The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World
DOHA DISCUSSION PAPERS

A Strategic Look at U.S.-Muslim World Relations

2008 U.S.-ISLAMIC WORLD FORUM
Security Task Force

Convener:
Peter W. Singer

With contributions by:
M.J. Akbar
Kurt M. Campbell

Saban Center at Brookings

The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World
DOHA DISCUSSION PAPERS

A Strategic Look at U.S.-Muslim World Relations

2008 U.S.-ISLAMIC WORLD FORUM
Security Task Force

Saban Center at Brookings

Convener:
Peter W. Singer

With contributions by:
M.J. Akbar
Kurt M. Campbell

THE DOHA DISCUSSION PAPERS provide testament to the opportunity for renewed dialogue between the United States and the Muslim world. Written specifically for the U.S.-Islamic World Forum's three task forces, they have been edited and compiled into separate volumes on Governance, Human Development and Social Change, and Security. The Doha Discussion Papers bring together the major papers and responses that frame each of the task force discussions. They include as well a summary of the off-record discussions at each of the task force sessions held at the U.S.-Islamic World Forum.

Table of Contents

Note from the Conveners

The annual U.S.-Islamic World Forum held in Doha, Qatar, brings together key leaders in the fields of politics, business, media, academia, and civil society from across the Muslim world and the United States. The Forum seeks to address the critical issues dividing the United States and the Muslim world by providing a unique platform for frank dialogue, learning, and the development of positive partnerships between key leaders and opinion shapers from both sides. It includes plenary sessions, smaller task force discussions focused on key thematic issues like governance, human development, and security, and initiative workshops that bring practitioners from similar fields together to identify concrete actions they might jointly undertake.

The theme of this year's Forum was "New Directions," as 2008 presents, for both the United States and the Muslim world, an opportunity to chart a new path in their relationship. Opened by H.E. Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the State of Qatar, the Forum featured keynote addresses by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, and U.N. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. Plenary sessions focusing on various aspects of the future of U.S.-Muslim world relations included such luminaries as former CENTCOM commander Admiral William J. Fallon, Chairperson of the African Union Commission Alpha Oumar Konaré, Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erakat, Egyptian televangelist Amr Khaled, Muhammadiyah chairman M. Din Syamsuddin, *Time* columnist Joe Klein, former Palestinian Foreign Minister Ziad Abu Amr, Senator Evan Bayh (D-Indiana), former National Security Advisor Sandy Berger, former Assistant Secretary of State Susan Rice, Council on Foreign Relations President Richard Haass, and former Assistant Secretary of Defense Peter Rodman.

At this year's Forum, we detected a marked change in tone from previous years—a sense that with the upcoming change in U.S. administrations and new political developments on a number of fronts, there was an opportunity for both the United States and the Muslim world to turn the page and write a new chapter in our mutual relations.

On behalf of the entire Saban Center at Brookings, we would like to express our deep appreciation to H.R.H. Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of the State of Qatar, for making it possible to convene this assemblage of leaders from across the Muslim world and the United States. We are also appreciative of the support and participation of H.E. Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani. Thanks goes as well to H.E. Mohammed Abdullah Mutib Al-Rumaihi, Foreign Minister's Assistant for Follow Up Affairs; Abdulla Rahman Fakroo, Executive Director of the Permanent Committee for Organizing Conferences; Malik Esufji, Director of Protocol, and the entire Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff for their roles in ensuring the successful planning and operation of the meeting. Finally, we would like to thank Hady Amr, Peter W. Singer and Shibley Telhami for convening the Task Forces, as well as Aysha Chowdhry for her hard work in editing these volumes.

Sincerely,

Ambassador Martin Indyk
Director
Saban Center at Brookings

Dr. Stephen R. Grand
Fellow and Director
Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World

Introduction

The U.S.-Islamic World Forum is a global conference held in Doha, Qatar. Since 2004, it has brought together key leaders in the fields of politics, business, media, academia, and civil society from across the Muslim world and the United States. Its goal was to address the critical issues dividing the United States and the Muslim world by providing a unique platform for frank dialogue, learning, and the development of positive partnerships between key leaders and opinion shapers from both sides.

The issue of security, how it is mutually defined and perceived, is perhaps the most critical issue to current relations between the United States and Muslims states and communities and their future. Thus, as part of the goals of the overall Forum, a task force was convened to examine and convene dialogue on critical issues of security and how they affect the relationship between the United States and the broader Muslim world.

The first part of the effort was to examine our mutual perceptions on security, where they are aligned and where they are different. Two leading thinkers from the United States and the Muslim world were commissioned to author short papers that would "set the scene" for discussions. M.J. Akbar and Kurt Campbell are not only influential opinion leaders, whom leaders on both sides of the divide consult for policy advice, but also analysts widely admired for their thoughtfulness.

The two authors were each asked to examine the same set of questions:

- What were the major trends and events over the last year that shaped security and perceptions of security between the United States and Muslim world?
- What do these trends and events project for the next 1-5 years?
- What are the key challenges and important events that we should prepare for over the next 1-5 years?

In the following sections are the result of their analysis. It is interesting and informative to examine the parallels in how these two leaders answered the same set of questions from their own perspectives, as well as the divergences in some of their conclusions.

Using the papers as a baseline for discussion, the Forum then assembled a diverse set of U.S. and Muslim world leaders for a focused discussion on key security issues. Those participating came from various parts of the United States, as well as Muslim states and communities in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. They included academics, politicians, journalists, generals, business leaders, civil society organizers, and advisors to each of the major 2008 U.S. presidential campaigns.

Over the course of two days, we examined a range of important issues, including the status of strategic relations between the United States and Muslim states and communities, the security situation in the Gulf, and the status of the so-called "war on terrorism." The sessions were held in a not-for-attribution setting to emphasize frank and open dialogue. Included is a summary of their discussions.

The goal of the task force was not to come to some type of mutual agreement or unanimous concord on what are obviously thorny issues. Rather, it was for each of the leaders to leave the experience with a better understanding of the issues and, more importantly, each others' perspectives on them. Ideally, the following papers and report will forward that goal beyond. It is only through building bridges of understanding that we will be able to recognize and reach our common goals.

—Peter W. Singer
Director, 21st Century Defense Initiative at Brookings

Security Task Force Attendees

Chair

Peter W. Singer, Director, 21st Century Defense Initiative at Brookings

Presenters

M.J. Akbar, Editor-in-Chief, *The Asian Age*, India

Mufid al-Jazairi, Chair, Cultural Committee, Council of Representatives, Iraq

Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, Chairman and CEO, Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia

Mehran Kamrava, Director, Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, Qatar

Michael E. O'Hanlon, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution, United States

Gary Samore, Vice President and Director of Studies, Council on Foreign Relations, United States

Attendees

Salam Al-Marayati, Executive Director, Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), United States

Mahmoud Al-Sumaedee, Imam, Umm al-Qura Mosque, Iraq

Muean Aljabiry, Filmmaker and Political Consultant, Iraq

David Barno, Director, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University, United States

Alexander Dehgan, Office of the Science Advisor to the Secretary of State, Department of State, United States

Mona Dreicer, Deputy Program Leader - Nonproliferation and Global Nuclear Materials, Management Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, United States

Daniel Feldman, Attorney, Foley Hoag, LLP, United States

Marc Ginsberg, Senior Vice President, APCO Worldwide, United States

Amr Gohar, CEO and Managing Director, National Telecom Card Company (NTCC), Egypt

Martin Indyk, Director, Saban Center at Brookings, United States

Said T. Jawad, Ambassador to the United States, Afghanistan

Bruce Jones, Senior Fellow and Director, Center on International Cooperation, New York University, United States

Lydia Khalil, Senior Fellow, MacQuarie University, United States

Peter Khalil, Senior Adviser, Minister of Defense, Government of Australia, Australia

James Kitfield, Foreign Affairs Correspondent, *National Journal*, United States

Joe Klein, Columnist, *Time*, United States

Kristin M. Lord, Associate Dean, Elliot School of International Relations, The George Washington University, United States

Suzanne Maloney, Senior Fellow, Saban Center at Brookings, United States

Ali A. Mufuruki, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Infotech Investment Group, LTD, Tanzania

Meghan O'Sullivan, Lecturer and Senior Fellow, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, United States

Farah Pandith, Senior Advisor, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Department of State, United States

Carlos E. Pascual, Vice President and Director, Foreign Policy Studies, The Brookings Institution, United States

Rouzbeh Pirouz, Chairman, The Civility Programme on Middle East Reform, United Kingdom

Amina Rasul-Bernardo, Lead Convenor, Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy, Philippines

Susan E. Rice, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies, The Brookings Institution, United States

Peter Rodman, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies, The Brookings Institution, United States

James Movel Wuye, Joint Executive Director, Inter-Faith Mediation Centre, Nigeria

U.S. Security and the Muslim World:

Prescription for Overextension

Kurt M. Campbell

Kurt M. Campbell is Chief Executive Officer of the Center for a New American Security (CNAS). He also serves as Director of the Aspen Strategy Group and Chairman of the Editorial Board of the *Washington Quarterly*, and is the Founder and Principal of StratAsia, a strategic advisory company focused on Asia. Prior to co-founding CNAS, he served as Senior Vice President at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Previously, Campbell served in several capacities in government, including as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asia and the Pacific, Director on the National Security Council staff, and Deputy Special Counselor to the President for NAFTA. He serves on several boards, including Aegis Capital, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, the U.S.-Australian Leadership Dialogue, the Reves Center at the College of William and Mary, STS Technologies, Civitas, the 9-11 Pentagon Memorial Fund, and New Media Strategies. Campbell is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Wasatch Group, and the International Institute for Strategic Studies. He is coauthor of *Hard Power: the New Politics of National Security*, principal author of *To Prevail: an American Strategy for the Campaign against Terrorism* (CSIS, 2001), co-editor of *The Nuclear Tipping Point* (Brookings, 2004), and has contributed extensively to journals, magazines, and newspapers. He is a contributing writer to *The New York Times*, a frequent on-air contributor to NPR's "All Things Considered," and a consultant to ABC News. He received a B.A. from the University of California, San Diego, and a Ph.D. in International Relations from Oxford University.

Executive Summary

The United States faces enormous challenges across the greater Middle East in the time ahead, challenges that have the potential to overwhelm America's foreign policy and national security apparatus. Iraq's continuing violence, Afghanistan's deteriorating security, Iran's increasing regional power and ambitions, Pakistan's failing national institutions, the spread of violent ideologies and capabilities throughout the region and to disaffected communities across the globe, the failure to secure a just peace between Israel and the Palestinians, mounting anxieties over the security of the energy supply from the Gulf —each and all will demand a consistent and steady focus in the formulation and execution of American foreign policy over the course of the next five years. However, new issues such as China's rise in the East will increasingly compete for attention and resources, and there will be strong pressures to broaden the aperture of American policy pursuits beyond the current U.S. preoccupation with Iraq and the other pressing problems of the Middle East. While this in some ways would be seen as an appealing detour from the chronic problems of much of the Muslim world, the immediate urgencies of the Middle East are likely to keep the United States closely engaged there for years to come.

U.S. Security and the Muslim World: Prescription for Overextension

The collection of foreign policy and national security challenges for America emanating from, or associated with, the Muslim world over the course of the last year reads like a master list of worrisome woes. There has been the ongoing (if decreasing) violence in Iraq and the associated American preoccupation and tunnel vision with that fraying place; unsettling security trends in Afghanistan due to a combined American and NATO ambivalence and lack of attention; worries over a shift in the correlation of regional power in favor of Iran; signs of a widening Sunni-Shia divide that threatens to fundamentally undermine regional stability; a precipitous rise in anti-Americanism throughout the greater Middle East; and a more recent slide towards a potentially nuclear form of chaos in Pakistan. Add to this the persistent worries about energy insecurity associated with the Gulf States, and the grim picture is complete. While the Bush administration has tried gamely, if belatedly, to step up its game to salvage some sort of agreement between Israel and at least some of the Palestinians, there is little here or elsewhere in the region to be particularly optimistic about.

Since 9/11, the United States has been overwhelmingly focused on the greater Middle East to the virtual exclusion of all regions of the world. Many expect this focus to continue at least for the better part of the next generation of policymaking. Yet, this primacy of place in the formulation of American foreign policy is about to be challenged by powerful and rising forces on the international scene. Rather than simply choosing which challenge to focus on from within the region—staging a responsible retreat from Iraq or turbo-charging efforts aimed at a comprehensive Middle East peace—the next president will hear persistent calls for widening the national aperture, shifting policy attention and resources from a fundamentally difficult and disappointing region to considering pressing challenges elsewhere, particularly in Asia.

Part of this new equation of reevaluation is based on global realities, but a critical component of this reorientation is related to the intense competition for defense resources that is now underway inside the Pentagon. The Army, and to a lesser extent the Marines, have been the big budget winners (and the Services with the most at stake and at risk) in the protracted American military engagement in the greater Middle East. This has left both the Navy

and the Air Force playing largely secondary or support roles in this region, scripts that neither is particularly comfortable with for the long haul. Both institutions have begun to argue passionately that the United States has larger global interests beyond simply prosecuting an ill-defined "war on terror" (a most unfortunate phrase, but still the mantra most often used and generally understood) in the Middle East, and that critical asymmetric threats and "rising states"—polite code words for China—have received far too little strategic attention, necessary resources, and national focus.

This competition for both a rationale and resources has at least partially led to a dawning new realization for many in the national security arena. After a protracted period of uncertainty concerning the nature of the foreign policy challenges that are likely to confront the nation over the course of the first half of the 21st century, twin challenges are now coming into sharper relief. For the next generation or more, Americans will be confronted by two overriding (and probably overwhelming) challenges in the conduct of American foreign policy: how to construct a more durable strategy for the greater Middle East that involves effectively waging a long, twilight struggle against radical groups that perpetrate terrorism like al Qaeda; and at the same time how to cope with the almost certain rise to great power status of China in the East.

Each task taken on its own would be daunting and consuming, but coming concurrently, as they inevitably will, these challenges are likely to be close to overwhelming for an American national mindset and government apparatus that are better suited to singular efforts. Together, these two international challenges comprise a sharp departure from the historical experience of previous foreign policy challenges—such as the nearly half-century struggle to confront and contain Soviet expansionism—for which the United States is as yet largely unprepared, militarily, psychologically, or politically. The potential threat in this developing scenario is that the United States will find itself overstretched and overextended in its national capacities to meet both challenges concurrently. And this short checklist of concerns does not include growing non-traditional challenges of the 21st century, such as coping with energy insecurity and climate change.

This is the first time in the nation's history that foreign policy-makers will have to cope with two such vexing and dissimilar challenges simultaneously. While it is true that, during World War II, America fought on two fronts in the Atlantic and Pacific against two allied, but very different, foes—Nazi Germany and imperial Japan—the military power employed to defeat the Axis was largely fungible and the tactics employed on each front were similar, adjusting for the inevitable variations of geography and terrain. Then, during the Cold War (still the undeniable shaping experience of this generation of foreign policy and national security practitioners), the United States faced one overarching and organizing foreign policy challenge coming from the Soviet Union. A singularity of purpose in the formulation and execution of American foreign policy has been the overriding experience for most of U.S. history, allowing for a greater unity of effort and a lack of competing demands. This era is now undeniably over, as the United States confronts two extremely varied sets of demands, one driven by weak and internally fractured states, giving rise to stateless terrorists, and the other by a rising commercial, political, and military giant in the East.

Ever since the galvanizing attacks of 9/11, the United States has in turn attacked (literally) the problem of violent extremism, primarily through the application of military power in Afghanistan and Iraq (the latter now inextricably linked to the terrorism matrix, largely as a consequence of American actions). The mostly unanticipated demands of the martial campaigns in the Middle East have had a corollary consequence beyond simply bogging down the military in unforgiving urban battlefields. The United States has been almost inevitably preoc-

cupied and distracted away from the rapidly changing strategic landscape of Asia at a time when China is making enormous strides in its military modernization, commercial conquests, diplomatic inroads, and application of soft power. Rarely in history has a rising power gained such prominence in the international system, largely as a consequence of the actions of—and at the expense of—the dominant power, in this case the United States. Indeed, aspects of China's rise have been accomplished without even an accompanying awareness in large part inside the United States. Current American talking points continue to stress the need to "manage" China's emergence as a dominant power, but it is perhaps more apt to describe a China that is increasingly attempting to manage American perceptions and actions, while China seeks to consolidate its newfound gains globally.

It is also true that the United States is coming to the end of the first phase of strategies designed to deal with each international problem—direct military action with respect to Middle East threats, and a loosely defined "engagement" strategy towards China. It has been somewhat disappointed by the results in both cases.

In the "war on terrorism," the first phase of the American campaign has relied too heavily on military power and not enough on an integrated political strategy, where military actions are but a component in an overall strategic approach. The new term of art among some American strategists for this enduring campaign is the "Long War," which suggests a multigenerational quest. This new terminology accurately conveys the issue of duration, but there are still questions about whether using war references are helpful. There are also the obvious problems with explaining just against whom we are meant to be fighting.

Overall, there has also been terrific confusion between ends and means and causes and effects in the overall American approach to the Middle East. Rather than triggering a wave of democracy and progress throughout the region, the Iraq misadventure has spawned concern over American intentions and competence and probably has undermined American power and standing in the world more than any other international action since the Vietnam War. In the next phase, the United States and its allies must find more cost-effective methods and multifaceted approaches to deal with terrorists embedded in sympathetic communities. The problems of "draining the swamps" of the Middle East and easing the resentments of disenfranchised Muslim populations in Europe and elsewhere are daunting. And they come with no clear-cut, short-term solutions.

So too, the United States has practiced a policy of "engagement" towards China for over a generation, an ill-defined approach, based on commercial interaction, designed to draw the Middle Kingdom into the global community of nations, but largely free from clear metrics of success or failure. The United States has hedged its bets to be sure, by maintaining a robust military presence in the Asia Pacific region, but the "engagement" and "hedging" elements of the American approach are not well-integrated, and the United States must begin to consider how best to interact with China in the next phase of relations. One might argue that the U.S. policy of "engagement" has succeeded too well, and that China is now beginning to get the better of the United States in open political and commercial contests.

Each of these broadly conceived international challenges involves fully utilizing all the tools of a successful foreign policy—cultivation of allies and friends, targeted use of foreign assistance, prudent investments in and uses of military power, development of more robust intelligence capabilities, initiation of more effective public education, and demonstration of sustained political will—in order to achieve success. Yet, beyond these generalities, there are major differences in the details of each case.

For China, the United States must maintain a forward-deployed military presence in the region that is both reassuring to friends and a reminder to others that it remains the ultimate guarantor of peace and stability. Capital ships, stealthy submarines, expeditionary marine forces, and dominant airpower will likely be the most effective tools of military power in a range of Asian scenarios where an American role might prove decisive. The United States must also conduct a nuanced diplomacy that eases regional tensions on the Korean peninsula and between China and Taiwan, while not compromising relations with friends and allies. It must continue to revitalize its alliances with Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Australia and diversify its military presence in creative ways. Building of closer relations with India and drawing it more confidently into global politics is of manifest importance. Chinese language skills will be important at every level of government and military service, as will a general knowledge of how Asia works. Most importantly, the United States must begin to rebalance its energies more evenly between the Middle East and Asia, because a continuing preoccupation with the Middle East will have negative long-term ramifications for the American position in the region and beyond. These setbacks would be difficult to recover from if America waits to re-engage only after the current unpleasantness in Iraq and elsewhere is behind it. Indeed, some argue that one of the most pressing reasons for an early departure from Iraq is that regional developments in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and even Europe are trending away from the United States, while America fritters its influence away in Mesopotamia.

In the greater Middle East, the United States will require a very different set of capacities for dealing with the ongoing war on terrorism as it heads into its next phase, as well as for broader security relations. A substantial ground forces component remains a non-negotiable capability, necessary for major and enduring operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and possibly beyond. Effective intelligence and early warning of possible terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland or friends and allies will be at a premium for the foreseeable future. Enhanced special forces capabilities and rapid strike forces will be essential for the conduct of effective operations against shadowy terrorist targets.

Beyond military efforts, major aid and economic programs designed to address profound problems of underemployment in the Muslim world will be of critical importance. While in Asia, America's allies are for the most part fairly established democracies, with thriving economies; in the greater Middle East, the situation is a bit more difficult. America must balance the fact that it seeks political and economic reform to undercut the long-term problem of radicalism, with the reality that many of its closest state allies in the region are fairly autocratic regimes. The demographic issues, with the far greater percentage of disenfranchised, unemployed youth in the Middle East, also present a challenge.

A nuanced strategy of promoting political and economic reform throughout the Middle East will require both a sustained commitment and an appreciation for local conditions. Greater training in a host of what had once been relatively obscure languages for American officials—Arabic, Persian, and a host of Indonesian dialects—will be important for achieving more effective intelligence capabilities and making better political assessments. Homeland security investments to deal with prevention and consequence management will also require serious and sustained government-led efforts.

These concurrent challenges, in short, will require starkly different government efforts and capacities for the United States. Taken together, they will also be exorbitantly expensive and difficult to implement on the cheap. Either one on its own would be daunting; taken together, managing the rise of China and the enduring challenges of the Middle East and the larger war on terrorism are likely to prove overwhelming. Given that the violent strug-

gle with Islamic jihadists is now an inescapable feature of American foreign policy and homeland security efforts, while relations with China involve a complex mix of cooperation and competition but are not necessarily destined to degenerate into open hostility, perhaps it will be prudent for American strategists to consider how best to phase and shape these simultaneous challenges. For instance, Chinese cooperation in the global war on terrorism and broader efforts such as maintaining stability in Pakistan should be a main feature in the American diplomatic strategy with Beijing, given that the PRC has as much to lose from the jihadists' success and unraveling Middle Eastern states as the United States. A major challenge for U.S. diplomacy will be to try to successfully enlist China in efforts to use its influence to check provocative Iranian action, particularly in the nuclear arena. Southeast Asia is likely to be a major battleground for hearts and minds between moderate Muslims and radical instigators. Here too, China also has a major stake in seeing the former prevail in this major struggle raging inside Islam and playing out in a number of Asian states.

The fight with the jihadists is unavoidable, as are many of the endemic problems of the Middle East, while a military or protracted political confrontation with China is not preordained. A wise American diplomacy would appreciate these distinctions and seek to develop its strategy accordingly. While the United States will need to continue its hedging strategy in Asia and to put more pressure on China for greater transparency, democratization, and regional confidence building, there are clear grounds for a sustained strategic cooperation between Washington and Beijing, where one of the potential benefits would be a united front against the global jihadist threat and the spread of instability throughout the Middle East. This does not mean that areas of competition and outright hostility between the two great powers of Asia will disappear—they will not—but instead, that differences between the United States and China can and should be managed, in order to focus on more immediate and shared threats. This may be both prudent and necessary as it is not clear that the United States has the political inclination and resources to deal with two all out challenges concurrently.

One further, but less well-recognized, feature of America's international character is its predisposition to predominance. Simply put, the United States will not yield its position or prerogatives gracefully to another rising state in the international order, no matter the circumstances or the nature of the arriving regime. This desire to sustain American preeminence and deter potential challengers to its dominant status is quite clearly articulated in the 2003 National Security Strategy of the United States. While the clear inspiration for this current determination to remain on top is China, these sentiments are not unique to the current competition for global power and prestige with Beijing. Indeed, at the end of the Cold War, there was much strategic commentary about the need to prevent the undue increase in influence and potential challenges to American authority coming from two other states seen at the time to be on the march—Japan and a newly reunified Germany. This suggests that while concerns over democracy and human rights animate America's worries over China's rise, these anxieties ultimately are not determinative. The essential feature of this hegemonic parable is that the United States will not experience transitions in its essential power relationships easily. Appreciating this essential truth will be an important ingredient in constructing an effective policy for the future.

The fact is that history is littered with failed strategies for dealing with rising states. The British and French attempts to contain a rising imperial Germany at the turn of the last century had disastrous consequences, as did the American and British acquiescence in not confronting Japanese appetites in other parts of Asia and the Pacific during the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, the only modern example of a graceful transition of power is between Great Britain and Washington. The intimate relationship that

spanned Washington and Whitehall throughout Britain's slow decline cannot, in any way, be construed as similar to the complex, largely distrustful links that currently exist between Beijing and Washington.

It is also true that we must approach the problem of making hegemonic predictions in Asia with some humility and trepidation because practitioners, commentators, and leaders have got it wrong far more often than right. It was scarcely a generation ago that Mikhail Gorbachev gave a speech in Vladivostock in 1986 that many felt would usher in an era of Soviet dominance in the Pacific. That was followed by a period when it was accepted as fact that Japan would become the dominant player in the international arena and Tokyo would inevitably transform its considerable economic power into political and military muscle, perhaps replacing the United States as the new Number 1 in the world. Throughout this period, there was also a deep belief that America was in the midst of a tragic and irreversible decline as a result of a costly and draining Cold War competition. This most recent period has been animated by the belief of an almost preordained Chinese ascent—even though Beijing faces enormous domestic and international challenges that could derail its course. Already there are prognosticators in Asia that have downgraded the long term prospects for China's rise and are instead anticipating India to be the next new ascender on the international scene.

One could also make the case here that the greater Middle East may not be as unstable as it appears to the outside observer. The states in the Gulf are among the most prosperous in the world, with reform taking place, albeit slower than an American appetite would like. A small, but plausible shift in power among Iranian leadership could eliminate a lot of tension. Autocrats may be on their last legs in places like Egypt and Syria. Pakistan very well could hold together, as it has weathered past internal crises. And we have seen developments in Palestine and Lebanon, such as elections and the withdrawal of Syrian troops that have certainly not yet brought stability, but still seemed almost impossible just a few years ago.

Nevertheless, the best assessment here is that two dominating and different challenges will dictate the American foreign policy agenda for at least the next generation, and there is an important domestic component needed for implementing an effective national strategy to stay the course. Constructing a durable, bipartisan consensus on the overarching foreign policy approach to these twin challenges is essential and inescapable. A degree of bipartisanship was a recurring feature of much of the Cold War era in American domestic politics and bitter divisions often stopped "at the water's edge," in Senator Vandenburg's immortal words. Bipartisanship has been conspicuously absent in current foreign policy debates in America and this internal divisiveness arguably hampers its effectiveness in the formulation and execution of American foreign policy. Given the magnitude of what lies ahead, a concerted effort to rediscover some common ground in American domestic politics (at least when it comes to foreign policy) may indeed be one of the most important ingredients for a successful balancing act between these two huge challenges facing the country in the coming decades.

For the United States, however, there is still the matter of where to focus attention when considering the situation in the Middle East, with so many problems that are already boiling over. There will still be enormous competition for scarce resources and attention when it comes to how to prioritize issues of concern in the broader Middle East. There will also be pressure to de-emphasize foreign policy pursuits in favor of a more activist domestic agenda. Continuity between presidential administrations in most things—despite rhetoric to the contrary—has been the order of the day in historical terms when it comes to the contours of American foreign policy. But now there are reasons to expect some substantial

departures from the outgoing Bush team's policies in those of the incoming administration (particularly if it is Democratic, but even if it is Republican) —especially with regard to the Middle East.

There will be powerful incentives to resuscitate peace efforts between Israelis and Palestinians and to begin a phased and responsible withdrawal from Iraq, as much as conditions allow. There will also be added urgency to refocus attention on finishing the job in Afghanistan by better leveraging U.S. and NATO forces. Democracy promotion will likely take on a more subtle approach and maybe even a back seat in the Middle East. A substantial domestic effort to gain greater energy security in the United States is likely around the corner. Its rationale is not merely for the environment, but to build a buffer from unanticipated instability in or around the Gulf. There will also be a sober assessment of the possibility of a major diplomatic push to build a more stable relationship with Iran. Finally, there will in all likelihood be a dawning recognition that even if America wanted to, there are few if any viable options for dealing with a disintegrating Pakistan.

Such issues would be more than enough to keep America's hands full over the course of the next five years or so, not just in the Middle East, but beyond. A reality is dawning, however, on security considerations for the United States in the Muslim world. All of the mounting challenges demand nearly exclusive attention in the greater Middle East, but they will leave little time for much else. Unfortunately, the other issues on the global agenda are also growing in importance and demanding more time and attention, particularly in Asia. The fundamental question then for a new team in the White House is whether they will try to pull off such a balancing act of time, resources and focus. If not, which priority will they choose?

The Axis of Equals and the Arc of Turbulence:

Looming Changes in the Security Relationship between the U.S. and the Muslim World

M.J. Akbar

Mobashar Jawed (M.J.) Akbar is founder and Editor-in-Chief of *The Asian Age*, India's first global newspaper, as well as the *Deccan Chronicle*. He has launched and edited several important publications in India including *Illustrated Weekly of India* and *The Telegraph*. Akbar has also written books on the Indian political landscape. A renowned political and social commentator, Akbar is also the author of several articles and books, including *Blood Brothers* and *India: The Siege Within, Challenges to a Nation's Unity*. In addition, he served as a member of India's Parliament from 1989-1992, and as an advisor in the Ministry of Human Resources, helping with policy planning in education and literacy programs. He holds a B.A. in English from Presidency College, Calcutta.

Executive Summary

America's principal foe in the Muslim world is Iran. Its most important Muslim ally in George Bush's "war on terror" is Pakistan. Iran and Pakistan straddle the principal battlefields, with Iran sandwiched between two American war zones, Iraq and Afghanistan. 2007 witnessed the reemergence of an emboldened Iran, buoyed by survival in its diplomatic, economic and military confrontation with the United States. Conversely, Pakistan degenerated into a "jelly state," unable either to stand up or dissipate into inconsequence. As the Arc of Turbulence gradually shifts from the Palestine-Lebanon-Iraq space to the Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan axis, the Muslim world is taking a fresh look at regional priorities and at Iran, wondering whether American power, super or hyper, is the best option for the preservation of self-interests.

2007 was a year of trends rather than events, of consequences rather than sequences; perhaps an uncertain third act of a five-act drama. The political crystal ball is never crystal clear at the best of times, so one attempts a gaze at the next five years, a period of flux, with some trepidation.

But certain developments stand out in the complicated jigsaw puzzle called the Muslim world: the growing confidence of Iran, the implosion of Pakistan, and a slow shift of the epicenter of conflict from the Palestine-Lebanon-Iraq zone to the Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan axis. Iran is the rising power, Pakistan is debilitating, and Afghanistan is again a quagmire that threatens to suck in anyone foolhardy enough to step into it. A new "Arc of Turbulence" is becoming visible.

There is a growing perception in the Muslim world that Iran has not only turned the tide in its confrontation with the Bush administration, but may even be in control of the stream of future events. Of course, Iran has substantial domestic problems, not the least of them being a government that has not delivered on basics like bread and development to an increasingly agitated youth. One estimate puts the figure of unemployed at over two million out of a working population of 21 million. But little unites Iranians more easily than the idea of Iran as the natural leader of the region, capable of defending the interests and honor of a Middle East rife with regimes that have sold out to the West in return for dynastic security.

Iran will seek the role of a major player not just to its west (where Iraq is already an undeclared ally) and south (where the Gulf is nervous) but also to its east and perhaps into Central Asia. Iran is now the most influential player in Iraq, active when it so desires, discreet when necessary, ambivalent when opportune. To its east, it has a common interest in the defeat of the Taliban, but is content to let NATO bleed in slow drips. The Gulf and Arabia are beginning to appreciate that an American defense screen might end up being a deceptive mesh; while they will never reject it, they need no lessons on what happened to the Maginot Line.

The problem is not anxiety over Iran's ambitions, but capability: can anyone do anything about it? By repeatedly hinting at or even threatening war, Bush raised the ante so high that he has stumbled on the way back to ground-level. The case for war was lost on the battlefields of Iraq, and other options are being construed as victory for Iran because they are softer. Soft is easily synonymous with timid in the region; or at least that the cost of war has become too high for America after Iraq. The arguments for both war and tougher economic sanctions have been sabotaged by the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate report giving Iran a pass on its "central guilt," building a nuclear arsenal. President Ahmedinijad called this document a "declaration of surrender." Even if we disregard his habitual triumphalism, it is obvious that the Bush

administration, which always claimed that all options were on the table, has removed the option of war from that table.

America's new Iran strategy, to confront as well as engage, contrasts sharply with previous belligerence. The Sunni ring around Iran is crafting a nuanced response: to hunt with the American hound in public, while running with the Iranian hare in private. Washington might seek a steel ring around Iran, but at best it will be a plastic circle. Those who have been traditionally suspicious of Iran have begun to make gestures of conciliation towards Tehran. Over the last year, the Gulf States have invited Ahmedinijad to speak at their annual meeting in Manama; Bahrain, homeport of the American fleet in the Gulf, has made overtures; and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia invited Ahmedinijad to join this year's Hajj as the King's personal guest. Tehran accepted the invitation—after a studied delay. Maureen Dowd quoted an unnamed "insider at the Saudi royal court" as saying "We don't need America to dictate our enemies to us, especially when it's our neighbor."[1] This person may have chosen anonymity, but we can be certain that the quote was not given accidentally, or without clearance.

The Muslim world is preparing for a new equation in which Iran has shifted from the "Axis of Evil" to the "Axis of Equals."

Obviously it is not the equal of America across the globe. But within the conflict zones of the Middle East and Afghanistan, slowly coalescing into an inter-related contiguous battlefield, Iran has become an effective counterpoint to the world's sole superpower.

This may not be a reality yet, but policy planning is often a child of perception. The American occupation of Iraq has set in motion a series of consequences that have tilted the regional balance in favor of Iran. The ironies of Iraq demand a library of books. Saddam Hussein was as bitter a foe of Iran's ayatollahs as the United States: he is gone, replaced by a government in Baghdad that has the most cordial relationship with Tehran. It has been recently noted that there have been only four instances in the Middle East, if you include Afghanistan in the term, when Muslim clerics came to power: "under the republican French in Egypt, under Khomeini and his successors in Iran, under the Taliban in Afghanistan and, it could be argued, with the victory of the United Iraqi Alliance in the Iraq elections of 30 January, 2005 (the U.I.A. was led by the Shiite cleric Abdul Aziz al-Hakim)."[2]

The Shia insurgents, who have largely achieved their objective of the virtual elimination of the British presence in their areas, are allies of Tehran. Iran, which was once bottled up with little room to maneuver, now has extended its geopolitical space from the west of Afghanistan to the west of Baghdad. This is not to suggest that Iran and Iraq will be anomalous to an individual state, or that they will not have varying interests, but the political and economic isolation of Iraq is no longer feasible.

The most important change seems to be, however, the American realization that it cannot declare victory in Iraq—a compulsion before departure—without ground-level accommodation with Iran. That message has already reached regional capitals.

Iran is responding to America in more than the shrill tones of Ahmadinejad. It is pertinent that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has just declared that he is not permanently opposed to ties with the United States. There is sufficient circumstantial evidence to suggest that this turnaround can be traced to the change of guard at the Pentagon, the starting point of a graded implementation of the Baker-

[1] Maureen Dowd, "Faith, Freedom and Bling in the Middle East," *The New York Times*, January 17, 2008.
[2] Juan Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

Hamilton commission's recommendations on Iran, which were essentially to talk to Tehran without changing the objective of eliminating its weapons capability. On-the-ground realities have dulled the confrontation and sharpened the engagement. It is not a matter merely of talks at diplomatic levels, or the capture and release of British navy personnel as Iran's 'friendly gesture.' The region believes, even if it will not say so, that America and Iran have come to a working arrangement on Iraq. It would require some extreme foolishness on the part of Iran's radicals to disturb this understanding by senseless provocation, and it is unlikely that Khamenei will permit it. He has already placed his own man, Muhammad Zolghadr, as deputy head of Basij, the volunteer militia. Ahmedinijad had dismissed Zolghadr in December as deputy interior minister for security affairs. Ali Larijani, who was eased out from the critical position of chief nuclear negotiator, recently visited Egypt as a representative of Khamenei. [Egypt gave asylum to the ousted Shah of Iran, and Iran broke off ties when Egypt signed a peace agreement with Israel in 1979.]

A significant, if studiously unmentioned, prelude to General Petraeus' "surge" was the withdrawal of the Shia leader Moqtada al Sadr from the battlefield. Al Sadr announced a "ceasefire" shortly before the "surge" became fully operational. In the middle of January 2008, al Sadr warned that the ceasefire could be coming to an end. We do not know his compulsions; perhaps it was meant to warn against any gratuitous declaration of American victory.

As British forces have moved out of the Iranian zone of influence, Americans have concentrated their combination of money-power and firepower on the Sunni insurgency while co-opting Shia insurgents in the south into the establishment. In other words, American forces are doing the work that Shias would have had to do in a post-withdrawal scenario. Nothing could suit Iran or Iraq's Shias better.

In the meantime, Moqtada al Sadr has used his "ceasefire" to further the theological education necessary to become a full-fledged ayatollah. [The Shia religious hierarchy begins from *talebeh*, "student," from whence the word *taliban,* to *alim,* "teacher," *masalegu,* "one who can explain problems," *vaez,* "preacher," *mojtahed,* "interpreter of the law," and then to ayatollah, a rank equivalent to *marja-e-taqlid*, "one worthy of emulation."] The growing theocracy in the Basra administration is possibly a sign of things to come in a post-American, Shia-majority Iraq.

Al Sadr surely sees himself as the Khamenei of Iraq. Iraq cannot be another Iran, if only because the population is not homogenous, but Shias will be in effective control of Baghdad. That, in essence, has been Bush's gift to the Shia community. There will be political accommodation of Sunnis and Kurds, but neither will be allowed the luxury of independence by either Baghdad or the neighborhood. Whether they say so publicly or not, Iraq and Iran are likely to be allies. *Time* reports that when a major American oil company showed interest in some Iraqi oil fields, it was told by the oil ministry in Baghdad that it might be worthwhile to get Tehran's approval for the deal.[3]

The governments of the Middle East are assessing the consequences of an American withdrawal from Iraq over the next five years, the process to begin either in the last days of Bush or on the next watch. What they do know already is that the logistics of withdrawal cannot function without the cooperation of Iran, and Iran will not provide this cooperation as a humanitarian gesture. It will demand greater regional influence in return.

The more cynical analysts in regional capitals see the American intelligence certificate to Iran as part of the trade-off. Those with a sense of humor are wondering at the conundrum: Saddam, who did not have the capacity to set off a bush fire, is dead because Ameri-

[3] *Time Magazine*, January 8, 2008 edition.

can intelligence was convinced that he had weapons of mass destruction. Iran, which has the capability of producing them, is getting a free ride.

There is also a growing suspicion that the NPT (Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty) regime is on its last legs. The immediate fallout from this—the word is doubly appropriate—is the revival of defunct departments of nuclear energy. France has just signed a deal with the UAE to supply nuclear reactors; Nicolas Sarkozy, unlike his predecessor, works in coordination with the White House. Naturally, the official veil is used: this energy is needed for "peaceful" purposes. No one believes the excuse. With A.Q. Khan neutralized, China opened a nuclear counter, if not a shop, during its Africa summit last year. A weakened America cannot enforce its dual-logic argument on nuclear weapons, where America can continue to make its own weapons more miniature and sophisticated; and the Middle Three [Israel, India, and Pakistan] are permitted to join the Big Five while the rest of the world is denied entry into the club. It is not unnoticed that two of the Middle Three are American allies and India is on its way to becoming one.

Paradoxically, the new conventional wisdom is that the only guarantee against American intervention, or defense against occupation, is a nuclear armory. The cost of war against a nuclear state is simply too high. Iran is the latest bit of evidence. A minor nuclear power may not be able to stave off international pressure, but the pressure will stop short of war, as in the case of North Korea. That is an unintended byproduct of America's search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

In the last five years, Iran has also built up credibility on the Arab and Muslim street. Its ability to stand up in the diplomatic confrontation with Bush has won it respect. Its surrogate, Hezbollah, turned back an Israeli invasion in Lebanon and won unprecedented admiration. This was the only war in which an Arab force emerged with its self-respect intact, its pride enhanced. The closest claim to an Arab victory was in 1973, but by the end of that conflict, Israel had seized the initiative; its troops were on the Egyptian mainland when a ceasefire was negotiated. Hezbollah, on the other hand, achieved the near-impossible without the resources of a state, lending legitimacy to another perception: that the real power in the Muslim world has shifted to shadow armies led by committed believers, rather than standing armies under corrupt or compromised autocrats.

There is relief in the Muslim world that America stopped short of war against Iran. This would have led to contiguous conflict between Beirut and Lahore, and spilled over into the Nile and the Ganges. This might be called the Arc of Turbulence.

America can destroy Iran's infrastructure from the air, but cannot possibly extinguish the capability of an Iranian response against American allies in the region. An American attack will deepen turmoil in an already vulnerable region, crisscrossed by shadow armies in search of targets.

America needs Iran's cooperation in Afghanistan as well. Fortuitously, Iran's principal objectives in Afghanistan are largely consistent with those of the United States, for Iran does not want the return of the Taliban. [The only nations that had diplomatic relations with the Taliban regime were Pakistan, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and only Pakistan had an effective mission in Kabul. Iran, incidentally, lobbied very hard to save the Bamiyan Buddhas. It offered Mullah Omar's regime hard cash, and was prepared to physically carve out the statues from the mountain and take them to Iran for safe-keeping.] Iran's interest in Afghanistan is a zone of influence across the Herat region and the Shia population. America can live with that.

Iran is wedged between the two zones of conflict: Iraq-Palestine-Israel to the west and Afghanistan-Pakistan to the east. The indication of 2007 is that

the second could emerge as the more dangerous place over the next five years. The Taliban has reasserted itself against NATO, and the instability in Pakistan is threatening not only the country, but the region and beyond.

The situation in Pakistan represents not only an internal systems failure, but also a collapse of American policy. Anarchy, or a vacuum of governance in large areas of Pakistan, could extract, over time, a higher price than Iraq. Pakistan is America's most important ally in the Muslim world. Bush has invested heavily in both financial and political capital, supporting General Pervez Musharraf's lone-hand regime with at least five billion dollars in return for support in America's parallel wars in South Asia against terrorists and the Taliban. In 2007, America discovered, perhaps to its own surprise but to no one else's, that much of this money had been diverted for Pakistan's defense requirements on the Indian border. Despite a 100,000-strong army put into the field against them, the Taliban or its allies control what the *Economist* calls "a vast and spreading swathe of territory" in Pakistan. A new leader has emerged, Baitullah Mehsud, elected chief of the Tehrik-e-Taliban.

The biggest danger if NATO withdraws from Afghanistan is not that Afghanistan will go to the Taliban, but that the Taliban could sweep to power in Islamabad. America must, in fact, prevent the worst possible consequences of its own intervention in the region by a combination of hard and soft power, for economic progress will be the key to success.

George Bush has compromised three fundamental policy objectives in order to keep Pervez Musharraf in power in Pakistan. Bush went to war in Iraq to eliminate nuclear weapons, dictatorship and terrorists. Pakistan has nuclear weapons, dictatorship and terrorists. The first two were tolerated as the price for the war against the third. Evidence has now emerged that Pakistan became a nuclear power with the tacit acceptance of successive American administrations. [When Richard Barlow, a CIA agent working in the directorate of intelligence on proliferation during George Bush Sr.'s administration, protested that the Pentagon was manipulating intelligence to ignore Pakistan's bomb program, he was sacked and denied his pension.[4]]

Six years after 9/11, dictatorship has been tacitly legitimized in the preservation of Musharraf in power through a pseudo-democracy that the Pakistani people do not want. There are more terrorists in Pakistan now than perhaps the rest of the world put together, and they can threaten Musharraf with impunity and assassinate Benazir Bhutto in the heart of Rawalpindi, the city that serves as the headquarters of the army. It is widely feared that a part of Pakistan's nuclear cache could one day become part of a terrorist arsenal.

The conclusion that the Muslim, and indeed the rest, of the world have reached is that the only principle that sustains American policy is the adjustment of principles for tactical gains.

The result is not a safer Pakistan, but a more dangerous one. Those who assassinated Bhutto, and their peers across the Muslim world, do not only want to destroy America; they also want to change their domestic regimes and take over their countries. The potential for chronic instability cannot be underestimated.

If American prescriptions had worked in Pakistan, cynics and realists who crowd the capitals of the Muslim world and have their own contradictions to protect, might have applauded, or at least breathed more easily. Instead, they have watched Iran, a nation hostile to America, gain power from confron-

[4] Douglass Frantz and Catherine Collins, *The Nuclear Jihadist: The True Story of the Man Who Sold the World's Most Dangerous Secrets…And How We Could Have Stopped Him*. (New York: Twelve, 2007)

tation while Pakistan, an ally of America, slips dangerously toward anarchy. It is fairly conventional to suggest that failure in Afghanistan will be more dangerous than failure in Iraq. No one seems to be estimating the implications of failure in Pakistan. It is in the vested interest of even India, let alone western Asia or the West, to prevent the degeneration of Pakistan. This cannot be done with the half-baked thinking currently on display. Cancer cannot be cured with a Band-Aid. Pakistan will not break, but it could turn into a "jelly state," quivering all the time, its military capability bogged in a mess that neither collapses nor turns stable.

America finally recognized that army rule had become unviable when early in 2007 Pakistanis bravely challenged their military dictatorship. A bizarre scheme emerged out of this recognition: a marriage of civilian flesh to military muscle. It was the sort of thing that probably looked pretty when written down on Foggy Bottom letterheads at the U.S. State Department. But it had little resonance either in principle or reality.

Then, instead of leaving the civilian choice to an honest election, giving at least partial legitimacy to the civilian-military partnership, Washington pre-selected the winner and brokered a deal with Musharraf that surpassed even the current high levels of cynicism. First, Musharraf imposed the 13th Emergency in Pakistan's 60 years, in order to play out a charade which amounted to a coup against his own government. He had to sack 60 judges, destroying the already-damaged reputation of Pakistan's judiciary, in order to become a "civilian" president. His place in the power structure has been kept above the accountability principle inherent in a popular election.

As part of the American arrangement, Musharraf dropped all corruption charges against the Bhuttos [the husband, Asif Zardari, is alleged to have collected a billion dollars and the wife, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, had to appeal against a ruling of a Swiss court in a case of money-laundering] through a National Reconciliation Ordinance, an arbitrary fiat. The only person who could have challenged Benazir for the prime ministership, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, was barred from contesting. Thousands were put under arrest because they would not accept such abuse of democracy. On the streets, Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party [PPP] was nicknamed Pervez's People's Party.

Assassins have shot that elaborate charade to pieces, and everyone is once again staring at a blank wall. There is neither democracy nor a Plan B.

A rudderless Pakistan, seething with more terrorists today than in 2001, is the inheritance of 2008. The Musharraf government is being forced to calm fears with periodic statements that Pakistan's nuclear armory is safe from the reach of terrorists, even as it reassures its population that there is no question of America taking control of its nuclear bombs. On the ground, jihadists are now operating between Afghanistan and Islamabad, north up to the secure mountains of Swat (from where their forbears fought the British Empire to a standstill in the 19th century) and south to Quetta, with pockets of strength in Karachi. The government has been unable to eliminate either Osama bin Laden or his followers.

The jihadi movement is far bigger than Al Qaeda, which, in fact, may not be as strong as is projected in the media. The future of the jihadi spectrum will depend on internal measures of control, of course, but much will also depend on how Washington addresses the problems of the Muslim world. Popular support to jihadis is probably in direct proportion to the anger against the United States and the West.

As we look forward over the next five years, very few of the present heads of government in the Arc of Turbulence are expected to be in place in 2013, as age or events catch up. A key American mistake has been to confuse an individual with stability, particularly among its friends. An external prop alone

may not suffice to guarantee continuity and calm. This will be a significant challenge to the present establishments in the Muslim world. Age is not on the side of Hosni Mubarak or King Abdullah; ground realities are not on the side of Musharraf or Hamid Karzai; and the vote is probably not on the side of Ahmedinijad, Ehud Olmert, the ailing Nuri al-Maliki, or Mahmoud Abbas. Some of the governments are, to put it bluntly, regimes on their last legs, and no one is certain who, or indeed what, might succeed them.

There are plenty of other imponderables. Any move toward an independent Kurdistan would be unacceptable to Turkey, Iran and Syria, and perhaps invite a military response. These three neighbors of Kurdistan know that America's appetite for direct war in the Middle East is exhausted.

Will a weakened America, paradoxically, be a better instrument for peace between Israel and Palestine? America may not be strong enough to send troops, but it is also not so weak that it can be ignored. If America and Israel realize that their military superiority cannot preserve the status quo, then the logic of peace will be more acceptable to them. Israel surely appreciates that it has nowhere to withdraw: it cannot change its neighborhood, or now expect America to destroy Iran. The Arab states, and the Palestinian people, have also begun to accept that they must coexist with Israel, and there is no other definition of mutual security. What Bush and his successors could not achieve by "shock and awe," they might induce by talk and persuasion.

The key security challenge will probably shift, during the next five years, from the Middle East to the Iran-Pakistan region. [Perhaps we could call it the Central East.] We have indicated the reason: a defeat for America and NATO could lead to the "Talibanization" of both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Will Iran have become a nuclear power by 2013? Will an alliance led by Taliban be in power in Afghanistan? Will an alliance that includes Tehrik-e-Taliban, or the various Jamaats, be in power in Pakistan? What could be the implications for India?

A nuclear Iran would complete the Nuclear Crescent: Israel, Iran, Pakistan, India, China and Russia. Within the bowl of this crescent lies three quarters of the world's known energy resources. What does this mean for energy security and wider global stability?

The next five years will also demand immediate attention to the old challenges of the Muslim world: poverty, education and gender bias are at the top of a long list. These are not problems that can be solved by external intervention, positive or negative. These are challenges that the Muslim world has to address internally. It has the resources to do so; it needs to discover the will. Will large parts of the Muslim world enter the 20th century, let alone the 21st?

As ever, the horizon is streaked with too many questions and not enough answers.

Security Task Force
Summary of Discussions

This summary was prepared by Andrew Masloski, Senior Research Assistant, Saban Center at Brookings

The 2008 U.S.-Islamic World Forum brought together some 160 top leaders from over 30 countries. Amongst its many sessions was a task force that brought together a diverse set of U.S. and Muslim world leaders for a focused discussion on key security issues. Over the course of two days, the leaders examined a range of important issues, including the status of strategic relations between the United States and Muslim states and communities, the security situation in the Gulf, and the status of the so-called "war on terrorism." The sessions, chaired by Peter W. Singer, Director of Brookings' 21st Century Defense Initiative, were held in a not-for-attribution setting, to emphasize frank and open dialogue.

Cynics and realists have watched Iran —a nation hostile to America—gain power from confrontation, while Pakistan—an ally of America—slips dangerously toward anarchy.

Session I – A Strategic Look at U.S.-Muslim World Security Relations

This session addressed three key questions that have informed both security concerns and perceptions of security between the United States and the Muslim world.

- What were the major trends and events over the last year that shaped security and perceptions of security between the United States and Muslim world?
- What do these trends and events project for the next 1-5 years?
- What are the key challenges and important events that we should prepare for over the next 1-5 years?

The opening presenters for the session were M.J. Akbar, Editor-in-Chief of *The Asian Age*, and Michael O'Hanlon, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution.

Overall, what was fascinating was how the discussion on broad security issues arced more towards the Gulf region and South Asia, rather than the traditional focus on states neighboring the Mediterranean.

Iran was a focus of the early part of the session. It was observed that a U.S.-led war with Iran now appears clearly off the table, having previously been a great fear of many on both sides. More broadly, it was argued that Iran is no longer isolated in the Middle East, evidenced by the fact that it has managed to improve its reputation in the Arab street to a significant degree. It was suggested that Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei is not permanently opposed to improving ties with the United States.

The idea of the United States and Iran reaching an accommodation with one another in the near-term was discussed as a potential misimpression. It was said that the U.S. military has not come to the conclusion that Iran is backing away from its activities in Iraq. In turn, President Bush repudiated the National Intelligence Estimate that suggested that Iranian nuclear enrichment is not as immediate a concern as once thought.

Conversation then turned to Pakistan, about which it was said that it would extract a higher price from the United States than Iraq in the long run. It was said that President Bush has compromised three important objectives in continuing to support President Musharraf of Pakistan. These three objectives—used as justification for the war on Iraq—are the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, the toppling of a dictator, and combating terrorism. It was noted that Pakistan is a nuclear power ruled by a dictator that has more terrorists within its borders now than it had in 2001. It was predicted that, in the near future, Pakistan could become a "jelly state" —one that remains somewhat coherent but suffers from constant internal strife. The consequences of this were argued to be worrisome for the region as a whole, as well as the United States.

The discussion then shifted to the importance of Iraq. Few argued for a calamitous withdrawal, and it was said that responsibility for Iraqi security must be passed over to Iraqis in a responsible fashion. The question of what the balance of power in the region would look like if the United States were to leave was discussed. The role of Iraq's neighbors was an area of question. Doubt was expressed that Iran was actively seeking to lessen the violence in Iraq. Discussion turned to the subject of the "Sunni Awakening." It was particularly interesting that the turn of events inside Iraq had received very little notice outside Iraq in the wider Muslim world, far less than in U.S. circles.

Afghanistan then became an area for discussion, particularly in the context of a potential shift in American attention from Iraq. It was observed that the situation in Afghanistan has gotten slightly worse over the last years. A particular question posed was whether or not the United States should be moving some troops out of Iraq and into Afghanistan.

Hezbollah in Lebanon was mentioned as a source of concern for the region's security, as the group has rearmed to pre-2006 levels. It was suggested that the Annapolis peace process could face difficulties moving ahead, especially when one looks at the uncertain security situation in the area.

A trend toward less anxiety in the United States over the possibility of a future terrorist attack on the homeland was noted, and it was maintained that less anxiety is positive as it allows the United States to deal with the threat of terrorism and relations with the region in a more manageable manner.

A question was asked about the effect U.S. presidential candidates' statements about meeting with foreign leaders was having in the region, especially with regard to the concept of negotiating with Ahmedinejad of Iran. Iran's rising street credibility in the region was noted to not be linked to the suggestion that American and Iranian leaders might come together to negotiate.

It was largely agreed that Iran will play an important future role in determining the security atmosphere of the region, but it was also agreed that Iran has its own domestic problems that could hamper any rise to preeminence in the region. These include Iran's troubled economy, the large youth population in the country, and the fact that Iran is a Shia country seeking influence in a largely Sunni region.

"The National Intelligence Estimate made a mistake on one side of the pendulum the same way that previous NIEs had made the mistake on the other side."

Session II – A Security Framework for the Gulf

This session addressed the challenges of ensuring stability in the Gulf region. In particular, the participants wrestled with 3 questions:

- How can stability in the Gulf region be ensured?
- Is there a role for a new institution or organization in the region?
- Where will the various concerns over nuclear issues in the Gulf take us to next?

"Talking about Gulf security is like trying to solve a riddle."

The opening presenters for the second session were Mehran Kamrava, Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, and Lieutenant General David Barno (ret.), Director of the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University.

The session began with a discussion of the many variables that inform the security situation in the Gulf. It was mentioned that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has made some progress on the path

toward greater regional integration, but there was disagreement as to why the GCC states have made substantive moves toward integration. Some suggested that the GCC states share a fear of Iran, while others saw it as a natural progression of regional integration. Security alliances in the Gulf were said to have been diversified more recently, with other European actors selling arms to Gulf states and opening up bases. It was noted that the GCC states have determined that any attempt to isolate or marginalize Iran in the region will be untenable.

Four areas of concern for the future of the Gulf security climate were identified. These include: the continued tensions between the United States and Iran; the ambiguity surrounding the security situation in Iraq; the uncertainty about the future of Afghanistan; and the questions concerning the Pakistani government's ability to ensure stability in the country.

Some predicted that the future would see the waning of Pax Americana, accompanied by the spread of nuclear know-how in the region. Some also predicted the steady and growing viability of the GCC as a force for regional integration.

It was asserted that U.S. interests in the Gulf will remain unchanged regardless of who becomes the next American president. These interests include countering both the scope and lethality of global terrorism, ensuring the steady flow of oil, and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

The issue of regional institutions was next explored. It was argued that GCC in its present state does not resemble a budding NATO-like alliance, and it was even suggested that perhaps it should not. The Gulf Security Dialogue—supported by the United States—was mentioned as an important effort to get the states of the GCC to think strategically on important issues like defense cooperation and the development of a shared assessment and agenda vis-à-vis Iraq.

It was noted that the United States is faced with the dilemma of whether or not to prioritize the Gulf region as an air and naval power center for U.S. armed forces. The political instability in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan was noted as an argument in favor of this stance.

"There is a balance at play here today with the limits of U.S. military power."

Discussion moved to the adequacy of American military involvement in Afghanistan. It was noted that U.S.troop levels in the country have been just enough to prevent a total loss against the militants but not quite enough to deliver a sound victory against them. It was suggested that it would be reasonable for the United States to expect Muslim countries to provide more aid and peacekeeping troops in conflict zones like Afghanistan.

It was suggested that the many manifestations of globalization could act as a stabilizing force in the region, and that the United States retains strong grounding on economic issues which it could harness to the advantage of greater stability. Some cautioned that globalization could become a source of problems if it came to be perceived mainly as Americanization and American domination of the region.

The implications of a nuclear Iran for the region's security were next discussed. It was asserted that Iran's acquiring significant nuclear technology would greatly burnish its reputation. It would also have the effect, it was argued, of making it more difficult for the United States to maintain the confidence of its Gulf allies in U.S. staying power in the region. In turn, it was also asserted that Iran's nuclear status would offer the country minimal advantages and actual, usable leverage in the region.

It was suggested that India has an important role to play in helping to guarantee security in the Gulf region. The theory that Pakistan and India no longer identify one another as the essential threats to

their own security was put forth. Pakistan's internal dynamics were again referenced as a serious threat to U.S. and regional interests.

Session III – The Status of the "War on Terrorism"

The final session of the security task force addressed the status of progress against violent extremist groups such as al Qaeda, in what is often referred to as "the war on terrorism." The leaders focused on 3 questions:

- Has progress been made in efforts against violent extremist groups like al Qaeda? Or are they just as strong (or stronger) than on 9-11?
- What are the primary trends shaping this effort and what do they bode for the next 5 years?
- What would an "end" of the war on terrorism actually look like?

The opening presenters for the third session were Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, Chairman and CEO of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Mufid Al-Jazairi, a member of Iraq's Council of Representatives, and Gary Samore, Vice President and Director of Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

The session began with an assertion that, in some ways, the United States has lost the "war on terrorism." It was observed that al Qaeda remains a potent threat to the United States and its allies and continues to add new recruits, who now operate more independently to hatch plots against the United States and its interests. In addition, the group has caused the United States to overstretch in its response to the actual threat al Qaeda poses, much in line with the group's plans. That Bin Laden remains a significant symbol of resistance for the group was also mentioned. All of this means that the United States has lost critical geopolitical power in the Middle East. It also suffers from a loss of soft power.

"Probably we are all in denial…it is still to painful to see or admit that we have actually lost the war on terror."

It was mentioned that, on the other hand, the United States and its allies can count some successes in their struggle against al Qaeda. These include the fact that the United States has largely destroyed al Qaeda's training and organizing ground in Afghanistan, has killed many leaders, and the group has not been successful in expanding its operations to many parts of the world it once targeted, including Southeast Asia.

Conversation turned to Iraq, and it was asserted that the country has become a terrorist battlefield. It was said that the Iraqi security and police forces are not ready yet to operate effectively on their own, and that the country has seen a shift in the attitude of the people away from wanting an immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces. The slow pace of the political developments that need to take place in Iraq was mentioned.

Conversation then turned to the general threat faced by the United States from terrorist groups. It was asserted that the United States is fighting jihadist groups that use violence in the name of Islam against those they deem infidels led by the United States. At the strategic level, this struggle was said to be about the extent to which Muslims believe that the jihadi movement is a legitimate one. There is a battle of ideas taking place within Islam, with its roots in the question of how Muslims as a whole should deal with modernity and their previous stature in the world.

"2007 has been a very mixed year for the jihadists."

Discussion then moved to some of the successes in the "war on terrorism." These include the fact that al Qaeda's operational effectiveness has been reduced and many of their plots have been discovered and neutralized. These are offset, it was argued, by the possibility that al Qaeda could exploit the continuing political instability in places like Iraq, Lebanon, and especially Pakistan, using it to their advantage. It was found that the geographic areas terrorist groups would likely flock to in the near future are those where the reach of the law is weak and public sentiment against the United States is strong.

It was said that the United States could do more to combat terrorism if it provided training to local police forces and other elements of rule of law, as opposed to focusing its training on the military. The Philippines was cited as an example of how training the local police would be much more effective than a military focus. The need for the United States to be aware that sometimes American criteria result in labeling common criminals or standard rebel groups as "terrorists" was mentioned, as this phenomenon is ultimately counter productive to the goals of the "war on terrorism."

Conversation returned to the subject of Iraq and whether it was possible for the United States to continue to wait for the Iraqi security and police forces to be ready to operate independently. It was suggested that as long as political developments continue to be delayed, these Iraqi forces have no stable and concrete polity for which to fight.

It was asserted that Pakistan remains the most important front in the "war on terrorism" and that the Pakistani leadership has been negligent about security in the country, with high costs for its neighbors in the region, as well as for the United States. It was said that victory in the "war on terrorism" will require seeking out the sources of terrorism; otherwise they will continue to find places like Pakistan in which to thrive.

The need to examine how both non-state and state actors cooperate to commit terrorism was raised. It was said that the alliances between these two types of actors are primarily marriages of convenience, suggesting that the United States could find ways to exploit the inherent weaknesses of some of these alliances.

Discussion finally turned to Africa's role in the "war on terrorism." It was said that many groups hostile to the United States work and train in Africa and that a bottom-up approach focusing on persuading African youths of the perils of working with such groups could be helpful in neutralizing their effectiveness. Massive exchange programs to raise awareness and skills were suggested as a concrete remedy.

Some stressed that defeating terrorism will require much more that the imposition of external forces on unstable countries. The "war on terrorism" will only be won, they asserted, when the people in these countries cooperate to beat terrorism. More political development and larger political and social space is necessary in order to facilitate this. Most agreed with this assessment, adding that sheer force will never suffice in the "war on terrorism." It was suggested that the United States must take more action to make progress on the issues that Muslims care most about.

Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World

The Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World is a major research program housed within the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. The project conducts high-quality public policy research, and convenes policy makers and opinion leaders on the major issues surrounding the relationship between the United States and the Muslim world. The Project seeks to engage and inform policymakers, practitioners, and the broader public on developments in Muslim countries and communities, and the nature of their relationship with the United States. Together with the affiliated Brookings Doha Center in Qatar, it sponsors a range of events, initiatives, research projects, and publications designed to educate, encourage frank dialogue, and build positive partnerships between the United States and the Muslim world. The Project has several interlocking components:

- The U.S.-Islamic World Forum, which brings together key leaders in the fields of politics, business, media, academia, and civil society from across the Muslim world and the United States, for much needed discussion and dialogue;
- A Visiting Fellows program, for scholars and journalists from the Muslim world to spend time researching and writing at Brookings in order to inform U.S. policy makers on key issues facing Muslim states and communities;
- A series of Brookings Analysis Papers and Monographs that provide needed analysis of the vital issues of joint concern between the United States and the Muslim world;
- An Arts and Culture Initiative, which seeks to develop a better understanding of how arts and cultural leaders and organizations can increase understanding between the United States and the global Muslim community;
- A Science and Technology Initiative, which examines the role cooperative science and technology programs involving the United States and the Muslim world can play in responding to regional development and education needs, as well as fostering positive relations;
- A "Bridging the Divide" Initiative which explores the role of Muslim communities in the West;
- A Brookings Institution Press Book Series, which aims to synthesize the project's findings for public dissemination.

The underlying goal of the Project is to continue the Brookings Institution's original mandate to serve as a bridge between scholarship and public policy. It seeks to bring new knowledge to the attention of decision-makers and opinion-leaders, as well as afford scholars, analysts, and the public a better insight into policy issues. The Project is supported through the generosity of a range of sponsors including the Government of the State of Qatar, The Ford Foundation, The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories, and the Institute for Social Policy Understanding. Partners include American University, the USC Center for Public Diplomacy, Unity Productions Foundation, Americans for Informed Democracy, America Abroad Media, and The Gallup Organization.

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy was established on May 13, 2002 with an inaugural address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The creation of the Saban Center reflects the Brookings Institution's commitment to expand dramatically its research and analysis of Middle East policy issues at a time when the region has come to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The Saban Center provides Washington policymakers with balanced, objective, in-depth and timely research and policy analysis from experienced and knowledgeable scholars who can bring fresh perspectives to bear on the critical problems of the Middle East. The center upholds the Brookings tradition of being open to a broad range of views. The Saban Center's central objective is to advance understanding of developments in the Middle East through policy-relevant scholarship and debate.

The center's foundation was made possible by a generous grant from Haim and Cheryl Saban of Los Angeles. Ambassador Martin S. Indyk, Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies, is the Director of the Saban Center. Kenneth M. Pollack is the center's Director of Research. Joining them is a core group of Middle East experts who conduct original research and develop innovative programs to promote a better understanding of the policy choices facing American decision makers in the Middle East. They include Tamara Cofman Wittes, a specialist on political reform in the Arab world who directs the Project on Middle East Democracy and Development; Bruce Riedel, who served as a senior advisor to three Presidents on the Middle East and South Asia at the National Security Council during a twenty-nine year career in the CIA, a specialist on counterterrorism; Suzanne Maloney, a former senior State Department official who focuses on Iran and economic development; Stephen R. Grand, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; Hady Amr, Fellow and Director of the Brookings Doha Center; Shibley Telhami, who holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland; and Daniel Byman, a Middle East terrorism expert from Georgetown University. The center is located in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings, led by Brookings Vice President Carlos Pascual.

The Saban Center is undertaking path breaking research in five areas: the implications of regime change in Iraq, including post-war nation-building and Persian Gulf security; the dynamics of Iranian domestic politics and the threat of nuclear proliferation; mechanisms and requirements for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; policy for the war against terrorism, including the continuing challenge of state-sponsorship of terrorism; and political and economic change in the Arab world, and the methods required to promote democratization.

BROOKINGS

The Brookings Institution
1775 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20036-2103
www.brookings.edu