

A region of constant conflict, the Middle East is of primary concern in the foreign policy of the United States. With a new administration about to enter office, a fleeting window of opportunity exists in which President-elect Barack Obama can efficiently change the perception of the United States and achieve a stable and balanced Persian Gulf region. At the forefront of the issues facing America is Iraq, the President-elect's first foreign-policy crucible and perhaps his greatest challenge. In addition, achieving a peaceful and cooperative relationship with Iran and Saudi Arabia, two of the most powerful countries in the Middle East, will be a very challenging task.

Physical security, economic security, and the promotion of diplomacy are critical within Iraq. Currently, there are five provinces that are still transitioning towards Iraqi control, an important benchmark for US efforts toward stability. As the remaining provinces transition, American forces will be able to gradually withdraw without a specific timeline in mind. However, these forces are currently required for non-lethal infrastructure development and security. A major point for economic development in Iraq is the accurate measure of GDP within an informal market. American methods should not be imposed, but recording business transactions will give legitimacy to the economy. In turn, using Iraqi bonds to maintain and increase foreign investment, as well as industrial development using their oil resources will bolster the economy. Finally, domestic and regional involvement in diplomacy is critical. The start to diplomacy should be small in scale and Iraqi-run with the goal of uniting sects under the common goal of Iraq's development. It is crucial that these groups meet frequently and maintain a strong relationship. The possible risks that the US will face in Iraq include sectarian violence and the start of a civil war, as well as a failure of the Iraqi government leading to Saudi or Iranian dominance.

The major goal for US policy in Iran is the expansion of diplomatic ties. This will be achieved by first removing the Revolutionary Guard from the terrorist list and expressing the willingness to lift some sanctions for economic incentives and nuclear program cooperation. Opening a dialogue with a presidential meeting, focusing on the change of rhetoric towards cooperation over directives, will change the face of the US and allow further diplomacy. Within such meetings, the US should express the allowance of a peaceful nuclear program for energy under IAEA observation. Furthermore, Russia and the EU should be involved as intermediaries and Israel should be informed of what is happening, given their large stake in the region. The US should also seek Iranian cooperation on Iraqi border security and the control of traffic between the two countries. Of course, the US faces the risk of rejection by Iran and a shift of US ties to Saudi Arabia and Israel when generous foreign policy is conducted in Iran. Also, Iran possibly developing nuclear weapons in spite of US discouragement would upset the careful balance in the region.

In the near future, America's relationship with Saudi Arabia should be focused on maintaining overall stability and the current political alliance. This can best be achieved, first and foremost, by

maintaining the status quo. Currently, the United States has relatively good relations with OPEC and the Gulf Cooperation Council. The recent arrest and trial of almost 1000 militants within Saudi Arabia, and America's current military relationship with the monarchy via training and equipment supply is indicative of the bond that the United States ought to pursue. Concurrent with these public measures, America must also be cognizant of Saudi Arabia's sovereignty and be wary of delegitimizing the government in the eyes of other states in the region and internal groups skeptical of the House of Saud's right to govern. Moreover, America ought to show appreciation for the Saudi's efforts by applauding their accomplishments and continuously supplying reassurance while bearing in mind the importance of "saving face" in an Arabian culture. On the subject of Iraq, involvement of Saudi Arabia in negotiations is fundamental to success. General David Petraeus' successful strategy in Al-Anbar province, and the relative calm in Iraq's "Sunni Triangle," owes much to the patience of Iraq's Sunni population. If America offers Saudi Arabia a stake in the peaceful future of Iraq, the monarchy can do nothing but benefit from their neighbors stability and prosperity. On the matter of human rights, America ought to work through international organizations to promote the welfare of citizens. This strategy provides the double benefit of pressuring the monarchy, as well as preserving the legitimacy of any organizations used in this goal such as the UN. There are several significant dangers associated with this policy. First, America's plan for promoting human rights in Saudi Arabia risks being perceived as hypocrisy because of its slow and muted nature relative to any unilateral criticism of the monarchy. In addition, Saudi corruption and reliance on oil encourages the fragility of the state. Perhaps the greatest danger with this policy is inordinately bolstering Saudi Arabia relative to Iran and thereby creating a bipolar region that threatens the stability of the Persian Gulf states with conflict. Nevertheless, the cautious application of various measures through this policy offers a good chance of maintaining stability in the Kingdom and its neighbors.

Within the next four years, President-elect Barack Obama will undoubtedly face great challenges originating from the Persian Gulf states. The application of a comprehensive, flexible, and well thought-out strategy which balances America's use of diplomacy, military force, economics, and information is critical to dealing with these challenges, be they expected or unexpected. The policy enumerated in this paper presents the new administration with an opportunity to redefine America's presence in the Persian Gulf and move this region towards peace and prosperity.