

THE MIDDLE EAST: PERSPECTIVES AND PROSPECTS



SUMMARY OF A ROUNDTABLE
(Including Policy Recommendations)

HELD IN
NEW YORK CITY
March 29, 2007

Our Mission

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy was founded in 1974 by Professor Hans J. Morgenthau and others. It is a nonprofit activist organization dedicated to the resolution of conflicts that threaten U.S. interests. Toward that end, the National Committee identifies, articulates, and helps advance American foreign policy interests from a nonpartisan perspective within the framework of political realism.

American foreign policy interests include

preserving and strengthening national security;

supporting countries committed to the values and the practice of political, religious, and cultural pluralism;

improving U.S. relations with the developed and developing worlds;

advancing human rights;

encouraging realistic arms-control agreements;

curbing the proliferation of nuclear and other unconventional weapons;

promoting an open and global economy.

Believing that an informed public is vital to a democratic society, the National Committee offers educational programs that address security challenges facing the United States and publishes a variety of publications, including its bimonthly journal, *American Foreign Policy Interests*, that present keen analyses of all aspects of American foreign policy.



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Dedication

With admiration, respect, and gratitude to
Ambassador Fereydoun Hoveyda,
the originator and director of the NCAFP's project
The Middle East: Islamic Law and Peace



FOREWORD

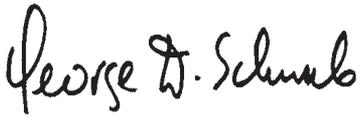
The March 29, 2007, roundtable (“The Middle East: Perspectives and Prospects”), the first held on the Middle East since the death of Ambassador Fereydoun Hoveyda, the director of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy’s (NCAFP’s) Middle East project, was as spirited as it was informative. In their commitment to deliver unvarnished analyses of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the 2006 war in Lebanon, Iran’s apparent quest to obtain nuclear weapons, the war in Iraq, the state of human rights in various states of the Middle East, and the stability of dictatorial regimes in the region, the presenters paid fitting tribute to the project’s founder and director, Ambassador Hoveyda, to whom the roundtable was dedicated. So did other attendees whose provocative questions unleashed a series of debates that focused on the turbulence of the region.

Fereydoun Hoveyda was a champion of telling the truth. Despite initial and severe criticism of his analysis of events in the Middle East, he maintained that the medieval mindset of Arab militant Islamic fundamentalists was responsible for their actions. Fortunately, he lived long enough to know that his concept had been adopted by other experts in the field.

This roundtable, like its predecessors, could not have been held without the generous support of Mutual of America and its chairman, president, and CEO, Mr. Thomas J. Moran; Mrs. Sheila Johnson Robbins; Mrs. Eugenie Fromer; and Kenneth J. Bialkin, Esq. I thank them for their unstinting support for a project that is at the epicenter of world peace.

I also thank Amir Taheri who has agreed to become a senior fellow of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, a position that will enable him to participate in future roundtables on the Middle East, including the next one that will be held in the near future on the significance of the geopolitical transformation of the region.

The policy recommendations recapitulated in this booklet are those alone of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George D. Schwab". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G' and a distinct 'D'.

George D. Schwab, President
National Committee on American Foreign Policy

INTRODUCTION

From the moment it began to the moment it ended, the roundtable held on March 29 proved to be one of the most provocative and freewheeling of any that the NCAFP has held during the past seven years to illuminate this tumultuous region of the world. In essence, the diverse comments voiced by the speakers and observers alike cannot be attributed exclusively to the fact that they were not for attribution. They also reflected the perception that few areas of the world arouse more passion and disagreement than the Middle East. The format tacitly adopted at the March 29 roundtable encouraged a range of related questions raised by observers and answers that frequently gave the speaker the opportunity not only to answer the overarching question but also to anticipate and answer supplementary questions as well. In effect, each round of questions was transformed into an impromptu dialogue or debate, pointing to the conclusion that the speakers and the observers possessed a number of varying perspectives about the Middle East that would not be reconciled that day.

Overview: The Dynamic in the Middle East

At last year's roundtable, the speakers maintained, it was clear that the status quo in the region had changed since the end of the cold war, but it was not yet apparent who would shape the change. After Paul Bremer assumed the role of American proconsul in Iraq and governed as if he were the sole authority in the country, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) challenged the United States for primacy in the region. Doubtful that U.S. staying power in Iraq would survive the end of the Bush administration and unwilling to accept the consequences of the grab for power by non-Arab, Shiite dominated Iran in a region whose Arab population is largely Sunni, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the six petro-monarchies in the Persian Gulf, convinced Egypt and Jordan to join them in forming the Group of Eight to formulate a plan that they hoped would be adopted at a meeting of the 22-member Arab League convened to confront the waning of American power in the

region, the rise of the IRI, religious disputes and sectarian conflicts between the Shiites and the Sunni, and the crisis of legitimacy that all Arab states face.

The speaker stated that because the IRI had made its possession of plutonium and enriched uranium and facilities that can be used to produce nuclear weapons a badge of sovereignty, abandoning its nuclear ambitions under the threat of force could result in widespread nationalist reaction and might culminate in the ejection from power of the radical President Ahmadinejad and his cohorts. Accordingly, the speaker predicted that the Iranian government would not do what its adversaries expect—compromise in order to avoid the imposition of a wide range of harsh sanctions by the United Nations Security Council. No one doubts that the issue of a nuclear armed IRI remains of great concern to its Arab neighbors as well as to the United States, Russia, China, the European Union, the United Nations, and other states and international organizations.

Turning to Lebanon, the speaker explained the importance of the second smallest Arab country in the Middle East. It serves as a balancer in that volatile region of the world. Identifying the factors that have led this small state to play such a prominent role in the Middle East, the speaker enumerated the many groups from Shiite Muslims to Maronite Christians that comprise its population, neighboring countries from Syria to Iran that are vying to control it, and countries and regional organizations from the United States to Russia to China to the European Union and the United Nations that are trying to influence it. The outcome in Lebanon, the speaker asserted, will constitute a win/lose situation.

According to the speaker, the gloom in Israel over the Israeli-Palestinian situation has been partly imported from the United States. The atmosphere alone could account for Israel's reaction to the Saudi peace proposal.

In Iraq, the only question, the speaker asserted, is who is going to win.

The Conflict from a Regional Perspective

The next speaker focused first on the Arab peace plan, describing it in the same terms that King Abdullah of Jordan is said to have used to characterize it to President Bush: the collective recognition of Israel by the Arab states in return for Israel's willingness to negotiate with the Palestinians a final status agreement involving security, refugees, Jerusalem, and borders.

The speaker expressed the judgment that the Arab states' seizure of the initiative can be considered a good thing because it undercuts the momentum that had been building rapidly in favor of Hezbollah since war erupted in Lebanon last summer. It can be argued that the proposal represents the Arab decision not to let the radicals take over the Middle East. Although the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), has declared that he is willing to negotiate such an agreement with the Israelis, the Israelis appear to have doubts about his power and credibility among the Palestinians. Moreover, the speaker asserted, it appears that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has decided that she will play a role in bringing both sides together in a series of talks designed to illuminate the parameters of a definitive agreement. In the speaker's judgment, the cost to be paid for the further radicalization of the Middle East and the Islamic world is very high. It should be borne by all of the parties responsible for the situation—Israel, the Arabs, the Muslims, and the United States, which is universally perceived to be Israel's protector.

The speaker discussed the importance of incorporating strong sanctions into the draft resolution that was presented to the Security Council by Russia, China, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States in response to the steps that Iran is taking to develop a nuclear weapons capability by enriching uranium in its own facilities on its own territory and concluded that the prospect of those sanctions might have caused some apprehension among the IRI leaders. However, it is unlikely that the IRI will relinquish its nuclear resources or stop supplying weapons throughout the region, including those shipped to Syria for Hezbollah and to the Islamic radicals in Iraq and elsewhere

in the Middle East. The jury is still out on whether Security Council sanctions will succeed in preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and from acting out and achieving its grand ambitions in the region.

The speaker voiced reservations about the meeting that was held about a month ago. It was convened by Iraq in order to discuss with its neighbors, especially Iran and Syria and members of the Arab League, as well as interested parties, including the United States, the efforts they were willing to undertake to stabilize Iraq. Declaring that engaging in discussions with Iran and Syria was not necessarily the key to prevailing on them to change a policy designed to promote the Islamist radicalization of Iraq and thus its destabilization, the speaker yielded to another speaker who was eager to relate information about the all-inclusive meeting. That speaker said that the Iraqi initiated meeting was endorsed by the United States whose ambassador attended. So did permanent members of the Security Council, the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Iran, and Syria. An agreement was reached to stop the flow of fighters and arms to Iraq. In fact, Iran closed a portion of its border ostensibly to symbolize its intention to implement the agreement. According to the speaker, the results of the meeting appear to be promising.

The second speaker resumed discussing the challenges that face the Middle East. In voicing the paradoxical conclusion that by insisting on an exit strategy and a timetable for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, the Democrats were helping the Bush administration to make the point that stabilizing Iraq can no longer be considered an exclusive U.S. responsibility, the speaker focused on the complexity of the situation in Iraq. The fear instilled by the prospect that the proposal might be implemented was palpable and could prove to be the galvanizing force that motivates other states in the region to act effectively and in unison to bring stability to Iraq.

In turning to Lebanon, the speaker voiced agreement that the struggle will culminate in a win/lose situation for

several reasons: The conflict involves the head of government versus the head of an Islamic militant group—that is, a state versus a militia--and moderation versus radicalism. In the speaker's judgment, the international community has shown its support for Lebanon by endorsing the UN's establishment of a tribunal to investigate political assassinations in the country. After stating that the lives of this generation and future generations will be served well by encouraging the Israelis and the Palestinians to enter into a settlement now, the speaker dismissed the idea that George W. Bush's waning incumbency will or should hinder him from playing a prominent role in foreign policymaking.

The Conflict from a Global Perspective

A speaker emphasized the global perspective that can be gleaned from analyzing the challenges facing the Middle East, asserting that the position that the United States has taken toward terrorism is logical and consistent. The threat is global, and the country responded to the 9/11 attacks in kind. The speaker maintained that the incidence of radicalization throughout the world and the rapid rise of anti-Americanism are realistic reactions to the U.S. counteractions. In effect, they constitute the price that the United States had to pay for responding the way it did to the attacks launched by its enemies. In essence, its response laid the foundation for the implementation of a realistic foreign policy in the post-9/11 world.

Nationalism as a Global Strategy to Advanced Totalitarianism

The speaker declared that of the many radical plans that have been devised for the Middle East, four matter. First is the jihadist fantasy of a caliphate utopia. In the speaker's judgment, although it is the most radical and talked about plan, it is not the most important. Nor is the second radical plan—the Wahhabi—the messianic nationalist approach to Islam propagated by Saudi Arabia's reigning monarchy. The designation of most important belongs not to a plan or plans formulated by a religious group or groups but to nationalist movements that use radical Islam to disguise their totalitarian bent. The individual states that are committed to advancing the supposed supremacy of their societies, cultures, and ways of life are using the typical vehicle of

nationalism, the nation-state, in order to achieve overall dominance, but in adopting an all-encompassing ideology, as the speaker suggested, they have chosen to pursue a cause that can only be called totalitarian and imperialist, whether the objects of their domination are coreligionists or not. The speaker singled out what seems to be the comparatively milder form of Islam that certain radical groups in Turkey, Egypt, Indonesia, and Malaysia propagate. In contrast is the Iranian form disguised in the garb of radical Islamism. In reality, the speaker asserted, it is unalloyed nationalism that seeks to impose its totalitarian will throughout the world. In essence, as Wahhabi radicalism is about Saudi Arabia, the expressed radical Islamism that is said to prevail in Iran is about Iran. According to the speaker, however, the Saudi commitment is different from that of Iran. The Saudis care about Islam. Like Hezbollah and Hamas, the speaker asserted, the regime in Iran is a camouflaged radical Islamist movement that uses nationalism to carry out its hegemonist agenda.

The speaker explained why it is important to develop and discuss a typology of extreme radicalism: It would enable analysts and policymakers to differentiate among various forms and formulate ways to deal with them individually and perhaps collectively. So too is it important to construct a typology of moderate Islamism. That may be beyond the scope of this roundtable, the speaker remarked, but it should be considered eventually, for not all moderate forms are equal and consequential to the same extent.

Issues That Illuminate Radicalism

In the speaker's judgment, the Palestinian issue, which underscores the experience of the Palestinian people, is not the key to unlocking radicalism in the Middle East. Nor is the supposed lack of legitimacy of Arab leaders. A crisis of leadership, not legitimacy, is what bedevils the Middle East today, the speaker asserted. Similarly the Sunni-Shiite divide is overstated. Qatar was cited as a state that is far more Wahhabi than Saudi Arabia. In fact, it is 100 percent Wahhabi. Its commitment to Wahhabism, which has generated competition with Saudi Arabia, is manifest in Qatar's alliance with Hezbollah in Lebanon. That

association was formed to check Saudi influence there. The end result of the competitive drive of each Wahhabi regime to achieve predominance undermines the notions of Sunni solidarity and of Sunni-Shiite conflict. This observation sparked comment from an observer who sought clarification of his understanding that both Saudi Arabia and Qatar are Sunni Arab states. The speaker explained that he cited the example only to underscore his contention that Sunni versus Shiite is not a simple one-plus-one-equals-two equation.

The Palestinian Issue

An observer asked why no one questions the suffering of the Palestinian people. In his judgment, their inability to form a government, to choose leaders, and to sustain a movement contradicts their status as the most educated, most literate, most able Arabs in the region. Why, he asked, should anyone assume responsibility for giving them a state when they have done little to demonstrate their ability to govern themselves. One speaker maintained that the Palestinians did at the time have a unity government and that the Arab initiative was unveiled only after the unity government had been established; that the agreement obligates Hamas to recognize Israel, and that the recognition of Israel is only one element of a solution. Maintaining that resolving the Palestinian issue was only one aspect of defeating radical Islamism, the speaker concluded that failing to solve the problem bears a high price.

The observer who raised the question reasserted his disagreement with the speaker by maintaining that the occupation occurred as a direct result of the refusal of the Arabs to accept the Jewish state. He expressed his reluctance to engage in a debate on the subject but reserved the right to revisit it later. Another speaker joined the discussion and after testifying to the common humanity of all of the people of the Middle East asserted that the Palestinian issue could be addressed effectively by asking why chaos exists there. In essence, the issue should be treated as a humanitarian one that recognizes the injustice of the situation. The speaker reiterated his contention that the Palestinian issue is not the core of the challenges posed by the Middle East. Nevertheless,

it is a moral issue that needs to be addressed.

In framing a related question, an observer said that the Palestinians had achieved the unique distinction of acting as if they were the heads of a failed state even though they have not been able to create a state. His question sought to elicit recommendations about how the Palestinians can be empowered to choose constructive, positive leadership that will enable them to pursue coexistence with their Israeli neighbors and create a viable, productive, and modern Palestinian state existing side by side with Israel.

A speaker again raised concern about turning the conference into an exclusive discussion of the Palestinian issue. Maintaining that it is unacceptable to deny the injustice of the issue, the speaker told the observer that it makes no sense to reject the Arab peace plan before its terms are made public. The observer asserted that he was referring to the peace plan submitted by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, which was presented recently for the second time. He termed it completely unacceptable. Again the speaker voiced reluctance to turn the roundtable into a discussion of one issue alone. One of the hosts voiced his agreement with the speaker. The speaker in turn, in characterizing as moderate the plan that had been presented, recommended that the Israelis submit a peace proposal of their own that could be vetted by both sides.

Finally the speaker whose initial comments sparked the debate answered his own question. He stated that the reason there is so much chaos in the Palestinian territories—why the semblance of a failed state emerged in Palestine before one was even created—is the failure to create and maintain the institutions necessary for a state to exist and function. Acceptance of this diagnosis, which would involve a historical investigation of responsibility that is beyond the scope of the roundtable, would be based on the realization that sustainable institutions must be built and stakeholders must be created through economic initiatives.

Another speaker expressed the judgment that the Palestinian issue is a relatively minor issue that needs to be

put into a larger perspective. From that perspective, the speaker asserted that since the Second World War, 116 wars have been fought on all continents, yielding both winners, who imposed a new status quo, and losers, who might have thought about revenge but accepted the reality of defeat. The one exception is the Arab-Israeli wars that were brought to the UN for resolution, turning both the combatants and the international organization into a ménage a trois. That, the speaker claimed, is the core of the problem. In effect, Palestine became a cause, an abstraction, not a solvable problem involving concrete issues of land, borders, water, citizenship, and an exchange of populations.

In order to perpetuate the issue as a cause, the Arab states kept the Palestinians in refugee camps, refusing to grant them living space and citizenship. Now 26 years after the same ideas for a peace plan were first submitted, the Arab states are presenting them again. The speaker's prescription: Israel should impose a solution based on its conception of where its territory begins and ends. Moreover, Israel and the Arab states should be left alone to work out a solution.

A speaker returned to his presentation by reminding everyone that such broad terms as "the Israelis" and "the Palestinians" require definition. How, for example, should the Palestinians of Israel be classified? Then the speaker mentioned the conflicts in Kashmir, Chechnya, and Colombia as situations that involve radical Islamists outside the Middle East. By anyone's assessment, these conflicts pose serious challenges to the world. The issue of Islamism, the speaker maintained, is not confined to the Middle East or to the Palestinian issue. In its global setting, Islamism opposes democracy and free markets and supports regimentation and controlled economies. Islamism transcends national and regional boundaries and affects the outcome of issues that are of vital concern to everyone in the world.

An observer asked the same question that was posed at the first NCAFP roundtable on the Middle East. That gathering, held seven years ago, consisted only of Muslim speakers and other participants. They were asked by NCAFP interlocutors: Would the Arab world ever accept a

non-Muslim sovereignty in its midst on territory that it thinks is Arab soil? The answer was no. A speaker refuted the answer by citing the Christian-Muslim sharing of political power in Lebanon as well as the admission of that multireligious state into the Arab League. The speaker observed that with the decline of Arab nationalism, Islamism has become the ideological fuel of the Middle East. Moreover, the Iranian kind of nationalist Islamism to which the speaker initially referred accepts the nation-state of Iran, whereas the Arab kind of radicalism that today is camouflaged as Islamism rejects the nation-state system. The speaker suggested that that rejection could be overcome by Arab states not acting as if they were members of a monolithic entity but behaving as if they were members of several nation-states that possess a sense of commonality and belonging based on a cultural continuum. There is, the speaker contended, a common Arab culture that does not encompass the fantasy of Arab nationalism that is said to be destined to create a single, homogenous state. The speaker expressed the belief that if a cultural dynamic were created, Arabs, like Israelis, would accept it; for it would offer no threat to anyone.

A speaker pointed to Iran as the motivating force that drove the Saudis to assume the role of peacemakers. Concern about Iran's ambitions in the region apparently motivated them to send a high-ranking Saudi official to visit Israel recently. This speaker disagreed with the preceding speaker who recommended that Israel and the Arabs be left alone to settle their differences but agreed that it is Israel's responsibility to demarcate its territory and to argue effectively for the implementation of its plan for peace. Doing so may be propitious inasmuch as the Arabs have expressed a willingness to accept the 1967 borders, in effect signaling their belated recognition of their defeat in the 1967 war.

After a break, the roundtable resumed the question-and-answer portion of the discussion. An observer asked a speaker to predict the strength of the Islamic lobby in the United States 20 years from now. The speaker replied that 20 years is a very long time in which many unforeseen developments could occur, adding that there is not one

monolithic Islamic lobby in the United States today. The speaker recommended a book on Islam written by a Wall Street Journal reporter who contends that Islam does not exist as an organized religion in the United States. The speaker expressed full confidence in the American system's ability to Americanize Muslims living in the country in the same way it Americanized Anabaptists and members of other religious groups considered zealous in their approach to proselytizing.

An observer asked a speaker to explain why the roundtable cannot seem to move beyond the Arab-Israeli conflict when every participant seems to agree that the issue is not of overriding importance. The speaker disagreed with that ranking by replying that it is important and of concern if only because the problem has not been resolved. Also, it is a matter that stirs emotions that the Islamists seek to inflame as part of their strategy of radicalizing the Middle East. Another speaker added that the conflict is especially charged with emotional intensity because it reminds the Arabs of colonialism and subjugation and the people of the West of the Holocaust.

Iran as a Nation-State and as a Revolution

An observer named a number of states in the region that possess nuclear weapons and asked the speakers to discuss why Iran's capacity to develop nuclear weapons would constitute a greater danger than they pose to the stability of the region. One speaker replied that all of the states that the participant identified except Iran are part of international structures designed to control and constrain their nuclear resources. Iraq under Saddam Hussein did not operate under similar restrictions; nor does Iran. The speaker again asserted that the regime in Iran is using the nuclear issue to appeal to the nationalist fervor of middle-class, educated Iranians who oppose both the regime's totalitarian ways as well as measures taken to circumscribe its sovereignty. The behavior of the Iranian president is understandable, another speaker remarked, once it is understood that he is speaking for a revolution, not a nation-state. A revolution possessing nuclear weapons is a daunting prospect, which is why Security Council

resolutions have targeted Iran as a revolution, not as a nation-state, another speaker stated.

Both speakers emphasized Iran's duality as a nation-state and as a revolution—two roles that frequently clash with each other. One speaker declared that Iran should complete its revolutionary stage as promptly as possible and return to the world of nation-states where it can pursue its national interests in the region, including subjecting its nuclear resources to international structures designed to regulate them, and develop normal relations with the United States and its Arab neighbors. Regime change, the speaker suggested, may be necessary to bring about such a transformation. To facilitate the process, another speaker suggested the implementation of low-intensity warfare similar to that employed by the Ahmadinejad's administration in Iraq and Lebanon among other places.

An observer asked the speaker who had asserted that the Sunni-Shiite conflict is exaggerated even in the emerging Shiite crescent to explain why. The speaker noted that the Shiite crescent in question contains Sunni Hamas. According to the speaker, competition is taking place between the Saudi monarchy and the rulers of the IRI. That competition, played out by proxies, reveals two layers of conflict: One is the rivalry, not enmity, between the Saudi monarchy and the Iranian rulers. The other is enmity between the United States and Iran. Elaborating further on his statement, the preceding speaker disagreed with the speaker who contended that it would be in Iran's best interests to ally itself with Israel and Turkey. On the contrary, this speaker asserted, national interests preclude ideological coloration. As rivals, both Iran and Saudi Arabia in a globalized world should compete against each other in order to achieve socioeconomic growth and promote Iranian and Saudi interests at the same time. The speaker did not refute the notion that discord marks the relationship between the Shiites and the Sunni but noted that their dealings with each other have always reflected bigotry and prejudice. In the speaker's judgment, the violence in Iraq reflects the effort by jihadists and ex-Baathists to impose their radical agendas.

External Ambitions Evident in the Region

The next discussion was sparked by an observer who asked about the interests of China and Russia in the area. A speaker replied that the Middle East, unlike other regions of the world, lacks institutional structures of stability such as the European Union or NAFTA, and in seeking to identify the limited range of international relationships that exist in the Middle East, the speaker underscored that deficiency.

What does exist in the area, the speaker explained, are relationships centered on the region's vital natural resources. The speaker cited the new Iraqi oil law that would allow China, Russia, France, and other countries to invest in developing 83 percent of Iraq's oil resources—most of them untapped—giving each participant a concrete interest in stabilizing the area. The speaker mentioned other prospects. One may eventually involve a gas pipeline linking Iran to India via Pakistan. If it materializes, it will be a means of bridging the divide between the contentious countries.

The second interesting development that may lead to the creation of a structure for stability in the Middle East is the role that NATO is playing in the region. Other than Israel, the joint chiefs of staff of the six GCC members—Arab states all—have agreed to hold annual joint conversations with NATO and conduct joint maneuvers with its forces. The speaker estimated that within the next two years 18 Arab states might well have established ties of some kind with NATO.

Not to be discounted is the role of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Seven Arab member states are already in WTO, and applications for membership from five others are pending. Also, of interest to the Middle Eastern states involved is the Euro-Mediterranean Initiative—a project proposed by the European Union.

All of these institutions offer some prospects for providing structures for stability in the Middle East.

In contrast, the speaker asserted, some Europeans, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, maintain

that if the United States continues to act as if the Middle East is its exclusive preserve, they will not become involved in trying to stabilize the region. They acknowledge and even support the U.S. leadership role in the region but maintain that other states should be encouraged to participate also. The speaker expressed the opinion that the United States should make it easier for Saudi Arabia to exercise geopolitical influence in the region by facilitating its membership in the WTO.

A speaker expressed optimism about prospects for the Middle East. In the struggle between radical Islamism and democracy, the speaker said, the Islamic forces have failed in their quest to rout the advocates of democracy throughout the region.

Oil

An observer asked the speakers to comment about the price that might eventually be paid because of the current failure of Iraq and Iran, but not Saudi Arabia, to drill for oil. The increases in GDP achieved by both India and China testify to the increasing need for this natural resource and the consequences that could result from its shortage.

A speaker maintained that the vast reserves of oil possessed by Iraq and Iran, not to mention Saudi Arabia, could ensure enough supplies of this vital resource for 35 years. Meanwhile some Arab states such as Kuwait have established future funds, which have enabled their governments to invest throughout the world. The revenues from such investments will undoubtedly constitute assets used in the development of the Middle East.

Prospects for the Middle East from a Variety of Perspectives: Revisiting the Issues

Transforming Two Peace Plans into One

Elaborating on the sense of optimism expressed moments earlier, the speaker focused on the Saudi peace plan that appears slated to be approved when it is submitted to a special summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference composed of 57 states that contain a Muslim majority. Its seven-member Steering Committee has

approved the plan already. In the speaker's judgment, the proposal will succeed only if Israel, which won the Arab-Israeli wars, presents a counterproposal. Excluded from the architecture of stability that the implementation of a peace plan would create will be the Islamic Republic of Iran. Trying to integrate a revolution that stands alone seems doomed to failure. In acknowledging the role that Russia and China are playing in the peace process, the speaker predicted that India could also play a significant role in the region, enumerating the reasons for its anticipated ascendancy in the Middle East.

Iraq, Lebanon, and Iran

The speaker expressed agreement with the speaker who contended that the Shiite-Sunni conflict is not the major source of instability in the region. The speaker cited the reforms undertaken by the Saudi rulers who have begun to treat their Shiite subjects more leniently, even appointing Shiites as ambassadors and as cabinet ministers. The United States, the speaker concluded, holds the key to stability in the region. Its partisan political warfare acted out in Congress and broadcast throughout the world for everyone to see, the speaker opined, presents a sorry spectacle. If the United States leaves Iraq before the Iraqis can defend themselves against their internal and external enemies, the architecture of stability erected so far will collapse.

A speaker contrasted the positions taken by the United States in Iraq in 2003 and Lebanon in 2006. In the Lebanon conflict, the United States favored first a bilateral approach that it had worked out with France. Later both countries appealed to the European Union and the United Nations to resolve the conflict. In the speaker's judgment, Lebanon must be won to prevent Iran from using Syria as a staging area from which to dominate the region. From one perspective, the situation poses a challenge to the international community's responsibility to monitor borders. Moreover, it serves as a reminder of the multilateral obligation to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of political assassinations. The speaker stated that it was finally possible to praise Saudi Arabia for trying to move the peace process in the right direction. Although it cannot be

praised for social reforms, Saudi Arabia, the speaker related, has undertaken a number of economic reforms that have proved to be effective.

From the speaker's perspective, it is necessary to use economic sanctions against Iran to convince it to abandon its uranium-enrichment activities.

An observer asked for clarification. She asked whom in the Lebanese government the speaker supported. The Maronites, she queried? The speaker answered that the political situation in Lebanon was fraught with complexity. The current president, General Emil Lahoud, was imposed by Syria, which forced a change in the constitution in order to extend his term of office by three years. The political climate was inflamed by the political assassinations of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and others, including journalists and members of parliament. Many Lebanese believe that Syria ordered the political killings. After a cross section of the Lebanese population took to the streets to demand an independent government, Hezbollah orchestrated a large counterdemonstration. In summary, the speaker characterized the support expressed as an endorsement of the legitimate government of Lebanon versus the militia.

The next speaker voiced disagreement with the previous speaker's endorsement of the use of economic sanctions against Iran, reminding participants of the ways in which Saddam Hussein manipulated such sanctions in order to impose totalitarian control over the Iraqi population. From the speaker's perspective, the world is witnessing what can be termed "the penultimate phase of the absorption of the nation-state system into the political culture and society of the Middle East." In that sense, the speaker expressed optimism about the future of the region. The speaker referred to the global, entrepreneurial economic system initiated by the United Arab Emirates, for example, and speculated that in time Saudi Arabia may enact similar reforms that will erode the impact of the alliance between the clerical establishment and the monarchy, which hinders the growth of the Saudi economy.

An observer reviewed two predictions made about the Middle East: one involving the sense that another war is imminent; the other the intuition that there is cause for optimism. He asked the speakers to comment. One speaker remarked that last year's war, provoked by Hezbollah, was not won by Israel because it conducted a bad war. In that speaker's judgment, two things can be done to prevent another war. One is convincing Israel that it cannot and should not act to protect the Syrian regime at the expense of Lebanon. In that connection, the United States should tell the Israelis that such an undertaking would not be in the interests of its major ally and protector. The other involves U.S. engagement with Saudi Arabia. In fact, the speaker maintained that although all interested powers need to become engaged in approving an agreement, the United States has to exercise the most important role in the peace process, for it has overriding national interests to defend in the region.

An observer focused on the amount of money flowing into the region and the investments made as a result. For example, the Middle East has become not only one of the prime users of its most important natural resources—oil—but it is one of the most important markets for steel. He expressed the belief that when the money flow stops in the Middle East, Iran will change. In his opinion, no one will care which God he prays to if there is no money. In recalling the story told about Golda Meir, who said that Moses was no hero to her because he ran around the desert for 40 years and found the only place where there's no oil, the speaker noted that the absence of oil in the disputed territories claimed by the Palestinians and the Israelis is a partial cause of the conflict.

A Role for the NCAFP

A host recounted the National Committee's work in Track I-1/2 and Track II negotiations and asked the first speaker to address the question of whether it is realistic to contend that attempts to enter into such discussions with Iran are not possible because in effect there is no one to talk with. The speaker cited changes that have taken place in Iran that may require reconsideration of that judgment. It is

clear, the speaker asserted, that the United States will not abandon Iraq as long as the Bush administration is in office. Furthermore, the nuclear issue has attracted the attention it deserves, and the Islamic Republic of Iran has been put on notice that it can no longer do what it wants without incurring a price for unacceptable behavior. Moreover, the opposition that has developed inside Iran can be engaged in a dialogue.

A speaker predicted that the IRI would rupture from within. Another speaker expressed the opinion that an American pullout from Iraq would hasten the weakening of the regime in Iran.

A speaker disagreed with that assessment, asserting that an exit from Iraq, immediate or in a period that can be characterized as short term, would not be beneficial to U.S. national interests or to global security. In the speaker's judgment, the world became unipolar in the historical moment that followed the end of the cold war. Then the United States was the only superpower.

A speaker reiterated the fact that the proposed withdrawal endorsed earlier would involve Iraq and not the region and that redeployment, not abandonment, is the strategic imperative underlying that proposal.

Another speaker returned to the remarks that raised the question of whether undertaking track I-1/2 negotiations with Iran is feasible. From the speaker's perspective Iraq is a battlefield for a proxy war between Iran and the United States; the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq would allow Iran to have two client statelets—Kurdistan in the north and Shiistan in the south—bastions of controlled chaos that Iran could unleash and orchestrate in the region. The speaker maintained that by all accounts the situation is improving in Iraq. Moreover, the United States has a moral obligation to Iraq, which coincides with its national interests. The speaker did not recommend economic sanctions that would seriously affect the living standards of the Iranian population.

An observer asked whether allowing the Baathists to rejoin

the army in Iraq would stabilize the country and facilitate the transfer of the security function to the government in Baghdad. A speaker answered that it was too late for that. Mistakes were made that cannot be easily undone. They include disbanding the army, removing all of the Baathists from the government, and imposing a U.S. regime of occupation. The speaker reiterated that the Baathists had formed the middle class in Iraq and the probable nucleus for the democratization of the country. Their mass dismissal from public service motivated many to emigrate or join the insurgency.

A Political Aside

Before presenting concluding remarks, a speaker again addressed the Democratic party's quest to bring about the timed withdrawal of American troops from Iraq. The speaker recommended that party leaders be given an opportunity to help formulate a Plan B that would give them a sense that they were partners with the Bush administration in formulating policy on Iraq. Consequently, their leaders would temper the electoral strategy the party has adopted for winning the next presidential and congressional elections. If that happened, perhaps they would no longer feel impelled to charge their opponents with losing the war in Iraq. In the speaker's opinion, the United States has already won the war in Iraq from which its troops should not be withdrawn until a structure of stability has been erected in the region and Iran's regional ambitions have been thwarted.



CONCLUSIONS

A speaker discussed the mood of optimism in the region. He identified the architecture of stability, or interlocking systems, as well as the five Cs of the U.S. policy that he prescribed for the Middle East: (1) Contain Iran (2) Crush the Syrian regime (3) Calm the Palestinians (4) Control Iraq (5) Cajole the Israelis. The speaker contended that there is a democratic movement in the Middle East, though no one would call it a facsimile of Jeffersonian democracy. Such terms as “accountability,” “participation,” “elections,” “freedom from censorship,” and “good governance” may sound like empty rhetoric here. Nevertheless, the repetition of such concepts reflects recognition on the part of regimes in power in the region that the population is aware of what is going on and demands reform. In addition, the emergence of civil society and nongovernmental organizations in the region testifies to the growing importance of participation, accountability, and commitment to democratic principles.

The speaker concluded by reiterating the contention that as long as there is division in the American government over U.S. policy toward Iraq, the United States will not be able to play the leading role that it could otherwise seek in the Middle East in this favorable moment in history.



NCAFP POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Iran is a sovereign state governed by a theologically inspired revolutionary regime. As a sovereign state, Iran operates in the international arena of states. As a revolutionary regime harboring ambitions to forge an absolutist Islamic Empire, Iran is on a collision course with much of the region. Such a clash would produce grave global implications. Hence in order to deal with this murky governmental configuration that confounds legitimate interests of states with militant jihadist ambitions, the United States, working with its allies, must employ the delicate tools of diplomacy until Iran's fanatical theological passion has run its course—a trajectory similar perhaps to what transpired in Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist Soviet Russia.

To help tame the revolutionary fervor of the regime, political realism favors a multifaceted approach that includes engaging Iran in track I, I-1/2, and II diplomatic and academic talks while maintaining effective economic sanctions in order to convince Iran's leadership of the necessity of resolving its nuclear ambitions. A nuclear Iran in the hands of theological fanatics with far-reaching ambitions is unacceptable.

Because revolutionary Iran is widely feared as a destabilizing force in the Middle East and beyond, it is of interest to the United States and its allies to help stabilize the region. Toward that end it is necessary to prevent Iran from transferring money and sending fighters and arms to Iraq and by way of Syria to Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. Not only must Iraq's borders with Iran and Syria be effectively sealed, but it is also necessary to prevent revolutionary Iran from using Syria to use Lebanon as a staging area from which to dominate the region.



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