



# GREAT POWERS AND REGIONAL ORDERS

The United States and the  
Persian Gulf

EDITED BY MARKUS KAIM

US FOREIGN POLICY  
AND CONFLICT IN THE  
ISLAMIC WORLD

URAN I UWNIS ANU INGIUNAI UICERS  
The United States and the Persian Gulf

in the Islamic World Series

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The proliferation of an anti-US ideology among radicalized Islamic groups has emerged as one of the most significant security concerns for the United States and contemporary global relations in the wake of the end of the Cold War. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 demonstrated the danger posed by Islamic extremists to US domestic and foreign interests. Through a wealth of case studies, this new series examines the role that US foreign policy has played in exacerbating or ameliorating hostilities among and within Muslim nations as a means of exploring the rise in tension between some Islamic groups and the West. The series provides an interdisciplinary framework of analysis which, transcending traditional, narrow modes of inquiry, permits a comprehensive examination of US foreign policy in the context of the Islamic world.

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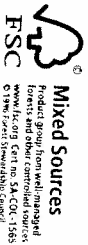
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## Charting U.S. Security Strategy in the Persian Gulf

James A. Russell<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 2007, veteran Middle Eastern analyst and former Clinton Administration official Martin Indyk characterized the Middle East as being turned “upside down” in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.<sup>2</sup> It is hard to argue with his assessment. The invasion and its aftermath have unleashed a wide-ranging re-ordering of the internal and external dynamics of regional security that could see the region plunged into a prolonged period of strategic instability.

External politics have been altered in important ways. The political empowerment of the Shiite majority in Iraq, accompanied by the loss of influence by Iraq’s Sunni power structure and the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish region has profoundly affected the regional balance of power. Iraq no longer serves as the Sunni bulwark against Shiite and Iranian expansion, and the Sunni Gulf State monarchies (and Jordan) now find themselves as frontline states against an emerging Iranian-dominated alliance comprised of Iraq, Syria and Hizbollah in Lebanon. In confronting these adversaries, the Sunni states also find that the region’s guarantor, the United States, is in a weakened position politically and militarily as a result of the disastrous war in Iraq and its Middle East policy throughout the past six years. It is unclear whether and/or how the United States can recover from this.

Confronted with a series of conflicting messages from Washington that at various times emphasized democracy, transparency and human rights and at other times demanded cooperation in the so-called war on terrorism, the region’s elites are investigating alternative arrangements to deal with the regional insecurity emanating from Iraq and the occupied territories as well as from the rising power of Iran. Framed by the Iraq invasion and the abandonment of constructive involvement in the Arab-Israeli dispute, these contradictory messages have contributed to the decreasing public support for the United States throughout the region. The decline in U.S. standing stretches beyond the Middle East and the Gulf. Polling in the Middle East, Africa and Asia in the summer of 2006 found a “deep attitudinal divide” between Westerners and Muslims in the sample areas.<sup>3</sup> Only 15 percent of the Jordanians held

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<sup>1</sup> James A. Russell is a senior lecturer in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School. The views expressed in this article are his own.

<sup>2</sup> As quoted by Seymour Hersh, “The Redirection,” *The New Yorker*, 832 (2007).

<sup>3</sup> Delphine Schrank, “Survey Details ‘Deep’ Divide Between Muslims, Westerners,” *Washington Post*, 23 June 2006, p. A19.

a favourable impression of the United States in 2000. In Turkey, merely 12 percent of respondents regarded the U.S. favourably.<sup>4</sup>

The decline of the U.S. position is spurring a reordering of the regional security environment. The region's rush to reinvigorate dormant nuclear power programs (Egypt) and to initiate new programs (the Gulf Cooperation Council) delivers a collective regional response to the situation. In December 2006, the Gulf Cooperation Council announced plans to start construction of its own nuclear power plants. Russian President Vladimir Putin toured the region shortly thereafter, promising to assist the GCC states in building their own nuclear reactors. In short, the region stands on the brink of an era of strategic insecurity. This may result in the ignominious end of the regional security architecture first constructed by the British early in the 20th century and then embellished by the United States at the end of Gulf War I. This chapter will review the development of regional security strategy under the Bush Administration and analyze its relevance in addressing the emerging and unstable regional security environment.

### Out with the Old

The Bush Administration that arrived in the winter of 2001 was determined to change the U.S. policies in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf by: (1) abandoning the peace process; (2) placing distance between the United States and Saudi Arabia; and (3) getting rid of Saddam Hussein. By 2003-2004, stopping Iran's march towards nuclear weapons had emerged as the fourth pillar of U.S. regional policy. Circumstances and domestic politics played critical roles in the abandonment of the peace process and the decline of U.S.-Saudi relations. The aftermath of the September 11th attacks placed excessive pressure on an already frayed U.S.-Saudi political partnership and was followed a decade of decline in the relations between the erstwhile strategic partners.<sup>5</sup> As for the peace process, the Bush Administration that came into office in 2001 openly stated its belief that the United States had become involved too much in trying to broker a deal between Israel and the Palestinians. Making good on its campaign rhetoric, the Bush Administration on the one hand called for the creation of a Palestinian state and on the other hid little to back up its words with action, watching in curiously detached isolation as the parties brutalized one another in successive waves of violence.

The Bush Administration's approach to the Middle East had its roots in work done in the 1990s by prominent neo-conservatives. Some suggest that a paper titled "A Clean Break: A Strategy for Securing the Realm" by Richard Perle and others provided the Bush Administration with a blueprint that articulated a broadly stated policy objective to fundamentally alter the internal politics of Arab states throughout

the region.<sup>6</sup> The paper, written in 1996 for the incoming Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, called, *inter alia*, for a regime change in Baghdad as part of a plan to spread democracy around the region and for isolation of those states resisting to fundamental political change – Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt. Spreading democracy, it was argued, would create a new set of actors throughout the region that would then be more amenable to reach a peace treaty with Israel. The paper reflected much of the thinking attributed to Paul Wolfowitz, who played a key role in crafting the Bush Administration's decision to invade Iraq. Wolfowitz is also generally credited with creating the first draft of the Bush Administration's approach to a national security strategy in the early 1990s.

If the "Clean Break" paper represented a potential blueprint for a new approach in the Middle East, the broader vision for the role that force could play as part of a more aggressive global American security strategy was clearly spelled out in a September 2000 report released by the conservative organization *Project for New American Century*. Many of the senior members of the organization would later assume prominent positions in the Bush Administration. The report, titled *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century*,<sup>7</sup> called for the United States to assume its position of global leadership and to take concrete steps in order to preserve and to extend America's position of global predominance. In a passage that could be regarded as the articulation of the Bush Administration's new strategic direction – even before the September 11 attacks, the report's authors declared in its introduction that "The United States is the world's only superpower, combining pre-eminent military power, global technological leadership, and the world's largest economy. Moreover, America stands at the head of a system of alliances which include the world's other leading democratic powers. At present, the United States faces no global rival. America's grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible."<sup>8</sup> The role of the military within this grand strategy, according to the report, was to "...secure and expand the 'zones of democratic peace'; to deter the rise of a new great-power competitor; to defend the key regions of Europe, East Asia and the Middle East; and to preserve American pre-eminence through the coming transformation of war made possible by new technologies."<sup>9</sup> All these themes emerged in the Bush Administration's strategy documents released after coming into office in 2001.

If using force to expand the so-called "zones of democracy" as part of a strategy of political transformation represented a central objective of using force against Iraq, it stands to reason whether this objective applies throughout the whole region. The decision to use force in pursuit of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) was framed as part of a broader strategic vision of political transformation as part of the global fight

6. Text of the paper can be accessed online at <http://www.isracheconomy.org/strat1.htm>.

7. Details of the Wolfowitz draft are contained in Nicholas Lemman's article "The Next World Order," *The New Yorker*, 1 April 2002.

8. Report can be accessed at <http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

4. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "America's Image Slips, But Allies Share US Concern Over Iran, Hamas," 13 June 2006, available at <http://pewglobal.org/report/pdf/252.pdf>.

5. Hersh, *op. cit.*, asserts that quiet and clandestine cooperation has restarted between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region to combat the growing

against terrorism. In 2003, President Bush's soaring rhetoric linked the toppling of Saddam Hussein with a plan to defeat terrorism and to spread democracy in the Middle East:

We are rolling back the terrorist threat to civilization, not on the fringes of its influence, but at the heart of its power. In Iraq, we are helping the long suffering people of that country to build a decent and democratic society at the centre of the Middle East. Together we are transforming a place of torture chambers and mass graves into a nation of laws and free institutions. This undertaking is difficult and costly . . . yet worthy of our country, and critical to our security. The Middle East will either become a place of progress and peace, or it will be an exporter of violence and terror that takes more lives in America and in other free nations. The triumph of democracy and tolerance in Iraq, in Afghanistan and beyond would be a grave setback for international terrorism. The terrorists thrive on the support of tyrants and the resentments of oppressed peoples. When tyrants fall, and resentment gives way to hope, men and women in every culture reject the ideologies of terror, and turn to the pursuit of peace.<sup>11</sup>

This rhetoric mirrored the verbiage in the Bush Administration's National Security Strategy Report, which unequivocally established the goal of expanding the zone of democracy around the world as a primary strategic objective. Presumably, expanding the zone of democracy will, in turn, make those states within the zone less prone to support terrorist groups and religious extremists. As noted in the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, "Ongoing U.S. efforts to resolve regional disputes, foster economic, social, and political development, market-based economies, good governance, and the rule of law, while not necessarily focused on combating terrorism contribute to the campaign by addressing underlying conditions that terrorists often seek to manipulate for their own advantage."<sup>12</sup>

The Bush Administration's strategy documents make clear that force is an instrument not just to pre-empt emergent threats but that can also be used as a tool to expand the democratic zone. In the report's foreword, President Bush emphatically states: "In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action."<sup>13</sup> Using force to effect regime change in Iraq indisputably represented such a path. This vision has run aground on the shoals of reality in the Middle East. As regional elites are eventually forced to bow to the unfolding forces of political change and transition sweeping through their domains, they will invariably be forced to distance themselves from their erstwhile protector - the U.S. military and the extended deterrent umbrella provided by its military presence. The United States thus faces the paradoxical position of helping to stimulate the regional political transformation it sought, but now faces a transformation that features the empowerment of anti-U.S. forces and which may in the long-term prove to be anti-democratic. This process of transformation threatens a system of regional security

11 Address of President Bush to the nation, 7 September 2003 at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/09/20030907-1.html>.

12 The White House, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (Washington DC, February 2003), p. 23.

13 The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington D.C., 17 September 2002).

based on a security umbrella provided by first by the British and then the United States.

#### Genesis of the Regional Security Architecture

At the end of World War I, the British were confronted by a series of paradoxes as they contemplated administering the spoils that victory in Europe had given them in the Middle East. All the former Ottoman dominions lay at their feet, stretching from Constantinople to Basra, Baghdad, across the Levant and down into the Hijaz. Victory in Europe, however, had exacted its toll, and the British faced a series of problems in administering these areas and integrating them into the empire. The war had emptied the country's coffers leaving it financially broke, and the public clamoured for a return home of the troops deployed in far flung places like the Middle East - which might have served as an instrument for British influence and control in these domains. As Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill strove to construct a formula that would preserve Britain's position as the dominant regional power while simultaneously scaling back its level of commitment to meet domestic political and economic realities. Churchill and his assembled experts faced all these issues during the Cairo Conference in March 1921 where he and his advisers made a series of decisions that are still affecting the course of history in the Middle East.

The best known decision made in Cairo was the accommodation of Britain's Hashemite friends in the Hijaz that resulted in the creation of Jordan and Iraq. A less well known issue was also vetted during the conference, where Churchill (becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1924-1929 in his next cabinet job) became attracted to the idea of using the Royal Air Force (RAF) to police the restive tribesman throughout the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq in lieu of the expensive and manpower-intensive option of occupying these areas with British or Indian troops. Throughout the early part of the 20th century and spurred by operations during World War I, the RAF had built a network of airfields that linked Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, the Gulf, Mesopotamia, Iran, Afghanistan and India. After the war under the pro-active leadership of Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard, the RAF consolidated the establishment of a series of airfields throughout the region in Aden, the Hijaz, Mesopotamia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the Trucial Sheikdoms, Oman, Afghanistan, Peshawar and Iraq. By the late 1920s, after receiving administrative responsibility for the Iraq mandate, the RAF had assumed the responsibility for the internal and external security of Britain's interests throughout much of the Persian Gulf.<sup>14</sup> RAF operations proved their worth to the British in their successful internal policing actions in Iraq, Yemen, Kuwait and the Trans Jordan, and Afghanistan during the interwar period. The RAF also helped bear back the marauding Saudi Khawan warriors during their raids into Kuwait, the Trans Jordan and Iraq in 1927-1928.

14 Authoritatively summarized in J.E. Peterson, *Defending Arabia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986) pp. 13-57.

The infrastructure developed by the RAF during this period proved invaluable during World War II, facilitating operations throughout the Middle East and the Allied re-supply of 5 million tons of war material to the Soviet Union through Iran. Following World War II, the facilities infrastructure provided the basis for the British military presence until 1971, when they finally departed from the region. Following the British departure, the United States gradually moved in to fill the vacuum created by the British withdrawal as the 1980s saw the Gulf increasingly become the most common destination for deploying United States Navy battle groups. During Operation Earnest Will in 1987, the United States signed on to the idea of using its Navy to police the Gulf and escort oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz. A whole generation of American naval officers effectively came of age in the Persian Gulf during the 1980s and 1990s. The Navy's operational hub in the Gulf in Manama, Bahrain (inherited from the British) now administers a variety of activities devoted to maritime security and counter-terrorism in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean.<sup>15</sup> As the United States considers the consequences of its invasion of Iraq, the unanswered question is whether future generations of American naval officers will have the same career experience in the Gulf as those during the previous 20 years.

### Impact of the Iraq Invasion

The Iraq invasion came at a time of a broader regional political upheaval and transition. The aftermath of the invasion simply throws more fuel on an existing fire, adding a momentum to the new intraregional political dynamics: (1) it reinforces pre-existing trends of generational political transition and the emergence of a new caste of internal political actors that are pressuring the region's governing elites; (2) the internal chaos in Iraq is also leading to the military empowerment of powerful non-state actors, providing them with the means to take on established conventional military forces on by using asymmetric tactics; and (3) the situation in Iraq assists Iran in its regional ambitions to extend its influence and power and its desire to position itself as a champion of regional political causes to the detriment of the surrounding Sunni political elites. All these three interrelated factors will shape the regional strategic landscape for the years to come.

One of the many critical failures in U.S. planning for the Iraq war centred on the idea that the Iraqis would sit idly by while a tyrant was physically removed from a job he had occupied for 30 years and wait for another group to take his place. The Bush Administration actually believed that a new governing elite could be parachuted on top of the existing governmental institutions in a seamless and peaceful transition.<sup>16</sup> This belief represented a fundamental misunderstanding of the structure of Iraqi politics and regional political dynamics. In Iraq, as elsewhere in the region, politics serves as an extension of the internal bare-knuckles battle for power between

15 For a description of current maritime security operations coordinated out of Bahrain see James A. Russell, "Maritime Security in the Gulf: Addressing the Terrorist Threat," *Security and Terrorism Research Bulletin*, No. 2 (February 2006), pp. 9-11.

16 Latest and perhaps most interesting treatment of this idea is in Dexter Filkins, "Where Plan A Left Ahmad Chalabi," *New York Times Magazine*, 5 November 2006.

competing tribal, familial, sectarian and religious groups. For these groups, loyalties tend to lie not within governing institutions but within their broader community. Government and its institutions represent tools to exert authority and control over rivals, not necessarily as vehicles to create national unity and collective identity.<sup>17</sup> Removing Saddam popped the lid off a complicated internal political environment in which the Sunni minority had exercised political control since Ottoman times. The invasion re-opened the competition in the internal political balance of power that had been established when Britain installed a Sunni monarchy supported by a caste of Ottoman Sunni technocrats in the early 1920s. Supported by the United States, Shiite and Kurdish communities (both with significant internal fissures) seized their chance in the chaotic aftermath of the Iraq invasion to use governmental institutions as a means to exert influence and control over their Sunni rivals. The passing out of government ministries to different Shiite and Kurdish figures in the aftermath of the December 2005 elections reflected this process.

These internal dynamics are layered upon an already fragile regional political climate. Upsetting the apple cart of Iraqi politics comes amidst a time of regional generational transition, with the anachronistic carcasses of discredited secular dictatorships and monarchies still littering the regional political landscape. The region is awash in post-colonial era familial elites desperately clinging to power and seeking ways to extend their collective reigns: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is positioning his son Gamal to succeed him; Syrian President Hafez Assad's son Bashar sits perched atop a creaky Alawite power structure. In Jordan, King Abdullah faces the daunting prospect of governing without the popularity and legitimacy of his father. In Bahrain, Sheik Hamad proclaimed himself King in an attempt to ensure that the Khalifa dynasty continues ruling over the island's restive Shiite majority in perpetuity. In Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah recently decreed that succession would be handled by an internal committee and that power would not necessarily pass directly to the next figure in the succession hierarchy. In Kuwait, succession in the Sabah family was handled with the constructive input of an increasingly assertive Kuwaiti parliament. The region's political uncertainty is unfolding against the backdrop of the chaos in Iraq. The political upheaval in Iraq threatens to disrupt the delicate balance between the rulers and ruled throughout the Middle East. While they all are far away from surrendering their hold on power, the events in Iraq and the vying for power of new actors throughout the region represent a challenge to the region's elites.

The Iraq invasion re-opened simmering sectarian fissures that had for the most part lain dormant during the 1990s and the era of U.S. containment in the Gulf. Political empowerment of Shites and Kurds in Iraq will have lasting implications in the region by re-igniting political aspirations within both groups across national borders.

Kurds in Iran and Turkey are already feeling the pull of the de facto Kurdish state that currently exists in northern Iraq. The armed Peshmurga today police the borders of the new Kurdistan, and the Kurds now have access to a portion of the oil sales revenues coming out of the fields near Kirkuk and Mosul. It is estimated

17 Vahd Nasr, "When the Shites Rise," *Foreign Affairs*, 85/58 (2006).

that oil reserves in northern Iraq total 48 billion barrels, with another 100 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The Kurdish Regional Government, (KRG) has already signed production sharing agreements with Norwegian and Turkish companies that are actively exploring for new wells in the Kurdish areas.<sup>18</sup> The KRG is treading delicately in its relationship with the Iraqi government in Baghdad, but there is little doubt in the region that, in political terms, the removal of Saddam has led to the Kurds finally achieving their centuries-old dreams of achieving political autonomy. A Kurdish state in northern Iraq represents a potential threat to Iran and Turkey, which both have sizable Kurdish populations. In July 2004, Iran and Turkey signed an agreement to cooperate in security matters relating to Kurdish separatist groups operating out of northern Iran. The agreement to cooperate against Kurdish groups comes amidst a growing Turkish-Iranian relationship that features the possible export of Iranian natural gas through Turkey to Europe.<sup>19</sup>

Political empowerment of the Shiite majority in Iraq following the removal of Saddam is also stirring Shiite political aspirations throughout the Gulf; they form the majority in Iran, Iraq and Bahrain, and have significant minorities in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon.<sup>20</sup> In December 2004, Jordan's King Abdullah voiced the concerns of the region's Sunni leaders when he warned of the possibility of a dominant Shiite crescent stretching from Iran through Iraq and Syria and into Lebanon.<sup>21</sup> The removal of Saddam revives the region's age-old religious rivalry between Shiites and Sunnis stretching back over the centuries. The triumph of the Baathists in Iraq during the 1960s and their rule during the next 40 years formed a critical component in the Sunni states' plans to keep Shiite influence bottled up in Iraq, giving them a free hand to manage their own Shiite minorities. The model of Iraqi democracy, which has given the political power to the Shiite majority, resonates powerfully within significant Shiite communities in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon.<sup>22</sup> Pilgrimages to the recently opened Shiite shrines in Najaf and Karbala have also invigorated the trans-national sense of Shiite religious identity and community that Saddam and the Sunni monarchies had long thwarted.<sup>23</sup>

18 "Who is to Control Kurdish Oil and Protect it From Sabotage?" *The Economist*, 28 September 2006, available at [http://www.economist.com/world/africa/PrinterFriendly.cfm?story\\_id=7971065](http://www.economist.com/world/africa/PrinterFriendly.cfm?story_id=7971065)

19 Details of the Iran-Turkey negotiations in Mervat Karik, "Turkey Treats Carefully in Negotiating an Energy Deal with Tehran," *Eurasia Insight*, 8 September 2006, available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eu090806.shtml>

20 Vali Nasr, "When the Shiites Rise"

21 Robin Wright and Peter Baker, "Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election From Iran," *Washington Post*, 8 December 2004, p. A01.

22 The impact in Bahrain is detailed in Hassan Fatah, "An Island Kingdom Feels the Ripples from Iraq and Iran," *New York Times*, 16 April 2006; also see Hasan Fatah, "Jordan Islamists Stir Tensions by Displaying Election Skills," *New York Times*, 12 May 2006. Developments in Kuwait are summarized by Mary Anne Tetrault, "Kuwait's Annus Mirabilis," *Middle East Report Online*, 6 September 2006, available at <http://www.merip.org/merip/mer090706.html>

23 These arguments are addressed in more detail in Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton 2006).

Empowerment of the Shiite communities and the increased pressure on the Sunni-led states also come at a time when a new caste of populist political leaders and Islamist-dominated associations are emerging region-wide to challenge the religious, age-based and familial hierarchies that dominate regional politics. Leaders like Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon, Ismail Haniyeh in the West Bank, and Muqtada Sadr in Iraq are the vanguard of new political and anti-democratic movements that are exerting authority through skillful grass roots politics backed by the point of a gun. These leaders are positioning themselves as alternatives to the familial and sectarian hierarchies that seized power with the departure of the colonial occupiers some 50 years ago. Importantly, below these visible figures are a variety of vibrant political associations in Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain and Yemen that are all mobilizing in order to exert power in the nascent democratic processes unfolding in these states. In Saudi Arabia, a group of once-dissident clerics has been re-admitted to mainstream society and actively participated in that country's municipal elections in early 2003.<sup>24</sup> Fiercy anti-U.S. clerics like Saifur al-Hawali have been permitted to join the process of political mobilization in the elections, which only confirmed the popularity of the religious conservatives at the local political level. Reflecting the Kingdom's changing domestic political landscape the regime stood by and allowed a group of clerics (including Hawali) in November 2004 to issue a fatwa urging support for jihadist forces inside Iraq. Region-wide political mobilization is being reinforced by the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, in which a variety of new actors are combining impressive organizational skills with Islamist and populist political rhetoric that melds Islamist political themes and historical narratives that feature resistance to the traditional powers and sources of authority and call to re-Islamize the society.

An important and complementary factor that accompanies the emergence of new political forces shaping the landscape is the arrival of a new generation of conventional weapons that allows non-state groups to establish so-called states-within-states and to challenge the established conventional military forces in the region. Shiite organizations like Hizbollah in Lebanon and the Mahdi Army in Sadr City are recent examples of this phenomenon. Both organizations have established states-within-states in their respective areas, combining political and military tools to exercise control. As Israeli and U.S. military forces have discovered much to their discomfort, lethal weapons like the RPG-29, anti-ship cruise missiles, advanced sniper rifles, remote piloted vehicles loaded with explosives, and new surface-to-surface rockets have increasingly provided insurgent and militia groups with dangerous new killing power. The Central Command's General John Abizaid told reporters in September 2006 that the new weapons provide an unwelcome "hint of things to come" in the already deadly military landscape.<sup>25</sup> Abizaid is clear about

24 Covered in *Gulf Arabia Reform Inside?*, International Crisis Group, 14 July 2004, available at [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle\\_east\\_north\\_africa/iraq\\_tam\\_gulf/28\\_gulf\\_arabia\\_reform\\_inside.cfm](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east_north_africa/iraq_tam_gulf/28_gulf_arabia_reform_inside.cfm)

25 As quoted in "New Weapons Turning Up on Midwest Battlefields: Abizaid," *Agence France-Press*, posted on the Defense News website, 19 September 2006, available at <http://www.defensenews.com/story.rnh?c=116336&c=1>

intra-regional cooperation between a variety of different groups that is spreading throughout the region: "There are clearly links between Lebanese Hizbollah training people in Iran to operate in Lebanon, and also training people in Iran that are Shia splinter groups that could operate against us in Iraq."<sup>26</sup> There have long been suspicions that Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps have been assisting insurgents and Shiite militias in fielding evermore deadly shaped-charge improvised explosive devices that are exacting a growing toll on the road-bound U.S. military in Iraq.<sup>27</sup> The U.S. M1A2 main battle tank, Marine Corps Amphibious Assault Vehicle, British armoured personnel carriers, and Israeli Merkava battle tanks have been destroyed by shaped-charge IED's and RPG-29s in the last 36 months.

The new generation of conventional weapons proved critical to Hizbollah's successful resistance against Israel's overwhelming conventional military power in Lebanon in August 2006. Hizbollah's organizational structure, featuring a decentralized command and control network with competent and innovative unit commanders, successfully executed a defence that countered Israeli-mounted infantry and armour and successfully struck an Israeli naval vessel.<sup>28</sup> Iraqi insurgents are also using similar asymmetric tactics against U.S. forces in Iraq, and many believe it is only a matter of time before the Shiite militias start to see their military capabilities grow with the new advanced weaponry.

It is no coincidence that this upsurge in regional military capabilities coincides with revelations that Russia has apparently abandoned its policy of restraining conventional arms transfers to Iran and developing nations around the world. According to the authoritative Congressional Research Service, "in recent years, Russian leaders have made major strides in providing more creative financing and payment options for prospective arms clients. They have also agreed to engage in counter-trade, offsets, debt-swapping, and, in key cases, to make significant licensed production agreements in order to sell its weapons."<sup>29</sup> Many of the new weapons in Hizbollah's arsenal, such as the RPG-29, are believed to have been originally sold by Russia or are being produced under license in Iran, which provided these weapons to its terrorist clients in Iraq and Lebanon.

This weaponry, combined with appropriate training and organizational skills, provides non-state actors like the Mahdi Army and Hizbollah with the ability to threaten all the conventional militaries of the region. Hizbollah has established effective local control throughout much of southern Lebanon, and Shiite militias have similarly established control over much of Baghdad and southern Iraq. In both

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Ware, "Inside Iran's Secret War for Iraq," *Time Magazine*, 15 August 2005; also, see Neil Aam "Shaped Bombs Magnify Iraq Attacks," *BBC News*, 10 November 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew McGregor, "Hizbollah's Tactics and Capabilities in Southern Lebanon," *Terrorism Focus* 3, no. 30 (August 2006), available at [http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/uploads/003\\_030.pdf](http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/uploads/003_030.pdf); also Nicholas Blanford, Daniel McCroory and Stephen Farrell, "Tactics That Have Kept the Most Powerful Middle East Army at Bay," *Times Online*, 10 August 2006, available at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,251-2306510,00.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Grimmett, *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations 1998-2005*, Congressional Research Service, Washington DC, 23 October 2006, pp. 1-11.

these cases, it is not clear that the central government authorities have the military capability to reassess control over these areas. For the Sunni-lead states in the Gulf and Levant, this is particularly troubling, given the history of conventional military incompetence throughout these states. Many states in the region have historically kept their conventional militaries weak in order to minimize the chances of internal coups coming out of the military. The new military power accruing to actors like Hizbollah provides these actors with a new bargaining leverage over internal political rivals as well as over the surrounding regional states.

The regional environment in the aftermath of the U.S. Iraq invasion suits Iranian interests and objectives. Iran's historical objectives of becoming the dominant regional political and military power have been realized. A comfortable political and military partnership appears to be emerging between the Shiite power structure in Najaf and Karbala with the Mullahs in Teheran. The U.S. military occupation of Iraq and the ongoing insurgency serve Iran's purposes in two ways. First, it ties down the United States militarily and reduces the coercive and deterrent leverage from its forward deployed forces. Instead of demonstrating resolve and strength as the neoconservatives had hoped, Iraq is demonstrating the limits of U.S. power and emboldens its adversaries. Second, the "slow bleed" of U.S. influence and military power in Iraq makes it more difficult for the United States to muster the political and military resources necessary to credibly threaten what looks like Iran's inexorable march towards a nuclear capability. Instead, the United States is forced to recognize Iran's dominant position. Iran now holds the keys to Iraq's future, not the United States. Iran is the new champion of regional political causes like the Arab-Israeli dispute. Where once Nasser and Saddam provided the main attraction, today, pictures of Iranian President Ahmadinejad and Hizbollah's Hassan Nasrallah dominate the Soaks of the Middle East.

### Today's Military Infrastructure

As Middle Eastern political leaders on the one hand consider the discombobulated political environment in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, they on the other hand see a robust and maturing set of U.S.-host nation military facilities that has grown significantly over the last 15 years. At the end of Gulf War I, the United States established Britain's concept of linked military installations, added headquarters elements and pre-positioned military equipment to a variety of facilities. Enabled by a series of bilateral defence cooperation agreements concluded between the United States and its regional partners, an overarching political and military framework emerged that saw a U.S. security blanket draped throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Mid-way through the 1990s, the United States had successfully pre-positioned three heavy brigade sets of military equipment in the region that formed the leading edge of the ground component that could be joined with air assets already in theater to counter conventional military threats to the peninsula. During the 1990s, the network of military facilities in Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Oman allowed the United States to operationalize the sanctions enforcement missions against Saddam. The infrastructure represented the literal representation of the security umbrella spread

by the United States over the Sunni monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula. By the end of the late 1990s, the infrastructure comprised the following main components:

- Central Command Naval Component, or NAVCENT, in Manama, Bahrain.
- Air Force Central Command Component, first at Eskan Village in Saudi Arabia before moving to Prince Sultan Air Base and then to Al Udeid in Qatar in August 2003.
- Army Central Command Component, Kuwait.
- Heavy Brigade sets of ground equipment in Qatar, Kuwait and abroad.
- Harvest Falcon Air Force equipment at Seeb in Oman.
- Aerial refueling detachment at Al Dhafra in the United Arab Emirates.

During the late 1990s, the digital revolution's benefits began seeping through into U.S. military operations throughout the world. Under the rubric of the so-called revolution in military affairs, digitized pictures of the land, sea, and air environments were piped into American military bases and those of their coalition partners. The creation of common operating pictures helped to build transparency and enhanced the situational awareness of coalition militaries throughout the Gulf. By the time of Gulf War II, the network had changed with the addition of a veritable alphabet's soup of new command elements, organizations and operational nodes:

- Combined Forces Command Afghanistan (CFC-A) in Kabul that works with NATO's International Security Assistance Force;
- Also in Afghanistan is the Combined Joint Task 76 that directs combat operations throughout Afghanistan;
- Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa in Djibouti (CJT-FHOA), which is assisting countries in the region to build indigenous counter-terrorist capabilities;
- Combined Joint Task Force 150 – a coalition maritime naval operation commanded by a revolving series of multi-national officers out of Manama, Bahrain that includes nine ships from seven countries performing maritime security in the Red Sea, Indian Ocean;
- Combined Forces Air Component Command's Combined Air Operations Center at Al Udeid, Qatar. This constitutes the Air Force's Central Command's forward deployed theater component;
- Central Command Forward Headquarters, (CENTCOM-FC) Camp As Sayliyah, Qatar, that is the leading edge of headquarters elements at Central Command's headquarters in MacDill Air Force Base, FL;
- Central Command Special Operations Headquarters (SOCCENT), Qatar, coordinates special operations in theater;
- Multi-National Forces Iraq (MNF-I) oversees all combat operations in Iraq.
- Multi-National Security Training Command – Iraq (MNSTC-I) that coordinates the program to train and equip Iraqi forces;
- NATO Training Mission – Iraq that focuses on developing the Iraqi officer corps
- Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), Kuwait, that

constitutions the Army's Central Command component that coordinates Army activity throughout the Central Command area of responsibility. CFLCC also maintains an area support group, or ASG, at Camp As Sayliyah in Qatar;

- Central Command Deployment and Distribution Center (CDDOC), Kuwait, that supports theater-wide logistics and information distribution;
- Information, Surveillance and Reconnaissance launch and recovery facility at Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates. This facility provides the Air Force Central Command Component with an operational and logistics hub to support theater-wide intelligence surveillance and collection with a variety of collection platforms.<sup>30</sup>

As was the case in Gulf War I, the infrastructure proved its use once again in the build-up and prosecution of the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2002 and 2003. The facilities provided the command elements to coordinate the forces in the region in the build-up to Gulf War II. Once the invasion started, these facilities provided command and control to the operational forces and coordinated the flow of information and materiel in support of combat operations.

The role of the Gulf infrastructure in using force in Iraq and Afghanistan may be a harbinger of things to come in other regions around the world. It seems clear that the basic outlines of the U.S. military footprint in the Gulf may be replicated elsewhere around the world. Various strategy documents highlight the growing importance of forward deployed forces to the U.S.' global security strategy. The Quadrennial Defense Review states: "Over time, U.S. forces will be tailored increasingly to maintain favorable regional balances in concert with U.S. allies and friends with the aim of swiftly defeating attacks with only modest reinforcements, and where necessary, assured access for follow-on forces."<sup>31</sup> A further goal for U.S. forces is to "increase the capability of its forward forces, thereby improving their deterrent effect and possibly allowing for a reallocation of forces now dedicated to reinforce other missions."<sup>32</sup> The National Military Strategy further stresses this point, noting that "Our primary line of defense remains well forward. Forces operating in key regions are essential to the defense of the United States and to the protection of allies and U.S. interests."<sup>33</sup>

At one point, the Gulf infrastructure provided the U.S. with the model to emulate around the world as it tried to realign its military forces around the globe in order

<sup>30</sup> List is derived from Statement of General John P. Abizaid, United States Army Commander, United States Central Command Before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the 2006 Posture of the United States Central Command, 14 March 2006. Al Dhafra detail is drawn from Department of Defense FY 2005 Supplemental Request for Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation United Assistance February 2005, available at [http://www.dod.mil/comptroller/defbudget/fy2006/fy2005\\_supp.pdf](http://www.dod.mil/comptroller/defbudget/fy2006/fy2005_supp.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, DC, 30 September 2001), p. 20.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Department of Defense, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2007: A Strategy for Today, A Vision for Tomorrow*, Joint Chiefs of Staff (Washington, DC, [document is undated]), p. 9.

to better address threats associated with the so-called war on terrorism. The Bush Administration's vision called for a series of new military facilities around the world to operationalize its aggressive new strategy. As noted by the former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Doug Feith, "Key premises underlying our forward posture have changed fundamentally: We no longer expect our forces to fight in place; rather, their purpose is to project power into theaters that may be distant from their bases."<sup>34</sup> The new infrastructure in the Gulf provided the United States with the ideal platform from which to project power to the centre of the so-called "arc of crisis" that is regarded by Pentagon strategists as the primary problem facing U.S. security strategy in the 21st century. Force can be projected both within the immediate environs of the arc but also outside the arc from Gulf bases, complementing the emerging global strike assets that are based in the United States.

In its March 2005 report *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, the Bush Administration spelled out a new scheme of supporting forward operations throughout the arc of instability. The report called for a new global posture that featured main operating bases (MOB), forward operating sites (FOS), and a "diverse array of more austere cooperative security locations." (CSL.) These facilities are intended to be linked and mutually supportive. Main operating bases – like the facility at Al Udeid, for example, are well-developed with sufficient infrastructures to support large numbers of forces and to receive even larger numbers in times of crisis. Forward operating sites were identified as "...scalable, 'warm', facilities intended for rotational use by operational forces. They often house prepositioned equipment and a modest permanent support presence. FOSs are able to support a range of military activities on short notice."<sup>35</sup> The vision of U.S. power projection called for a new, networked scheme of forward operating areas spread throughout the arc of instability from the main operating areas in the Gulf.

To realize this vision, the United States has showered the region with military construction projects in order to support the ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan:

- In October 2004, as part of supplemental appropriations to fund ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Congress earmarked \$63 million in military construction funds for improvements at the Al Dhafra airfield in the United Emirates, which accommodated a United States Air Force aerial refueling detachment during the 1990s and now hosts an information, surveillance, and reconnaissance launch and recovery facility.
- The same bill contained \$60 million to fund additional enhancements to the Al Udeid airfield in Qatar.
- In Afghanistan, the United States is spending \$83 million to upgrade its two main bases at Bagram Air Base (north of Kabul) and Kandahar Air Field

<sup>34</sup> Remarks by Douglas J. Feith, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, "Transforming the U.S. Global Defense Posture," 3 December 2003, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C.

<sup>35</sup> Department of Defense, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., March 2005), pp. 19-20.

in the south.<sup>36</sup> The funding will be used for expanding runways and other improvements to provide new billeting facilities for U.S. military personnel.

- The expansion of the facilities infrastructure in Afghanistan has been mirrored with the development of facilities and solidified politico-military partnerships in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.<sup>37</sup>
- In early 2006, Congress approved \$413.4 million for Army military construction projects in Iraq and Afghanistan through 2010. The same bill funded \$36 million for Air Force construction projects in these countries.
- In Iraq, the United States has so far spent an estimated \$240 million on construction at the Balad base (north of Baghdad), the main air transportation and supply hub; \$46.3 million at Al Asad, the largest military air centre and major supply base for troops in Al Anbar; \$121 million at Tallil air base (southern Iraq). Other projects include \$49.6 million for Camp Taji located just 20 miles northwest of Baghdad; \$165 million to build an Iraqi Army base near the southern town of Nunnay; \$150 million for the Iraqi Army Al Kasik base north of Mosul.<sup>38</sup>

#### A Political-Military Disconnect in the Gulf?

The relevance of the expanded network of facilities in the Gulf and Central Asia to the regional security is questionable. It reflects a mismatch between the military capabilities being built and the regional environment in which the capabilities are meant to be used. The emerging facilities infrastructure is built on the premise that the United States needs to perform two basic military missions: (1) flow of large numbers of conventional forces into the region and (2) address regional contingencies with forward deployed forces on short notice with special operations forces and weapons platforms capable of standoff precision strikes. For the regional elites, the facilities are intended to: (1) protect them from coercive external threats; and (2) remind internal opponents of the regime's powerful friends. While the dynamics of the Iraq invasion has created a political environment in which it is dangerous for the regional elites to be seen as publicly tied and beholden to the United States, the environment raises doubts over whether the United States can realistically

<sup>36</sup> "U.S. Invests in Upgrades of Afghanistan Bases," *Associated Press*, 28 March 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Good treatment of the growing U.S. security partnerships in Central Asia is contained in Ian Berman, "The New Battleground: Central Asia and the Caucasus," *The Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2004-05).

<sup>38</sup> Figures drawn from Becky Branford, "Iraq Bases Spur Questions Over US Plans," *BBC News*, 30 March 2006, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4834032.stm>; Peter Spiegel, "Bush's Requests for Iraqi Bases Funding Make Some War of Extended Stay," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 March 2006; Charles Hanley, "How Long Does the U.S. Plan to Stay in Iraq," *Associated Press*, 20 March 2006, available at <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=1746987>; also see Walter Posch, "Staying the Course: Permanent U.S. Bases in Iraq," *Middle East Policy*, 13 (Fall 2006), pp. 100-106.

expect to use the facilities infrastructure to perform its two primary missions for the foreseeable future.

A test case for the United States emerged in early 2007 as a result of the unfolding crisis over Iran's nuclear program and rumours of military plans for an extended bombardment of Iran's nuclear sites.<sup>39</sup> The military infrastructure in the Gulf would be critical to mounting any sustained operations to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities that are reportedly widely dispersed throughout the country. In early 2007, it remained unclear whether the Gulf States would allow the use of facilities on their soil to support U.S. military strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities. Qatari First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jasssem bin Jabor Al Thani told reporters in March 2007 that "We will not participate by any means to harm Iran from Qatar," though he refused to indicate whether Qatar was effectively vetoing the use of Al Udeid Air Base or the Central Command's headquarters in any Iranian operations.

It remains to be seen whether and/or how the Gulf States will deal with their ambivalence over the U.S. military footprint. The regimes fear the prospect of a politically ascendant and a potentially nuclear armed Iran and see the U.S. military presence as a powerful tool to resist Iranian attempts to operationalize a coercive political framework throughout the region. But the regimes equally fear the creation of domestic political dynamics that are increasingly hostile to the United States and which by necessity must force them to publicly distance themselves from their erstwhile protector. Some of the region's elite are better positioned to resist internal political pressures than others. The al Nahyan's in the United Arab Emirates, for example, face no serious opposition or internal political pressure to reduce their ties with the United States. Hence, the U.S. operations at Al Dhafra Air Base apparently remain safe for the time being. But in other Gulf States, such as Bahrain and Kuwait, changing internal political dynamics may force the regimes to start pressuring the United States to reduce their military footprint. The wild card and lynchpin for the regional base structure is in Iraq, where the United States has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in new military facilities. Given what is an untenable long-term military situation, it appears inevitable that a phased U.S. withdrawal will come in the next several years, pressured by the Iraqis and domestic public opinion in the United States. It is unclear whether any Iraqi government will acquiesce to a long-term, foreign military presence in the new bases being built at Balad and elsewhere.

The political-military disconnect, it must be said, also exists in the United States. The quiescent domestic political environment of the 1990s that had permitted the United States to quietly develop its regional military infrastructure has been transformed by the Iraq War and the so-called war on terrorism. U.S. political relationships with the Gulf State elites that had been conducted quietly and with little fanfare during the 1990s are today being subjected to new scrutiny in the Press and in Congress.

## Conclusion

The dynamic regional environment emerging in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion could represent a watershed for the Gulf military base structure that continues to be populated with ever-more and new staffs and organizational structures. While the concrete jungle that continues to sprout from the sands of the Persian Gulf might have made Sir Hugh Trenhard proud, it is not clear whether the network of military facilities will be of much future use in preserving future regional security and stability. If Iraq proves to be a precursor to a prolonged period of strategic instability as new actors vie for political power throughout the region, the facilities infrastructure established by the British and passed on to the United States may prove to be casualty of this process. Such an environment suggests that externally-applied military power via forward-based ground presence will prove to be of decreasing importance and may well be politically untenable for the regional elites. This does not mean that the United States will have no tools at its disposal to project military power and influence. The end result of the coming regional upheavals and the pressure this will place on the ground-based military presence means that the United States Navy may once again reign supreme, projecting power and influence on an episodic basis from the sea. Should such a scenario unfold, the next generation of U.S. naval officers can rest assured that their career paths will in fact remain consistent with their forefathers and that carrier battle groups and expeditionary strike groups will continue to make their way to the Persian Gulf.

<sup>39</sup> General outline of the plan is indicated in "US Attack Plans Revealed," *BBC News Online*, February 20, 2007, available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6376639.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6376639.stm).