



Brandeis University

Crown Center
for Middle East Studies

Mailstop 010
Waltham, Massachusetts
02454-9110

781-736-5320
781-736-5324 Fax
www.brandeis.edu/centers/crown/

Judith and Sidney Swartz Director
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Associate Director
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Postdoctoral Fellows
Banu Eligür, Ph.D.
Naghmeleh Sohrabi, Ph.D.

Middle East Brief

From Deterrence to Legitimacy: A Proposed Shift in U.S. Policy in the Middle East

Dr. Abdel Monem Said Aly

The United States is in dire need of reassessing its policies in the Middle East.¹ The report of the Iraq Study Group, headed by former Congressman Lee Hamilton and former Secretary of State James Baker, was an Iraqi-centered attempt to repair America's standing in the Middle East.² The United States is in urgent need of a much more comprehensive approach to the region, however—an approach that includes a proper treatment of the Iraq issue, but is not framed and dictated by it. This is because the current difficulties and failures experienced by the United States in Iraq are merely part of the broader problems confronting America's regional and global postures and cannot be separated from them.

The harvest of U.S. policies since the horrific terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, has not been promising, neither in the context of the efforts to win the war on terror nor as a means of advancing U.S. and Western interests in the region. Different indicators and methods of assessment point to the continuous deterioration of conditions in Afghanistan and Iraq, as both countries have become increasingly radicalized and infested with terrorism. The gulf between the West—and the U.S. in particular—and the Arab and Islamic countries is widening.

A review of events in 2006 alone demonstrates that the early optimistic evaluation of the elections held in Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, and Kuwait turned out to be premature and unwarranted. In all four cases, the actual electoral outcome has increased the strength of Islamic fundamentalist forces at the expense of liberal and secular parties. On June 25, 2006, a mini-war erupted in the Palestinian territories as Israeli forces returned to Gaza, less than a year after Israel disengaged from the area. And on July 12, 2006, following a cross-border incursion by Hezbollah, Israel launched a major military operation against Lebanon—a war that lasted 34 days and threatened to escalate into an even

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Abdel Monem Said Aly is Director of the Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo, Egypt and a Senior Fellow at the Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University.

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broader confrontation with Syria, and possibly with Iran as well. In a sense, the sixth Arab–Israeli war proved to be much more than simply another Arab–Israeli confrontation. From Hezbollah’s side it may have been seen as part of a much larger counteroffensive vis-à-vis the U.S. war on terror; from the Israeli side, as part of a broader confrontation with fundamentalist Islam.

Indeed, the post–September 11 war on terror seems to have expanded from Afghanistan to the shores of the Philippines, and from Palestine, through Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, to Iran. The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the nuclearization of Iran, the fundamentalist resistance and terror in Iraq, the winning of elections by Hamas in Palestine and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the triumph of the Sharia courts’ forces in Somalia before they were toppled by Ethiopian forces, and the resurgence of al-Qaeda terror types and groups in Egypt and Algeria—all have been part of this expansion. The war waged last summer by Hezbollah, and its perceived victory in the eyes of the Arab and Islamic publics, was thus merely one dimension of a much broader phenomenon.

When on September 20, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI quoted a “Persian philosopher” regarding the aggressive nature of Islam and its contradiction with reason, he opened the gates to a confrontation that continues to simmer—one that involves questions about the Crusaders and the Conquistadors who fought in the name of Christianity and Islam, respectively. Only nine days earlier, the fifth anniversary of the September 11th attacks was commemorated. The “war on terror” that followed those attacks—first in Afghanistan, then in Iraq, and then against fundamentalist Islam as a whole—has overshadowed all other aspects of highly complicated issues. Thus, Islam—or at least Islamic fundamentalism—has become the central focus of international relations, much as Communism was during the Cold War era.

Slightly less than a year before the Pope’s statement, on September 30, 2005, the world had witnessed the Danish cartoon affair—a development that seemed to validate the so-called “clash of civilizations.” Why did a cartoon in an obscure newspaper of a small country result in such havoc, motivating demonstrations, violence, and the burning of embassies in a number of Arab and Islamic countries? During the months that followed, the United States and Europe were busy with attempts to address the political and strategic implications of this affair.

In all these episodes, the United States was confronting not state actors but rather a mixture of states, political movements, and terrorist organizations—along with broad sentiments of rejection and hatred of the West in general, and of the U.S. in particular. What these separate events had in common was the involvement, in one form or another, of Islamic fundamentalism, engaging in a mode of political behavior antagonistic to U.S. interests and Western thought. In some sense, Islamic fundamentalism, in its different faces, questions the merits and justification of U.S. and Western hegemony over world affairs, with particular focus on the Middle East. And what all these episodes reveal is that a reexamination and reassessment of U.S. strategy must begin with a better understanding of America’s adversaries.

Understanding the Other Side: From Communism to Islamic Fundamentalism

Islamic fundamentalism is the most recent of the ideologies that have sought to challenge the supremacy of the West in world politics. Fascism and Communism presented similar challenges during the twentieth century. Both were proposed by states and movements that offered themselves as alternatives to Western liberal ideologies. Communism was the later of these, embodied in a superpower—the

Soviet Union—and a bloc of states that attempted to enlarge its domain from Europe to Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Communism was viewed as a moral cause, inspiring people to fight and die on its behalf. The movement protested an unjust world—and justice, particularly social justice, was its banner. In reality, however, the idea became an ideology, and the ideology represented political interests to a far greater degree than it championed the basic needs of human beings. Thus, the road to dictatorship and tyranny was paved with good intentions.

Far from monolithic, Communism turned out to be a diversified phenomenon. States like the Soviet Union, China, Yugoslavia, Albania, Vietnam, and Romania followed different varieties of Communist rule. Some Communists, particularly in Western Europe, genuinely believed in democracy. Others employed violence and terror. Most of the terrorist organizations of the 1960s and 1970s were related to Communist movements; some were Leninists, others Trotskyists and Maoists.

Unlike fascism, Communism was not defeated in war but rather overthrown as a result of a complex set of policies that revealed the fallacy of the idea itself, and its intrinsic contradictions. The basic American and Western strategy to confront Communism involved a complex mix of military, political, economic, and ideological components. But at its core, the strategy revolved around the concept of deterrence. The ability to punish was deemed sufficient for containing and, later, rolling back Communism: from its ambition to advance globally, to a presence restricted to just a few countries.

The Faces of Islamic Fundamentalism

Islamic fundamentalism is different in many ways from both fascism and Communism. The latter two were products of Western civilizations; Islamic fundamentalism is not. Fascism and Communism were products of advanced industrial societies in the North; Islamic fundamentalism is a product of the less developed countries in the South. Fascism and Communism attempted to address the realities of the present day; Islamic fundamentalism addresses both the present day and “the day after.” Fascism and Communism attempted to build states that would be powerful enough to challenge the existing world order; they found in Russia, Germany, Japan, and Italy bastions of expansion. By contrast, Islamic fundamentalism found its opportunity in the global Islamic umma—the **community of the faithful**. Fascism and Communism were outgrowths of the industrial age; Islamic fundamentalism is a by-product of the global age.

Despite these differences, however, the similarities among all three movements are striking. Islamic fundamentalism

has an ideal notion of man, as a being who can achieve salvation in life and death through a religion—Islam—that is free of all forms of human distortion. This idea will guide men—Muslims in particular—to the true path, along which God provides mercy and compassion. The “heavenly idea” appeared prior to man and should guide and control his path from the present to the future. The heavenly idea, therefore, precedes politics; it is not the product of a political process.

Since the heavenly idea appeared prior to man, and man thereafter became corrupted by politics, economics, and Western influence, it is essential, according to Islamic fundamentalism, to create a new “faithful man.” He is to be a variation of the Warrior in Spartan politics, “the new man” and “the reborn” in other totalitarian systems. He has only one purpose: to serve God and his word. Accordingly, Islamic fundamentalist organizations work hard to isolate individuals from their society, from the media, and from their work environment. In some cases, they take would-be Muslims to the desert, or to caves, to live and train. This occurs in the course of a meticulous process of religious practice, embracing the creation of a fear of sin and of severe punishment in the afterlife. Accordingly, books supplied to these individuals portray death, and the torment and agony to be faced after death, in great detail.

Understood within this context, Islamic fundamentalism is an alternative to politics, particularly in Arab and Islamic countries. In these countries, a struggle among three competing paradigms for change can be detected. Each of these proposes a different view of the directions, goals, and methods that the political community should follow. The first is the *bureaucratic* paradigm. It is represented by the state, sometimes by a ruling party, and always by bureaucrats whose numbers make them the largest political party or interest group, regardless of the precise character of the state’s political system: socialist or capitalist, royalist or republican, oil-producing or non-oil-producing.

The bureaucrats’ goal is the protection of the political community. They are the nationalists—the guardians of the state against threats from within and without. For them, the state is an objective, organic, and natural being, which cares for the poor and the less fortunate. For them, change means the consolidation of state power in order to protect and to defend. Reform is aimed at making the state more powerful and capable of leading and guiding.

The second is the *democratic* paradigm. It is represented by pre-1950s liberals, the globalized intelligentsia, the business community, the growing middle class, the media, and modern civil society. Democrats favor increasing citizens’ opportunities and choices with respect to planning and participating in their present and future. The polity is

designed to help individual citizens pursue happiness on equal terms.

The third is the *theocratic*, or Islamic fundamentalist, paradigm. It is represented by several political and religious movements that range from the traditional to the modern, from the moderate to the radical, and from the Muslim Brotherhood to al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups. For all these movements, the goal of the polity is salvation, the protection of the faith, and the implementation of God’s word: the sharia. The tools proposed to achieve this goal vary “from ballots to bullets.”

Islamic fundamentalism, like Communism, is diversified. It is not the religion of Islam; rather, it represents a political expression of militancy and a literal interpretation of the sacred texts of the Islamic faith. Thus, fundamentalists are not merely Muslims who adhere to the religion and tenets of Islam; rather, they are political activists who use politics to advance socioeconomic interests by enlisting the cause and mission of an “Islamic” ideology. They have come to power in a number of countries—Sudan, Afghanistan, and Iran—and are present as political movements and parties, of the Sunni or Shia variety, in others.

In a typical Muslim country or community, Islamic fundamentalism assumes the following expressions:

- *The religiosity of the population* undergoes a sharp increase, manifested not only in religious practice, such as praying and fasting, but also in a greater role for religion in determining social and political matters. In practice, the society becomes less tolerant of other ideas, as well as of minorities and women.
- *The religious establishment* (for example, Al-Azhar in Egypt) becomes less dependent on the government and adopts more conservative views. In most Muslim countries, large numbers of religious personalities served a tour of duty in the Gulf region, where they earned money—and, thereby, independence—and adopted conservative Wahabi views. Their propensity to express

religious views on all aspects of life increased with the expansion of region-wide Arab media.

- *Muslim Brothers* are the mainstream Islamic fundamentalist movement, which came to life in Egypt in 1928 and has spread since then to most Islamic countries. Their view of religion is comprehensive, encompassing life and death, religion and state, the individual and the community. Muslim Brothers do not accept terror and violence as modes of political behavior except when Muslims are subjected to the aggression of others. They believe in a basically majoritarian democratic political process in which the basic tenets of Islam are observed. In general they use religious symbols to incite and mobilize the population and to energize voters. The Palestinian issue is at the top of their political agenda.
- *Liberal Muslim Brothers* are an offshoot of the original movement; they believe in the congruence between Islam and democracy. They are represented in Morocco, by the Wasat party in Egypt, and by the Justice and Peace Party in Turkey. For Liberal Muslim Brothers, the concept of citizenship is central, and religion is primarily a moral commitment.
- *Populist Islam* is represented by individuals who use modern media—especially television—to influence large numbers of people in Islamic countries. They vary from the most moderate to extremists. The vast majority of them are conservatives who use different means of incitement to mobilize Muslim masses.
- *Radical Islam* is represented by a large number of organizations that operate mostly underground and that espouse different forms of political violence. The most notable examples are the different Gamaat Islamia and Jihad Islami groups.
- *Terrorists* espouse violence in Islamic, Arab, and Western countries in order to change the world so that it more closely resembles a virtuous society. The best examples of these are the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Recent studies show that the targets of these organizations have tended to be Middle Eastern countries³ and not the West, as the tables below demonstrate:

Table 1: International Terrorism

<i>International</i>	2005	2004	2003	2002
Total number of casualties	443	733	470	970
in the Middle East/Gulf	394	405	327	375
in Iraq	321	352	172	*
in South Asia	35	74	30	105
in Southeast Asia/Oceania	0	10	42	214
in North America	0	*	*	3
in Western Europe	0	192	1	0

* Data not available

Table 2: Domestic Terrorism

<i>Domestic</i>	2005	2004	2003	2002
Total number of casualties	7041	4333	1877	1793
in Middle East/Gulf	5831	2290	557	189
in Iraq	5679	2120	367	3
in South Asia	764	803	773	918
in Afghanistan/Pakistan	307	396	248	159
in Southeast Asia/Oceania	71	192	30	137
in North America	0	0	0	0
in Western Europe	56*	2	6	15

* London attacks, July 2005

Source: Rick Coolsaet and Teun Van de Voorde, "The Evolution of Terrorism in 2005: A Statistical Assessment," Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium, February 2006, p. 3.

Although the Taliban and al-Qaeda are the most dangerous terrorist groups, most others in this category also adhere to the central idea of separation from a Western-dominated world. They have made negative assessments of the extent to which international relations are just, and of the moral codes that govern such interactions. The diversity of these groups reflects different understandings of the world, however, and different interests as well. That these movements might experience some change and evolution regarding the possibility of making peace with liberal democracies should not be excluded.

Building American Strategy: Objectives and Interests

The United States is the only superpower in the world today; its relative power is historically unprecedented. At its peak the British Empire produced 8% of world GDP; the United States now produces 30% of the world's GDP. Maintaining this dominance requires the continuing expansion of capitalist markets, from Alaska to the Philippines. Given this vast domain of interest, the Middle East is central to U.S. global policy.

American policy interests in the Middle East have remained constant since the 1940s, notwithstanding the changing and expanding nature of the region. The following interests have been the focus of American policy-making:

- Oil;
- The security of Israel;
- Stability against radical forces: Communists, Marxists, pan-Arabists, and now Islamic terrorists and others;
- Prevention of nuclear proliferation, and the spread of other weapons of mass destruction; and
- Newly added: integrating the Middle East, particularly the Arab world, into a world order of capitalism and democracy.

For the time being, the achievement of these objectives is under severe constraints:

- The supply of oil is threatened by the situation

in Iraq. Iraq was promising to produce up to 4 million barrels per day, thereby competing with Saudi Arabia in the oil market. Contrary to pre-Iraq war expectations, however, Iraqi oil production is declining, and there is a great waste of oil reserves as the oil infrastructure has become a target of terrorist attacks and as faulty methods for pumping oil have been utilized, destroying the wells. Additional threats to the stability of the Gulf oil-producing region involve the possibility that the Sunni-Shia divide might spread to Bahrain, the eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. These threats are becoming increasingly real as a result of the spreading civil war in Iraq. Another source of concern is terrorists' threats to oil routes and pipelines (the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal).

- The security of Israel has improved since the 1970s as a result of its peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, and on account of the stability of its strategic relationship with Syria since 1974. A low-intensity conflict has continued with the Palestinians, however, and more recently with the Lebanese. The wall, or separation barrier, provided temporary security, which has been increasingly challenged by resort to tunnels and the use of short-range rockets. Hamas's victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections and the increasing influence of Hezbollah in Lebanese politics have signaled a growth in the power of movements that reject Israel's existence, while chaos in the adjacent Palestinian territories has resulted in an atmosphere of increased uncertainty for Israel.
- Stability in the Middle East is threatened by an invigorated Iranian revolution, under the new populist leadership of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, capable of challenging the West—coupled with a rise in radical fundamentalism in Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Somalia, Algeria, and Afghanistan. Fundamentalists threaten the region through elections, violence, and terror, or simply by delegitimizing regimes and/or states. Instability has prevailed in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, and Palestine. Unrest and acts of terror have been experienced by most countries of the region.

- Nuclear proliferation in the Middle East has continued, with no end in sight. In the wake of Iraq's aborted attempts to create the infrastructure for the production of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, Iran has more recently become the center of such efforts—and the possibility that Iran might acquire nuclear weapons reopens the nuclear issue for the entire region. Thus, Ali Abdullah Saleh, president of Yemen, promised his people that Yemen would acquire a nuclear capability, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia are rethinking their nuclear options.
- Integration of the Middle East into the world of capitalism and democracy seems to have become an increasingly distant goal. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the region has negatively affected developmental priorities and shifted attention to cultural and security concerns: Geopolitics has taken primacy over geoeconomics in the politics of the Middle East. The UNDP Arab Human Development Reports reflect an Arab world that lags behind other regions of the world in competitiveness and democratic institutions. While a number of Arab countries experienced the beginning of positive change in those respects in 2005, this movement toward change was soon to be crippled in 2006.

Assets and Liabilities

The previous sections pointed out that Islamic fundamentalism is a complex trend, comprising ideas and forms of political behavior that negatively affect U.S. interests and objectives in the Middle East. It was also stressed that Islamic fundamentalism is not a monolithic or unified or well-integrated phenomenon, and that its main targets are the Arab and Muslim countries of the Middle East. Addressing such a diversified phenomenon requires that the United States act prudently, carefully considering its own assets and liabilities, and adopt complex policies to advance its varied objectives.

Here, America's previous experience with addressing the Communist threat is relevant, despite the differences we've acknowledged—particularly with respect to understanding the complexity of the challenge. It is important to recognize, however, that the reason that deterrence was at the heart of Western strategies to deal with the Communist threat was that the Communist movement was state-based: States can be deterred and forced to change their behavior. By contrast, except in Iran, Islamic fundamentalism is not state-based. Outside Iran, it is embodied in very fluid groups and ideas, reflecting high levels of zeal and commitment. This requires the adoption of a different set of options, grounded in a different strategic concept: *legitimacy*.

American Liabilities

In attempting to face the challenges presented by the Middle East, the U.S. suffers from a number of serious deficits:

- A **cultural deficit**. The cultural gap between the United States and the Middle East is at least as large as the geographical distance between them. Gallup polls show a sharp decline in the favorable ratings given by Americans to Arab and Middle East countries. Arabs are usually depicted as characterized by six B's: Bedouins, belly dancers, bazaar men, backward, billionaires, and bombers. The reputation of the U.S. in the Arab world is, likewise, currently at an all-time low. Americans are seen as characterized by six C's: cowboys, colonialists, capitalists, conspiracies, crusaders, and clients to Israel. Americans are depicted throughout the region as hegemonic and aggressive.
- A **democratic deficit**. The gap between the two sides in this regard is huge not only on account of differences in their political systems, but also because the recent instances of democratization in the Arab world have not been entirely comforting. Fundamentalists won elections in Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. As was pointed out earlier, there are three competing forces in the Arab world: the bureaucrats, the theocrats, and the democrats. Since the last are also the weakest group, the United States is left with having to choose, unhappily, between the bureaucrats and the theocrats.
- A **social deficit**. While the rights of women, minorities, and gays are an accepted part of or issue in American domestic politics, this is not necessarily the case with respect to the politics of Arab states. These states will take a long time to change their social traditions and acknowledge prejudices.
- A **legitimacy deficit**. This refers mainly to the manner in which American behavior in the Middle East is regarded. The American presence in the region is considered by Middle East electorates as illegitimate, because it is seen as supporting tyrants. The U.S. is also perceived as lacking international support, particularly since its invasion of Iraq in 2003. Hatred of the U.S. is seen as extending beyond Arab countries to the world at large.

American Assets

Alongside these liabilities, the United States enjoys a number of important assets when confronting the challenges of the Middle East:

- With a GDP of more than \$12 trillion and a vibrant and energetic society, the U.S. is the greatest power of all time, unmatched by any other power or group of powers. Its military capability is second to none; it dominates global media; and it possesses a very advanced technology that has so far prevented a recurrence of terror in the U.S.

of the type and magnitude experienced on September 11, 2001.

- The U.S. leads the worldwide globalization process by virtue of the quality and strength of its values, its multinational corporations, its markets, and its institutions.
- The U.S. shares a security threat vis-à-vis terrorism with Muslims, Arabs, Russia, China, the EU, and India. All these states face the same threat, though in different ways. The Belgian Ghent University study on terrorism concluded that more than 90 percent of terror operations are directed against Arabs.⁴
- There is a growing distaste in the region for dictatorships and autocratic regimes.
- Finally, the extremism of terrorists and Islamic extremists, and their lack of political vision with respect to solving their countries' problems, should be reckoned an asset for the U.S. Their acts of violence in Muslim countries have resulted in their no longer being seen through the prism of religious romanticism. And their rule in a number of countries—Iran, Afghanistan, and Sudan—is increasingly recognized as constituting a dismal failure.

Policy Options

At this point, the United States must choose between two basic strategic options:

- **To commit or to cut losses.** Committing will require greater resolve and a lot more time and energy, which translates into much higher costs and the probability of greater internal division in the U. S. Cutting losses will result in a loss of credibility, the continued rise of fundamentalism, greater chaos, and a major shake-up in the region.
- **To engage or isolate** radical and fundamentalist forces. Engagement may be interpreted as weakness—but an attempt to isolate may result in even greater violence.

A thorough comparison of the advantages and risks of these grand-strategy options is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say, however, that if the U.S. decides to commit and engage, it must change its core concept of dealing with the Middle East. So far, deterrence has failed to prevent the Taliban from reemerging in Afghanistan, and the U.S. military presence did not deter al-Qaeda from basing itself in Iraq. Nor did deterrence work in Somalia, Palestine, or Lebanon. If anything, it seems that confrontation with the U.S. has helped the various brands of Islamic fundamentalism in the region to gain popularity and enlarge their base of recruitment.

The United States may want to consider, then, shifting from a strategic posture focused on deterrence to a political strategy that places the quest for legitimacy at its core. Legitimacy in

this context implies acceptance of American behavior. The use of force should not be entirely excluded, but it should be regarded as secondary to gaining acceptability, and to achieving consensus among relevant actors. Indeed, it was in this realm (among others) that the Hamilton-Baker (Iraq Study Group) report fell short. The report contains many recommendations for engaging a variety of powers, but it lacks a comprehensive approach toward dealing with the much broader historical challenge. If adopted, such a broader approach could be translated into the following “Ten Commandments”:

1. **The U.S. is in a long and complex war.** The war with different forms of Islamic fundamentalism will not end in a year or two, in a single battle, or in any one theater of confrontation. Legitimacy requires preparing the American people for war—a war that cannot follow presidential election cycles. Fighting this war requires a national consensus—and building such a consensus requires a thoroughgoing dialogue between the administration and Congress as well as with others concerned with U.S. foreign policy, including think tanks and universities. Finally, a similar dialogue should be opened with the Arab-American and Islamic communities in the U.S. The purpose of such a dialogue and debate is not only to generate support for a long war but to ensure provision of the means—material, military, and, most importantly, moral—that will be required.

2. **This is a war of ideas.** The United States must differentiate at all times between Islam, Muslims, and Islamic fundamentalism. The first two are not the enemy; indeed, Muslims, or some of them, are possible allies. The war should be singularly directed at Islamic *fundamentalism*, intellectually as well as via other means that might win over peoples' hearts and minds. The focus of this war will be the gaining of legitimacy—and unfortunately, current U.S. strategy is based on force and deterrence, which are not effective in a war of ideas. According to Peter Singer, in “FY 2006, approximately \$560 billion of the U.S. federal budget [went] to military operations. Approximately \$55 billion [was] spent for homeland security (plus another estimated \$9 billion spent on homeland security at the state and local level). But while the overall U.S. budget for diplomacy and foreign operations [was] \$32 billion, only about \$540 million [went] towards the hearts and minds element (public diplomacy and outreach programs). Of this, only about 27 percent [was] directed towards the Muslim world, with an overt amount consumed by showy government-run media programming that has failed to crack the marketplace in the region with any credibility.”⁵

This must change. More emphasis must be placed on the idea of progress and change and on the merits of

liberal democracy as it is experienced in industrial advanced societies. Media and outreach should highlight the success stories in Islamic countries—Turkey and Malaysia—and the positive experiences of Muslims in India and the West, over and against the catastrophic experience with Islamic fundamentalist governance in different countries—Afghanistan under the Taliban, Sudan under Turabi, Iran under Khomeini—and the treatment of women and minorities by different Islamic fundamentalist movements and groups. And the Bosnians and Kosovars must be allowed to tell their stories of Western assistance to Muslims.

In waging the war of ideas, the U.S. should avoid theological debates. At the same time, the value of the Ibrahimitic religions—which unite Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the belief in one God and in His moral commandments—should be highlighted. Emphasis should be placed on the idea of progress, and on the failure of Islamic fundamentalists to address the basic needs of the population wherever they have ruled. Poverty and other developmental issues should be high on the agenda of dialogue with Islamic groups.

3. The U.S. should not mix history with strategy. Long-term change requires a long-term perspective. Democratization should be viewed as a historical process, and the acquisition of democratic traditions takes a very long time, as the experience of Spain, Portugal, and South Korea demonstrates. At the same time, the United States must keep its immediate strategic objectives well defined: for now, winning the war against terrorists in Iraq and Afghanistan. But the United States will not obtain the approval of Arab and Muslim countries—legitimacy—while it is trying to change their governments. For this reason, the U.S. government should leave the preaching of democratic values to American civil society and international human rights organizations. In some cases, discreet and quiet diplomacy will be required.

4. The U.S. cannot do it alone. The United States must partner with other major powers as well as with regional powers—all those who have a stake in fighting terrorism. The country must review its policies toward Russia, China, and India and accommodate their primary interests. China and India are both in dire need of Middle East oil, much more so than the U.S. Their supplies are dependent on the U.S. using its power to protect the transfer of oil from the Gulf. Moreover, some of the troubles the U.S. faces in the region are related to the strategic vacuum created by tensions in America's relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the post-September 11 era. Repairing these relations, along with those with Morocco, Jordan, and other Gulf states, can create a coalition of moderates

in the region. In turn, these countries can contribute to the war of ideas with Islamic fundamentalism—which, as noted earlier, threatens their interests at least as much as it does Western interests. The United States should not only keep its enemies close, as the Iraq Study Group report recommended, but keep its friends closer, at all times.

5. The U.S. should create a coalition of powers to deal with each of the crises in the region. As with the coalition of the six involved in the negotiations with North Korea, the United States should create similar coalitions to deal with Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iran.

6. Engage Islamists who are open to talking in public, who are willing to open their internal system to elections and to accept the democratic process, who do not engage in or promote terror, and who are prepared to reduce their use of rhetorical incitement. At the same time, the U.S. should encourage liberal Islamists, secular liberals, civil society, and members of the business community to create a moderate camp prepared to balance the growing power of Islamists.

7. The U.S. should work to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The major lesson the U.S. should draw from the history of the Middle East is that unless it works hard to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, the conflict will in turn threaten America's vital interests. As the U.S. abandoned its efforts in this realm following the failure of the second Camp David summit, the resulting diplomatic and political vacuum was filled by violence, terror, suicide bombing, and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The summer 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah represented the ultimate convergence of Islamic fundamentalism and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Resuming Arab-Israeli peace negotiations on the bases of the Clinton Parameters of 2000 and the statement issued by President Bush in 2002 can change the environment in the region from one of despair, which helps fundamentalists, to one of hope, which makes U.S. victory possible.

8. The U.S. should resolve the Iraq question and legitimize the U.S. operation in Iraq by including UN forces and by reviving the Saudi proposal for having Islamic and Arab forces in Iraq under independent command. The U.S. should encourage the Arab League initiative for a second meeting of reconciliation of Iraqi political groups and factions and encourage a revision of the Iraqi Constitution that would allow for a second legislative council based on equal representation of sects and that would guarantee the just distribution of oil revenues. Most important, the different Iraqi forces

should be persuaded that the United States will not accept a fragmentation of Iraq.

9. **The U.S. should make a long-term commitment to reform and democracy**, but without daily sermons and supervision. A long-term strategy based on establishing the conditions for democracy would be characterized by:

- expanding the middle class through free trade agreements and the investment of American multinationals;
- using American media on a massive scale and encouraging U.S. allies to do the same. America's current investment in this realm is not competitive with that of regional media powers;
- changing aid policies to emphasize investment rather than charity.

10. **The U.S. must adopt a better system for disciplining U.S. troops** stationed in the region. This discipline should prevent such scandals as those at Abu Ghraib, Haditha, and Guantanamo from reoccurring. American use of force should be subject to the highest international standards of respect for human rights.

Conclusions

Since the Second World War, the United States has been active and influential in the Middle East in different ways. As in many other regions in the world, U.S. interests in this region have grown and diversified. To protect these interests, America's behavior in the Middle East was shaped for decades by the environment and politics of the Cold War. Favorably for the United States, radical and revolutionary socialist regimes and states of the 1950s and 1960s gradually lost their appeal in the 1970s and 1980s. But even earlier, for several reasons the Middle East was a region that Communism failed to penetrate. With the exception of South Yemen, no Arab government had espoused a Soviet-style political system; and Communist parties failed to find broad constituencies in the region. Also, despite the friction with the U.S. over the Israeli-Palestinian issue, several Arab governments were instrumental in eventually bringing about the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, throughout that period—with the exception of a short period in 1973—Middle East oil continued to flow, enhancing the industrial and military capacity of the West.

To reach that happy conclusion by the end of 1980s, the U.S. has used traditional foreign policy approaches to protect and expand its interests. At the heart of these approaches was the concept of deterrence, in its military, policy-making, and alliance-formation dimensions. By the 1990s, however, the world had changed, and so had the Middle

East. The changing nature of international politics from the Cold War to globalization has created the need for a comprehensive change in America's approach to different regions of the world. In the Middle East, and in the rest of the Islamic world, the rise of fundamentalism in different forms has created a new challenge to the United States and its Western allies.

The unique nature of the Islamic fundamentalist challenge is that it is not embodied mainly in states, which the U.S. can deter, but rather is spread among peoples. It has a global reach and is attempting to influence 1.3 billion Muslims, who span six continents. Facing such a challenge requires that the U.S. adopt a strategy that substitutes legitimacy—the broad acceptance of its behavior—for deterrence. Legitimacy is required in a world characterized by expanding globalization—which is led, paradoxically, mostly by one superpower, the United States. America's loneliness at the top of the global power structure can only be ameliorated by a legitimate world order in which U.S. leadership is broadly accepted. In no other theater of the world is this new approach more important than in the Middle East. This is the thrust of the recommendations made in this Brief: the creation of a coalition of states, united by shared values and aimed not only at facing the challenge of Islamic fundamentalism but at stabilizing the Middle East and integrating it into a new world order.

Endnotes

1 There is a growing demand for such a reassessment in the U.S. policy community. See P. W. Singer, "The 9-11 War Plus Five: Looking Back and Looking Forward at U.S.-Islamic World Relations," Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 2006.

2 United States Institute of Peace, Iraq Study Group Report, available at http://www.usip.org/isg/iraq_study_group_report/report/1206/index.html.*

3 See: "[Muslims Real Victims of Terror](http://www.Zaman.com)," www.Zaman.com, July 17, 2005; and Rick Coolsaet and Teun Van de Voorde, "[The Evolution of Terrorism in 2005: A Statistical Assessment](http://www.psw.UGent.be/polwet)," Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium, February 2006, www.psw.UGent.be/polwet, p. 3.*

4 Ibid.

5 Singer, "The 9-11 War Plus Five," p. 9.



Brandeis University Crown Center
for Middle East Studies

Mailstop 010
Waltham, Massachusetts
02454-9110

781-736-5320
781-736-5324 Fax
www.brandeis.edu/centers/crown/

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