
**SOURCES OF CONFLICT IN THE GREATER
MIDDLE EAST**

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INTRODUCTION

An Enduring Area of Engagement

Few would question that the greater Middle East is an area of central geostrategic concern for the United States—a place where U.S. interests are at stake, conflict is frequent, and demands on U.S. military forces are high. Moreover, the evolution of the region over the longer term is likely to have an important influence on global prosperity and stability, affecting a broad range of issues in which the United States as a global power will have an interest. Developments in all of these dimensions will influence the demands and constraints imposed on the use of American military power, including air and space power, in and around the Middle East.

For the purposes of this study, the “greater Middle East” is understood to include the states of North Africa, the Levant (including Turkey and the Palestinian entity), and the Persian Gulf. The discussion extends to areas on the periphery of these states, such as the Caucasus and Central Asia.

From a U.S. perspective alone, looking simply at the period 1979–1996 (to include the Gulf War and its aftermath), the greater Middle East has been the dominant theater for U.S. intervention in both frequency and scale (the 1979 Iran hostage rescue effort, deployments to Lebanon in 1982, the 1986 El Dorado Canyon strikes against Libya, the 1987–1988 reflagging and escort of tankers in the Gulf, the 1990 Gulf War, and continuing operations in northern and southern Iraq

in the wake of the defeat of Baghdad. Stretching the definition of the region, one might also include the 1992 peacekeeping operation in Somalia). A recent survey of U.S. intervention policy examines 12 prominent cases from 1979 through 1994, of which seven are Middle Eastern.¹ If the repeated interventions against Iraq are treated as separate cases, the number of Middle Eastern deployments is even more overwhelming. Quite apart from these instances of intervention, the region is of enormous significance from the point of view of peacetime presence and planning. In the Cold War period, the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf stood out as areas where the U.S. military presence held steady or grew. Under current conditions, forces based elsewhere—in Europe or the Indian Ocean—are most likely to be used for contingencies somewhere in the greater Middle East. One of two canonical major regional contingencies (MRCs) is assumed to be in the Middle East.

What Is the U.S. Interest? What Is at Stake?

In an era in which U.S. interests are being examined more critically, the greater Middle East continues to present high stakes for American policymakers. Taking a longer-term (through 2025) perspective, U.S. key national interests include

- the survival of Israel and completion of the Middle East peace process,
- access to oil,
- forestalling the emergence of a hostile regional hegemon,
- preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction,
- promoting political and economic reform and through it internal stability, and
- holding terrorism in check.²

¹See Richard N. Haass, *Intervention: The Use of American Military Force in the Post-Cold War World*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 1994.

²U.S. interests are discussed in similar fashion in Commission on America's National Interests, *America's National Interests*, RAND/CSIA/Nixon Center, July 1996, pp. 39–41.

Some of these interests are specific to the region, but most are closely linked to broader, systemic interests in stability, nonproliferation, energy security, and evolutionary versus revolutionary change.

Israel and the Peace Process. The United States has been committed to the security and prosperity of Israel since the founding of the state, and this commitment will almost certainly remain a key interest through the period under discussion. U.S. policy over the next decade will, however, be shaped by the parallel national interest in promoting, reinforcing, and bringing to completion the Middle East peace process. Success in this arena will have a considerable influence over the region's future propensity for conflict and the demands on U.S. strategy and forces. Achievement of a comprehensive peace will very likely bring increased demands for monitoring and security guarantees. Failure will raise more conventional demands for deterrence and reassurance. At the same time, the increasing prosperity and military capability of Israel—and economic realities in the United States—will shape the level of support this enduring interest implies.

Energy Security. Access to Middle Eastern oil in adequate amounts and at reasonable prices will almost certainly remain a vital interest.³ A large proportion of world petroleum reserves are to be found in the greater Middle East. The Gulf states alone account for 65 percent of proven world oil reserves, and despite changing patterns of demand and consumption over the past two decades, almost 35 percent of the industrialized world's oil supply came from the Gulf in 1994.⁴ The five countries with the greatest proven reserves are all in the Middle East. If Caspian oil and gas are included—and they should be, since much of the future production from this region will be exported via the Levant or the Gulf—the region's importance in energy terms is greatly reinforced. Growing energy needs in Eastern Europe and Asia could place greater pressure on demand and further increase the strategic significance of the region's oil resources. Al-

³It is worth noting that our interests, even in the Persian Gulf, have never been driven solely by oil. See Ian O. Lesser, *Oil, the Persian Gulf, and Grand Strategy: Contemporary Issues in Historical Perspective*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, R-4072-CENTCOM/JCS, 1991.

⁴G. C. Georgiou, "United States Energy Security Policy and Options for the 1990s," *Energy Policy*, Vol. 21, August 1993, pp. 831–839.

though world oil production continues to grow rapidly, world reserves have grown even faster, and the bulk of these new additions have been in the Middle East.⁵ Given our systemic interest in international economic stability, the United States is unlikely to abandon its current role as ultimate guarantor of world access to Middle Eastern oil.⁶ Future aggression by Iraq or Iran against the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula would doubtless trigger an American military response on the order of the Desert Storm operation.⁷

Containing Hegemons and Proliferators. There continues to be a strong consensus within the U.S. strategic community about the need to prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon or, more precisely, a “hostile” regional hegemon (i.e., a power capable of and interested in regional domination).⁸ From a strategic planning perspective, this need could be extended to include preventing the emergence of competitors capable of successfully challenging U.S. military power. Such competitors could come from within or outside the region.⁹ The United States will also continue to have a closely-related interest in preventing regional powers—and nonstate actors—from acquiring new or additional weapons of mass destruction and the means for their delivery at longer range. These weapons can be classed as a systemic concern for the United States. But the greater Middle East has emerged as a focal point for WMD challenges, with longer-range ballistic missiles poised to change the relationship between the traditional Middle East and adjacent regions in

⁵Alan Richards and John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996, p. 53.

⁶Currently, the United States imports some 10 percent of its oil from the Persian Gulf, and Europe almost 30 percent. For two perspectives on this disparity in the context of overwhelming U.S. involvement in Gulf defense, see Shibley Telhami and Michael O’Hanlon, “Europe’s Oil, Our Troops,” *New York Times*, December 10, 1995; and Lawrence J. Korb, “Holding the Bag in the Gulf,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1996.

⁷*America’s National Interests*, p. 40.

⁸For a discussion of the role of the United States in preventing the emergence of such a hegemon, see Zalmay Khalilzad, “The United States and the Persian Gulf: Preventing Regional Hegemony,” *Survival*, Vol. 37, No 2, Summer 1995, pp. 95–120.

⁹Potential extraregional peer competitors might include a resurgent Russia, a more assertive European Union, or, at the borderlands of the Middle East, China.

security terms. Indeed, many of today's leading proliferation risks are arrayed along an arc stretching from Algeria to Pakistan.¹⁰

Promoting Internal Stability. It has become fashionable to refer to the greater Middle East as an arc of crisis. Given the strength of pressures for change within societies across the region, it might be more appropriate to describe the region as an "arc of change." As a status quo power, the United States has a strong systemic interest in avoiding violent change and encouraging behavior in line with accepted international norms. The links between political and economic reforms and stability cannot be taken for granted. There is an emerging Western consensus that movement toward modern economic systems, more representative government, and greater attention to human rights will help forestall radical change in societies under pressure. Broadly speaking, we will continue to have a national interest in preventing violent change and the emergence of radical or revolutionary regimes (such regimes are unlikely to "wish us well").

Dealing with Terrorism. Finally, recent events have reinforced American awareness of terrorism as a security problem. Terrorism is a well-established mode of conflict on the Middle Eastern scene. We will continue to have a keen stake in limiting the threat of terrorism to friendly regimes and Western citizens and assets, as well as preventing the spillover of political violence emanating from the region. A variety of future regional conflict scenarios may stem from terrorist action, and counterterrorism is likely to be a motivating factor in many instances of U.S. and Western military intervention. Terrorism might also emerge as a tactic for regimes bent on more-traditional forms of regional aggression. In the future, U.S. strategy will need to address the problem of terrorism both as a stand-alone threat and as a "fifth column" or "asymmetric" risk in regional conflicts.

Study Objectives and Structure

Our analysis assesses the demands and constraints likely to be imposed on the U.S. Air Force and U.S. strategy more generally as a re-

¹⁰See Ian O. Lesser and Ashley J. Tellis, *Strategic Exposure: Proliferation Around the Mediterranean*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, MR-742-A, 1996.

sult of developments across the region. We take as our starting point the premise that political-military trends inside the region, as well as on its periphery, will influence the uses of air and space power in defense of the national interests outlined above. This chapter considers likely developments in the near and mid-term (through 2005) and the longer term (through 2025).

The notion of the “greater” Middle East has been adopted to capture one of the key macro trends in the current strategic environment, and one that we believe will be even more significant in the future—that is, the steady erosion of traditional distinctions between “Middle Eastern” security and “European” and “Eurasian” security. This erosion is the result of the growing reach of military systems and the growing economic and political interdependence of regions. Spillovers of different sorts, from transregional terrorism and smuggling to refugee flows and migration, are further contributing to the breakdown of old regional definitions. Although trends and scenarios in Europe and Eurasia are treated elsewhere in this volume, our analysis considers interrelationships and effects beyond the Middle East.

It is also increasingly clear that an understanding of the emerging strategic environment and its implications for defense planning should look beyond the traditional sources of conflict on Israel’s borders and in the Persian Gulf. These places will remain essential from the perspective of interests and the likelihood of demands on U.S. military forces. But key flash points exist in other areas and could acquire greater significance for planning purposes over time. Thus, within our greater Middle East framework, we devote considerable attention to North Africa, Turkey and its neighbors, and the problems of Mediterranean security in general.

The following sections discuss regional trends and their consequences, with specific attention to key internal and external drivers; alternative “strategic worlds” and their implications; and overall implications for U.S. policy and Air Force planning.

KEY INTERNAL TRENDS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Societies Under Stress

States across the region are facing threats to stability as a result of internal trends. The most consequential trends in this context include

- demographic change and relentless urbanization,
- problems of economic growth and reform,
- dysfunctional societies and the erosion of state control, and
- crises of political legitimacy and the challenges of Islam and nationalism.

Taken together, these trends have encouraged and will almost certainly continue to support a pervasive sense of insecurity within Middle Eastern societies. When officials and observers within the region itself talk about future security, they will be concerned first and foremost with *internal* security. The key “drivers” identified here will all have consequences for the types of conflict and non-conflict demands and constraints the U.S. military is likely to confront across the region through 2025. The drivers represent deep systemic factors that will be at the forefront of challenges to stability in the region for the next several decades.

Demographic Pressures, Urbanization, and Migration

Although global population growth has slowed considerably, disproving the extremely pessimistic assumptions of the 1970s, population trends in the Middle East have not followed this hopeful pattern. Overall, the Middle Eastern population is expected to double by 2025, with annual growth rates of roughly 3 percent. Over the last ten years, the Gulf states and the countries of the Maghreb, including Egypt, have experienced population growth on the order of 40 percent—with the result that per capita GNP has dropped sharply. The population around the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean is likely to reach 350 million not long after the end of the century (by contrast, the total population of the current members of the European Union will not exceed 300 million in the same period). From a social viewpoint, it is perhaps more significant that the pro-

portion of people under 15 years of age in these highest-growth areas will reach 30 percent by 2025.¹¹

Demographic change of this kind will have a number of potentially destabilizing consequences. First, it will reinforce long-standing trends toward urbanization across the region as populations move to the cities in search of jobs and social services. Uncontrolled urbanization is already a well-established trend around the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Cities such as Cairo and Istanbul, designed for hundreds of thousands, now rank among the most densely populated in the world, with populations approaching 15 million. Indeed, the Middle East has long been dominated by its cities, including provincial cities in the rural hinterland. Cities are and will continue to be the focus for intellectual, economic, and political activity. As a whole, the region is more heavily urbanized than East Asia, South Asia, or Africa.¹² The challenges of housing, feeding, and providing transport and medical care for ever larger and younger populations, evident almost everywhere in the region, are most acute in the cities. The inability of states to adjust to the problems of urbanization is also having political consequences for established regimes. Islamist movements in particular, including Algeria's FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) and Turkey's Refah (Welfare) Party, first made their mark in urban politics where they registered striking electoral successes.

Whereas traditional rural relationships among families, clans, landowners, and peasants once formed the basis for political stability in many Middle Eastern societies, Middle Eastern politics now turn increasingly on economic relationships and new systems of patronage based in the cities. It is in the cities that disparities between the "haves" and "have-nots" are most striking. The future shape of Middle Eastern politics, whether radical or moderate, is likely to center on urban areas, and control of the cities will be a leading measure of state control. Any Western involvement in the region's internal conflicts over the next decades—for example, to defend Gulf

¹¹An amalgam of World Bank and UN estimates. See *World Economic and Social Survey 1995*, Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, United Nations; New York, 1995; and Eduard Bos et al., *World Population Projections 1994–95*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

¹²Richards and Waterbury, p. 251.

monarchies or to protect Western citizens and assets—will have to account for the likelihood of operations in urban areas, with all the constraints on deployment, mobility, and the use of force this implies.

Population increases are also changing the character of Middle Eastern states and introducing or deepening sources of internal conflict. For example, in the early years of the Turkish republic, the population was perhaps 15–20 million. By the end of this century, Turkey's population will approach 90 million, most residing in urban areas. In this context, it is hardly surprising that Turkey's secular, Westernized elite feels itself under pressure from more traditional, religious, and "Middle Eastern" arrivals from Anatolia. Population growth and urbanization have simply changed the nature of the country. Similar transformations have occurred as a result of migration and population growth elsewhere in the region. In some cases, disparities in population growth along ethnic and religious lines have fundamentally altered political balances and the prospects for stability.¹³ Prominent examples include the steady erosion of the Maronite position in Lebanon in the face of a growing Muslim population; the expanding and increasingly assertive Shi'ite population in the smaller Gulf states; the relatively rapid growth of Kurdish communities in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq; and the high birth rates among Palestinians and Israeli Arabs. Demographic changes along these lines will continue to be a source of friction within Middle Eastern societies as old political arrangements and ethnic compacts lose their relevance. For this reason among others, ethnic and separatist conflicts are likely to be a feature on the regional scene over the next decades.

Population size and growth will be a factor in the power and potential of states. In the Middle East, however, large populations can be a source of vulnerability when coupled with low economic growth rates and the pressures noted above. The most stable and powerful states in the future may be those where demographic pressures and economic performance have been brought into line, allowing regimes to devote additional resources to investment, development

¹³See discussion of the politics of differential fertility in Richards and Waterbury, pp. 96–100.

of defense industries, and the acquisition of modern military forces without risking domestic chaos. The ability to control corrosive demographic trends is also likely to play a key role in determining the relationship of Middle Eastern states to the “rich” societies on their periphery, above all the European Union (Israel, as a “rich” regional state, is in a special category of its own). The EU, even those members with a keen awareness of the consequences for their own security of instability in the south, will be reluctant or unable to provide aid and investment if the case seems hopeless.

Demographic and economic disparities will be the engine of migration, from rural to urban areas, from poor to rich—or less poor—areas, and from insecure to more-secure states and regions. It has become fashionable to speak of migration and refugee movements as key facets of the post-Cold War security environment worldwide. The Middle East as a whole is a leading source and recipient of the movement of people for economic and political reasons, and is home to the world’s largest refugee population.¹⁴ Within the region and worldwide, Iran has the single largest refugee population, composed largely of Afghans, Iraqis, and migrants from adjacent Kurdish regions. The Gulf states have also been large net recipients of migrants from poorer states in the Middle East and Asia. Remittances from migrant workers make a significant contribution to the economies of key countries such as Egypt.

At the same time, the countries of North Africa are large net exporters of labor to Europe. The potential exists for larger-scale movements based on turmoil in North Africa, including the collapse of the Algerian, Libyan, or Moroccan regimes, although there is considerable debate about the likely scale. For the poor and increasingly populous countries of North Africa and the Levant (including Turkey), the migration of workers to Europe has been an important economic and social safety valve.¹⁵ To the extent that the European Union places

¹⁴The refugee population of the Near East and South Asia is almost nine million. See U.S. Department of State, *World Refugee Report, 1993*; cited in William B. Wood, “The Geopolitics of International Migration,” in George Demko and William B. Wood (eds.), *Reordering the World: Geopolitical Perspectives on the 21st Century*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995; see pp. 191–205.

¹⁵There are almost two million Turks in Germany alone, perhaps one-third of whom are Kurds.

increasing restrictions on legal immigration and makes illegal migration more difficult, this outlet could decline over the next decades, resulting in increased pressure on already hard-pressed states.

The potential for destabilizing migration is a growing concern for key states within the region. Iran, Syria, and, above all, Turkey will be wary of potentially large movements of Kurdish refugees fleeing instability on their borders. Beyond the problems of absorption and cost, it is feared that such flows could worsen existing separatist violence. The insecurity of a growing Kurdish population is likely to be a permanent operating factor in the stability of the northern Gulf and the Levant for the foreseeable future. A very different example can be seen in the case of Egypt and Sudan. Egyptian observers are increasingly concerned about the implications for Egyptian security and stability of large-scale migration on the country's southern border. Egyptians are also concerned about the way in which migration can interact with other sources of conflict—e.g., Nile waters, terrorism—in their relationship with Sudan. The prospect of refugee movements as a result of ethnic conflict or leadership change in Sudan also imposes some constraints on Egyptian policymakers, who might otherwise see benefits in the destabilization of their southern neighbor.

Migration and refugee issues, both north-south and south-south, could emerge as a leading point for Western diplomatic and military engagement in the region and on its periphery. In the Mediterranean, migration is likely to be largely a European responsibility, although U.S. assistance might be required in monitoring and helping to control disastrous flows. Elsewhere, the U.S. role is likely to be more central, with implications for surveillance and humanitarian assistance capabilities. The situation in northern Iraq that gave rise to Operation Provide Comfort in the wake of the Gulf War is unlikely to be the last of its type in a region where the drivers for such crises are durable.

Dilemmas of Economic Growth and Reform

With some notable exceptions, the countries of the greater Middle East face a troubled economic future, with serious implications for stability and the propensity for conflict. High levels of unemployment, inflation, and external debt are commonplace. For most states

in the region, the prospects for significant economic growth are poor given relentless population pressure and the entry of larger numbers of young people into the economy. Unemployment rates are very high by world standards. Algeria, Iran, Lebanon, Yemen, and the Palestinian territories have unemployment rates at or above 30 percent (an extraordinary 45 percent in Gaza). GNP growth across the region has generally been flat or little better than flat over the last decade. Some states, including Afghanistan, Algeria, and the leading oil producers, have experienced a decline in GNP over the last decade, the result of political turmoil and declining oil revenues. Given the importance of oil production to the regional economic environment, it is not surprising that many Middle Eastern economies are "vulnerable, single commodity dependent," with 40 percent or more of revenues hinging on the export of a single product.¹⁶

Israel and, potentially, Turkey are exceptions to this dismal economic picture. The Israeli economy is not without difficulties, with a history of high inflation and high levels of unemployment by OECD standards. Yet Israel is an increasingly prosperous society with Western levels of economic performance embedded in the Middle East. For a decade prior to the Gulf War, Turkey benefited from the highest rates of economic growth in the OECD. Over the last few years, however, Turkey has returned to the historical pattern of wildly fluctuating economic performance and high inflation (currently nearly 100 percent per year). As in a number of other places in the region (e.g., Morocco), a dynamic private sector has emerged, but little progress has been made in the dismantling of state industries or improved distribution of wealth.

It is widely assumed that economic reform, including privatization and the reduction of government subsidies, will be essential to the emergence of more productive and modern Middle Eastern economies over the next decades. This path will be difficult even for states such as Turkey with relatively good human capital, abundant resources, diversified economies, and well-developed links to West-

¹⁶*Handbook of International Economic Statistics, 1995*, Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, September 1995.

ern markets. For countries such as Egypt, the political risks of economic reform are daunting.

From a “sources of conflict” perspective, the relationship between prosperity and stability is potentially critical. Yet the link between these elements is unlikely to be as clear or predictable as some observers and policymakers (inside and outside the region) have tended to assume. Significant improvements in economic performance over the longer term are widely thought to be unlikely in the absence of economic reform. The absence of reform continues to be the basis for much U.S., EU, and international financial institution policy toward the region. But real economic reforms are at best unpredictable in their effect on political stability, because they spread the burden of adjustment unevenly and interrupt established patterns of patronage and corruption. Where a highly visible class of new capitalists has emerged—in Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, and pre-revolutionary Iran—problems of inadequate distribution of wealth and unsatisfied rising expectations have made themselves felt on the political scene. Even the issue of the distribution of income is no clear guide to the likelihood of instability. Morocco, often viewed as the most stable society in North Africa, has the worst distribution of income among its neighbors, with a somewhat better situation in Tunisia. Algeria, embroiled in savage political violence, has long had the best distribution of income in the region.

For the region as a whole, the relationship between economic factors and regime stability is likely to remain unpredictable in most scenarios short of economic collapse. Even where economic progress may well contribute to stability, it might prove difficult to reconcile economic time horizons, typically longer term, with immediate political challenges. Even for those states undertaking serious reforms, managing the lengthy transition will be demanding and risky. Success or failure in managing economic reform could also have implications for the likelihood of a durable Arab-Israeli settlement, because instability flowing from economic inequality will weaken the position of regimes essential for the peace process. Sensitivity to the distri-

butional effects of economic reform might even prove “a necessary condition for sustaining a peace negotiated from above.”¹⁷

The pervasive insecurity of Middle Eastern states has bred high levels of spending on security establishments and military equipment. Apart from the strategic implications (examined below), this trend has negative implications for the economic future of a region critically short of investment in other sectors, including education and infrastructure.¹⁸ Taken together with the inability of economic growth to keep pace with expanding populations, the prosperity gap between the greater Middle East as a whole and its rich European and Asian periphery (including Israel) is likely to grow over the next decades. One implication of this is that the issues currently at stake between north and south in economic terms—aid, investment, trade, and migration—are likely to become more prominent and more contentious.

The scale of Middle Eastern requirements for aid and investment will very likely far outstrip available Western resources, especially if the reintegration of Eastern Europe proceeds apace. Some indication of this looming imbalance between needs and resources can already be seen in the context of the EU-Mediterranean Partnership launched in Barcelona in November 1995.¹⁹ At Barcelona, the EU committed itself to a five-year program of assistance for North African and Middle Eastern states of slightly less than \$7 billion, much less than the amount of assistance to be devoted to Eastern Europe, and dramatically short of the roughly \$70 billion the EU will transfer to its southern European member countries in the same period. Even greater stringencies are likely to apply in the case of U.S. aid through the end of the century and beyond. In Egypt, the leading recipient of U.S. economic assistance, it is increasingly assumed that the aid relationship will decline and perhaps evaporate altogether over the coming years. In this environment, hard-pressed Middle Eastern states are likely to place great emphasis on diversifying their economic rela-

¹⁷Etel Solingen, “Quandaries of the Peace Process,” *Journal of Democracy*, July 1996, p. 151.

¹⁸See Richards and Waterbury, pp. 103–133.

¹⁹The 12 Mediterranean partner countries are Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, the Palestine National Authority, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey.

tionships and on pursuing closer political and security ties where they appear to offer an advantage in the competition for scarce aid and investment.

Insecure Societies and the Erosion of State Control

The pervasive insecurity characteristic of Middle Eastern societies makes itself felt at several levels: at the level of regimes concerned about survival and the external exploitation of internal weakness; at the level of ethnic and religious groups, or classes, concerned about preserving their position or carving out additional autonomy; and at the level of individuals confronting dysfunctional states. The notion of “failed states,” common in discussion of sub-Saharan Africa, may also have considerable relevance for the future of the Middle East. States confronting the demographic and economic challenges outlined above may simply prove incapable of adjustment and face collapse over the next decades. Political forces with more radical agendas may emerge to provide new solutions with different social and ideological bases, particularly Islam. Such successor regimes will still have to confront basic challenges, but may succeed in redefining these challenges in ways that defer traditional tests of governance (e.g., management of the economy). In other cases, the alternative to existing regimes may be prolonged chaos—the “coming anarchy” described by Robert Kaplan.²⁰

Over the past few years, it has been fashionable to point to the growth—or absence—of civil society as a measure of political development and change in the Middle East.²¹ In places where civil society is well developed, it is generally viewed as an indicator of stability and democratization. Pressures for greater transparency and democratization have arguably been growing across the region, evident in states as diverse as Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.²² The development of organizations outside the (most often

²⁰See Robert Kaplan, “The Coming Anarchy,” *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994.

²¹See Jillian Schwedler (ed.), *Toward Civil Society in the Middle East*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995, in particular the chapter by Augustus Richard Norton, “The Future of Civil Society in the Middle East.”

²²See Ian O. Lesser and Graham E. Fuller, *A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995, p. 4.

authoritarian) government framework provides a potentially significant force for change over the longer term, suggesting that Middle Eastern societies are likely to become more complex and more diverse as new interest groups and substate actors emerge. This social complexity has potentially significant implications for the way in which states outside the region seek to influence the behavior of regional actors, especially in the context of economic instruments. A related trend, already evident in many places across the region, especially where a dynamic private sector has been accompanied by dysfunctional or chaotic government, has been for individuals increasingly to organize their lives without reference to the state. Ethnic, religious, and other “networks” have been leading beneficiaries of this phenomenon, reinforced by the growing ease of communication within and outside Middle Eastern societies.²³

Indeed, the information revolution is itself likely to be a leading driver in the political and security future of the greater Middle East. From North Africa to the Persian Gulf, the infrastructure for modern telecommunications is expanding rapidly, providing new opportunities for private enterprises, the independent media (where it exists), and others in “civil society.” This infrastructure is also bolstering the effectiveness of opposition movements, both peaceful and violent, including terrorists. Algeria’s FIS and Turkey’s Islamist Refah Party provide good examples of the way modern information gathering and dissemination can be harnessed to help produce electoral success. Modern telecommunications have emerged as the basis for more effective communication between exiled opposition leaders and their supporters in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere. In the 1970s, Ayatollah Khomeini used smuggled cassettes to spread his message in Iran. Today, Islamists in Saudi Arabia or Tunisia rely on fax machines and the Internet to reach over the barriers to political organization erected by authoritarian regimes.²⁴ The net result of this trend

²³The rise of networks and their political implications are treated in David Ronfeldt, *Tribes, Institutions, Markets, Networks: A Framework About Societal Evolution*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, P-7967, 1996.

²⁴Currently, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Kuwait, Tunisia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates have access to the Internet. Saudi Arabia has Bitnet; and Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco have access to E-mail and are moving toward Internet links. See Brian Nichiporuk and Carl H. Builder, *Information Technologies and the Future of Land Warfare*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, MR-560-A, 1995.

is likely to be a progressive loss of central control in traditionally authoritarian societies across the greater Middle East. Although this loss by itself is unlikely to result in the collapse of regimes, it will be an important factor in the ability of diverse groups, whether moderate or extreme, to undermine the power and legitimacy of ruling elites.²⁵

The information revolution will also reinforce the potential for spillovers of political violence between regional states and between the region and the West. Arms smuggling and terrorist cells established in support of violent Islamist groups in North Africa are already an established phenomenon in Western Europe. Recent terrorist incidents point to the spread of this problem to North America and Asia. The communications-based support for this trend is likely to deepen over the next decades, contributing, along with the movement of peoples and the spread of ballistic missiles, to the declining ability of peripheral regions to insulate themselves from the consequences of instability and conflict within the greater Middle East.

Unresolved Political Futures

From Morocco to the Persian Gulf, leaderships across the region are aging. By 2025, most if not all of the established figures on the regional scene, whether moderate or radical, will have disappeared. Who will replace them? In the near-to-mid term, many states, including key moderate regimes such as Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the smaller Gulf states will face potentially destabilizing successions. More broadly, it is worth considering how durable traditional monarchies and authoritarian leaderships can be in an era of decreasing control, greater transparency, and pressures for reform. The problem of unresolved political futures is already a key driver in the evolution of the strategic environment in the greater Middle East, and one that is likely to acquire even greater significance as the current generation of leaders comes to an end.

The issue of legitimacy is likely to be central to the region's political evolution over the next decades. Regime legitimacy will be under

²⁵Recent empirical studies suggest a strong correlation between the growth of networked communications and the propensity for democracy.

increasing pressure from many quarters, ranging from the inability to address pressing economic and social problems to crises of identity involving the organization of society as well as interactions with the West. Many of the traditional external moorings for regime legitimacy—anticolonial struggle, Arab nationalism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, “non-alignment”—have disappeared or shown signs of disappearing. At the same time, changing economic and demographic patterns have undermined traditional sources of legitimacy within societies. Even the Moroccan and Saudi monarchies, which have relied on deep religious and clan ties as a basis for legitimacy, are finding it difficult to hold at bay the forces of political change. Secular dictatorships such as Libya, Syria, and Iraq are even more fragile.

Islam and Nationalism

It is likely that the two most powerful forces on the Middle Eastern political scene toward 2025 will be Islam and nationalism. Almost 20 years after the Islamic revolution in Iran, political Islam is far from a spent force in the internal politics of Muslim countries. Indeed, it shows clear signs of vigor in a wide variety of settings in and around the Middle East. The evolution of key states, including Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Turkey, Jordan, and Iran—as well as Bosnia and Chechnya on the periphery—is already being driven by Islamic politics in government or in opposition. Attempts by established regimes to crush radical Islamic opposition—as in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia—regardless of their success in the near term, are unlikely to be fully successful. These movements reflect deep-seated political, economic, and social problems. Repressed and driven underground, Islamic movements tend to be viewed by much of the Muslim public as the only legitimate answer to their societies’ predicaments and to a deepening identity crisis. “Under these circumstances . . . Islamist movements are acquiring a monopoly by default as the only serious opposition to failing regimes.”²⁶ The pressures giving rise to the Islamist phenomenon are long term, and the phenomenon itself is likely to prove durable.

²⁶Lesser and Fuller, p. 165.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the pervasiveness of the problems encouraging Islamic opposition suggests a uniform path for Islamist movements and regimes. On the contrary, existing regimes and the West are likely to confront a variety of movements, ranging from the most radical (on the pattern of Algeria's Armed Islamic Group) to well-organized parties capable of gaining power through conventional political means (as in Turkey and Jordan). In overall terms, however, the power of Islam as a religious, cultural, and political force is likely to be another "permanently operating factor" across the greater Middle East. Indeed, it is very likely that the region will see the advent of at least one and possibly several more Islamic regimes between the end of the century and 2025.

The growth of Islamist movements and the possible rise of new Islamic regimes will have potentially important implications for conflict within and among Middle Eastern societies, as well as between the Muslim world and the West. Where violent Islamist movements exist but cannot easily triumph, as in Algeria, the stage may be set for prolonged strife affecting regional balances and the ability of states to clash or cooperate with the West. Moderate movements in power may establish an acceptable *modus vivendi* with the West. Others may adopt an uncompromisingly revolutionary and anti-Western stance. In security terms, the Western debate about Islamic "fundamentalism" has turned on the potential for the emergence of a concerted Islamic bloc poised for a "clash of civilizations" with the West.²⁷ Our analysis suggests that powerful cleavages within the Muslim Middle East, and equally pronounced differences of approach in the West, make the prospects for a broad civilizational clash remote. Moreover, it is worth noting that while Islamic movements in general may not "wish us well," their principal targets are internal, and their agendas, even in power, are likely to be overwhelmingly domestic.

In the fashionable focus on Islam as a force in Middle Eastern futures, it is easy to forget the powerful role of nationalism as a driver in the evolution of the region. In leading countries such as Algeria, Egypt, and Turkey, the experience of throwing off the old regime and constructing a modern state remains a powerful image in contempo-

²⁷See Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993.

rary politics. Some observers have described the current Algerian turmoil as the second half of an unfinished nationalist revolution. Turkey's Islamists rely heavily on nationalistic images and rhetoric. Nationalism can arguably be seen as the leading force behind the recent behavior of states as diverse as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Many of the same forces that helped bolster the legitimacy of regimes across the region also helped to foster identities (e.g., Arab nationalism, rejection of Israel) transcending individual states. In the more fluid environment already emerging on the post-Cold War scene, a renationalization of perceptions and policies is likely. In this respect, trends in the Middle East are very much part of a broader tendency toward more assertive nationalism evident in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere. Islam and nationalism can also interact in ways that bolster the legitimacy of regimes and reinforce external orientations, with implications for interactions with the West. For example, the reluctance of regional states to support U.S. actions against Iraq in the wake of the Gulf War—most recently in September 1996—has been couched in terms of Arab and Islamic solidarity at the public level, together with sensitivity about the national sovereignty implications of U.S. presence and operations.

The recent experience of terrorism against U.S. military facilities in Saudi Arabia highlights the question of how a U.S. military presence in the region will affect the perceived legitimacy and stability of friendly regimes. In Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and elsewhere in the Gulf, the U.S. presence will almost certainly continue to serve as a flash point for Islamist and nationalist groups looking to undermine existing governments. Short of this, U.S. presence and operations, as at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey, can pose dilemmas of sovereignty even for more moderate, Western-oriented elites. Regimes across the region will, of course, want to keep the U.S. presence for purposes of deterrence and reassurance, but will seek to limit its visibility and potentially destabilizing effects on public opinion. From a U.S. perspective, the level and character of presence in the region will need to be more carefully measured in terms of the balance between de-

fense requirements and the desire not to undermine the legitimacy of allied regimes.²⁸

Strategic Implications of Internal Trends

The internal trends or “drivers” noted here will have significant implications for the strategic environment that will confront U.S. policymakers and military planners in the near-to-mid term as well as toward 2025. First, the tension between increasing (and younger) populations and low economic growth will increase the pressure on already hard-pressed regimes. Leaderships across the region face wholesale generational change, raising the possibility of very different patterns of governance and regime behavior. Existing regimes face, on the one hand, an erosion of traditional means of control, and on the other, increasingly assertive opposition from ethnic and religious movements. The result is likely to be even more emphasis on the internal dimensions of stability and security and an increasing propensity for conflict arising from domestic power struggles and local anarchy.

Second, relentless urbanization suggests that cities will be the central backdrop for internal conflict of this nature, and will also be increasingly important nodes in the economic, industrial, and information infrastructure. Attacks on highly visible urban targets cannot easily be ignored by regimes, and such attacks will be high on the agendas of terrorist and insurgent groups.²⁹ Given these trends, the use of force in future regional crises may have more in common with the 1982 Israeli operations in Beirut, or the air war against Baghdad’s economic infrastructure, than the desert battles of the Gulf War.

Third, unsettled political futures and the continued power of Islam and nationalism on the regional scene suggest a far less predictable and less congenial environment from the perspective of security cooperation. Key moderate regimes, from Morocco to Egypt and Saudi

²⁸The reticence of friendly Arab states with regard to NATO’s Mediterranean Initiative is explained, in large measure, by the wariness of public opinion and questions of sovereignty and legitimacy.

²⁹Mary Morris, *The Post-Peace Agenda for the Middle East: Coping With Demographic Stresses*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, P-7895, 1994, p. 11.

Arabia, are vulnerable and will measure their relationships, in particular with the United States, against public opinion and the dictates of national sovereignty and perceived legitimacy. In the worst case, friendly regimes might collapse and be replaced by more-or-less revolutionary states. The result could be a substantial erosion of U.S. military presence, of direct security cooperation, and of access. The leaderships of today's "rogue states" are similarly vulnerable to the erosion of state control and the pressures of Islam and political change more broadly. The chances of the current trio of "rogue" regimes—Libya, Iraq, and Iran (and one might reasonably add Syria)—remaining unchanged in direction and behavior over the next 25–30 years are slight. The essential point is that current assumptions about the nature of regimes are likely to be challenged, if not overturned, by inevitable political change. The impressive U.S. forward structure of bases and relationships characteristic of the 1990s could be profoundly shaken by instability and leadership change across the region.³⁰ Pressures for democratization, evident across the region, may produce a more stable environment over the long term. But democratization might be achieved only at the cost of considerable instability and nearer-term risks to Western interests in the status quo. The process of democratization in previously authoritarian states might even imply an increased risk of regional conflict, as one well-known study suggests.³¹

Finally, the internal evolution of Middle Eastern states may well bring to power movements disposed toward confrontation with the West, although it is most unlikely to take the form of a sweeping ideological or religious confrontation between civilizations. Interests and stakes in relations with the West vary greatly across the region, and as the discussion below suggests, intraregional cleavages are unlikely to diminish and may well deepen. While new regional alignments are possible, even likely, the prospects for broad-based combinations of "Islamic" or "Arab" power and potential for the purpose of confronting the United States as a peer competitor in regional terms are strictly limited.

³⁰We are grateful to Dr. Geoffrey Kemp of the Nixon Center for Peace and Freedom for his comments on this point at a June 1996 seminar at RAND, Santa Monica.

³¹See Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "The Dangers of Democratization," *International Security*, Summer 1995.

KEY REGIONAL AND GLOBAL TRENDS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

As the preceding discussion suggests, trends within Middle Eastern societies will have a substantial influence on the future shape of the region as a whole. At the same time, a number of key trends on the regional and global level will also drive the nature of conflict and the strategic environment toward the year 2025. These key drivers include

- the search for strategic weight through new military technologies and strategies,
- growing economic dimensions of security and regional geopolitics,
- the erosion of traditional distinctions between the Middle Eastern and adjacent security environments as a result of “reach” and spillovers,
- unresolved regional frictions and threats to the territorial status quo,
- new security geometries (alignments), and
- the role of extraregional powers—above all the United States.

The Search for Strategic Weight

A leading characteristic of the future environment in the greater Middle East is likely to be the continuing search for strategic “weight” on the part of ambitious regional actors. The search for greater weight in regional and international affairs can take many forms, including active diplomacy, new geopolitical alignments, buildups of conventional military forces, and, most significantly, the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and the means for their delivery at longer range. The desire to be “taken seriously” by Middle Eastern neighbors, the United States, and the West as a whole will be a key driver in the policies of rogue regimes as well as more moderate regimes in pursuit of prestige and influence.

The end of Soviet patronage and the declining utility of “non-alignment” as a means of leverage in international politics have had

a profound influence on Algeria, Libya, Syria, and Iraq. Arms and advisers from the Eastern bloc contributed to the power and potential of Middle Eastern states within the Soviet orbit, including Egypt through 1973 and technically non-aligned states such as Algeria. Far more important, however, was the strategic weight that Soviet patronage represented in relations with Israel and the West. The prospect of Soviet backing in crises and the potential for superpower escalation made it more difficult to bring pressure to bear on these regimes and lowered their costs of limited regional adventures (e.g., Algerian intervention in the Western Sahara, Egyptian involvement in Yemen and Oman). Nonetheless, the Soviet connection and the risks of superpower involvement also implied certain limitations on the freedom of action of regional actors. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait probably would not have been possible under Cold War conditions: Moscow simply would not have permitted such provocative and potentially escalatory behavior by a key client state. In the current environment, superpower constraints of this sort are largely absent, with negative implications for regional stability. This condition is likely to persist and acquire more troublesome outlines as friendly status quo actors as well as revolutionary states seek to augment their regional weight.³²

Proliferation Dynamics. With the exception of North Korea, the world's leading WMD proliferators are arrayed along an arc from North Africa to South Asia, making the greater Middle East a focal point for America's systemic concern about the spread of unconventional weapons. Substantial WMD capabilities, including missiles and longer-range aircraft capable of reaching within and beyond the region, are already present in North Africa, the Levant, and the Gulf. In assessing current and future WMD capabilities, it is useful to divide regional proliferators into three categories.³³ The first category consists of states that do not now possess WMD systems and have shown no inclination to acquire them. States in this category include Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, and the smaller Gulf sheikdoms. It is

³²Proliferation trends beyond the rogue states are beginning to attract wider attention. See, for example, Amy Dockser Marcus, "U.S. Drive to Curb Doomsday Weapons in Mideast Is Faltering: Not Only Rogue Countries but America's Own Allies Try to Expand Capability," *Wall Street Journal*, September 6, 1996, p. 1.

³³See Lesser and Tellis, pp. 36–37.

most unlikely that such states will find it useful or practical to develop any such capabilities over the next decades. The second category consists of states that either possess or have demonstrated an interest in acquiring WMD and associated delivery systems (including WMD-capable aircraft) but are not capable of developing such capabilities on their own. External sources of weapons, equipment, and expertise are essential to proliferators in this category. Algeria, Libya, and Saudi Arabia follow this pattern.

States in the third category have or are proceeding to acquire WMD and delivery capabilities, and also possess the expertise, resources, and defense industrial base to permit substantial indigenous development of WMD. These internal capabilities may also be enhanced through a network of external supply relationships. States currently in this category include Egypt, Iraq, and Iran, and, of course, Israel. Turkey, as a NATO member, has remained largely outside the debate about proliferation in the Middle East. But given the character of proliferation risks on its borders and growing uncertainty about the future of Turkey's security relationship with the West, the question of Turkey's capabilities and WMD potential is not irrelevant for the future.

There is some potential for states now in the second category moving toward the category of indigenous capability, but this movement is likely to be limited by broader structural and economic factors. The essential point is that there already exists a core of WMD-capable states within the region. This core will remain and perhaps grow. More significantly, the core may deepen to the extent that states with indigenous capabilities—or the financial wherewithal—acquire nuclear weapons and the means for their delivery at longer range. Definitive judgments about the likelihood of the current proliferators with nuclear ambitions actually acquiring workable systems between now and the year 2025 are beyond the scope of this discussion. Iran and Iraq, have this possibility within the decade. Libya, Syria, Algeria, Egypt, and even Saudi Arabia could all become nuclear powers by 2025 if they are sufficiently motivated and the international environment is permissive enough. Chemical, biological, and radiological capabilities are sufficiently well established in the region today to suggest that they will be a feature of the strategic environment toward the year 2025, quite apart from the issue of their use in conflict.

The range of delivery systems, whether aircraft or cruise and ballistic missiles, is increasing. Several states are on the threshold of acquiring systems of 1000–2000 km range. Israel and Saudi Arabia already possess such systems. It is very likely that by the year 2000 or shortly thereafter, ballistic missiles of transregional range will be in the arsenals of most if not all of the leading regional powers, complicating traditional notions of the operational rear and increasing the potential for political blackmail within and beyond the region in times of crisis. In addition to the potential delivery of WMD, these systems also will provide opportunities for increasing the effectiveness of conventional forces when armed with smart and increasingly accurate submunitions.

The motives of regional states for acquiring WMD are already pronounced and are unlikely to change substantially over the next decades under most likely conditions. In purely military terms, WMD offer a low-cost alternative relative to the expense and difficulty of deploying advanced conventional technology. Past use in the region and the active pursuit of such capabilities by a number of powers is creating its own spiral of increasing demand, both as a tool of intimidation and as a deterrent.

Israel's nuclear deterrent combined with her conventional superiority remains a major issue for her neighbors, further stimulating efforts to achieve some form of strategic parity through WMD. Even a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute would not eliminate the drive for strategic weight—although it might well dampen the prospects for nuclear proliferation. The potential for Western intervention will remain, and targets of intervention will likely continue to view WMD as a useful trump. The generalized quest for regional influence and international prestige appears durable and ironically could even be given a boost by an Arab-Israeli détente, because the confrontation with Israel has been a leading sphere for Arab activism in the past. Finally, the bureaucratic motives for launching and sustaining WMD programs also appear durable.³⁴

³⁴At least one analysis also suggests a correlation between liberal economic and political behavior and the willingness to compromise on WMD, particularly nuclear options. In this context, and with some exceptions, the Middle Eastern outlook is not

Certain proliferation “wild cards” are worth noting: a serious deterioration in Arab-Israeli relations, complete Iranian or Iraqi breakout from existing control regimes, the rise of new revolutionary states with WMD ambitions (Saudi Arabia, maybe Algeria), a sharp reduction in the taboo against WMD use as a result of a regional crisis in which WMD are effectively employed; even more active participation of Russia and China as supplier; or large-scale cooperation among regional proliferators (an “Islamic bomb” à la Samuel Huntington).³⁵ All would serve as spurs to proliferation. Some wild cards might serve to dampen proliferation, including disastrous consequences of WMD use in a regional crisis, effective global or regional disarmament regimes, and preemptive Western (or Israeli) action that dramatically raises the perceived cost of proceeding with WMD programs.³⁶ The deployment of more-effective ballistic missile defenses might also influence the propensity to acquire certain types of systems, but will leave many WMD options unaffected.

Growing Conventional Capabilities. Beyond the WMD issue, the future strategic environment in the region is likely to be characterized by continued high levels of conventional armament and the growing sophistication of weapons systems. The Middle East continues to be the largest arms market in the developing world, accounting for roughly 50–60 percent of the total value of all transfers between 1988 and 1995 (excluding Turkey—if Turkish acquisitions are included, the figures would be substantially higher). Saudi Arabia alone accounted for some 30 percent of all developing world arms transfers in this period. It is worth noting, however, that the Middle

encouraging. See Etel Solingen, “The Political Economy of Nuclear Restraint,” *International Security*, Fall 1994.

³⁵Potential WMD collaborators under current conditions include Syria-Iran and Iran-Pakistan. During the Gulf War, there was some speculation about Algerian cooperation in hiding Iraqi nuclear material. Changing regimes and geopolitics could well lead to cooperation along other axes toward 2025.

³⁶Decisive progress on the bilateral track of the Middle East peace process—with Syria—is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for progress in regional security and arms control arrangements. The collapse of the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) process in 1994, with Egypt in the vanguard, points to the entrenched character of regional suspicions. On the prospects for regional arms control and disarmament, see Gerald M. Steinberg, “Non-Proliferation: Time for Regional Approaches?” *Orbis*, Summer 1994; and Shai Feldman (ed.), *Confidence Building and Verification: Prospects in the Middle East*, Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1994.

Eastern market is not the fastest growing; this distinction belongs to Asia.³⁷ The United States has been the dominant supplier.

A number of the regional drivers previously discussed will directly contribute to the demand for large conventional military forces throughout the region. Egypt, Turkey, Israel, Syria, Iraq, and Iran all can be expected to retain major conventional forces well into the next century. Several factors contribute to this projection, including enduring sources of state-to-state conflict that could result in major wars; growing competition over resources; and enduring territorial and cross-border ethnic disputes. Ideological competition and terrorism could also result in major state-to-state conflicts. The ability to defend national territory from invasion, as well as the ability to seize and hold territory, will remain the key driver of core conventional capabilities among the major regional states.

Internal political factors will continue to shape regional military forces. For many regimes, national military power will remain a symbol of legitimacy and state power as well as an instrument of internal security and deterrence against domestic sources of opposition. Large military establishments carry with them their own political weight. As with general economic reforms, serious risks may be associated with restructuring and reducing armed forces. Aside from challenging the vested interests of senior military officers who may be part of the ruling elite, the reduction of standing forces is likely to increase unemployment and social discontent. For many of the economically strained countries of the region, the military serves as a jobs program and safety valve.

The increasingly sophisticated way of war will also influence conventional forces in the Middle East. While less-developed states throughout the region will meet specific armaments needs through imports, their ability to develop the complex organizations and expertise required to extract anything approaching maximum capability from this weaponry will remain limited. Consequently, regional states will be reluctant to trade away potentially useful mass. Future force structures are therefore likely to consist of large traditional forces interlaced with sizable inventories of advanced weaponry.

³⁷Richard F. Grimmett, *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 1988-1995*, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 1996.

The sheer size and sophistication of arsenals being acquired in the region could have an effect on regional balances for some time to come, even if arms transfers to the region begin to slow over time as a result of favorable regime changes, achievement of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement, or economic stringency (including a likely decline in U.S. security assistance to Israel and Egypt). The combination of growing arsenals and insecure regimes, with considerable potential for changes of orientation in key friendly states over the next decades, introduces another disturbing variable. The dilemma posed by current defense needs in the Gulf and elsewhere and the possibility of sophisticated arms falling into the wrong hands will be difficult to resolve. Few supplier states will be willing to signal their declining confidence in the stability of friendly regimes by curtailing arms sales, quite apart from the economic stakes.

The effects of the military buildup in the Middle East will also have implications on the periphery. New Turkish systems and improvements in the capacity of Turkish forces for power projection have already begun to affect perceptions in the Aegean, the Balkans, and in Russia. Weapons acquired by Egypt, Syria, or Saudi Arabia largely for prestige and “weight” within the Arab and Muslim world could also begin to affect security perceptions in Europe if “civilizational” relations deteriorate. It is worth observing, however, that the most likely first victims of new conventional and unconventional weapons being acquired in the region will be neighboring Middle Eastern states.

Arms for Oil? Over the longer term, it is possible that shifts in the oil market could affect transfers of weapons and militarily useful technologies. Arms-for-oil policies were a noteworthy outcome of the first oil crisis, as European oil consumers sought to ensure themselves adequate oil supplies. Tightening of the oil market as a result of economic trends or a political crisis could encourage a return to this practice (whether the region could absorb transfers much in excess of current levels is an open question). Less sophisticated, but also less expensive sources of arms and technology are likely to expand, on the pattern of current Russian and Chinese transfers. More assertive regional policies in Moscow and Beijing—already evident—could hasten this development. Finally, new sources of arms and technology will develop within the region or nearby. Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, and Iran are all likely to emerge as more important suppliers with increasingly capable defense industries. These “third tier”

suppliers may also be the least amenable to participation in any new regimes aimed at controlling conventional arms transfers to the region.³⁸

Peer Competitors or Niche Competitors? Of principal concern to U.S. security over the longer term would be the emergence of military “peer” or “niche” competitors. In the case of the former, it is difficult to envision a true peer military competitor arising, even by 2025. Given the many systemic problems facing all of the major states, none will realistically be able to challenge core U.S. military power in anything approaching peer status. The emergence of a niche competitor, in this case a state or alliance of states sufficiently powerful militarily to dominate the local balance of power in ways detrimental to the United States, is more plausible. There are a variety of alternative futures in which the United States could find itself facing such niche competitors. Two paths are most plausible. First, a major outside power could invest heavily in building up one or more regional clients. Candidates for such a role include a resurgent Russia or a much more actively engaged China. Second, a niche competitor could emerge from the collapse of key friendly regimes. The rapid loss of major regional partners, combined with substantial military capabilities possessed by U.S. opponents, could yield a sharp shift in military balances and present a demanding “niche” challenge.

Niche competitors as well as less-potent adversaries are also likely to employ “asymmetric strategies” against the United States—that is, strategies designed to exploit U.S. vulnerabilities while avoiding U.S. military strengths. The threat of WMD is most frequently invoked in this regard, as are selective “high-leverage” uses of advanced conventional technologies (e.g., in the Gulf region, combining a surprise attack with use of advanced mines and missiles to impede initial U.S. access, or cleverly penetrating and collapsing information systems linking U.S. forces). The posited “endgame” of such strategies is to present the United States with options so unattractive that Washington is deterred from mounting an effective response. Although long-

³⁸For a discussion of the potential for new control arrangements, see Kenneth Watman, Marcy Agmon, and Charles Wolf, Jr., *Controlling Conventional Arms Transfers: A New Approach with Application to the Persian Gulf*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, MR-369-USDP, 1994.

standing adversaries will plan and equip for a confrontation with the United States, for most states the United States will be a secondary planning factor. The demands and challenges presented by immediate neighbors will remain the dominant drivers of military strategies. Therefore, while states can be expected to seek ways to exploit asymmetric strategies that could offer leverage in dealing with the American way of war, they must first address more immediate challenges. To the extent that these two demands are in tension, the ability of regional states to mount truly high-leverage asymmetric strategies against U.S. military forces may be constrained.

Niche competitors could also employ asymmetric military strategies aimed at the political vulnerabilities of their neighbors as a means to offset superior U.S. military capabilities. For example, a state with aggressive intent could choose to inflict widespread countervalue damage against neighboring societies. Targets could range from population centers to high-value infrastructure such as desalination plants, hydroelectric facilities, dams, and critical energy facilities. Such threats could provide an effective form of political blackmail against weak governments. Similar threats could also be used to deter regional states from granting access and support to U.S. forces. Under these circumstances, more traditional military instruments could then be used to take advantage of delays or denials.

Finally, niche competitors could use terrorism—directly or through proxies—in parallel with more-conventional operations, hoping to throw U.S. strategy off balance and erode political support for intervention. This tactic was feared during the Gulf War, but never materialized. It could easily figure in future regional contingencies.

The Growing Economic Dimensions of Security

The economic aspects of Middle Eastern geopolitics have always received considerable attention as a result of the region's energy resources. Over the next decades, it is likely that new energy, water, and infrastructure issues will substantially alter the strategic environment facing regional and extraregional powers.

Energy and Energy Routes. The continuing significance of the region for world energy supply has already been noted. This significance could well expand over the next decades as a result of in-

creased demand and the exploitation of large, newly proven reserves in North Africa, the Gulf, and, above all, Central Asia. Proven and potential oil reserves in the Caspian Sea basin are estimated at some 200 billion barrels, roughly equivalent to Iraqi reserves. Caspian natural gas reserves could be on a par with those of the United States and Mexico combined.³⁹ The exploitation and transport of these resources over the next decades will be a dramatic new element in regional geopolitics. A variety of alternative routes have been under consideration for the shipment of “early” and long-term oil—pipelines across Russia to the Black Sea, routes through the Caucasus and Turkey to the Mediterranean, shipment through Iran to the Gulf, pipelines to Pakistan and China, as well as combinations of these schemes. On a cost basis alone, it is quite possible that a substantial portion of future production from the region will go through Iran, despite U.S. opposition (will Iran still be seen as an adversary in 20 years?). This route will have important strategic consequences, because an Iranian route for Caspian oil will further increase world reliance on unimpeded navigation in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. A route through Turkey—more likely in the case of “early oil”—would have the contrasting effect of diversifying the lines of communication (LOCs) for oil, but would be hostage to stability in the Caucasus and the Kurdish regions within and outside Turkish borders.

The broader point is that new energy production and LOCs will change long-standing assumptions about choke points and economic interdependence. Major new producers will not have the luxury of shipping oil directly from their own territory. They will be dependent on stability within and stable relations with neighboring states. Another example of this phenomenon is emerging in the Mediterranean, where high-capacity pipelines for gas are being built. The new trans-Maghreb pipeline links Algerian fields with growing energy markets in southern Europe via Morocco and Spain. Expansion of the existing trans-Mediterranean pipeline will allow increased energy shipments from Libya to Europe via Sicily. The net result is likely to be a more complex set of geopolitical relationships based on energy infrastructure. The implications of this trend could vary sub-

³⁹Rosemarie Forsythe, *The Politics of Oil in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, Adelphi Paper No. 300, London: IISS, 1996, p. 6.

stantially depending upon the overall stability of the Middle East and its subregions. New vulnerabilities and opportunities for leverage in conflict will emerge. On the other hand, more diverse energy routes could also reinforce economic interdependence and help to dampen the potential for conflict where energy revenues and pipeline fees are at stake.

The Revival of Overland Links. Overland transportation in the Middle East has not fared well over the last century. Transportation infrastructure within states has remained relatively underdeveloped. More significantly, political obstacles have impeded the growth of transregional links. The lack of such links is striking given the potential that was recognized in the early years of the 20th century, when rail links across the Balkans to the Levant and the Gulf were viewed as a natural extension of land communications in Europe (the “Berlin-Baghdad railway”).⁴⁰ After nearly a century of stagnation, new links are beginning to emerge, with potentially important implications for regional geopolitics. The recently opened rail lines between Iran, Georgia, and Turkmenistan open the possibility of overland shipment of oil from Central Asia (or China) via Iranian or Turkish ports, or onward overland to Europe—while bypassing Russia. This trend will almost certainly reinforce the importance of the greater Middle East in economic terms, and could be critical to the independence of the new republics of the former Soviet Union should Russian policy take a more assertive course over the next decades. Similarly, a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute would open up the possibility of direct overland trade between Israel and its neighbors and the European Union. This trade could be an important aspect of a broader movement toward regional economic integration as a result of Arab-Israeli peace.

Economic Infrastructure. Another key trend in the economic security of the region is likely to be the continuing concentration of high-value and potentially vulnerable economic infrastructure, especially around the Persian Gulf. A complex and apparently vulnerable oil

⁴⁰The strategic implications of the Berlin-Baghdad railway scheme for German and British positions in the Middle East and the Indian Ocean were a subject of great concern at the time. The railway—never completed—threatened to outflank British maritime access to Mesopotamia and the Gulf. See E. M. Earle, *Turkey, the Great Powers and the Baghdad Railway*, New York: Macmillan, 1924.

production and transport infrastructure has long been a feature of the Gulf and North Africa. Although this infrastructure has been targeted in regional conflicts and insurgencies, including the Iran-Iraq war and the invasion of Kuwait (although at considerable economic cost in the latter case), it has proven surprisingly resilient. In Algeria, terrorist groups have not made the gas infrastructure a serious target, perhaps in anticipation of its utility to a successor regime, or perhaps as a result of tough security measures.

In the future, the key targets for regional aggressors may be the increasingly modern and highly concentrated infrastructure for power generation, desalinization, industrial production, telecommunications, and the services needed to support urban life. States or groups bent on regional intimidation will very likely seek the ability to attack such targets. This strategy in turn will raise new problems of defense for local states and their extraregional security guarantors, above all the United States. Simply put, as Middle Eastern societies become more urban, more highly industrialized, and more “modern,” they will steadily acquire new economic vulnerabilities. The growth of an indigenous defense industrial sector will also offer new targets for attack and problems for defense across the region over the longer term.

Water Fears, Water Rivalries. Competition over water resources is widely seen as a key source of conflict in the region over the next decades. By 2010, virtually all of the region’s countries and territories are projected to be “water stressed.”⁴¹ Water is already an increasingly prominent issue in the security perceptions of regional states (as in other instances of resource “vulnerability,” perceptions can be as important as reality in driving the actions of states). Leading water-related flash points will include Iraq, Syria, and Turkey (a key water-surplus state) over the Tigris, Euphrates, and Orontes waters; Iran and Afghanistan over the Helmand river; Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan over the Nile; and Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon over the Jordan, Yarmuk, and Litani Rivers and the West Bank Aquifer. Of these, the dispute between Syria and Turkey is probably the most dangerous.

⁴¹That is, having available fewer than 1,000 cubic meters per person per day, a level below which water scarcity begins to affect agriculture and industry. Lester R. Brown et al., *State of the World 1993*, A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society, New York: W. W. Norton, 1993.

But observers around the region are increasingly inclined to cite water as a likely source of future conflicts.⁴² Here, as in several other cases, friction over water can interact with territorial and political disputes to produce a volatile geopolitical mixture.

The persistence of water dependence and, above all, perceived vulnerabilities will make control over downstream water supply a source of leverage in crises and conflicts. Turkey would be in a position to exercise such leverage over Syria and Iraq, and is already doing so in a veiled manner in an effort to end Syrian support for PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) terrorism in Turkey. Sudan might similarly threaten Egypt over the Nile waters in a future crisis. In reality, tampering with the downstream flow is not easily accomplished without environmental and political costs to the upstream states, suggesting that instances of large-scale strategic interference with water supply might be a rarity. But the effect of perceived water vulnerability on regional behavior, including the possibility of preemptive action to secure water supplies, should not be dismissed.

Where the general evolution of relations is positive, cooperation over increasingly valuable water resources could spur the peaceful resolution of disputes. This cooperation has already been evident in the normalization of Jordanian-Israeli relations. The prospects for a wider settlement will require more serious treatment of water issues, especially in the Golan Heights and in the West Bank and Gaza. Under these conditions, Turkish water resources will be a key asset for encouraging and consolidating Middle East peace, and a variety of water-shipment schemes have already been suggested by Ankara and others.⁴³

Economic Warfare. From the perspective of relations between regional states and the international community as a whole, the economic dimension will be critical, and not simply because of energy and nonenergy trade. Use of economic sanctions has become a

⁴²Boutros Ghali, Egypt's Foreign Minister, is reported to have commented that the next conflict in Egypt's region would be over the Nile waters.

⁴³Turkey plans to ship water by tanker to Israel and Gaza, and might build pipelines to ship water to Jordan and the Gulf. Chris Cragg, "Water Resources in the Middle East and North Africa," in *The Middle East and North Africa 1996*, 42nd edition, London: Europa Publications Limited, 1995, pp. 162-165.

regular feature of U.S. and United Nations policy in dealing with “rogue states,” many of which are Middle Eastern. The factors identified earlier in this discussion suggest that the region will continue to produce more than its share of rogue states over the next decades. The fashion for sanctions may vary over time, especially as multilateral regimes prove difficult to launch and sustain. To the extent that sanctions continue to be applied in a Middle Eastern context, however, the United States will need to address the implications of an increasingly diverse and interdependent economic scene across the region. The proliferation of lines of communication for energy and other trade will complicate monitoring and enforcement. The industrialization and urbanization of Middle Eastern societies will change the conditions for economic warfare generally, including the effectiveness of blockades and the attack of economic targets in periods of conflict. Targets will be more varied, and new nodes and bottlenecks will present themselves, but the capacity for substitution and adjustment may also increase. Overall, however, the economic dimension of future regional crises and conflicts is likely to be more prominent rather than less.

The Erosion of Distinctions Between Regions in Security Terms

Western strategists have become accustomed to thinking about security in terms of discrete theaters—“European security,” “Middle Eastern security”—with relatively little interdependence across regions (a notable exception to this tendency could be seen early and late in the Cold War, when protracted conventional conflict between East and West seemed possible, and “theater interdependence” and “horizontal” strategies became fashionable notions). In the future, such compartmentalized thinking will be less useful as developments across the greater Middle East raise the prospect of more direct effects on the security of Europe, Eurasia, and even Asia, with important implications for U.S. freedom of action in future contingencies.

By the end of the century, it is possible that every European capital will be within range of ballistic missiles based across the Mediterranean, in the Levant, or in the Gulf. This, taken together with the potential for refugee flows and spillovers of political violence from crises on Europe’s Mediterranean and Middle Eastern periphery,

makes it clear that future strategies will have to pay attention to Europe's growing exposure to the retaliatory and spillover consequences of Western action anywhere in the Middle East. Some awareness of this issue could be seen during the Gulf War, with (ultimately overstated) concerns about terrorism, ballistic missile risks to southern Europe, and threats to Western assets in North Africa and elsewhere.⁴⁴ A future conflict in the Gulf, under conditions of greater European exposure, could have very different consequences, including greater European and Turkish reluctance to offer access to facilities, overflight, and military forces if this means placing their own territory at risk. Cooperation might ultimately be forthcoming if the stakes are high and clear enough, but the calculus of cooperation and its price could be very different. In the context of the ballistic missile risk, more effective and rapidly deployable defenses may be part of the answer to improving the prospects for en-route (as well as in-theater) access and cooperation. The reality, and the perception, of other spillover risks may be more difficult to address.

Developments in the greater Middle East will also have a potentially important role in security within Russia and its "near abroad." There will be numerous points of interaction, from the character of Islamic activism on Russia's southern flank and its effect on separatist movements and on the political evolution of the Caucasus and Central Asia, to Russia's own WMD and ballistic missile exposure. The evolution of Eurasia in security terms will be directly affected by the prospects for stability in Afghanistan, Iran, or Turkey. The prospects for the reassertion of Russian control over Central Asia and the Caucasus will be constrained to the extent that land communications between the new republics and the Middle East expand. A more assertive Turkey could also find itself in overt competition with Russia for influence in the Turkic republics. In the worst case, political vacuums and separatist movements in the Caucasus could pull Moscow and Ankara into conflict, directly or through proxies.

⁴⁴Spain had a more specific concern about the security of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on the Moroccan coast in the heated pro-Saddam atmosphere prevailing in Moroccan opinion. The Spanish military garrison was substantially reinforced during the crisis.

The Asia-Pacific region may also be increasingly, although less directly, exposed to the consequences of developments within the Middle East. Energy security is a long-standing point of interaction for Japan and could become an important stake for China. Beyond economic interests, there is a demonstrated potential for Muslim and Turkic identity and separatist pressures to affect the stability of western China. Pakistan could be drawn into closer strategic relationships with Muslim states to its west, with arms and technology transfer implications noted earlier.

Threats to Borders

The future strategic environment in the Middle East will almost certainly feature the threat of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism as permanently operating factors in military operations. Problems of regime support amidst internal conflict, of humanitarian and evacuation operations, and of other low-intensity or nonconflict contingencies will also be key elements in planning for the region. Against this background, it is essential to consider that many of the most likely and militarily stressful demands on U.S. involvement in the region over the next decades will continue to arise from the conventional defense of borders against large-scale aggression.

The Control of Territory and the Control of People

The scenarios considered for this study reveal the persistence of serious geopolitical rivalries, often reinforced by resource or stability concerns, in which attempts to overturn the territorial status quo are possible.⁴⁵ Three Arab-Israeli conflicts, two Gulf wars, and numerous lesser crises highlight the centrality of the conventional attack and defense of territory in regional conflict. The often artificial character of borders established by colonial competition and arrangement from the Maghreb to the Gulf will continue to encourage irredentism. Boundaries will continue to be essential to the exercise of

⁴⁵Some of the more prominent scenarios along these lines include potential conflicts between Morocco and Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, Egypt and Libya, Egypt and Sudan, Israel and Syria, Syria and Turkey, Iraq and Iran, Iran or Iraq and the Gulf sheikdoms or Saudi Arabia. Over the longer term, Saudi Arabia itself could develop territorial ambitions on the Arabian peninsula, beyond existing territorial disputes with Yemen.

power within the nation-state system, which, despite rising competition from nonstate actors and networks, is likely to remain a cornerstone of the regional order over the next decades. There will, however, be a growing tension between the control of territory and the control of people. The latter has been an historically important feature of Middle Eastern geopolitics, central to the management of the Ottoman Empire and a powerful feature of the contemporary scene.⁴⁶ The most recent crisis and realignments in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq illustrate this point superbly. As in the post-Cold War Balkans, the temptation to bring territorial arrangements into line with the control of people—to consolidate the national “space”—could be a highly destabilizing feature of the Middle East in the 21st century. This impulse could also spell the fragmentation of key states, including Algeria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, where ethnic separatism is already a threat to the unitary character of the state.

It is arguable that the buildup of conventional military forces across the region, apart from the issue of “strategic weight” discussed earlier, is also a leading symptom of the perceived insecurity of borders. Today’s friendly regimes are among the leading consumers of sophisticated conventional arms transfers. But with the exception of Israel and perhaps Egypt, few if any of our current allies are likely to be capable of defending their borders alone against a determined aggressor (e.g., Tunisia against Libya, Kuwait against Iraq). As a result, a serious U.S. commitment to Middle Eastern security and the defense of key allies implies a continuing requirement for deterrence and defense against large-scale aggression.⁴⁷ This requirement suggests a key task for the presence and projection of air and space power to the region through the end of the century and beyond.

Renewed Arab-Israeli conflict, perhaps with a threat of direct aggression on the Golan Heights, would raise the stakes in terms of territorial defense. By contrast, a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace would reduce (but not eliminate) the net risk to the territorial status

⁴⁶Bradford L. Thomas, “International Boundaries: Lines in the Sand (and the Sea),” in George J. Demko and William B. Wood (eds.), *Reordering the World: Geopolitical Perspectives on the 21st Century*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994, p. 92.

⁴⁷The parameters of deterrence in the region are explored in Aharon Klieman and Ariel Levite (eds.), *Deterrence in the Middle East: Where Theory and Practice Converge*, Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1993.

quo. The development of *effective* regional or subregional (Mediterranean, Gulf) collective security mechanisms would presumably be aimed at guaranteeing existing borders; the emergence of such mechanisms is a remote possibility.

New Security Geometries

Geopolitical theorists like to describe the Middle East as a “shatterbelt”—a strategically oriented region that is a politically fragmented area of competition, classically between the continental and maritime realms.⁴⁸ The Middle East’s six regional powers—Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Israel, and Turkey (Algeria has the potential to serve as a seventh)—cast their shadow over their smaller neighbors and groups within neighboring states. With the end of the Cold War and with movement, however inconclusive, on the Middle East peace process, the alliances among these states and their subordinates are increasingly fluid.⁴⁹

Even the partial, tenuous reintegration of Israel as a valid partner for Arab and Muslim states has opened new avenues for cooperation and friction. Turkey has launched an overt strategic relationship with Israel, involving intelligence sharing, training, Israeli access to Turkish airspace and, above all, joint pressure on Syria. Jordan has a strong interest in Israeli cooperation in regional stability and the containment of risks from various quarters, including Iraq and the Palestinians. Strategic cooperation among Turkey, Israel, and Jordan suggests the possibility of a formidable new alignment with U.S. backing. This potential has not gone unnoticed in the region, and has produced considerable anxiety in Syria and Egypt, the former concerned about strategic encirclement and the latter seeing in these moves tangible confirmation of its declining influence in regional affairs. Possible counters to a Turkish-Jordanian-Israeli alignment could include closer Syrian-Iranian and/or Syrian-Egyptian cooperation. Examples of shifting alignments can also be found elsewhere in the region, from the reluctance of some former members of

⁴⁸Mahan, Fairgrieve, Mackinder, and Spykman are the exemplars. See Saul B. Cohen, “Geopolitics in the New World Era: A New Perspective on an Old Discipline,” in Demko and Wood, pp. 2–35.

⁴⁹See Cohen, p. 34.

the Gulf coalition to confront Iraq, in part because of growing concerns about Iranian power, to the off-again, on-again character of Algerian backing for the Polisario movement in the Western Sahara. Smaller Arab states in the Gulf as well as the Maghreb have used the multilateral track of the Middle East peace process, including the arms control and regional security (ACRS) talks, to press their sub-regional agendas and to assert their discomfort with Egyptian leadership.

Narrow, national self-interest will be the driver for many types of realignment. Turkey will be interested in closer relations with Iran as a means of satisfying the country's growing demand for energy. The proposed natural gas deal between Ankara and Iran should be seen in this context. Similarly, Turkey will not hesitate to open a new economic relationship with Iraq, the country's largest trading partner before the Gulf War—or even, under certain conditions, to cooperate with Baghdad in facilitating the reassertion of Iraqi sovereignty in northern Iraq. The fact that Turkish policymakers are willing to envision normal relations with Iraq and Iran, despite the consequences for relations with the United States, is a measure of the strength of Turkish national interest in the region.

The conditions that have given rise to these shifting geometries could change many times over between now and the end of the century and beyond. Radical changes in regimes or the emergence of new relationships along ideological lines could produce even more striking alignments. The advent of additional Islamic regimes could yield an axis based on Iranian, Sudanese, Algerian, Libyan, or even Turkish and Egyptian ties. In this extreme setting, a secular Syria might make strategic common cause with the West and pursue a rapid disengagement with Israel. Hardly any of these potential combinations are too far-fetched. But it is worth considering the limitations to some potential alignments, even in the face of ideological and tactical interests. For example, Arab suspicion of (mostly Persian) Iran and Turkey will not be easily overcome, and nationalism is likely to remain a potent force in determining how far regional actors are willing to compromise on sovereignty issues. The essential point is that the future regional scene is likely to be characterized by more diverse and more rapidly shifting security geometries.

In some cases, security relationships long taken for granted in U.S. planning will be foreclosed. Would a successor regime in Cairo—even a familiar regime facing public criticism of Egyptian ties to the West—allow the United States to use the Suez Canal in a future Gulf contingency? If the Suez route is not available, this could have serious implications for the pace and character of U.S. power projection, with the potential for far greater burdens on airlift. In other cases, new alignments will open new possibilities for coalition strategies, presence, and power projection (e.g., the expanding defense relationship with Jordan). Flexibility and the recognition of inevitable change will be essential to maintaining freedom of action over the longer term.

Role of Extraregional Powers

The potential for shifting security geometries will not be limited to the region itself. As our analysis suggests, extraregional powers will have a continuing stake in the evolution of the greater Middle East and a growing exposure to the consequences of conflict and cooperation within the region and on its periphery. The roles of Russia, the European Union, and the United States will be central.

Russia is likely to remain extremely sensitive to the strategic orientation of areas on its southern periphery, above all Turkey and Iran. Moscow cannot be expected to remain quiescent if an anti-Russian Islamic coalition emerges in the northern Middle East. A more nationalist and assertive Russia might also seek to keep the United States off balance in the Gulf or the Levant through revived military ties to Iraq, Iran, Syria, or Libya. These ties could also imply more active transfers of WMD technology, not simply leakage of expertise and materials. A more assertive and confrontational China could play much the same role as a supplier of equipment and technology aimed at making U.S. intervention more costly and unpredictable. In general terms, however, it is difficult to envision a return to more sweeping Russian presence and engagement in the region. In places such as the Mediterranean, Russian military presence is unlikely to return in the period under discussion.⁵⁰ Similarly, the prospects for

⁵⁰Although Turkish policymakers are inclined to see Russia's prospective transfer of surface-to-air missiles to Cyprus in just these terms.

Russian designs on the resources of and maritime access to the Gulf, a perennial concern of the Cold War years, are probably nil.

If the Middle East peace process cannot be revived, or if oil markets tighten, European involvement is likely to accelerate. Even without these negative developments, the future environment is likely to be characterized by a greater degree of multipolarity, with significant European involvement on the political and economic fronts. The European Union and NATO Europe are increasingly attuned to their stakes in stability in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, and are beginning to develop new initiatives along these lines, a trend that is likely to continue. If the economic dimensions of the peace process are to move ahead, European aid, investment, and markets will be essential. In many ways, the European Union is a much more logical co-sponsor of Middle East peace efforts than Russia, whose involvement is an artifact of the immediate post-Cold War period and may not survive the next few years. At a minimum, the EU, led by France, will press for a more active political role in Arab-Israeli and Gulf security matters.

At the same time, Middle Eastern states (and the Palestinians) have already begun to look to the EU as a means of diversifying their security ties. On the economic front, it has long been evident that the future prosperity of the Middle East and North Africa will be dependent on freer access to European markets, as well as European investment and finance. The search for new security geometries that might offer opportunities to address pressing challenges (including violent internal opposition to existing regimes) has also encouraged tentative interest in security ties with the Western European Union and NATO.⁵¹ For Israel, in particular, these ties have special value, because it is arguable that the country may have more to gain from being part of the European security system than from any future Middle Eastern architecture. For the Arab partners in NATO's emerging Mediterranean dialogue, long-standing popular (and to some extent elite) distrust of NATO will make deeper cooperation difficult. Moreover, as NATO focuses more seriously on security

⁵¹NATO's Mediterranean Initiative currently includes Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania, Egypt, Israel, and Jordan.

problems in the south, it may prove difficult to reconcile partnership with a growing perception of threat.

An important variable for the future will be the extent to which NATO adopts a more active out-of-area posture and the extent to which the transatlantic relationship more broadly comes to grips with common challenges outside the European area. While the notion of greater burden-sharing in the Gulf and elsewhere is engendering heated debate on both sides of the Atlantic, lack of progress in developing a genuine European capability for power projection beyond Europe—indeed within Europe—and continuing disputes over containment versus engagement (of Iran, Iraq, and Libya) suggest little progress in this area in the near-to-mid term. Europe will be a more independent and assertive actor across the region, but is unlikely to be a more capable one in military terms.

Finally, the most important extraregional variable for the future of regional security will be the United States itself. Our analysis highlights the enduring nature of U.S. interests in the Middle East. The level and character of our engagement and presence, and our capacity for power projection in times of crisis, will be dominant elements in the regional security equation for the foreseeable future. The influence of the United States on the strategic environment across the region under current conditions cannot be overemphasized. American withdrawal—the end of America's role as preeminent security guarantor—could transform the security picture in profound terms and could affect the propensity for conflict and cooperation far beyond the region, as other extraregional actors move to fill the strategic vacuum. One of the many potentially disastrous consequences of U.S. withdrawal might be the much more rapid spread of weapons of mass destruction as regional powers strive to substitute for American deterrence or capitalize on their newfound freedom of action.

Even assuming continued American willingness to remain actively involved in the region, and the availability of money to sustain this involvement, the U.S. ability to serve as security arbiter and guarantor across the region will face new challenges as a result of the trends identified in our analysis. It is most unlikely that the United States will face any serious peer competitor in military terms, inside or outside the region, in the period under discussion. Nonetheless, the region is likely to witness types of conflict and upheaval in which

American military power will be highly constrained. In scenarios featuring internal conflicts and regional chaos where vital interests are not at stake, the United States may be reluctant to intervene at all. Indeed, in certain future strategic worlds in which patterns of conflict and regional risks are quite different from those prevailing today, the U.S. role may be an important variable, with consequent implications for strategy and the use of military force.

Strategic Implications of Regional and External Trends

The trends and drivers identified above will have important implications for U.S. strategy and Air Force planning. First, the search for strategic “weight” will provide a continuing incentive for the proliferation of conventional and unconventional arsenals. Middle Eastern rivals will be the first and most likely victims of WMD use, but the existence of such weapons and the means for their delivery at longer range will place heavy demands on surveillance and counterproliferation operations. The growing reach of systems—potentially WMD-armed—deployed in the region will also result in the growing exposure of regional and European allies to the retaliatory consequences of U.S. action in the Middle East. Together with other types of spillovers, from terrorism to refugee flows, this growing exposure will make access, overflight, and other forms of cooperation much more difficult to negotiate with potential coalition partners.

Second, the changing economic and resource aspects of security will offer new possibilities for the attack and defense of economic targets, as well as new sources of conflict and cooperation across the region. The maturing of the region’s economies and infrastructure will change the way in which sanctions are likely to be used in dealing with rogue regimes, with implications for monitoring and economic warfare. In general, the significance of economic and infrastructure factors in strategic planning for the region could increase markedly.

Third, the existence of threats on the “low” and “high” ends should not obscure the reality that large-scale conventional threats to borders will persist and perhaps drive requirements for force structure in the region. The likelihood that many friendly regimes, to whose territorial integrity we are committed, will be unable to mount an effective defense of their borders unaided reinforces the importance of this observation for future planning.

Fourth, just as regime changes are inevitable over the next decades, regional alignments will experience significant, possibly extraordinary, flux, creating problems as well as opportunities for coalition strategy, presence, and access. The ability to move forces (e.g., from the Mediterranean to the Gulf) will be less predictable, with the potential for significant changes in the mix of airlift and sealift for Middle Eastern deployments. Such an environment will place a premium on flexibility and “hedging” or on portfolio approaches to regional power projection. Current alignments cannot be taken for granted. Today’s unthinkable coalitions may not be unthinkable in 20 years’ time.

Fifth, the persistence of a wide range of regional frictions and the possibility of settlements with accompanying international guarantees (Israel-Syria is the most prominent example, but it is not the only one) suggests that the monitoring of regional disengagements and assistance with confidence-building regimes could be an important part of U.S. involvement in the region over the next decades. Security guarantees associated with the settlement of disputes, above all in an Arab-Israeli context, could significantly shape requirements. In more pessimistic scenarios, a reinvigorated Arab-Israeli dispute could also place substantial demands on U.S. power, while further complicating the outlook for regional support in the Gulf and elsewhere.

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIC WORLDS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

The internal, regional, and external trends or “drivers” we have identified could yield a wide range of outcomes and could interact to produce very different strategic worlds. We next trace four alternative net outcomes for the region. Each alternative world will have different meanings for stability; the nature of risks, strategy, and demands; and constraints on military power. The selection of these alternative worlds, while not arbitrary, is meant to be illustrative rather than definitive. We have deliberately modeled these worlds on theories prominent in the current debate on the future of the international system as a whole (“great game,” “clash of civilizations,” “the coming anarchy,” and the “end of history”), with the objective of illuminating the implications in a Middle Eastern setting. See Table

7. It is perfectly possible, even likely, that the evolution of the region toward 2025 will be a “hybrid”—exhibiting traits characteristic of more than one strategic world. We have also identified signposts or indicators that the region might be moving toward one or another world.

The “Great Game”

The thrust of this world is not unlike the current situation, with regional rivalries free of Cold War constraints and the rigidities of traditional Arab-Israeli confrontation. Specific subregional rivalries (Morocco-Algeria, Egypt-Libya, Turkey-Syria, Iran-Iraq, Iran-Turkey-Russia) would likely exist alongside broader struggles for Middle Eastern leadership, with Egypt and Iran in the vanguard. Nationalism will be a leading force in this world, possibly reinforced by religious or ideological themes. But this vision of the future environment posits an essentially secular competition among regional rivals, with considerable potential for the involvement of extraregional powers. The term “great game” is especially appropriate because one of the leading focal points for regional rivalry in this setting will

Table 7
Alternative Strategic Worlds

Parameter	Great Game	Clash of Civilizations	Anarchy	End of History
Driver	Regional rivalry	Islam vs. West	Uncontrolled ethnic/urban conflict	Convergence/integration
Strategy	Balance	Deterrence	Containment	Reassurance
Focus	Resources/territory	Borderlands	Internal	LOCs/networks
Risks	Borders	WMD/terror	Spillover	Haves vs. have-nots
Signposts	Shifting alliances	Rise of blocs	Failed states	Successful reform

be the northern Middle East—the Caucasus and Central Asia—with Russia, China, and Pakistan as potentially important actors along with Iran and Turkey.⁵² This world would constitute something of a geopolitical free-for-all, with heightened risks to the territorial status quo, heightened perceptions of vulnerability with regard to vital resources (oil, water), and attempts by unsatisfied states and groups to undermine the stability of rivals. Areas of vacuum, such as the western Sahara, Lebanon, or northern Iraq, will be focal points for conflict.

A variation on this world might see the rise of a new, modified Cold War—perhaps between the United States and China—with the Middle East as a theater for renewed strategic competition. In the worst case, the region could see new proxy wars, with the additional ingredient of weapons of mass destruction.

In this world, stability can be achieved by a balance of power or by regional hegemony. The former implies considerable flux in alignments and constant attention to the behavior of neighboring states. The latter implies an extraregional security arbiter with overwhelming military power that can be brought to bear (historically, “Pax Britannica”; currently, “Pax Americana”), or in the absence of such a power, the emergence of a regional state bent on playing the role of hegemon. The development of nuclear weapons could be an essential factor in the ability of regional states to aspire to this role over the longer term. The leading military risks under “great game” conditions will flow from the conventional threat to borders and the potential use of WMD, acquired by regional powers as part of the general quest for strategic weight and by smaller powers as a hedge against aggression.

Key indicators of movement toward this world would include a shifting pattern of regional alignments, more intensive competition over scarce resources, and more aggressive interventions by regional powers in security vacuums. Recent experience offers several of these signposts.

⁵²The “great game” refers to the 19th century rivalry between Russia and Britain over the control of Central Asia. See Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*, New York: Kodansha, 1990.

“The Clash of Civilizations”

Samuel Huntington’s widely debated *Foreign Affairs* article (and recent book) bearing this title suggests that after the competition between communist East and capitalist West, the next great global confrontation will be along civilizational lines (“the West against the rest”). In this schema, the most prominent and dangerous cleavage will be between Islam and the West. Our analysis of the strength of political Islam across the Middle East suggests that such a bloc-to-bloc confrontation is unlikely.⁵³ But the Huntingtonian thesis is worth mentioning as a stark alternative to other possible worlds. Preconditions for a clash of civilizations would include the advent of several new Islamic regimes (virtually all Middle Eastern states are candidates, not simply Algeria, Egypt, and Turkey, as often noted), and the emergence of broad-based cooperation among Islamic states, including security cooperation. WMD-related cooperation (an “Islamic bomb”) could be a feature of this environment. An Islamic bloc, incorporating earlier arrivals to Islamic politics such as Iran and Sudan, could move beyond distaste for Western power and culture to embrace active confrontation with the West. Nationalist impulses would be set aside in the service of ideological aims.

Under these conditions, a new “Iron Curtain” could emerge along north-south lines and along the borderlands between Islam and the West. The Mediterranean would serve as the focal point for confrontation. Given the extent of Russian nationalist concern about the “Islamic threat,” Russia might well form part of the Western bloc in this world, with Russia’s southern flank forming an additional line of confrontation. In many respects, this possible, but rather unlikely, world would represent a return to the thousand-year confrontation between Islam and Christianity centered in the Mediterranean and the Balkans.⁵⁴ Indeed, Spanish observers first coined the term *guerra fría*—cold war—to describe the competition between Spain and the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁵ This strategic world would mark a return to the

⁵³See the discussion of this question in Lesser and Fuller; see also John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

⁵⁴See Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1982.

⁵⁵See Ada B. Bozeman, *Strategic Intelligence and Statecraft: Selected Essays*, Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1992, pp. 235–255.

first cold war, but possibly with many of the trappings of the more familiar Cold War, including ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. In a generalized clash of civilizations, Israel's strategic position as an outpost of the West would become much more precarious, reinforcing the significance of Israel's nuclear arsenal and perhaps encouraging more concrete, formal strategic cooperation with the United States and NATO (if the latter exists in its current form through the year 2025).

In this world, the thrust of U.S. strategy toward the region will be deterrence, over-the-horizon presence (except in the Mediterranean—few if any regional states will want a U.S. military presence on their territory), and counter-terrorism. A variation on this world might include threatened cutoffs of oil from Islamic producers, and disastrous price increases. Operations aimed at seizing readily accessible oil resources in the Gulf or North Africa might be a part of this environment (the feasibility of such operations was widely debated in the mid-to-late 1970s).

Relevant signposts for this world would include the rise of new Islamic regimes, the emergence of overt “civilizational” blocs, and the adoption of declaratory strategies in the West aimed at countering an “Islamic threat”—all most unlikely, with the exception of new Islamic states.

“The Coming Anarchy”

This alternative world springs directly from the observations offered earlier in relation to rapid population growth and uncontrolled urbanization across the greater Middle East. The notion that these trends, evident throughout much of the Third World, are leading to the breakdown of societies and the “failure of states” was popularized by Robert Kaplan in a 1994 article entitled “The Coming Anarchy,” as well as in a recent book.⁵⁶ The hallmarks of this world are growing economic disparity between “haves” and “have-nots,” political chaos, rampant urban violence, and new risks to stability in

⁵⁶See Robert D. Kaplan, “The Coming Anarchy,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994; and Robert D. Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, New York: Random House, 1996.

the form of environmental degradation and epidemics. Large-scale ethnic conflict, migration, and refugee flows are also leading features of this world.

In this environment, the leading sources of conflict are domestic, and the strategic imperative for regional states and extraregional powers alike will be the containment of chaos and associated spillovers, from terrorism and organized crime to refugee movements and disease. Ethnic, tribal, and religious cleavages could also be expected to thrive in these chaotic conditions, and the containment of these problems will become the focus of extraregional actors as well as more-capable regional powers. Some degree of regional exploitation of these conditions can also be expected. The situation in the Sudan provides perhaps the best glimpse into this type of future. More dramatic examples are to be found in sub-Saharan Africa (Rwanda and Liberia are the archetypes). The “coming anarchy” model predicts similar breakdowns of society in Egypt, Algeria, and even Turkey. Intervention for peacekeeping or humanitarian purposes in such an environment will be extraordinarily challenging, and the scope of the chaos envisioned in this regional world may discourage Western attempts to intervene at all. Containment rather than intervention may be the longer-term policy focus for the United States and Europe.

The most important indicator that the region may be heading in the direction of anarchy would be increasing examples of “failed states” in which the economic, political, and social order has broken down. Egypt will be a key bellwether over the next decade.

“The End of History”

Notwithstanding these pessimistic scenarios, it is also possible that the Middle East—at least parts of it—will evolve along much more positive lines in economic, political, and security terms over the next decades. Francis Fukuyama’s notion of the “end of history” referred directly to the triumph of Western liberalism over its ideological

competitors as a means of organizing society, with positive implications for the international system.⁵⁷

With some interpretive license and *pace* Frank Fukuyama, the broad outlines of this world in Middle Eastern terms would include a comprehensive and durable settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute, successful political and economic reforms and peaceful transitions from authoritarian rule, and movement toward regional integration and effective security architectures. Population growth will be brought under control. Secularism, democracy, and free-market economies will flourish in key states (e.g., Turkey, Egypt) where future paths now are uncertain, and will eventually become characteristic of changing societies across the region, including the republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Human rights performance will improve and will be accompanied by wider adherence to international norms of internal and external behavior, all of which will contribute to regional security and stability. In addition to economic integration within the region, the Middle East and North Africa will develop a closer economic and political relationship with Europe. Over the longer term, the more dynamic Middle Eastern economies will begin to converge with (a much enlarged) Europe in terms of prosperity. Under these conditions, Turkey might even become a full member of the EU. The combination of relatively full access to European markets and greatly improved infrastructure will contribute to growth from the Maghreb to Central Asia.

In short, this world envisions a transformation of the region from high levels of insecurity and a high propensity for conflict to an environment in which security is a second- or third-order concern. U.S. and Western strategy toward the region in this setting would more nearly approximate strategy for Europe: reassurance against residual risks. These risks will flow from transitions gone awry and from the resentment and social tensions that economic reforms will doubtless produce. The character of likely risks in this very optimistic scenario suggests that military requirements could be satisfied without large-scale extraregional presence. The settlement of basic disputes may also encourage the emergence of genuinely effective regional secu-

⁵⁷See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: The Free Press, 1992.

rity and arms control arrangements for the Middle East, including the limitation of weapons of mass destruction.

The leading indicators of movement toward this (perhaps unreasonably) optimistic scenario would be evidence of successful political and economic reform in key states, successful conclusion of the Middle East peace process, and the withering of revolutionary and radical religious movements and regimes. These developments are possible for the region over the next decades; the difficulty will be getting from here to there and the considerable risks to stability arising from the transitions.

Military Demands and Constraints in Alternative Worlds

The alternative worlds discussed above have distinctive implications for the demands and constraints on the use of air and space power and other military instruments. The “great game” is perhaps closest to the environment facing military planners today, with high demand arising from diverse risks and potentially stressful contingencies. Regional rivalry places a premium on the defense of borders and the protection of resources. A significant regional presence is a necessity for purposes of reassurance and rapid response. On the other hand, constraints are relatively light. The desire for balance and reassurance allows for a considerable degree of regional cooperation and host-country support. We have adversaries, but we also have allies. The aggressive nature of potential adversaries allows scope for the use of force in response. Potential contingencies are, for the most part, amenable to the application of conventional air power.

A “clash of civilizations” would pose very different challenges for U.S. strategy and power projection. The emergence of an Islamic bloc with conventional and unconventional military capabilities and the capacity, by virtue of geography, for pursuing horizontal strategies, will be highly demanding. The borderlands between Islam and the West would become a new front line for European security. Israeli security would become much more tenuous and could impose additional requirements on the United States. WMD risks and delivery systems of longer range would take on new meaning if Western—perhaps U.S.—territory emerged as a primary target. At the same time, much of this demanding agenda for deterrence and defense would have to be met from over the horizon—few if any regional

states would tolerate a U.S. military presence, and the maintenance of substantial forces offshore (e.g., in the Gulf) might become untenable. A broad-based confrontation between Islam and the West therefore implies high demands and high constraints.

“Anarchy” would imply a very different strategic environment for the use of force, including air power, with a proliferation of internal conflicts and murky clashes among nonstate actors. Humanitarian and environmental crises will also be a prominent feature in this world, and urban settings will figure prominently. Successful intervention in these situations will require specialized forces and coalition arrangements. Restrictive rules of engagement and general limitations on the use of forces will be the norm. Overall, constraints will be high. But demand may also be low, as few contingencies will be major in character, and the national taste for intervention in this environment may be limited.

Finally, the “end of history” implies fewer and lesser conflicts across the region, and thus far lower demand (and even this may be met by regional or near-regional powers). In those rare instances in which the use of U.S. military force is required, constraints will be moderate or low. Limitations on the use of force will exist, especially in the context of peacekeeping operations, but regional consensus for action is likely, increasing the prospects for access and cooperation. Relevant models from a different setting might be NATO land and air operations in Bosnia. A summary is shown in Figure 3.

REGIONAL CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall Observations

To the extent that the United States remains actively engaged in global security, crises and conflicts in the Middle East will remain a leading source of demands on U.S. military power, including air and space power. At the same time, the definition and character of the region in security terms are likely to change substantially over the next decades. Indeed, many of the trends driving these changes are already observable on the regional scene.

- *Future sources of conflict will be more diverse; old centers of gravity are changing.* The long-standing U.S. focus on the Persian

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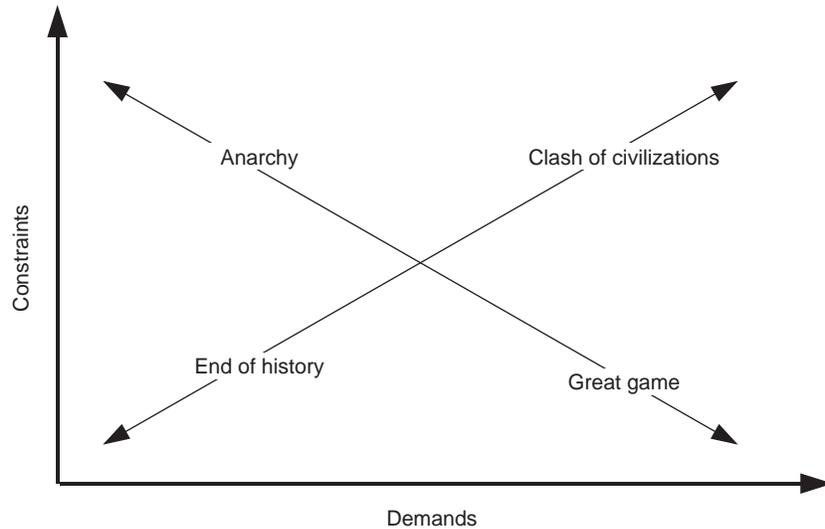


Figure 3—U.S. Military Demands and Constraints in Alternative Worlds

Gulf and the Arab-Israeli confrontation in the Levant will remain, but demanding future contingencies are just as likely to arise from instability in North Africa, on Turkey's borders, and in the Caucasus and Central Asia—formerly peripheral areas on the borderlands of the Middle East. Air Force planning for the next decades must anticipate a far broader range of scenarios and missions, functionally and geographically.

- *Many of the leading sources of conflict in the region will be internal, and for most regional states security will be, above all, a question of internal security.* Aging leaderships and a steady erosion of the legitimacy and capacity for control of economically hard-pressed regimes suggest that the political constellation of the region may change significantly over the next decades. Few, if any, of today's regimes—from U.S. allies to rogue states—are assured of survival toward the year 2025. Our capacity to influence the internal evolution of regional states is likely to be limited, and thus our strategy and planning for the region must incorporate a

significant hedging component, with consideration of alternative means of deterrence and power projection.

- *Islam and nationalism will be key drivers in the evolution of societies and policies across the greater Middle East.* It is very likely that the region will see the rise of additional Islamist regimes, although this need not necessarily imply radical shifts in foreign and security policy orientation. Even where Islam is a powerful political force, rising nationalism is likely to have a strong effect on regional behavior. At a minimum, the future environment is likely to be more unpredictable and difficult from the perspective of risks and prospects for security cooperation. There is a high probability of the loss of major security partners over the next decades.
- *Traditional distinctions between the Middle East and adjacent regions will continue to erode in security terms.* The spread of longer-range weapons systems and the continued challenge of spillovers, from terrorism to refugee flows and energy vulnerabilities, will mean ever-greater interdependence between the Middle Eastern, European, and Eurasian environments. At its most extreme, this interdependence could imply growing problems of homeland defense (e.g., in relation to ballistic missiles and terrorism) emanating from the Middle East.
- *There is little prospect that the United States will face any true “peer competitors” in military terms from within the region, but more capable “niche competitors” may well emerge.* Future regional adversaries will be tempted to pursue asymmetric strategies, making use of terrorist and WMD threats, perhaps in combination with conventional warfare. Given the growing range of ballistic missiles deployed in the region and the capacity of terrorist networks, such threats are just as likely to emerge in distant rear areas (e.g., the Mediterranean or Egypt in the case of operations in the Gulf). Broader frictions between Islam and the West along civilizational lines—however unlikely—will increase the potential for regional cooperation among potential adversaries, especially with regard to WMD and terrorism. More-assertive extraregional powers, including Russia and China, could encourage the rise of niche competitors within the region.

Demands and Constraints on Air and Space Power

The key internal, regional, and external trends shaping the geopolitics of the greater Middle East toward the year 2025 will impose specific demands and constraints on air and space power in the context of regional contingencies.

- *The conventional defense of territory will continue to be a key factor shaping requirements for deterrence, presence, and power projection.* The combination of persistent regional frictions, concerns over the control of resources (oil, water), large conventional arsenals, and the limited capacity for self-defense of key allied states suggests that the defense of borders will be a key task for American air power in the region. Attention to “low” and “high” end threats—terrorism and weapons of mass destruction—should not obscure the continuing challenge of large-scale conventional aggression. To the extent that the Middle East peace process stalls or goes into reverse, demands on military power from this quarter will increase further.
- *The application of air power in urban settings will be a leading feature of the future Middle Eastern security environment.* Crucial political struggles affecting the future of regimes and Western interests will be played out in the region’s cities. Critical economic and defense-industrial infrastructures will be concentrated in urban areas. Cities will be a focal point for terrorism risks, both to regimes and to Western citizens and assets, and will be key strategic prizes in regional conflicts. Combined with the likelihood of humanitarian operations in densely populated areas, the demands and constraints associated with the use of force in urban settings will be an increasingly important feature of the environment for air power. Beirut in 1982 might be just as important a model for the future as the desert war in the Gulf.
- *There will be growing demand for air power in the attack and defense of economic targets and for economic warfare generally.* The modernization of Middle Eastern economies is resulting in more concentrated and vulnerable economic infrastructures outside the energy sector. The expansion of indigenous defense industries is another factor in this equation. The defense of economic infrastructure is likely to become a more important issue in the defense of friendly regimes given the growing capacity of re-

gional aggressors to place targets of economic value at risk. At the same time, U.S. air power will be central to the economic dimensions of strategy in major contingencies, and as a means of monitoring and enforcing economic blockades against rogue regimes.

- *The Air Force is likely to face high demands for surveillance and reconnaissance across a broader and rapidly changing region.* Several aspects of the emerging strategic environment will drive this demand, including the prominence of the mobile target problem arising from the intense proliferation pressures in the region; the popularity of economic sanctions as a means of containing aggressive states and the associated monitoring requirements; likely U.S. roles in monitoring any agreements arising from the Middle East peace process (e.g., on the Golan Heights); and cooperation in implementing regional confidence-building measures. Humanitarian, environmental, and refugee crises arising from a more anarchic Middle East will add to this demand. Even if European and regional allies take on more of the security burden over the next decades, they will still look to the United States to provide intelligence and surveillance support in crises (even in cases where our allies act alone).
- *The United States will face a mounting tension between continued demands for regional presence, especially in the Persian Gulf and the eastern Mediterranean, and increasingly contentious and constrained relationships with host countries.* Enduring military imbalances and the need for rapid reaction and visible deterrence, in addition to likely peacetime monitoring requirements, argue for a substantial and continuing presence. Yet this presence will be increasingly difficult to manage. Beyond the exposure of U.S. forces to WMD and terrorism risks, political acceptance problems and the prospect of political instability and economic stringency in friendly regimes will limit host country support and tolerance for the use of air power against neighbors, except in defense of their own borders. Closer attention to sovereignty concerns and more-diverse approaches to regional security among traditional allies will reinforce this trend. The most stressful situation would arise from confrontation with a bloc of revolutionary states, in which the issue of U.S. presence appears in stark “West against the rest” terms. In this case, the

demands for deterrence will be high, but few regional states will be inclined to host a U.S. air presence, and new arrangements for over-the-horizon presence will be required.

- Finally, the United States will face greater uncertainty of en route and in-theater access in crises, with implications for regional strategy and Air Force operations. From western Europe to Turkey and the Gulf sheikdoms, traditional allies will be increasingly exposed to the retaliatory consequences of U.S. action anywhere in the Middle East. Even where a basic political consensus exists, cooperation in future crises may have more in common with the October 1973 (Yom Kippur War) or September 1996 (Palestinian-Israeli clashes) experiences than the extraordinarily benign atmosphere of Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Predictable access to air bases and overflight rights cannot be taken for granted today, and certainly not over the longer term. To the extent that traditional allies are still inclined to help, the “price” of cooperation—political, economic, and defensive (e.g., against ballistic missile threats)—is likely to be far higher than in the past. The Air Force will also be affected by the broader prospects for cooperation. If Egypt refuses to allow the use of the Suez Canal for moving forces and materiel to the Gulf in a future crisis, the burden on airlift may increase substantially. Uncertain prospects for Turkish support in regional contingencies—apart from the defense of Turkish territory—could make Incirlik Air Base irrelevant to power projection in the Levant and the northern Gulf, increasing the value of Jordanian and Israeli alternatives.