The Gulf and Transition

US Policy Ten Years After the Gulf War

Policy Issues on the Periphery

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Introduction

This transition study reflects the result of a long-standing project on Gulf net assessment, funded in part by the Smith Richardson Foundation. This project has already produced some eight books, including two major studies of Iranian and Iraqi military forces published in 1999 – Iraq and the War of Sanctions and Iran’s Military Forces in Transition (Praeger 1999). Additional detailed briefings and supporting data on the military balance in the Gulf, energy and economic trends, Iranian and Iraqi proliferation, and Gulf arms transfers can be found on the CSIS web page at www.csis.org under the sections market as “Gulf in Transition” and “Strategic Assessment.

This volume is intended to support US policy making and the reader should be aware that the sources used are deliberately chosen to rely as heavily as possible on current official US government documents and reports, unclassified intelligence reporting and estimates, and official international institutions like the World Bank. The goal is to provide data that policy makers are familiar with and can trust. The author, however, is solely responsible for the conclusions and suggestions made in this analysis and no attempt was made to coordinate its content with either any officials or experts in the US government or other policy analysts in the CSIS.

The Gulf is so complex a region that it is impossible to discuss all of the policy and issues on its periphery. These include problems like the security of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, and the risk that the Indian-Pakistani conflict could spill over into the region, and the growing problem that Afghani/Pakistani terrorism and support of violent extremists poses for the region. There are two issues on the periphery, however, that are so important to US policymaking that they cannot be ignored.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

The Arab-Israeli conflict not only affects the hearts and minds of the entire region, it creates a linkage between the Arab-Israeli confrontation states, Israel’s nuclear and missile forces, and proliferation in Iran and Iraq. It undermines the ties between the moderate Southern Gulf states and the West, and it tends to fracture three of the world’s great religions. It strengthens the hands of Iran extremists, and Saddam Hussein’s ability to play the “pro-Arab” card against the US.

In spite of past progress in the Arab-Israeli peace process, it is now all too clear that relations between Israeli and Palestinians can take the form of a prolonged conflict. Israel is still formally at war with Syria and Lebanon, and faces a serious rejectionist threat from terrorists, Iran, and Iraq. Following the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon, Israel still faces a security threat from Hezbollah– a Shi’ite Islamic movement with strong Iranian and Syrian sponsorship. Lebanon remains under Syrian and Israeli occupation, and its factions still present the threat of another round of civil war. A strong, highly visible and continuing US effort to find a solution, and an Arab-Israeli peace that all parties can agree to, is more than an Arab-Israeli issue. It is critical in the Gulf to find security and to reducing the threat of terrorism.
At the same time, its Gulf allies need to be very realistic about US ties to Israel. US military aid to Israel, and Israel’s confidence in US support in an emergency, is the only way that Israel can ever be secure enough to reach the kind of peace with will be acceptable to the Palestinians, Syria, and Lebanon. A strong Israel is the only Israel that will never use nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction, and that can move from peace to arms control. There are some in the Arab world, and even some US and European Arabists, that cannot seem to grasp this reality, They would find the reality created by an isolated Israel far worse.

**Turkey and the Kurds**

The US should seek to ensure the security of Iraq’s Kurds and their political and human rights – possible through the kind of limited autonomy that previous Iraqi governments have promised them. The US has no strategic interest in any form of “Kurdistan,” however, and creating a Kurdish nation which could create a new source of instability in the Gulf.

This does not mean the US should abandon its broader concerns for the human rights of all the Kurds in the region but it also does not mean that the US should raise Kurdish hopes of independence, and using the Kurds as a base for military adventures against Iraq. The US made this mistake in the mid-1970s. It labeled the Kurds as traitors in the eyes of many Iraqi’s and the US then abandoned the Kurds in 1975 because of its strategic interest in Iran. There have been enough ethnic tragedies in recent wars. The US should not risk creating another one.

More broadly, the US has a strong strategic interest in Turkey and in ensuring that Turkey will provide aid and power projection facilities in the event of any new adventures by Iraq. A strong, friendly and largely secular Turkish interest is of great strategic value to the US in dealing with value to the US in dealing with Iran, the Caspian, and Central Asia as well.
Central Asia and the Caspian: Putting an End to the “New Great Game”

As has been discussed in Chapter V, the US has become over-engaged in the Caspian and Central Asia, largely because of mistaken policies in dealing with Iran. The Clinton Administration involved the US in this “new Great Game” to obtain access to what were perceived as massive oil reserves, limit Russian influence, and prevent Iran from profiting from Caspian oil. In practice, Caspian and Central Asian energy reserves seem to be the size of a new North Sea at most, and will develop slowly. There is no reason to challenge Russia in its own backyard, particularly since Chechnya has shown Russia that it has little reason to reabsorb Islamic and non-Russian minorities.

“Pipeline politics” seem unlikely to seriously affect Iran’s future military efforts in any way, but they already interfere with the operations of US companies in the Caspian and Central Asia, create pointless political antagonism in Iran and Russia, and attempt to legislate energy development in Turkey. **US interests in the Caspian and Central Asia at most require the US to seek a level playing field for US companies in developing the region’s energy resources. Once again, the best way for the US and the world to win this particular “new great game” in terms of globalism is not to play it.**

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Drugs, and Iran

The US and Iran have already been able to cooperate unofficially in one area. Both governments have shown that they share a common interest in blocking Afghanistan’s support of terrorist movements on it soil, like that of Usama bin Ladin, and in halting the Taliban’s export of neo-Wahhabi Islamic extremism and terrorism to Central Asia and the Gulf region. This is also one of the few issues that both governments have been able discuss, if unofficially.¹ **They also have shown they share a common interest in halting the flow of drugs across the Iranian border, and which the Taliban has vastly increased and made Afghanistan’s largest export.** The US has

¹ This includes accepting Iranian requests to join the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and condemning the Afghan Taliban ruling regime internationally and increasing economic sanctions on that regime.
repeatedly sought to increase cooperation in these areas in recent years and should continue to do so.

The US should continue to do what it can to expand this cooperation, and also the persuade Pakistan, particularly Pakistani intelligence, to turn away from its de facto support of the Taliban’s extremism and Islamic extremists and terrorism. The end of the Cold War, and political change in Afghanistan, have created new strategic priorities for the US in South Asia. At this point Pakistan threatens to be a strategic liability rather than an asset. The most recent US State Department report on terrorism makes this point, at least indirectly.\(^2\)

In 1999 the locus of terrorism directed against the United States continued to shift from the Middle East to South Asia. The Taliban continued to provide safehaven for international terrorists, particularly Usama Bin Ladin and his network, in the portions of Afghanistan they controlled. Despite the serious and ongoing dialogue between the Taliban and the United States, Taliban leadership has refused to comply with a unanimously adopted UNSC resolution demanding that they turn Bin Ladin over to a country where he can be brought to justice.

The United States made repeated requests to Islamabad to end support for elements harboring and training terrorists in Afghanistan and urged the Government of Pakistan to close certain Pakistani religious schools that serve as conduits for terrorism. Credible reports also continued to indicate official Pakistani support for Kashmiri militant groups, such as the Harakat ul-Mujahidin (HUM), that engaged in terrorism.

...Islamist extremists from around the world—including North America; Europe; Africa; the Middle East; and Central, South, and Southeast Asia—continued to use Afghanistan as a training ground and base of operations for their worldwide terrorist activities in 1999. The Taliban, which controlled most Afghan territory, permitted the operation of training and indoctrination facilities for non-Afghans and provided logistic support to members of various terrorist organizations and mujahidin, including those waging jihads in Chechnya, Lebanon, Kosovo, Kashmir, and elsewhere.

Throughout the year, the Taliban continued to host Usama Bin Ladin—indicted in November 1998 for the bombings of two US Embassies in East Africa—despite US and UN sanctions, a unanimously adopted United Security Council resolution, and other international pressure to deliver him to stand trial in the United States or a third country. The United States repeatedly made clear to the Taliban that they will be held responsible for any terrorist acts undertaken by Bin Ladin while he is in their territory.

In early December, Jordanian authorities arrested members of a cell linked to Bin Ladin’s al-Qaida organization—some of whom had undergone explosives and weapons training in Afghanistan—who were planning terrorist operations against Western tourists visiting holy sites in Jordan over the millennium holiday.

...Pakistan is one of only three countries that maintains formal diplomatic relations with—and one of several that supported—Afghanistan’s Taliban, which permitted many known terrorists to reside and operate in its territory. The United States repeatedly has asked Islamabad to end support to elements that conduct terrorist training in Afghanistan, to interdict travel of militants to and from camps in...
Afghanistan, to prevent militant groups from acquiring weapons, and to block financial and logistic support to camps in Afghanistan. In addition, the United States has urged Islamabad to close certain madrasses, or “religious” schools, that actually serve as conduits for terrorism.

…On 12 November, shortly after the United Nations authorized sanctions against the Taliban, but before the sanctions were implemented, unidentified terrorists launched a coordinated rocket attack against the US Embassy, the American center, and possibly UN offices in Islamabad. The attacks caused no fatalities but injured a guard and damaged US facilities.

…Pakistan and India, several Pakistani and Kashmiri extremist groups stridently denounced US interference and activities. Jamiat-e-Ulema Islami leaders, for example, reacted to US diplomacy in the region by harshly and publicly berating US efforts to bring wanted terrorist Usama Bin Ladin, who is based in Afghanistan, to justice for his role in the 1998 US Embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. The imposition of US sanctions on 14 November against Afghanistan’s Taliban for its continued support for Bin Ladin drew a similar response.

This is a risk the US should also consider closely in its pipeline politics. Iran is scarcely an ally or friend. But, Afghanistan already has a far worse regime that Iran, and one that does far more to promote terrorism. A Pakistan, under a military dictator who may ultimately be replaced by Islamic extremists, and whose intelligence services already have ties to the Taliban, Usama bin Laden, and Islamic extremists throughout Central Asia is little better. Pakistan may have been an ally, but times change. In any case, Afghanistan and Pakistan are terrible routes for energy exports and one where the US should make it clear it will never help any company, do anything to aid its employees, or assume any risk on their behalf.
1 The Economist, September 23, 2000, p. 54.
2 Office of the Secretary of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1999, Department of State Publication 10687, Released April 2000, pp. 28-31.