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The Middle East: Evolution of a Broken Regional Order

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The Carnegie Middle East Center

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This paper is the first of a multi-author set of studies that will examine how a number of key players in the Middle East—namely Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt—perceived the threats and opportunities created by the aftermath of September 11 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq and how they have shaped their policies in reaction to changing developments. This first paper examines the context within which these states act—the changing Middle East order. It identifies patterns and trends in the dynamic history of the Middle East interstate system, and it examines the period since 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. It concludes with remarks about the competing projects for a new regional order. The series of papers will later be published in book form, both in English and Arabic.

Introduction

The Middle East is broken. The structures and power balances put in place in the late 1970s and amended after the end of the Cold War are no longer. These structures and balances included a number of key elements. Israel was at peace with Egypt and Jordan and in an informal truce with Syria—hence the Arab–Israeli conflict was no longer pursued by any major contiguous state opponents of Israel. A weakened Palestinian movement had been chased out of Lebanon in 1982 and co-opted in the Oslo Accords of 1993. Syria’s role in the region was recognized and its influence in Lebanon legitimized—indeed, after 1990, it was promoted to suzerainty. Iraq was bolstered in the 1980s by the United States as a buffer and counterbalance to revolutionary Iran, and later, throughout the 1990s, it was preserved but contained. Saudi Arabia helped manage the finances of this scheme and helped maintain Arab consensus when possible. And the United States saw out the end of Soviet influence in the region, secured a military foothold in the Gulf, and gained in political influence: first as a broker of Israeli–Egyptian peace in the late 1970s, then as the architect of a pro-Iraqi containment policy against revolutionary Iran in the 1980s, as the leader of an Arab and international coalition to liberate Kuwait from an Iraqi invasion in the early 1990s, and as the patron of another major peace initiative launched in the Madrid peace conference.

Today, this system is in ruins. Iraq collapsed as a centralized sovereign state, and its implosion altered the geopolitics of the system. For the previous

two decades, Iraq had represented a buffer within the Middle East system—counterbalancing Iran and keeping Turkey facing west; now Iraq is the epicenter of a new set of tensions drawing in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran, and Turkey. Iran has become a dominant player in the heart of the Middle East. Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has shown an increasing interest in the Middle East while at the same time continuing to pursue accession to the European Union (EU). Additionally, the implosion of Iraq has drawn Turkey back into intense concern about Kurdish ambitions and has spurred it to rebuild relations with Syria and Iran. Saudi Arabia, once an arm’s-length player, has moved to become a direct manager of regional affairs by talking directly to Iran and backing Sunni groups and parties throughout the region. Syria has been pushed out of Lebanon, and although it retains considerable power there, its power is not what it was in the 1990s. Syria also has come under pressure from the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the UN Security Council, and it has internal regime worries. Lebanon, after its first bold steps of post-Syrian independence, has succumbed to internal division and continued external influence, and it teeters between paralysis and civil unrest. Farther south, the peace process was abandoned, and the Palestinian body politic split into rival camps on the West Bank and Gaza; only in late 2007 did the United States attempt to revive the peace process. Indeed, all the states in the region have been affected by the dramatic changes in the regional system.

This paper is divided into several sections. The first provides an analytical overview of the phases the Middle East as a regional system has gone through, as a way to gain a deeper appreciation of its various dynamics. The second takes a more detailed look at the period since September 11 and the invasion of Iraq. The concluding section explores the competing approaches that external and regional players have promoted to reorganize the region.

Delimiting what is meant by “the Middle East” is not an exact science. Indeed, defining regional “sub-systems” in international politics in general is difficult. Yet, regional relations and power balances are an important subject of policy study. Regional systems can be understood as groups of states that have a high level of interaction with each other—positively or negatively—and that influence each other through relations of power, interest, economics, ideology, or otherwise. These systems can resemble an interstate “society” in that they share common institutions and values and try to coordinate their actions, such as through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the European Union or, less effectively, the League of Arab States; or they can be groups of states that are simply acting on, and reacting to, each other.

In the present project, of which this is the first paper, we are focusing on the foreign policies of key states in the Middle East and how they have reacted and adapted to the events of the post-9/11 world. The project will focus on the dynamics among Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Jordan, as well as Egypt. Of course, a wider study of the changing Middle East and the impact of

recent events would have to include Israel, as well as the Mideast policy of the main external player, the United States, and the role of emerging powers such as Russia, the EU, China, and India. In this project, we are limiting our focus to the Iranian–Turkish–Arab triangle.

The Changing Middle East

Origins

The origin of the Middle East as a region of weak states penetrated by international powers goes back to the decline of Ottoman power in the eighteenth century. The term “Middle East” emerged in Western diplomatic parlance in the early twentieth century to refer to the area between the eastern Mediterranean and India. The Great Powers had already divided up most of Africa and Asia and were looking to carve out influence in the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and Afghanistan. As the Ottoman Empire weakened, the Eastern Question revolved around how to deal with this “sick man of Europe.” Britain, which had occupied Egypt in 1882 and had secured alliances in the Persian Gulf region, favored propping up the Ottoman Empire out of fear that its collapse would lead to a scramble for power by Russia and other European powers that would damage British interests. In fact, Britain and Russia had come to an agreement in 1907 to maintain this status quo.

This precarious order collapsed with the First World War. As the Young Turk government in Istanbul established an alliance with Germany, Britain reversed its century-old policy and moved to dismantle the Ottoman Empire and secure the Arab provinces for itself. During the war, the British made contradictory commitments: encouraging Hussein bin Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, to lead an Arab revolt against Turkish rule and promising him rule over Greater Syria; at the same time promising much of Syria to the French and a homeland in Palestine to the burgeoning Zionist movement.

Indeed, the modern Middle East was born of the detritus and contradictions of the post-World War I settlements. The British and the French divided up zones of influence in the Arab Middle East: The newly created states of Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine were placed under British mandate, and the newly created states of Syria and Greater Lebanon fell under French mandate. Egypt remained under British control. Turkey and Iran escaped direct foreign mandates, thus getting a head start in terms of nation- and state-building. The Arab provinces, already suffering a deficit in terms of not having been indigenously governed for the preceding centuries, suffered the additional setbacks of new divisions and falling under a new phase of foreign government.

The Middle East of the post-Ottoman period between the end of World War I and the start of World War II had a number of characteristics. It separated Turkey from the Arab regions after centuries of intertwinement. It created an

“Arab Middle East” with its own issues and conditions, separate from the issues of the emerging nation-states of Turkey and Iran. The ascendance of Arabist identity was partly linked to the Arab Revolt of 1916 but was reinforced by the rejection of the arbitrary borders imposed by the occupying Western powers and a longing for a larger, more unified Arab state, comparable to Turkey and Iran and with some immunity from the Europeans’ divide-and-rule tactics. The common issues that emerged were the challenges of overcoming European mandate rule, the contradiction between championing Arabism but consolidating local territorial states, and the emerging question of Palestine.

It is fair to say that during this phase there was no interstate system as such in the Middle East. The mandate powers directed the foreign policies of the Arab territorial states, and Turkey and Iran were busy consolidating internal power. However, several features of this period carried over into later periods: low levels of regime legitimacy in territorial states; high levels of dependency on outside protection and, hence, high levels of external penetration of the region; and continued appeals to wider political identities such as pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism.

Independence, Oil, and Israel

The 1940s were watershed years in more ways than one. The exhaustion of Western Europe in the Second World War meant that neither France, Britain, nor Germany would be able to maintain colonial influence in the Middle East and that the United States and soon the Soviet Union would emerge as the new superpowers in the global system. The end of European colonialism translated into independence for the territorial states of the Arab world, although the local political elites who inherited this independence maintained close relations with their European patrons. The discovery of oil in the 1930s and proof of its profound strategic importance in the Second World War had an immediate impact on the oil-rich states. The United States established a strategic alliance with Saudi Arabia; Britain reinforced a string of emirates it had helped establish along the western shores of the Persian Gulf previously as trading posts and now as promising oil sources; and Western powers also grew intensely interested in the oil resources of Iran. This was translated into a large stake for British Petroleum in the Iranian oil industry, and later a U.S.-engineered coup in 1953 to unseat a nationalist prime minister—who was going about the nationalization of Iranian oil—to install a more cooperative Shah. Turkey, for its part, turned to the West after the war, joining NATO and further disengaging itself from Mideast politics.

The dominance of Western influence in Turkey, Iran, and the Arab east in the wake of the war could have facilitated the establishment of a regional security system under Western tutelage. Indeed, the United States tried to do just that in the mid-1950s with the Baghdad Pact. The pact sought to bring together Turkey, Iran, and Iraq and some other Arab states in a pro-Western alliance to block the expansion of Soviet power into the region.

But the conflict over the establishment of Israel set in motion a chain of events that led to the Arab states drifting away from Western control. The abject failure of Arab states to prevail over what was perceived initially as a ragtag collection of Zionist guerrilla groups in 1948 had major effects: It dealt a shattering blow to the legitimacy of the pro-Western governing elites in those states; it raised demands for military action; and it revived the fortunes of Arab nationalism. The conflict with Israel was interpreted by the Arab public to mean that the period of colonialism, which they had thought might be coming to an end, had emerged in a different form. And so the anti-colonial politics that had animated some of the independence movements in the 1930s and 1940s was revived, this time cast in broad Arab nationalist terms.

Egypt Attempts Its Own Regional Order

With strong leadership, wide ideological appeal, the largest Arab population and economy, a dominant cultural position in the Arab world, and the most developed state structures of any other Arab country, Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser made a bid, with support from the Soviet Union, to supplant Western influence in the region. It also sought to promote Arab unity and collaboration under Egyptian leadership and prepare for a rematch with Israel. Nasser's success in nationalizing the Suez Canal in 1956 and surviving the subsequent Anglo–French–Israeli war, which was designed to weaken him, catapulted him to regional and international stardom.

Nasser's bid for Arab leadership had lasting effects. It ended up toppling pro-Western governments in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, and Libya—and, but for Western intervention, it might have done the same in Jordan and Lebanon. It also led to the triumph of Arab nationalist anti-Western perspectives in the Arab street and the vast expansion of Soviet influence in the region. Nasser's leadership consolidated the principle of a common Arab cause and common action. It also gave a new Arabist flavor to the workings of the feeble League of Arab States, which had been established in 1945 almost as a bulwark *against* Arab nationalism. Moreover, it created the tradition of collective decision making, at least in principle, when the practice of Arab summitry began in 1964.

Nasser's ambitions soon ran into serious obstacles and eventually collapsed. By the early 1960s, the Egyptian economy was showing the strains of overreaching regionally. The Egyptian intervention in Yemen was failing and draining resources, and Syrian and Iraqi elites had recoiled from what they perceived as Egyptian domination and Nasser's authoritarian and overbearing ways. The United States, meanwhile, had shored up its conservative clients in the region, supporting and arming Saudi Arabia to take on Nasser in Yemen, providing crucial support to Hashemite Jordan, maintaining Lebanon's distance from the Arab nationalist aspirations, and strengthening Iran in the Gulf. Egypt's regional scheme suffered its biggest setback, however, in 1967, when Israel defeated

Egypt and Syria, and Jordan as well, in the Six-Day War. Israel ended up in control of the Egyptian Sinai, the Syrian Golan, and the West Bank and Gaza.

After the war, Nasser accepted the principle of land for peace with Israel enshrined in UN Resolution 242, abandoned further attempts to seriously project Egyptian power in the Arab region, and suspended his campaign against the Arab conservative monarchies. Israel's overwhelming military superiority demonstrated that it could not be countered with Soviet arms. And the United States emerged as a key player in the region, as Egypt, Syria, and Jordan realized that security from Israeli power could be obtained only through the restraining influence of the United States on Israel.

The Post-Nasser Interlude

Nasser's death in 1970 marked a clear end to Egyptian domination of regional politics, and it enabled the establishment of a tripartite alliance of Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, whose strong leaders—Anwar al-Sadat, Hafez al-Assad, and Feisal bin Abdul-Aziz, respectively—were on a fairly equal footing. Within this alliance, Sadat and Assad waged war on Israel, while Feisal led an oil embargo against the West. These confrontations were designed to achieve three objectives: shake the sense of military superiority feeding Israeli political intransigence; pressure the West to force Israel to negotiate; and create the conditions for a land-for-peace deal under which territories seized by Israel in the 1967 war would revert to Arab sovereignty.

The collapse of Arab nationalist convictions and the growing contradictions among the now fairly established Arab states soon led to a disintegration of this alliance: Sadat sued for a separate peace; Assad reacted by strengthening his relations with the USSR and expanding his influence into Lebanon; and Feisal, under pressure, lifted the embargo and was assassinated soon thereafter. The Arab nationalist period had truly ended, and *raison d'état*, evident in the policies of both Egypt and Syria, became clearly dominant.

The eclipse of Egypt caused a scramble for regional leadership. Syria was able to carve out a strong position for itself with control of Lebanon and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was based there. But Syria did not have the wherewithal to make a larger bid for leadership. Saudi Arabia used its oil wealth and Islamic status to buy influence throughout the region and spread its brand of Islam among clerics and religious institutions. But Saudi Arabia did not have the numbers, strength, popularity, or ambition to step out in front. In the late 1970s, Iraq tried to play the role of the leader, and it had the size, resources, Arabist credentials, and ambitious leadership—Saddam Hussein assumed full power in 1979—to make such a bid. However, Iraq's potential was soon squandered in a long and ruinous war with Iran throughout the 1980s and then an equally ill-advised invasion of Kuwait in 1990 that brought it into war with the United States and a large Arab coalition.

A Multipolar Balance

The Middle East of the 1980s and 1990s was one of multiple centers and numerous balances of power. The elements of multipolarity had emerged for a number of reasons. First, the 1967 defeat and the demise of Nasser had dealt a powerful blow to Arab nationalism, which had promoted the hope and expectation of Arab unipolarity; the cooperation of Sadat, Assad, and Feisal in 1973 was based quite plainly on the acceptance of multipolarity. Second, the shift of power, mainly economic, from Egypt to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf also created the material conditions for alternative centers of power. With the economic power of the Gulf also came increasing influence in the press, audio-visual media, and publishing, as well as growing influence in the establishment and orientation of schools and universities. Third, the power shift to the Gulf also caused, and was accompanied by, an ideological shift, from the secular leftist Arab nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s to religious conservatism that was the hallmark of the new Gulf power centers; in other words, there was now a new bipolarity in ideology as well, with some Arab states (Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and Egypt) pulling in one ideological direction and others (Saudi Arabia and other member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC:, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman) pulling in another.

Fourth, the natural progress of economic growth and state building in most Arab states in itself created increasingly favorable conditions for multipolarity. In the 1950s, Egypt was far ahead of other Arab states on most indicators; by the 1970s and 1980s, many Arab states were beginning to catch up with Egypt in terms of economic institutions, communications organizations, and political influence. Fifth, the end of the U.S.–Soviet Cold War in the early 1990s also had relevant multipolar consequences: Although the main reality of the Middle East during the Cold War settled into a bipolar one, both sides had initially tried to promote a form of regional unipolarity, hoping to consolidate a hegemonic order in their favor. The United States tried first in 1955 to gather the Arab states under a pro-Western Baghdad Pact; the Soviets tried next with their support for a pan-Arabist Nasser. As long as the Cold War continued, each superpower had an interest to group Arab states in some form of bloc in its favor. When the Cold War ended and multipolarity no longer meant that the global adversary would gain an advantage, it became more tolerable and indeed desirable.

The multipolarity that emerged was not confined to the Arab world but began to include Iran as well, after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Before the revolution, the Shah's Iran defined itself in strong Persian terms and, although it projected military power into the Persian Gulf, emphasized its separation from the Arab and Islamic worlds. After the revolution, Iran promoted itself as a quintessentially Islamic nation with its roots in the holy sites of Islam and Shi'ism, the majority of which are in the Arab world. Before the revolution, Iran was closely allied to the United States and represented part of the Cold War environment; after the revolution, Iran embarked on its own foreign

policy—one that was hostile to the United States—and sought to play a leading role in the Arab and Islamic worlds. Iran, effectively, became a pole in the changing Middle East order, with a powerful resource base, a fresh ideology (to add to secular Arab nationalism and religious Sunni conservatism), and a growing reach through Syria, and the Shi'i communities of Iraq and Lebanon—and potentially the Shi'i communities of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, and Yemen as well.

The multipolar reality expressed itself in institutional terms as well as various spheres of influence. The League of Arab States and the institution of Arab summits, which had defined the Egyptian-led era, were joined in the 1970s by the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the institution of Islamic summits led by Saudi Arabia. As a Shi'i state, revolutionary Iran was not able to vie equally with Saudi Arabia at the official level for leadership of the Sunni-majority Arab or Islamic world, but it presented itself as a rival to Saudi leadership and the “authentic” representative of Islamic leadership not beholden to the West. Iran hosted its own Islamic institutions and summits, often including leaders of many non-state actors.

This multipolar reality included the consolidation of various spheres of influence. In the 1960s, Nasser's Egypt, through a combination of ideological charisma and harder tools, surpassed all other regional states in having significant influence across most of the Arab world. Its reach affected events in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, and Yemen. In the 1970s, Egypt lost virtually all of this influence, and the other countries endeavored to fill the void.

Syria moved into Lebanon in 1976 and built a dominant position there, giving it not only control of Lebanon but also significant sway over Palestinians through its influence over the Palestinian presence in Lebanon. It also gained standing with Iran through its patronage of the new Iranian-backed Hizbollah in Lebanon. Syria reinforced its influence over Palestinian politics by hosting rival groups to Fatah, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the PFLP-General Command, and Hamas, in Damascus. An earlier attempt in 1970 by Syria to extend its influence into Jordan during the confrontation between the Jordanian state and the PLO was thwarted by Israeli threats to Syria.

After its failure in the 1980s to defeat Iran and thus emerge as the pre-eminent Arab and Gulf power, Iraq tried in 1990 to at least regain a sphere of influence by occupying Kuwait. That drew a massive response from the United States and a multinational coalition, forcing Iraq to retreat. So, although Iraq is potentially the strongest country among its neighbors, it went through the 1980s and 1990s with no spheres of influence beyond its borders.

Under the Shah, Iran—with U.S. help—did cast a long military shadow over the Gulf. However, it did not have spheres of influence in the Arab Middle East in the political sense. After the revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran quickly developed spheres of influence running mainly through Iraq, Syria,

and Lebanon. With the Syrian regime run by a non-Sunni Alawite minority, Iran developed a strong working alliance in which it increasingly emerged as the senior partner. In Lebanon, Iran adopted the cause of the Shi'i community there and established Hizbollah, which it proceeded to develop into a political, military, and social service organization to rival the Lebanese state. With regard to Iraq, Iran adopted the cause of the Shi'i community there as well. Unable to operate in Iraq under Saddam, Iran hosted thousands of Iraqi Shi'i dissidents and built up the political and militia nuclei of the Iraqi Shi'i opposition in exile. These groups were able to project only limited influence in Iraq during Saddam's rule; after the fall of Saddam, they became a dominant force.

During the 1950s, Saudi Arabia did not have the resources or vision to effectively project power beyond its borders. In the post-1973 oil boom, Saudi Arabia matured as a state, realized its power in the world economy, and confirmed its influence over regional events. Saudi Arabia moved within the Gulf in 1981 to organize its sphere of influence there by working to establish the Gulf Cooperation Council, which brought the small Arab Gulf states from Kuwait to Oman effectively under Saudi leadership. Simultaneously, the Saudi government moved to enhance its general influence by pouring billions of petrodollars into setting up schools, universities, newspapers, audiovisual media, and publishing houses throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds to promote a Wahhabi—or at least conservative Sunni—worldview and to counteract secular, nationalist, and liberal ideologies. The funding included support for Islamic political parties and eventually some Islamist militant organizations, most notably the jihadists and Taliban in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia replaced Egypt's al-Azhar as the main trainer of Sunni clerics in the Arab world, and although political Islam had its origins with the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt in the late 1920s, political Islam's patronage and support in the 1970s and beyond shifted to Saudi Arabia.

The pre-September 11 Middle East was also characterized by multiple power balances. During the height of the Cold War, the balance of power between the superpowers, through their local client states, was the main one that counted. As the Cold War wound down and ended, local power balances—in particular, the balance surrounding the Arab–Israeli conflict—became more significant. Arab–Israeli hostilities had instigated four wars in three decades, though by the mid-1980s an uneasy stability prevailed. Egypt had signed a separate peace with Israel; Syria had taken control over most of Lebanon as a substitute for serious progress on the Golan; Israel had defeated the PLO in south Lebanon and Beirut in 1982; and Syria had helped finish off the PLO in Tripoli and other parts of Lebanon. The withdrawal of Egypt from confrontation with Israel effectively ended the period of state-led Arab–Israeli wars, and the elimination of the PLO's presence in Lebanon reduced the PLO's impact on regional politics. As PLO leader Yasser Arafat turned to peace making in the early 1990s, the paradigm of Arab–Israeli war that had defined the period between 1948 and the mid-1970s had receded. Israel, no longer effectively at war with its state

neighbors—it was enjoying peace with Egypt and a truce with Syria—could turn its attention to consolidating its hold over the occupied territories by annexing the Syrian Golan Heights and embarking on a massive settlement program on the West Bank.

During this period, Egypt and Jordan concentrated on their own challenges of regime security and economic development, while Syria focused on consolidating its control over Lebanon and maintaining its regime security at home. Throughout, the state players maintained a kind of balance of power, with Israel retaining a strong military and Syria keeping close enough behind to provide a deterrent to Israel. Syria also was building Hizbollah as a resistance movement and deterrent to Israel in south Lebanon. Even Egypt maintained a growing military, largely to appease the military establishment at home but also to maintain the appearance of deterrence toward Israel.

The other balance of power that mattered during this period was that between Iran and Iraq. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the two states maintained a balance of power and dual containment. While Iran was ruled by the Shah, the United States effectively managed Iranian power and kept it neatly twinned with Saudi Arabia—and out of regional and internal Arab politics. With the Islamic Revolution and under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran emerged as a newly independent regional actor, with potentially very wide popularity and influence among the populations of the region. Of course, Saddam Hussein moved quickly to try to challenge that threat by invading Iran in 1980, when he thought it was at its weakest, and the war drew support from the Arab Gulf and the United States. Iranian power did not suit Saddam's Iraq, nor did it suit the Arab Sunni states of the Gulf, or the United States, which had suddenly lost the alliance of the largest Gulf state and gained it as a mortal enemy. The Iraq–Iran war did not defeat Iran but did exhaust it. Even after the end of the Iraq–Iran war and the Iraqi defeat in Kuwait and the harsh sanctions of the 1990s, the Baath regime continued to constrain Iranian power until its own demise in 2003. With a hostile Iraq, Iran was politically and geo-strategically hemmed in; with a collapsed Iraq, Iran gained direct influence in Iraq, one of the most central and significant states of the Arab–Islamic world, and gained indirect access to other states in the Arab Middle East.

Indeed, by the late 1990s, the region had settled into a kind of uneasy stability defined by these multiple power balances and various spheres of influence. It was that status quo that would be shattered by the events of September 11 and the occupation of Iraq that began eighteen months later.

The New Context: September 11, Iraq, and Beyond

Profound developments have altered the nature of Middle East power balances and inter-state relations in the past half-decade. Many of these developments were the direct and indirect outcome of changes in U.S. policy. The magnitude

of the September 11, 2001, attacks triggered a fundamental change in U.S. foreign policy, bringing the neoconservative agenda to the fore and promoting preemptive intervention, unilateralism, and a focus on Islamic terrorism as the main security threat to the United States. This agenda led to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the occupation of Iraq, threats to promote regime change in Iran and Syria, and pressure on nations to align along a “with-us-or-against-us” dichotomy. It also came with a strong democratization agenda arguing that terrorism was generated by repressive states and that more participatory political systems would help soak up the resentment and anger expressed in terrorist acts. The effects of U.S. policy also created indirect consequences—the empowerment of Iran, the eruption of Sunni–Shi’i conflict in Iraq, the resurgence of Kurdish ambitions, the flourishing of al-Qaeda in Iraq—that created additional risks and opportunities for local states.

Direct U.S. military involvement in the Middle East began in the 1980s, with the U.S. Navy escorting oil tankers through the Persian Gulf. It escalated into full engagement in 1990–1991, with U.S. forces leading the war to push Saddam out of Kuwait. But the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the occupation since then, has had far more dramatic consequences. It eliminated Iraq as a strong state, thus creating a regional power vacuum and completely altering the power balances and containment effects of that state. Second, it created a domestic power vacuum, which instead of flowering into democracy erupted into insecurity and sectarian civil war, consuming Iraqi lives and livelihoods and inexorably drawing in regional states as well. Third, it placed the U.S. military in the heart of the Middle East within the context of a long occupation and an aggressive regional regime-changing agenda. The reality of that predicament reignited anti-colonial sentiments of decades past, now conjoined with “anti-crusader” rhetoric that has even deeper Islamic and historical resonance.

The shift in U.S. policy after the September 11 attacks is not the only significant change that affected the region during this period. First, the attacks marked an event of historic magnitude for the Salafist jihadism promoted by Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, one that has galvanized jihadists throughout the Islamic world. Although al-Qaeda took a strong blow with the subsequent U.S. overthrow of the Taliban and the occupation of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda-style jihadism had proved its reach and status and would become a growing force. It has survived, though embattled, in Afghanistan and Pakistan; it has grown dramatically in post-invasion Iraq; and it has proved its appeal in operations and attacks throughout the Middle East, Asia, and Europe.

Second, the toppling of the Taliban and the Saddam regime inadvertently removed the main adversaries that had kept Iran contained. The empowerment of the Shi’i majority in Iraq made Iran’s windfall profit from U.S. policies in the region all the more dramatic. The strengthening of Iran has been compounded by a sharp increase in oil prices that brought in extra billions to the Iranian treasury and by the defeat of the Iranian reformist movement led by

Muhammad Khatemi and the rise of the hard-line element led by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Third, the reemergence of Iran and the events in Iraq have triggered sectarian Sunni–Shi'i tensions. These tensions have been tearing Iraq apart and fueling brutal ethnic cleansing that has left virtually no part of the country untouched. They have also affected other countries. In Lebanon, Sunni–Shi'i tensions almost led to open civil war in early 2007. They have also affected Bahrain and Kuwait, and to a lesser extent the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. In terms of interstate relations, they have introduced a new dynamic, with a number of Sunni state leaders talking of a "Shi'i Crescent" and the emergence of an Arab Quartet, composed of the majority Sunni states of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, and Egypt, that is seeking to counterbalance the power of a rising Shi'i Iran, a nascent Shi'i-dominated Iraqi government, an Alawi-led Syria, and a Hizbollah-dominated Lebanon. The Sunni–Shi'i factor might be pushing the region toward a new kind of cold war, similar to the Arab cold war between radical and conservative Arab states in the 1960s.

Fourth, in Syria, the death of Hafez al-Assad, one of the key architects of the pre-2000 Middle East, has had important consequences in the Arab east. Within a few years, the Syrian regime found itself chased out of Lebanon, ostracized from the Arab world, in the gun sights of the United States, under international investigation for murder, and embattled at home. Hafez al-Assad understood the contradictions of regional and international relations and pursued his regime's interests largely within the context of indirect accommodation with the United States and Israel and within the framework of a stable regional environment. His son Bashar, however, has not been able to manage change positively and has had to resort almost exclusively to tactics of destabilization and spoiling.

Fifth, the shift in U.S. policy has also influenced Israeli policy. Although the peace process had been effectively suspended with the last-minute failure of the Camp David talks hosted by outgoing President Clinton in 2000, the new turn in U.S. policy under George W. Bush after September 11 encouraged Israel to pursue more aggressive policies. During this period, Israel prosecuted two military campaigns: one in the summer of 2006 to eliminate Hizbollah in Lebanon and the other against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Sixth, there has been a noteworthy shift in Turkish policy as well, primarily with the steady rise of the AKP. Still interested in entering the EU, the AKP is at the same time more fully embracing its Islamic roots. While Turkey supported the Gulf War to liberate Kuwait, it opposed the invasion of Iraq and denied the United States operational use of its key bases in eastern Turkey. In addition, concern about the Kurdish question, especially after the collapse of the central Iraqi state, has spurred Turkey to turn more attention toward the Middle East. To contain the perceived Kurdish threat, it has rebuilt strong working relations with Syria and Iran, both of which have Kurdish concerns,

and began relaunching attacks into Kurdish Iraq. To explore the potential value of its standing in the Muslim Sunni world, it has pursued contacts with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan, and it no longer shuns the Muslim label.

Seventh, the combination of high oil prices, U.S. involvement in conflicts in the Middle East, and a resurgent Kremlin paved the way for a renewed role for Russia in the region. Under Vladimir Putin, Russia moved away from the West-embracing policies of Boris Yeltsin, grew suspicious of U.S. policies in Central and Eastern Europe, and perceived Russia's interests in challenging U.S. hegemony and buttressing states that stand up to the United States. High oil prices have allowed Russia to project power again after the bankruptcy of the 1990s, and U.S. troubles in the Middle East have created opportunities for Russia to reclaim some of its Cold War influence. It has rebuilt relations with Syria, providing some protection in the UN Security Council and rearming the Syrian military, and it is engaged in large arms and trade deals with Iran as well.

Post-September 11 Timetables

The post-9/11 period can be divided into several phases. The first, which was effectively a short prelude to the changes that would begin in the Middle East, lasted from 2001 to 2003. In this phase, U.S. policy focused on the invasion of Afghanistan, and the Middle East system was not directly affected. The majority of Arab and Islamic states condemned the terrorist attacks. Many provided intelligence and material support to early U.S. responses to al-Qaeda and did not oppose the invasion of Afghanistan.

Tensions were brewing over Iraq, but many states in the region hoped for a political resolution to the standoff that could avert an invasion. Saudi Arabia and the GCC states had a troubled history with Saddam's Iraq: On the one hand, Saddam had attacked and weakened Iran from the very outset of its Islamic Revolution, when events in Iran threatened to foment change in Saudi Arabia and other parts of the region; on the other hand, when his war with Iran was over, Saddam had turned his attentions south, occupying Kuwait in 1990 and threatening the Saudi oil fields. Saddam had already used chemical weapons on his own people, and fears that he might still have an active weapons of mass destruction program cast a long shadow in the GCC. Still, Saudi Arabia and the GCC states feared the consequences of a U.S. invasion of a fellow Arab and Muslim state, especially one with a Shi'i majority. Saddam had been contained so far, and many argued that containment could still suffice. Iran and Syria had a darker history with Saddam. Iran had fought a long and hard war with Iraq and considered Saddam's Iraq a mortal enemy; it would not be sad to see his regime go and had many allies among the Shi'i majority that could seize the opportunity of his regime's passing. Iran, however, considered the United States an even greater enemy and was deeply troubled by the prospect of a U.S. military presence on its borders. The rival wings of the Baath parties in Syria and Iraq had a bloody internecine history, and Assad blamed Saddam

for fomenting revolt in Syria in the 1980s and trying to unseat him. Syria had supported Iran throughout its war with Iraq, and Assad, too, would not be sad to see Saddam's regime pass. However, Syria was concerned that the overthrow of the Baath regime in Baghdad by the United States might be a prelude to the overthrow of its own Baath regime in Damascus.

All in all, the states in the region hoped that a large-scale U.S. invasion of Iraq could be avoided. The threat from Saddam had been largely contained since his army's eviction from Kuwait in 1991, and while there were some concerns that he might indeed be developing weapons of mass destruction, most states favored going through the UN inspection process rather than backing an accelerated U.S. timetable of unilateral ultimatums. In this phase, the Middle East system was still pretty much intact, and the power balances that had been in place since the late 1970s still prevailed.

The Collapse of Iraq and the Regional Order

Structural change started with the second phase, which lasted from 2003 to 2005 and shattered the Middle East system. It is defined by the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March of 2003 and its immediate consequences. This phase was also characterized by U.S. aspirations that the war in Iraq could be used as a stepping-stone to exert pressure on Iran and Syria, and it was accompanied by pressure on U.S. allies in the region to democratize. It was a period of expansion of U.S. power into the Middle East in which the limits and unexpected consequences of that expansion were not yet clear.

None of the states in the region supported the invasion, but none had any warmth for the regime of Saddam Hussein either. The United States proceeded with the invasion without any regional backing. The real struggle, however, proved to be not in winning the war but in securing the peace. While Iran and Syria were happy to be rid of Saddam's regime, they were very concerned that a comfortable U.S. victory in Iraq could lead to campaigns for regime change in their own countries. While Iran in particular had facilitated the U.S. invasion by essentially looking the other way and prevailing upon its allies in Iraq to, in effect, accommodate the invasion, both Iran and Syria were now intent on making the U.S. occupation as uncomfortable as possible. It was a difficult line: cooperating with the occupation to the extent that it would marginalize Sunni power and create a new Shi'i-majority government, and at the same time inflicting enough pain on the occupation to make sure the U.S. public would not tolerate a long deployment and would eventually insist on a withdrawal. Such a withdrawal would leave Iran and Syria no longer under threat of proximate U.S. troops and would leave Iran holding the reins of power in Baghdad. Iran has a more sectarian interest in developments in Iraq than Syria, but the Alawi-dominated Baath regime in Sunni-majority Syria had long been threatened by Saddam's Sunni-dominated regime in Baghdad. Moreover, the Syrian regime had been allied with Shi'i Iran and with the Shi'i parties in Lebanon since the

early 1980s—all the more reason it would feel safer with Shi'i dominance in Baghdad than with Sunni dominance.

Saudi Arabia had stood aside during the invasion, but as it saw the post-invasion politics of Iraq go beyond the marginalization of the Baath Party to the growing sidelining of the Sunni community in favor of the Iranian-backed Shi'a, it became increasingly concerned. Indeed, much of the financing of the Sunni insurgency was initially coming from private Saudi sources, and many volunteer fighters were of Saudi origin. The Saudi government initially did little to stop this trend, but after the al-Qaeda bombings in Saudi Arabia itself in late 2003, and under growing U.S. pressure, the government moved to clamp down. Saudi Arabia, however, remained concerned about Shi'i dominance in the new government in Baghdad. It refused to embrace the new Shi'i-led government, did not restore diplomatic relations with Iraq, and pushed for a larger Sunni role in the new Iraqi state. Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE shared the concern that Shi'i and Iranian power was growing in Iraq. It was in this period that sectarian Sunni–Shi'i tensions emerged in regional politics. As a response to rising Iranian power, the Arab Quartet, comprising the Sunni states of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, and Egypt, was consolidated. However, the Quartet tried to counterbalance confrontation with accommodation. Saudi Arabia reached out to Iran and made clear that it sought good relations with Tehran, and the Arab Quartet refused to accede to U.S. attempts to create an Arab alliance of “moderates” against Iran or to provide Arab support for a proposed U.S. strike on Iran. Nevertheless, the two camps eyed each other warily and pursued rival policies in the region.

This period also was notable for two other important developments in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. In Saudi Arabia, a serious wave of al-Qaeda terror attacks rocked the kingdom in 2003. This was a watershed moment for Saudi leaders. In 2001, their response to the events of September 11, in which fifteen Saudis had been involved, was to treat it as an embarrassing and regrettable incident that had soured relations with their strategic U.S. patron. But, in contrast to the Saudi royal family's reaction to the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, they had not taken dramatic action at home. After the Grand Mosque incident, the royal family beefed up security at home while also moving closer to the Wahhabi establishment to burnish its religious image and increased its financing of militant jihadism abroad—mainly in Afghanistan—to gain credibility among jihadists and keep them busy outside of the kingdom. The 2003 bombings inside Saudi Arabia made clear that this strategy was not working and that Saudi Arabia was no more immune than the West to the conflict unleashed by al-Qaeda on September 11.

The 2003 attacks persuaded Crown Prince, later King, Abdullah to change policy in a number of ways. First, the government launched a security crackdown to find and close down al-Qaeda cells in the kingdom. Second, the kingdom put new restrictions on public and private funding of Islamist and Salafist groups

abroad, trying to discourage the ones they considered a threat. Third, it worked with members of the clerical community to reform the educational system to tone down some of the more radical teachings, and it also encouraged the issuing of fatwas that emphasized the spiritual and moral aspects of jihad and discredited acts of terror. Fourth, Abdullah initiated a series of political and economic reforms—including a national dialogue process, local elections, and the planning of new economic cities—to inject more dynamism into the kingdom and provide more room for participation and economic opportunity.

Since 1979, Saudi Arabia had leaned heavily on the policy of financing Salafism and jihadism abroad as a means of projecting its own power; keeping Soviets, leftists, and secularists at bay; and answering the Islamic challenge from Iran. After 2003, its policy became more complex, with the kingdom still supporting many Salafist and conservative Islamist groups but at the same time realizing the risks involved in unfettered Islamic radicalism and working with the United States and regional allies to reduce those risks.

The other significant event of this phase related to events in Lebanon. Syria and the United States parted ways over the war in Iraq, and as Syria appeared to aid the insurgency, the United States hinted at regime change in Syria. The United States and France then led an international and Arab effort, channeled through the UN Security Council, to push Syria out of Lebanon. In April 2005, after the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri and massive anti-Syrian demonstrations in Beirut, the Syrians finally left Lebanon. Their withdrawal after 29 years of occupation was a historic blow to the sphere of influence that Hafez al-Assad had painstakingly built in the 1970s and 1980s, but it also unleashed tensions and conflicts in Lebanon that had been dormant under the Syrian boot.

This period was also marked by U.S. pushing of what President Bush called the Freedom Agenda. After having failed to find weapons of mass destruction or actual links between Saddam's Iraq and the September 11 attacks, the Bush administration settled on democratization as a principal justification for the occupation of Iraq. It then generalized the principle to push a democratization agenda for the Middle East. U.S. thinking was that repressive politics led to frustration and fostered habits of violent politics, and that frustrated citizens would take out their anger on the repressive states in which they lived as well as on the states' U.S. patrons. More participatory politics, the U.S. administration argued, would help defuse the tensions and hence dry up the fertile ground on which terrorism thrived. Toward its declared enemies, Iran and Syria, the United States interpreted democratization essentially as it did toward Saddam's Iraq: as regime change, to be brought about by external intervention, internal upheaval, or both. For U.S. allies like Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, democratization would be brought about by encouraging them to open up their political processes and organize more elections and political participation. Perhaps extrapolating from its recent experiences in Central and Eastern Europe, the

United States seemed to expect that democratization would bring pro-Western elites to power, thereby helping to create a U.S.-friendly zone of influence. For a while, the “Cedar Revolution” in Lebanon calling for Syrian withdrawal, the “Kifaya” movement in Egypt demanding the end of Hosni Mubarak’s lengthy reign, and the voters’ revolt in Kuwait seeking electoral reform and fresh elections seemed to indicate that the so-called color revolutions of Central and Eastern Europe might have indeed reached the Middle East and that Bush’s freedom agenda had hit the mark.

The 2003–2005 phase, therefore, was one of dramatic change. By removing the Iraqi state, it broke the old Middle East state system of power balances and buffers; in its place was a new regional situation of flux. It heralded the demise of the old rules of the game, a dramatic expansion of U.S. power, and the emergence of a U.S. attempt to create a “new Middle East” based on U.S. predominance, the defeat of U.S. opponents, and the emergence of pro-Western elites throughout the region. The United States had shifted from a policy of managing the Middle East through power balancing, containment, and crisis management to a policy of changing the Middle East through domination, confrontation, regime change, and democratization. The realities of the region had not yet caught up with the new, ambitious U.S. policies.

Regional Realities and the Limits of Power

The third phase is that of 2006, in which the U.S. ran up against the limits of its own power and the law of unintended consequences. In Iraq, the situation took a drastic turn for the worse after the Samarra shrine bombings of February and the outbreak of massive sectarian fighting and escalating attacks on occupation forces. While in 2004 and 2005 there was still a sense of expectation that perhaps the political process would bear fruit and the transition from occupation to stability would progress, the events of 2006 dashed such hopes and seemed to underline the failure of the U.S. mission in Iraq and the collapse of Iraq as a stable society. The states of the region were faced with the prospect of dealing with an Iraq that had spiraled out of control and whose sectarian violence threatened to engulf neighboring countries and perhaps draw them in as well. The U.S. invasion of Iraq, rather than projecting U.S. power, had led to an implosion of power in Iraq, one that involved Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey in different and uncomfortable ways as each sought to protect its interests.

In Palestine, the victory of Hamas in the parliamentary elections flew in the face of U.S. rhetoric promoting democracy—while the U.S. spoke of democratization, it was unhappy with the results of those elections. The Palestine elections came in the wake of parliamentary elections in Egypt in which the Muslim Brotherhood had done alarmingly well by U.S. standards. The U.S. soon suspended its pressure for democratization, a retreat that was greeted with sighs of relief by the authoritarian regimes in the region. The Hamas

victory was the breeze that brought the democracy promotion house of cards crashing down.

In Lebanon, after getting Syria out the previous year, the United States had been trying to push its advantage by encouraging Israel's attempt to destroy Hizbollah in the summer war of 2006. The failure of Israel to do so and the survival of Hizbollah was also a turning point in that it showed that Hizbollah, and with it, Syrian and Iranian influence, was still potent in Lebanon and that U.S. power there, too, had perhaps reached its limits.

As for Iran, it had become clear that the U.S. invasion of Iraq, far from being a prelude to the weakening or toppling of the Iranian state, had to the contrary greatly empowered it throughout the region.

This phase, therefore, was one in which the limits of U.S. power had been reached, the revolutionary Bush administration vision for the region was quietly shelved, and Iran and to a lesser degree Syria came to realize that they had not only survived the American onslaught but also had achieved some gains. This phase was also one in which Saudi Arabia and other U.S. allies realized that the U.S. involvement in Iraq and the Middle East had gone badly wrong and that they, as regional states, had to move quickly to deal with the new realities that had been unleashed. These efforts were characterized by a new activism of Saudi King Abdullah in regional diplomacy, launching initiatives to manage the Palestinian, Lebanese, and Iraqi crises and building bridges with Iran.

The developments of 2006 began to suggest a rethinking of U.S. Middle East policy. This was first expressed in the bipartisan Iraq Study Group report released in late 2006. It advised a phased drawdown of troops in Iraq and diplomatic overtures to Syria and Iran. The Bush administration, however, rejected the findings of the report, instead pushing a surge of troops in Iraq and maintaining a very tough line against Iran and Syria.

A Precarious Calm

The fourth phase is that of 2007–2008. Initially, the tough policy of the Bush administration seemed to pay off: Iran pulled back its support for radical insurgent groups in Iraq, and Syria closed down large sectors of its porous border with Iraq. The situation in Iraq improved markedly, and the U.S.-led mission in Iraq seemed once again to have a slim chance of success.

Indeed, the Bush administration changed the style of its Middle East policies in 2007 by turning from all-confrontation to more accommodation. In addition to shifts vis-à-vis Iran and Syria, the United States encouraged the resumption of the long-suspended Israeli–Palestinian peace talks by sponsoring the Annapolis peace conference in November of 2007. In Lebanon, it also shifted from a policy of confrontation to one of exploring accommodation; in November it backed a compromise proposal in Lebanon to elect General Michel Suleiman, the head of the army and previously considered close to Syria, as president of the republic. As its term approached its end, the Bush

administration seemed intent on moderating some of the effects of its aggressive policies of the past five years by maintaining troops in the region while at the same time stepping back from confrontations with regional opponents.

As 2008 progressed, many eyes in the Middle East were on the U.S. presidential elections set for November. The United States had been the main player in changing the Middle East as of 2003; it had created new realities, new risks, and new opportunities for the states of the region. Iran is anxious to know how committed a new U.S. administration is going to be to staying in Iraq and obstructing Iran from pursuing a nuclear program. Syria wants to know whether a new U.S. administration will remain committed to an independent Lebanon and hostile to the regime in Damascus. Saudi Arabia needs to calibrate its policies in the region partly in light of what its strategic ally ends up doing.

Beyond the United States, however, the regional players are also eyeing each other. Will Iran consolidate its newfound influence in the region by moderating its revolutionary rhetoric and working with key Arab states to create stability in the Middle East, or will it push its advantage, maintain strong revolutionary rhetoric, pursue a nuclear weapon, and try to establish a hegemonic position in the region? Will Saudi Arabia move toward playing more of a mediating and conflict-management role, or will it react to threats by bolstering Sunni radicalism and taking the fight to its opponents? Will Syria moderate its policies in Lebanon and rejoin the Arab fold, or will it keep all its eggs in the Iranian basket? Will Turkey maintain its stable course of political and economic development and its accommodation of growing Kurdish independence in northern Iraq, or will the AKP and the military come to blows and the Turkish-Kurdish conflict reignite? Most importantly, will Iraq stick together in the coming months and years, or will it fully unravel, drawing the states of the region into conflict? Finally, will Israel's conflicts with the Palestinians, Hamas, and Hizbollah ignite another regional war involving Syria, or will Israel and Syria move toward peace?

The dynamics of the new Middle East are truly fluid. The changes brought about since 2003, in addition to changes still to come, create a wide range of risks and uncertainties.

Conclusion: Whose Order?

The conditions of fluidity and instability that have long beset the Middle East have not discouraged attempts—both external and internal—to impose order. The British had a vision of a stable, British-dominated, post-Ottoman Middle East, but realities of power sharing with the French, the resurgence of Turkey, the decline of British power, and serious colonial unrest in Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt led in a different direction. The United States tried to impose its own order through the Baghdad Pact in 1955, but Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union and domestic opposition led by Nasser foiled those plans. Nasser himself

came closest to creating an Arab order, going so far as to achieve unity between Egypt and Syria.

After 2001, the United States sought to create not only a new regional order, but a new Middle East. This would be a region where U.S. power would be dominant and local states would be U.S. clients, a region where old regimes would be overthrown—violently or through elections—and new elites, friendly to the West, would emerge. The unspoken template might have been post-World War II Western Europe or Japan, where military intervention and the toppling of hostile regimes were followed by the flowering of pro-Western democracies and market economies. More recently, even in post-Cold War Central and Eastern Europe, the collapse of hostile regimes led to favorable Western-leaning political developments. This grand ambition, however, was sunk in the sands of Iraq, where the United States ran up against the limits of its power, which dissipated in the complex realities of a region where elections weakened regimes friendly to the United States and favored hostile ideological opponents.

Within the region, various forces have tried to impose alternative orders on the Middle East. An alliance led by Iran and including Syria, Hizbollah, and Hamas as well as a number of factions within Iraq worked for a Middle East that would expel U.S. influence and join in a wide regional alliance hostile to the United States and at war with Israel. This effort encountered a number of obstacles. First, some of Iran's friends in Iraq needed the U.S. military intervention and presence to create and stabilize the Shi'i-majority government. Second, despite its attempt to present itself as a pan-Islamic leader, Iran could not escape its Shi'i identity, and Sunni-Shi'i tensions in Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain created a Sunni backlash against Iran. Third, Iran's bid to play a leadership role in the Arab world, perhaps akin to what Egypt attempted in the 1960s, also became ensnarled in Arab-Persian tensions. While Iran can look forward to a new Middle East in which it enjoys potentially preponderant influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories, it has acquired opponents in Saudi Arabia and the GCC states, as well as Jordan and Egypt.

Saudi Arabia worked to create a different regional order composed of Arab states; Iran would remain an external player although one with which Saudi Arabia sought friendly and neighborly relations. This new Arab order, led by Saudi Arabia, would maintain friendly relations with the United States and seek peace with Israel on the basis of land for peace. It would preserve a strong Sunni identity while coming to terms with Shi'i communities and demands throughout the region. Saudi Arabia also hoped to tie in Turkey and Pakistan as regional Sunni allies to counterbalance Iranian power. The Saudi approach organized action among Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, and Egypt and shored up embattled clients in Lebanon and Palestine. However, Saudi Arabia did not have a positive plan of engagement toward the new state emerging in Iraq—except support of some disgruntled Sunni opposition groups—and its overtures to Turkey and Pakistan bore little fruit.

The group that had started the whole chain of events that led to these new realities also aspired to create a new regional order favorable to its agenda. By drawing the United States into battle with the Islamic world, al-Qaeda and the radical jihadists hoped to foment a wave of Islamist revolts, similar to the anti-colonial rebellions of the first half of the twentieth century, that would topple incumbent regimes and destroy the alliances with the United States on which they had thrived. The new regional order in the Arab and Islamic worlds would be based on strict interpretation of Islam and fierce opposition to the United States and Israel. Indeed, despite early setbacks in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda for the first time gained a large foothold in the Arab world through its massive presence in various parts of post-invasion Iraq. The war in Iraq provided inroads to al-Qaeda and attracted volunteers from around the Arab and Muslim worlds. It also provided a staging area from which al-Qaeda could project influence into Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and the occupied Palestinian territories. However, the al-Qaeda heyday was short-lived. Sunni groups in Iraq, some of which had welcomed or tolerated al-Qaeda as a scourge against the rising influence of Shi'i groups, turned against al-Qaeda after they realized that it had its own agenda and would try to impose a Taliban-like social order on them. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Syria, all of which thought they could manipulate al-Qaeda in Iraq for their own purposes, also realized the danger of al-Qaeda and moved increasingly to close it down. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and even Lebanon cracked down on al-Qaeda-style cells and organizations in their own countries. The general Arab public did not rise up in support of al-Qaeda's aspirations but rather developed an aversion to al-Qaeda's methods and extreme radicalism. Al-Qaeda and radical jihadism might claim a stake in the future of Afghanistan or even Pakistan, but it does not appear to have a prominent future in any of the Arab states. While its ambitions to create a new regional order have had a strong impact in parts of Iraq and have caused bloodshed in a number of Arab countries, it appears destined to be a marginal, if fierce, player in the Arab world.

Indeed, the events of the past few years have broken the precarious old Middle East order without replacing it with a new order. And although rival external and regional players have been pushing their own agendas for a new regional order, none of them has prevailed. The competition among these rival visions and forces appears destined to continue in the years ahead.

In the meantime, meetings of countries neighboring Iraq have been taking place, first in Egypt, then in Turkey and Kuwait. Participants in addition to Iraq have included Iran, Turkey, and key Arab countries. Discussions have focused on exploring potential common ground on security as well as political and economic issues. These meetings have been encouraged by the United States and the international community; their progress, however, has been slow, as tensions within Iraq and the region continue to make the main players wary of each other. Turkey still launches occasional raids into northern Iraq; Iran

persists in backing armed groups in Iraq, Lebanon, and elsewhere; Saudi Arabia and most Arab states consistently decline to initiate normal diplomatic relations with the new government in Iraq. The challenges facing these regional states are whether they can develop a common understanding of a new regional order that provides an alternative to the divisive orders promoted by individual states; whether they can prioritize common interests over political and ideological differences; and whether they can develop a cooperative security architecture to manage the dangerous tensions simmering within the region.



In the papers that follow in this research project, individual authors will examine the perspectives and policies of six of the key players in this challenge: Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. The studies will explore a number of questions:

- How have these states responded to the dramatically changing regional realities since the U.S. occupation of Iraq?
- How do they perceive common and conflicting regional interests?
- How have they altered their foreign policy, either to prosecute conflicts or to pursue common interests and build regional stability and order?

Through this research and these reflections, the authors can offer a better understanding of the common and conflicting interests among the states of the region. In so doing, it is hoped that they can suggest policies and initiatives that would reinforce progress toward an inclusive vision of regional order and the development of a stable political and security architecture.

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