

**THE MIDDLE EAST:  
IN SEARCH OF A NEW BALANCE  
OF POWER**



**SUMMARY OF A ROUNDTABLE**  
*(Including NCAFP Policy Recommendations)*

**HELD IN NEW YORK CITY**

*March 12, 2008*

## *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.



# CONTENTS

Letter from the President . . . . .	2
Introduction . . . . .	3
Israel in a Turbulent World . . . . .	3
<i>Iran and Syria</i> . . . . .	5
<i>The Balance of Power from Israel's Perspective</i> . . . . .	6
The Context of Turkey's Relationships . . . . .	6
<i>Turkey's Relations with Syria and Iran</i> . . . . .	7
<i>Turkey's Relations with the United States</i> . . . . .	8
<i>The Islamic Jihadists Versus the Reformers</i> . . . . .	9
<i>Iran and Iraq</i> . . . . .	10
<i>Discussion: The Kurds, the Russians, the Iranians, and the Turks</i> . . . . .	11
The Arab-Muslim World . . . . .	17
<i>The Maghreb</i> . . . . .	17
<i>Iraq Amid a New Strain of Islamist Jihadis</i> . . . . .	18
<i>Iran and Saudi Arabia</i> . . . . .	21
<i>Israel</i> . . . . .	22
The Balance of Power in the Middle East . . . . .	22
<i>The Western Powers</i> . . . . .	23
<i>Russia</i> . . . . .	23
<i>China</i> . . . . .	24
<i>India</i> . . . . .	24
A Wobbly Architecture of Stability . . . . .	24
Major Problems Facing the Middle East . . . . .	25
Discussion . . . . .	25
NCAFP Policy Recommendations . . . . .	27
Presenters and Other Participants . . . . .	30

Dear Reader,

Obvious from the title of the 2008 roundtable, “The Middle East: In Search of a New Balance of Power,” is the extent to which the National Committee on American Foreign Policy has shifted its Middle East focus. The emphasis in the past centered on topics such as “Militant Islamic Fundamentalism in the 21st Century,” “Can Muslims Accept Israel in their Midst?,” “Democratic Reform and the Role of Women in the Muslim World,” “Reform and Human Development in the Muslim World,” and “Arab Women and the Future of the Middle East.” The intent was to come to an understanding of the Muslim mind-set in general and that of Arab Islam and Iran in particular and develop guidelines on how Arab Islam and Iran can succeed in draining politics from militant theological ideologies, a precondition for genuine coexistence between Arab Islam, Iran, and much of the rest of the world.

With the issuance of the 2006 roundtable report, “Iran: The Nuclear Threat and Beyond,” the center of gravity began to shift. Revolutionary Iran’s President Ahmadinejad’s determination to change the regional status quo by embarking on a nuclear course and likely contributing to nuclear proliferation, combined with imperial ambitions and threats to wipe the state of Israel out of existence, has provoked regional turmoil and deep global concerns. Hence the 2008 roundtable endeavors to determine the parameters of the geostrategic transformation of the Middle East, specifically whether a new political configuration is taking place in the region as a response to Ahmadinejad’s challenge.

Some presenters predicted outcomes; others were unwilling to speculate beyond facts such as Ahmadinejad’s persistent defiance of Security Council resolutions; the International Atomic Energy Agency; and carrots offered by the United States, Britain, France, China, and Russia for terminating its nuclear course. But none was less than forthcoming or wary of declaring a threat and calling for the ultimate response.

The NCAFP expresses its gratitude to the conference participants who took time from their busy schedules to attend the conference. A special thanks to the roundtable organizer, Amir Taheri, the NCAFP’s senior fellow for the Middle East. The National Committee is especially grateful to Mutual of America; Kenneth J. Bialkin, Esq.; Ms. Eugenie Fromer; Ms. Madeline Konigsberg; Ms. Sheila Johnson Robbins; and the George D. Schwab Family Fund for providing major support for this roundtable.

Sincerely,

George Schwab  
President

# INTRODUCTION

In presenting analyses of the perceived change in Israel's geopolitical position in the region as a result of technological developments and its recent conflict in Lebanon; the role played by Syria in provoking the war in Lebanon; the effects of the primacy that Turkey accords to the reactions of other countries in the region, including the Kurds of northern Iraq, to its arch enemy, the Kurdistan Peoples party (PCC), in determining the nature of its relationships with other countries; Iran's growing influence as a balancing power in the region; and finally challenges mounted by Russia, China, and India to the role of balancer that the United States assumed in the Middle East when Great Britain gave up that role in the postwar period, the roundtable held by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) on March 12, 2008, elucidated the complex question of whether a new balance of power is taking shape in the Middle East. To arrive at an answer, a basic question was posed: Has the U.S. role in the region changed? Yes, maintained the experts whose sometimes diverse, sometimes similar judgments have been explored and explained in this publication although not attributed to any person who attended the roundtable as a presenter of a distinct point of view or as a participant eligible to ask questions and offer comments and observations.



## Israel in a Turbulent World

The presenter spoke of his pride in Israel. Among other things, he stated, its agriculture has made the deserts bloom; its medicine has healed limbs that seemed beyond repair; its innovations in many fields, as well as its creativity, are especially apparent in its music and culture.

He spoke of the good relationships that Israel has forged at the UN with Pakistan, Indonesia, Oman, Qatar, the Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, and Russia and China as opposed to its relationship with Libya. After the Security Council, on which Libya sits as a nonpermanent member, arrived at a consensus on a presidential statement condemning the actions of a Palestinian suicide bomber whose self-immolation resulted in the death of several children and the wounding of many others, Libya blocked its passage. The presenter informed the roundtable that Iran intends to become a candidate to fill a nonpermanent seat on the Security Council that will become available in 2009.

The speaker emphasized the “craziness” of the world that has emerged in the second half of the first decade of the 21st century by noting a number of incongruities: “The greatest rapper is white, the world’s greatest golfer is

black, the world's greatest soldiers are Jewish, Germany does not want to go to war, and the French accuse the Americans of being arrogant.”

According to the presenter, the world in the UN is no longer divided between north and south. The dividing line is based on terror: At opposite ends are those who wage it and those who fight it. Moreover, in the presenter's judgment, for the first time Israel is facing an existential threat in the form of missiles ranging from 12 kilometers to 250 kilometers aimed at it from south to north and from east to west. They are fired by Hezbollah and Hamas whose mission is to destroy the Jewish state. Missiles launched by Hamas will soon be able to reach Israel from Gaza. Though missiles of collective destruction are aimed by the fanatics who swear allegiance to Hezbollah and Hamas—both bona fide terrorist groups—they represent, the presenter contended, the “bloody tentacles of the twisted minds in Teheran.” In reality, he said, Iran is on Israel's border.

The good news, the presenter asserted, is not only the tougher stance that the United States and its European allies have taken toward Iran since its nuclear ambitions and the means of achieving them became evident but also similar responses that have begun to be made by moderate Arab states. In the presenter's judgment, reflected in the aside that he made at a conference to the author of *The Clash of Civilizations*, Professor Samuel Huntington's next book should be titled *The Clash of Civilization* because the real conflict is centered in one civilization—within Islam. Moreover, the eerie silence of many Islamists about the extensive losses that the clash has inflicted on Muslims has been as disquieting as it has been self-destructive. The presenter described the attendance of so many Arab states at the Annapolis conference and their announced willingness to support a process leading toward the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli struggle as a cause for optimism, for it signaled that many Arab states have finally responded to the threat posed by Iranian imperial ambitions in the region. In effect their revised perception reflected a kind of collective response to a wake-up call designed to urge the formation of a coalition of the moderates based not on a revision of their perceptions of Israel but on their fear of Iran. In actuality, the presenter stated, Saudi Arabia finally concluded that it—its oil as well as its regime—is Iran's real target.

As he reached the conclusion of his analysis of the Palestinian-Israeli struggle to create a state of Palestine committed to live in peace with Israel, the presenter speculated that because the president of the United States, as well as his secretary of state, wants to create a legacy based on contributing to the resolution of the Palestinian issue before his term in office expires and because he is a lame duck and consequently weak, as are Prime Minister Ohmert of Israel and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, perhaps, in an ironic twist, their lack of political strength may predispose them to negotiate a settlement that will be acceptable to all sides.

A participant asked the presenter whether he thought the spread of radicalism in Arab and other countries will produce governments dominated by fundamentalist Muslims—a development that would enable them, like the government of Iran, to send radicals to the UN who are intent on gaining support for their fundamentalist agendas. The presenter offered the examples of Teheran/Damascus versus Dubai/Abu Dhabi/Qatar, where American universities and medical facilities are flourishing, and suggested that Muslims decide which combination of countries is the better model.

Then the presenter focused on Turkey as an example of a democratic Muslim country that has a governing Islamic party. It has applied to the European Union for admission, which may take many years to achieve. Finally, he named the country in which a majority of Palestinians have stated they want to live. It is Israel. Their choice, he maintained, reflects their respect for Israeli institutions, Israel's adherence to democracy and the rule of law, and its advanced technology. In his judgment, the Arab failure to develop along the same lines as Israel explains the plight of the 53 or 54 Muslim countries in the world today. Only Turkey and perhaps Malaysia are exceptions to that pattern of underdevelopment.

#### *Iran and Syria*

The presenter then turned to Iran, citing statistics that reveal the relative youth of its population. In the presenter's opinion, the threat perceived in Iran's determination to become a nuclear power is real. Consequently the world cannot wait for the Iranian grassroots to bring about the kind of institutional change that would be required to counteract or eliminate the overall threat. Other countries must act effectively to circumvent it.

In response to a participant's remark regarding the incongruity of Jordan's and Egypt's pursuit of normal diplomatic relations with Israel while casting negative votes against it in the United Nations and his request that the presenter elaborate on Israel's strategy toward Hezbollah, the presenter stated that the real problem is in the north, not the sites in Israel shelled from Gaza. According to him, Iran is the real problem. It ships weapons into Syria where Hezbollah has its logistics center and operates its lucrative drug trade. The presenter predicted another war involving Hezbollah or Hezbollah as a proxy for Iran in northern Lebanon. He claimed that the Golan Heights is not of actual significance to Syria. Syria, he maintained, is engaged in the north because it considers Lebanon to be southern Syria and is determined to operate with impunity there as the de facto ruling government. Syria's second objective is to terminate the tribunal that was authorized to investigate the assassination of the Lebanese prime minister. In the presenter's judgment the plot to murder the prime minister was drawn up in the presidential palace in Damascus. Essentially Syria's rejection of the two demands that it end its involvement in Lebanon and cooperate with the tribunal investigating the

assassination explains why the United States and Israel and other states have refused to enter into talks with the regime in Damascus.

A participant asked the presenter to assess the effectiveness of the extensive aid that the United States and the United Nations give to sustain the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) refugee camps and the feasibility of the State Department's proposal to develop the East Bank of the Jordan. The presenter stated unequivocally that UNRWA is doing good work in Gaza. He added that anything that can be done to improve the lives of the refugees who have virtually been held hostage in refugee camps for 60 years should be done as soon as possible. In essence, UNRWA should remain, for it is doing necessary and important work.

### *The Balance of Power from Israel's Perspective*

The presenter reminded the participants that the balance that existed in the region was shattered when regime changes occurred in Iraq and Afghanistan. Though a number of states in the region have associations with NATO, the Middle East has no well-rooted institutions such as the European Union or the Organization of American States that would provide security and stability. The regime changes that have occurred in the area have led to instability and the rise of groups seeking to produce a climate of chaos designed to fuel their quests for power. The conflict that has already occurred has led to the realization that a new balance of power must be established in the Middle East. At first, the presenter explained, President Bush sought to distance the United States from authoritarian and dictatorial powers in the region by promoting democracy, which, it was hoped, would lead to stability. The Lebanese rose up to expel Syria from their territory, and Saddam Hussein and the Taliban were ousted from power. Before long, however, as both the war in Afghanistan increased in tribal ferocity and Iraq erupted into sectarian conflict, the United States had second thoughts and began to reconsider its traditional way of conducting bilateral relations in the region: not only renewing its relations with the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East but also seeking to enter into negotiations with the Iranians. Thus the implementation of one policy and then the other and finally both at the same time led to confusion, indecision, and failure. Some observers asked: "What does the United States want to do: talk with the Iranians or help Iran's enemies remove the fundamentalist Islamic regime from power?" The incredulity implicit in the question is why, the speaker asserted, U.S. policy in the area is a failure.

### **The Context of Turkey's Relationships**

Stating that in his presentation he would analyze the significant changes that have occurred in Turkey's geostrategic environment, a presenter focused on the 1990s when Turkey had good relations with both the United States and



Israel. It did not enjoy similar relations with Iran and Syria because of their treatment of the PKK, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization aimed at destabilizing Turkey by attacking it and eventually incorporating its Kurdish population into a Kurdish state created by them. Both Iran and Syria provided the PKK with a safe haven and logistical support bases. Damascus even hosted the head of the PKK. Turkish-Israeli relations date to the forties. Syrian-Iranian anti-Turkish actions only solidified them. Turkish-U.S. relations were strengthened during the cold war. Turkey's membership in NATO, its postcold-war cooperation with the United States in the Balkans and on energy issues, on exploring the feasibility of undertaking Central Asian and Caspian Sea projects, and in providing protection for the British and the Americans as they policed the no-fly zone established to protect the Kurds of northern Iraq from Saddam Hussein after the Gulf War reinforced the impression that Turkey was a steadfast ally of the United States.

Today Turkey's relations with Syria, Iran, the United States, Israel, and Iraq are diametrically different from those of the 1990s. A candid assessment of contemporary Turkey reveals the change in its geopolitical position that altered its relationships so markedly.

#### *Turkey's Relations with Syria and Iran*

According to the presenter, the PKK and the Justice and Development party of Turkey (AKP) are the sources of the change. The government of Turkey threatened to invade Syria unless it stopped supporting the PKK and even amassed forces on the border to give credibility to its threat. Not only did the Syrians comply, but they worked in unison with the Turks to disband the bases that the PKK had established on Syrian soil. The Syrians even banished the head of the PKK from their territory. In essence, Turkey's threat of force proved to be a credible and effective tactic against Syria: Syria cooperated to such an extent that Turkey, first, established a neutral relationship with the country and then a positive relationship.

The presenter stated that Iranian leaders' withdrawal of support for the PKK in 2003 occurred not because the Turks had threatened them but because they were afraid. In that year, it is claimed, they also abandoned their nuclear ambitions. The Iranians' fear, the presenter asserted, stemmed from the fact that U.S. forces were not only on their border with Afghanistan but also were present in all of the states bordering Iran. Iran apparently decided to improve its relationship with Turkey by making the friend of its enemy its friend and treating its new friend's enemy as its enemy. Iran's strategic decision to pursue harmonious relations with Turkey resulted in its bombing of PKK camps on its territory and arresting PKK members who operated from there.

As it did with Syria, Turkey changed its relationship with Iran based on its neighbor's new way of treating the PKK as an enemy. In essence, based on

its perception of their new behavior, the Turkish government concluded that Syria and Iran had adopted its policy toward terrorists. In summary, the Turks see the Middle East primarily through the prism of the PKK. If a country helps the PKK, it is an enemy; if a country helps Turkey against the PKK, it is a friend.

### *Turkey's Relations with the United States*

The head of the PKK was captured in the 1990s with the help of the United States and Israel, the presenter asserted. The rogue leader is said to have encountered a “blonde” Turkish special operative who spoke excellent English and at times Hebrew too. Of course, that did not lead to the downfall of the PKK, whose paramilitary fighters, the Turks maintained, were given sanctuary by the Kurds of northern Iraq. The organization was still in operation when the United States invaded Iraq, causing the Turks to express concern that the war would embolden the Kurds with whom the United States was working in northern Iraq to seek autonomy and eventually enter into a union with the Kurds of Turkey in an independent state. Accordingly, as the war in Iraq developed from 2003 to 2008, the relationship between Turkey and the United States deteriorated.

The Israelis have proved to be the only constant in Turkey's relationships in the Middle East because they have never wavered in their opposition to the PKK. The relatively harmonious relationship between Israel and Turkey has prevailed despite the governmental changes that occurred in Turkey.

The current Turkish governing party, the AKP, which has been in office since 2002, rejects the term “Islamist” to describe it. Instead, the party classifies itself as a party of reform. A history of the Welfare party, the AKP's predecessor, which governed briefly in the 1990s, provides insights into the influences that have affected the AKP's attitudes and actions, especially its approach to foreign policy. In essence, the Welfare party was an anti-Western, anti-American party whose negative stance failed to win favor for long. Its successor learned the lesson from that experience and pursued a more nuanced policy toward the United States and Europe, which holds the key to its admission to the European Union. Reminding the participants that the way in which other states treat the PCC is a major determinant of Turkey's relationships with those states, the presenter stated that since the AKP's ascent to government, Turkey has maintained a good relationship with Israel and cultivated good relationships with nonstate actor Hamas and with Syria and Iran as well as a multiplicity of relationships with the United States and Europe. In other words, the AKP's multilayered foreign policy reflects the party's perceptions of Turkey's complex national interests.

The government's public assessments of its relationships with other states have cast into bold relief the appraisals made by the Turkish people, a majority of

whom now claim to be anti-Israeli and anti-American and increasingly anti-European Union as well. The views of many people in Turkey have been attributed to the AKP leaders' praise of Syrian and Iranian leaders in the domestic media and their negative critiques of Israeli, American, and European leaders in the same media. In effect, the PKK is an issue that has provided a strategic opportunity for an Islamist government to orchestrate a reversal in public opinion concerning the value of Turkey's relationships with specific countries and groups in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States.

Since 2008, when the United States resumed its efforts to help Turkey curb the PKK by allowing, among other things, Turkish forces to cross the border and wipe out PKK camps in northern Iraq, public opinion toward the United States has not changed. The current of anti-Americanism seems strong, suggesting that five years of continuous negative criticism of the United States trumped effective action that the United States took recently against Turkey's proclaimed enemy. The presenter stated that he can envision a day when Turkey will declare its inability to help the United States address the situations in Iran and Iraq because the Turkish public does not like the United States and Turkish leaders must comply with the viewpoints of the public because Turkey, after all, is a democracy. The presenter concluded by declaring that in order to change public opinion in Turkey, the Turkish government must speak honestly about U.S. goals in the area and speak as positively of the United States as it does of Iran and Syria. So far that effort has not begun.

### *The Islamic Jihadists Versus the Reformers*

The next presenter began his analysis by underscoring that it elucidated the connection between U.S. foreign policy and a possible change in the balance of power in the region. Within the context of this framework, he focused his presentation on the Levant—Lebanon, Syria, and Iran combined. As part of his presentation, the speaker stated, he would discuss two specific terrorist groups that he thinks will challenge and confront the West for at least the next decade.

The presenter reminded the participants that the United States has always relied on countries in the region to provide stability. In return, the United States provided support. The nature of the regimes it supported mattered little; stability was the overarching foreign policy goal. Though other objectives were identified by President Bush, Secretary of State Rice, and some members of Congress from time to time, stability retained its status as the most desirable condition to be achieved or maintained.

Challenging stability in the region, the speaker maintained, are two forces: (1) the Islamist jihadists and (2) the reformists, particularly the proponents of democracy. Other than dealing with the Islamist jihadists in a way that

reflects recognition of them as terrorists, the U.S. State Department, various European foreign ministries, and EU diplomats in Brussels have tried on a number of occasions to engage such groups as the Muslim Brotherhood in order to co-opt them. Before and even after 9/11, the U.S. approach involved ignoring genuine democratic forces for change while engaging in dialogue with those who claimed to believe in democracy. The presenter, speaking for himself and his colleagues analyzing the Arab and Muslim world, recommends that the United States reverse that approach, that is, no longer cease to insist on the maintenance of a status quo that includes a continuation of treating the Islamist jihadists as if they represented the voices of genuine reform. Instead, they should support the real reformers in the area and help them to move forward. Among the pillars of support that the United States should supply are monitoring elections and providing critical assessments of the implementation of human rights. The partners in the dialogue with the Islamist jihadists should be the reformers, not outside states. The talks should be held in public and monitored by representatives of the West. In that way public opinion in Arab and Muslim states would be able to change in an atmosphere of transparency and the free exchange of ideas, enabling some people to shed anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism as they develop the ability to distinguish truth from the propagation of extremism.

The presenter emphasized the sophistication of the jihadist movement, which is funded by petro-dollars. For example, Hezbollah receives \$300 million from Iran every year. That is why, he concluded, it is winning the war of ideas in Lebanon. Moreover, the movement controls TV stations and radio stations and pays women ten dollars a day to wear the hijab. He stated that without the flow of petro-dollars, Hezbollah's 20,000 missiles, and Wahabbi support given to Hamas, he doubted that Hamas and Hezbollah would have won one election.

### *Iran and Iraq*

In the presenter's judgment, the Khomeinist regime in Iran is bent on transforming the upper Middle East from Afghanistan all the way to the eastern Mediterranean, south of Turkey and north of Israel into an area of hegemony, which it would dominate. Here's how it would play out based on the understandings that they have entered into.

Affirming that Iran's and Syria's final objective in Iraq is the immediate and abrupt withdrawal of American forces, enabling them to exercise absolute influence from Baghdad to Basra, the presenter asserted that the Iranians are counting on the American election to bring about that result. In addition, they expect their accomplices Syria and the jihadists to help them achieve dominance in Iraq. When that has been achieved, Syria will have broken out of its isolation. That would signify that Iran, Iraq, and Syria are linked, enabling Syria, through the open Lebanese borders, to link up with

Hezbollah and perhaps strengthen and exploit the de facto borders that Iran has with Israel. Iran's strategic situation in the area would allow for the projection of nuclear-armed missiles into Israel and Lebanon. No one would doubt that those developments would change the balance of power in the Middle East, in the eastern Mediterranean, and in large areas of Europe. In effect, Iran's projection of power represents its grand strategic design to control a vast area of the region.

The speaker concluded his presentation by addressing UN Resolution 1559, which was introduced in 2004. It calls for the withdrawal of the Syrian Army from Lebanon and the disarming of militia elements, specifically Hezbollah. He discussed the failure of Lebanon's prime minister to recognize that implementing the resolution could not be delayed; it had to be accomplished within a time frame that allowed for the effective dispatch of UNIFIL forces to implement its provisions. Closing the border between Syria and Lebanon would help to prevent Iran from carrying out its geostrategic design in the area and short-circuit a projected change in the balance of power in its favor. Delaying action would allow Iranian and Syrian forces to regroup and rearm and reposition themselves against UNIFIL and the Lebanese Army.

*Discussion: The Kurds, the Russians, the Iranians, and the Turks*

A participant asked both presenters whether they discerned differences in the international positions of the Democratic and Republic contenders in the primaries held to determine the party nominees for president of the United States. One presenter commented that everyone knows which foreign policy experts are advising which candidates as well as the content of their recommendations, and so nothing is secret about the process. He said neither of the Democratic candidates is contemplating an immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. It would be phased. His conclusion is that if the United States negotiated the withdrawal with Iran and Syria, it would lead to the collapse of the political process in Iraq. Recollecting Senator McCain's promise not to repeat the mistakes that have exacerbated the conflict since the inception of the war, the presenter said that a Republican president might support one surge after another in response to changing conditions. That could result in the implementation of various notions of the status quo, which could be a mistake, for it would negate the impression of moving forward, which is necessary to convince civil society that the war is being waged successfully. Conversely, it would give credibility to the notion that the United States is winning in its struggle against the Islamist jihadis.

Another participant asked a presenter why the PKK is the primary focus of the Turkish government's foreign policy. Moreover, he queried, why does the government's desire to defeat the PKK play the same role in its domestic policy, seemingly outweighing its interest in fostering economic growth and

providing other benefits for the Turkish population that would not only enhance its support among the population but in the world as well. The presenter reiterated his contention that the Kurds in Turkey are not oppressed. He said that the 3,000 to 5,000 people who constitute the PKK are only a small minority of the Kurdish population in Turkey of approximately 10 million. Moreover, what distinguishes the PKK from other Kurds is violence. Its actions during the past two decades have resulted in the deaths of more than 30,000 people. In the judgment of the Turkish government and most of the Turkish people, the PKK poses an existential threat to Turkey.

According to the presenter, people of Kurdish, Bosnian, Georgian, Albanian, Bulgarian, or Crimean Tartar origin who settled in Turkey and call themselves Turkish are nationalists. That allows their allegiances to be hyphenated, explaining the politically acceptable term of Kurdish-Turks.

A presenter offered another argument against the PKK. Not only does the party use violence, but its stance against democracy, grounded in Marxism-Leninism, reveals that it is dedicated to the destruction of the republic of Turkey. That makes the PKK a political issue.

A participant called attention to the fact that none of the analyses focused on the influence of Russia in the region. In his judgment, Russia is continuing to influence developments in the region, including the positions taken by Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and other states. The participant contended that without Russian assistance, Iran would have had fewer chips with which to play the game of power broker in the region. Russia's aim, he asserted, is to weaken the power of the United States and elevate itself to a status of equality by using its position to gain leverage as a member of the Quartet consisting of Russia, the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union. If the United States acts once it is ascertained that Iran is embarked on a program designed to produce nuclear weapons, U.S. action will confirm the popular impression in the region that it is an imperial power, whereas taking no forceful action will give credence to the notion that it is weak. Either reaction will be welcome to Russia.

A presenter appealed for patience, remarking that the afternoon's discussion would be focused on Russia and China and India. Patience did prevail but did not deter a brief discussion of the joint interests that Russia and the United States have in the region. That discussion focused on proposals for countering Iran but not by attempting to resurrect elements of the status quo that had redounded to Iran's interest, say, in the 1990s and in the period leading to the invasion of Iraq. The presenter reminded the participants that Iran represents two forces in the conflict: the Shiia and the Khomeinist extremists. In the long run, he stated, the choice between those forces—a decision that will determine the role that Iran plays in the Middle East—will be made by the

Iranian people, not by outside powers, including the Arabs.

The United States, the presenter contended, does not have a policy toward Iran. Being against Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons is a position, not a policy. But he asserted that fueling the democratic movement in Iran may stop the production of nuclear weapons and that development could stimulate the advance of democracy to a point that could be evocative of the popular nationalist movements that led to the fall of the Soviet Union.

A presenter turned briefly to the importance of Russia in the Middle East by summarizing Russian-Turkish relations. Until recently the relationship was hostile. It changed when the AKP came to power and Russia and Turkey forged a strong energy connection relating to the Caspian Basin and the energy fields of Central Asia. In the 1990s the United States promoted the East-West corridor extending east from Central Asia to the Caspian area and west into Turkey to the Mediterranean where oil and gas flow to Europe and to the United States. When the pipeline was negotiated, oil was \$30 a barrel and Yeltsin was the president of a Russia that was powerless to effect the development of superpower relationships in the region.

Now plans are underway for a North-South corridor that would bypass the East-West corridor. Stretching from Russia through the Black Sea to Turkey to the Mediterranean, the pipeline has locked gas from Turkmenistan and oil from Kazakhstan into a network that will serve to institutionalize Russia's new and harmonious relationship with Turkey. Meanwhile, a muscular Russia under Putin is buying oil and gas from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan and selling them to Europe at prices set to exact extraordinary profits. For example, Russia is charging Europe \$200 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas that it buys from Turkmenistan for \$70 per 1,000 cubic meters—a profit of approximately 300 percent. European countries purchase about 70 percent of their gas from Russia. That's the source of Russia's wealth and its vigorous foreign policy in the Middle East.

The presenter reiterated how important it is for the Turkish government to counter the strong strains of anti-Americanism prevalent in the country. If it doesn't, those sentiments will fester and grow and undermine the nature of the U.S.-Turkish relationship—a development that will conduce to Russia's economic and political advantage.

The presenter proceeded to give a succinct multidimensional analysis of Iran. Though both Shiite and Khomeinist factions contend against each other in the religious and political arenas, they are not the primary protagonists that determine the direction of the country's foreign policy. Considerations of power play a mighty role. For example, Armenia, a Christian state, is Iran's favorite neighbor primarily because Armenia provides Iran with access to

Russia. Though not a critical consideration, their joint aversion to Azerbaijan tends to solidify the joint tie between Armenia and Russia.

In response to a question from a participant about Turkey's possible manipulation of the PKK situation to justify loosening its ties with the United States and strengthening its relationship with Iran, a presenter pointed to the favorable front-page publicity given in Turkey's newspapers to Iran's bombing of PCC camps in Iraq and the meager midsection reporting in the same newspapers of Secretary of State Rice's statement that the United States would resume helping Turkey counter the PKK after five years of ignoring the activities of the terrorist-designated group. The speaker concluded that the issue of the PKK needs to be addressed because it is driving a wedge in the relationship between Turkey and the United States.

Related to the issue of the PKK is the whole issue of terrorism and the way in which it has influenced the U.S. approach to foreign policy since 9/11. According to a presenter, until recently Turkey had come to the conclusion that the United States was not employing universal standards but selective standards in order to brand some groups as terrorists and to overlook the terrorist actions that the PCC engaged in from its bases in northern Iraq from 2003 to 2008. Iran's willingness to take out PCC camps in Iraq evidently spurred the United States to authorize the Turks to cross the border into northern Iraq in hot pursuit of the PKK. The good news is that not only have the Turkish media given broad coverage to the U.S. decision to aid the Turks against their enemy, but the United States is prepared to counter the Iranians' attempt to create antagonisms in Turkey's relationship with the United States. The presenter concluded that the United States should continue to counter the Iranian moves, which resemble a game of chess, by helping Iran's enemies in the area.

A participant asked whether it was still possible for the United States and others to succeed in convincing the suppliers of gas to use the pipeline that bypasses the Russian-dominated East-West pipeline. A presenter responded that the Russians have locked Turkmenistan into a 50-year contract. He related that they have a monopoly in the European gas distribution markets for Central and Eastern Europe. In other words, every country east of the Rhine River depends on Russia. In his judgment, had the United States proved to be a reliable partner, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan would have been willing to supply gas to the North-South pipeline. Instead, they were enticed away by the concrete proposals presented by the Russian energy envoy—Vladimir Putin. The U.S. representative, whose name few can recall, proved to be ineffective because he lacked status and did not offer conclusive proposals.

A presenter elaborated on his previous recommendation that the United States do what the Iranians do, only do it better. Others in the region, he



stated, are also models for emulation. He proposed that the United States follow the Saudi example and fund nonpolitical mosques and Islamic groups, including those situated in the United States and Europe. Instead of focusing on the opposition, the United States has returned to the practice of supporting regimes that claim to oppose extremist groups—fueling anti-Americanism that stems in part from American support for oppressive regimes.

A presenter pointed to the fact that before the war in Iraq, the United States had subcontracted to the Turks its relations with Central Asia. The election of the AKP in Turkey provoked suspicion on the part of the Turkmen that having to deal with a Turkish government dominated by Islamists would be fraught with danger. They finally concluded that they preferred the hard bargains driven by the Russians to the realization of their fear that Turkey's governing party would use Islamism to stir up Turkmenistan's Islamic population. The presenter concluded by affirming that he is still confident that the United States can conclude agreements with the states of Central Asia. After all, he said, Russia is not popular in the area, whereas the United States is.

In response to a participant's question about Turkey's relationships with Western Europe and the desirability of engaging in a war of ideas designed to counter the Islamist jihadis, a presenter replied that Turkey's admission to the European Union is the fulcrum of those relationships. He related that the Turkish people are coming to the conclusion that the European Union does not want Turkey to become a member of its exclusive club and that their perception of the situation has affected Turkey's relationship with the United States, which has deteriorated in the past five years. He recommended that the United States advocate for Turkey's timely admission.

Also connecting the United States to Turkey's admission to the European Union is President Nicholas Sarkozy of France who is not only Europe's most vocal advocate of the United States on the Continent but also a vociferous opponent of Turkey's admission to the European Union. Based on the length of time it took large states such as the United Kingdom to conform all of their regulations to those of the European Union in order to gain admission, it looks as if Turkey will not be admitted to the EU until the middle of the next decade. Meanwhile, the presenter asserted, France's opposition is producing a negative effect in France, where 10 percent of the population, which is Muslim, has listened to and rejected President Sarkozy's arguments. In accepting Turkey's application for admission, the European Union in effect accepted Turkey's membership.

A participant returned to the discussion of Central Asia and the role that gas and oil have played in shaping Kazakhstan's relations with the United States, Russia, China, and the Middle East. Kazakhstan's efforts to maintain

good relations with all of those powers, he asserted, are in its national interests. Furthermore, he reported that in areas not serviced by the pipeline such as Baku, tankers from Kazakhstan provide oil to that port. The complexity of the issue not only relates to the method of delivering gas and oil but to a number of other factors, including whether the modernization of the existing pipeline or digging under the Caspian Sea, which raises the possibility of environmental damage, is the better option. The participant also related that a leading diplomat had told him that the U.S. government did not care how and under whose auspices oil reaches the market. Its only concern is that it be delivered to its destination.

A presenter reasserted his assessment that the United States could have prevailed on the pipeline issue had it tried. It succeeded with Azerbaijan, which now participates in NATO operations, because it invested in Azerbaijan. The next administration needs to do the same thing by supporting Turkey as it acts in Central Asia in behalf of its own interests as well as those of the Central Asians and the United States.

Another presenter remarked that the only change in the status quo regarding the distribution of Central Asian oil and gas is that Russia is using them as political weapons and preventing them from reaching markets that it doesn't like.

During lunch the presenters and participants discussed the "battle of ideas that is taking place in the Muslim world," including the appeal of democracy and the prevalence of anti-Americanism. One of the presenters stated that 90 percent of anti-American literature is produced in the United States and Europe. He identified three kinds of enemies of the United States: (1) remnants of the Communist parties; (2) the Islamists; (3) despotic regimes, including Turkey, with which the United States claims it is allied. He compared the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, through which the United States undertook to counter anti-U.S. propaganda during the cold war, with the availability of multiple means of communication today, including the Internet, and recommended that accurate published assessments of the United States be translated into Arabic and Persian and posted on the Internet for all to read and contemplate. Moreover, he recommended that the United States support American universities that have recently opened in a number of Middle Eastern countries and others as well. He related that Muslims are flocking to them. Education, in short, provides an effective means to root out anti-Americanism. He noted that some successes have already been achieved by the anti-Islamists, especially the Pakistanis, and there is hope that others will occur. He affirmed his belief that the tide is turning and that the United States must develop a policy for the region.

Additional discussions took place about the integration of North African Muslims in France, including participation in the government of France,

and one participant's accounts of living as a child in Turkey and her perceptions of the U.S. use of soft power in the country.

## **The Arab-Muslim World**

### *The Maghreb*

In the afternoon session a presenter affirmed that the major crisis of the contemporary world is taking place in the arc of crisis—the Arab-Muslim world. He recounted that after independence, Arab countries created several organizations such as the Arab League and the Union of the Arab Maghreb (UAM) in North Africa. He stated that those organizations had not worked and would not work without democracy. Nor would they be effective if they had to rely on their own resources.

His perception of the Islamic challenge in North Africa reflects his understanding that it is not modeled on Wahabbi Islam, Turkish Islam, Asian Islam, or the Islam of black Africa but is a force of its own making. In the presenter's judgment, North Africa is in a predemocratic phase of development. He discussed the paradox of Algeria's political and economic backwardness in view of the fact that the country has the most resources in the area. The speaker attributed the state of Islam in Algeria to its creation in the schools, the government-controlled media, and the sponsorship of the state. Not to be discounted is the fact that Al Qaeda set up its organization in Algeria, underlining the notion that Islamism did not grow organically in the area. The absence of democracy, attributed to the fact that those who had espoused it were repressed, led to the false impression that the Islamists were the only opponents of the Algerian state.

The presenter expressed his belief that the outcome of the 2009 elections in Algeria would be a true reading of the vote only if international monitoring, as occurred in Pakistan, Morocco, and Venezuela, takes place. Meanwhile, Algerian society is striving to nurture democratic alternatives through trade unions, political parties, and women's organizations.

A participant asked the presenter, a Berber, about the status of the Berbers in North Africa and was told that about one-third of Algerians speak various Berber languages, in Morocco Berbers are a majority, and in Tunisia Berbers are a small minority. Although Algerian Berbers managed to persuade the authorities to allow a constitutional change that would permit some observances of Berber culture, including the use of Berber languages, those changes have not been implemented in the educational system or been incorporated in artistic and literary works.

The conversation shifted briefly to the colonial era and a description of the French treatment of the Berbers. It was stated that the French tried to

eliminate the use of Berber languages and discourage the observance of Berber culture. Their efforts proved to be ineffective. In response to a participant's question about the importance of remittances sent home by Algerians and other North Africans working in France, the speaker said that it used to be extensive. No longer is that the case as the well-educated children of the former migrants are immigrating to other countries, including Western Europe and Quebec in French-speaking Canada.

In the presenter's judgment, Islamism in Algeria has been very violent and very superficial, perhaps owing to the fact that it was imported there by the Egyptians who were invited to preach and teach in the country. As a consequence of such indoctrination, many Algerian students joined the Islamist jihadis. In Algeria, he concluded, it is social misery, not ideology or beliefs, that nourishes the growth of Islam.

A participant asked the presenter to characterize the nature of U.S. relations with North Africa and was told that the increasing presence of nongovernmental organizations in the area as well as the willingness of the U.S. ambassador to meet with opposition groups indicates a change for the better. In the face of the Algerian government's attempts to prevent American officials from speaking with the opponents of the regime, the Americans persisted and the regime, whose prime minister had received support from Iran, backed down. A brief question about literacy in Algeria elicited the comment that reading is not a popular pastime in Algeria and that Franz Fanon is now considered among the old furniture of intellectualism in the country.

#### *Iraq Amid a New Strain of Islamist Jihadis*

At first a presenter turned the participants' attention to Iraq and the role it may play in bringing about a change in the balance of power in the region. His assessments concerning the effectiveness of U.S. influence were entirely negative. He affirmed that the U.S. government and private enterprise in the country can do little to stem the threats that are emerging. Furthermore, he believes that the region is not caught up in a war of ideas. Instead, it is one of bullets, ball bearings, and suicide vests. In his judgment, the jihadis, who are not a monolithic entity but consist of the old Al Qaeda and other so-called Al Qaeda groups that have sprung up to wage their own brands of warfare, are setting the agenda and the time lines. Instead of focusing on Iraq, the presenter said he wanted to discuss the Islamic jihadis who have adopted the Al Qaeda franchise. He concluded that their contribution to the rest of the Middle East is that they export young men—young Algerians and Tunisians and Moroccans who have been fighting in Iraq and elsewhere.

The change in that direction began with the establishment of a group under Zawahiri who had specific ideological differences with Al Qaeda that

centered on the Saudi regime. Unlike Al Qaeda, Zawahiri's group saw opportunities in Iraq. Striving to become terrorists without state sponsorship, Zawahiri and his group used technology for fund raising, recruiting, and propaganda in innovative ways. Although they are withdrawing from Iraq, they have not abandoned the fight. Their fighters at the midlevel of the organization are primarily Syrian and Saudi, and it seems likely that the organization will break along those lines and that those countries will become the battlefields of the new Islamist jihadis. The presenter said that his vision of Iran is of a rotting carcass. Strategies, he added, should not be built around an Iranian threat. If Israel has concluded that there will be another war with Hezbollah, Damascus should be bombed and its electricity grid should be taken out.

The presenter's take on Hezbollah is that despite its positive assessments of its own gains, it cannot bring down the Lebanese government. Nor can Iran. In his judgment, the Iranian gambit for hegemony is similarly exaggerated. The Iranians want to be taken more seriously. The real battlefields will be Syria and Saudi Arabia whose regimes will have to contend with the returning jihadists who can activate themselves into networks of fierce fighters in no time at all. The speaker pointed out that the Islamist jihadis embedded in their home bases do not need a majority or even close to a majority of the populace to support them. All they need, say, are 10,000 determined fighters operating in one province and perhaps 5,000 in another to wage a relentless struggle.

The presenter maintained that the most important skills that the Americans will need to develop in Iraq are those of crisis management and damage control. In order to defeat Hezbollah, defenders will have to do what Hezbollah does to promote terrorism, including kidnapping and committing other crimes against the population. In the course of learning how to fight insurgencies for as long as 10 or 15 years and being surrounded by havoc emanating from Syria and Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the presenter stated, will develop the military and the intelligence capacity to wage counterterrorist war.

A participant asked the last presenter to elaborate on the chaotic scenarios he alluded to, and the presenter discussed his projections of what life in Saudi Arabia and Syria would be like under the continuous attack of the Islamist jihadis fighting in the name of the Shiites and the Sunnis. He expressed the belief that the prize is Syria. To him, Damascus, not Dubai, is civilization. The jihadis have declared the Alawites—the religious sect whose members became the rulers of Syria in the 1930s despite the fact that they were an outcaste group—to be their abominable enemy.

A participant asked whether Iran would intervene in Syria's behalf, and the presenter said no. It lacks the resources to do so. Waging conventional warfare is not what causes other countries to fear Iran. It is the nuclear threat it poses. The way to deal with that threat, the presenter maintained,

is to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities. Another participant asked whether the United States or an ally would lose the sympathy of the street, which is pro-American, if it bombed the facilities. The presenter answered that the designated bomber "should go for it." He pointed out that other deadly things would probably be going on at the same time: Israel's search for elusive rifles fired not by Hezbollah but by jihadist cells and disruptions in the delivery of Saudi oil caused by explosions deliberately orchestrated to cause shortages and chaos and highlight vulnerability.

A participant asked whether the forced removal from office of the Assad family could result in a regime such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The presenter responded that the Assads were the alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood, and if it proved so easy to remove them from power, they would be problematic. The presenter stated that he is not sure the Assads will survive or that the Alawites will fight to defend Damascus, choosing instead to withdraw to the mountains where they used to live.

A participant asked whether a presenter thought that the Alawite versus the jihadist struggle would turn out to be the only political game in Syria. Where are the democratic, intelligent forces, he asked? A presenter said he didn't know of many people in Syria who possess the capacity to initiate democratic regime change.

A presenter commented that the situation in the Arab-Muslim world evokes the image of the Russian doll. He invited the participants to imagine that each doll contains terrorists that materialize when the largest doll is opened and are unleashed when the contents of the last doll become visible. Switching to the notion of the war of ideas, he said that one can consider that the biggest doll represents the misperception that Islam does not have a place in the modern world. Then there is the doll that represents proselytizing—spreading Islam throughout the world. Another doll represents collecting the means necessary to pursue the contest of winning the hearts and minds of people through the work of hundreds of charities, NGOs, and others who raise money for the jihadis by appealing to religious sentiments. No group of jihadis is alike. They reflect the societies they war against, and because they belong to those societies, their neighbors either support them or say nothing against them. Maintaining solidarity between kith and kin is as powerful an idea in the Middle East as it is in other parts of the world.

### *Iran and Saudi Arabia*

A presenter observed that Iran is doing what it would have done had the shah or his slated imperial successor remained in power: taking advantage of what it perceives as a change in the balance of power in the region. Iran is building a glacis—a seemingly impregnable fortress represented by Iraq,

Syria, and Lebanon—thus putting itself on Israel’s borders if conflict erupts. It is also trying to reshape the region in its image and thwart its enemy, the United States, whose confused signals betray that it has no policy toward the country. Moreover, Iran is trying to break out of its isolation as a Shiite power, which it is attempting to do by appearing to be opposed to the existence of Israel. Israel, in the presenter’s opinion, is Iran’s best ally in the region.

Perceiving a difference between two presenters regarding their perceptions of where the next struggle will occur in the Middle East, a participant asked them to discuss the subject. A presenter discussed his perception that the tide is turning against the jihadis in Saudi Arabia. According to him, as the Saudi government captures the jihadis, it reeducates them—a program, including confessions and expressions of regret broadcast on evening TV—that appears to be effective. In addition, far fewer Saudis are going to Iraq to volunteer, the Saudis have boxed in Saudi jihadis in a few provinces to the south, and they have created a guard to protect the oil fields.

A participant asked a presenter to address the participant’s understanding that there is a connection between Al Qaeda and the Wahabbi religion. He also wanted to know whether there is a connection between Al Qaeda and the Wahabbi hierarchy. The presenter stated that there is a connection that has gone through many stages of development. Currently Al Qaeda in Iraq and the Zawahiri organization are focusing on such facets of Wahabbism as anti-Shiite rhetoric and activity directed against them. There is a form of neo-Wahabbism, referred to as the awakening, that is influential among younger Saudis. It stems from a young generation’s protest against their rulers and the subsequent takeover of the Islamic holy site in Mecca in 1979. At the behest of the Saudi government, French commandos were sent in to flush them out if possible or to kill them if necessary. Their successors, the neo-Wahabbis, are the Islamist jihadis that are waging war today while their elders hide in the caves of Afghanistan.

The participant seconded the conclusion expressed by one presenter who identified the U.S. lack of a policy in the Middle East as a source of worry. The presenter reiterated his position and expressed the corresponding judgment that U.S. enemies believe the United States is weak and divided and that the Islamist jihadis are winning their war.

### *Israel*

A participant asked a presenter to give his opinion of what Israeli policy should be, especially in the wake of being surrounded by Syria and Iran. The presenter answered that the Israeli-Palestine subject had not been discussed much in the roundtable because he thinks it is not the biggest problem in the Middle East. In his judgment, Israel, like the United States, lacks a

policy. Like the United States also, it is making mistakes that can be identified as designating the regime of Bashar al-Assad as people with whom they can deal. Because Syria acts as if southern Lebanon is a part of its territory and Israel is being assaulted from southern Lebanon, then Syria is responsible for the attacks and ought to be attacked in retaliation. The second mistake is that Israel is trying to use the tactics of conventional warfare against irregular warfare. The third mistake is that Israeli leaders have become afflicted with what the presenter calls the American disease of criticizing themselves endlessly.

A participant agreed with the presenter's assessment based on her recent trip to Israel. Although she encountered a degree of defeatism at the top of the government, she said she perceived that that attitude had not spread to the population.

A participant asked the presenter who focused on Saudi Arabia and Syria as the eventual targets of the Islamist jihadis whether establishing targets in the Middle East suggests that the jihardists will not attack Europe and America. The presenter answered yes to America but no to Europe where many disaffected immigrants live and serve as a recruiting mecca for the neo-Islamist jihadis. With the death of Zawahiri, the new brand of Islamic fighters are animated by the objective of establishing a caliphate.

Another presenter reminded the participants that the conflict is not only about Islam and the promises of the prophet, but it is also about power and politics.

## **The Balance of Power in the Middle East**

The conclusion began with a discussion of why the Middle East, unlike the rest of the world, has not been affected by the tide of democratization that occurred in Eastern and Central Europe, in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, in Latin America, and in Africa following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Though there are democratic forces in the region, they have to contend against those of superior numbers who maintain that democracy is incompatible with Islam. The countries of the Middle East are distinct in other ways too. Several countries are at war with each other and have border disagreements that threaten to flare into warlike activity. Unlike the other regions of the world, the countries of the Middle East have established no regional organizations. In sum, except for Israel, they are underachievers or semifailed states that spend comparatively large portions of their budgets on military weaponry. In fact, there is an arms race going on in the region, perhaps fueled by the specter of Iran as a fledgling nuclear power. Moreover, the Middle East is a region of young people, unlike Europe and the United States, which, for the most part, contain a majority of aged people. How



that aspect of demography will factor into future developments cannot be ascertained now. Everyone in the region seems to sense that a balance of power is taking place in the Middle East. Some young people are doing something to participate in the new order; others are steeped in malaise.

### *The Western Powers*

What, the presenter asked, is more of a commitment than an invasion? Nevertheless, the U.S. commitment to Iraq raises questions because of the countervailing desire on the part of many Americans, including congressional leaders, to disengage and withdraw U.S. troops from the country. Then there is Europe, whose leaders seem to believe that they can buy their way out of trouble by increasing trade and offering their enemies a range of other material benefits. Although Europe has immense economic and trade power in the region, it lacks the political will to exercise its political power.

### *Russia*

Nationalist Russia, on the other hand, knows precisely what it wants to do. It is pursuing a variety of measures to recapture its great power status. The Russians believe, the presenter asserted, that if Iran spins out of control, the Americans will deal with it. Meanwhile, perceiving that Russia has nothing to gain from seeing a pro-American regime installed in Tehran, President Putin went to Tehran and met with President Ahmadinejad. During their meeting they revived the 1921 and 1941 treaties that allowed Russia to station troops in Iran under specific circumstances. Evidently the Iranians view the reinstated treaties as a deterrent to American warlike action taken in response to Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons. In addition, Russia has agreed to sell to Iran its most advanced anti-aircraft missile system, which would be used against high-flying heavy bombers dispatched to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities.

Russia is discussing with the states of Iran, Qatar, and Algeria, which leads the world in the production of gas, the advantages inherent in establishing a group that could become known as OGEC (Organization of Gas Exporting Countries) modeled on OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). Such an organization, Putin is evidently intent on arguing, should be linked with Russia. Illustrating the extent of its vision of reacquiring great power status in the Middle East, Russia has secured mooring and visiting rights for its navy in two of Iran's ports and is negotiating to lease port facilities in the historic Alawite territory of Syria. Russia evidently succeeded to such an extent in convincing the Saudis of the strength of their commitment to the Middle East that their king traveled to Moscow recently, the first visit undertaken by a Saudi monarch to the capital of Russia either in its post-cold-war setting or in its cold-war

position as the imperial capital of the Soviet superpower.

The presenter stated that he believes that Russia is playing a very dangerous game. Putin's assessment that the United States will intervene in the Middle East if things go wrong may be dead wrong. The presenter characterized the Russian position as poker played according to rules devised by the KGB.

### *China*

Anticipating the day when it will surpass its status as the second largest consumer of oil in the world to become the first, China is wooing oil producers in the Persian Gulf area and the Caspian Basin. Recently the Chinese convinced the Saudis to invest in downstream projects in China that resulted in linking 19 refineries to the Chinese market. To give credence to their contention that Iranian leaders are not pariahs, Chinese diplomats and dignitaries such as the president of China and the foreign minister have visited Iran. Chinese diplomats have suggested to Iranian officials that China has acted in the Security Council to soften resolutions against what many have judged to be Iran's defiant attempts to acquire nuclear weapons. Moreover, despite the dangers inherent in the project, the Chinese are negotiating with the Iranians to construct 20 nuclear power stations in a country that stretches across an earthquake bed.

### *India*

Democratic India is thirsty for oil and is struggling to find a foothold in the region. The Indians have proposed the construction of a gas pipeline from Iran to India via Pakistan, but because of conditions in Pakistan no one is willing to invest in the pipeline. According to the presenter, the Indians, like the French, have concluded that because the United States has no policy, American approaches to the region should not be reflected in the policies of the erstwhile allies of the United States.

## **A Wobbly Architecture of Stability**

About three years ago, it appeared as if an architecture of stability was being created in the region as a result of negotiations among specific Arab countries in the area, Algeria in North Africa, and NATO. One illustration of the good effects of establishing such a relationship is the association between the military of Turkey and NATO. That tie has been judged to be one of the factors that has helped to convince Turkey's military to remain secular. In contrast, some of the multinational forces of NATO in Afghanistan have been assigned to duties that they consider unseemly or resist for a variety of cultural reasons, and the layers of bureaucracy that must be negotiated between military officials of sovereign states and NATO officials sometimes make inaction or delayed action the inevitable response to enemy acts of aggression.

## Major Problems Facing the Middle East

The war against terrorism is a war for civilization. Should the West lose it, civilization as we know it will disintegrate and disappear from the region, the presenter contended. Gas and oil, which are in plentiful supplies in the region, will not be extracted and brought to market in the face of unremitting attacks by Islamist jihadis. The demographic problem represented by the millions of North Africans who seek entry to Europe continues to pose a serious problem. Integration is almost impossible to achieve when a vast number of immigrants arrive in continuous movements that that can only be characterized as wave after wave.

In the presenter's judgment, U.S. leaders must take a position now in favor of one group or another. The American government could enter into alliances with Islamists, as it did with the Saudi Wahabbis, even though such a relationship would be only temporary: The prophet forbade permanent relationships with infidels. The United States could pursue relationships with reformers, innovators, and prodemocracy forces that may not be strong enough to come to power now but could succeed in the future. Finally, it could work to perpetuate the status quo by continuing to support such rulers as Mubarak of Egypt and the Saudi royal family. The most important thing that the United States has to do, he reiterated, is to take a position and not follow all three approaches at once.

The presenter recommended anchors of stability such as a common market, defense treaties, the granting of most-favored-nation status to give specific states in the region stakes in the global system, facilitating their transformation to the status of stable insiders rather than unstable outsiders.

## Discussion

A participant asked whether the presenter thought that the threat from Iran was imminent and if so why did so much silence surround the issue. The presenter replied that the present Iranian government's position is the same as the shah's who wanted to have a tactical nuclear weapons capacity because he did not trust that the United States would keep its promise to defend Iran. If the Soviet Union invaded, the shah wanted to inflict such a level of damage on Soviet forces that they would eventually have to withdraw. The presenter related that Khomeini canceled the nuclear program that had been begun with the help of the United States that trained the first nuclear physicists and helped to establish the first Iranian faculty of nuclear physics in 1957. The presenter declared that the threat stemmed not from the nature of the weaponry but from the nature of the regime.

The presenter commented on the interrelationship between international relations and domestic politics, pointing out the implausibility of Iran's

engaging in peaceful relations with other states in the region while it is oppressing its own people. Because of its hostile behavior toward Iranians and other people living in the Middle East, the only source of legitimacy it can draw on is its propagation of anti-Americanism, which resonates throughout the area but not in Iran except at the top. Not to be ignored either is the effect that domestic politics has on U.S. foreign policy. Both, he asserted, are chaotic. A participant discussed his concern over disagreements in the United States about foreign policy. He discussed the domestic scene in the United States in the 1930s to illustrate the point that perhaps only an attack promotes unity of purpose in American foreign policymaking.

Gratitude was expressed to the presenters for their thought-provoking analyses and to the other participants for their avid interest in the proceedings and the acute understanding that they expressed in their questions, which are reflected in the NCAFP policy recommendations listed below.



# NCAFP Policy Recommendations

## I. Grand Strategy

Preventing Iran from producing nuclear weapons and thwarting its imperial ambitions must be the overarching U.S. foreign policy objective in the Middle East. Toward that end it is in the interest of the United States to

play a leading role in forming a coalition of countries in the region and beyond that can and will act in unison in thwarting aggression in the Persian Gulf region;

prevent Iran or any country or a combination of countries from establishing hegemony in the region;

ensure the free flow of trade in the Persian Gulf;

pursue a robust diplomatic strategy combined with a strict enforcement of Security Council resolutions in the expectation that Iran will abandon its belligerent course. Should sanctions fail, the next step to counter Iran's moves must include a blockade. Force is the last recourse;

seal Iraq's borders with Iran and Syria in order to freeze and then roll back Iran's hegemonic drive toward the Mediterranean and the borders of Israel, a country it has condemned to extinction;

insist that the UN implement UNIFIL's mission in Lebanon in order to curb and then eliminate Hezbollah's aggression;

pursue a diplomatic course with proxy Syria, the country that serves Iran as a conduit for transferring funds, arms, jihadists, and instructors to Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, with the aim of breaking its bonds with Iran.

## II. The War on Terrorism

Whereas militant Islamic fundamentalists equipped with conventional weapons are tactical threats to sovereign states, terrorists in possession of unconventional weapons constitute serious strategic threats to polities in which they operate. Hence the war against militant Islamic fundamentalism must continue everywhere until they are routed. The major threat at this moment emanates from the border regions between

Afghanistan and Pakistan. That militant swamp must be neutralized and eliminated by effective U.S. and NATO operations in cooperation with Pakistan if possible.

### III. The War of Ideas

Focusing on Iran's nuclear and imperial ambitions must not preclude the United States from pursuing other interests in the region. Those interests include the war of ideas, which can be waged by

updating and expanding U.S. cold-war instruments such as the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe in addition to the all-important Internet in order to relate, in Arabic and Farsi, objective news about America compiled by experts as a means of refuting anti-American propaganda;

discussing (not preaching), in Arabic and Farsi, both with local proponents of democracy and local interlocutors of a militant stripe, such liberal democratic verities as the rule of law, human rights, freedom of expression, party politics, and free elections and why they have captured the imagination of people elsewhere in the world;

strengthening American institutions of higher learning and encouraging such institutions to establish wherever possible local branches, or at least local programs, staffed by scholars, not ideologues;

encouraging the translation of works of scholars, fiction and nonfiction writers, and poets into various languages, including Arabic, Farsi, and Kurdish; disseminating representative and constructive programs by radio and postings on the Internet for everyone to listen to and read and discuss; and ensuring that the works reach American and Islamic libraries in the region and beyond.

### IV. The War in Iraq

To prevent Iran from filling a vacuum in Iraq and thus facilitate its imperial designs, it is vital to maintain an adequate military presence in Iraq until the Iraqi government is in a position to ensure order and stability.

### V. Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Iran's hegemonic ambitions are prompting Arab governments to seek overtly and covertly closer relations with Israel, the region's great power. Lessening tensions between Palestinians and Israel will help to promote the idea that there is a common cause. Though Israel's closest

friend and ally, the United States, remains involved in the region and in the resolution of the conflict, the U.S. pursuit of its objectives in the Middle East need not preclude Israel from talking to its neighbors if it believes that such contacts serve the country's national interest.

Now is an opportune time to press Arab countries to recognize after 60 years the legitimacy of Israel to exist.

## VI. Turkey

The United States needs to stress to the Turkish government the harmfulness of anti-Americanism. The Turkish government must do its utmost to remove from its official statements pronouncements that reflect a stereotypical, prejudicial attitude that harms U.S.-Turkish relations.

Turkey must also be encouraged to take the initiative to form a multinational defense architecture in the Middle East as a means of stabilizing the region as NATO has done for Europe.

## VII. Countries of the Mediterranean Sea

To keep the extended Middle East—North African coastal countries—stable and friendly, the United States should support and help to expand the Mediterranean Dialogue program and NATO's "Open Door" policy.



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