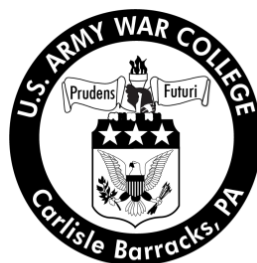


A Steady Hand in the Coming Storm: American Landpower and the Middle East of 2030

by

Colonel Michael R. Eastman
United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2012

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USAWC CIVILIAN RESEARCH PROJECT

**A STEADY HAND IN THE COMING STORM:
AMERICAN LANDPOWER AND THE MIDDLE EAST OF 2030**

by

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ABSTRACT

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Strategic deliberations about the future role of American military forces in the Middle East should be based on an objective analysis of interests and threats, not bureaucratic desires. Based on consistent themes in the National Security Strategy, the United States has three enduring interests in this region: ensuring global access to energy, thwarting violent extremist networks, and preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. However, the pressures of a rising youth generation, increasing global demand for oil, the difficulties of political transition, and a belligerent Iran combine to endanger these interests in the coming decades. Each of these threats can be mitigated by American efforts to promote stability and reduce conflict in this contested region. As part of the joint force, the Army is uniquely capable of addressing a number of these challenges while also serving as a force for professionalization and partnership with the overwhelmingly ground-based militaries of the Middle East.

A STEADY HAND IN THE COMING STORM: AMERICAN LANDPOWER AND THE MIDDLE EAST OF 2030

I. The Proverbial Debate Returns

As our current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down, political deliberations in this country return to a familiar pattern. Set against a backdrop of 'not re-fighting the last war,' a debate about future military strategy dominates much of the discussion. Proponents of a technology-centric force tailored for conflict in the air and on the seas face those who would build upon the experiences of a decade of war to retain the core tenets of counterinsurgency alongside the ability to conduct mobile land warfare. As in the past, the debate is sharpened by a budget ax suspended over the Department of Defense. The services anticipate funding cuts so deep as to allow for only one side to survive. And, as in the past, many approach the problem as bureaucrats defending turf, rather than as strategists objectively building a military that will best serve the Nation.

This article frames a response to one future role of American land forces by looking specifically at the Middle East over the next twenty years. It begins by highlighting our enduring national interests in this region. We then consider potential threats to these interests, both existing and future, while attempting to assess the



Map of the Middle East
2011 CIA World Fact Book

likelihood that they occur. Finally, those scenarios that require American ground forces are identified, along with the force structure implications of these conclusions. In doing so, we hope to provide a strategic perspective in a debate too often clouded by budgetary concerns and unnecessarily framed as an inter-service, zero-sum game.

It is every strategist's dream to receive a neatly packaged list of ends required of our military, articulate the most effective mix of military tools to achieve them, and then present this to our political leadership for funding. The dream approaches utopia if this planning can be done without regard for budgetary constraints. However, crafting a military strategy in this fashion is rarely attempted. Budgetary realities drive strategic considerations, political ends are either unknown or poorly defined, and arguments over means are difficult to prove outside of actual combat. This combination lends itself to positions focused on efficiency rather than effectiveness. It encourages a reflexive dismissal of lessons learned in past conflicts, creating opportunities for bureaucracies to prepare for the threat they want to face rather than the ones they will. Most recently, it fuels contests such as those seen today pitting proponents of an air and sea-centric force against those arguing that future employments of force require a significant ground component.

Discussions like these risk overshadowing some of the most fundamental considerations necessary for developing a sound strategy; namely, which threats our nation is most likely to face, and what will the military we retain be able to do about them. Even in a fiscal environment that foreshadows major reductions in the force, elements of sound strategic planning remain invaluable. As military professionals, we must carefully examine the threats to our national interests, both current and future, and

offer our best advice as to how these should be addressed. If nothing else, civilian leaders must be advised of those things that can and cannot be done (without great cost or unacceptable risk) as a result of their decisions.

II. The Problem with Predictions

Any effort to forecast future conflicts is inherently a questionable endeavor. If the past is any indication, the strategist is wrong on the specifics far more often than right. The work is doubly in jeopardy when the attempt is tied to a particular service and vulnerable to concerns over parochialism and simple bureaucratic interests. This study acknowledges both problems, looking as it does at the role of landpower in the Middle East for the next two decades from the perspective of the Army. This is no effort at perfect prediction, nor are ground forces offered as the military panacea for all future contests in this region. There are, however, vital national interests at stake in the Middle East for the foreseeable future. There are a wide range of existing and potential threats to these interests. Perhaps most importantly, there are several critical factors at work that will shape the environment in the region over the next several decades.

While informed observers may argue about the probability of one threat or another actually occurring, there is likely a general consensus about both our key interests and the potential threats that may endanger them. There is little dispute that demand for petroleum will increase with the industrial surge of China and India, or that demographic pressures and an overwhelmingly youthful population will increase political pressures on Middle Eastern regimes. The understudied question, then, is which of

these threats require a capability uniquely resident in American ground forces, and what does that mean for the Army in our current fiscal environment.

While it may be impossible to predict with certainty the actions of a potential adversary, the hard won experience of the last several conflicts has shown that American ground forces, and the Army in particular, provide the nation with a set of capabilities that simply cannot be achieved solely from the air or the sea. Whether as a demonstration of American political intent through boots on the ground, a deterrent against the largely land-based forces of this region, a training partner with current and future allies, or a counterinsurgency force seasoned by a decade of war, American ground forces fill a vital role in the suite of options available to this nation in times of adversity.

With this objective in mind, we examine the role of land power in the Middle East for the next two decades. Building directly on our national interests in the region as articulated in the 2010 National Security Strategy, we consider current and future threats that may require a military response. While there is bound to be disagreement about our powers of prediction, perfect foresight is not the goal. Instead, we simply seek to identify a range of likely challenges this nation may face as a basis for weighing decisions about capabilities needed in the future force. Moreover, whether or not these specific challenges come to fruition is at least partly impacted by an adversary's calculations about our ability to prevent them.

III. United States Vital Interests in the Middle East

The 2010 National Security Strategy identifies four enduring national interests:

- 1) The security of the United States, its citizens, and U.S. allies and partners;
- 2) A strong, innovative and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity;
- 3) Respect for universal values at home and around the world; and
- 4) An international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.¹

As the National Security Strategy emphasizes, these interests are interdependent; none can be achieved in isolation. When the overarching goals of national security, prosperity, values and international order are considered in the context of the Middle East, three vital interests emerge that will remain relevant decades into the future. It is these interests, rather than parochial concerns, that should drive deliberation of military strategy.

Any discussion of U.S. strategic interests in the Middle East begins with ensuring global access to oil. Barring a dramatic shift towards alternate sources of energy, much of the international economy will remain reliant on a commodity largely concentrated in this region. In the *2011 World Energy Outlook*, the International Energy Agency projects that the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) will supply nearly half of all global demand by 2030, up from 42% today. Over the same time period, production is likely to decline at existing fields and known reserves, making stability in this region both more important and increasingly contested.² Much of the

growth in demand will come from the developing economies of China and India, more than offsetting any marginal decreases in demand for oil from the United States. In other words, despite domestic actions taken over the next few decades to reduce American reliance on foreign oil, the majority of our trading partners will become increasingly dependent on a commodity concentrated in the Middle East.

These projections make stability and security in the region a precondition for functioning international markets and the free flow of goods. Even if the United States manages to reduce its reliance on imported petroleum over the next several decades, it is far from certain that its major trading partners will keep pace. Therefore, even the perception of a major disruption to the flow of oil will have global consequences, damaging economies internationally and directly impacting the prosperity of America's people and its allies. As such, it will remain in our national interest to ensure stability across this region not because the United States needs OPEC oil, although it will, but because the global free market system itself depends on access to this crucial commodity in order to function.

A second vital national interest in the Middle East is the disruption, dismantling and defeat of those violent extremist networks that possess the intent and capability to harm the United States or its allies. Many of the most dangerous terrorist groups trace their origins to this region, taking full advantage of popular dissatisfaction, dysfunctional governments, and ungoverned spaces to create bases of operation, recruitment, and training. The radical Islamist component of these groups is intrinsic to their appeal, making their continued presence in the Middle East a reasonable assumption even years after the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Iraq and Afghanistan.

A third and related interest is denying terrorist organizations and their proxies access to weapons of mass destruction. Possession of nuclear, biological, chemical or radiological weapons would enable these groups to commit violent acts on a spectacular scale. Similarly, controlling the spread of such weapons, along with the knowledge required to produce them, remains a vital national interest. For this reason, continued efforts to limit the proliferation of these weapons to regimes opposed to the United States, such as Iran, also remain a strategic objective. As we shall discuss further, however, in the time horizon considered in this study, an Iranian regime armed with some number of tactical nuclear weapons is far more likely than not, with implications for the spread of similar weapons to the regimes in Saudi Arabia and perhaps others in response.

There are unquestionably additional interests the United States has today in the Middle East, such as the spread of democratic values and respect for basic human rights, the continued participation and contribution of Turkey as a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partner, and the lasting viability of Israel as our lone democratic ally in the region. While important, however, these enter the discussion of military strategy here only in the sense that they are components of those vital interests already discussed.

This holds true for two fundamental reasons. First, many of the specific regional interests of the United States have a temporal component that makes their utility in the development of strategy problematic. For example, the future role of NATO, an organization developed to ensure the collective security of Europe from the Soviet Union, is far from clear. As such, a focus on Turkey, while important, cannot be

considered vital. Similarly, the end result of uprisings in the Arab world could just as easily be an increase in the number of representative governments as not, weakening the case for unqualified support of Israel on the grounds of protecting democracy in the region. Second, while the defense of universal human rights and promotion of democracy have long been at the heart of America's national interests, the military is less effective for achieving these interests than other components of national power. Although partnership with regional militaries or the potential separation of adversaries certainly contribute to our moral and ideological objectives, they do so primarily through preventive actions aimed at ensuring stability.

With these constraints, enduring American vital interests in the Middle East are fairly limited. They consist of ensuring global access to the free flow of oil, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and defeating terrorist organizations emanating from the region that possess both the intent and capability to harm the nation and its allies. Securing these interests depends on lasting stability across the region, which in turn provides the space for the spread of democratic ideals and respect for human rights to develop aided by the exercise of American political, diplomatic and informational efforts.

IV. The Middle East of 2030 and Beyond

It is extremely difficult to forecast the trajectory of events in this region over the coming years. Lacking perfect foresight, the strategist can only survey what is known of events and actors in the Middle East and make probabilistic assessments of how things will play out. To be certain, short of assuming an outbreak of stability in the Middle East

(which seems wildly irresponsible as a matter of policy regardless of how desirable this may be), one must at the very least examine current and potential threats which could impact our vital national interests and plan for them accordingly.

As a foundation for military strategic thought, it is appropriate to address factors that impact the region as a whole, rather than make specific fine-grained predictions in an environment of dynamic change and uncertainty. First among these, as noted previously, is the continued importance of petroleum to the global market. Assuming continued investment in infrastructure modernization, more than half of the world's oil supply will reside in this region, with Iraq's production increasing to meet and perhaps even exceed all other nations except Saudi Arabia. At the same time, countries not currently endowed with an abundance of oil are unlikely to discover it. Given the increased relative importance of oil over the next several decades, this has several consequences.

Middle Eastern countries whose economies rely almost exclusively on energy exports for revenues will have little cause to diversify. Patronage and the direct redistribution of oil revenues, whether in the form of social welfare or government positions, will remain the dominant practice. Development of a viable middle class will continue to be retarded, and the wealth gap between social strata will persist as a source of popular dissatisfaction. A secondary result of the overwhelming reliance on oil exports will be the growing inability of OPEC members to manipulate production for political gain. Relying almost entirely on petroleum revenues to secure their position and pay off a disenfranchised population, political leaders will be increasingly unable to tolerate large fluctuations in production. Perhaps most important, threats to intentionally

close the strategic Straits of Hormuz ring hollow, as this option becomes the equivalent of political suicide. Any short term damage to the global market would be more than offset by domestic unrest in the initiating countries, and likely meet with incredible

resistance from other OPEC members whose own survival relies upon this commodity flow.

Concurrently, the resultant rise in prices that accompanies growing demand and reduced supply will impact poorer countries in the region. As their neighbors grow richer, the lack of efficient markets, a commercial middle class and a modern transportation infrastructure will leave many nations even further behind. The resulting popular dissatisfaction will be exacerbated by a second regional trend that threatens to further destabilize the entire region.

Demographic projections indicate that by 2030 more than half the population of the Middle East will be under the age of 34, a figure well exceeding that of the developed world (see Table 1). This “youth bulge” promises to challenge even the most efficient of governments, as demands for education, social services and upward mobility are met with limited opportunities, silence, and repression.³ Governments that function through revenue redistribution will be hard pressed to meet the needs of an

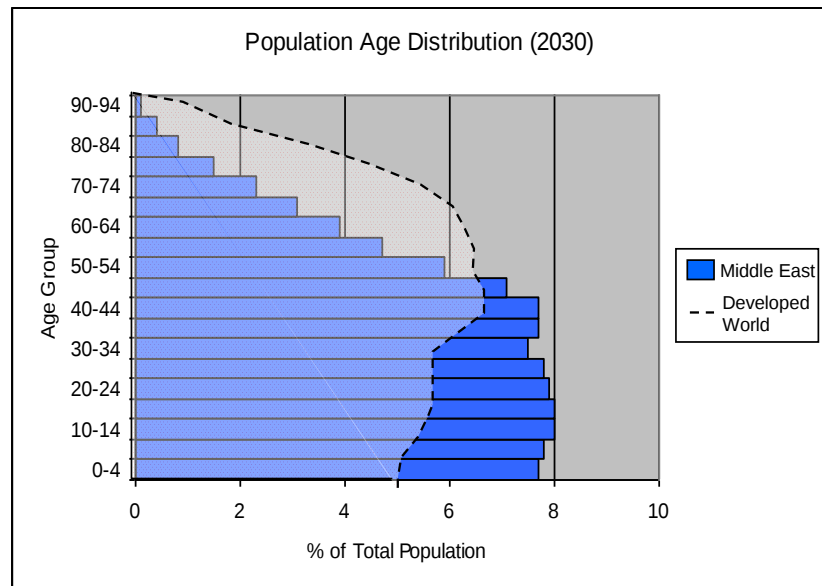


Table 1. 2030 Aggregate Population Age Distribution (Middle East and the Developed World)
Source: United States Census Bureau International Population Database, 2012

increasingly interconnected society, well aware of standards of living in other parts of the world. Those that tilt towards a more radical interpretation of Islam are likely to focus popular dissatisfaction on external forces, then as now citing the influence of Western society as the source of all evils. With few prospects for positive outlet, these decades will also see the continued emigration of intellectual capital. Those unable to flee contribute to a growing pool of potential recruits attracted to the message of radical Islam and eager to vent their anger. Both trends run counter to a lasting stability.

The evolution of the popular uprisings across the region, the 'Arab Awakening', represents a third general trend that will impact conditions in the Middle East for the next several decades. As recent events have demonstrated, predictions of a regional shift towards democracy are premature at best. There is undoubtedly some level of commonality among protest movements against ineffective or repressive government. However, the ways in which affected regimes have responded, along with internal divisions within protest groups themselves, make a common result unlikely. Potential outcomes range from the peaceful transition of power to the violent repression of protestors in defense of the existing regime. Even in those cases where some form of representative government does emerge, there is no guarantee that the final result will be pro-Western in orientation.

The instability associated with transitions between forms of government is ultimately the more pressing factor in considerations of future threats. Multiple studies have demonstrated that the transition to democracy, even if defined loosely as achieving stable representative government, is a process requiring some twenty to thirty years with many twists and turns along the way. More troubling, states undergoing

either a transition to democracy or backsliding towards greater autocracy are far more likely to go to war than states with a stable form of government of either kind.⁴

The question of which Middle Eastern countries ultimately adopt a representative form of government is therefore less important than the potential instability that accompanies the transition. With numerous countries in the early stages of government transition of some sort, the likelihood of both inter- and intra-state conflict must be considered high over the coming decades. While there is a good chance that some of these states do eventually succeed in their quest for representative government, that hardly bodes well for regional stability in the interim. There is also a high probability that even a representative government in a country such as Egypt or Syria retains a starkly anti-Western orientation in keeping with the prevailing popular views of its citizens.⁵

A nuclear Iran represents the fourth major variable impacting American national interests in the region. Despite continued efforts to undermine Iran's nuclear weapons program, it is quite probable that they develop some number of low yield weapons within the next few decades. This unwelcome reality poses at least two distinct challenges. First are Iran's ambitions for regional hegemony. Emboldened by the possession of nuclear weapons, Iran will likely feel safe from invasion by foreign forces for all but the most egregious offenses. The regime will be increasingly prone to exert influence on neighboring states, and Iraq in particular, as it attempts to expand authority over the Shia community. While it is unlikely that the Iranians conduct a cross-border invasion or engage in overt inter-state war, Iran will suffer from the same pressures of demographics and economics as the rest of the region. Unable to meet the demands of a restive populace, the Iranian regime will be more likely to focus attention outward to

distract from problems at home. Operating under the belief that nuclear weapons prohibitively raise the stakes for any American intervention, the Iranians will be a persistent force for instability across the region.

The possibility that Iran would be willing to share their nuclear technology with terrorist groups must also enter into strategic calculations. Although the risks of state-sponsored nuclear terrorism will not be lost on the Iranian regime, there are significant difficulties associated with preventing the transfer of weapons and nuclear technology to non-state actors.⁶ Barring massive governmental reform within Iran, recognized divisions between the military and political leadership, along with a stated opposition to the United States, make unsanctioned weapons transfer a distinct possibility.

Finally, given a nuclear-armed Iran on their doorstep, a number of wealthy Gulf States could reasonably be expected to initiate weapons programs of their own in response. The dynamics of arms races are well known, as is their tendency towards instability and miscalculation. However, the diversion of government funding and attention towards weapons programs will also distract these regimes from meeting basic societal needs, further exacerbating problems across the Middle East.

Taken together, these four regional trends paint a bleak picture for the immediate future of the Middle East. Petroleum exports will remain central to the global economy, but at the expense of diversifying regional economies. An increasingly youthful and globally aware population will place demands on government structures generally incapable of meeting them. Popular unrest, currently manifested in the Arab Awakening, will continue to fuel demands for political change, and the propensity for conflict will increase almost regardless of the government response. Finally, the

addition of an emboldened, nuclear-armed Iran threatens to further destabilize an already troubled situation.

Vital American interests in the region have been defined as ensuring access to energy resources crucial to the global economy, defeat of terrorist networks with international reach, and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The predicted instability in the Middle East creates conditions that threaten each of these interests. The continued delivery of oil is contingent on some minimum level of stability in the region. This is even more critical as the percentage of world supply is further concentrated in the Middle East region. While the deliberate interruption of oil exports as a political weapon will be increasingly unlikely, conflict in the region produces the same undesirable results. Labor protests, deliberate sabotage of ports and pipelines, or outright combat between and among armed groups all have the potential to disrupt the global economy in ways unfavorable to United States interests. Unfortunately, the combined effects of popular dissatisfaction, political instability, and widespread inter-religious and inter-ethnic strife make these outcomes more likely than not in the coming years.

Terrorist groups in the region, particularly those in the rings of instability associated with the ungoverned spaces of Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and even Somalia, will continue to thrive unless addressed. The appeal of a radical Islamic agenda, perpetuated by an overwhelmingly young and dissatisfied populace, will continue to create opportunities for recruiting, training, and harboring organizations whose stated purpose is the destruction of the United States. The possibility that these groups obtain

weapons of mass destruction, either directly from Iran or otherwise, remains so long as instability and repression are the Middle East's defining characteristics.

In addition, consideration must be given to how other major powers will engage the Middle East in the coming decades. Most military strategy today is biased towards assuming that the United States alone has vital national interests at stake in this region. However, as Chinese and Indian demand for oil increases, it is only logical that these nations take a more active role in ensuring access to this vital resource. While currently lacking the strategic reach enjoyed by the United States, Chinese military investments are clearly directed at achieving the ability to project military power. On the one hand, this presents an opportunity for burden-sharing, as both nations benefit greatly from a stable Middle East and a functioning global economy. However, if American forward presence is reduced significantly, it creates the opportunity for foreign economic and military interests to fill the space. Should our future relations with these rising powers deteriorate, arbitrarily ceding our influence in the Middle East could have lasting ramifications. American military strategists that must make deliberate decisions about the capabilities needed within the defense department, and ground forces in particular, from within this complex framework over the next twenty years.

V. The Enduring Utility of Landpower

All indications are that the potential for instability in the Middle East will only increase over the next several decades. Unlike the past decade, which saw the massive commitment of American forces in Iraq, future years are less likely to require sustained ground campaigns. United States vital interests as they have been defined

in this work do not lend themselves to interventions intended to promote regime change or the spread of democracy. However, the absence of what some have termed ‘wars of choice’ should not be mistaken for a reduction in the importance of land forces in defense of our enduring interests in the region. There are several significant roles for Army forces in the Middle East that will remain relevant throughout the time period in question as part of the national effort to promote stability and achieve our strategic objectives.

First among these is the importance of demonstrating American commitment and resolve with military forces in the region. The role of the military in the Middle East cannot be understated. As national institutions, the armed forces of the region hold significant political influence. They can serve as forces for stability or agents of repression, often unconstrained by the constitutional limits that define the role of militaries in Western society. As a method of preventing conflict, one of the most effective ways American influence is exerted is through building partnerships between our armed forces and those of our potential allies. Not only do the resulting personal bonds open channels of communication and reduce opportunities for miscalculation, these relationships also tend to have a professionalizing effect. The restraint exhibited by Egyptian army units during the 2011 demonstrations in Tahrir Square, for example, is at least partially attributable to a professional, apolitical ethos developed by years of training and partnering with their American counterparts.

The fact that the armed forces of the Middle East are overwhelmingly land-based should also not be casually dismissed. Available statistics show that across the region, Army forces constitute some 87% of all military forces (see Table 2). The United

Country	Total Military	% Ground	% Air Forces	% Naval Forces
Bahrain	8200	73%	18%	9%
Egypt	704000	88%	7%	5%
Iran	868000	94%	2%	4%
Iraq	275200	97%	2%	1%
Israel	621500	83%	14%	3%
Jordan	160700	92%	7%	0%
Kuwait	39500	89%	6%	5%
Lebanon	76400	98%	1%	1%
Oman	34000	74%	15%	12%
Palestinian Authority	49000	100%	0%	0%
Qatar	11800	72%	13%	15%
Saudi Arabia	214500	84%	9%	6%
Syria	411500	89%	10%	2%
Turkey	800000	71%	16%	14%
United Arab Emirates	65500	90%	7%	3%
Yemen	265000	98%	1%	1%
Total		87%	8%	5%

Table 2. Composition of Middle East Militaries
Source: 2011 INSS Military Forces Database

States must retain sufficient Army forces to ensure that relevant, productive relationships between ground components continue. A reduced permanent forward presence is sound policy for many reasons, but not if it results in a vacuum between our own military and those in the region. Efforts made to improve the effectiveness of regional armed forces only grow in importance as a means to restrain the hegemonic ambitions of Iran. Additionally, these relationships frequently result in willing partners with vastly superior local intelligence networks that will continue to be a critical part of operations to dismantle terrorist networks resident in the Middle East.

A related role for Army forces is the targeted disruption of terrorist organizations based in the Middle East. The forward staging bases utilized today for counterterrorism operations are a byproduct of conventional forces deployed to the region. Secure and persistent access throughout the Middle East is not guaranteed once American forces complete their withdrawal in the coming months. Absent a continued partnership and minimal presence in key states willing to provide access and intelligence, the complexity

of future counterterrorism operations increases significantly. Without some forward presence, precision strikes remain an option for national policymakers, but the ability to detain terrorists and leverage any intelligence found is lost without the participation of ground forces. Perhaps more damaging, the moral legitimacy of remote strikes in the Arab world is likely to come under increasing attack from the international community. There are certainly scenarios appropriate for this particular application of military force, as seen in Pakistan today. However, the tactic does come with a strategic cost. Sole reliance on cross-border remote strikes, whether from drones or aircraft, will erode support for American efforts and may ultimately undermine pursuit of our national objectives in the region.

Major inter-state war is arguably least likely as a source of instability in the Middle East. However, Iran's aspirations for regional leadership, along with the tendency for regimes under political duress to focus on external enemies as a way to distract from unrest at home, make war in the Middle East a distinct possibility over the period in question. Along with efforts to partner with regional militaries, the United States must also retain sufficient deployable heavy forces to deter, and if necessary defeat, regional aggression. American dominance of the air and sea are not likely to be challenged in the coming decades. As a means of deterring combat between regional militaries, however, relying solely on long range precision platforms greatly reduces the options available to our national leaders.

Increasing urbanization of the region, combined with the demonstrated penchant for warring factions to blend into the civilian population, vastly increases the challenges associated with future warfare in this region. There is little doubt that American

airpower will remain able to rapidly defeat a heavily armored invading force. However, that dominance does not readily translate into success for a wide range of actions more likely than mobile armored warfare. Whether the task becomes the separation of warring factions, enforcement of a zone of neutrality, the evacuation of American citizens, or the defeat of insurgent forces intent on disrupting the flow of oil across miles of pipeline, American military options must necessarily extend beyond precision strike. Recent Israeli experiences against Hezbollah and Hamas demonstrated that airpower alone is ineffective against the hybrid forms of warfare increasingly commonplace in the Middle East unless accompanied by a capable ground component.⁷ Retaining a credible, rapidly deployable ground force to operate jointly alongside American air and sea power provides the best range of options in this unique environment.

Alternately, reliance on proxy local forces backed by American airpower, though often advocated as a cost effective option, has risks of its own. As demonstrated most recently by operations in Libya, the United States and its allies risk losing the ability to shape the outcome of even a minor conflict without a persistent, credible ground presence. The relative importance of stability in the Middle East argues against the employment of American forces unless accompanied by the capacity to set conditions for a positive result.

Finally, the ability to deploy large numbers of ground forces retains great value. As a demonstration of political intent, there are few actions a President can take that carry the weight of American boots on the ground. The commitment of ground forces capable of operating across the spectrum of combat from high intensity warfare to counterinsurgency can itself prevent conflict from escalating without necessitating the

destruction of an adversary's arms or infrastructure. While some number of these forces can and should be resident in the reserve component, the requirement to rapidly deploy heavy ground forces demands a credible percentage be retained in the active Army as well.

When the military services operate as part of a balanced joint force, the options available to national policymakers in times of crisis are much greater than what any one service provides in isolation. The growing economic importance of the Middle East for the global economy makes stability in this area increasingly important. Regional trends, however, indicate that stability over the next twenty years is anything but ensured. Land forces, more than any other, have the critical role to play in preventing conflict during times of relative peace, deterring aggression when contemplated by regional actors, and defeating adversaries in times of war. The added challenges of locating and disrupting terrorist networks with little respect for national boundaries or collateral damage strongly argue for the continued investment in Army forces trained for operations in the Middle East.

VI. Where Do We Go From Here?

By all indications, conditions in the Middle East for the next few decades appear extremely bleak. Just as the global economic importance of the region crests, demographic and political pressures combine to encourage instability on a scale exceeding recent history. Taken together with the regional aspirations of a nuclear-armed Iran and the pernicious presence of international terrorist organizations, ensuring

stability in the region will require a concerted, coordinated effort by all agencies of the United States government.

Developing the appropriate military strategy for the Middle East begins with an evaluation of our enduring national interests. Limiting American interests to those that are truly vital results in a short list, lacking goals that have proven unachievable or do not directly impact American security, prosperity, or values. Even narrowly defining our future vital interests in the Middle East, however, highlights several critical roles for Army forces. With lasting regional stability as the overriding goal, the importance of preventive actions cannot be overstated. This nation has already made a major investment in Middle Eastern stability through our efforts in Iraq. While far from perfect, we should not squander these gains, but capitalize on them in the pursuit of lasting stability.

Maintaining and expanding partnerships with regional ground forces will serve to strengthen bonds, open channels of communication, and reduce opportunities for miscalculation. At the same time, professionalizing our allies serves to deter regional actors inclined to expand their influence or distract their populace with foreign adventures. As the network of forward bases disappears with the conclusion of the war in Iraq, these relationships also offer one of the few remaining ways to gain access and intelligence necessary for the dismantling of terrorist networks operating across the region. Finally, it remains in the Nation's long term strategic interest to retain military ties to the Middle East. Accepting a reduced forward presence need not equate to the dissolution of these relationships, particularly as other major powers have every incentive to fill the gap in the coming decades. With ground forces constituting the

overwhelming majority of military organizations in the Middle East, it is logical that the Army remain resourced and trained to perform this mission.

The Army, as part of the joint force, also acts as a credible deterrent against major inter-state war. American air and naval forces, by their very dominance, make the reemergence of armored warfare extremely unlikely. However, their utility against other forms of warfare, whether an insurgency or a hybrid threat operating among an urban population, is greatly diminished unless accompanied by significant ground forces. Because regional pressures make low level conflict increasingly likely in the coming years, it remains in our best interests to retain a force capable of deterring, and if necessary, defeating it when it occurs.

As we consider what military forces are necessary to defend US interests in the Middle East two decades from today, the answer that evolves is neither a pure counterinsurgency force nor one heavily weighted towards stand-off precision fires. Instead, the Nation should retain a balanced military capable of operating across the full spectrum of conflict. This in no way undermines a prudent investment in air or sea power in an international environment where global access is at risk. However, an honest assessment of the capabilities of each service, coupled with the likely scenarios they may be required to operate in, clearly argues for a significant land capability. The global importance of the Middle East through 2030 demands an Army that can partner and train with allies, while deterring and defeating a predominantly land-based range of threats.

Endnotes

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