



SEARCHING FOR A POST-SADDAM REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

By James A Russell*

There has been a great deal of discussion and controversy over U.S. policy toward Iraq and what that country's future might--or should--be. Yet one important neglected issue is how an altered Iraq might affect regional security in the Persian Gulf and in what ways a post-Saddam Gulf might be made more stable and secure. This article discusses past U.S. policy toward the area and proposes ideas for future efforts to promote regional peace and prosperity.

With the Bush Administration intent on regime change in Baghdad, much attention in the press and in the policy community is understandably focused on the rights and wrongs or tactics of removing Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. But while the circumstances of Saddam's removal are being crafted and debated, the broader issue facing strategic planners is the task of reconstructing a regional security architecture that may be more relevant to the region's emerging requirements in a post-Saddam era.

Just as the attacks of September 11, 2001, forced a break from the past and enabled new ways of thinking about how the United States should interact with the international community, the debate over the removal of Saddam provides the United States with an opportunity to reexamine a host of assumptions that have driven U.S. security strategy and policy in the region over the last decade.

When the Berlin wall came tumbling down in 1989 and the inauguration of the "post-cold-war" world was proclaimed, the forces of change that swept through various other parts of the globe did not materially affect the Gulf. The presence of a defiant Saddam and the so-called "box" of containment constructed largely with

American military power were major reasons why forces unleashed by the absence of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry did not manifest themselves in the Gulf. But the prospect of a Gulf without Saddam could represent a "crumbling" of a Berlin Wall of sorts in the region and unleash a variety of pent-up forces for change that could profoundly affect regional security and stability. The dictates of prudent planning suggest that the United States, the region and the international community start thinking about these issues now if we hope to see how a war with Iraq could be made into a positive force for long-term security.

If the Gulf has been slow to see the forces of change flowing in the post-Cold War era, it is also true that United States strategy in the Gulf has changed little during the last 20-odd years. American interests, strategy, and policy have remained remarkably constant over the decades. Starting with formulations by senior policymakers dating to the 1940s, the United States has always regarded unimpeded access to the oil of the region as a "vital" interest. While using force to protect this interest was by extension always an implicit assumption, it wasn't until President Jimmy Carter's January 1980 statements in the aftermath of the

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Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that the commitment finally became public. Flowing from this commitment, the United States subsequently deployed forces to the Gulf in the 1980s to protect oil tanker traffic and then fought the Gulf War after Saddam threatened to overrun the Arabian Peninsula in 1991.

U.S. strategy and policy in the region since then have operated on three assumptions:

1. The need for access to reasonably priced oil;
2. The need to ensure that no hostile force control the region and its oil supplies or so intimidate other states so as to coerce supplier states into taking actions inimical to consuming nations;
3. A commitment to use force if necessary to protect and further these interests.

The U.S. security architecture in the region is largely based on these key premises.

The idea of a “security architecture” suggests a complex interrelationship between a host of political and military variables and a decision-making process that can coherently and systematically integrate them into a whole. In terms of defining the critical elements of the architecture, the United States has over the decades: (1) defined the U.S. vital interests in the Gulf; (2) developed a strategy to protect and further those interests; (3) formulated policy to implement that strategy; and, (4) committed the political and financial resources to operationalize this policy in the region.

During the 1990s, the United States did reasonably well following this logical process in establishing a security architecture that served its interests. In strictly military terms, that architecture had a number of main elements: forward deployed U.S. forces engaged in ongoing operations, access to host nation facilities, prepositioned equipment, sales of defense

equipment to promote the self-defense capabilities of American allies, and regional military engagement through exercises and training.⁽¹⁾ The issue facing the policy community today is whether this existing security structure will be relevant to the post-Saddam period and whether it will continue to protect and promote U.S. interests and those of its allies.

REGIONAL SECURITY DURING THE 1980s AND 1990s

With the fall of the Shah in 1979 and the Islamic revolution in Iran, the United States found itself without a regional security strategy. The “dual pillars” of Iran and Saudi Arabia had essentially been reduced to one--the House of Saud.

With the eruption of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, the United States gradually acceded to the idea pushed by its Gulf partners that a strong and viable Iraq--even a heavily armed one--should be a primary component of the region's security structure. The main purpose of a secular, Sunni-led Iraq, so the formulation went, was to provide a counter-balance to the more populous and potentially dangerous Shi'i Iran and its Islamist regime. The understanding during the 1980s--and it was a role taken by Saddam willingly and aggressively--was that Iraq would serve as the bulwark against any military expansion of the Islamist revolution by Iran into the Tigris and Euphrates valley and onto the Arabian Peninsula.

The benefit to the United States and the rest of the world was predictable and unimpeded access to oil at reasonable prices. The Gulf states consequently provided Iraq with billions of dollars in support during the Iran-Iraq war, and the United States assisted Iraq's war effort with intelligence and other economic assistance as part of a general policy to prevent an Iranian victory. During this period, the United States deployed forces to the region on an episodic basis to

supplement a small naval presence in Bahrain. Operation Earnest Will in 1987-1988, in which the United States escorted Kuwait's oil tankers through the Gulf, proved to be a precursor to a larger military presence in the 1990s.

When Iraq proved to be a threat rather than a pillar of regional security, the United States adopted the policy of "dual containment" of the regimes in Baghdad and Tehran, a policy that was maintained throughout the 1990s. While the United States sought to prevent each country from exercising undue influence in the region, there was also an implicit understanding that the United States and its regional partners did not want Iraq to collapse completely or be dissolved into several successor states for fear of creating a strategic imbalance that could be exploited by Iran. Further, while Iranian relations with the Gulf States generally improved during the 1990s (with the exception of the UAE), the region remained concerned about Iran's Islamist revolutionary government and its aggressive pursuit of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), especially nuclear weapons and long-range delivery systems that put their capitals at risk.

While the need to preserve access to the region's oil reserves was still present in U.S. policy formulations during the 1990s, the need to promote simultaneously the Middle East peace process while containing Iraq and, to a lesser extent, Iran gradually came to be seen as the primary elements of U.S. Gulf policy. Reflecting this emphasis, the U.S.-Saudi "strategic partnership" that had been greatly enhanced during the 1980s in the Reagan and Bush administrations grew less important to Washington.

While the Saudis provided the means for the United States to implement its policy of containment by providing access to Prince Sultan Air Base and other facilities, the U.S.-Saudi relationship did

not necessarily flourish and grow correspondingly in other areas. Little progress was made in the two most important issues in the bilateral relationship: U.S.-led efforts to negotiate a settlement to the Arab-Israeli dispute and the Saudi request for U.S. support to join the World Trade Organization. The Saudis were reluctant to support U.S.-led efforts in the Middle East peace process during the 1990s, and the Clinton Administration insisted on a variety of preconditions being met before backing Saudi Arabia's entry into the World Trade Organization.

The pattern of relations with Saudi Arabia was to be repeated elsewhere in the Gulf: security and military issues predominated in the bilateral relationships throughout the region. Reflecting this emphasis, senior Defense Department officials made routine trips to the region during the 1990s, while senior State Department involvement was largely confined to the Levant and Israel. Amidst this backdrop, the United States--spearheaded by the Defense Department and the Central Command--set about constructing the physical infrastructure to support ongoing operations that had the dual purpose of containing Iran and Iraq and, in the U.S. view at least, enforcing UN Security Council resolutions affecting Iraq.

From a military perspective, the base structure served two broad purposes: 1) it provided a political statement and signal of U.S. commitment to defend the region and conduct operations designed to "contain" Iraq; and 2) it dramatically reduced the time it would take to assemble forces in a contingency. The 1990s effectively saw the creation of what has been regarded as the "permanent" military presence in the Gulf, in which the United States completed its move into the vacuum created by the British withdrawal from the Gulf in the early 1970s. Some observers described this as the era of "Pax Americana" in the Gulf.(2)

CONTEMPORARY SECURITY STRUCTURE

What did the security structure look like on the eve of the massive build-up of 2002-2003? On any given day during the 1990s, there were 17,000 to 25,000 U.S. military personnel, 30 naval vessels, and 175 aircraft deployed in the Persian Gulf region. During the periodic crises between UN inspectors and Saddam, these numbers increased significantly, but they rarely fell back below these baseline levels. Air Force aircraft operated out of Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia and Ali al-Salem and al-Jaber Air Bases in Kuwait as well as al-Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates.

Together with carrier-based aircraft, these forces flew Operation Southern Watch missions to enforce the southern no-fly and no-drive zones in Iraq. Established in August 1992, Operation Southern Watch followed the precedent of Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq, entailed coalition aircraft patrolling Iraqi airspace below the 32nd parallel, and later expanded to the 33rd parallel in 1996 in response to the Iraqi attack in Irbil.

In the aftermath of the August 1994 Iraqi build-up in southern Iraq and pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 949, the United States and its coalition partners also created a so-called “no drive zone” in southern Iraq to prevent Iraq, by force if necessary, from significantly enhancing its military forces in the south.

At sea, the Bahrain-headquartered Central Command naval component, called NAVCENT or the Fifth Fleet, provided the forces and command and control over enforcement of the UN trade embargo against Iraq through the Maritime Interception Force, or MIF. In what came to be known as Operation Desert Spring, a continuously deployed ground element in Kuwait exercised with prepositioned

military equipment stored at Camp Doha just north of Kuwait City.

During this period, the United States effectively developed primary operational “hubs” that could provide support for ongoing operations while at the same time able to receive forces that would flow quickly into the region in a contingency. Reflecting this presence and pace of operations, Dubai became the U.S. navy’s busiest port of call in the world outside the continental United States during the 1990s.

The build-up of the infrastructure depended, of course, on political elements incorporated into the architecture, namely the agreement and participation of the Gulf states, which had always depended on outside support for their security. During the 1990s, the governing elites happily developed robust politico-military relationships with the United States as a way to guarantee their security. These states were driven by the knowledge that they could never rival a still heavily armed Saddam, and by their lingering mistrust of Iran--despite President Muhammad Khatami’s election and the resulting Iranian attempts at regional rapprochement.

To secure the necessary regional cooperation, the United States concluded agreements with every country in the Gulf except Saudi Arabia, agreements which guaranteed access to host nation military facilities, protected the rights of deployed U.S. military personnel, and permitted, in principle, the prepositioning of U.S. military equipment. By the end of the 1990s, the U.S. had prepositioned heavy brigade sets of ground equipment in Kuwait and Qatar, with one additional brigade set remaining afloat. This presence was almost always augmented by a carrier battle group.

The combination of the forces in theater and the prepositioned military equipment ensured that the United States could constitute what amounted to a heavy armored division in a matter of weeks, with

a capacity to fly in troops to use the prepositioned equipment. This ground component, in conjunction with air and naval assets already in the theater, gave the United States the ability to create a reasonably strong combat capability on short notice; a capability that would, at the very least, hold Iraq until reinforcements arrived. In turn, of course, this served as a deterrent to aggression since attackers would know for sure that the United States could respond in force to any aggression.

The idea of “detering forward” was made into a reality in the Gulf during the 1990s, and arguably provided the model that was subsequently integrated into the Bush Administration’s Quadrennial Defense Review, which specifically calls for the United States to develop capabilities in the operational theaters themselves that will enable an immediate response to local military contingencies.(3)

In military terms, the fruits of the efforts during the 1990s are being reaped today, most immediately in the war on terrorism, but in other areas as well. In addition to the support provided to prosecute operations in Afghanistan and other missions in Central Asia related to the war on terrorism, the Gulf infrastructure will help accommodate whatever forces are necessary and provide the command and control backbone for any potential military operation against Iraq.

It is important to note that the host-nation facilities made available to U.S. forces in the 1990s have been augmented by the ability to use the al-Udeid airfield in Qatar and plans to open a new prepositioning site at Arifjan in Kuwait. Arifjan will replace the Camp Doha prepositioning site, providing better storage facilities as well as space for the Army’s Central Command component headquarters, called ARCENT. Al-Udeid with its 12,000-foot runway has apparently developed into a major hub for current and future U.S. military operations. The site

can reportedly accommodate hundreds of aircraft and up to 10,000 military personnel. A Central Command forward headquarters element may also be taking up residence at al-Udeid--providing the forward presence in theater for the command that has long been sought by military planners.(4)

During the 1990s, the U.S. military presence and its supporting base structure was developed in the context of a policy of containing Saddam and, to a lesser extent, deterring Iran from regional adventurism. The “traditional” rationale of protecting access to oil supplies became increasingly supplanted by the “newer” principle of deterring aggression and maintaining regional stability as the U.S. focused politically and militarily on containing Saddam. Perhaps reflecting this shift, discussions about the importance of Gulf oil receive scant attention in the Bush administration’s case to use force against Iraq.

BUILDING A NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

The Bush administration’s goal of removing Saddam provides civilian and military planners with the opportunity to re-examine a host of assumptions that have essentially gone unchallenged over the last decade. A new government in Baghdad could dramatically alter the political landscape throughout the region that would also enable new ways of thinking about regional security.

In preparation for this eventuality, the United States and its Gulf partners should set about reviewing a number of critical issues to determine whether (and if so, how) the approach to regional security should be modified to address the new security environment. Among these issues to be determined are:

1. What are U.S. interests in the Gulf?
2. To what extent can Iraq “balance” Iran?

3. What will be the role and configuration of the U.S. military presence in the region?

4. What role will individual countries play in providing for region-wide security and for their own defense from external aggression?

Addressing these four issues would help the United States and its regional partners devise an enduring security architecture for the new century. The United States would emerge from regime removal in Iraq with unparalleled military power in the region and, quite possibly, with the necessary political leverage to convince its Gulf partners to overcome their historic reluctance to cooperate with each other in a more systematic approach to regional security. It is an opportunity that should be seized aggressively by all parties.

OIL AND U.S. VITAL INTERESTS

The basis for the U.S. strategic interest in the Persian Gulf has always been oil, followed in the 1980s and increasingly thereafter by a commitment to help preserve regional security and deter aggression. Recently, however, some analysts have challenged the idea that access to Gulf oil is of paramount interest, pointing to a decreasing U.S. dependence on Gulf oil and the emergence of potential alternative suppliers (Russia and the Caspian Sea, for example) that may make the Gulf less directly important to the United States.

Periodic crises with important suppliers notwithstanding, world oil markets today are characterized not by the scarcity of crude, but by the emergence of additional suppliers and new economically viable oil recovery techniques that should enable oil producers to keep pace with the expected increase in global demand for oil for the foreseeable future.⁽⁵⁾ This is a welcome development for the global economy.

What challenges this analysis is that the projections also demonstrate that the Gulf will remain unrivaled as a supplier capable of delivering vast quantities of cheaply produced oil. Assuming these projections are accurate, it is clear that the Gulf will become steadily more important to the global economy during the next 20 years. Specifically, the Gulf is currently estimated to possess 679 billion barrels in proven oil reserves (representing 66 percent of the world's total), 22.7 million barrels per day in current production capacity (31 percent of the world's total), and a little over five million barrels per day in excess production capacity (91 percent of the world's total).⁽⁶⁾ And these figures do not take into account the Gulf's additional margin of relative importance if Iraq were to return as the world's second leading oil exporter.

U.S. dependence on Gulf oil has declined over the last decade as suppliers in the Western Hemisphere (Venezuela, Mexico and Canada) have become relatively more important to the United States. During 2001, the Gulf supplied approximately 30 percent of all U.S. gross crude oil imports, or about 2.1 million barrels of oil per day. By contrast, in 2001 the Western Hemisphere accounted for 48 percent of all U.S. gross crude oil imports, or about 4.7 million barrels per day.⁽⁷⁾ The anticipated emergence of new oil sources over the next decade and beyond is projected to increase U.S. reliance on Western Hemisphere and Atlantic basin suppliers in relative terms.

By 2020, the United States is expected to consume an additional 7.4 million barrels per day, reaching approximately 27.5 million barrels per day (about 24 percent of the world's estimated daily consumption of approximately 112 million barrels per day). With the continued slow decline of U.S. domestic production over this period, the United States will become gradually more dependent on imported oil

over the next 20 years. Net oil imports are projected to grow from 9 to 12.7 million barrels per day, constituting approximately 65 percent of total U.S. oil demand by 2020 as compared to an estimated 56 percent in 2003. To quench the nation's growing thirst, it is estimated that by 2020, the United States will double imports of Persian Gulf oil to 4.2 million barrels per day; Atlantic basin and Western Hemisphere sources are expected to supply the United States with approximately 9 million barrels per day during the same period.(8)

But if the United States will become somewhat less dependent on Gulf oil relative to the growing dependence on Western Hemisphere and Atlantic Basin suppliers, other parts of the world will see their dependence on Gulf suppliers grow dramatically. Developing Asia (China, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines) is expected to increase its oil consumption by 3.7 percent a year, needing an additional 15.8 million barrels of oil per day by 2020, with most of it coming from the Gulf. When anticipated oil demand from developing and industrialized (Japan, Australia, and New Zealand) Asia is aggregated, the region is expected to consume nearly 21 million barrels of oil daily, with most of this coming from the Gulf. China alone is expected to import 7.2 million barrels of oil per day by 2020, mostly from Gulf suppliers. To meet this demand, it is estimated that the Gulf will have to increase oil exports from 14.8 million barrels per day in 2000 to 33.5 million barrels per day by 2020. In short, the Gulf will have to more than double oil exports over the next 20 years to keep pace with the expected increases in the demand for oil from Asia and North America.(9)

Thus, the U.S. interest in Gulf oil is more complicated than what in the past has been more narrowly defined as dependence on oil from the region. While the

industrialized world's dependence on Gulf oil is expected to increase incrementally over the next 20 years, the non-industrialized or developing world's dependence on Gulf oil is expected to increase exponentially. The implications of this development for regional security have not been addressed by either the United States or the wider international community.

OIL AND POLITICAL STABILITY

Interconnected with the importance of oil to the U.S. and global economies is the question of political stability and whether the Gulf political structures now in place can adapt to a new political environment that may emerge in a post-Saddam period. While the immediate shape of a post-war government in Iraq is uncertain, it seems clear that the Bush administration's long-term objective is to establish some form of democracy in Iraq when Saddam is gone. It is unclear what impact such a development would have on the Gulf states, that until now have made only halting steps towards their own form of democracy (Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar). The impact of a democracy in Iraq on Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which have made no moves towards representative government, is an even greater uncertainty. Whatever happens in a post-Saddam era, however, the international community must work with the region to try and ensure that any process of political transition remains peaceful.

Catastrophe awaits the world if political transition turns into violent revolution. Internal political stability is a prerequisite for all the Gulf States, without which it would be difficult for them to make the domestic investment and create the conditions to attract the foreign investment necessary to meet the world's growing demand for oil. These investments will also be critical for internal stability, as the Gulf states attempt to meet the twin

challenges of cushioning the impact of macroeconomic reform on their populations and expanding their gross domestic products fast enough to keep pace with population growth rates that are among the highest in the world.

The situation is particularly acute in Saudi Arabia. While the smaller Gulf states (Kuwait, UAE, and Qatar) can conceivably continue to rely on their rentier economies over the short term due to their small populations, Saudi Arabia's projected 56 percent population growth over the next 15 years suggests that its economy will require fundamental change to preserve the country's stability.⁽¹⁰⁾ An inescapable conclusion is that a process of political and economic transition must occur in Saudi Arabia if internal stability in the kingdom, if not the entire region, is to be preserved. This is especially true since instability in Saudi Arabia would almost certainly affect the other countries on the Arabian Peninsula.

Such a formulation suggests that political and economic stability must also be regarded as a vital U.S. interest and hence involves the United States, and arguably the whole world, in the process of political and economic transition throughout the Gulf. How the United States involves itself in this process, if at all, is a key policy issue--maybe the key policy challenge for developing a new security architecture in the post-Saddam environment.

Expected developments over the next two decades suggest a different formulation for the United States' strategic interest in Gulf oil, with a number of interconnected assertions:

1. The fastest developing and growing parts of the global economy will be increasingly dependent on access to reasonably priced Gulf oil.

2. As the world's largest economy, the United States has a vested (even a vital)

interest in continued global economic development and growth.

3. The United States has an interest in ensuring that political conditions in the Gulf enable the region to make the necessary investments to ensure that production can be increased quickly enough to keep pace with global demand.

4. The United States must decide how, if at all, to involve itself in the process of political and economic transition that will inevitably occur in the region.

ROLE FOR RECONSTITUTED IRAQ

A potential ouster of Saddam Hussein provides U.S. officials and their regional partners with a unique opportunity to review assumptions on the role of Iraq in the regional security environment. Today's policy reflects an assumptive construct built on a balance of power theory, which in the region has held that Iran and Iraq served as counterweights to each other, making the area more stable as a result. Based on this reasoning, if one of these states was to weaken, the other state would fill the vacuum and create conditions for regional hegemony and instability. Reviewing the historic circumstances that gave rise to this approach is a worthwhile exercise which can guide arguments as to whether this approach still makes sense in a post-Saddam environment.

To be sure, U.S. policy today continues the approach taken over the last 20 years. U.S. officials continually posit the requirement to preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq, however artificial its borders may have been when they were created by French and British civil servants in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The continued banding together of Iraq's three incongruous components--a minority Sunni center, a Kurdish north and a Shi'i south--is deemed essential to regional security. In addition to the need to balance Iran, it is feared that a breakup of Iraq would encourage Turkish intervention in the

Kurdish areas of northern Iraq and Iranian intervention in the Shi'a areas of southern Iraq.

These concerns notwithstanding, an argument can be made that the evidence does not support the underlying assumption positing the necessity and role of a strong Iraq in maintaining Gulf security. A critical examination of the historic circumstance suggests that a strong Iraq has been one of the main causes of regional instability over the last 30 years, particularly a highly centralized Iraq under military and Ba'th strongmen, most notably Saddam Hussein.

Even before Saddam came to power, Iraq threatened Kuwait in 1961 and was faced down only by a British deployment to the Kuwait-Iraq border. After a relatively peaceful period during the 1960s and early 1970s, the Saddam-led Ba'th regime started two major regional wars, developed and used chemical weapons on its opponents and its citizens, and aggressively developed WMD, including nuclear weapons. The death of an estimated 1.5 million people in the Iran-Iraq and Kuwait wars, the proliferation and use of WMD, and the necessity of a continuously deployed forward U.S. presence to prevent further Iraqi aggression simply does not support the idea that a unified Iraq has been a stabilizing force in the region.

Given this historic record, it further remains unclear whether and how Iraq's Sunni, Kurdish and Shi'a communities can function together in any sort of "modern" political context in a post-Saddam era. Iraq has been controlled by an authoritarian, Sunni-led minority regime since its inception, starting with the Hashemite monarchy imposed by Great Britain, which was followed by military rule and a Sunni-led Ba'th party apparatus that evolved into a totalitarian dictatorship. The country has always been held together by coercion and force--not by an underlying congruence of

interests among Shi'i, Sunnis and Kurds that translated into common consent of the people.

Quite the opposite has been the case. The Sunni minority regime has sometimes admitted a few Shi'i and Kurds into the power structure, but has basically kept overwhelming control in its own hands since the inception of the Iraqi state. Today, as has been the case throughout Iraq's history, the Sunni minority fears being overwhelmed by the more numerous Shi'a and being set upon by vengeful Kurds. This belief on the part of at least some Sunnis, that they are in dire danger if the regime falls, is one of the last cards in Saddam's hands in his effort to maintain support and to ensure that the army fights on his behalf.

Some have suggested a federalist democracy as a way to ensure a balance among the competing communities, perhaps reducing their ethnic coherence by making trans-communal alliances attractive. Federalism would give groups--nominally regional, but also ethnic-related given the geographic concentration of these groupings--local self-rule. If the democracy aspect is intended to heighten the attraction of maintaining a unified state, the federalist component is intended to reduce the perceived cost of surrendering authority to a central government. How such "democratic" arrangements can be structured to keep the more numerous Shi'a from exercising proportionately more control in a central government is unclear.

This system could work, but it would be a difficult task. Of course, the re-creation of some type of dictatorship (even if one far milder than Saddam's regime and supplying relatively more benefits to its citizens) would always remain as an attractive short-cut to maintaining Iraq's national cohesion. Indeed, the more imperiled Iraq's apparent survival as a unified entity, the more some would advocate such a solution. One other

difference would be that the identity of the dictatorial, dominant group could come from more sectors than formerly had been the case.

When confronted with the breakup of the states in Europe at the end of the Cold War, the West gave in to the inevitable. No matter how hard U.S. officials and their European partners tried, they could not keep artificial entities together if the people in them could not or would not live in peace. NATO, in fact, made the decision in Bosnia to separate the warring communities and to deploy military forces to end the violence. Perhaps the lessons of the Balkans are irrelevant to the situation in Iraq. Still, this history and their supporting assumptions are worth reviewing as the international community contemplates the nature of a post-Saddam Iraq.

Whatever the practical difficulties of keeping Iraq together, the United States must declare its intention to preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq to attract what political support it can for regime change in Iraq. Yet it should be under no illusions about the difficulties of unifying the three groups. U.S. officials should consider that by allowing the breakup of Iraq, the United States might find a viable path toward realizing an overriding policy objective, which is to prevent the re-emergence of another military dictator that will continue to develop WMD and threaten its neighbors, if not the entire international community.

Another overriding U.S. objective in a post-Saddam Iraq is internal stability, which would allow the country, in whatever form, to reconstitute itself economically and politically. Whether internal stability is ensured through democracy, confederation or some other acceptable political form, the United States should be less concerned with the labels of the political system than with results. With the second largest known oil reserves in the world, Iraq has a resource and a market for

it that can easily pay for economic recovery. This outcome would benefit everyone: the Iraqis by repairing the damage of many years of failed government and sanctions, and the world by increasing the supply to meet anticipated increases in its demand for oil. This is particularly important as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait alone are incapable of meeting the expected rise in demand for Persian Gulf oil.

AN IRAQ-IRAN BALANCE?

If the idea that a strong, centralized Iraq is essential for regional stability is open to question, it also seems equally the case that the threat to the Arabian peninsula posed by Iran seems less compelling than it did 20 years ago. Simply put, the Islamic Republic no longer constitutes a force capable of unleashing political upheaval throughout the region. Today, Iran is beset with internal political troubles, and the government seems incapable of addressing the country's systemic economic problems.

While the conservative mullahs in Tehran continue to manipulate the state resources available to them to support terrorism, develop WMD, and actively undermine the Middle East peace process, it seems increasingly clear that their extremist views are disconnected from the broader Iranian polity. Reflecting this situation, the mullahs seem to have given up on the idea of building domestic popularity. In addition to the continued popularity of the "moderate" President Khatami, public opinion polls in Iran seem to indicate a desire for more global integration and even dialogue with the United States, despite the regime's efforts to deter and demonize such beliefs.⁽¹¹⁾ It seems clear that the region no longer fears the spread of the Islamic Revolution. Indeed, in a complete reversal of the situation one and two decades ago, Iran is more imperiled with the specter of internal

upheaval than are the Gulf Arab monarchies.

The conventional military threat to the region posed by Iran also seems reduced over the last decade.⁽¹²⁾ At this point, it is hard to see that Iran's conventional military capabilities represent any serious threat to the Gulf States. Amphibious operations across the Gulf to threaten Qatar, the UAE and Oman are simply not plausible. And the presence of allied or American troops in Iraq would make any use of force along that avenue impossible to contemplate.

A quarter-century after the Islamic revolution, Tehran's military threat to the region has decreased and the broader political and ideological challenge to the Gulf states initially presented by the revolution has ameliorated. While Iran's continued development of WMD and its support for terrorism remain a concern, the regime's interest in, and ability to realize, regional domination are far more limited. Even if the regime was intent on regional military dominance, the United States and its partners are well positioned to meet the challenge. All these factors suggest that a regional security strategy built on the idea that Iran represents a serious political and military threat should be re-evaluated.

Moreover, the requirement for a "balance" between Iran and Iraq as a means to ensure regional stability is by no means clear. Instead of maintaining a balance between Iran and Iraq, the relative decline of the conventional military threat posed by Iran to the Gulf States suggest that the time may be ripe to make an attempt to integrate Iran into regional security arrangements to promote transparency and build trust. Drawing Iran into such arrangements will be initially difficult in a post-Saddam environment due to the large numbers of United States' military forces that will be deployed in Iraq, not to mention the forces already deployed in Afghanistan. It is easy to see how Iranian extremists will paint an

apocalyptic picture of the United States finally "surrounding" Iran. In this environment, it is critical that the United States and its regional partners make clear to Tehran its intent to build a post-Saddam era in the Gulf on the pillars of trust, transparency and confidence building measures.

ROLE AND CONFIGURATION OF THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE

The removal of Saddam will lead to an unparalleled American military presence in the region since the immediate situation in a post-war Iraq will likely require thousands of U.S. troops deployed for reconstruction, humanitarian operations and local security. But the context of this presence needs to be treated very carefully-avoiding the characterizations of the cry of "pax Americana" that are bound to come from critics. Indeed, if care is taken in crafting the post-Saddam security environment, it is possible to foresee circumstances that eventually would allow the United States to significantly reduce its military presence in the region. Such a development would undoubtedly be welcomed in the Gulf States, where the highly visible U.S. military presence has become a domestic political liability for the ruling elites.

While forces will be needed inside Iraq, a post-Saddam environment may change the requirements for large contingents of continuously deployed forces in the other Gulf States. With Saddam gone, for example, there would be no need to continue Operations Southern and Northern Watch and the Maritime Interception Operations. These operations have required large numbers of personnel and equipment rotated through the region on an ongoing basis. Ending these operations does not mean that the United States should abandon or otherwise withdraw from the region. Even while the Saudis have stated they will ask for American

troops to leave after a victory over Iraq, this does not seem to mean that the infrastructure built up for cooperation and emergency deployment would be dismantled. The United States still has a requirement defend the region if necessary, and to have forward operating areas to help prosecute the war on terrorism.

Indeed, it would be a mistake for the United States to withdraw from the infrastructure developed during the 1990s, which could provide a foundation for a new regional security structure. Such a structure would move the United States away from the 1990s model of ongoing operations that depended upon large contingents of continuously deployed forces. Instead, the infrastructure could develop into a vehicle to promote coalition interoperability, collective security, and regional military integration; in addition to the capabilities it provides the United States to help defend the region.

Emphasizing and then implementing these concepts would require fundamentally new ways of thinking about security on the part of both the United States and its Gulf partners. Despite protestations to the contrary, the U.S. military prefers to operate without coalition partners, which is particularly true in the Gulf. For their part, the Gulf states seem equally uninterested in developing any credible system of collective security outside the American security umbrella. Bridging this political and philosophical divide is made more difficult by technical issues, in which the mismatch between the U.S. and the region's force structures cannot be overstated. Differences in doctrine, training, platforms, weapons, and data formats make cooperation at the operational level extremely difficult.

Still, Rome was not built in a day. A phased, step-by-step process to build U.S.-coalition military integration might yield results with sufficient long-term political commitment by both sides. Initially, the

facilities' infrastructure could facilitate the dissemination of region-wide early warning information and intelligence to promote confidence and transparency. The infrastructure also could provide a command, control and communications backbone that could be used to coordinate exercises and training throughout the region. Emphasizing these functions might mean a reduction and different configuration for the United States forces deployed in the Gulf outside Iraq.

Under such a scheme, headquarters command elements would assume more of an immediate role in regional security than forces engaged in ongoing operations. Using the existing bilateral agreements with our security partners as the basis upon which to proceed, the United States should continue to maintain Central Command service-specific forward headquarters elements in the theater. The footprint of such a scheme would look like that which is in place today: Army staff headquarters in Kuwait at Arifjan/Camp Doha; Air Force staff headquarters at Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, with the Navy staff remaining in Bahrain. A Central Command headquarters group could be based in Qatar at al-Udeid. These staff elements should be integrated with a secure communications system and could share common operational picture information throughout the theater with coalition partners as appropriate.

The headquarters elements would have a variety of functions;

First, they would provide early warning of potential threats to regional security and have the ability to communicate this information in real-time throughout the theater.

Second, they would provide the advance administrative and logistical vanguard necessary to coordinate any buildup of U.S. forces in the region.

Third, using the Operation Desert Spring model in Kuwait to exercise

continuously with prepositioned military equipment, these elements could be involved in continuous military exercises either using pre-positioned equipment or command-post exercises that continued to hone our ability to build up quickly if necessary.

Fourth, these elements could be configured in such a way as to build command-level integrated relationships with host-nation militaries. For example, it might be possible to foresee that the Combined Air Operations Center at Prince Sultan Air Base would serve as a nerve center for all Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) air forces. Or, alternatively, that all GCC Air Forces might be linked to each other through the facility at Prince Sultan Air Base (PSAB). Each of the service-specific “hubs” could replicate this notional model of coalition operations at PSAB. Thus, the U.S. headquarters elements would serve as hubs to facilitate region-wide sharing of a common operational picture and early warning, promoting confidence and transparency between friendly militaries.

Finally, these facilities could provide the in-theater platform upon which to build genuine coalition war-fighting interoperability, starting with coalition command post exercises and ending with actual multilateral exercises modeled on Operation Bright Star in Egypt--currently the largest multi-national exercise in the region that takes place every other year.

ROLE OF GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL IN REGIONAL SECURITY

With the prospect of Saddam being gone, the time is ripe to try and change the way the GCC and the United States think about collective security. The GCC--whose members include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE--remains the only available mechanism for the United States to work through to provide an integrated, region-wide

approach to collective security. Thus far, the GCC has failed abysmally to develop into a meaningful mechanism for this purpose. But an ouster of Saddam provides the United States and its GCC partners with an opportunity to breathe new life into the concept of collective security and regional military integration.

At the conclusion of the GCC summit on January 1, 2000, GCC members signed what press reports characterized as a “joint defense pact.” The agreement, which has not been released publicly, reportedly calls for a four- to- five-fold increase in the existing GCC Peninsula Shield force (PSF) from 5,000 to 25,000 and for the GCC to develop a shared early warning system. The agreement also reportedly includes language stating that an attack on one member is an attack on all GCC states. The new pact represents the culmination of efforts since the end of the Gulf War to give the GCC Secretariat a more meaningful role in developing mechanisms for collective defense and regional military integration. It is unclear how the new PSF force would be structured, and how quickly the force might be reconfigured, or more importantly, how much political commitment there is the Gulf States to following through on the agreement.(13)

In a post-Saddam environment, the United States could directly approach the GCC secretariat and volunteer to start working with the members to develop the Peninsula Shield force along the lines that have already been agreed. In addition to constituting an actual force to serve as an instrument of regional security, the United States and the GCC could integrate themselves more closely via the U.S.-built infrastructure and the Hizam al-Taawan (HAT) project, a C4I air defense system built by the GCC that will provide interfacing of radar data, operational support messages and secure voice communications to all the GCC members. The main purpose of HAT is to provide the

GCC member militaries with a common air picture through terminals in all the member defense ministries. A fiber optic cable that stretches from Kuwait along the southern Gulf to Oman ties the system together. This cable could be used to as a data backbone to disseminate U.S. and coalition-provided information on shared early warning and battlespace visualization to the GCC militaries as appropriate.

Such an initiative would have to overcome significant hurdles, mostly stemming from the GCC members' own reluctance to pursue collective security seriously. But with strong U.S. leadership, the circumstances of a post-Saddam environment provide an opportunity to work on these ideas that should not be passed up.

CONCLUSION

As the world's pre-eminent economic and military power, the United States has a vital interest in helping to create the internal conditions that will be necessary for the Gulf suppliers to increase their oil production to meet global demand over the next 20 years. Access to reasonably priced oil promises to be more important, not less important, to the health of the global economy. A credible security architecture that protects the region from external threat while promoting collective security and regional military integration would certainly support this overall strategic objective.

For the Gulf states and their peoples, the critical objective is to move through a period of economic and political transition in the post-Saddam era while maintaining internal stability. It is critical that the region is free from external threats during this period. The example of Kuwait's relatively effective investment and development program being threatened with destruction by a powerful neighbor continues to show how deadly and dangerous events can be if things go

wrong. The question is how the wealth of the GCC states benefits their citizens or becomes an attraction for those who would expropriate their wealth. The stakes are extremely high for the local people, U.S. interests, and the world as a whole.

Consequently, serious planning needs to start now on the configuration of the regional security structure in the post-Saddam period. The promise of a post-Saddam period in the Gulf represents an historic opportunity to fundamentally redefine the dynamics of a region that has proven to be among the unstable in the world. The challenge to the United States, the region, and the international community--whether beforehand they support or oppose it happening--is to ensure that another Gulf war and the removal of Saddam serves as a positive force to allow the Gulf to make a peaceful transition into the post-cold war world, providing an enduring framework for peace and security.

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NOTES

1. United States Security Strategy in the Middle East, Department of Defense, Office of International Security Affairs, May 1995, pp. 21-23
2. See Foud Ajamai's eloquent treatment of this development in *Dream Palace of the Arabs* (Vintage Books, New York, 1998) pp. 178-192. Also see Ajami's article "The Sentry's Solitude," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2001, for more discussion of "Pax Americana" in the Gulf.
3. Quadrennial Defense Review Report, Department of Defense, September 30, 2001, p. 25
4. Detail on activity at al-Udeid and on the impending deployment of the Central

Command's forward headquarters elements is provided in Tony Perry's, "A Command Center Rises from the Desert Gulf," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 2002. Also see Vernon Loeb, "U.S. Forces in Tampa Plan Qatar Exercises," *Washington Post*, September 12, 2002, p. A1. At this point, it is unclear whether the headquarters element will deploy to al-Udeid permanently. See *Reuters Wire Service* report "U.S. Postpones Qatar military Exercise to December," October 22, 2002, 0534 AM.

5. See Edward Morse and James Richard, "The New Oil War," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2002, pp. 16-31. Also see Thaddeus Herrick, Marc Lifsher and Jeanne Whalen's article "Persian Gulf Oil Still Critical, but U.S. Grows Less Dependent," *Wall Street Journal*, March 15, 2002, p. 1

6. Persian Gulf Oil and Gas Fact Sheet, Energy Information Administration, March 2002.

<<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/pgulf.html>>

7. United States Country Analysis Brief, Energy Information Administration, May 2002,

<<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/U.S.a.html>>

8. International Energy Outlook 2002, Energy Information Administration, March 26, 2002. p. 28, p. 38 Figures from International Energy Outlook 2003, Energy Information Administration, January 9, 2003. <<http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/aeo/>>

Breakdown on potential sources of oil imports were derived from International Energy Outlook 2002, Energy Information Administration, March 26, 2002. p. 38 <<http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/ieo/index.html>>

9. Figures derived from International Energy Outlook 2002, p. 38

10. U.S. Census Bureau data used in "Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future with Nongovernment Experts,"

National Intelligence Council, December 2000, show that the Saudi national (foreign workers excluded) population will increase from approximately 15.8 million in 2000 to 24.7 million by 2015. A report by M. Ghazanfar Ali Khan in the October 26, 2002 *Arab News*, "Riyadh Population to Cross 11m by 2020," summarizes the findings of a recent study suggesting that Riyadh's population (including foreign workers) will grow at an annual rate of 8.1 percent over the next 20 years, creating a regional mega city that will rival Cairo in size.

11. On September 22, 2002, Iran's state-run National Institute for Opinion Polls released a survey, which found that three-quarters of 1,500 surveyed people in Tehran backed opening talks

with Washington. Another 46 percent said U.S. policies on Iran were "to some extent correct." The director of the polling center, Behrouz Geranpayeh, was subsequently thrown in jail by the Iranian judiciary, which is controlled by the conservative Mullahs. For a summary of other recent polls and an interesting discussion of the Tehran "underground," see Tim Judah's article "A Revolution Crumbles" in the *Manchester Guardian Weekly Magazine*, October 5, 2002.

12. The deterioration of Iran's conventional forces over the last decade and the decreased threat to the region is detailed in a recently released report by the Rand Corporation. See Daniel Byman and John Wise, "The Persian Gulf in the Coming Decade: Trends, Threats and Opportunities," Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, January 2003, pp. 19-26.

13. See *Associated Press* report out of Manama, Bahrain, "Six Gulf Nations Sign Defense Pact," December 31, 2000.