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**US Strategy in the Middle East:  
The Gap Between Strategic Theory  
and Operational Reality**

**Working Draft**

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**October 22, 2002**

Note: This paper is a rough draft of a final article prepared for the University of Maine conference on the United States and the Arab world held on October 19-20, 2002. Any comments or suggestions will be gratefully accepted.

There is always a gulf, if not a void, between strategy as theory and strategy as an operational reality. National strategy documents can afford to talk in vague terms and general principles about concepts, trends, and global problems. Operational strategy must deal with real problems and the need to provide carefully focused solutions. National strategy documents do not need to bog down in the sordid realities of actually providing money, bases, and forces. Operational strategy must do all of these things. National strategy can talk about what forces and military capabilities should be. Operational strategy must define and implement real world force plans, and deal with what forces and military capabilities can actually become.

It is all too easy to forget these points, and the fact that theoretical strategy may lead us towards change, but inevitably becomes the casualty of events. Anyone can talk in theoretical terms about preemption versus deterrence, capability versus threat based force plans, asymmetric war and terrorism, versus conventional war and “revolutions in military affairs.” Every major crisis or war, however, forces us to reshape our declared strategy to deal with real world problems and issues, and make major changes to deal with the lessons of operational practice.

### **The Gap Between Strategic Theory and Operational Reality**

We again face this gap between strategic theory and operational reality in dealing with our own strategic issues, as well as the Middle East, as we head towards a possible war with Iraq. We are the world’s most effective and innovative military power, and the envy of virtually every other military force in the world. At same time, we face the following ongoing problems in reshaping our declared strategy into operational strategy as we prepare for war with Iraq.

- *We are not implementing a capabilities-based strategy against an unknown post-cold War enemy. We are going to war against the same enemy for the second time in a little over a decade and doing so in a region that our “old” strategy gave high priority as part of a two major regional contingency strategy. In fact, we are still focused on the same major regional contingencies in other parts of the world: The defense of South Korea and the defense of Taiwan’ we are still deeply committed to maintaining the security of the Balkans, and we remain at war with Al Qaida.*

In fact, it is worth pausing to note that a capabilities strategy that ignores the need to give focused regional priority to key threats and risks is inherently

absurd. We have one enduring strategic priority in the Middle East we must defend.

All of our projections of energy supply indicate that we face the need to project the world's key sources of oil exports for decades to come. After nearly three decades of intense effort to find commercial viable proven oil reserves outside the Middle East, current estimates indicate that the Middle Eastern and North African Arab states have between 68% and 70% of the world's reserves – a percentage nearly 10% higher than in the 1970s, when this exploration effort began. The Gulf alone has 65% of the world's proven reserves.

Russia – a high cost producer with an inefficient oil production infrastructure – may be able to sustain high levels of production for a while, but it only has 4.6% of the world's reserves. The entire reserves of the Caspian and Central Asian states of the FSU only add another 2.3%. The US has only 2.9%.<sup>i</sup> In contrast Saudi Arabia alone has at least 25% and probably well over 30% Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and the UAE each have some 8-11%. All can produce new oil at only 20-30% of the cost of either Russia or the Caspian states.<sup>ii</sup>

Talking about the future is more uncertain. There are many private projections of energy based on politics, lobbying, ideology, and pure guesswork. However, only OPEC, the International Energy Agency, and the Energy Information Agency (EIA) of the US Department of Energy have the ability to create large scale data bases on energy reserves, flow, and consumption, and model them with real credibility. All three of these sources roughly agree about future trends and based their estimates on models and data that have proved roughly correct over more than a decade. There are no certainties in energy, but to the extent there are facts, they are contained in the work done by these sources.

If one looks at the EIA projections, which are the authoritative source for US government analysis, one gets a very different “fact-based” view of the future from the ones in the Bush Administration's policy statements, Congressional debates, and carelessly researched news articles. The noise surrounding the Bush energy policy issued in 2001 and the resulting Congressional debate over the 2002 energy bill disguises the fact that even if *all* the additional US production of oil and all other forms of energy called for in such policies was actually achieved, it would have virtually no impact on dependence on US strategic dependence on oil exports.

The Bush energy policy documents issued in 2001 never addressed the foreign side of energy supply and consumption, and never included any meaningful quantified forecasts of the impact of its policy. However, the Department of Energy's Energy Information Agency (DOE EIA) has issued quantified forecast since that time.<sup>iii</sup> Even though these forecasts do call for significant additional energy efficiency and conservation, and increases in other fuels and renewables, they still call for US direct imports of oil to increase from roughly 9.2 MMBD in 2002 to a best estimate of 26 MMBD in 2020 (a 183% increase over less than two decades), and to a range from 25 to 29 MMBD.

Yet, such estimates grossly understate our true dependence on oil imports. The US now imports around \$1.2 trillion worth of goods and services a year.<sup>iv</sup> Many are manufactured goods from Europe and Asia that are critically dependent on imported oil. We have no estimate of such indirect energy imports in any of our energy plans, but it is clear that they would add at least another 1 MMBD to our import level – far more oil than either the Bush energy policy or Congressional variation on this policy in the 2002 energy bill – would save in terms of energy imports. Our imports and true level of oil import dependence will also increase through 2020.

Moreover, we are critically dependent on “globalism” in terms of the ability of other nations to buy our exports and invest in our economy. Not only must we compete for oil imports at market prices in a world market – an issue that makes where our oil imports come from in any given period largely irrelevant. Our vital strategic interests depend on the global availability of oil at moderate prices, not on our own imports.

If the world economy is to keep growing a moderate average rate during the next two decades, the EIA indicates that total Middle Eastern oil production capacity must increase from 29 MMBD in 2002 to 51 MMBD by 2020 – a more than 75% increase. Total Gulf capacity must rise from 24 MMBD to 43 MMBD – a nearly 80% increase. Saudi capacity alone must increase from 11.4 to 22.1 MMBD – a 93% increase.<sup>v</sup>

World demand for oil exports will continue to steadily increase in spite of major projected increases in gas, renewables, other fuels, and energy efficiency and conservation. Total petroleum exports are projected to increase from 42.4 to 70.9 MMBD (a 67% increase), and exports from the Gulf from 14.8 MMBD to 33.5 MMBD (a 126% increase). While the US and other industrialized nations will consume part of this increase, most will be vital to the growth of less developed nations. The EIA projected that

industrialized states will need another 6.2 MMBD by 2020, but that developing nations will need an increase of 17 MMBD. China alone will need 7.2 MMBD.

The punch line is simple. When we talk about Iraq, the Middle East, the Gulf, our strategic interests, and the world's economy, the fact is that all of our projections of energy supply indicate that we will be dependent on the world's key source of oil exports for decades to come. We can't make this going away with fantasies about other energy resources, by political discussions of domestic energy policy that ignore the realities of what such policies can or cannot hope to accomplish, or by exaggerating the role of smaller oil powers. We have one vital strategic interest in the Middle East: energy exports. Barring a technological miracle, that dependence will continue for decades. Our capabilities-based strategy will have to deal with the reality of planning and being ready for a major regional contingency in the Middle East for at least another two decades.

- We are not “preempting” an imminent threat of attack from Iraq, we are carrying out a systematic campaign to deal with a long-standing proximate threat whose weapons of mass destruction may reach an unacceptable level of capability at a time we cannot predict with any precision.

The issue is not, therefore, one of whether we preempt in the normal sense, but a very different issue of defining the conditions under which a slow and systematic process of proliferation is so threatening that we should take preventive military action. Here, we clearly have no general strategy that we can apply to other regional proliferators like Algeria, Iran, Israel, Libya, and Syria – much less to North Korea.

- *We are not skipping a generation to adopt new tactics and technologies and implement the revolution in military affairs. In fact, we face yet another near term major regional conflict where we must rely on evolving platforms, weapons, and C4I/SR/BM systems—most of which were used in some form in the previous Gulf War.*

We may talk about “netcentric warfare,” but the reality will still be limited by issues like “bandwidth,” the low density of key sensor platforms, communications equipment and problems, intelligence processing and a host of long-standing problems that Afghanistan showed all too clearly still limit our operations. Moreover, we have no convincing mid to long-term architecture that can even define our specific procurement and system goals. At best, we are conducting an “evolution in military affairs” on the basis of constant improvisation and dialectics.

“Precision” presents the same broad set of problems. In spite of ongoing, major advances in many aspects of precision warfare, we still have very uncertain concepts and capabilities for targeting, major bandwidth and communications problems, and a largely unreliable battle damage assessment system.

The intense internal focus on these issues within the Department of Defense and US intelligence community has led the US to largely ignore how it will achieve interoperability with its allies, how it must adapt its systems and equipment to allow interoperability, and what arms transfer/sales and military training policies it will pursue. We talk about dependence on coalition warfare in other parts of our strategy documents, but have no clear goals for implementing it in one of the most critical aspects of force development.

- *We may have to fight an asymmetric war in Iraq, but we also will have to fight a conventional one.* In fact, the most serious conventional threat we face from Iraqi forces is the classic problem of urban warfare.

More broadly, we have not defined what we are seeking from our regional allies in terms of force changes to deal with asymmetric warfare, and major gaps exist in our military advisory efforts because many of the required capabilities in Middle Eastern states exist in intelligence units, paramilitary, and other special units where we have limited contact or which are outside the mainstream of our traditional advisory and arms sales efforts.

*The threat we face from Iraqi weapons of mass destruction is not new in character. Not only did we face this threat in 1990, but we have faced a similar threat for more than two decades in North Korea and did so long before the end of the Cold War.* Our counterproliferation capabilities are very similar to those we had a decade ago. We have no missile defenses other than an improved version of the Patriot, no date or firm cost estimates for a successor, and no current ability to estimate the effectiveness of such systems. We are only beginning to transition to better passive defense, detection, and characterization systems. We have made major advances in intelligence and strategic reconnaissance and precision conventional strategic capability but our ability to use them in counter proliferation missions is untested and we have not articulated a meaningful strategy for doing so.

Once again our strategy does not articulate a clear role for our allies, or define our role in protecting them – although some references are made to

the issues involved in our Nuclear Posture Review. We have not redefined extended deterrence to deal with regional allies like those in the Middle East. We talk about missile defense but have no programs we can as yet define that would either provide US power projection capabilities or give our allies any idea of the availability, cost, and performance of future US systems. We have not even defined the availability and cost of systems like the Patriot PAC-3 in ways that make it a convincing interim competitor to the S-300/S-400 variations available from Russia.

- *We have not defined, much less implemented any of the new force shifts called for in the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR).* In fact, we still have no clear idea of what those shifts will really be, since the QDR did nothing more than provide broad generalizations about force transformation and provide one table that repeated the Bush/Clinton force levels dating back to the period before the Gulf War. We at best will get a clear picture of the new force structure the Bush Administration plans as part of the FY2004 Future Year Defense Plan (FYDP), and it is virtually certain that the Bush Administration will propose interim force levels and major weapons systems that cannot be procured at the planned rate, strength, and cost.

Regardless of our various strategy documents, we will go to war while each of our military service's force plans, programs, and budgets is in near total disarray. All four services now have an unaffordable mix of personnel, readiness, and procurement expenditures. The Army cannot define its army of the future as a meaningful procurement plan and has major development problems in virtually every category. The Navy is building down its fleet to unacceptable levels, faces major procurement problems in every category of ship and naval aviation, and as yet does not know what to do. The Marine Corps is caught in a major procurement squeeze over the Osprey and JSF, does not know its future role in naval aviation, and must redefine much of its amphibious force mix, as well as its land warfare weapons mix and mission. The Air Force is caught up in a massive funding squeeze because of the cost of the F-22. It faces major problems in redefining its electronic warfare and intelligence, tanker, bomber, and UAV/ UCAV force and seems to adjust its future force mix and levels by the week.

This necessarily leaves our allies without any clear picture of how their force plans, force development efforts, and procurement efforts will interact with those of the US, a problem that is compounded by our failure to define our force plans in terms of future regional capabilities.

- *We have no real plans for new forms of force deployment and mobility.* We do have better airlift aircraft and logistics management, but we still must move Cold War era force packages by traditional sealift, and our forward presence and deployment concepts are dictated largely by day-to-day needs and local political conditions. We seem to be politically incapable of coming to grips with the need to resize our basing and deployment structure in the US, and our efforts to change the National Guard and reserves are a political morass.

This leaves our allies (and ourselves) with no clear picture of our forward basing, forward deployment, power projection, prepositioning, and mobility strategy beyond the course we are already pursuing. It is unclear what we expect of regional allies and what future role we want them to play. The problem of regional political sensitivities as well as our future arms sales and military advisory strategies are left unaddressed.

- *For internal political reasons, we largely avoid the issue of whether our strategy should set clear goals for conflict termination, and the role we plan to play in peace making and national building.* We dodge around the real world necessity to go far beyond warfighting and shape any peace or post conflict situation.

In the process, we set no goals for an allied role or allied support, except a potential future in which we will continue to ask them for burdensharing and attempt to give them as much of the mission as possible.

- *In spite of a declared reliance on coalition warfare, we will go to war with Iraq one real ally—Britain—and the role of our regional allies will be to provide bases, border defense, and some air defense.*

While USCENTCOM and 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet headquarters have developed limited joint training programs, we talk about interoperability while our force changes and arms sales policies make it more difficult. We have never reshaped our FMS and other arms sales policies to stress partnership over sales and “burdensharing.”

These gaps between our declared or theoretical strategy and the various real world strategic we actually pursue do not mean that the US military does not make constant progress in improving many aspects of its capability, but this progress is

necessarily evolutionary, dialectical, and event-driven. In fact, our declared strategy—unlike war plans and the truth—does not have to wait for a conflict to begin to become a casualty of war. It is an ongoing casualty of peace.

More generally, these gaps between the kind of strategy declared in our National Security Strategy, Quadrennial Defense Review, Nuclear Posture Review, and various “transformation studies and the operational reality we face in the Middle East illustrate a serious and long standing problem in the way we approach US and Arab military relations.

We may talk about coalition warfare and the need to create coalitions of the willing to deal with specific problems, but there is no country in the Middle East where we can now say that our military relations, military advisory and training efforts, and arms sales efforts are truly focused on creating effective partners. Far too often, we give priorities to arms sales and burden sharing. We do not focus on creating effective mission capabilities, but rather on using military relations to help and secure an Arab-Israeli peace or access to bases and facilities. In far too many cases, we have been more interested in FMS sales and profits than helping our allies understand the need for effective training, manpower management, force conversion, maintenance, and sustainability.

We rarely, if ever, address the broader problems in the economics of regional defense, even though these have ranged from \$58 to \$84 billion in recent years, and from 7 to 11% of the region’s GDP. Several key allied countries – Israel, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia – spent around 10% of their entire GNP on military forces in 2000, and these figures ignore several more percent on paramilitary and internal security forces.<sup>vi</sup> We ignore the key issue of the extent to which such spending helps create development problems that may ultimately create more -- not less – regional security problems.

### **Operational Strategic Issues on the Edge of War with Iraq**

At the same time, we face very real problems in shaping our operational strategy, and ability to use our existing tactics and technology, to fight the kind of war we face with Iraq. We have the strength to fight a quick, decisive conventional war if we are willing to commit enough assets to achieve overwhelming force; if we can deter, destroy, and suppress Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction; and if we can get the necessary allied basing and support.

It is also clear that we plan to go to war with little active participation from any Middle Eastern ally, other than to provide bases, port facilities and land/air transit, and some degree of self-defense. We are not really seeking regional partners, at least in a war fighting sense.

In practice, however, we must deal with the following immediate challenges in shaping an operational strategy and some again have significant implications for cooperation with our regional allies:

- *We are still deeply involved in experimental efforts to find the best targeting strategy to actually use our improving ISR and precision strike capabilities. Our ability to operate in the face of deception, decoys, and the use of civilians as cover is uncertain in many tactical situations. Our battle damage assessment capability has had all of the same technical and credibility problems in Afghanistan that it had in Desert Fox, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Desert Storm. We still face major problems in defining credible air campaigns and strategies.*

We have shown we can win decisively in spite of these problems and issues. They do, however, complicate the broader interoperability problems discussed earlier, and they create serious operational problems in conducting military campaigns even when we ask our allies to be largely passive. The images of civilian casualties and collateral damage that will emerge in a large-scale war with Iraq will interact with the hostility to the US caused by the images of Iraqi suffering as a result of sanctions and Palestinian suffering during the Second Intifada. We did not demonstrate during Afghanistan that we could refute false charges on a timely basis, put real-world cases in a convincing context, or even have a meaningful way to estimate the number of enemy and civilian casualties we produce.

It is equally unclear we can handle the issue of convincing the world what we have or have not done to civilian infrastructure, oil facilities, water, urban services, etc. Coupled to the probable images of urban warfare, we face serious potential problems in military as well as civilian relations in terms of explaining and justifying our warfighting actions.

- *We face new challenges in shaping our air strategy and tactics to suppress Iraq's air defenses while simultaneously carrying out the suppression of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and paralyzing Iraq ground movements. We face similar new challenges in using air power to guard the flanks and rear areas of advancing ground forces, and in supporting urban warfare in an era when collateral damage has only marginal acceptability.*

We are not asking our allies to participate in such conflicts, but the resulting images of mass Iraqi casualties and any images of urban warfare will compound the

political and media problems that exist in other areas of combat. We face serious potential problems in military as well as civilian relations in terms of explaining and justifying our warfighting actions. The problems Israel faced during its actions in Jenin could be mild compared to the problems we could face in Baghdad or Tikrit.

- *Rather than “preempt” Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, we face the problem of suppressing and destroying such forces under conditions where Iraq is fully alert, may be capable of first use and covert/terrorist attacks, and may have launch on warning or launch under attack capabilities.* Rather than knowing we can control the situation, we face “wild cards” such as possible Israeli escalation in response to an Iraq attack, and the fact that any Iraqi attack with WMD that inflicts mass casualties or affects the world’s oil supplies radically raise the strategic ante in ways we cannot predict or control.

We have already begun to address the operational problem, regardless of the shortfalls in our strategy. Israel has been offered Patriot units in addition to its Arrow missile defense system. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have Patriots and the US will reinforce the missile point defenses and wider area air defenses of its allies. Some effort has gone into helping Gulf states prepare passive defenses, and the US agreed to provide missile launch warning data several years ago.

The fact remains, however, that the US has no theater missile defense capabilities beyond limited point defense, has severe shortfalls in providing its own forces with passive defense equipment and adequate warning and characterization, and has not announced any clear plans for dealing with successful Iraqi chemical or biological strikes.

It is one thing to talk about suppressing Iraq’s capabilities and other to be able to detect, target, and strike effectively – particularly if Iraq uses covert methods of attack, preempts, and/or can execute an effective launch-on-warning and launch under attack capability. There is also the problem of targeting such facilities and forces in populated areas, when dual use facilities are involved, or when there is a risk attacks can release chemical or biological agents in ways that affect Iraq civilians.

The issue of Iraqi WMD attacks on Israel a serious threat of uncontrolled escalation, although Iraq seems to lack the weapons strength and effectiveness to pose an existential threat. At the same time, Iraqi WMD attacks on oil facilities can present serious problems, as can attacks on any

population center in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, or the UAE.

- *No war since 1991 has forced us to fully resolve the problems in integrating fixed and rotary wing attack operations that we encountered in the Gulf War, and war on Iraq may well add new problems in providing joint operations using air power and heliborne assault forces, as well as in securing the flanks and rear of other land forces.*

These tactical problems are unlikely to have any direct impact on Arab and allied military relations in the Gulf, other than to extend the length and intensity of the war and possibly increase collateral damage. They do, however, illustrate the fact that there are additional tactical problems in interoperability we have yet to solve, and which will exacerbate the problems in giving our regional allies effective joint warfare capabilities.

- *We cannot predict how much ground and air forces are enough to ensure a quick and decisive victory with any certainty. We must plan attacks based on the assumption Iraq will not be able to use much of its land force structure in the face of our airpower, or at least use it well. We cannot be certain this will work although it seems likely it will. Our strategy must also rely on “intangibles” like the probable lack of loyalty and commitment in the regular army.*

The net effect is to create further uncertainties about the length of the war, the civilian casualties and collateral damage involved, and the problems involved in civil-military relations where allied Arab militaries are more passive than partners.

- *We may not have to face Iraq in prolonged and/or intense urban warfare, but this is certainly possible. Iraq had little experience in urban warfare since 1988 and did poorly in the Iran-Iraq War. We, however, have an uncertain track record in urban combat. Our air-land battle tactics and strategy for urban warfare are at best unproven, and our ISR/BM systems will have to be adapted on an opportunistic basis. Events and tactics in urban warfare can drive both strategy and the duration and intensity of the war.*

As has been noted earlier, this may present major image problems in terms of collateral damage, civilian casualties, and post war recovery and humanitarian issues.

- *Our civil-military experience in the Balkans and Afghanistan may or may not be relevant in Iraq, which is a nation of some 23 million people with deep tribal/clan, ethnic, religious, and geographic divisions. It is not yet*

clear we have an effective civil-military strategy for peacemaking and peacekeeping, but these missions will have to begin on D-Day—if not before—and not after “victory.”

The US not only must shape the battlefield from the start, it must shape the peace from the start. If we have anything approaching a true coalition approach to civil-military and peacemaking operations in Iraq, it is one of our best kept secrets.

- *The political dimension of our strategy in dealing with Iraq is already critical and will become steadily more critical with time.* So far, we have largely lost the battle for regional and world public opinion. During the actual fighting, we will face inevitable additional problems in terms of dealing with media coverage of civilian casualties and collateral damage, efforts to link the war to Israel and the Second Intifada, every possible conspiracy theory, and charges of American neoimperialism.
- *We can only fight at all if we can win the support of a critical minimum of allies, and sustain it through the fall of Saddam Hussein. We must then broaden that coalition to deal with the problems of nation building and peace making.* If we do need our regional allies, we face many technical problems in interoperability even with any ally like Britain. Our interoperability with Turkey and our Gulf allies is far more limited, although it is unclear how much of an active military role they will really play. The issue of linking US sensors, C4I/BM systems, and air/missile defenses with Kuwaiti and Saudi Patriot Battalions and air defenses may be an issue.
- *Our strategy for conflict termination and nation building after a war with Iraq will be even most critical of all.* The war will not be over when it is over, if “over” means the fall of Saddam Hussein. The battle to win a successful peace can last months or years longer, and the military role must be in support of the political, economic, and humanitarian role. The Bush Administration and US military, however, are only beginning to come to grips with the fact that “nation building” and peacemaking are vital elements of modern strategy.

Military planners and analysts may argue over which items on this list involve grand strategy, strategy, or tactics. In practice, however, the fact that one man’s “strategy” is another man’s “tactics” is operationally irrelevant. All of these problems need to be solved.

Fortunately, we have the professionalism, flexibility and technology to do this job, and we face a weak, inflexible enemy that has little recent combat

experience and which has had no major deliveries of new weapons and technology for over a decade. Barring the worst case—an Iraqi use of weapons of mass destruction so lethal or successful that it fundamentally changes the political and military environment, the US should be able to find the operational strategy it needs and win decisively in four to six weeks.

In practice, the US military has shown since Desert Storm that American tactical and technical superiority is so great that the US can make up for a great many strategic errors—at least at the warfighting level. Rather than try to adapt reality to declared strategy, the US will fight in ways that react to operational priorities and then again rewrite its declared strategy to coincide with the lessons of the what will now be the “last war.” No practical man has ever mourned over the corpse of a dead strategic theorist or military reformer.

### **The Regional Dimensions of Strategy**

However, the US may well encounter problems in the political and economic dimensions of its grand strategy in going to war with Iraq, and which could have immediate and lasting impacts on its military relations with its local allies:

- The US will be far better off if it has some form of cover, if not endorsement, from the UN.
- If the US is to fight at all, however, it must have the support of nations like Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Turkey for basing and military operations.
- The US needs at least the passive tolerance of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, their willingness to increase oil exports to compensate for any problems in global energy supply. Hopefully, the US will also gain some kind of access to Saudi Arabia—at least in terms of air space and transit.
- The US needs Iran to stand aside and avoid complicating both the campaign and peacemaking.
- In any very different context, it needs the same passivity from Israel.

The practical question is whether the US can create and sustain such a political or “grand strategic” environment in ways that will allow US and British military forces to operate effectively both in removing Saddam and in post-war nation building.

### **The Case of Turkey**

Meeting this challenge may be easiest in the case of Turkey, although there are no guarantees. Turkey's main demands are reasonable: effective political cover and US sensitivity to local political conditions, a firm guarantee of Iraq's territorial integrity, a guarantee that the Kurds are neither given independence nor priority over Iraq's Turcomans, and economic compensation.

These are not high price tags, but the US does have a bad habit of forgetting its friends and practical realities, and relying on vacuous moral pronouncements. It certainly failed to give Turkey adequate aid during and after the Gulf War. The US—like the EU—tends to deal with Turkey in terms of moralistic selfishness, rather than realpolitik. Turkey deals in realpolitik and judges by actions, not words.

### **The Case of Iran**

The Bush Administration has dragged Iran, with its very different problems and challenges into an “Axis of Evil” with Iraq. It has tried to ignore the reality of an elected Khatami faction in Iran, and continued with a policy of economic sanctions that cuts US business off from Iran's middle class and secular elements without affecting Iran's real world ability to buy arms. If anything, it has managed to praise the Iranian search for reform in ways that encourage violence and imprisonment without providing useful support to Iran's very real forces for reform.

Even so, Iran may not be a significant political and grand strategic challenge if the US can avoid giving Iran the message that it may be next or that Iraq will become some kind of enduring US “base”. Iran has much to gain from Saddam's fall, the removal of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and a further weakening of Iraqi military forces. It also learned during the Iran-Iraq War that Iraqi Shi'ites are Iraqis first and Shi'ites second. Another Iranian adventure in Iraq offers little more than risks and provocation of the US. A united and moderate Iraq offers Iran greatly improved security as well as the prospect of broader regional stability and easier long-term relations with the US.

The practical problem will be the tendency of Iranian hardliners to carry out new adventures with Iranian-backed Iraqi elements like the Hakim faction or simply to seek confrontation with the US for internal political reasons. The US is so strong, however, that unless US forces falter and the war drags on, or the US leaves a power vacuum in Southern Iraq, Iran is likely to remain cautious.

If there is a political threat to dealing with Iran, it is more likely to be the threat posed by those US neoconservatives who cannot be silent long enough to allow the US to win the wars it is already fighting and who have fantasies that the

US can either fight its way through the entire Middle East or that a US victory in Iraq will somehow catalyze changes in every other regime in the region.

The fact such American fantasists are reinforced by an equally unrealistic set of Israeli fantasists makes things worse. The end result fuels both Iranian fears and much broader regional conspiracy theories about American neoimperialism and Zionist plots. And, Israel's recent tendency to noisily create its own "axis of evil"—Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran—is not helping.

The US does not need to accommodate Iran beyond reducing the Iraqi threat, but it does need to make it clear that there will be no "next step" without the emergence of a far more serious Iranian threat than exists today. It also needs to make it clear it is willing to have the same kind of informal relations with Iran in dealing with Iraq that it had in Afghanistan. There is no need for concessions; there is a need for discretion and quiet communication.

### **The Case of Israel**

The worst wild card we face in both warfighting terms and in shaping our grand strategy is the possibility that Iraq might be successful enough in using weapons of mass destruction against Israel to lead Israel to use nuclear weapons. This is a worst case the US cannot hope to avoid or control, nor should it seek to visibly limit Israel's freedom of action in the event of such Iraqi success. The US lacks the leverage to stop Israel from responding to such an Iraqi attack, and even a hint that the US was taking such action might weaken the deterrent threat Israel poses and actually encourage Iraqi action. The US must quietly plan for such a worst case, but it does not seem credible enough at this point in time to be more than a marginal possibility.

Other forms of Israeli military action are much less threatening. Conventional missile attacks on Israel, and even token and ineffective Iraqi use of weapons of mass destruction, could trigger Israeli conventional attacks on Iraq. The US can quietly discourage this by its traditional means: Bribes in the form of more aid to Israel. At the same time, Israeli conventional strikes on Iraq at a time the US is already leading a major war on Iraq may not be all that destabilizing. The Arab street will already be about as angry as it can get, and few Arab governments are likely to take dramatic new action as a result of limited Israeli retaliation as long as Israel avoids civilian casualties and collateral damage.

There is, however, another political risk that could be very serious. Israel may not show restraint in dealing with the Second Intifada or might broaden its war with the Palestinians to include Lebanon and Syria before or during a US-led war with Iraq. Firm US diplomatic pressure is needed. Israel has much to gain from US success in Iraq, but its present government has shown little restraint and

judgment in the recent past and seems firmly committed to endlessly escalating to nowhere.

Once again, the US also needs to make it clear to the region that it does not endorse neoconservative and Israeli fantasies about going on to region-wide conflicts or triggering broader regime overthrow. In many ways, Israel has become the country that can't shut up—even when it is to its clear strategic advantage to do so. The US, however, can make it clear that its commitment to Israel does not involve a commitment to its sillier armchair strategists and more vocally irresponsible hardliners.

### **The Case of the Arab World, the Second Intifada and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process**

The US can only get the Arab military cooperation it needs in the Gulf to prepare and execute a war with Iraq as long as the Second Intifada does not explode in new ways; as long as any Israeli military action towards Iraq is limited; and as long as the US campaign against Iraq does not falter, result in massive civilian casualties, or drag out indefinitely.

And, there are severe limits to what the US can now accomplish in dealing with its Arab Gulf allies. The US cannot win the hearts and minds of the Arab world before or during war with Iraq, although it may be able to do so after the fall of Saddam Hussein if it can carry out a truly successful nation-building exercise.

US rhetoric and moral posturing has so far had a largely destructive impact. No Arab state is deeply concerned about the character of Saddam Hussein's regime, and all Arab states least partially fear that the US may have broader regional ambitions in going to war with Iraq terms of basing, oil, and wider regime change. Every Arab state also has populations that are deeply angry at the US because of its support of Israel and perceived role in the Second Intifada.

The US now can only hope for the support of selected Arab governments in preparing for, and executing war with Iraq because they (a) need the US in terms of its strategic presence and aid. (b) want Saddam gone if this is virtually guaranteed and does not involve high political exposure, and (c) respect American power.

The situation will be much easier, however, if the US can get some kind of diplomatic cover from a UN resolution, and can find some way to ease the tensions caused by the Second Intifada and revitalize the Arab-Israeli peace process.

US and Arab military relations do not depend on the US turning its back on Israel or abandoning its firm commitment to Israel's security. They do depend on the success of a real US commitment to halting the settlements, and to rolling back

the Israeli occupation to the limits of greater Jerusalem area and the necessary security adjustments to the 1967 lines. They depend on consistent US efforts to create a viable Palestinian state.

So far, the Bush Administration has failed to achieve these goals. President Bush has made it clear that he is seeking both statehood for the Palestinians and security for Israel, but perception throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds, and throughout most of Europe, is that the US is providing day-to-day support of Israel without having clear goals for the peace process, for dealing with the humanitarian plight of the Palestinians, or for working towards the kind of viable Palestinian state that President Bush has advocated.

The Administration's actions have been faltering and inconsistent and its rhetoric has often been careless and criticized the Palestinians and Arabs without putting balanced pressure on Israel. Every day increases Arab frustration and resentment and systematically undermines decades of effort in military cooperation. The end result is a failure to prepare the political battlefield for war with Iraq as well as a failure to provide either Israel or the Palestinians with a meaningful way out of their present tragedy. It is also to create a growing threat to the stability of Egypt and Jordan.

### **The Case of the Arab World and The Gulf**

At the same time, there already are serious underlying problems in US and Gulf Arab military relations and the war is likely to make them worse. These are scarcely all the fault of the US. The Arab states in the Southern Gulf—and particularly Saudi Arabia—have contributed to these problems in four ways.

- First, they have never explained to their own peoples the true nature of their military plans and capabilities, they have never sought a real consensus behind their arms purchases and force expansion, and they have tried to deal with their need for a US military presence more by silence than open explanation.
- Second, they have ignored the problems of Islamic extremism when such problems did not threaten their regimes, and have tolerated the export of such extremism. They have failed to implement policies that give their young men and women real jobs and real opportunities, and they have carelessly allowed money to flow to violent and futile causes.
- Third, they have refused to take proliferation truly seriously. They have failed to look honestly at the long-term implications of what Iran and particularly Iraq may do. In fact, much of the Arab world seems to be in a state of denial when it comes to Iraq. It ignores the UNSCOM reports. It

ignores the aftermath of Hussein Kamel's defection and the revelation of a massive Iraqi biological weapons effort in 1995 – after five years of Iraqi lies. It ignores that fact Iraq was found to be lying about the weaponization of VX gas in 1996 and 1997, and the pattern of Iraqi illegal imports – including Jordan's discovery that Iraq was importing the guidance platforms for Soviet nuclear armed, sea-launched missiles.

- Fourth, until Crown Prince Abdullah's peace initiative, the Arab Gulf states stood largely aside from the need to make the peace process work. They paid lip service to the Palestinian cause, but rarely made good on their pledges. They stood largely aside from Camp David. They waited in the wings during the period up to Oslo. They were far too passive in dealing with Rabin, Peres, and Barak.

Indeed, these failures in the Arab Gulf are part of far broader failures in the Arab world. If the US has sometimes faltered in moving the peace process forward, far too many of the Arab states have failed to face the need to reach a true peace with Israel, push the Palestinians towards a full commitment to a peace based on Israel's security, and deal with the other strategic realities of the Middle East for more than 30 years.

The US, however, has failures of its own: It has failed to develop a political and political-military strategy to deal with several key problems in the Gulf.

- First, it has failed to understand the depth of the reality that US and Arab military relations do not depend on the US abandoning Israel but they *do* depend on an aggressive US effort to check the settlements and advance the peace process.
- Second, the US has created a successful military engagement strategy between the US and Gulf military, but its public diplomacy has been shamefully incompetent in explaining why US forces are present in the Gulf, the nature of US arms sales, and the role the US plays as a military advisor. This silence occurs in spite of the fact that the US delivered \$17.5 billion worth of arms to the Gulf between 1994-1997 and \$15.5 billion more during 1998-2001, and has over \$7 billion worth of new arms agreements in the pipeline. It has also put militancy sales before a true partnership in creating effective Gulf military forces and creating true interoperability.
- Third, the US has dealt with Arab public opinion regarding the US military role in the Gulf and the Arab world issues largely through public silence. It has ignored the need to shape popular opinion, to deal with Arab

intellectuals and religious figures, and respond to their challenges and complaints.

- Fourth, American public diplomacy has been at its considerable worst in dealing with Iraq and Saddam Hussein. During the Clinton Administration, the US largely ceded the propaganda battle to Iraq. The US State Department has only made rare, faltering, and shallow efforts to explain the realities of UN sanctions, US containment, the oil for food program, and the reasons for the suffering of the Iraqi people.

Somewhat incredibly, the Bush Administration has compounded this situation by moving towards a preemptive war with Iraq while waiting to make a detailed, systematic, and persistent public and private case that Saddam Hussein's proliferation is truly dangerous until September. It has done so while trying to ignore the growing linkage between this issue and the backlash from the Second Intifada, and neither the US or British governments have since seen the need to provide detailed arguments and analyses in Arabic.

### **Defining US Goals for Iraq's Future**

The Bush Administration does not seem to realize that its grand strategy in a war with Iraq will be judged by the kind of peace it seeks to create and not by its success in warfighting or the fall of Saddam Hussein. The US has talked in vacuous terms about democracy in Iraq while failing to define a credible plan and goals for real world nation building. It has done far too little to win the minds and support of Arab intellectuals and peoples for its military actions and presence.

The US has failed to provide a clear picture of how it will deal with Iraq's recovery and nation building. The US has done little to convince the Iraq's people that it will not try to foist a hapless outside opposition upon them. The US has not made it clear that it will never seek to profit from such an intervention. It has not made any public attempt to free any new regime of reparations and debt, and has expressed no vision of the Iraq to come.

More broadly, some US officials have acted as if the US has no real faith in any of the governments of its Arab allies, and as if some miracle would suddenly transform Iraq magically into a modern democratic state which would then magically catalyze equal change throughout the Arab world—regardless of all the real world political, cultural, economic, and demographic realities involved. This crosses the line between neo-conservative and neo-crazy.

We only have months to change this situation while we have wasted years. In fact, we may only be able to salvage this situation—if we go to war—by a victory so quick and decisive that it is nearly bloodless and then by showing we

have made a commitment to nation building in Iraq that is truly unselfish, fully successful, and actually gives the Iraqi people the future they deserve. History has shown us, however, that it is far easier to win a war than it is to win a peace.

### **Terrorism and Asymmetric Warfare**

Finally, any grand strategy dealing with the war in Iraq must deal with the fact that the political challenges in going to war with Iraq interact just as much with those of the war on terrorism as they do with those of the Second Intifada. The US has wasted much of the sympathy and support it got following September 11<sup>th</sup> in the Arab world. This is partly a result of a failure to sustain a clear commitment to the Arab-Israeli peace process. It is partly a result of a failure to explain and justify US actions towards Iraq and our military presence in the Gulf. But, to be blunt, it is partly a result of what has often been a mean-spirited and even xenophobic treatment of nations like Saudi Arabia and of a tendency to bully rather than persuade.

Once again, the Arab world is partly to blame. Islamic extremism is a very real threat and many Arab regimes were all too complacent in exporting the threat posed by such extremists, and tacitly allowing extremist movements to operate as long as the target was Israel or secular regimes in Central Asia. The combination of the Taliban and Al Qaida was intolerable in Afghanistan long before September 11<sup>th</sup>, and it perverted, rather than served, the cause of Islam.

But, this does not excuse those US critics that have since condemned every moderate Arab regime, and particularly Saudi Arabia, as if they had never been friends. The perception in the Gulf and the Arab world is that we are the progress in most Southern Gulf states and other moderate states in the Arab world. It is that the US sees the entire Arab world and Islam as if its culture and political society were encouraging terrorism. It is that the US is ignoring the fact that virtually every moderate Arab government began the fight against such marginal extremists long before we did.

Here, the causes of our political problems do not lie primarily in US official strategy and policy, although some US officials that have made serious misstatements and political mistakes. The problem is the cumulative impact on Arab leaders and Arab public opinion of outside advisors, of “experts” with negligible real world experience in visiting the Arab states they condemn, and of equally inexperienced writers in the US media.

The message from far too much of the US since September 11<sup>th</sup> has not been that we share a common threat in dealing with Islamic extremism and terrorism—and have common goals. It has rather been that we hold entire Arab nations

accountable for actions of their worst citizens. It is also a message that the flaws of Arab states are somehow unforgivable while ours can be ignored.

The end result is that we may go to war at a time when the US, the Arab Gulf states, and the Arab world are heading towards self-inflicted “clash of civilizations.” In fact, if current trends continue and the US fails to carry out a truly successful nation building campaign in Iraq, and deal with the Second Intifada, the US will probably turn many of its friends and neutrals into critics and enemies.

Worst of all, the result will be to give Bin Laden a peculiar kind of victory. It will be a victory that does nothing to advance his own pathetic fantasies, and his vision of a world that would imprison the Arab world in the past. It will be a victory that will divide the US and its Arab allies and which could well cripple efforts to create regional security and development for years—if not for decades.

### **Grand Strategy and Operational Reality**

Several themes run through this analysis: One is that successful strategy is more event-driven than a driver of events. Another is that there are major tactical and technical uncertainties that still affect the evolution of US strategy in fighting Iraq, regardless of whether it is theory or operational. A third is that a war with Iraq might involve some “worst cases” the US cannot control or avoid, although their probability is limited.

None of these themes are arguments against war or military action. They simply describe the fact that all conflicts involve risk and that the ability to innovate during a conflict is usually far more important as the broad strategy formulated before beginning one.

However, another theme of this analysis is that US grand strategy, and US ability to shape the political context of the battlefield, involve serious regional problems that go far beyond the immediate problem of Iraq. The US military often talks about achieving “information dominance” in a narrow tactical sense. The US may achieve this “dominance” during its military operations, against Iraq. The US definitely does not have “information dominance” in any political sense, however, and there are severe limits to what the US can accomplish before or during war with Iraq.

The US clearly needs to develop an operational grand strategy for the Middle East that will assist it both in winning the conflict and in winning the peace. The three key elements of such a grand strategy seem obvious: They are (i) a deeper engagement in the Arab-Israeli peace process; (ii) treating Arab allies as real partners and not as objects of suspicion or possible targets for regime change;

(iii) and a new political-military engagement strategy focused on partnership in the Gulf and Arab world.

A fourth, and even more important element, is to give the high possible priority to achieving decisive operational success in nation building in Iraq, and making this effort fully visible to the world. A US-led war will never be popular, but a successful peace may well be.

- The US should make it clear that peacemaking does not mean occupying Iraq. It means a partnership in which the US acts as a peacekeeper throughout the country long enough for Iraq to reach political stability, new Iraqi leaders to emerge, and Iraq's various factions to work out some stable form of power sharing.
- It means demonstrating that the US has no imperial ambitions and that it will not seek any lasting military bases or use Iraq as a springboard for further military action.
- It means proving that the US will not exploit Iraq in any way, and will allow the Iraqis to reach their own decisions on their future form of government.
- It means showing the world that the development of Iraq's oil resources and economy will be carried out by Iraqis on a purely competitive basis with no special advantages to the US or US headquartered firms.
- Finally, it means the US will take the lead in ensuring forgiveness of all of Saddam's past debts and reparations and not be bound by contingency contracts signed by Saddam's regime.

In shaping its grand strategy to deal with the operational realities of war with Iraq, the US needs to understand that military victories do not win wars, they merely defeat the enemy. True victory is always political, grand strategic, and dependent on the nature of conflict termination and its aftermath. The ability to act upon this fundamental principle of grand strategy will be the true test of American operational strategy in a war with Iraq.

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<sup>i</sup> These figures are based on the estimates in the BP Statistical Review of World Energy, June 2002.

<sup>ii</sup> BP Statistical Review of World Energy, June 2002

<sup>iii</sup> See the DOE/EIA Annual Energy Outlook, 2002, and International Energy Outlook, 2002.

<sup>iv</sup> CIA, World Factbook 2002.

<sup>v</sup> These data, and the following figures, are based on the reference case projections by DOE EIA in International Energy Outlook, 2002.

<sup>vi</sup> Based on various editions of the IISS Military Balance.