



Gulf-U.S. Relations: Going Where?

By Dr. John Duke Anthony

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Editor's Note:

In light of the long-awaited testimony before Congress today by U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and Commanding General of U.S. Forces in Iraq General David Petraeus, SUSRIS is pleased to provide the following essay on "Gulf-U.S. Relations: Going Where?" by Dr. John Duke Anthony. Dr. Anthony is the founding President and CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations.

Established in 1983, the Council is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit and nongovernmental educational organization. The Council's mission is educating Americans about the U.S.-Arab relationship and the nature and scope of American interests and involvement in the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world. A fuller account of Dr. Anthony's biography, the Council's programs, events, and activities, and its role as publisher of record for Saudi-U.S. Relations Information Services can be obtained via the Council's Web site at www.ncusar.org. An edited version of this essay is scheduled to appear in the annual *Gulf Yearbook* published by the Gulf Research Center (GRC) in the Emirate of Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

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Today's Congressional testimonies by the lead U.S. diplomatic and military representatives in Iraq are of interest and value for the considerable light they shed on American attitudes and actions in that war-torn country. The previous week's commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the American-led invasion and occupation of Iraq did likewise and included a more diverse range of analysis of U.S. policies and positions related to Iraq. The coming weeks will mark yet another commemoration: the seventieth anniversary of America's energy and economic relationship with Saudi Arabia.

The essay that follows addresses trends and indications relating to those two phenomena as well as several other issues bearing on America's relations with the Gulf region as a whole, and vice versa. It does so through a prism that focuses on key policy-related developments that have led to the situation in which the United States and the Gulf countries presently find themselves in relation to each other's needs, concerns, interests, objectives, and relations. Following a brief introductory overview, the essay proceeds to address, respectively, matters pertaining to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, defense, and Palestine en route to concluding with an assessment of the prospects for U.S.-Gulf relations in the foreseeable future.

Introduction

The past year has been replete with challenges for U.S.-Gulf relations. Evidence of constancy within change and change within constancy is that issues pertaining to the Gulf and nearby areas continue to dominate headlines. In international and regional affairs generally, Iraq and Iran, together with Saudi Arabia, oil, and Palestine, remain among the foremost topics of political discussion in Washington, the Gulf, the eastern Mediterranean, and beyond. Closely aligned to them in the public mind, if such a thing exists, are popular perceptions of the U.S. position and role in furthering or worsening the prospects for security and stability in the countries noted and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Throughout much of the year, the conflict between Washington and Tehran over the Islamic Republic's nuclear program, in addition to Iran's growing political influence in the region, has remained in prominent focus in the United States and the Gulf as a whole. The accompanying tensions have made for a series of harsh exchanges between leaders in the United States and Iran, further worsening the existing atmosphere of mutual recrimination and demonization. On the one hand, providing additional frameworks of debate have been ongoing efforts to weigh the implications of these issues and their impact upon intra-Gulf and Gulf-U.S. ties. On the other have been simultaneous attempts by specialists to assess the state of interests and key foreign policy objectives among the concerned parties and their impact upon domestic politics within the capitals of the Gulf countries, the Bush administration, and the run-up to this year's congressional and presidential elections. This essay seeks to demonstrate how the current situation in which the United States and the Gulf countries find themselves came to be and to delineate and examine the most

pressing challenges that confront them from this point forward.

Context

Neither Iraq nor Iran has been the sole or paramount concern among leaders and informed citizenry within the Gulf or the United States. From a broader perspective, an at times over-riding concern among officials in Washington and the capitals of the GCC countries, in addition to those in Amman, Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Tehran, Tel Aviv, and elsewhere, has been the ongoing potential for a wider regional conflict. Accentuating this concern have been terms like a 'Shia Crescent' extending from Iran to Lebanon, which has conjured up fears of sectarian strife and heightened struggles for influence in the region.

Of far greater potential to practically guarantee broadening regional insecurity and instability has been the serious and ongoing debate over the possibility of the United States using armed force against Iran. Only this past November, with the publication of a new U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran, did there appear a lessening of the case for the United States attacking the Islamic Republic militarily. Even so, hawkish members and supporters of the U.S. and Israeli governments were undaunted. They remain adamant in their opposition to Iran completing the uranium fuel enrichment process that would make it possible to produce a nuclear weapon in the event the Islamic Republic should decide to do so.

At the same time, many close to the White House, together with Members of Congress and prominent commentators in the media and public policy research institutes, have continued to support President Bush's insistence upon distinguishing between what he has called "moderate" and "radical" regimes in the region.[1] The late November 2007 Annapolis Arab-Israel Peace Conference notwithstanding, U.S. strategy throughout most of the past year until the present has aimed less at bringing together potential adversaries in the region and more at containing Iran, Syria, and the organizations that it persists in describing not only as extremist and militant but also as threats to U.S. and allied countries' interests. This strategy has been manifested in a variety of efforts. A common denominator has been the way in which the strategy has been aimed at economically and diplomatically isolating Iran, refusing to increase the caliber of engagement with Syria, and in closing ranks with important allies in the region.

SAUDI ARABIA

Among the most prominent of Saudi Arabia's activities over the past year has been the continuation and acceleration of its diplomatic initiatives. The strategic objectives in the kingdom's efforts have been constant. One goal has been to bring warring or quarreling political parties and movements closer together. A second has been to establish points of consensus with a view to forging firmer foundations supportive of détente if not also rapprochement between leaders of opposing political factions. A third has been, wherever possible, to lessen the overall level of tension, acrimony, and polarization among the relevant actors regarding contentious issues and interests.

To these ends, the Kingdom has devoted considerable effort to regional diplomacy. In so doing, it has put itself at the forefront of efforts to resolve regional crises and bring competing parties to the negotiating table. For example, Saudi Arabia has continuously expanded its role in attempting to defuse the political situation in Lebanon, where Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's embattled government remains in a standoff with an opposition bloc that includes Hizbollah and the followers of Christian General Michel Aoun. While the Kingdom all this time has remained a key supporter of Siniora's government, King Abdallah met with Hizbollah members in December 2006 and has since then continued to spearhead efforts to resolve the crisis. Efforts to bring about a resolution, however, have stalled. This was most recently evident in the annual Arab League summit in Damascus March 29-30, to which Saudi Arabia and numerous other Arab countries sent low-level representatives and Lebanon boycotted the meeting altogether. Not surprisingly, there were no dramatic breakthroughs as the delegates were divided on matters pertaining to violence in Iraq, how best to proceed in Lebanon given its boycott of the meetings, and what else to do in order to reconcile Hamas and Fatah in the Israeli-occupied areas of Palestine. An additional unstated aspect of the summit was the disenchantment among numerous delegation leaders of Syria's attitudes towards Lebanon, support for Hamas against Fatah, and close relationship with Iran. 2 Despite this, Riyadh has continued to call for the Lebanese elections to be held in accordance with the country's constitution as a means of peacefully and effectively ending the longstanding standoff between key political factions.

Diplomacy, Peacemaking, and Washington's Reactions

One of the Kingdom's greatest achievements on the regional diplomatic front, albeit one that proved short-lived, was the brokering in Makkah on February 8, 2007 of a political cooperation and power sharing agreement between the feuding Palestinian factions of Fatah and Hamas. The two factions concurred on ministers for a unity government. For a time, it seemed that Palestine was on its way out of the political impasse that had gripped it since the Hamas electoral victory in January 2006. Despite the eventual collapse of the unity government and the onset of a different phase of the crisis later in the year when Hamas effectively seized complete control of the Gaza Strip, leaving Fatah in control of the West Bank, no one has faulted Saudi Arabia for its efforts. To the contrary, Riyadh has burnished its credentials as a leader willing to take political risks that others have been either too timid or unwilling to assume for the sake of pursuing regional peace.

Dating from a year ago, the Kingdom's regional peacemaker role was further strengthened by its decision to host the annual summit of the Arab League in Riyadh after previously declaring it would not do so. During the March 28-29, 2007 conference, a 2002 peace plan originally presented by then Crown Prince Abdallah at an earlier Arab summit in Beirut was revived and put forward as a new pan-Arab peace overture to Israel. The conference, however, also heightened Saudi Arabia's and most other Arab countries' growing exasperation with the U.S. position in Iraq. King Abdallah, voicing the sentiments of the vast majority of those present, issued the strongest condemnation to date of the U.S. presence in Iraq, calling it an "illegitimate foreign occupation." Many American elected and politically appointed officials were taken aback not only by the nature of the substantive charge but also by the force with which it was delivered. Not surprisingly, tensions between the two countries'

political establishments simmered throughout the remainder of the spring and on into the summer.

On June 24, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to support a measure originally introduced by Democratic Congressman Anthony Weiner of New York. The measure, which sought to ban all U.S. aid to Saudi Arabia, was a potent symbolic, if not material, gesture. Lost on most American analysts was the substantive blow that would have been dealt Saudi Arabia in the defense cooperation sector in the event the president signed the measure into law. As of this writing, President Bush had not done so and it is unclear whether the measure will be reintroduced before the end of the president's administration in 2009. The context for concern is that the Kingdom, in light of its decades-old defense relationship with the United States, has long benefited from a discounted rate charged it by the U.S. International Military Education and Training Program in association with the U.S. Defense Institute for Security Assistance Management. The institute has long been responsible for educating and training the Kingdom's security assistance officers and other military personnel tasked with working alongside their American defense counterparts and vice versa. Also at risk was a first-ever U.S. taxpayer contribution to an agreement between Saudi Arabia's leading women's education institution and a prominent American university whereby the latter has been providing technical and administrative assistance to the former with a view to enhancing the caliber of skills and human resource development among Saudi Arabian women. Further heating up the bilateral political temperature, a U.S. report in July charged that Riyadh was working to undermine the Nuri Al-Maliki government in Iraq while at the same time failing to exert due effort to curb the influx of foreign fighters into Iraq, allegations the Saudi government rejected as outrageous.

Undaunted, King Abdallah continued his diplomatic initiatives, to mixed results. A landmark visit to the Vatican in November signaled an increased willingness to engage in intra-civilization dialogue. Earlier, a similarly high-profile visit to Great Britain was dogged by mutual recrimination, with the Saudi monarch claiming that the United Kingdom had not done all it could to prevent the 7/7 bombings in London, and various British groups and media outlets calling for a boycott of the visit on the basis of the King's comments and the country's human rights record.

Energy and U.S. Leaders' Failure to Level with the American People

On the oil front, the Kingdom has lost no opportunity to place U.S. complaints about high prices in context. The Saudi Ministers of Petroleum and Foreign Affairs have underlined that the unprecedented high price of oil cannot be laid at the feet of the oil-producing countries or attributed to notions of inadequate supply. Instead, the main reasons remain the actions of foreign and especially American financial hedge fund managers and speculators, the record-high use of and dramatically increased demands for imported oil by China and India, the ongoing and periodically heightened climate of fear spurred and sustained by the U.S. invasion and occupation-induced chaos in Iraq, and continued talk in the United States and Israel about the possibility of one or the other of these countries, or possibly the two combined, attacking Iran militarily. Additional factors sustaining high prices continue to be the absence for 30 years and counting of a single new refinery in the United States and intermittent supply disruptions in places such as Venezuela, Nigeria, Russia, and the United States itself following an explosion at a major refinery in Texas. [3] Even so, Saudi Arabia has

repeatedly declared its readiness not only to pressure its fellow OPEC members to moderate their price increases but also to give serious and favorable consideration to increasing the levels of its own oil production with a view to lowering or at least not raising oil prices further.

With the American presidential election season proceeding towards the coming summer's political party conventions, U.S. lawmakers and other political aspirants to public office have required no reminding of their constituents' concerns about gas and heating oil prices. Even so, neither Congress nor the Administration has budged from their previous reluctance to inform and educate the American people about basic energy realities. The leaders of both branches of government continue to abdicate their responsibility to level with the electorate about how energy realities have determined an interdependent relationship between the United States and Gulf as well as numerous other oil exporters to their respective benefit.

Prominent among basic facts that most American political leaders have refused to include in their public statements is that Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries contain 70 per cent of the world's proven hydrocarbon reserves and that their oil – in total amount nearly *thirty* times that of the United States -- continues to be the easiest and least costly to produce anywhere on the planet. (Author's italics). Also absent from U.S. official pronouncements on policy matters related to energy issues is that Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries' governments remain as amenable as they have been for the past quarter of a century to supply not just U.S. energy markets but also the soaring demands associated with the robust economies of China, India, and Japan that show no signs of lessening their status as serious competitors. Worse, most of the Democratic and Republican candidates for the 2008 U.S. presidential nomination have compounded the ignorance of the American people as a whole by repeatedly making claims bordering on fantasy. Most of the candidates have implied that, if they were elected president, they would help usher in a new era in which the United States would be free of reliance on Middle Eastern oil.[4]

More specifically, neither U.S. Government leaders nor the leaders of either of the two major American political parties have been willing to admit that not only claims to the effect that the United States can become self-reliant in energy matters in the foreseeable future are fallacious in the extreme but that, to the contrary, the United States is destined to remain in a relationship of extraordinary and reciprocally rewarding *interdependence* with the Gulf and the world's other oil producers for the near term and beyond for decades to come. (Author's italics). Neither has Washington officialdom or any of the presidential aspirants publicly acknowledged or explained how the domestic and foreign energy components of the American economy – presently, up to 60 per cent of the country's energy needs are imported – have underpinned the extraordinarily high standards of living among American citizens in comparison to their counterparts in other countries since World War Two. Moreover, no American leader thus far has pointed out that most Europeans, Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans pay double what American motorists shell out per gallon of gasoline at the pump at service stations throughout the United States or that most hair shampoos, soft drinks, and mouth washes cost more per gallon than does a gallon of gasoline. And no candidate for public office has yet had the courage to admit publicly how, for more than half a century and counting, the energy dimension of the U.S.-Gulf relationship has been directly related to the security, stability, economic

growth, and material well-being of America's friends, allies and strategic partners worldwide.

The consequences of this failure of American domestic leadership have hardly been cost-free. For example, despite the manifold instruments at the command of the executive and legislative branches of government for use in informing and educating the public about energy realities, the number of Americans that understand how the U.S. economy and the physical comfort of U.S. citizens benefits massively and pervasively from the country's position and role in the Gulf countries' energy sectors remains exceptionally limited. In addition, few Americans comprehend the degree to which the placement of hundreds of billions of dollars of these countries' oil- and gas-generated wealth in U.S. banks, government bonds, and, increasingly, corporate equity continue to help grow the American economy, lessen the need for increased federal taxation, aid in maintaining inflation at manageable levels, extend production runs, lower the per unit costs of expensive defense, aviation, and many other American manufactured products exported to the Gulf countries and elsewhere, and thereby contribute directly and indirectly to the employment and livelihoods of millions of Americans.[5] Fewer still are aware of how the deep-rooted, massive, and pervasive extent of these benefits has long been, and remains, a source of profound envy for the governments and peoples of every other country.

Saudi Arabia, for its part, remains acutely conscious of the international expectation that it continue wielding its paramount influence within OPEC responsibly. To this end, it has reassured oil importers again and again of its commitment to steady supply and "moderate" prices not only in principle but in practice. In so doing, it has been at pains to emphasize that its statements in this regard are not mere rhetoric. With a view to doing what it can to slow the rise in price, if not lower it to a more internationally accepted level, Riyadh has not only pressured fellow OPEC member countries to raise production. It has also continued, as it has been doing for years, to maintain at its own expense the world's largest spare production capacity while at the same time tapping into its sovereign wealth to invest billions in exploring for, discovering, and bringing into production new sources of supply. Further, the Kingdom has entered into additional major investments in China with a view to helping meet that country's continued skyrocketing demands for oil imports to fuel its booming economic growth. [6]

IRAQ

The recent commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003, undoubtedly helped to place into clearer context and perspective that which only a year earlier was exceptionally complex and, for many, difficult to comprehend. Indeed, it would be hard to have imagined 2007 having begun for Iraqis on a more emotionally charged note. Former president Saddam Hussein was executed by hanging on December 30, 2006. That the execution was slated for the first day of the Sunni celebration of Eid al-Adha (the ritual Muslim feast at the end of the annual Islamic pilgrimage) was a point not lost on the country's citizens. Shortly thereafter, grisly videos of the event surfaced, sparking protests and outrage.

Reconfiguring U.S. Military Strategies

On the military front as it pertained to the United States and the Iraqi government, the year saw the implementation of a new American strategy, as well as a new military commander and top diplomat in Iraq – respectively, General David Petraeus, a highly regarded authority on counterinsurgency, and Ryan Crocker, a distinguished Arabist and career ambassador. It was widely agreed that 2006 had been disastrous, with that year’s February bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samara inflaming sectarian hostility to levels not seen before. In conjunction with the Democratic victory in the U.S. Congressional elections in November 2006 and the departure of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, following earlier resignations by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Undersecretary Douglas Feith, and United Nations Ambassador John Bolton -- all four of whom having been among the more ardent American advocates of the United States attacking Iraq militarily -- the significantly heightened levels of inter- and intra-communal strife amidst widespread chaos underscored the need for a major adjustment in strategy.

On January 10, President Bush formally announced what the White House called “a new direction” for Iraq, reflecting a strategy that became generally known as the “surge.” Nearly 30,000 additional U.S. soldiers were subsequently sent to Iraq. The stated goals were to create “space for political progress” by enhancing security, especially in Baghdad. To this end, the new plan also established “benchmarks” for Iraqi politicians to meet. Foremost among them were an oil revenue-sharing agreement, a political reconciliation process, and, to that end, the enactment of a law allowing former members of the Ba’thist Party (most of whom were summarily dismissed by American authorities barely three months after the U.S.-led occupation commenced) to join the government. By year’s end, critics noted that, despite Bush administration supporters’ claims to the contrary, most of the more important benchmarks had not been met.

At the onset of the surge, supporters argued that real gains were possible and that the new strategy offered America’s best chance for establishing a stable state in Iraq. Unstated was that the United States would continue building four major American military bases in Iraq – in the vicinity of Baghdad, in the Kirkuk-Mosul area near the oil fields of northern Iraq, in the south not far from Basra and the southern region’s prodigious oil supplies, and in the western part of the country where potential oil fields have yet to be explored. The bases alone, combined with the ongoing large numbers of American troops and civilian military contractors, continue to provide abundant evidence that the United States has every intention to maintain a massive military, economic, and political presence in Iraq for many years to come. A result has been the degree to which Baghdad’s ability to initiate and implement a range of actions at odds with major American interests independent of overriding direct and indirect U.S. input and influence remains considerably curtailed. Indeed, the country’s overall freedom to maneuver relatively unfettered in pursuit of its legitimate national interests remains reduced to a level not seen since the era preceding the Iraqi revolution of 1958, when despite being a member of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Iraq’s foreign relations and defense policies were heavily influenced indirectly, and at times directly, by Great Britain.[7]

These developments, coupled with the continued placement of numerous U.S. advisers in virtually every Iraqi government ministry, indicate that whatever Iraqi regime may be in place at a given moment in the immediately foreseeable future will remain de facto an American client state. In essence, its situation will likely continue to be not unlike the protectorates through which Great Britain long administered key components of the defense and foreign relations of most of the Gulf countries. As such, with regard to many of the most vital functions of any government, it will remain stripped like the Vichy government in France and that led by Norwegian Prime Minister Quisling in World War II of any meaningfully definitive ability to manifest the three fundamental criteria of membership in the United Nations as defined by the UN Charter: namely, its national sovereignty, political independence, and (possibly, yet to come) territorial integrity. [8]

Critics also charge that, despite the presence of 162,000 U.S. service men and women in Iraq, plus tens of thousands more American security subcontractors and civilian support personnel – the total representing four times the number of forces the U.S. maintains in Korea and Germany combined – the U.S. military continues to have far too few troops (less than half what pre-war Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki and former CENTCOM Commanding Generals J. Binford Peay and Anthony Zinni had indicated would be necessary) to bring the country under control.[9] Opponents claim further that any gains from the surge will likely be lost when the additional forces inevitably withdraw.

It was in the context of the surge strategy that the new Democratic Congress prepared to challenge the president's war policy. The Democrats were split, however, on the best way to proceed. Even now, they remain divided on this issue. Many, sensitive to the emotional and patriotic calls to "Support the Troops," continue to fear the potential political repercussions of cutting off funding. In any case, it has thus far proved impossible on procedural grounds for the Democrats in the Senate to muster the necessary 60 votes to lessen the financing of the war in any significant way. Even so, after numerous votes and lengthy consultation, compromise, and often acrimonious debate, the legislature did send to President Bush's desk a war funding bill that included a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq. However, as the bill was vetoed as promised, Congress has since remained resigned to passing another funding bill with no binding timeline.

Evaluations of the surge strategy thus far have been mixed. Even opponents have been forced to admit that many indicators of violence have dropped (to the unacceptable levels of 2005) since the surge reached full strength in the summer, and that security in Baghdad overall has improved. At the same time, it has been noted – albeit mainly by specialist defense and other publications but not the main media outlets – that 2007 all totaled was the deadliest year yet for American troops in Iraq, and that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to sustain the higher troop levels beyond this spring without a revision of deployment policy or a decision to introduce a prolonged pause into the planned drawdown of troops. The most commonly used words to convey this view have been "improvement," "progress," "success," "effective," "the surge is working," and "victory is possible."

As in the period preceding the 2004 presidential election in the United States, President Bush, Vice-President Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and National Security Adviser Stephen

Hadley have been uniformly upbeat in their individual and collective assessments of the surge strategy's effectiveness. Their overall enthusiastic description of how well the war has been going has been amplified by the media's continuing positive gloss on the surge's impact, together with many public commentators' optimistic interpretations of reality in Iraq. While the second half of the past year's lower number of casualties is statistically accurate, the accounts of the surge's more praiseworthy supporters have been nonetheless viewed by many as self-serving and with more than a dose of suspicion and incredulity. Indeed, they have been perceived by many analysts as crafted by the White House and the Bush administration's activists with no higher purpose than advancing the cause of the Republican Party's prospects for winning the 2008 presidential election or, at least, not losing by a landslide.

Further confirming perceptions that American policies on issues pertaining to Gulf-U.S. relations are being determined in part with a view to persuading the electorate to vote not only for a Republican candidate for president in 2008, but also for candidates able to wrest control of the Congress from the Democrats, has been the Bush administration's decision to finally place on trial individuals accused of organizing the 9/11 attacks. The decision practically guaranteed that for the remainder of the election year Americans will be regularly reminded of the same kinds of implicitly anti-Arab and anti-Muslim national security-related issues, together with temptations to take advantage of many Americans' anxieties, nervousness, apprehensions, and feelings of being scared, that were proven to be so effective in propelling the Republicans to victory in the 2004 elections.

Scholars of earlier national liberation movements' histories, including America's against Great Britain and Iraq's against Great Britain, can hardly ignore how such bullish pronouncements parallel ones articulated by leaders of previous imperial powers. Indeed, many of the exact same words or near synonyms were employed by representatives of the counterinsurgency forces and political powers of virtually every one of the dozen empires that came to an end in the 20th century. Leaders in these countries' foreign, colonial, commonwealth, and overseas territory offices and agencies sought similarly to persuade their body politics' electorates to believe that all that was necessary to defeat the insurgents was continued allocation, authorization, and appropriation of adequate financial and human resources together with the requisite strategic and political resolve – what President Bush throughout the first half of 2007 encapsulated in his calls to “Stay the course.”

Fast forward from the previous century to the present, and the insights are inescapable. In the absence of the kinds of sustained inputs noted, the message conveyed in the case of how further into the present century the United States should plan on remaining in Iraq could hardly be clearer. The implication is that a U.S. failure to prevail against the insurgents in Iraq would not only harm the “cause” and prospects for an eventual American “victory.” The implication is that such a failure would also extract an immense price in the United States and within the network of America's Iraqi collaborators and allies elsewhere, negatively affecting U.S. strategic economic, political, commercial, and defense interests as well as key foreign policy objectives.

As the campaign for the 2008 U.S. presidential election continues to gather momentum, there has been no shortage of specialists and spokespeople in public policy research institutes adept at

supporting the Bush administration's commitment to stay the course in Iraq. They have been particularly forceful in sounding the clarion call of alarm as to what strategic nightmares and long term damage to America's reputation for dogged determination and perseverance would be certain to ensue in the event the United States were to end the war in Iraq by withdrawing "precipitously." Throughout the past year, many supporters of the Bush administration and Republican presumptive nominee Senator John McCain have produced material for media and other public commentary on how well, in their view, the American counter-insurgency campaign in Iraq has been succeeding.[10]

Undergirding such pronouncements has been the ubiquitous theme that the United States can simply not afford to fail in Iraq. The persistence of this theme has been despite the American electorate in the mid-term elections of 2006 having voted overwhelmingly in favor of the United States ending the war. Its persistence has also been in spite of Iraqi polls indicating most Iraqis want to end the American occupation. A corollary to the continue-the-current-course perspective is that a serious drawdown of American forces in Iraq, let alone their complete withdrawal at any time in the foreseeable future, would be strategically dangerous and morally calamitous. Ironically, the exact same two concepts are ones that were employed by many of those that had opposed the war, and its prolongation, in the first place. In any event, a drumbeat likely to continue is that no American administration should seriously contemplate removing U.S. troops from Iraq in any substantial numbers, let alone totally, at any point in the period immediately ahead.

Further indication of the White House's resolve has been the extent to which the president and vice-president continue to be as firmly committed to remaining in Iraq for years to come regardless of the nature and extent of American public opinion to the contrary. In this regard, Senator John McCain, numerous others among President Bush's supporters in the Congress, the media, and growing numbers of Americans as a whole seem to have become resigned to what increasing numbers see as the endless prospect of Americans being killed and wounded in Iraq. Indeed, many profess to agree with Mr. Bush's assertion, unsubstantiated by any irrefutable evidence, that retaining sizeable American armed forces in Iraq is essential to fighting terrorism and terrorists abroad rather than at home.

Such views have been recently reinforced by the president's new U.S. National Director for Intelligence, Admiral Mike McConnell. In formal testimony to the Congress, the director introduced an altogether new reason for fear among the American people: namely, that the United States has become dangerously vulnerable and exposed to potential Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks by " sleeper cells" throughout the country. In seeking to justify his policies towards the anti-American sentiments that continue to be manifested in parts of the Arab and Islamic worlds, the president himself has regularly incorporated into his speeches references favored by his neo-conservative supporters. Examples have been his use of such buzz words as "Islamofascism" and "Islamic terrorism," his and Senator McCain's view that Muslim armed militants, terrorists and Islamic extremism are America's greatest security threats, and that he is but fulfilling his presidential duties aimed at "safeguarding the security of free nations."

Unstated Implications

On the strategic front in areas away from Baghdad, optimists point to the shift of Sunni tribes in volatile areas like the western Al-Anbar province, where a group of tribal leaders around the same time the surge was launched began cooperating with the United States in targeting groups like Al-Qaeda. The “Anbar Awakening” (taking its name from the Anbar Awakening Council, a group of Sunni shaikhs formed in 2006) has been touted as one of the past year’s great successes on the military front. The relationship of this success to the surge strategy is less clear, but it has nevertheless represented a significant new dynamic on the ground. Meanwhile, critics, including Nuri Al-Maliki’s Baghdad government in particular, continue to express concerns about the implications of facilitating the arming of the Sunni tribal groups. The ongoing tenuousness of the security situation – highlighted when one of the key leaders of the Council, Shaikh Abdul Sattar al-Rishawi, was killed on September 13, 2007 – has been underscored also by the major material and employment incentives for the increasing numbers of otherwise out-of-work Sunnis who have agreed to fight alongside the U.S. forces. Whether and for how long the United States will be able or inclined to sustain and eventually increase the substantial monetary outlays involved, and whether the strategy and tactics introduced into Anbar Province can be replicated with a comparable degree of success elsewhere, remains an open question.

What remains undeniable is that an uncertain future for many Iraqis anchored in grinding poverty and unemployment with no near-term end in sight has had the result of making numerous Iraqis more vulnerable recruits to extremism. Equally true is the reverse: the exact same phenomenon has made increasing numbers of Iraqis in some areas more amenable, if only out of a sense of deepening despair and desperation, to be “co-opted,” in effect, by the occupying authorities and their Iraqi associates. Many in this category rationalize that, despite the indignities and sense of humiliation associated with agreeing to fight the insurgents among their fellow citizens and foreign supporters, the perceived lack of realistic and acceptable alternatives, their wanting to salvage what remains of whatever they possess, and their not wanting to join the millions of other Iraqis that have fled the country or been displaced within it, has left them little choice. Indeed, many profess to believe that only thus might they at least finally be able once again to earn a living in their homeland, put food on their parents’ table, and perhaps even enhance the prospects of being able to marry and start a family of their own. That still more have not elected to do the same is related to a widespread perception within Iraq, abundantly documented anecdotally, that anyone willing to do so might as well sign their own death warrant in the eyes of others who portray those that have done so as having joined forces with the enemy. Certainly, the assassinations of a high number of Al-Anbar “Awakening” leaders, members of parliament, politicians, senior national, provincial, and local government leaders, as well as would-be-police recruits in various parts of Iraq as well as bureaucrats associated in one way or another with the occupation, even if only as translators, is directly attributed to such an image as portrayed by many of the victims’ fellow citizens and not just those of the armed insurgents.[11]

Rule of Law, Responsibility and Accountability Issues

Another factor in U.S.-Iraqi relations has been the Maliki government’s increasingly critical stance

toward private U.S. contractors providing services ranging from basic personal protection for the American military forces to guarding the U.S. Ambassador and other State Department officials. Making the contractors' presence and functions especially objectionable and politically inflammatory in the eyes of Iraqis from the beginning has been the American official insistence that these individuals be granted immunity from the application of not only Iraqi law and prosecution but also the U.S. Uniform Code of Military Justice application to the U.S. armed forces. Not surprisingly, Iraqis equate these exemptions for foreigners occupying their country as equivalent to denying Iraqis their rights in much the same way as the detested "capitulations" that compliant governments during the Ottoman Turkish era granted select groups of non-Arabs and non-Muslims living and working in their countries.

With reason, Iraqis have argued that the American demands that U.S. and other foreign armed civilian personnel protecting the occupiers not be subjected to Iraqi jurisdiction and law enforcement constitutes a blatant derogation of Iraqi national sovereignty, independence, and jurisprudence. In addition, it is also directly in contrast to the many pronouncements by American officials in the Bush administration demanding that Arab governments, including that of Iraq, display greater respect for the rule of law, transparency, responsibility, and accountability. A flashpoint in this debate was an incident this past September 16 in which members of an American security detail operated by Blackwater Company opened fire in Nisoor Square in Baghdad resulting in 17 Iraqi civilian fatalities. In the aftermath of this incident, Blackwater's license to operate in Iraq was placed in serious jeopardy by the Iraqi government. The legal status of the contractors remains ambiguous, the degree of effective American and Iraqi scrutiny and oversight clouded, and the end result of the uproar as yet uncertain. The uncertainty itself sheds further light on the degree to which the United States, more than Baghdad, continues to call many of the shots in Iraq as to who can do what, where, why, when, and how in matters pertaining to security as regards American civilians living and working in the country as part of the occupation.

Iraqi frustration, anger, and despair over the occupation have continued to be evident in protests led by Muqtada Al-Sadr either directly or by his supporters, in the outcry over a U.S. project to build a wall separating a Sunni neighborhood in Baghdad from other areas, and in the mourning for victims of a March 2007 car bomb in an area once considered one of the most tolerant parts of the city. Especially ominous in terms of its implications for the prospects for near term security in Iraq were polls this past September that showed a majority of Iraqis deeming attacks on U.S. military forces acceptable, with less than a third being optimistic about the future, and a majority demanding an end to the U.S. occupation. Even so, amidst these depressing indications, statistics reflecting a significant lowering of overall violence in the second half of the year, especially towards the end, were seized upon by the war's supporters as good news. The lessened numbers of American and other casualties continue to be cited as evidence that the "surge" is working and that the United States would be wrong to consider having its troops withdraw from the country at any time in the foreseeable future.[12]

Yet four key factors have assisted the surge immensely have been largely unreported or underemphasized by the U.S. national media until very recently. One of the most important factors

went unacknowledged by senior U.S. officials in Iraq until a quarter of a year after the fact. It was that Shia clerical leader Muqtada Al-Sadr's late-summer call for a unilateral ceasefire by his Mahdi Army, by far the most militant among the numerous Shia militias engaged in the insurgency, was still in effect at year's end and has just been extended. This alone has made a huge difference in the lowered numbers of American and other casualties. A second factor is that many areas within Baghdad have been cleared not only ethnically but also in terms of their sectarian orientation. The resultant decreased number of people to kill on ethnic or religious grounds has translated into lower casualty statistics. A third factor is that numerous insurgents have revised their tactics for attacking the American and Iraqi armed forces, police officers, and strategic components of the country's economic infrastructure. They have done so by temporarily ceasing acts of violence in particular areas only to return just when the U.S. and Iraqi government's forces had withdrawn or reduced their numbers, believing a particular area had been pacified.[13] A fourth factor is that increasing numbers of insurgents associated with Al-Qaeda, whose numbers in Iraq compared to indigenous fighters has never been large to begin with, have relocated to Afghanistan and Pakistan where the security and stability of those two countries' governments has presented opportunities to militants and extremists on a scale not heretofore witnessed in quite some time.

Tallying Lesser Known Totals

But the broadest argument against declaring the surge an unqualified success remains the relative lack of major political progress, which had been the declared rationale for the surge in the first place and nearly all observers agree is crucial to the establishment of stability in Iraq. Indeed, the Iraqi parliament has often found itself unable to convene a quorum, and many American politicians, especially as the Iraqi legislature adjourned for an August recess and has yet to pass a law governing how the country is to relate to foreign oil companies seeking concessions in Iraq, continue to express disappointment in the Maliki government.

Still other studies view the past year's trends and indications from yet another vantage point, documenting it as the one in which the greatest overall level of violence had occurred since the war's onset in 2003. In particular, one recently completed study by the World Health Organization has estimated that the number of Iraqi *civilians* killed since 2003 in actions directly attributed to the U.S.-led invasion and occupation is 153,000, which, by any standard, was massive – vastly more than all the U.S. armed forces killed in the Korean and Vietnamese wars combined. (Author's italics). Given that the American and Iraqi populations are approximately 302 million and 25 million, respectively, and using the same ratio of deaths as a percentage of total population for purposes of equivalency, the comparable number of American civilians killed over the same period of time would be 1,836,000. As for refugees fleeing the country's violence and chaos since the attack by U.S. and other forces began, numerous reports have noted that an estimated 1.3 million Iraqis fled to Syria and another 400,000-700,000 to Jordan. An equivalent number of American refugees fleeing a foreign occupation of the United States during this period would be 23 million U.S. citizens having fled to Mexico and Canada.

Further, if one adds the number of Iraqis that have been displaced internally, an estimated 600,000 up

until as recently as three weeks ago, the total American equivalency for both categories of refugees would be 27 million. In early April 2008, numerous American commentators have claimed that the number of domestically displaced Iraqis is double the conservative figure just stated, *i.e.*, two million, not 600,000. If proven accurate, this would make the American equivalent not 27 million but nearer to 90 million Americans having been displaced from their homes and compelled to finding lodging elsewhere with the United States.[14] In contrast, as of September 2007, the number of Iraqi refugees allowed into the United States over the same period of time was fewer than 800. An agreement reached later in the fall stipulated that an additional 12,000 Iraqi refugees would be allowed entry into the United States by the end of the year or shortly thereafter.[15] However, as 2008 began, only 2,000 of the additional number of refugees approved for entry into the United States had been processed. As for the number of Iraqis imprisoned by a combination of arrests by mainly American and Iraqi armed forces as well as police since the invasion began, and of whom 80 per cent of the total are Sunnis, the number in the past year alone has increased from approximately 12,000 to 16,000, a jump of 33 per cent.[16] In terms of an American equivalency, the number of U.S. citizens incarcerated this past year as a result of having been arrested for resisting or suspected of resisting a foreign occupation of their country during the period 2003-2007 would be 192,000, up from 130,000 in 2006. Among the vast majority of those imprisoned, many solely on suspicion, only a tiny minority have been charged with a specific offense, tried in court, and/or found guilty of having committed a crime. On these statistical grounds alone, that many fewer Iraqis are “free” to engage in acts of violence has been seldom if at all mentioned by many observers, including ones inclined to give all or most of the credit for the surge’s success to the American forces primarily and to Iraqi forces only secondarily.

America’s Presidential Election in the Balance

In contrast to the daily reportage in the American media and in Congressional discussions on when and at what rate U.S. troops would withdraw from Iraq, the focus of the American debate about U.S. policies towards Iraq has changed profoundly since last fall. The reasons reflect not only the comparatively positive reporting noted with respect to the surge-related developments inside Iraq but, more importantly, that the campaign for the American 2008 presidential and congressional elections continues to be in full swing. Throughout the past year, all but one of the half a dozen Republican Party candidates acted as though the 2006 Congressional elections had not occurred. Instead, they indicated strongly that, should they be elected president, they would keep U.S. armed forces in Iraq indefinitely. Even the two leading contenders for the Democratic Party, Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, have declared that, contrary to their earlier positions, they now favor keeping U.S. troops in Iraq until at least 2010 if not longer.

The reasons, the two Democratic contenders have emphasized, would be to ensure force protection for such troops as remain, to continue to train Iraqi military and security forces, and to defend the American embassy in Baghdad, destined to be the largest and most expensive in history. (Additionally, none of the three candidates have mentioned publicly that barely half a dozen of the American diplomatic, defense, and other personnel presently staffing the embassy – by far the largest of any country in history -- are fluent in Arabic, the national language of the Iraqi citizenry). Few

media pundits, let alone the candidates for their respective party's nomination to be president, have as yet been inclined to point out that such assurances clash directly with the 2006 election results in which the electorate for Congress, which returned a Democratic majority to both Houses, voted overwhelmingly to demand an end to the war and that 2007 public opinion surveys in Iraq conveyed the same sentiments.

Moreover, none of the candidates have as yet chosen to acknowledge publicly or even comment on the fact that one of President Bush's longest and closest associates in political and energy matters, namely the Hunt Oil Company of Dallas, Texas, secured a concession this past year from the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq. Included in the terms is a production sharing agreement stipulating that, in addition to exploring for oil, in the event any is discovered and produced, the lion's share of such profits as might result will accrue not to the KRG but the producer. That the U.S. Department of State criticized the agreement but did nothing else has served to further confirm Iraqi and other perceptions that securing access to Iraqi oil and gas reserves was the paramount factor driving the decision of the Bush administration to oust Saddam Hussein and install in his place a collaborationist government stacked with American advisers in every ministry.

Enhancing this perception on one hand is that the concession was announced despite the absence of national legislation stipulating the terms for foreign investment in the country's energy sector. On the other, the lack of central government permission for any licenses or permits to import equipment to facilitate drilling and production for export from any new or existing fields has thus far failed to prompt President Bush to cancel the agreement is an issue that, in itself, is hardly without resonance. Certainly, it contrasts dramatically with what the White House did when Conoco secured a concession in 1995 to develop Iran's offshore oil and gas. Responding to immense pressure from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in March of that year, President Clinton used his executive authority in March 1995 to cancel the concession. [17]

Further, the Bush administration's handling of this issue to date has done nothing to dissuade the many Americans, Iraqis, and others in the Arab countries, the Middle East, the Islamic world and beyond, that considerations related to energy and its protection through the building of permanent military bases and a client state were the overriding American strategic and economic objectives from the beginning. Indeed, as former U.S. Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan and many others noted this past year, the act of invading and occupying Iraq has placed the United States in the preeminent strategic position, vis-a-vis all other countries, to influence, if not control, the uses to which Iraq's bountiful reserves of oil – nearly four times that of America's – will be put and, more specifically, again in comparison to all other foreign governments, on what terms nationally, bilaterally, and internationally it will be sold to foreign customers, with the latter including, in particular, energy deficit countries in Asia and Europe. [18]

Making Impermanence Permanent

Also occurring during the past year was an event that in its content is astounding for what it signifies not only for U.S. but also Iraqi long-term interests and objectives. In the middle of a high-profile

conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict hosted by President Bush in Annapolis, Maryland, in late November, much of the American public gave scant attention to a report that announced almost matter-of-factly the conclusion of an historic and far-reaching decision between the United States and Iraq, one that will unavoidably and inevitably reverberate negatively among most Iraqis and many others as well as impact future U.S. and international debate regarding Iraq. Buried deep inside most American major newspapers was a late November 2007 report that U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker had reached a profound and historically unprecedented agreement with the Iraqi government headed by Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki. Notwithstanding ongoing American domestic pressures to end the U.S. military occupation of Iraq as soon as possible, the decision declared that the American and Iraqi government had agreed that *the United States would remain extensively involved in Iraq politically, economically, and militarily for many years to come.* (Author's italics)

With the U.S. media preoccupied with the Annapolis conference, the first of its kind since the 2000 U.S. presidential election and with the representatives of more than 40 countries attending, the Bush administration proved the adage that 90 percent of successful politics is timing. Indeed, the confluence of the United States and Iraq declaring an act as controversial as this one at an unusually propitious moment was hardly coincidental. It brought to mind 1956, when Great Britain, France, and Israel, without informing in advance their most powerful ally, the United States, secretly launched their tripartite invasion of Egypt in an effort to settle the Suez Crisis, and Moscow simultaneously moved its armed forces into Budapest to suppress a Hungarian nationalist uprising against Soviet rule. Both moves were timed to occur during the very week when the vast majority of the U.S. electorate's attention was overwhelmingly focused elsewhere – on going to the polls to vote in that year's presidential election.

IRAN

If the past twelve months had been nothing else they would have been notable for reflecting continued high tension between Iran and the United States.[19] Illuminating the context have been additional sanctions against Iran imposed by the U.N. Security Council in December 2006. The stated rationale for these measures was the Council members' charge that Tehran had failed to cooperate fully with the investigation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) into Iran's nuclear development program. Declaring they were not persuaded that Iran had earlier been completely truthful in its declarations to the IAEA, three of the Security Council's five permanent members, the United States, France, and Great Britain, have continued their support for sanctions and other efforts to isolate the Islamic Republic in an effort to halt the enrichment of the uranium components of its nuclear program.

As China and Russia, in contrast, emphasized the need for conciliatory measures, the sanctions enacted were narrower in scope than Washington, Paris, and London would have preferred. Even so, the internationally approved additional sanctions not only highlighted Iran's difficult international position but spurred an outpouring of criticism against President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad from reformists within the country, albeit not of a magnitude to diminish the extent of his support

nationally as indicated in his followers' recent ability to retain, and slightly increase, their position and role within the Iranian parliament. Not lost on many observers is that these same three Western countries' IAEA representatives and the IAEA itself virtually looked the other way and did nothing to recommend sanctions against Egypt and South Korea for pursuing nuclear-related activities that, like Iran's, they regarded as less than adequately transparent.

Confrontation's Continuing Drumbeat

A new round of U.N. sanctions imposed on March 24, 2007, after Iran failed to meet a 60-day deadline for cooperation after the December sanctions, appears to have been no more effective than the earlier ones. Iran's response thus far has been to refuse to comply with either set of blandishments and restrictions. Instead, insisting that it will not change its nuclear policy, Tehran subsequently rejected proposals that it freeze its uranium enrichment in return for an immediate freeze on sanctions. A subtext to the international discussion of the nuclear issue have been the persistent rumors, despite continued refutation from President Bush and Israeli administration officials, that the United States and/or Israel might attack Iran militarily.

In any event, both sides have continued to engage in saber-rattling, with U.S. officials pointedly refusing to rule out military options, while sending two carrier battle group ships to the Gulf in the first half of 2007, where they remain to this day, and staging simulated war games near Iran's territorial waters. Meanwhile, Iranian officials, citing what they have referred to as provocative American actions designed to bring about armed conflict, have periodically issued a stream of pronouncements threatening to respond with all means available to any U.S. military action. Among the suggestions has been to stress that Iranian forces could wreak havoc on U.S. interests in the region, with instruments ranging from support for armed groups fighting American and U.S.-trained forces in Iraq and Afghanistan to the use of oil as a weapon. Choosing not to limit its responses to rhetoric alone, Tehran has also staged its own war games, as it has done annually since the early 1990s, only more recently displaying new weapons technology.[20]

Lending context to what the Bush administration's supporters have regarded as Iran's defiance and what Teheran and other critics of U.S. efforts to isolate and intimidate Iran have viewed as elemental prudence have been various factors – eight in all. One, Iran continues to insist that as a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) it is within its rights to complete the requisite uranium fuel enrichment cycle pursuant to producing nuclear energy, a right that has not been credibly contested by other NPT adherents. Secondly, Iran's leaders remain wedded to the notion that having a peaceful civilian nuclear power program is essential to its ambition to become an industrial power. Few American mainstream media commentators have bothered to join the debate at this level of analysis. Fewer still have reported the irony that growing numbers of Americans reason similarly in terms of the United States.

Indeed, more and more Americans argue that they United States should rely increasingly on nuclear power to help meet the country's energy needs not only in support of industry, manufacturing, and electricity generation, but also as a means of helping to grow the American economy as a whole.

Thirdly, Iran's leaders have repeatedly noted that Israel, China, India, Pakistan, Great Britain, France, and the United States have been allowed to develop and possess nuclear weapons and the means for their delivery as an insurance and form of deterrence and defense against being attacked by other countries. That Iran should be denied the means to uphold the same inherent right to self-preservation represents to millions of Iranians the height of hypocrisy and an unacceptable double standard. Fourthly, many analysts acknowledge that Iran has legitimate national security and defense needs against the nuclear powers positioned against it. Not least among the reasons is the far more lethal array of U.S. weaponry, operational bases, and armed forces surrounding the Islamic Republic on virtually every side, together with America's massive and pervasive air and naval dominance as well as non-stop surveillance, in every direction, of the main air, sea, and land corridors to and from Iran.

Fifth, Iran continues to be intimidated by the incessant and implicit pro-war sentiments against it in the United States and Israel voiced by President Bush, Vice-President Cheney, National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, and an array of Israeli leaders along with eminent American and Israeli neo-conservatives, many Christian evangelicals, numerous hawkish commentators, prominent think tank specialists, and others in Tel Aviv and Washington. Over the past year, many of these have joined Bush, Cheney, Hadley and their Israeli counterparts in repeating their earlier statements that Tehran would not be allowed to proceed even with its civilian nuclear development program if, as many analysts believe would be the case, the resultant dual-use technology and resources would provide it the means to produce a nuclear weapon. In effect, this new focus has changed the nature and focus of the debate and raised the ante.

The debate has shifted from not permitting Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon to preventing it from acquiring the means to do so. Many Iranian leaders unsurprisingly continue to believe that such threats mask the ongoing goal of changing the regime in Tehran to one more compliant with American and Israeli interests and objectives. Indeed, some Iranians believe that such views are likely to persist even in the hypothetical context of the Islamic Republic's leaders agreeing to ironclad guarantees in which Iran refused to obtain and apply the required technology and materials to develop such a weapon and even were it to accede to what would likely be nothing less than the most intrusive and demanding international inspections and standards of verification ever devised.

Sixth, Tehran continues to take umbrage at the irony that, despite the Bush administration's adamant opposition to Iran being allowed to produce a nuclear bomb, the United States itself has remained insistent on the right not only to modernize and increase the effectiveness of its own nuclear weapons. It has also remained firm on the right to configure them so as to be able to penetrate the kinds of underground facilities in which many Washington officials believe some Iranian fuel enrichment centers are positioned already or would likely be situated. Seventh, the countdown to the 2008 U.S. presidential elections has lent mounting credence in some quarters to the fear that President Bush, in his remaining months in office, might seize upon any convenient pretext to justify ordering American airpower to attack Iran.[21] Among the scenarios numerous analysts have opined might be more likely than others is one where such an attack, either by the United States or Israel, might replicate on a much larger scale a strike similar to the one that Israeli aircraft effectively unleashed

upon Iraq's nuclear reactor at Osiraq in 1981.[22] Others have speculated on the possibilities of missiles being fired at Iran from U.S. aircraft carriers and Washington and/or Tel Aviv authorizing commanders of their countries' respective submarines to strike Iranian nuclear facilities, key industrial sites, selected military bases, and telecommunications networks.

Another scenario envisions the replication of the combination of Israeli sabotage and assassinations that had succeeded earlier in terminating Egypt's nuclear program.[23] Still another envisions an array of air strikes, again by either U.S. or Israeli aircraft or some combination of the two that, beyond inflicting damage upon Iran's nuclear and missile facilities, would likely deal a major blow to the country's nuclear program, possibly setting back its development for years to come. Certainly, forces capable of wreaking havoc upon the program remain near to hand in the form of two massive U.S. navy aircraft carriers in the Gulf in addition to submarines and long-range bombers positioned at bases in the Indian Ocean archipelago of Diego Garcia and elsewhere. Simultaneously, Israel has continued to underscore its ongoing preparations to attack Iran's nuclear facilities in the name of deterrence, delay, containment, and/or rollback in the event that the United States proves reluctant to do so.[24] Tehran could hardly conclude otherwise, given that the American taxpayers have provided the Israeli air force long range F-16 fighters and allowed the country's C-130s to be reconfigured in such a way as to enable them to refuel other aircraft aurally.[25]

Eighth, throughout much of the past year, there has loomed a time-sensitive aspect to the latter scenario. Some analysts have suggested that one of the most opportune times to attack Iran would be in the waning months of the Bush administration prior to the inauguration of a new president in January 2009. The most propitious moment for the United States and/or Israel to do so, some analysts pointed out, would have been *before* receipt by the Iranian nuclear reactor at Bushehr, situated in the southwestern part of the country in an area adjacent to the Gulf coast, of the uranium fuel enrichment rods from which it could eventually produce a nuclear weapon. (Author's italics). The consequences of any attack on the reactor afterwards, analysts inside and outside the region have argued, would pose a Chernobyl-like threat.

Such an eventuality, a prominent Kuwaiti strategic analyst indicated to this writer, would carry with it the potential for a disaster of epochal proportions, one that would immediately threaten most of the northern Gulf's vital water supplies.[26] Yet the optimum timing of that scenario has disappeared -- press releases issued by the Islamic Republic News Agency and official Russian statements on January 30, 2008, reported that Russia's final shipment of the remaining nuclear fuel destined for the Bushehr reactor was delivered earlier in the month.[27] This has led some analysts to doubt whether either the United States or Israel would likely attack that particular reactor. However, it has not ruled out the possibility of strikes on other reactors and related facilities. Neither does it preclude an altogether different scenario, one where a future earthquake in Iran, of which there have been many throughout the country's history, could result in a disaster affecting the reactor at Bushehr or other reactors elsewhere that could be every bit as devastating.[28]

Anvils of Anxiety and Adamancy

U.S.-Iran tensions have remained near boiling point. When President Ahmedinejad spoke publicly at Columbia University in September 2007 during his visit to the U.N. General Assembly, the nature of his reception there served only to highlight further the hostile climate prevailing between the two countries. Ratcheting up the American animosity towards Tehran still further, the United States in October singled out the Quds (Jerusalem) Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) for punitive measures over and beyond the existing sanctions. It designated the IRGC as a terrorist organization and slapped new sanctions on several Iranian banks based on their connections to it. The measure was a key step in the U.S. strategy of further isolating Iran economically, with U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson saying, "It is increasingly likely that if you are doing business with Iran you are doing business with the IRGC."

All of these events have been played out in the context of broad fears of a resurgent Iran. The question of how to deal with Iran, not only on the nuclear issue, but in the broader strategic perspective, therefore continues to loom large for the United States and all the states in the region. Opinions remain divided on the relative merits of two measures forcefully articulated by the Bush administration before as well as during his recent visit to several GCC countries: namely, isolation of Iran and the building up of a power bloc opposed to it versus the pursuit of conciliation and compromise. Compounding the difficulties of the United States forging a unified position among so many countries, however, continues to be a massive and pervasive international material interest eager to significantly increase the level of foreign investments, trade, and the establishment of joint commercial ventures with Iran.

Indeed, numerous American companies for years have sought entry into the Islamic Republic's lucrative markets long precluded them -- to the appreciable benefit of many of America's commercial competitors in other countries -- by U.S. laws and policies. This is the undeniable, if unacknowledged, objective of many foreign governments and businesses, America's included, in what all agree could be incalculable strategic advantages and economic gains for any country able to gain, as China, India, Japan, and Turkey have already succeeded in obtaining, significant access to Iran's massive oil and gas resources. Indeed, some analysts continue to believe that the kinds of potential benefits the United States could derive from successful regime change in Tehran, including the possibility of privatizing the country's energy sector and opening it and other sectors of the economy to American and other foreign contracts and operations, outweigh any benefits (otherwise often referred to historically as "the spoils of war") cited by the instigators of the United States attacking Iraq and which, in the invasion's aftermath, have increasingly been accomplished.[29]

Despite the foreign policy implications of these and additional imponderables related to Iran's relations with other countries, and vice versa, numerous U.S. strategists have proclaimed that the new NIE on the state of the Islamic Republic's nuclear program has not changed the basic rationale for regime change in Tehran. These remain wedded to a coldly calculated version of U.S. national interests that the world would be better off led by a regime that would pose neither challenges nor threats to America's objective of being the world's preponderant power in matters pertaining to Gulf

stability, security, and defense for as far into the future as possible. The arguments put forward by the regime change proponents wear many faces. In particular, some American and Israeli neo-conservatives, military strategists, and representatives of various corporate interests in the defense, aerospace, construction, technological, and other areas continue to view the perceived potential rewards of regime change in Tehran as enormous. Their frames of reference are geostrategic, geopolitical, economic, energy, commercial, and defense prisms that in key ways contain a quite different and more multifaceted set of potential rewards than Iraq.

Regime Change Options' Staying Power

Geo-strategically, few analysts deny that the most potentially valuable components of Iran's territory dwarf those of Iraq. The latter, with seven neighbors, has a coast of less than 50 miles, only three ports, and territorial waters that, compared to many of Iran's, are in numerous places shallow; Iran, with 11 neighbors, has a coastline 10 times as vast (more than 500 miles) and nearly 20 harbors of varying size, depth, and development potential. In addition, since the early 1990s, Iran's navy, in contrast to Iraq's, has annually conducted war games in the Gulf, inclusive of areas north and south of the Strait of Hormuz through whose maritime passages the lion's share of the Gulf's vast energy exports are shipped to international markets in Asia, Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere. Moreover, again unlike Iraq, Iran's geo-strategic influence is further heightened by its bordering not just each of the Gulf's seven Arab countries, all of which produce oil and gas, but also the additionally energy-rich Caspian Sea.

These unique Iranian geographic and geo-economic features represent a natural land bridge to the Gulf which Russia and various Central Asian oil producers have long coveted as the most direct and potentially least expensive export route for their oil and gas exports. Older generation geo-strategic analysts recall how these distinctive features of Iran were highly prized during the Cold War. During that 44-year period Iran functioned for many years as the waist of an hour glass in a broader geopolitical arrangement known first as the Center for Economic Reconstruction and Development and later as a prominent participant in the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), of which the United States and Great Britain were the principal backers. The member-states of those two bodies, spanning from west to east, were Turkey, Iraq (which withdrew from the arrangement in 1958), Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.[30] While those days are dead and gone, the prospects of a newly refurbished arrangement along similar strategic and geopolitical lines is attractive to American visionaries eager to find an acceptable arrangement that might act as a *de facto* buffer against the spread southward of newly resurgent Russian economic, political, and military influence towards the Gulf.[31] However, it is difficult to see how such an arrangement could come into being as long as the current Iranian regime remains in power.

Geopolitically, the goal of supplanting Iran's regime with one more compatible with U.S., Israeli, and other interests continues to presuppose that Tehran would cease its support for those among its current agents, supporters, and sympathizers in Iraq as well as Hizbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Occupied Territories of Palestine. Analysts also argue that an Iran under a new regime favorably disposed to whatever outsiders enabled it to seize power and be recognized internationally would

likely no longer oppose Israel and various components of a meaningfully renewed Arab-Israeli peace process, thereby heightening the prospects for lessened violence in that conflict if not also enhancing the possibilities for an eventual comprehensive, enduring, and peaceful settlement.

Commercial and Construction Considerations

The extent to which these considerations are fueled by additional economic, energy, and commercial ones is self-evident. Closely aligned is awareness of the steadily growing interest in gas, for which Iran's holdings, again unlike Iraq's which remain unknown, continue to be massive and second only to Russia's. Not least for reasons owing to the international price of oil having passed the \$100 mark for the first time in history, American energy companies remain by far the greatest contributors to the engine that drives the U.S. economy, the producers, refiners, and distributors of the premier propellant of America's automotive vehicles, and the largest taxpayers into the U.S. Treasury.

In the past year these companies posted even higher revenues – \$40 billion for ExxonMobil alone, in comparison to \$39 billion in 2006 – than the record-high earnings of the year before. A development driven largely by factors unrelated to Iran but giving many reason to ponder how it might relate to it at some point in the future in the event the regime in Tehran is replaced by one vastly more open to do business with the United States, is represented by the exponential expansion in the number of American companies active in the Gulf. Whereas ten years ago, the number of American firms engaged in the GCC region's economies was under 500, in the past two years the total has soared to more than 750, a 50 per cent increase.[32]

In addition, what has been apparent for some time now in almost all the GCC countries is that what was once the region's most ubiquitous bird 30 years ago, the building crane, has returned in force. Far from the earlier stereotyped images of remote and underdeveloped places punctuated with desert oases, Bedouin encampments, and mountain hamlets, and what barely a generation ago was acknowledged as one of the most forgotten and forlorn corners of Arabia, the GCC component of the contemporary Gulf bears little resemblance to its former self. In each of the GCC countries' booming economies, American firms are more prominent than at any point in the past three decades. The extraordinary growth in their exponentially expanded transportation and tourism industries continues to be financed by greatly augmented oil revenues together with substantially increased investments by private sources of corporate and individual wealth. Continuing to undergird and propel both phenomena is the strategic need for ever-increasing numbers of meaningful jobs for half the GCC member-states' youth (*i.e.*, those in Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia), for which U.S. companies remain well-positioned, especially in areas related to technology, education, training, human resources development, and economic infrastructure.[33]

The employment as well as business opportunities for which U.S. companies are pursuing on a scale heretofore unimagined are vast. They remain associated with expanded financial and services sectors generally and, more specifically, with greatly increased demand for design, engineering, procurement, and construction. Additional opportunities for American and other corporations to win lucrative contracts continue to stem from the need for new housing, rentals, airport expansion and

maintenance operations, travel agencies, tour guides, food services, health care facilities, real estate representatives, legal counsel, banking, automotive agencies (inclusive of all-terrain vehicles and drivers), computer sales and services, institutes providing technical training, catering, and much more.[34] At first glance, none of this may seem relevant to U.S. commercial prospects in Iran. However, upon closer examination the relevance in many ways could hardly be clearer. For example, one need only consider the implication not just for any foreign economic actors being able to access the energy resources of Iran. Of additional importance is the potential of the Iranian market for the importation of capital as well as consumer goods and services – at 80 million inhabitants and growing, the Islamic Republic’s population remains substantially greater than the foreign as well as indigenous populations of all six GCC countries and Iraq combined.

Indeed, when and if the moment arrives where the icy relationship between Tehran and Washington will have thawed sufficiently to allow Americans to do business in the Islamic Republic, large numbers of U.S. firms in Iraq and the GCC countries already situated barely half an hour’s flight away will be ready to take advantage of the opportunities. In the interim, no one can deny that, from an international business perspective, Iran’s physical proximity to additional nearby markets in Pakistan, India, Central Asia, and even more populous and robust polities and economies in lands further east, continues to exceed that of markets nearer to less populous Iraq by a substantial degree.

Militarily, were regime change in Iran to result in the new leaders acquiescing to the United States possessing the preponderant share of armed force in the Gulf for the indefinite future – as the post-Saddam Hussein government in Iraq thus far has had little choice but to acquiesce to -- this would complete the Pentagon’s de facto encirclement of the Gulf littoral, thereby putting into place the last remaining piece in the architecture of a U.S.-led pan-Gulf defense network and system. When and if this were to occur, the long term American strategic goal of surmounting and replacing Great Britain’s previous imperial mantle throughout the length and breadth of the Gulf would be complete. It would likely also, like nothing else, help to ease the way for U.S. entry into Iran’s lucrative economic, commercial, financial, industrial, technology, and hydrocarbon sectors. These two achievements alone would possibly do as much as anything else to validate, certainly in the minds of its authors and advocates, the 1992 Defense Policy Guidance (DPG) drafted by then Pentagon official Paul Wolfowitz, which was encapsulated in President Bush’s National Security Strategy document of 2002. The policy’s strategic objective, subsequently reconfirmed by the White House, remains focused on the United States being able to preclude or blunt any further major inroads into these resource-rich areas beyond those already obtained by the growing international power, economies, and influence of China, India, Japan, and Russia.[35]

Uncertain Calculus: Whither the White House?

With the November 2008 elections eight months distant, the implications for U.S.-Iran relations associated with the prospect of a new Democratic or different Republican administration in the White House and the Congress beginning in January 2009 remain less than clear. Even now, the outcome either way cannot necessarily be equated with a guaranteed certainty that the overall calculus vis-à-vis Iran’s situation and the continued preference of some in Washington of seeking regime change in

Iran will improve fundamentally and irrevocably for the better. This could be the case whether Senator McCain enters the White House or in the event that New York Senator Hillary Clinton, wife of former President Bill Clinton (1992-2000), becomes the Democratic presidential nominee and wins the election.

Indeed, American policies aimed at toppling the government in Tehran originated not with the Bush administration but the administration of President Bill Clinton. In the 1990s the latter initiated its support for the radical Iranian opposition group Mujahhidin El-Khalq, even though the U.S. government had earlier listed it as a terrorist organization. It was also the Clinton administration that successfully persuaded Congress to appropriate funds for an information campaign designed to separate support for the Islamic Republic's clerical regime from Iranian popular opinion. Iranian exiles in the United States, whose numbers have been estimated as high as a million, have extended additional aide for an array of Iranian exiles, including the son of the shah, Reza Pahlavi, who was overthrown in 1979 and later died and was buried in Egypt.[36]

A further plausible scenario in which Tehran would still have reason for concern would be regarding the possible uses to which the United States might unleash its military might against Iran in the future. Such a scenario, at a minimum, would defy Iran's repeated insistence that all foreign military forces be withdrawn from the region.[37]

Absent a major political rapprochement between Washington and Tehran it would also challenge Iran's objective of consolidating its geopolitical gains in Iraq. These remain anchored in the Islamic Republic's intimate association with the post-Saddam Hussein government led by Iraqi Shiites, many of whom it had supported during their long exile in Iran.[38] It would also constitute an ongoing affront to the Islamic Republic leaders' religious sensitivities, given that the location of most of the numerous shrines deemed holy not only by Iran's Shia Muslims but also Shia Muslims elsewhere are in Iraq, not Iran.

At the same time, no Iranian leader of stature thus far has publicly attacked the premise behind a growing international consensus as to what an American decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq rapidly and completely might entail. A specter associated with the possibility is that such a decision might rapidly produce a situation with regard to the prospects for restoring order, security, and stability in Iraq more ruinous for their interests than the one that presently exists. The specific fear is that such a withdrawal could quickly lead to massive instability and insecurity along much of Iran's long border with Iraq. If so, it would call into question how, if at all, that would further the Islamic Republic's, let alone Iraq's, interests. As 2008 enters its second quarter, it remains unclear as to what further actions, if any, the Bush administration and/or Israel might yet take in pursuit of their respective stated interests and objectives vis-à-vis Iran.

DEFENSE

The defense cooperation components of Gulf-U.S. relations have been impacted in recent months by

two major developments.[39] One was the international expose of a nearly two decades-old controversial arms sales arrangement between Saudi Arabia and U.K. supplier BAE Systems. Since the previous year and earlier, the deal had been shadowed by British media allegations of corruption. In late 2006, however, the British government ordered an officially sanctioned oversight body to suspend investigation into the deal. Its rationale, voiced by then British Prime Minister Tony Blair, was that not to do so would endanger vital British national interests. U.S. and other government officials explained the rationale behind the British decision in terms of how an unimpeded investigation risked placing in jeopardy the jobs of thousands of British citizens in the country's aerospace and defense industries, the country's single largest employers. 40 The quashing of the investigation, however, only heightened suspicions of possible impropriety if not also illegality. Nevertheless, an \$8.9 billion deal between London and Riyadh, was signed in September 2007, with Saudi Arabia to receive 72 Eurofighter Typhoon jets.

Arms Sales Re-Dux: Cons ..

In the second major defense-related development, the United States declared on July 30 the intent to permit U.S. arms manufacturers to sell high-tech defense equipment and systems valued at \$20 billion to Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries. The U.S. Congressional and other domestic response to these announcements was predictable. The reaction was immediate and mirrored a longstanding pattern of Israel-centric opposition to any effort to strengthen and expand the American-Saudi Arabian defense relationship, if not also the military ties between the United States and any and all Arab countries not yet in a formal peace treaty relationship with Israel. A recurring emphasis among Members of Congress, political pundits, and the media has been that the conclusion of such sales could stimulate a destabilizing arms race, add to regional instability, and further strengthen the likelihood of eventual conflict on a scale previously unknown. A sub-theme of these arguments has been that such sales ought not to proceed in light of the accusation that Saudi Arabia has not done enough in support of the United States' officially declared "War on Terror." [41]

.. and Pros

Supporters of the sales view the matter differently. They highlight that the proposal was formulated not unilaterally by Washington or any of the capitals of the GCC countries, but jointly. They reason that any effort to strengthen the GCC countries' deterrence and defense capabilities, especially as a means to balance Iranian influence in the region, is only prudent. In so doing, supporters of the sales have underscored the obvious: the GCC countries remain situated in what is undeniably a dangerous neighborhood. GCC and American analysts further emphasize that the GCC region is the one area to which the world's sole superpower has mobilized and deployed more of its troops and treasure in the past 20 years than any place else on earth. Failure to do the utmost to enhance security and stability for one's friends and strategic partners in such an internationally vital region would be tantamount to irresponsibility and recklessness in the extreme.[42]

An additional argument in favor of the arms transactions is that if the United States does not sell defensive military equipment and systems to Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries at this time,

others will. A potential consequence were this to occur would be a deterioration in the evolving overall sense of defense and deterrent oneness of American and GCC member-countries' military strategic and tactical doctrines. Also put at risk would be the quality of interoperability and maintenance of U.S.-manufactured weapons systems already in place and in the process of being strengthened and expanded in the area stretching from Kuwait to Oman. Indeed, were the United States to fail to give serious and favorable consideration to a legitimate defense request coming from one or more of its GCC long-term strategic partners, this would be tantamount to conceding to U.S. adversaries and competitors for regional strategic, economic, political, and commercial influence, America's preeminent position and role in defending the Gulf.[43]

PROSPECTS

On the broader issue of U.S.-Gulf relations from a perspective other than economic, political, commercial, and defense cooperation, there remains serious cause for concern regarding the people-to-people dynamics of the overall relationship – specifically, those in the field of education. A key element helping to formulate and shape those dynamics positively in the contemporary era for as long as anyone can remember remains the extraordinary number of Arab graduates in the GCC countries from American universities. Upon returning home, thousands of these individuals have entered government service. Over time, many of them have acceded to positions of substantial influence in virtually all of the Gulf countries' governmental agencies as well as businesses, banks, and centers of science and technology. In the Saudi Arabian cabinet alone from 1975 until the present there have annually been more PhD graduates of American universities than PhD graduates of any kind in the U.S. Cabinet, Supreme Court, Senate, and House of Representatives combined. The same is true of the Kingdom's younger but substantially larger national deliberative body, the *Majlis ash-Shura* (Consultative Council) since its inception in the early 1990s. A largely similar set of statistics is in evidence in most of the other GCC countries.

In contrast, it is doubtful whether as many as 100 Americans other than those of the Islamic faith and/or Arab ancestry could claim to have successfully fulfilled the requirements for graduation from an Arab university in *any* of the Arab world's 22 countries or the 57 nations that compose the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the largest membership organization of the world's 1.5 billion Muslims. (Author's italics). This is despite the American and Arab populations being almost exactly the same, i.e., 300 million. Since 9/11, the contours of the earlier educational bonds have of course not remained static. On the other hand, neither have they exhibited anywhere near the nature and extent of dynamics and mutuality of benefit associated with the decades prior to that event. Indeed, evidence of how the kinds of strong interpersonal bonds forged in an earlier era's series of Gulf-U.S. special relationships have become seriously frayed in less than a decade is hardly lacking. Perhaps the most emotional, contentious, and far-reaching damage to these relationships continues to be the long delays and onerous logistical arrangements accompanying Gulf Arab country emerging leaders' efforts to obtain timely entry and/or re-turn visas in order to commence and complete their university degrees in the United States.

The Fraying of Saudi Arabian-U.S. People-to-People Ties

Saudi Arabia is by far the most prominent case in point. Despite a high profile meeting between President Bush and the Kingdom's then Crown Prince Abdallah several years ago in which they declared an agreement had been reached that was designed to solve the situation, the overall problem of visa issuances by Americans to Saudi Arabians remains almost as elusive as before. Indeed, U.S. visa application delays and other complexities thwarting the ability of GCC Arabs to obtain permission to enter the United States for educational, annual medical check-up, tourist, and/or business reasons continues largely unabated. This is in spite of intermittent U.S. official statements implying that the situation has been improving.

To the contrary, in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, epicenter of the world's largest oil company and seat of the planet's most prodigious reserves of petroleum, a prominent billboard continues to capture the conundrum in a nutshell. Paid for by the United Kingdom's taxpayers, the advertisement trumpets ongoing British policy to encourage Saudi Arabians – not just students but also practically any of the Kingdom's other citizens not disqualified on health or legal grounds – to apply for a visa to visit Great Britain, assuring qualified applicants they will be granted an entry visa within a *single day*. (Author's italics). The long-term implications of this highly restrictive American visa policy continue to make it exceptionally difficult for GCC and other Gulf Arabs to continuously strengthen and expand the overall Gulf-U.S. relationship at the level of people-to-people ties. That the results and prospects bode ill for the future of U.S.-Gulf relations as a whole is as self-evident as the prognosis that neither a resolution of the problem nor the prospects of its significant amelioration appear likely in the remaining months of the Bush administration.

Iraqi Imponderables

Another imponderable in terms of near-term Gulf-U.S. relations continues to be Iraq. An unexpected development during the past year that was received with astonishment mixed with apparent apathy was the following. Supporters and opponents alike of President Bush's policies towards the war-torn country hardly raised an eyebrow when he shifted the tone and focus of his rhetoric for the first half of the year to something he had not said previously. Dropping his oft-repeated promise of, "We'll stay the course," it was as though he had decided to switch conceptually and metaphorically to a similarly cadenced but unspoken implication of, in effect, "We'll stay, of course," with barely a peep from the mainstream media.

In the eyes of critics and advocates of the American occupation of Iraq, the statistics are revealing. The context is the highest number of Americans overtly resident in Iraq on any given day in Iraq dating from the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, when diplomatic relations between Baghdad and Washington were severed, until the commencement of the American invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003. During this 37-year period, the number of American representatives stationed in Iraq was never more than seventeen. Contrast this number with that since then through March 2008, when on any given day the number has never been less than *a quarter of a million Americans*, all of whom were associated in one way or another with the country's occupation. (Author's italics).

Iranian Uncertainties

What the remaining months of the Bush administration might hold in store for Iran also remains uncertain and framed within a set of similarly clouded lens. An exception is the hawkish stance of U.S. Republican Senator John McCain. The Senator, a much-decorated Viet Nam war hero, is clearly President Bush's favored and most likely as well as natural heir to his hard-line approach not only towards Iraq but also Iran. Few doubt the senator is inclined to continue not only having American armed forces occupy Iraq indefinitely but also confronting Iran forcefully and, if need be, militarily. Indeed, McCain has left little to the imagination as to his willingness not to be reluctant to attack Iran militarily should he be elected president and the situation following his inauguration in his view were to warrant it. In response to a question at a political rally as to what he might do if the Islamic Republic were to continue its nuclear development program all the way through the complete cycle of uranium fuel enrichment his response was revealing. He replied in a manner that those who were present said seemed partly to be an effort to be humorous and partly an attempt to be serious by suggesting that he would consider bombing Iran.

As had been the case in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration's and Senator McCain's issues of contention involving Iran remain numerous and diverse. On one hand, they range from opposing Iran's assistance to Lebanon's Hizbollah, Palestine's Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and Syria, to its opposition to pressing Israel to withdraw completely from the Palestinian territories, including east Jerusalem, which Israel has continued to occupy by force of arms since June 1967. On the other hand, the administration and Senator McCain have shown no sign of lessening their opposition to Tehran completing the fuel enrichment cycle associated with its nuclear program, its maintaining a Euro-centric bourse to facilitate commercial relations with the European Union whose member countries collectively continue to be the Islamic Republic's premier trading partner, and the rhetorical blandishments of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that have regularly lambasted Israel, questioned the Holocaust, and threatened the interests of the United States and its forces occupying Iraq.

Bush's Mideast Visit, Iran, and Palestine

In contrast with the unimpressive overall assessment of the Bush administration's overall approach to Gulf-U.S. relations in the past year, many Gulf leaders hailed President Bush's visit the Mideast three months ago for the first time since winning the 2000 election. In addition to spending three days in Israel, the itinerary included his first-ever visits to Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Lost upon the American media's reporting but not observers in Doha and Muscat was that the president's schedule failed to include stops in the capitals of two GCC countries that have played out-sized roles as vital American allies in matters pertaining to Gulf security and stability: namely, Oman and Qatar. The visit's stated objective was twofold. One goal was to urge the host countries' governments to stand firm with the United States in its efforts to prevent Iran from expanding further its increased regional influence made possible by the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

To some analysts, the nature, tenor, and tone of this predictable facet of the president's message was eerily reminiscent of Vice-President Cheney's swing through many of the same countries in March 2002, when he urged GCC governments' leaders to stand firm with the United States in its determination to confront Iraq, if necessary, by force.[44] In Bush's visit, as in Cheney's, the hosts were welcoming and diplomatic but not hesitant in underscoring how local public opinion viewed the needs of alleviating the plight of the Palestinians and Syrians as being of a far higher priority. Another purpose, which critics suggested the White House may have crafted with a view to acknowledging this particular concern, was to enlist the assistance of these governments in furthering the prospects for Arab-Israeli peace by remaining supportive of U.S. efforts to isolate groups such as Hizbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad.[45]

Analysts largely applauded the president taking the initiative to ascertain regional realities first hand. However, few believe that in the little time remaining for him in office he is likely be able to move the conflict's main protagonists, especially Israel in its unique position as the occupying power of Palestinian and Syrian lands, toward a peaceful and successful conclusion. Instead, notwithstanding his greater number of public statements supportive of peace and his visit to the region, the president is expected to do little to improve what his administration's policies have done to harm America's image and long-term U.S. strategic interests in much of Arab and Islamic world beyond the damage inflicted during his first seven years in office. In the eyes of the president's critics, what is more likely remains confined mainly to his uttering platitudes and offering lofty rhetoric in favor of a settlement but doing little of meaningful or enduring consequence to bring the objective to fruition.

The crux of the matter regarding Palestine – by far the oldest, largest, and most pervasive disagreement between the leaders and people of the Gulf countries and the United States – therefore remains as before. It is how to persuade not only the Bush administration but the candidates of both American political parties vying to replace it in 2009 to move beyond the matters of the moment regarding any given regional crisis in the Gulf or elsewhere. It is how to ensure that Washington officialdom will remain focused on the need to address the underlying issues and reasons for the ongoing success of Al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hizbollah, Islamic Jihad, and other militant groups in attracting recruits to their cause.

If there is one reason why the prospects for meaningful progress on this particular issue appear to remain so dismal, it is that however impressively the president continues to speak in support of the establishment of a sovereign and independent State of Palestine alongside a secure Israel who's right to exist is recognized – a right that has been acknowledged by the Palestine Liberation Organization since 1987 -- observers have correctly noted that his words have been consistently belied by his actions. The latter have consistently indicated that he is unwilling to try to persuade the Israeli government or anyone else that, on this particular issue, he has either meant what he has said or said what he has meant. Certainly, more than seven years into his presidency and obligation, to use his own oft-repeated words, "to do whatever is necessary to protect the United States and the interests of the American people," the record is revealing.

Viewed objectively and dispassionately, there is no evidence that the Israeli government, were it to

fail to cease colonizing the Palestinian and Syrian territories it continues to occupy forcibly, or even to dismantle the lengthy wall it continues to build illegally on still more confiscated Palestinian land – reducing the previous 22 per cent of territory available for establishing a sovereign and independent State of Palestine to only 14 per cent – risks losing President Bush’s strong personal support. Neither are there signs of an imminent withdrawal or diminution of U.S. taxpayer financial, military, and diplomatic assistance to Israel. This is despite the Jewish State’s continued violation of the U.N. Charter’s dictum and U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 in this matter regarding “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force,” to which the United States and Israel, the two of them by treaty as well as by international law, and the United States also by the terms of its Constitution, remain solemnly bound to uphold.

In this light, notwithstanding President Bush’s having hosted the Annapolis Conference in November and taken the time to meet face to face with GCC leaders in their own countries, neither act has shown the slightest sign of liberating so much as an inch of occupied Palestinian or Syrian territory during his remaining time in office. Instead, the president’s stated resolve continues to be viewed practically everywhere as less than credible. Worse, it remains perceived as little different from the way in which it has been viewed from practically the outset of his administration. In particular, the president’s meetings, lofty rhetoric, and recent visit to the region aside, his leadership on this issue is deemed by leaders from one end of the Gulf to the other and the world over as sorely wanting.

Worse, in the view of many analysts, the president is seen as having done nothing truly effective to end or even reduce the overarching issue fueling anti-Americanism and attacks on Americans and U.S. interests in the Arab and Islamic worlds, and among Al-Qaeda supporters in particular: namely, the perception that the invasion and occupation of Iraq was undertaken in substantial measure as a U.S.-Israeli initiative from the start. Following from this, America’s moral stature remains fallen not only in the Gulf and throughout the Middle East, but practically everywhere else as well. Even the president’s more charitable observers opine that his efforts amount to too little too late.

More troubling to some is the irony that Washington officialdom continues, as it has done incessantly since 9/11, to use the phrase “national security” more than any other administration of an American president in history, despite a seeming willingness to accept ongoing levels of insecurity in one of the world’s most strategically vital areas. In their defense, the president and vice-president have stated periodically throughout the past year that history will judge whether they have charted the right course. In the interim, few deny that the past year, much as the years since the invasion and occupation of Iraq began, has remained as costly as ever.

Certainly, the overall assessment of the efficacy of America’s relations with the Gulf countries continues to appear to large numbers of the region’s citizens and others elsewhere as audacious and reckless. Perhaps the harshest indictment is that the administration’s overall approach to its Gulf friends, partners, and adversaries speaks volumes about a persistent U.S. lack of bravery -- an unwillingness at the highest levels of the American government to tackle the larger political and policy-related issues noted herein that from the beginning have not only enabled anti-American

insurgents, radicals, militants, and extremists to be recruited and sustained, but allowed them to enjoy measures of support they would not otherwise have merited.

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NOTES:

- 1-The genesis of this dichotomy has been credited to Martin Indyk, President Clinton's National Security Adviser for the Near East and later his Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs as well as U.S. Ambassador to Israel. See Hisham Melhem, *Dual Containment: The Demise of a Fallacy*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, 1997, p. 11.
- 2- See SUSRIS, March 31, 2008.
- 3- During the year, Saudi Arabia continued its cooperation with one of America's largest oil producers to complete a substantial addition to an existing refinery on the Texas Gulf coast.
- 4- See Robert Bryce, *The Dangerous Illusion: Energy Independence*. New York: Public Affairs and Perseus Books Group, 2008. In terms of educating the American people on policy matters relating to energy generally, the behavior of Members of Congress has not been any better. This is despite the opportunities for Congress to exercise its leadership and oversight responsibilities in matters pertaining to the uses to which the American taxpayers' dollars are put. Prior to the Democrats winning control of both houses of Congress in the November 2006 elections, the leadership of the Republican-controlled legislature had been adamantly opposed to allowing a major U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) investigation into meetings the office of Vice President Dick Cheney had convened in late 2000-early 2001 pursuant to formulating the Bush administration's energy policies. The GAO, in its role as the official watchdog over matters pertaining to U.S. government spending and policy in general, had sought to obtain from the vice-president the names of the corporate oil and gas officials with which he and/or his staff met more than 40 times in late 2000 and early 2001 pursuant to determining the Bush administration's policies regarding energy and the environment. Prior to the November 2006 mid-term elections, the Republican leadership in Congress threatened the GAO that if it continued to persist in the part of its investigation that sought the names of those with whom the vice-president and his staff had met in those two policy-related contexts, it would risk losing or facing a substantial reduction in its funding. With the Democrats replacing the Republican as the leaders of both houses of Congress, this political obstacle preventing the GAO from conducting its duties in this matter was removed. Yet even though leading Democratic members of Congress

acknowledged there was no longer any political, legal, or similar impediment standing in their way, they nonetheless refused to resume the investigation despite private assurances to this writer and others to the contrary. Further, this was in spite of public knowledge that only three of the meetings under the aegis of the office of the vice president had anything to do with the environment -- the rest were devoted exclusively to energy matters, inclusive of the vice-president, his staff, and the corporate executives examining maps detailing the location, extent, and geological attributes of Iran and Iraq's oil and gas reserves. Of related importance, neither did the Congress insist upon the completion and submission of the long-awaited and oft-promised second report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that had earlier been launched to provide Congress' own explanation of the intelligence failures prior to 9/11. This was despite Congress having the right, duty, and mandated responsibility to obtain the report and the outgoing committee chairman having stated in public on a national television talk show viewed by millions that the report was well on its way to fruition. These Congressional failures to provide the necessary scrutiny over core issues relating to American energy policies and their impact upon U.S. policies and actions towards Iraq, Iran, and U.S.-Gulf relations generally were inexplicable to specialists, among whom this writer was one, who spent most of a morning in June discussing these and other issues with a member of one of the relevant Senate oversight committees tasked with exercising such responsibilities. Particularly revealing in the meeting was that the Member of Congress stated that only two members of the oversight committee had expressed any interest in undertaking the scrutiny that they were charged with conducting.

5- A major example within recent months has been the second much publicized economic bailout of U.S. financial giant Citibank by a GCC member-country's financial institution. In an unprecedented move pursuant to its strategic decision to deploy sovereign wealth funds to acquire equity stakes in major Western economic enterprises, UAE Emirate Abu Dhabi's state investment authority injected more than eight billion dollars into Citibank's cash-strapped coffers, helping the U.S.-based bank weather losses associated with the U.S. housing mortgage crisis. Abu Dhabi's financial rescue of Citibank replicated an earlier one by Saudi Arabia's Kingdom Holding Company Chairman HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin 'Abdalaziz Al-Sa'ud.

6-For a view that in places is at odds with the notion of benefits deriving from the reality of energy interdependence that I have argued here, see John Deutch, James R. Schlesinger, David Victor, et al., *National Security Consequences of U.S. Oil Dependence*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2006.

7-For insight into how the Anglo-American venture launched in Iraq in 2003 can be placed in context with other forms of empire over the past century and a half, see Roger Owen, "Question and Pensees: What is a Strikingly New Characteristic of Imperial Projects – Or the Way They Are Analyzed – in the Middle East?: Pensee 1," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (February 2007), pp. 7-10. Providing insight into how insurgents and revolutionaries ended numerous earlier empires and/or transformed colonial rule into national sovereignty and political independence, see, inter alia, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth and Black Faces, White Masks* as well as William R. Polk's *Violent Politics: A History of Insurgency, Terrorism, and Guerrilla War, from the American Revolution to Iraq*. New York: Harper Collins, 2007.

8- In a discussion with this author in December 2006, one of the GCC countries' ambassadors posted to the United States conceded that, "The Iraqi government leaders are seen as collaborators with a

foreign government that has invaded and occupied not just any Arab state, but one that was once viewed for centuries as the epitome of Arab culture and civilization." See also the remarks by Dr. Abdelrahim Foukara, Washington Bureau Chief of Al-Jazeera International, to the 16th Annual Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference, October 31, 2007 in Washington, D.C., as reported in *SUSRIS*, January 2008.

9-The number of American armed forces and related personnel stationed in Iraq can be usefully analyzed in comparison to the human resources utilized to administer Great Britain's century and a half imperial outpost in Aden and South Arabia (1839-1967), on one hand, and the defense and foreign relations of eastern Arabia (1819-1971), on the other. The British military and civilians posted to these two sizeable regions in Arabia and the Gulf were but a small fraction of the numbers mobilized and deployed by the United States to Iraq since 2003. (The comparison is based on British archives and the author's work related to the two areas noted. In 1970, the newly independent government of the People's Republic of South (and later Democratic) Yemen permitted me, as Fulbright Fellow, to live and conduct empirical field research in what until 1967 had been the Crown Colony of Aden, the Aden Protectorate, and the South Arabian Federation with reference to their transition from British imperial rule to national sovereignty and political independence in the People's Republic of South [later Democratic] Yemen. In 1971, the British Foreign Office allowed me to observe first hand the process whereby it proceeded to abrogate the treaties by which it had long administered the defense and foreign relations of Bahrain, Qatar, and seven other emirates that would come to form the United Arab Emirates).

10- Among a plethora of private sector groups supportive of the administration and the surge that profess to be similarly inspired – versus others of an opposite persuasion – have been associations representing the stated interests of hundreds of thousands of American armed forces veterans. To cite but one example among many, *Military Officer*, a journal published by the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), noted that MOAA President Vice-Admiral Norb Ryan, Jr. (USN-Ret.) had written following his 2007 visit to Iraq that "success stories in Iraq and Afghanistan were being suppressed in the media." [See "With the Troops," "From the President," September 2007]. In response, a reader and member of MOAA wrote to request that MOAA "have [its] Web and media office .. publish success stories about our military." The editor replied that since the MOAA president's return from Iraq earlier in the year, the journal had been doing just that in a newly introduced regular feature called "Good News": containing "good news" stories about American troops. Every duty day," the editor said, "staff members change out the stories." See "Your Views," *Military Officer*, January 2008, p. 16.]

11-For an illustrative account of the precarious situation in which large numbers of the 8,000 Iraqi translators and others cooperating with the U.S. occupation forces in Iraq have increasingly found themselves, see Lori Grinker's "Life Interrupted: A Photojournalist's Account," *Bill Moyers Journal*, Public Broadcasting System, February 15, 2008

12-"Iraq's Civil War, the Sadrists, and the Surge," *Middle East Report* No. 72. February 7, 2008, International Crisis Group; JoAnne O'Bryant and Micahael Waterhoude, "U.S. Forces in Iraq," Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, January 23, 2008; and Kenneth Katzman, "Iran's Activities and Influence in Iraq," Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, January 24, 2008.

13-Author's interview on January 30, 2008, with a U.S. Army officer intricately involved in designing

and implementing the surge and additional interviews in March 2008 with seven other American army officers among whom were several that had had as many as three tours of duty in Iraq.

14-These figures are the result of extrapolating the statistics for Iraq to an American equivalency. For example, Iraq's population of 25 million is one twelfth of America's 302 mn; 153,000 times twelve is 1,836,000.

15-Author's interview with a representative of the Embassy of the Iraq, Washington, D.C., November 2007.

16-Data for the number of Iraqis killed, those that have become refugees abroad as well as within Iraq, and the number imprisoned since the onset of the invasion and occupation launched on March 19, 2003, are derived from numerical accounts published in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the CIA 2007 World Fact Book's statistics for the United States and Iraq and extrapolating the numbers for Iraq to an American equivalency.

17-On Clinton's Executive Order 12957 of March 15, 1995, cancelling Conoco's concession and prohibiting all oil development deals in Iran, his subsequent Executive Order 12597 of May 6, 1995, which "effectively imposed a blanket ban on all commercial and financial transactions with Iran, and the role of pressure exerted by the American Israeli lobby on the White House to do so, see Roger Howard, *Iran Oil: The New Middle East Challenge to America*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007, pp. 10-12; Scott Ritter, *Target Iran: The Truth About the White House's Plans for Regime Change*. New York: Nation Books, 2006, p. 26; and Milhem, pp. 12-13.

18-Alan Greenspan, *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World*. New York: Penguin Press, 2007, p. 463. When some Americans immediately contested the validity of Mr. Greenspan's assertion, he orally reworded his assessment to indicate that what he had meant to say was that the United States acted as it did, in effect, out of knowledge that interruptions in the steady flow of oil from the Gulf had more than once affected the world's economies, a comment viewed by many as a distinction without a difference. See also Christopher M. Blanchard, "Iraq: Oil and Gas Legislation, Revenue Sharing, and U.S. Policy," January 18, 2008, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.

19-"Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses," January 30, 2008, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.

20-See Steven A. Hildreth, "Iran's Ballistic Missile Programs: An Overview," January 24, 2008, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.

21-The launching of Great Britain's long domination of eastern and southern Arabia from 1819 to 1971 and from 1839 to 1967, respectively, was facilitated similarly -- the British navy responded forcibly and successfully to attacks by Arabs that had reacted to British provocations in these two regions.

22-James Noyes, "Iran and the GCC," in *Iran's Nuclear Program: Realities and Repercussions*. Abu Dhabi, UAE: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2006, p. 81 et seq.

23-Ibid.

24-Michael Eisenstadt, "Delay, Deter, and Contain, Roll-Back: Toward a Strategy for dealing with Iran's Nuclear Ambitions," in *ibid.*, pp. 13-31.

25-Paul Rogers, *A War Too Far: Iraq, Iran, and The New American Century*. London: Pluto Press, 2006, page 263.

26-The author and the source for this particular health and environmental analysis, Kuwait Center for Strategic Studies Director Dr. Sami Faraj, participated with others in a workshop on Iran and Gulf

stability in Dubai in June 2006. See also Noyes, *op cit.*, p. 73 and Rogers, *ibid.*, p. 244.

27-Nazila Fathi, "Ahmadinejad Says A-Plant Will Open in a Year and Belittles Israel," *New York Times*, January 31, 2008, p. A-12.

28-Paul Rogers, *op cit.*, p. 244.

29-This exact viewpoint was shared with the author before the invasion of Iraq by two former major White House officials, one a Republican and the other a Democrat, in private meetings at two different prominent American public policy research institutes. The Democrat was the more forceful of the two in arguing that, "The United States has got its priorities upside down, inside out, and backwards – it should be attacking Iran first, Iraq later."

30-Iran is presently positioned uniquely within two other multilateral regional organizations: (1) the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), in which its fellow members are Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Kazakhstan, and Afghanistan, and (2) the Caspian Sea Cooperation Organization (CASCO), together with Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. One specialist has written that, "The clear objective of such multilateral measures is not only to bolster Iran's relations with [the] member-countries' governments and economies," ... "but also to establish Iran as the linchpin, geographically and organizationally, of a series of interlocking fora. Thus, Russia, one regional rival, is included in CASCO and Turkey, another competitor, belongs to the ECO, but only Iran is a member of both." See W. Nathaniel Howell, "Iran's Policy in Northwest Asia: Opportunities, Challenges, and Implications," in Jamal S. Al-Suwaidi, *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability*. Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996, p. 183.

31-In a discussion with the author about possible looming scenarios involving Afghanistan and Pakistan on January 30, 2008, an American Department of Defense Mideast strategist opined that the United States would likely abandon earlier objectives of thinking it would be possible to defeat a resurgent and increasingly effective Taliban. While stressing no consideration was being given to withdrawing U.S. forces from Afghanistan, the mission, he said, would be reconfigured and confined for the indefinite future instead to protecting the capital, U.S. and other coalition forces, and the American base at Bagram along with periodic bombings of insurgent strongholds and re-supply routes. This individual indicated that among other unofficial objectives, the United States and its allies would likely maintain a long-term geo-strategic interest in Afghanistan as a possible eventual route for the export of Central Asia oil to the Indian Ocean. An additional objective could be to deny such a route to Russia and, if at all possible, preclude or severely limit the Iranian clerical regime's ability to export energy to South Asia (e.g., Pakistan and/or India), and East Asia through the northeastern corner of Afghanistan that borders China.

32-Author's interview with a U.S. government official tasked with monitoring U.S.-GCC region commercial relations, Washington, D.C., September 9, 2007.

33-John Duke Anthony, "The Construction Boom in the Gulf," *Encyclopedia Britannica: 2008 World Yearbook*. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2008, p. 477.

34-Ibid.

35- When the DPG was being formulated following the end of the Cold War, a then senior U.S. Foreign Service Officer with access to one of the drafts then in process summarized and explained to this writer its broad outlines and key premises as follows. In order for the United States to retain its position as the world's sole superpower by 2020, it would have to remain preeminent in five areas of

power and influence: economics, finance, technology, defense, and selected industries. It was postulated that essential to achieving this five-part strategic objective would be unhindered American access to adequate sources of energy and, more specifically, those that lay beneath the onshore territories and seas of the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf countries.

36-See Reese Erlich, *The Iran Agenda: The Real Story of U.S. Policy and the Middle East Crisis*. Sausalito, CA: Poli Point Press, 2007, p. 67.

37-John Duke Anthony, "An American in Qatar: Observations on the GCC's December 3-4, 2007 Heads of State and Ministerial Summit, SUSRIS, December 11, 2007.]

38-One analyst has written about "the overthrow of Saddam [Hussein] – through democratic elections – by a regime comprised largely of individuals who had lived in or were sympathetic to Iran," adding that, "one of the major arguments working against the notion that Iran wants to destabilize Iraq is the fact that there has never been a more pro-Iranian government in Baghdad." See Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East*. New York: Perseus Books, 2006, p. 253.

39-See Christopher M. Blanchard, "The Gulf Security Dialogue and Related Arms Sale Proposals," January 17, 2008, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.

40-Author's interviews with three senior U.S. government representatives and analysts on December 9, 2006.

41-For a refutation of this charge, see the author's debate on National Public Radio's To the Point program, "Arms Diplomacy for the Middle East," as broadcast on July 31, 2007, for which edited excerpts appeared in SUSRIS on August 8, 2007:<http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/articles/2007/loi/070808-anthony-npr-html> and www.ncusar.org .

42-Ibid.

43-Ibid.

44- On March 19, 2002, at the Zayid Center for Coordination and Follow-Up in Abu Dhabi, UAE, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney and this author, in separate back-to-back addresses to the same audience composed of the UAE diplomatic and press corps, discussed and debated the merits of various approaches then under consideration regarding Iraq. None in the audience publicly agreed with the vice-president's reasoning in his insistence on assigning the issue of confronting Iraq, if need be by force, such a high priority. The audience was polite but differed sharply with Mr. Cheney, insisting that of far greater importance was the need to address the pervasive threats to regional stability and security stemming from the unresolved Israel-Palestine and Israel-Syria conflicts.

45-Brookings Institution Saban Center Nonresident Fellow Dr. Shibley Telhami has provided an alternative assessment of the president's visit to the region. In his view, the Bush administration, with its Iran-centric and Israel-centric preoccupations, and the interests of the president's Arab hosts regarding where Iran registered among their most important concerns, were not on the same page. Writing in *The Washington Post* on January 14, 2008, about how Israel and the Bush administration were prepared to pursue a peace process between Arabs and Israelis as a means of forging an Arab coalition that would support Washington in opposing Iran, Telhami claims that the Arabs with whom the president met have been using the Iran issue differently. In his view, the latter see it as a means to persuade Israel and the United States to be serious about Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. The likely reason, he suggests, is that Bush's Arab interlocutors probably concluded it is easier in Washington and Tel Aviv for Arabs to focus on the Iranian threat than the peace process. He adds

that one should “not mistake polite nods from Arab leaders for U.S. policy on Iran as an endorsement of that policy.” See also “Middle East Peace: It’s Not about Iran,” Saban Center Monthly Bulletin, January 2008.