United States. One important argument is missing, that is, the argument that if the nation does not fight now, it will be too late to fight tomorrow. It is that argument, with its corollary that opponents must be supposed to know how sensitive one’s position is, and that therefore their threats are not accidental but evidence of real intention, which identifies most clearly the occasion for war. At Pearl Harbor, in 1941, the Japanese faced the United States with an affront such as no nation could possibly let pass. The Germans had been most careful to avoid an affront. (In World War I, on the other hand, when by reviving their unrestricted submarine campaign they deliberately took the risk of American intervention, a good many Americans could still be found to argue that the affront was not great enough to justify war in the absence of a real threat. The cause of neutral rights and of democracy had to be invoked.)

Just as a nation needs a signal to begin a war, so it needs a signal to stop, and that signal is often even harder to give or to detect. Because statesmen in the modern world are seldom wholly cynical, they commonly feel that war has been forced on them. As a war continues, they begin to raise their demands to include compensation for losses incurred. It is therefore hard to identify the point at which agreement for a truce can be reached, short of the final defeat of one side. Every success by either side leads it to think that final victory may be possible; every defeat, that this is not the moment to negotiate. It is the intellectual difficulty of translating the theory of the balance of power into a workable policy in a specific situation that, more than anything else, ensures that this theory is seldom of use when the time comes for negotiation.

These generalizations are supported by American practice in two world wars, yet American practice was not different from that of any other nation. Neither Britain nor France paid any special heed to the balance of power during either war. No way could be found of ending either war without the complete defeat of one side. After each war the recourse was not to some restored balance, but to a congress system. The experience of the League of Nations suggested to the allies in 1945 that no security structure was worth anything unless the great powers agreed, and that the right of veto might as well be formally accepted. If the five powers were not in agreement, the hope was at best for stalemate, by the agreed inactivity of four if one stood out. As always at the end of a war, what was in people’s minds was peace, rather than either liberty or justice.

**Balance of Power: Second Half of the Twentieth Century**

In neither world war, then, did the United States enter for considerations of the balance of power. In both, the entry of the United States so quickly and completely tilted the balance of power in favor of the side it joined, that had the United States been regarded as an element in the balance, the wars in the form they took would never have broken out. After World War I, the United States withdrew in disillusionment. After World War II that recourse was not open, although many in the Truman administration feared it and worked to prevent it. It took time before it became apparent, either to Americans or to any others, that the balance had been shifted permanently during, and to some extent as a result of the war. It took time before it was realized that Britain would not recover, that France was not a world power, and that noncommunist China would not become the guardian of the Far East. Yet, paradoxically, while the postwar hope of a concert gave way, just as it did after the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), to an ideological confrontation, the balance of power was being restored.

It has often been argued that the balance of power is really an imbalance of power. If the balance is to work at all, there must be at least three parties, such that any two can overpower the third, should its activities become too threatening. More than three is better; but three is the minimum. The idea of balance as implying some sort of equality gives way readily to the idea of balance as superiority of force on the side of the existing order. The balance between two powers or groups that sometimes is called the “simple” balance is altogether too unstable. It requires a degree of vigilance, of preparedness, of national concentration on defense, which is ultimately intolerable. The Cold War implied just such a balance, of course, and it should come as no surprise that the rhetoric of the Cold War, on both sides (although recent attention has been given to that of the West), did not speak of balance at all, but looked to victory. That is a characteristic of the simple balance.

It was well recognized that the United States and the Soviet Union were in direct and unique competition. The appalling consequences of nuclear war introduced a new kind of stability. The so-called balance of terror or balance of deterrence ensured that each nuclear power was anxious not to give the other power any sort of signal that would justify an attack, and was also anxious not to identify such a signal. This caution was compatible with, and even required, an arms race. It was not by accident that for a time the chief danger to stability was thought to arise in an area where nuclear power could not be used with any advantage, yet which was regarded as vital. Talk of tactical nuclear weapons showed more wishful ingenuity than realism, and much of the American emphasis on strategic nuclear superiority derived from the knowledge that only such superiority could counter Soviet geographical advantages in Europe.

If it was compatible with an arms race, the American-Soviet balance was also compatible with an ideological struggle waged with vigor on both sides. It is false to claim, as some revisionist historians now do, that the Cold War was started and maintained only by the United States; and that the Soviet Union, much weakened by the world war, was merely pursuing the traditional aims of Russian policy. (Those aims had been opposed by Great Britain for a century, and it is odd to find the Left arguing that a policy of old fashioned imperialism is acceptable and, in essence, advancing the doctrine, if not of the balance of power, at least of spheres of influence). The ideological struggle reflected the knowledge of both great powers that they contended in a fast-changing world; and the Cold War began to loose intensity, not when the protagonists decided to abandon it but when world circumstances changed and new elements began to contribute to the balance, that is, lacking nuclear capacity, it is true, but disposing of real force. It became almost conventional to speak in terms of a world of five poles: the United States, the Soviet Union, Europe, China, and Japan, to which perhaps the oil-producing states should be added. These poles differ from the great powers of old in that they are not of the same sort. Only two are nuclear in any serious sense. Other differences readily suggest themselves. It is as a consequence of this development that serious discussion of the balance of power is again taking place.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a student of Clemens von Metternich and Otto von Bismarck, naturally introduced the concept of balance into his discussions of foreign policy; he would not have done so if the preconditions had not been there. Yet, while he spoke of Soviet policy as “heavily influenced by the Soviet conception of the balance of forces” and as “never determined in isolation from the prevailing military balance,” he was more apt to speak of American policy as seeking a “balance of mutual interests” with the Soviet Union and as moving toward détente through a “balance of risks and incentives.” Such language was chosen with an American audience, and with the preconceptions that Kissinger believed Americans have, in mind. Nevertheless it shows two elements almost wholly lacking in classic balance of power theory: the recognition that nations may now offer domestic rewards and suffer domestic penalties in the conduct of international relations, and the conviction that the domestic penalties will be too great without an agreement on restraint, that is to deliberate if tacit, by the opponents. The balance of power is seen not as replacing cooperation, but rather as requiring it.

The Cold War ended with a cry, not the civilization-ending “bang” as predicted by some analysts. The Soviet Union simply chose to withdraw from the superpower competition. With the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union, the United States became incontrovertibly the world’s dominant economic-military power (a title it had actually had for much of the Cold War). Without an apparent foe to challenge its security, the major question confronting U.S. foreign policy was what would succeed the Cold War’s bipolar balance of power. The issue among academics and political commentators was whether the United States should (1) emphasize its dominant position as a “unipolar” global power, or (2) seek a leading role in a tripolar or multipolar system.

The conservative commentator Charles Krauthammer advocated the former.

Krauthammer defined “unipolar” as meaning the United States should act unilaterally in resolving international matters that threatened its national interests. Acknowledging that the United States had lost the dominant economic position it had held during the early Cold War years, he nevertheless asserted that America remained the principal center of the world’s economic production. An aggressive, determined U.S. foreign policy, backed by the world’s greatest military prowess, Krauthammer argued, could dominate world politics. Perhaps in the future the United States might become the largest partner in a multipolar world; until then, however, he wanted Washington leaders to continue acting unilaterally. He concluded that “Our best hope for safety is in American strength and will, the strength and will to lead a unipolar world, unashamedly laying down the rules of world order and being prepared to enforce them.” It would be a Pax Americana in which the world would acquiesce in a benign American hegemony.

Other analysts envisioned a multipolar post-Cold War world, probably comprised of three or four power centers, in which the United States would remain the most affluent and powerful but would not be hegemonic. Joseph Nye, for example, suggested that a U.S. long-term unilateral hegemony was “unlikely because of the diffusion of power through transnational interdependence.” Preferring the term “multi-levels of power,” Nye endorsed preserving a strong military but predicted that the United States would not be able to dominate or direct the economic and political centers in an interdependent world. Thus, Washington should cooperate with like-minded nations in meeting such international concerns as conflicts between world markets, the acquisition by small nations of unconventional but destructive weapons, the international drug trade, environmental dangers of technological society, and diseases that can spread across continents.

Lawrence Freedman, who shared Nye’s basic conception, focused on America’s successful strengthening of democracy in Asia and Western Europe after 1945. This, he argued, had created valuable political-military allies who rebuilt the world’s economic foundations, promoted political democracy, and played the crucial role in halting communist expansion. In due course, these nations began competing with American business for world trade and investments because the United States had encouraged European economic unity and a prosperous Asia-Pacific region. Freedman foresaw that these European and Asian allies would press for a greater post–Cold War role in international affairs and, if Washington accommodated their expectations, all parties would benefit. If, however, the United States chose to deal unilaterally with economic and trade issues, there could be greatly increased tensions or even military conflict.

Both Freedman and Nye anticipated that states outside the American-European-Japanese centers would likely pose the gravest threat to global stability. During the Cold War the super-powers had been able to dampen most conflicts in Third World regions; it proved more difficult thereafter. The demise of bipolar constraints made violent confrontations stemming from festering ethnic, tribal, nationalist, religious, and territorial disputes more likely. And indeed, as John Lewis Gaddis reminded us, the first post–Cold War year “saw, in addition to the occupation of Kuwait, the near-outbreak of war between India and Pakistan, an intensification of tension between Israel and its Arab neighbors, a renewed Syrian involvement in Lebanon, and a violent civil war in Liberia.” It seemed a harbinger of things to come.

In Nye’s view, attempting to deal unilaterally with these and other looming upheavals would place a heavy burden on the American treasury and national will. Far better, he argued, to seek multilateral cooperation to control the peripheral troubles. Failure to contain regional conflicts could put global stability in jeopardy.

American decision makers understood that the military component of the global equilibrium increasingly shared center stage with other elements as the world became more interconnected. The impact of technology, most notably personal access to various forms of global communications, that is, worldwide telephone systems and television networks, and later the Internet, was impossible to ignore, and the 1990s witnessed economic interdependence that found manufacturing, banking, and merchandising virtually ignoring national borders. In search of continued economic growth and prosperity, Americans increasingly embraced the idea of globalization. President Bill Clinton stressed the interconnectedness of global economic affairs and the necessity of U.S. leadership in this area.

Few in Washington disagreed, and the 2000 presidential campaign saw much more agreement than disagreement between the two major candidates about how the United States ought to exercise leadership in the world arena. Once in office, however, the administration of George W. Bush immediately moved to adopt a starkly unilateralist approach of the type espoused by Charles Krauthammer and others. The Bush team ignored or refused to endorse several international treaties and instruments, most notably the Kyoto agreement regarding environmental pollution standards, and insisted on pursuing a missile defense system that would involve the abrogation of the 1972 ABM treaty and, perhaps, stimulate a new arms race. Even though these policy decisions provoked serious objections from America’s allies, and more strenuous protests from other nations, there seemed little concern in Washington about searching for an international consensus.

Critics of George W. Bush and of unilateralism complained that the approach indicated a failure to see the fundamental limits of American power, even in a one-superpower world. The critics achieved a measure of vindication with the terrorist attack on the United States on 11 September 2001. The assaults on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon exposed America’s vulnerability to a new destabilizing force: global terrorism. The Bush administration, while not disavowing its unilateralist inclinations, appeared to recognize the desirability of a “global coalition” to meet a newly recognized challenge that largely ignored the traditional international power structure. There were differences of opinion inside and outside the administration on how best to wage the struggle against terrorism, but on one thing all could agree: the United States could not do it alone.

The history of modern international relations, and of the American part in them, then, suggests a certain pattern. Americans, though often professing a distrust of European-style balance of power politics, have nevertheless sought precisely such a balance of power, or equilibrium, in world affairs. That preference survived the important shift from a world of very slow social change to a world of awesomely fast social change. It survived the end of the Cold War. It had not prevented wars nor served effectively to restrain any state that sought advantage from an active policy; it meant only that at the eleventh hour, coalitions formed to oppose serious attempts at world dominion. In this process the United States played an appropriate part, allowance being made for the great security provided until the mid-twentieth century by its geographical position.

The practical preference for an international balance does not always give rise to anything that can be called a theory of the balance of power, nor even to the use of the term in political discussion. At times when the balance is a “simple’ balance, that is as during the Cold War or the years immediately preceding World War I, there is little discussion of a concept to which appeal cannot usefully be made, and what discussion there is, is apt to be critical. Equally, a period of great international complexity and uncertainty does not seem to be one that a theory of the balance of power can helpfully elucidate. Somewhere between these extremes the greater flexibility provided by a “complex” balance allows the idea of a balance, as something desirable and as a positive interest of the contending parties themselves, to be advanced. Because the balance is at its most stable when people need not consider its maintenance or even its existence, the discussion of balance is at best an indicator of strain in international affairs; but it may indicate the least amount of strain that mankind is likely to achieve.

This is at the level of academic principles and practical theorization, however when it comes to specific interests in the Middle East the issue of balance of power becomes very problematic in the short run and it is just a possibility that could work to stabilize instabilities in constantly changing Middle East.

**Bush And The New Middle East**

President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice are quite confident about their assessment that a new Middle East being born. In fact, their policies in support of the actions of their closest regional ally, Israel, have helped their proposal. However, it will be hard to see a secular Middle East soon or friendly to the United States when we consider the prevailing sentiments of a major part of the population.

What is happening in the broader Middle East and North Africa can be seen as a bounce back effect that has been playing out slowly since the horrific events of Sept. 11, 2001. In the immediate aftermath of those attacks, there was worldwide sympathy for the United States and support for its declared “war on terrorism,” including the invasion of Afghanistan. Then the overstretching of this universal goodwill by so-called neo-conservatives to advance direct control designs was confirmed by the war in Iraq. The Bush administration’s dishonest statements about “weapons of mass destruction” diminished whatever credibility the United States might have had as liberator, while disastrous mismanagement of Iraqi affairs after the invasion led to the squandering of a conventional military victory. The country slid into bloody sectarian violence, while official Washington stonewalled and refused to admit mistakes. No wonder the world is becoming more skeptical about the United States capability of solving problems.

Against these new world tendencies, President Bush made something of a comeback in the first year of his second term. He shifted his foreign policy rhetoric from a “war on terrorism” to a war of ideas and a struggle for liberty and democracy. Through much of 2005 it looked as if the Middle East might finally have its long-overdue spring of freedom. Lebanon forged a Cedar Revolution, triggered by the assassination of its popular former prime minister, Rafiq Hariri. Egypt held its first multi-candidate presidential election in 50 years. So did Palestine and Iraq, despite harsh conditions of occupation. Qatar and Bahrain in the Arabian Gulf continued their steady evolution into constitutional monarchies. Even Saudi Arabia held its first municipal elections.

But there was more. Hamas mobilized candidates and popular campaigns to win a plurality in Palestinian legislative elections and form a new government. Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt achieved similar electoral successes. And with these developments, a sudden impact fell over Washington and other Western capitals.

Instead of welcoming these particular elected officials into the newly emerging democratic fold; Washington began to give a watching eye with fear on Muslim democrats. Even the moderate pressure on autocratic allies of the United States to democratize in 2005 had all but disappeared by 2006. In fact, shaky Arab autocrats felt they had a new lease on life with the West conveniently cowed by an emerging Islamist political force.

Now the cold war on Islamists has escalated into a shooting war, first against Hamas in Gaza and then against Hezbollah in Lebanon. Israel is perceived in the region, rightly or wrongly, to be an agent acting on behalf of U.S. interests. Some will admit that there was provocation for Israel to strike at Hamas and Hezbollah following the abduction of three soldiers and attacks on military and civilian targets. But destroying Lebanon with an overkill approach cannot be morally tolerated or politically justified especially that the Security Council resolution 1701 achieved far more objectives that Israel and Lebanon failed to attain.

Born in the thick of an earlier Israeli invasion, in 1982, Hezbollah has projecting itself as a resistance movement against foreign occupation, a social service provider for the needs of the rural south and the slum-dwellers of Beirut, and a model actor in Lebanese and Middle Eastern politics. Despite access to millions of dollars in resources from within and from regional allies Syria and for most Iran, its three successive leaders have projected an image of concern for their announced objectives.

In more than four weeks of fighting against the strongest military machine in the region, Hezbollah held its own and won the admiration of millions of Arabs and Muslims. People in the region have compared its steadfastness with the swift defeat of three large Arab armies in the Six-Day War of 1967.

None of the current heads of Arab states made the list of the 10 most popular public figures as Hasan Nasrallah did. While subject to future fluctuations, this new reality suggests the direction in which the region is moving to the disadvantage of the USA. The Arab people do not respect the ruling regimes, perceiving them to be autocratic, corrupt and inept. They are, at best, ambivalent about the fanatical Islamists of the bin Laden variety. More mainstream Islamists with broad support; developed civic dispositions and services to provide are the most likely actors in building a new Middle East. In fact, they are already doing so through the Justice and Development Party in Turkey, the similarly named PJD in Morocco, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas in Palestine and, yes, Hezbollah in Lebanon. This reality is perplexing the established regional alliances strengthening rejectionist factions at the expense of other traditional parties ultimately making the design for a Middle East balance of power very obscure and hard to calculate and attain.

These groups, parties and movements are not inimical to democracy. They have accepted electoral systems and practiced electoral politics, probably too well for Washington’s taste. Whether we like it or not, these are the facts. The rest of the Western world must come to grips with the new reality, even if the U.S. president and his secretary of state continue to reject the new offspring of their own policies.

 Beirut is burning, hundreds of Lebanese die, hundreds of thousands loose all they ever owned and become refugees, and all the world is doing is rescuing the “foreign passport” residents of what was just two weeks ago “the Paris of the Middle East”.  
   
The speed at which everything happened during the 2006 Summer war of Israel on Lebanon (along with many other pieces of information) indicates that Israel has been waiting for a long time for the international conditions to recreate a balance of power through a massive war on Lebanon. In fact, one does not need to speculate on this, since right from the start, Israeli and U.S. official sources have been pretty open in this regard. As a Senior Israeli official explained to the Washington Post on July 16, “Hezbollah cross-border raid has provided a “unique moment” with a convergence of interests.” The paper goes on to explain what this convergence of interests is:

For the United States, the broader goal is to strangle the axis of Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria and Iran, which the Bush administration believes is pooling resources to change the strategic balance of power in the Middle East, U.S. officials say.

For the U.S., the Middle East is delicately balanced where the game is establishing full U.S. stability prospective. The U.S. already controls Iraq and Afghanistan, and considers Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and a few other states as friendly cooperating regimes. But even with this massive foothold, full U.S. control over stability is still far from established. Iran has only been strengthened by the Iraq war and refuses to accept directives from the USA. Throughout the Arab world, including in the cooperative regimes, there is boiling anger at the U.S., at the heart of which is not only the occupation of Iraq, but also the oppression of the Palestinians, and the U.S. backing of Israel’s policies. The new axis of the four contending factions of the Bush administration (Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria and Iran) are bodies viewed by the Arab world as resisting U.S. or Israel’s rule, and standing for Arab liberation. From Bush’s perspective, he only has two years to consolidate his vision of complete U.S. stabilization of the Middle East, and to do that, all seeds of resistance should be crushed in a devastating blow that will make it clear to every single Arab that abiding by a balance of power is the only way to stay alive. If Israel is willing to do the job, and crush not only the Palestinians, but also Lebanon and Hezbollah, then the U.S., torn from the inside by growing resentment over Bush’s wars, and perhaps unable to send new soldiers for this cause right now, will give Israel all the backing it can. As Rice announced in her visit in Jerusalem on July 25, what is at stakes is “a new Middle East. “We will prevail”, she promised Olmert. But Israel is not sacrificing its soldiers and citizens only to please the Bush administration. The “new Middle East” has been a dream of the Israeli ruling military circles since at least 1982, when Sharon led the country to the first Lebanon war with precisely this declared goal. Hezbollah leaders have argued for years that its real long-term role is to protect Lebanon, whose army is too weak to do this.

**Globalization and The New Middle East**

How can one perceive of regional balance of power in the new Middle East in light of the accelerating paces of globalization. The Latter is drawing the world closer and raising challenges that no one country, even as powerful as the United States, could solve on its own.  Hitherto, the United States is limiting its commitments to global institutions and organizations, and acting alone rather than collectively.  This tendency has been clear both in the Clinton and Bush years.  U.S. relations with the United Nations have also been a source of concern.  The U.S. retreated from its early post-Cold War involvement in UN peace operations and adopted a more restrictive and selective attitude.  While willing to intervene in Europe, through NATO, it devoted little support to UN peace operations in Africa.  Before September 11, the Bush Administration has declined to include the U.S. forces in the UN operation in Afghanistan.  After September 11, the President’s “axis of evil” statement has raised concerns about military unilateralism.  Although the UN Security Council anticipated the U.S. attack on Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime, but it does not encompass the overthrow of regimes with records of aggressive behavior nor does it legitimate the use of force against states deemed unfriendly.  In addition, the unilateral U.S. decision to launch war on Iraq undermined the United Nations Security Council’s lawful authority to maintain international peace and security.  Some say that despite his declared readiness to act unilaterally, President Bush has been soliciting support from consequential states, including China and Russia.  Others viewed that without access to facilities in Pakistan and other states bordering Afghanistan, U.S. operations would have been much more difficult to sustain.  And others observe that overthrowing Saddam Hussein without Turkish and Gulf States’ support would have been a very expensive feat.  Furthermore, “a unilateralist policy might gradually strain relations with France, the United Kingdom, and Germany”, countries on which the U.S. relies for help in building weak or rogue states.  However, a fact remains: “the Bush administration may form coalitions when it suits the United States but its overriding mission is to show the world why the American way is best.”

In such a vision and process, the Bush administration has circulated to its G-8 partners the details of the Greater Middle East Partnership (GMEP) that Washington hopes for at the group’s May 2004 summit in Sea Island, Georgia. The GMEP is a core element of the administration’s larger Greater Middle East Initiative, which has additional security and political components beyond those outlined in the GMEP.

To provide a completely different perspective on American plans for the Middle East this article is using the English-language website of the London-based Arabic newspaper al-Hayat. This newspaper published what it called the “U.S. working paper for G-8 sherpas” (the latter term referring to the government officials responsible for preparing the event). If this eight-page document is in fact authentic, that is to say, a claim that no administration official has disputed, then the president’s “forward strategy of freedom” is likely to remain illusory.

Although the details of the G-8 GMEP proposal as laid out in the al-Hayat “working paper” include several insightful ideas, the proposal as a whole suffers from two major problems. First, too many of its initiatives emphasize form over content, offering support to any regional actors willing to play the electoral game without regard to their commitment to the values that under-gird democracy. The unintended result could be further strengthening of Islamist forces precisely at a moment when they are on the retreat in many countries. Second, too few of the projects dedicated to “human development” actually address the primary obstacles to solving systemic problems. Consequently, such projects will have little impact on the true ailments of Arab societies. On the positive side is the fact that the administration seems keen on trying to enlist G-8 partners in what, over time, could develop into one of the most seismic initiatives of the post-Cold War era, perhaps even the mission that defines that era. On the negative side, the recipe proposed in the draft, which amounts to two parts counterproductive, two parts irrelevant, and only one part truly useful, is unlikely to either promote real reform or advance U.S. interests in the greater Middle East or what is so called New Middle East.

**An Intellectual Perspective Analysis**

The logic of the GMEP derives from the two Arab Human Development Reports (AHDRs) drafted by a group of Arab scholars under the auspices of the UN Development Program in 2002 and 2003. Indeed, arguments, statistics, and recommendations from the two AHDRs are cited throughout the G-8 GMEP proposal. This endorsement of the AHDR provides a shaky intellectual foundation for the GMEP. To be sure, the AHDR offers many useful analytical insights, including the identification of three major “deficits”: in freedom, knowledge, and women’s empowerment. Yet, both reports, especially the 2003 version, are remarkably politicized, scientifically lacking researched documents. Indeed, the latter cites the Arab-Israeli conflict as the main cause of the aforementioned deficits and places principal blame on the Bush administration for poisoning the environment for Arab freedom and education in the post-September 11 environment. In claiming this they have undermined the internal and domestic deficiencies.

The authors of the G-8 proposal also seem to have borrowed an even more dangerous aspect of the AHDR, namely, placing all residents of the greater Middle East under a one-size-fits-all demographic construct. In the AHDR, all residents of Arab League countries are regarded as Arabs and are therefore given Arab solutions to their political and social problems. The reality, of course, is that more than a quarter of all residents of Arab countries are not Arab, whether they are Berbers in Morocco and Algeria, non-Arab Christians in Sudan, or Kurds in Iraq. The G-8 proposal goes one better: by its definition, the greater Middle East includes Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Israel, making it a region in which Arabs are a distinct minority. Yet, virtually all of the proposal’s analysis and recommendations are directed toward Arabs. Where is the recognition of the region’s ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic mosaic?

**The G-8 Initiatives And Its Prospects**

The G-8 proposal presents three sets of initiatives: “promoting democracy and good governance, building a knowledge society, and expanding economic opportunity.” (This essay focuses on the first two parts; a forthcoming Policy Watch will address the economic component). Together, they are designed to “forge a long-term partnership with the Greater Middle East’s reform leaders and launch a coordinated response to promote political, economic, and social reform in the region.” As presented, some initiatives are likely to meet that test; many others are not.

The democracy and governance initiative includes projects intended to provide technical assistance for holding elections; arrange parliamentary exchanges and training; create women’s leadership academies; establish grassroots legal aid opportunities; support independent media; expand regional anticorruption efforts; and strengthen local and regional civil society organizations. Some, like the media program, are good ideas but timid in breadth and scope. The G-8 proposal’s focus on training and exchanges is far too limited. All over the Middle East, forward-thinking journalists, editors, screenwriters, television producers, and film directors are eager to start up everything from newspapers to educational satellite TV stations; they need money and political support, not just training, but the G-8 proposal offers little of either.

Other ideas, such as the legal aid project, focus on the right issue but miss the big picture. For example, the GMEP’s initial focus on providing defense attorneys for accused criminals is misplaced. More high-value targets for legal aid are women who, despite their numerous rights on paper (e.g., to property, divorce, child custody), often lack the means or the education to ensure that their rights are respected. In terms of the potential societal impact and the sheer number of people affected, focusing on women’s legal rights rather than criminals’ legal rights would be a much more effective strategy.

Other project ideas, especially parliamentary training, are simply bad policy. The reality in many Middle Eastern countries is that anti-American, anti-Western, anti-peace Islamists constitute large or even dominant blocs in local parliaments. An open-door policy of parliamentary training would only help such individuals become more effective critics of pro-American, pro-Western, pro-peace regional governments. It would also send a mixed message to local voters, convincing many that the United States and its allies have lost so much faith in local leaders that they have chosen to support Islamists as an alternative.

The missing element in almost all of the G-8 proposal’s democracy and governance initiatives is values. Nowhere does the proposal state that the G-8 will support those leaders, reformers, and organizations that share the common values of G-8 countries: liberalism, tolerance, openness, meritocracy, and respect for both the rule of law and personal freedoms of speech, assembly, religion, and conscience. Instead, the initiatives emphasize the important but merely technical aspects of democracy (e.g., voter registration). The proposal’s commitment to expand direct funding of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), while significant, begs the question of which NGOs should receive such funding. Without a values component, the answer is unclear. Although a valueless proposal has less chance of provoking opposition around the Middle East, it also has less chance of actually promoting the reforms it aspires to foster.

Two aspects of the proposal’s NGO section reinforce the impression that Washington is placing a higher priority on winning European and Arab approval than on pressing for urgent, substantive reform. First, the G-8 is asked merely to “encourage” governments to permit NGOs to operate freely, without even raising the potential of conditionality (e.g., suspending or limiting economic assistance to protest government intervention in the operation of local NGOs). This formulation effectively tells local leaders that G-8 support for civil society initiatives lacks spine. Second, the NGO section makes no reference to the recently instituted U.S. requirement that all NGOs receiving financial aid must pledge not to knowingly provide material support to terrorist groups. Is Washington signaling a willingness to suspend that requirement for NGO assistance that flows through the G-8?

**Balance Of Power And Stability**

In most parts of the world, there were no regional powers that could keep the peace, at least not on behalf of American interests and values, therefore, the United States had to do it alone and designate itself as the world police. With the September 11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. soil, a new era have emerged generating new concepts and frameworks for foreign policy conducts.  A new ‘ism’ surfaced, that is a new definition for terrorism, and new conceptualizations of geographical regions were constructed.

The Code of Federal Regulations as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives defines terrorism in the United States.” It is an end that justifies the means.  Terror has been practiced throughout history and throughout the world.  But the terror attack of September 11 is undoubtedly the most significant and lethal terror operation in the modern history.  Its impact has been greatly magnified by its targeting the U.S. and the use of modern technology and communications media.  It attracted television coverage, which brought the event directly into millions of homes.  Terrorists used the high-tech globalization against Americans who had originated so much of the technology and it seems that “Americans and terrorists are resembled in having a vision of globalization.”

The United States is now launching a war on another ideology yet with no borders.  The Bush administration declares a global war on terror and that entails a new strategy.  Thus, the Bush administration initiated a National Security Strategy known as the Bush doctrine overturning the established order.  Not because it commits the U.S. to global intervention; they were involved in before.  Not because it targets terrorism and rejectionist states (Iran, Iraq, and North Korea); nothing new either.  What’s new is that it makes a long-building direct interventional tendency explicit and permanent.  In another sense, the September 11 attacks allowed the “Bush administration to avert the crisis of legitimacy it had previously faced, and re-enter world affairs with a new sense of confidence.” These terrorist events gave the United States a reason to shape up international politics, and a justification for easy recourse to war whenever and wherever an American President chooses.

“The ongoing global war on terror launched by the Bush administration has greatly reshaped many aspects of U.S. foreign policy and will have a far-reaching impact on international relations and global strategic configurations.”  The whole world was reclassified relatively to the U.S. and regional reconfigurations are taking new shape: The Middle East is no longer the arena of a sole issue traditionally labeled as Arab-Israeli conflict. The first main strategy of the Bush doctrine is to identify and isolate what they label as terrorist states in the larger Middle East.  These states include: Iraq, Iran, Syria, and groups in Afghanistan and Lebanon. The second stage is to use preemptive military action against terrorist states to enforce a regime change, and the third is to engage in nation building, thus institutionalizing democracy.  This doctrine marks a shift of focus from powerful states to nation’s weak or illegitimate governments, as well as a shift in policy from deterrence and containment to more direct military involvement. “The Bush doctrine is based on undefined conspiratorial enemies, shadowy networks of individuals who overlap with states and who are planning an imminent attack based on dangerous technologies.”

The first stage of the campaign against global terror necessitated aggressive military turnover of the terrorist Taliban regime in Afghanistan on the basis that it was harboring Osama Bin Laden and his terrorist network. The second stage is the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of the Saddam authoritarian regime on the basis that it possesses weapons of mass destruction (WMD).  However, Bin Laden has not been captured, and WMD have not been found in Iraq.  In trying to understand the U.S. foreign policy behind the launching of these two wars, let us try and answer the how and why of the two stages.

Wars need alliances, therefore new alliances and coalitions were formed, i.e. Pakistan, India, Uzbekistan, and Russia, this formula of alliances triggers new conceptualization of the Middle East region. But at the same time long-time alliances were questioned, i.e. Egypt and Saudi Arabia if democratization of the Middle East region is still a priority.  Yesterday’s allies are today’s enemies and vice versa. Osama Bin Laden and his groups fought with the U.S. against the Soviet Union’s expansion in the Caspian Sea region.  The U.S. militarized Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war.  Individuals and private foundations in Saudi Arabia financed terrorist organizations and 15 out of the 19 September 11 hijackers are Saudis.  Behind the purpose of the war on Afghanistan aiming at capturing Osama Bin Laden, dismantling al Qaeda, and toppling the Taliban regime, it seems that “a specific war on Afghanistan had been planned at least a year earlier than October 2001, and terms related to regional strategic and economic interests, had actually been rooted in at least four years of strategic planning.”  Behind the war on Iraq and the distortion of WMD, which up till now have not been found, lays another purpose of the U.S. existence in the Middle East.  The Bush doctrine clearly defines this purpose by stating that threats to “economic freedom”, that is to say that, the failed neo-liberal economic system, is one of the key values which the U.S. will militarily defend through an offensive war. Indeed, the Bush doctrine is found to “extend the geopolitical, military and political boundaries to conquer and exploit “new strategic regions”.

The foreign policy strategy underlying the two wars on Afghanistan and Iraq is two-fold:  First, it has shifted the West-anti West confrontation from the U.S. soil to U.S. targets abroad. Second, it has secured U.S. long time desired geopolitical strategic influence in the Caspian Sea region and the Middle East.

The Caspian Sea basin composed of Russia and Iran, as well as several former republics of the Soviet Union – Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, has “captured worldwide attention due to the phenomenal reserves of oil and natural gas located in the region.”  Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan possess large reserves of oil and natural gas.  Uzbekistan has oil and gas reserves that may permit it to be self-sufficient in energy and gain revenue through exports.  Although many states hope to benefit from the development of these reserves, Japan, Turkey, Iran, Western Europe, China, and Russia, “the future development of the Caspian Sea region and similarly the Middle East are clouded by ethnic and political turmoil within the region and the emergence of a new hidden power struggle between the U.S. and Russia.”  The potential for conflict derives from contested boundaries and territorial disputes, the prevalence of authoritarian regimes, severe economic disparities, long-standing regional rivalries, and ethnic and religious strife. According to the U.S. this reality imposes a redefining of regions and specially the Middle East.

The emergence of a new Middle East will most probably cause harm to itself, the United States, and the world because it is constantly changing in contending forces alliances.

All the eras in the Middle East have been defined by the interplay of contending forces, both internal and external to the region. What has varied is the balance between these influences. The Middle East’s next era promises to be one in which outside actors have a relatively modest impact and local forces enjoy the upper hand, and in which the local actors gaining power are radicals committed to changing the status quo. Shaping the new Middle East from the outside will be exceedingly difficult, but it, along with managing a dynamic Asia, will be the primary challenge of U.S. foreign policy for decades to come.

The modern Middle East was born in the late eighteenth century. For some historians, the signal event was the 1774 signing of the treaty that ended the war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia; a stronger case can be made for the importance of Napoleon’s relatively easy entry into Egypt in 1798, which showed Europeans that the region was ripe for conquest and prompted Arab and Muslim intellectuals to ask, as many continue to do today, why their civilization had fallen so far behind that of Christian Europe. Ottoman decline combined with European penetration into the region gave rise to the “Eastern Question,” regarding how to deal with the effects of the decline of the Ottoman Empire, which various parties have tried to answer to their own advantage ever since.

The first era ended with World War I, the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of the Turkish republic, and the division of the spoils of war among the European victors. What

ensued was an age of colonial rule, dominated by France and the United Kingdom. This second era ended some four decades later, after another world war had drained the Europeans of much of their strength, Arab nationalism had risen, and the two superpowers had begun to lock horns. “[He] who rules the Near East rules the world; and he who has interests in the world is bound to concern himself with the Near East,” wrote the historian Albert Hourani, who correctly saw the 1956 Suez crisis as marking the end of the colonial era and the beginning of the Cold War era in the region.

During the Cold War, as had been the case previously, outside forces played a dominant role in the Middle East. But the very nature of U.S.-Soviet competition gave local states considerable room to maneuver. The high-water mark of the era was the October 1973 war, which the United States and the Soviet Union essentially stopped at a stalemate, paving the way for ambitious diplomacy, including the Egyptian-Israeli peace accord.

Yet it would be a mistake to see this third era simply as a time of well-managed great-power competition. The June 1967 war forever changed the balance of power in the Middle East. The use of oil as an economic and political weapon in 1973 highlighted U.S. and international vulnerability to supply shortages and price hikes. And the Cold War’s balancing act created a context in which local forces in the Middle East had significant autonomy to pursue their own agendas. The 1979 revolution in Iran, which brought down one of the pillars of U.S. policy in the region, showed that outsiders could not control local events. Arab states resisted U.S. attempts to persuade them to join anti-Soviet projects. Israel’s 1982 occupation of Lebanon spawned Hezbollah. And the Iran-Iraq War consumed those two countries for a decade.

**The United States As A Catalyst And Actor**

The end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union brought about a fourth era in the region’s history, during which the United States enjoyed unprecedented influence and freedom to act. Dominant features of this American era were the U.S.-led liberation of Kuwait, the long-term stationing of U.S. ground and air forces on the Arabian Peninsula, and an active diplomatic interest in trying to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict once and for all (which culminated in the Clinton administration’s intense but ultimately unsuccessful effort at Camp David). More than any other, this period exemplified what is now thought of as the “old Middle East.” The region was defined by an aggressive but frustrated Iraq, a radical but divided and relatively weak Iran, Israel as the region’s most powerful state and sole nuclear power, fluctuating oil prices, top-heavy Arab regimes that repressed their peoples, uneasy coexistence between Israel and both the Palestinians and the Arabs, and, more generally, American primacy.

What has brought this era to an end after less than two decades is a number of factors, some structural, some self-created. The most significant has been the Bush administration’s decision to attack Iraq in 2003 and its conduct of the operation and resulting occupation. One casualty of the war has been a Sunni-dominated Iraq, which was strong enough and motivated enough to balance Shiite Iran. Sunni-Shiite tensions, dormant for a while, have come to the surface in Iraq and throughout the region. Terrorists have gained a base in Iraq and developed there a new set of techniques to export. Throughout much of the region, democracy has become associated with the loss of public order and the end of Sunni primacy. Anti-American sentiment, already considerable, has been reinforced. And by tying down a huge portion of the U.S. military, the war has reduced U.S. leverage worldwide. It is one of history’s ironies that the first war in Iraq, a war of necessity, marked the beginning of the American era in the Middle East and the second Iraq war, a war of choice, has precipitated its end.

Other factors have also been relevant. One is the demise of the Middle East peace process. The United States had traditionally enjoyed a unique capacity to work with both the Arabs and the Israelis. But the limits of that capacity were exposed at Camp David in 2000. Since then, the weakness of Yasir Arafat’s successors, the rise of Hamas, and the Israeli embrace of unilateralism have all helped sideline the United States, a shift reinforced by the disinclination of the current Bush administration to undertake active diplomacy.

Another factor that has helped bring about the difficulty of the American era has been the failure of traditional Arab regimes to counter the appeal of radical Islamism. Faced with a choice between what they perceived as distant and corrupt political leaders and vibrant religious ones, many in the region have opted for the latter. It took 9/11 for U.S. leaders to draw the connection between closed societies and the incubation of radicals. But their response, often a hasty push for elections regardless of the local political context, has provided terrorists and their supporters with more opportunities for advancement than they had before.

Finally, globalization has changed the region. It is now less difficult for radicals to acquire funding, arms, ideas, and recruits. The rise of new media, and above all of satellite television, has turned the Arab world into a “regional village” and politicized it. Much of the content shown — scenes of violence and destruction in Iraq; images of mistreated Iraqi and Muslim prisoners; suffering in Gaza, the West Bank, and now Lebanon — has further alienated many people in the Middle East from the United States. As a result, governments in the Middle East now have a more difficult time working openly with the United States, and U.S. influence in the region has waned.

The outlines of the Middle East’s fifth era are still taking shape, but they follow naturally from the end of the American era. A dozen features will form the context for daily events.

First, the United States will continue to enjoy more influence in the region than any other outside power, but its influence will be reduced from what it once was. This reflects the growing impact of an array of internal and external forces, the inherent limits of U.S. power, and the results of U.S. policy choices.

Second, the United States will increasingly be challenged by the foreign policies of other outsiders. The European Union will offer little help in Iraq and is likely to push for a different approach to the Palestinian problem. China will resist pressuring Iran and will seek to guarantee the availability of energy supplies. Russia, too, will resist calls to sanction Iran and will look for opportunities to demonstrate its independence from the United States. Both China and Russia (as well as many European states) will distance themselves from U.S. efforts to promote political reform in non-democratic states in the Middle East.

Third, Iran will be one of the two most powerful states in the region. Those who have seen Iran as being on the cusp of dramatic internal change have been wrong. Iran enjoys relatively enough petrodollars wealth, is the most powerful external influence in Iraq, and holds considerable sway over both Hamas and Hezbollah. It is a classic regional power, with national security interest to remake the region in its image and the potential to translate its objectives into reality.

Fourth, Israel will be the other powerful state in the region and the one country with a modern economy able to compete globally. The only state in the Middle East with a nuclear arsenal, it also possesses the region’s most capable conventional military force. But it still has to bear the costs of its occupation of the West Bank and deal with a multi-front, multi-dimensional security challenge. Strategically speaking, Israel is in a weaker position today than it was before this summer’s crisis in Lebanon.

Fifth, anything resembling a viable peace process is unlikely for the foreseeable future. In the aftermath of Israel’s controversial operation in Lebanon, the Kadima-led government will almost certainly be too weak to command domestic support for any policy perceived as risky or as rewarding aggression. Unilateral disengagement has been discredited now that attacks have followed Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon and Gaza. There is no obvious partner on the Palestinian side who is both able and willing to compromise, further hindering the chances of a negotiated approach. The United States has lost much of its standing as a credible and honest broker, at least for the time being. Meanwhile, Israel’s settlement expansion and road building will continue apace, further complicating diplomacy.

Sixth, Iraq, traditionally a center of Arab power, will remain messy for years to come, with a weak central government, a divided society, and regular sectarian violence. At worst, it will become a failed state wracked by an all-out civil war that will draw in its neighbors.

Seventh, the price of oil will stay high, the result of strong demand from China and India, limited success at curbing consumption in the United States, and the continued possibility of supply shortages. The price of a barrel of oil is far more likely to exceed the existing price than it is to fall below $40. Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other large producers will benefit disproportionately.

Eighth, “militiazation” will continue apace. Private armies in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestinian areas are already growing more powerful. Militias, both a product and a cause of weak states, will emerge wherever there is a perceived or an actual deficit of state authority and capacity. The recent fighting in Lebanon will exacerbate this trend, since Hezbollah has gained by not suffering a total defeat, while Israel has lost by not realizing a total victory, a result that will embolden Hezbollah and those who emulate it.

Ninth, terrorism, defined as the intentional use of force against civilians in the pursuit of political aims, will remain a feature of the region. It will occur in divided societies, such as Iraq, and in societies where radical groups seek to weaken and discredit the government, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Terrorism will grow in sophistication and remain a tool used against Israel and the presence of the United States and other non-indigenous powers.

Tenth, Islam will increasingly fill the political and intellectual vacuum in the Arab world and provide a foundation for the politics of a majority of the region’s inhabitants. Arab nationalism and Arab socialism are things of the past, and democracy belongs in the distant future, at best. Arab unity is a slogan, not a reality. The influence of Iran and groups associated with it has been reinforced, and efforts to improve ties between Arab governments and Israel and the United States have been complicated. Meanwhile, tensions between Sunnis and Shiites will grow throughout the Middle East, causing problems in countries with divided societies, such as Bahrain, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia.

Iran is a more difficult case. But since regime change in Tehran is not a near-term prospect, military strikes against nuclear sites in Iran would be dangerous, and deterrence is uncertain, diplomacy is the best option available to Washington. The U.S. government should open, without preconditions, comprehensive talks that address Iran’s nuclear program and its support of terrorism and foreign militias. Iran should be offered an array of economic, political, and security incentives. It could be allowed a highly limited uranium-enrichment pilot program so long as it accepted highly intrusive inspections. Such an offer would win broad international support, a prerequisite if the United States wants backing for imposing sanctions or escalating to other options should diplomacy fail. Making the terms of such an offer public would increase diplomacy’s chances of success.

Diplomacy also needs to be revived in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is still the issue that most shapes (and radicalizes) public opinion in the region. The goal at this point would be not to bring the parties to Camp David or anywhere else but to begin to create the conditions under which diplomacy could usefully be restarted. The United States should articulate those principles it believes ought to constitute the elements of a final settlement, including the creation of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 lines. The more generous and detailed the plan, the harder it would be for Hamas to reject negotiation and favor confrontation. Consistent with this approach, U.S. officials ought to sit down with Hamas officials, much as they have with the leaders of Sinn Féin, some of whom also led the Irish Republican Army. Such exchanges should be viewed not as rewarding terrorist tactics but as instruments with the potential to bring behavior in line with U.S. policy.

Oil as a potential diminishing energy source is what the modern Middle Eastern geopolitics has been about.  Given the vast energy resources that form the backbone of western economies, influence and involvement in the Middle East has been of paramount importance to the United States. To maintain superiority, control and influence over the region, the West, mainly the U.S., have helped in the perpetuation of Arab leaders into their incumbent positions of power and supported the overthrow of those that are not seen as favorable.   Protection of the Saudi regime has been a basic feature of U.S. security policy since 1945, when President Roosevelt made an arrangement with Ibn Saud.  At the core of this arrangement is a vital agreement, that is: in return for protecting the royal family of Al Saud against its enemies, American companies are allowed unrivaled access to Saudi oil fields.

The United States, considering itself the world police, and determined to protect its vital interests in the region, is facing problems to forge stability.  “American officials claim that the conspicuous presence of U.S. troops in the Gulf and the demonstrated willingness of successive administrations to endorse the use of force will reduce the risk of conflict by deterring potential adversaries from obstructing the flow of oil.”  When Iraq invaded Kuwait, then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney explained that Saddam Hussein would acquire a “stranglehold” over the U.S. and world economy if he captured Saudi Arabia’s oilfields along with those of Kuwait. That was the main reason why the United States liberated Kuwait and invaded Iraq.  In the same context, the war against Iraq now is intended to provide the U.S. with a dominant position in the Persian Gulf region, and to serve as a facilitator for further assertion of power in the region.  Some and not necessarily all believe that it is aimed at Iran, Syria, and more at Russia, China, and Europe, as it is part of a larger process of asserting capable power in this part of the world.  When you think of oil, it is not just a source of fuel but also a source of power, and as U.S. strategists see it, “whoever controls the Persian Gulf oil controls the world’s economy, and therefore, has the ultimate lever over all competing powers.”

The Middle East is the most militarized region in the world. And, with the U.S. geopolitical aspirations, stability should be stored, thus, weaponry should be limited.  Lately, Libya decided to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction program and allow thorough inspections; Iran signed the protocol to the non-proliferation treaty allowing snap inspections of nuclear facilities. In addition, President Bush signed the Syrian Accountability Act, and, both the U.S. and Britain demanded Syria to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction, yet, Israel continues to develop its military capabilities, and the Arab Israeli conflict has not been resolved.

The Bush Doctrine calls for a better world where democracy prevails as the source of peace and stability.  Benjamin Barber affirms that this preemptive war has failed, and it simply cannot coexist with democracy for although the war in Iraq is won, the peace has been lost where the U.S. is trying to impose democracy at the barrel of a gun. Democracy, in its analytical explanation and theory is ideal, however, it comes from the inside and cannot be imposed from above.  In this sense, the U.S. foreign policy drawn in the Bush doctrine is best described as coercive openness, where it calls for freedom, peace, and democracy, albeit chooses to impose regime change and unilateral intervention.

It seems the United States, choosing to extend further its interests in the region, will face many obstacles.  Now the United States faces the challenge of protecting as well as reforming Saudi Arabia. It needs the present regime to stabilize geopolitics and the oil economy. However, the Saudi regime is threatened by the differences among the Saudi royal family.  Even though President Bush has repeatedly proclaimed that his administration will go after all those who harbor and support terrorists and that he hopes to democratize the entire Middle East, it is understood that Saudi Arabia up till now is excluded from both these measures.

The U.S. war on terror is limitless in time and space.  And a suppressed people that sees U.S. influence as a major root cause of the current problems in the Middle East has led to a rise in acts of terrorism and anti-U.S. sentiment.  When looking at some of the actions of the United States in the region, it can often be seen why this is eventually so. Then, how will the United States, in drawing its foreign policy strategy, promote balance of power and achieve stability at a time when its ability is short of containing this unannounced civil war in Iraq?

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**ميزان القوى والشرق الأوسط الجديد**

يبدو ميزان القوى للوهلة  الأولى مبدأ بسيطاً وسهلاً. لقد تم تحديد عبارة «ميزان القوى» في القانون الدولي لأن مثل هذا «التوازن العادل» بين أعضاء «عائلة الدول» يحول دون تزوّد أيّ من الدول بالقوة الكافية لفرض إرادتها على بقية الدول. وعلاوة على ذلك، فقد استعملت هذه العبارة أكثر في إطار الجدل السياسي أكثر مما استعملت في التحليل السياسي.

وراء كل تفسيرات عبارة ''ميزان القوى'' يمكن الاحتكام إلى الواقعية في إدارة الشؤون الدولية. تبقى الواقعية ربما حجّة الكبح الأكثر إقناعاً. ومن المعروف أن عقيدة ميزان القوى هي أداة لتعزيز الكبح.  إن غياب الكبح أو نقضه هو أمر خطير وغير صائب ومصيره الفشل في النهاية.

بهذا المعنى يكون ميزان القوى في الشؤون الدولية مرتبطاً   ارتباطاً مباشراً وواضحاً بفكرة الحسابات والتوازنات داخل الدولة، وهو يشكّل بشكل متساوٍ أداة لفرض الكبح على الرجال الذين قد يتخلّون عن ميزان القوى هذا بفعل إغراء السلطة.

هذا التحديد يبقى على مستوى المبادئ الأكاديمية والتنظير العلمي، ولكن حين يتعلّق الأمر بمصالح معيّنة في الشرق الأوسط، تصبح مسألة ميزان القوى جدليّة على المدى القصير، وهي مجرّد إمكانية قد تنجح لترسيخ المسائل غير المستقرّة في شرق أوسط متغيّر باستمرار.

فما هو فعلاً ميزان القوى؟ لقد أعطى الكاتب في هذا النص تحديداً لهذه العبارة، ولكيفية فهمها، وشرح كيف أثّرت على المنطقة، وتحدث عن المشكلات الأساسية التي تواجهها المنطقة حالياً، وكيف ''تغتصب'' الولايات المتحدة الأميركية ميزان القوى.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/balance-power-and-new-middle-east#sthash.ppjglOet.dpuf