

SCUSA 60 THEME:
“MEASURING PROGRESS AND DEFINING NEW CHALLENGES”

THE MIDDLE EAST: GULF STATES

This region represents a perennial challenge to the United States because of the extraordinary geostrategic importance of the resources present in the various nations surrounding this body of water. The U.S. military presence in Iraq, maintained at significant cost in blood and treasure, has attained a level of stability not seen since the opening days of war. The ground gained against the insurgency must be maintained and a proper balance of troops must be determined so as not to lose the initiative. The continued tension in the U.S. standoff with Iran over its nuclear ambitions and its alleged involvement in Iraq’s internal problems continue to bedevil US policy makers. The problems in Iraq and with Iran seem to place an even greater premium on the long term stability of key Gulf States such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar, emphasizing the need to maintain strong security cooperation even with regimes that clearly do not embrace our liberal values. Should Washington abandon its advocacy of democracy in order to pursue its traditional understanding of security in the region? What path should the United States pursue when it embraces two goals seemingly at odds with each other?

Regional Security

The Persian Gulf is home to over half of the world’s proven oil reserves and has the capacity to influence world oil prices by simply increasing production. There is also over 40 percent of the world’s natural gas located in the region most of which is controlled by Iran and Qatar. The security of this global commodity is of intense interest to the United States. Currently, the U.S. Fifth Fleet is headquartered in Bahrain and there is a large U.S. Air Force presence in Qatar. These tiny nations with massive oil revenues rely on the US to provide for their security. This relationship, though, is not without issues. Iran views itself as a regional power and is not interested in competing with the United States for regional hegemony, a role they feel they naturally fill. The southern gulf nations cannot defend themselves against Iran even if they use their oil resources to create military forces. While the Gulf Cooperation Council has been effective in resolving issues among the Gulf principalities it has not proven to be an effective collective security mechanism.

Issues for Discussion

- What should be the US role in the Persian Gulf from a security standpoint?
- Should the US support the transition of the GCC to a collective security organization and, if so, should the US be involved in that Council as a regional partner?
- What are the regional threats to the free movement of oil and natural gas from the Gulf region?

Iraq

Overview

President Bush has made it clear that the U.S. has a long-term commitment to Iraq. The current strategy seeks to build a federal system with a moderately strong central government and semi-autonomous regions. Focus at the national level has centered on rebuilding the Iraqi Security Forces to enable them to establish order in the country and pressure various political factions to compromise on such key issues as oil-revenue sharing. Simultaneously, Washington has pushed the government in Baghdad to modernize Iraq's oil infrastructure to provide the fledgling government with a stable source of revenue. The hope and expectation of the Bush administration is that a strong, democratic Iraq can eventually take shape, and that it will act as a key ally in the region.

US Military presence in Iraq

Currently the United States has approximately 160,000 troops stationed in Iraq conducting a variety of missions as part of a surge of forces intended to pacify strategic portions of the state, starting in Baghdad. The size of the American force will be increasingly difficult to maintain in the face of growing domestic pressure in the United States to withdraw American combat troops. Yet the Iraqi military is not ready to stand on its own and conduct counter-insurgency operations independently. The sectarian nature of the conflict has led some knowledgeable observers to suggest that the nation is now tipping into a civil war and that the U.S. presence is a fragile lid on an inevitable conflagration. One must also consider the regional impact of this massive American presence.

Iraqi Government Reform

The US commander, GEN Raymond Odierno and his predecessor, GEN David Petraeus, have increased the tempo of US offensive operations to counter the threat from Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and sectarian militias. This strategy is coupled with efforts to cooperate with Sunni tribes in Anbar province and elsewhere in order to rein in sectarian violence and eliminate AQI's operations. By focusing locally, the U.S. hopes to increase the legitimacy of the central government which Washington is pressing to inaugurate "national reconciliation" through legislation that will presumably allow for the equitable sharing of power and resources. Yet this local strategy, by empowering previously weakened Sunni groups, may have the unintended consequence of sowing the seeds of regionalism, civil war, or perhaps separatism.

External Issues

The idea of partitioning Iraq into regions based on Sunni, Shia and Kurdish populations has been proposed as a means to end relatively peacefully the sectarian violence in Iraq. For some analysts, the merits of this proposal are offset by the strong possibility that it will promote regional instability and conflict. An independent Shia southern Iraq would develop strong ties with Shia Iran, encouraging the growth of a "Shia Crescent" in the Middle East – fomenting tensions between Shia and Sunni governments in the region. A new Sunni state in former Iraq would be crippled from a lack of natural resources – particularly oil – and would rely on neighbors, specifically Saudi Arabia, for extensive assistance. An independent Kurdish state in

the north would have both Iran and Turkey concerned over the possibility of agitation among their large Kurdish minorities for reunion with their brethren across the border.

Issues for Discussion

- How much longer can the United States maintain the “surge” of its military forces in Iraq? Is the “surge” achieving a measure of success? In this context, how do we define success?
- Is the elected Iraqi government taking advantage of the increased numbers of US troops to improve the effectiveness of their security forces?
- Can the US government effectively influence the Iraqi government to forge national reconciliation legislation?
- Will the U.S. electorate support a long-term, large-scale troop presence in the region? Will the Iraqis, as a whole or along sectarian lines?
- What goals should the U.S. prioritize in its long-term strategy for Iraq?
- What are the implications of the current short-term strategy on those priorities (combating sectarian violence and AQI through the use of a “surge”)?
- Is a unified Iraq a realistic and sustainable goal?
- What are the consequences of a full or partial withdrawal of US forces?
- What are the regional considerations of rising Kurdish nationalism?

Iran

Overview

The U.S. continues to be concerned about Iran’s foreign and domestic policies. In the past Washington has accused Iran of supporting attacks on American servicemen in Iraq through the supply of weapons and explosives to insurgents, and of providing political and material support to Iraqi political parties opposed to the U.S. occupation. For its part, the United States leads the international opposition to Iran’s ambitions to develop its nuclear capabilities, perhaps for the purpose of creating a nuclear arsenal. American foreign policy, therefore, seeks to induce Iran to forego its nuclear program, end its sponsorship of terrorism, and cease its interference in Iraqi domestic politics. These daunting objectives, like the problems they address, are deeply intertwined. For its part, Iran sees itself as a regional power facing a potential enemy (the United States) that is now deployed in two countries on its borders, Iraq and Afghanistan, and in the Persian Gulf. Washington must take the Iranian worldview into account if it hopes to craft effective foreign policies that address its three major sources of concern in its relations with Iran.

Nuclear Proliferation

The standoff between the international community and Iran over Teheran’s nuclear program has become more complicated as Iran’s influence grows in the region. Options that have been considered in the past have ranged from military actions in various forms, to economic sanctions, to full diplomatic engagement with cooperative technological exchange. Despite (or perhaps due to) this spectrum of choice, little international consensus has emerged on how to deal with Iranian nuclear ambitions. Iran claims that it has over 3000 centrifuges operating and

has tested the Shahab-3 missile, a potential delivery system for nuclear weapons capable of striking Israel. The Gulf Cooperation Council has offered to provide enriched uranium to Iran, an offer Iran may be interested in but has not stopped their enrichment program. A number of questions help to frame the debate over policy priorities in relation to Iran:

- What are the perceived consequences of a nuclear Iran?
- What are the realistic options for the U.S in dealing with Iran's nuclear ambitions?
- What are the regional effects of the nuclear stand-off and how does it hurt or help U.S. foreign policy on other regional issues?
- How strong is the international consensus in opposing Iran's nuclear program? How might the United States prevent the defection of states like Russia and China?

State Sponsorship of Terrorism

A brief note of caution and explanation would seem prudent at this point. Many objective observers do not consider Hizb'allah to be a terrorist organization. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this conference, which is to frame U.S foreign policy priorities, this paper will conform to the list of terrorist organizations used by the U.S. State Department which includes Hizb'allah.

Although several Arab regimes, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt, initially criticized Hizb'allah's attack on Israel in the summer of 2006, Iran never wavered in its support of the organization. In the aftermath, as the UN debated and temporized, Hizb'allah quickly and effectively began reconstruction efforts in Southern Lebanon. This recent conflict and its consequences delivered a powerful blow against Arab nationalism. Many in the Middle East believe that Hizb'allah achieved what numerous Arab regimes acting in concert had failed to accomplish over the last 50 years: confronting Israel and winning. Iran's support of Hizb'allah throughout this crisis has bolstered its prestige and power in the region.

The optimism in Lebanon created by the withdrawal of Syrian forces has now dissipated and it seems little can be done to block Iranian support for Hizb'allah. If the Lebanese government lacks the capacity and authority to govern the country effectively, the appeal and influence of Hizb'allah will increase in Lebanese politics.

A few key questions emerge from this brief assessment:

- What are the consequences for the United States of a newly empowered Hizb'allah in Lebanon?
- What should the priorities of the U.S. be in addressing this issue?
- What are the regional effects of the recent conflict between Israel and Hizb'allah, particularly in terms of U.S policy and interests?
- What does the prominence of Hizb'allah in the elected parliament say about U.S. policy in the region?

Involvement in Iraq's Internal Affairs

Iran's influence in Iraq can be seen on many levels. Iranian President Ahmadinejad made an historic visit to Iraq in March, 2008. There is burgeoning trade and Iranian-financed public works projects. Growing ranks of Iranian Shiites are making the pilgrimage to holy places in An-Najaf and Karbala, and Iran has financed the construction of several large mosques in those

areas. Iran enjoys demonstrable influence with multiple factions within the Shiite political sphere, ranging from the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) to Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al'Mahdi Army. Some questions that are relevant to setting U.S. priorities in this area are:

- How can Washington engage Teheran on improving border security between Iran and Iraq while still confronting the Iranian leadership on the issues of nuclear proliferation and state sponsorship of terrorism?
- Exactly how does our commitment to a successful outcome in Iraq (however defined) limit our options in dealing with Iran?
- What are the effects of growing Iranian regional influence in the wake of the conflict with Israel and Hizb'allah and the "Shia revival" that seems to be taking place in the region (in Shia communities within Southern Iraq, Bahrain, UAE and Qatar)?

Saudi Arabia

The complex and often contradictory nature of U.S. foreign goals is nowhere more visible than in the U.S. – Saudi relationship. Although the U.S. needs stable partners in the Gulf area, the viable partners in the region are also potential targets for U.S. pressure to liberalize if not democratize their polities. The House of Saud exemplifies the dilemma faced by American foreign policy.

Should we continue to support a security relationship with the al-Saud government, building its capacity for counterterrorism operations and pressing it to combat violent Islamic extremism? What are the carrots and sticks available to the United States to encourage Riyadh to move in the direction of authentic liberalization? What areas of liberalization, or perhaps even democratization, should Washington stress? Should the US re-structure its program for training and equipping Saudi forces to serve as an incentive for measured political reform? Similarly, should the U.S. continue to encourage the Saudis to institute stronger financial controls over religious/charitable organizations and the national banking system in order to monitor and disrupt terrorist financing? The Saudis would reap many benefits from US assistance in continuing the modernization of their banking system and the US would benefit greatly from increased financial oversight of Saudi charities.

- How should the U.S frame its security and political policy towards Saudi Arabia?
- To what extent can the U.S. influence political reforms in Saudi Arabia?
- Does the importance of maintaining oil supplies and a stable government outweigh the democratization imperative?
- Is Saudi Arabia the best choice for a security partner in the Persian Gulf region? Are there other options that should be considered?
- What are the potential, long-term regional impacts if Saudi Arabia becomes unstable due to too much or too little political reform?

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