

ASSESSING ALTERNATIVE SECURITY FRAMEWORKS FOR THE PERSIAN GULF

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The purpose of this paper is to provide a conceptual and analytical foundation for discussions about the future shape of security arrangements in the Persian Gulf subregion. In this regard, a first priority is to define what is meant by “regional security.” Is the primary focus on the national security of individual nation-states, on collective security among sovereign allies, or on the security of individual citizens? Who is the architect and who the subject of a regional-security architecture?

In general, the sovereign nation-state remains the principal focus when constructing a framework for security and stability in all the regions of the world, including the Gulf. However, states are made of individuals, and it should be recognized that the domestic dimension of stability, peace and prosperity cannot be forgotten. Some analysts have gone so far as to say that the greatest danger in the Gulf is not a nuclear Iran or the threat of a conventional invasion by an aggressor, but rather internal socio-economic and political changes that might be increasingly hard to control.¹

I offer the following definition of regional security: a situation in which the financial and human capital of nations is

used primarily for social, political, economic and spiritual development, rather than for military and security/police forces. The question is, how does one arrive at this ideal endpoint? To clarify the major strategic choices facing decision makers in both the Gulf and in the capitals of external powers, I provide a concise outline of three competing schools of thought in international security: the hegemonic or counterproliferation school, the realist school and the cooperative-security school (sometimes referred to as liberal internationalism, liberal institutionalism or constitutionalism). I then outline various challenges in applying the frameworks to the Gulf security environment.

These security frameworks can be thought of as macro-level blueprints for ordering relations between states or as grand strategies for the management and regulation of power. They offer competing answers to questions about the ways in which states use (or threaten to use) power, the foreign-policy circumstances in which power is used, the ends (values, goals) toward which power is applied, and possible limits on the build-up of surplus military power.² The final goal of all three frameworks is to create a stable and

peaceful structure of relationships that allows every state to meet its minimum security needs and develop its economy and political institutions without at the same time increasing the level of threat toward its neighbors. In this sense, the frameworks described in this paper are on a higher plane of abstraction than defense strategy, military tactics or economic projections. They set a foundation that constrains and shapes defense and economic policy options, allowing state leaders to choose a coherent set of policies that allow for peaceful growth and prosperity.

In meeting these ends, the frameworks also address the question of legitimacy and authority: What constitutes the lawful use of power, whether diplomatic, economic or military? How can instruments of power be used in a way that is seen as legitimate by as many actors as possible? Legitimacy and authority matter. If some prominent states (or even sub-national groups) believe that the prevailing framework for security is purposely disadvantageous for them and purposely targets their beliefs, values and economy for destruction, these targeted actors will find ways to subvert, weaken and even destroy it, undermining the chances for peaceful development for all states within the region.³

Hence, legitimacy and authority are intimately connected to questions of sustainability. If a security framework is to last, it must be supported by most of the actors affected by it.⁴ The gains achieved through the creation of a security framework must, to a large extent, be seen as mutual gains. In turn, how widely and equitably the gains of growth are distributed will depend on whether the ideological, economic and military circumstances of a given region are conducive to sharing them.

ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORKS

There are three primary, competing schools of thought in security practice today: the traditional model of competitive *Realpolitik* and the evolving, conflicting models of hegemony and cooperative security.

Realpolitik is diplomacy based on implicit and explicit military threats, but these threats are not meant to deny another sovereign actor its core national interests and security concerns. Rather, relative advantage is sought around the margins, with a multipolar mix of states joining in fluid, dynamic relationships based on tactical gains and losses over time. Allies and enemies are not defined on a permanent basis. True balance-of-power logic generally does not recognize such a concept as permanent enemy or friend. All states are thought to have varying levels of common and competing interests, and commonalities will allow almost any state in the region to ally with another according to the dictates of the moment.

Realpolitik foreign-policy practices were perfected during the period of nation-state development in Europe prior to the French Revolution, from 1648 to 1789. During this period, most competition was connected in some way to expansion and the strengthening of the state. Since politics and central rule were still effectively shielded from popular mandates – with most of the population having little real connection to the abstract entity of the “state” – this constant power grabbing and national expansion was generally pursued along non-ideological and highly pragmatic lines. Warfare in the period 1648-1789 was centered mainly on formally trained state armies made up of paid mercenaries, with truces, alliances, cease-fires and so on

being conducted completely at the top of the chain of command and based on legalistic written documents. The brutality of war was circumscribed by commonly accepted norms of diplomatic and military behavior. When leaders decided it was best to drop out of an alliance, or call a truce detrimental to an ally, or even switch sides and declare war on a “friend,” the new policy generally took hold immediately without negative pressures from factions within one’s own territory. One former diplomat and historian has summarized this period as the “Age of Sovereignty.”⁵

Through balance-of-power strategies, European monarchies managed to keep expansionist competition manageable for most of this period. After the French Revolution, however, the aristocracy was weakened, and eventually the nationalist aspirations and conflicting ideologies of the developing political systems led to conflicts. The relatively constrained nature of balance-of-power politics was slowly undermined, and Europe again succumbed to internecine warfare in the early twentieth century.⁶

Traditional Realpolitik began to break down as starkly different ideological and value systems emerged within contending nation-states. This dramatically increased the probability of mutual misperceptions, because instability and conflict are common when one side’s defensive actions begin to look offensive to its main competitor. The chances for such misperceptions are rife when defensive actions are viewed through the prism of conflicting ideologies. This is further exacerbated when a state seeks to secure relative advantage over an opponent, due to the fact that the conflicting value systems make cooperative efforts look too costly and even immoral. After

all, why cooperate with a source of competing values when one can ensure security through weakening or eliminating it?

Finally, the growth of sub-national or transnational actors in the nineteenth century, including ethnic nationalist movements and terrorist groups, directly undermined the kind of strong sovereign control needed to ensure that balance-of-power logic would prevail. World War I, for instance, was preceded by a dramatic escalation in terrorist activity in Europe based upon ideologies or cultures that did not conform to state boundaries. This reality severely aggravated interstate competition between the Great Powers and ultimately undermined power balancing as a conflict-management tool.⁷

Traditional balance-of-power methods of conflict management seem to work best under these circumstances:

- States share some degree of common values and interests and thus have similar definitions of national security and stability;
- States trust their opponents not to wreck the system as a whole in the name of spreading a particular system of values;
- States respect the sovereign existence and independence of all other actors;
- The existence of transnational or intra-national movements/ideologies does not undermine the central role of the sovereign state as the primary actor;
- The policy preferences of states are reasonably predictable and stable over time, allowing mutual trust to build up; and
- A high degree of stability in the domestic politics of states keeps radical changes in ideology from altering foreign policy.

A second strategy for providing a new regional-security framework is the hegemonic or counterproliferation strategy,

based on the victory of the interests of one set of states over those of others and the operational use of military and economic instruments for compellence as well as deterrence.⁸ In particular, the United States is putting renewed emphasis on the perfection of a threat-based national-security methodology to maintain and expand its sovereign interests in the post-Cold War world. Known in some circles as a counterproliferation strategy, this package of tools consists of technology-denial methods directed at the developing world (export controls); new methods of deterrence involving precision-guided and more lethal conventional munitions alongside the existing nuclear arsenal; and more proactive methods of defense that rely on preemptive strikes as well as reactive measures. The perfection of defense, deterrence and preemption has become the major goal of the U.S. national-security planning community.⁹

In some ways, the counterproliferation vision of the world resembles the mercantilism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As with mercantilism, traditional alliances will ensure collective security for friends and allies while protecting trade routes, international financial holdings and technological advances from disturbance or exploitation by enemies. Under this vision of international politics, globalization of the free market is selective; dual-use commercial advances with military applications are to be uniformly denied to developing countries that might use them to gain political or military power. Security is therefore seen in cooperative, multilateral or mutual terms only for friends and allies, who band together in their economic and military relations to defend against intratable enemies. Ideological and resource

competition is seen as endemic to international relations and as an unavoidable reality that necessitates improved methods of control to minimize unpredictability and uncertainty in relations with potentially hostile actors.

In sum, the hegemonic or counterproliferation approach views diplomatic relations largely in terms of bilateral and selectively multilateral relationships – that is, formal alliances or informal security understandings between friends. For the United States, this network encompasses NATO, South Korea, Japan, Israel, Australia, non-allied Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Singapore, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states in the Middle East. They receive preferential U.S. aid, trade relationships, military-technology-sharing arrangements and even sales of off-the-shelf high-technology military items. Technology sharing and development are seen to be positive only insofar as they occur within this circle of friends and allies. Security is viewed as a fungible good that can (and should) be divided between opposing camps.

Like deterrence and balance of power, a compellence/counterproliferation strategy based upon hegemony relies on both explicit and implicit threats. However, the goal of these threats is not to establish a roughly equal balance among all sovereign actors but rather to consolidate economic and military supremacy among friends and allies. Under this approach, states explicitly attempt to make their interests (and those of their allies) predominant. Moreover, there is no attempt to build conceptual bridges between qualitatively different societal traditions or to reconcile interests through a partial redefinition of goals that meets the

minimum requirements of each actor.

Finally, the cooperative-security school incorporates far different assumptions about world politics and the place of the stronger powers within it. The central idea is that all nation-states will find greater relative security through mutual obligations to limit their military capabilities rather than through unilateral or allied attempts to gain dominance. It is not only friends and allies that participate in security regimes. The cooperative-security outlook assumes that enemies or potential enemies will accept the same legal and technical constraints on behavior as friends, despite the existence of substantial mutual mistrust. It is also assumed that these legal and technical constraints will be mutually advantageous and verifiable. Security is guaranteed not through dominance, but through the outlawing of policy options that have the goal of achieving dominance over the opponent.

All the major tenets, concepts and assumptions of this school of thought have been enumerated in the Brookings Institution publication, *Global Engagement: Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century*.¹⁰ First, according to the Brookings study group, “The central strategic problem for a cooperative security regime is not deterrence, as in the cold war, but reassurance.” The requirements of reassurance are more demanding in some ways than those of deterrence:

Unlike deterrence . . . the key to reassurance is a reliable normative and institutional structure. . . . It requires an ability to initiate and maintain cooperation among sovereign states on matters that have been traditionally conceived of as the heart of sovereignty: decisions about what is needed to maintain and preserve national security.

Achieving this end-state of cooperation depends not only on threats against bad behavior but, more importantly, on political legitimacy, economic incentives and inducements, and plain self-interest:

[S]ubstantial compliance with these strictures cannot be achieved by the threat of military retaliation. Compliance must be induced by the continuing sense that the limits imposed on military capabilities are consistent with the security requirements of the participants and that they are being generally observed.

How can states be sure that others are in general compliance with agreed norms? Although most attention has been geared towards the success or failure of sanctions and improved ways to implement and target costly sanctions, the participants in the Brookings study identified other, less punitive aspects of cooperation: “a strong normative base, inclusiveness, non-discrimination, transparency, regime management, and [lastly] sanctions.” A normative base should be founded upon “fair and accepted procedures, applied equally...and reflect minimum, substantive standards of fairness and equity.” In turn, this requires a type of inclusiveness that rewards the regional states for their continued compliance: “Without an effort to accommodate the concerns of the ‘have not’ countries, it would be impossible to create the norms that an effective regime requires.”¹¹

In sum, under the cooperative-security approach, security is increasingly defined as a collective good that cannot be divided, due largely to the globalization of social and economic trends, the diffusion of new technologies with dual-use applications, and the specter of mass destruction raised by

mutual use of WMD in conflicts. Because of this core assumption, the cooperative approach does not officially separate states into categories of friends, allies and enemies, but treats all actors as equal (if strained) partners in the quest for mutual security. The cooperative-security viewpoint posits that security is best pursued with other states rather than against them, even in those cases where the states in question have starkly different value systems and ideological goals. To summarize these diverging schools of thought:

- The traditional, competitive Realpolitik model of international security can be thought of as a balance of interests based upon a rough balance of power.

- The more recent U.S. strategic evolution can be thought of as an imbalance of power and interests (hegemony) based upon both offensive (compellant) and defensive (deterrent) threats used in conjunction with one another.

- The relatively recent cooperative model can be thought of as a balance of interests based upon mutual reassurance.

Two of these strategies have a great deal in common: the traditional balance-of-power strategy is similar to cooperative security because they both insist on a balance of interests. They differ, however, in their preferred form of guaranteeing this balance. Realpolitik relies largely on implicit threats as seen through economic and military power (and temporary alliances to build up power), while the cooperative school relies instead on promises, reassurance and verification of legal agreements.¹² Both of these schools differ dramatically from the evolving U.S. approach of hegemony. This strategy is increasingly focused on the establishment

of an authoritative value system based on a network of friends and allies who largely share the foreign-policy goals of the United States. The hegemonic approach assumes that the deleterious effects of competition are best addressed through the elimination of competition itself – through the persistent weakening of those actors who harbor opposing goals, views and values. In marked contrast, the balance-of-power and cooperative-security schools both guarantee each actor that its national interests will be met at some minimal level (assuming that a balance of power does not break down or that promises can be reliably verified and enforced, both of which have been extremely problematic in practice).

In fact, the cooperative-security school requires a set of geopolitical circumstances very similar to that of realism. It assumes, like realism, that the primary actor is the sovereign state, which will enter into verifiable agreements with other states. It also implicitly assumes that ideological and resource conflicts will not be so acute that mutual agreements ordering relations will be viewed automatically with suspicion or that, once they enter into the new framework, individual states will abuse it to pursue their own goals at the expense of others. Hence, any gains that nations seek would either be shared or they would involve jockeying for position on the margins, rather than committed attempts to undermine or subvert other parties. Finally, like realism, cooperative security implicitly assumes that parties to an agreement will have constant policy preferences over time, and that they are therefore domestically stable (or at least immune to revolution). After all, if a state's identity were to change through massive domestic turmoil, as for instance Iran's did in 1979, it is hard

to see how the multilateral or bilateral agreements constituting a cooperative regional framework would survive.

CAN MULTILATERAL BONDS ENSURE PEACE AND STABILITY?

Which broad strategy offers the best prospect for building a peaceful, prosperous and stable future in the Gulf? Several international theorists have argued that if leaders are concerned with long-term value rather than short-term gains, they should construct comprehensive multilateral coalitions. This recommendation is based not just on ideals, but on history.

In an examination of armed conflicts and international order from 1648 to 1989, political scientist Kalevi Holsti has shown that attempts by victorious powers to construct stable, secure multilateral frameworks have repeatedly foundered on their inability to make their coalitions truly comprehensive in both their membership and the issues addressed.¹³ Across centuries, there have been persistent weaknesses in the attempts of the strongest regional and global powers to guarantee the peace. Based on these flaws in past peacemaking efforts, Holsti has identified eight requirements for the creation of a stable international order:

1. There must be a “system of governance.” This does not necessarily imply formal institutions. Rather, it means that “some or all actors, or an agency acting on their behalf, must be able to make decisions on what constitutes tolerable foreign-policy behavior, identify major transgressions of rules and norms, and be prepared to act jointly to enforce them.”

2. The order must be *legitimate*: “The peace settlement that establishes . . . the foundations for the postwar order should

not create the breeding ground for a new war to overturn the results of the previous conflict . . . Principles of justice . . . have to be incorporated.”

3. The international system must assimilate those actors (non-state groups as well as nation-states) that may perceive themselves to be outside the prevailing order. Assimilation is closely related to legitimacy: “The purpose of assimilation is to demonstrate that the gains of living within the system . . . outweigh the potential advantages of seeking to destroy or dominate it.”

4. There should be a “deterrent system” put in place to deter aggression or hostile actions that would undermine the new order. Of course, the concept of deterrence is key to U.S. global and regional strategies and is also practiced by the militaries of developing states such as Iran or Israel. However, in Holsti’s systemic conception, deterrence should ideally be seen as an integral part of the multilateral order, not as the policy of one state against another on a bilateral basis.

5. “The system of governance should include procedures and institutions for identifying, monitoring, managing and resolving major conflicts between members of the system.” However, it is not enough for such procedures simply to exist; they must be fully and consistently used: “The norms of the system include the presumption that states in conflict would employ the various facilities; *non-use would imply aggressive intent*” (emphasis added).

6. “Those who design the order should develop and foster strong norms against the use of force and carefully articulate those circumstances in which it might be justified.”

7. There must be “procedures for

peaceful change.” According to Holsti, “change is a constant of social, economic and political life,” and therefore constitutes “one of the most difficult problems in international relations.” Unfortunately, “few agreements have incorporated methods . . . for reviewing settlement terms, for raising new grievances, in general for adjusting commitments and responsibilities to new social, economic, demographic or diplomatic conditions.”

8. The new international order must anticipate the rise of future political and social issues that could lay the ground for armed conflicts. According to Holsti, the historical record shows that “all the great peace settlements failed in one important respect. The architects of peace were backward-looking.”¹⁴

Why would either strong or weak states want to enter into such agreements? Historian G. John Ikenberry has argued that strong states, or “hegemons,” should agree voluntarily to institutional constraints on their power and preferences – that is, they should construct legal or tacit agreements that purposely limit their “returns to power.”¹⁵ First, it is advantageous for the strongest states; they can use their asymmetric power advantage to indefinitely lock in the benefits accruing from a favorable post-war balance. The cooperative institutions and pattern of relationships created after a major conflict would ensure a “high rate of return” on the hegemon’s diplomatic, military and economic post-war investments long after the decline of its actual economic and military capabilities. Further, if the weaker states were to agree to a set process and abide by the decisions reached through the new arrangement, this would save the hegemon the increasing

costs of policing the new post-war order. Essentially, the hegemon would no longer be obliged to react to every crisis with costly military solutions.

Second, after a war has demolished the old order, weaker states have an incentive to lock in commitments by the strongest actors in order to reduce uncertainties about the stronger states’ ultimate intentions. In effect, they agree to an asymmetric set of mutual gains that favor the stronger powers in exchange for some reasonable assurance that the weaker states’ sovereignty and national interests will be respected and that future agreements will be the product of norms and rules as well as the power balance.

Thus, both parties would seek to minimize uncertainties about future instabilities and disagreements by constructing a process-based framework. This framework would then set parameters on methods and solutions for disputes, thereby reducing uncertainty to a level where the arrangement is attractive to both parties, but not stipulating exact formulas for every issue. The success of the process would gradually engender trust between parties and in the process itself. Instead of immediate advantage, the strongest powers would seek policy outcomes that are moderated by rule-based practices (and perhaps even formal institutions) so that the payoffs are maximized over time. In Ikenberry’s conception, there are no permanent winners or losers; every actor is assured some limited return on its investment. Naked advantage is traded for stability and predictability which will, over time, grant higher payoffs to both the strong and the weak than if they left the outcome to the power balance alone.¹⁶

SECURITY PRACTICES

In the past, the United States has focused almost completely on building up strong local allies (pillars) to dominate the region without taking account of the domestic side of security in the Gulf. In the 1970s, the United States relied on a strategy of “local hegemony” – support for the Saudi Arabian monarchy and the shah of Iran. This strategy failed when the Iranian coup of 1979 ejected the shah from power, and later when the rise of transnational terror groups with Saudi citizens as active members resulted in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Both of these failures were brought about in large part by domestic developments within Iran and Saudi Arabia.¹⁷

In the 1980s, the United States tried to create a pure balance of power to keep the peace. This included U.S. intelligence and financial aid to Iraq in its war with Iran, which kept both countries from growing too powerful and thereby provided immediate security to neighboring Arab regimes. However, this strategy allowed Iraq to build up offensive military power and turned a blind eye to the human-rights transgressions of Saddam Hussein as well as to his use of chemical weapons against Iran.¹⁸

After the war with Saddam Hussein in 1991, Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton created and maintained a multilateral security framework known as the Madrid process. Under this umbrella fell individual “baskets” of issues, including the Oslo peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, separate multinational talks on limiting conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction (the Arms Control and Regional Security or ACRS process), and concurrent multilateral talks

on “soft” security issues such as environmental degradation, economic development and water sharing.

While comprehensive and ambitious in scope, the Madrid process had several flaws. First, the United States relied completely on a selectively multilateral approach of collective security or a partial collection of friends and allies who were counted on to provide security for the entire region, despite the fact that some key countries (Syria, Iran) were excluded. As expressed by one former official at a June 2003 U.S. workshop, “We fell in love with our coalition. Everything was based on the [anti-Iraq] coalition.” This led to the systematic exclusion of key actors, which undermined a true region-wide solution.¹⁹

Second, there was no consistent political strategy for the Gulf sub-region alongside military strategy and tactics within the Gulf. This was in large part due to an awkward and politically non-viable fusion of Levant security with Gulf security. There was an over-dependence on the political goal of reaching a comprehensive and final peace between the Israelis and Palestinians as the answer to all problems in the Gulf as well as the Levant. The Israeli-Palestinian peace talks drove everything else. To the extent that the Gulf region has its own distinct geopolitical realities, it was unrealistic to reduce all political questions to that one dimension.

In practice, U.S. decision makers pursued a purely military definition of the containment and deterrence of Iraq and Iran in the Gulf, relying on military tools rather than a political framework to bring comprehensive peace to the region. There was a failure to build an order based upon common principles, norms, expectations, institutions and the rule of law. This was in

stark contrast to regional security in Europe during and after the Cold War, in which the military alliance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) existed alongside extremely strong and inclusive political and economic arrangements. After World War II, there was the Marshall Plan for Europe, while after the defeat of Iraq in 1991, there were just bilateral defense arrangements. This resulted in the security dependency of Arab monarchies on the United States, as opposed to security interdependence among the regional states themselves. Further, there was a general lack of appreciation of the importance of domestic factors as a prominent component of Gulf leaders' threat perceptions and "security."

Underlying all of these structural problems with the Madrid process was a mistaken assumption that authoritarian regimes in Iran and Iraq could be brought down through isolation and economic strangulation. Saddam Hussein and Iranian clerics were able to stay in power indefinitely despite substantial U.S. pressure on both governments.

Finally, even on the military side, there was only a partial accomplishment of primary goals. The Joint Staff in the Pentagon outlined three main goals, but only one was successfully met because it was relatively easy to accomplish. According to one former official with Central Command planning experience during the first Clinton administration, the three goals were 1) improving rapid U.S. deployment capabilities through bilateral defense-cooperation agreements, including the pursuit of heavy-lift capacity for quicker deployment and more flexible mobility within the region; 2) strengthening local defense capabilities of GCC states; and 3)

promoting intra-GCC cooperation and inter-agency cooperation between states. Unfortunately, only the first goal was consistently improved, with results that were seen in the second war against Iraq. Other goals were only partially met. There were great efforts to expand the indigenous capabilities of Saudi Arabia, but despite some early positive results, the training rates and equipment upkeep for Saudi Arabia's military have atrophied or declined. The UAE has a rapidly expanding air force, but it is not integrated into the GCC as a true collective good. Kuwait is the primary example in which there was "some progress" toward strengthening ground capabilities.²⁰

In part due to these failures in U.S. policy and in part due to inherent regional geopolitical dynamics, traditional notions of Realpolitik continue to inform the dominant thinking and practice among Gulf states. Regional governments continue to rely on outsiders to ensure a rough balance of power to protect their sovereignty, domestic identity and regime security.²¹ Extensive contributions from external powers (the United States, China, Russia) have been used to construct and maintain this balance of power. These contributions have sometimes taken the form of a proxy balance of power via importation of weapons technology (missiles to Iran, advanced conventional weapons to GCC states), while in other instances, it has taken the form of actual U.S. military deployments or "forward defense" measures.

In short, the preferred form of coalition for insuring stability and security seems to be a two-party coalition across regions – bilateral agreements with an outside power – rather than a multilateral coalition within the region. Furthermore, these two-party

coalitions are based upon either traditional Realpolitik or hegemonic logic, relying as they do on the build-up of surplus military power and the implicit threat of external intervention to fend off larger neighbors in the event of a crisis.²²

Regional multilateralism plays a decidedly secondary role in the definition of the Gulf security environment.²³ While the GCC is a crucial multilateral organization, it may be too rife with internal disagreement and too exclusionary to provide a firm basis for a new regional-security framework. First, it is not constructed in a way that allows for easy expansion, as is the case with European organizations. Its strong suit is also its limitation: it is based on Arab monarchies with roughly similar domestic structures and foreign policies. All GCC states share similar interactions with the United States (including bilateral defense agreements); similar fears of Islamic fundamentalist actors (both transnationally and domestically); broad agreement that intra-GCC trade should increase; and similar political alignments with other states inside and outside the Gulf (including a common focus on the importance of the Israeli-Palestinian question). It is not likely that these factors can provide a foundation for expanding the organization to include states such as Iraq, Iran and Turkey.²⁴

Moreover, despite their commonalities, GCC states have often acquired weaponry to balance and deter each other as much as common external enemies, or to use as bargaining leverage within the organization. Integration of capabilities remains poor, and military options do not seem connected to a collective, overarching political goal, as was the case with NATO in Europe during the Cold War. Defense expenditures often seem to be a way for the smaller GCC

states to strengthen themselves vis-à-vis their largest member, Saudi Arabia. At most, the GCC states have individually established a credible deterrent toward each other and toward Iran, but not toward other potential enemies. Overall, the GCC is a net consumer of security from the United States rather than a net producer.²⁵

Finally, it is questionable whether the state-building goals of the relatively new nations in the Gulf could be reconciled with membership in a strong multilateral security organization. Inevitably, joining such an organization involves giving up some level of sovereignty over diplomatic, economic and military policy options, and it involves a great deal of liberalization and transparency. But Gulf states are leery of joining a wider cooperative effort that would give each member the power to critique and influence the domestic issues of other members. Control over information, finance and defense options can be integral to strengthening the state and its evolving sovereign identity.²⁶ In general, the relatively weak political base and nascent sense of state identity that characterize Arab governments in the Gulf have until now mitigated efforts to cooperate more productively in either the military or economic spheres of foreign policy through a more efficient, multilateral division of labor. Economic as well as military levers are still largely within the control of the sovereign elite, and the business communities are too integrated within the halls of power to supply a truly independent voice for stronger ties between economies. The governments have not felt adequately established domestically to give over a significant portion of their hard-won sovereign control of state economic and military resources to a new regional

institution or joint plan for action. After all, such an institution might eventually base its legitimacy on a transnational Arab identity not completely under the control of any one country's sovereign elite.²⁷

Meanwhile, the reliance of individual Arab monarchies on outside powers has substantial benefits for the cooperating partners at the regional level: strong defense and economic links that give the regional partner more strength and flexibility in dealing with its own neighbors (especially for the smaller states when dealing with large nations such as Iran and Saudi Arabia). Furthermore, given the relative shortage of technological and industrial capabilities among many Middle East states – and in some cases, shortages of population relative to defense needs – the maintenance of a rough balance of power for conflict management would probably be impossible without substantial contributions by external powers.²⁸

A factor that strongly supports this web of purely bilateral relationships is U.S. hegemonic power within the region. Any future Gulf security equation will depend a great deal on U.S. actions. While this could work to the benefit of a qualitatively new framework, it could easily become an inhibiting factor. If the United States can get almost anything it wants through bilateral action and agreements (economically as well as militarily), why spend large amounts of political or financial capital to build a multilateral framework that is more dependent on the actions of regional actors themselves?

In fact, it is not clear that the United States even *wants* such multilateral local cooperation in the economic realm. It is manifestly in the U.S. interest (and in the interest of the rest of the global economy)

to have very low oil prices. Cooperation within the region would result in more economic power, as has been seen with the growth of the EU in Europe. While the United States wanted a simultaneous growth of economic and military power in Western Europe – a strong EU was promoted alongside a strong NATO – it has potentially divergent goals in the Gulf. And without greater economic interaction and cooperation, is there actually a basis for stronger security interactions among Gulf States? Can one be pursued without the other? Is the United States willing to allow both agendas to go forward, even if it means higher oil prices?²⁹

Despite these difficulties with constructing a new multilateral Gulf framework for security, however, there is ample reason to test new multilateral policy options alongside traditional bilateral ties. The evolving reliance on bilateral coalitions with external powers creates several paradoxes and long-term instabilities:

1. They contribute to domestic instabilities by demonstrating the inability of the government to provide for its own defense indigenously, thereby giving the impression of dependence on neo-imperial powers,³⁰

2. The contributions of outside powers may obviate the need for regional governments to form common defense doctrines, weapons programs and training, thereby feeding into an existing policy inertia that favors bilateral rather than multilateral agreements for defense,³¹

3. These contributions may obviate the need for cooperation in general, because individual states receiving outside military aid (in whatever form) may hope that they can achieve their desired foreign objectives through securing relative advantage over an opponent rather than through compro-

mise and reassurance;

4. The outside contributions may bring with them the particular ideological value systems and associated foreign-policy objectives of the foreign power making the contribution, which includes the effects of systemic competition between Great Powers such as the United States, China and Russia.³² U.S. disagreements with China over Taiwan could easily lead to uncooperative practices vis-à-vis the Middle East, especially the Gulf subregion, where China and Russia see aid to Iran as a form of larger global competition with the United States.

5. The contributions may bring with them the domestic political interests and economic objectives of the outside powers: for instance, the need of European powers, Russia, and the United States to keep their high-tech arms industries maintained at a level that allows them to satisfy domestic lobbies and job seekers;³³

6. Finally, the security dilemma may overwhelm the stabilizing aspects of the balance of power. What one side sees as defensively oriented deterrent threats and actions (such as weapons purchases and regional alliances) may be viewed as offensive by the competitor. This is most starkly seen in the Israeli perceptions of its nuclear deterrent as an inherently defensive capability, which directly contradicts the prevailing negative Arab and Iranian perceptions of that same capability. The dynamic of conflicting, contradictory perceptions is also seen in Iranian views of several recent trends such as the Israeli-Turkish alliance, large U.S. arms transfers to GCC states, and U.S. military bases in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Arab Gulf. Both Iran and Israel believe that their own missile capabilities are

inherently defensive, while the capabilities of the other are viewed as inherently offensive. Finally, there is an inherent security dilemma between the large and small Gulf states. As summarized by one group of prominent experts,

[T]he Gulf region lacks a systematic way for Iran and Iraq – the two northern powers – to interact with the rest of the Gulf states. Moreover, no process now exists through which Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia – the Gulf’s Big Three – can negotiate the terms of their political and military relationships without potentially exacerbating the security dilemma in one or more capitals. . . . Similarly, no forum exists that affords the smaller Gulf states . . . a voice in security affairs thus lessening their chance of being bullied by their larger neighbors.³⁴

In sum, it is readily apparent that the prevailing Gulf practices of selective multilateralism, bilateralism and unilateralism do not meet all eight conditions for a stable system of conflict management outlined by Holsti, nor do they reflect Ikenberry’s argument for an institutional quid pro quo between the strong and the weak. The reason for this is simple: the types of coalitions currently favored by leading nation-states are inherently exclusionary. Whether one is looking at selective multilateralism (GCC states together with the United States), bilateralism (U.S.-Israel, U.S. and individual Gulf monarchies) or pure hegemonic unilateralism, the end result is the systematic exclusion of major state and non-state actors from the prevailing security order. This exclusion takes place both economi-

cally (through sanctions) and militarily (through arms sales and deterrent threats on behalf of friends and allies against their adversaries). It is hard to imagine how an exclusionary system can meet Holsti's conditions of legitimacy, assimilation, peaceful change, consensus on the use of force or conflict resolution between disputants. If some states are selectively allied against other states, and vice versa, and the entire purpose of a coalition is defined by being opposed to someone else, how is it possible for that coalition to construct a system that is seen as legitimate by all, and that assimilates all actors' major interests?

A NEW AGENDA

Whether or not a hegemonic approach is taken by the United States towards the region, it will inevitably be pulled in the direction of providing surplus military, diplomatic and economic power to undergird a new set of relationships that are sustainable and durable. However, decision makers must be more cognizant of the overarching purpose of diplomatic engagement between actors with contradictory national interests. Is engagement meant to reassure a competitor through promises, deter and balance a competitor through defensive threats, or compel a competitor to alter its behavior through the use of offensive threats?

There is a laundry list of obstacles to the construction of a cooperative, comprehensive and multilateral security framework based on reassurance as well as deterrence and compellance. Despite these real difficulties, current analysts favoring movement toward a concerted multilateral approach emphasize that a new cooperative framework need not compete with

existing bilateral relationships, and that the framework could be built incrementally over many years, even decades.³⁵ There could be trilateral agreements under a larger norm-based umbrella; not every instance of cooperation need cover all states that are members of the framework. Cooperation on specific issues such as drug trafficking or environmental concerns would not mandate major changes in the existing way of doing business; bilateralism and multilateralism could complement each other. Disagreements related to sovereignty concerns could still exist. The purpose of an evolving, cooperative multilateral forum would be for states to act on issues of common concern and to agree to the greatest extent possible on threat perceptions as well as opportunities for positive change, in order to maximize resources and diplomacy where a common goal exists.

Interstate relations and domestic politics in the Persian Gulf are fragile. Any security framework will ultimately depend not just on indigenous efforts, but also on substantial external contributions to help create a surrogate balance of power and interests that involves the purposeful creation of mutual interdependence among regional states. But if the outside powers were to embrace the tenets of cooperative security, then outside contributions would not consist solely of the provision of weaponry, forward basing or rapid-deployment capabilities to provide a rough military balance. External powers would also supply credible diplomatic and political guarantees to assure state leaders that cooperative limits on the use of power – alongside regional measures to enhance their levels of mutual security dependence – will ultimately increase their security

over the long haul. Furthermore, military instruments would have to be tailored in a way that does not impede a gradual movement toward closer security ties within the region itself. For instance, organizations such as the GCC could be empowered through concrete operational steps to increase their capacity and independence vis-à-vis U.S. forces, or through regional confidence-building measures on a bilateral or multilateral basis with previously excluded states such as Iran.³⁶

Ideally, the United States would shape its policies so as to avoid the creation of new animosities and perceptions of injustice, inequity and a general sense of illegitimacy within the region. For any surrogate balance to be truly sustainable, diplomatic initiatives, economic transactions and aid, and military agreements (arms sales, joint maneuvers, deployments) would have to be crafted so as to create a real sense of mutual gain.³⁷

As the post-war order continues to take shape, the role of dialogue within the region could be key to constructing a new Persian Gulf system of conflict management. First, there is a need to develop networks of security expertise among analysts and officials in the region. Second, consensus will be required around security goals, principles and norms by as many actors as possible within the region, whatever their different national interests may be.³⁸ In furthering these goals, U.S. policy could play an important catalytic role, although Track II initiatives could be useful in filling the vacuum where official dialogue does not take place. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are in a position to create and support opportunities for dialogue that might not otherwise exist. They, along with many multinational

corporations, often have a positive presence on the ground in countries whose populations are otherwise skeptical of U.S. agencies or agents. The long-term commitment of such organizations and companies to regional security, economic growth and humanitarian assistance, regardless of ongoing conflict, has allowed important relationships to develop.³⁹

In sum, there are two major contending approaches to Gulf security: U.S. hegemony and principled multilateralism. If the United States were to adopt the Bush administration's approach, Gulf relations would be patterned along the following lines:

- Gulf security would be exclusionary, with U.S. "friends and allies" on one side, and U.S. enemies such as Iran on the other. The United States would make a decision on who is excluded, based on factors such as internal regime structure, support of terrorism and WMD aspirations.
- Confidence-building measures in the military realm (such as arms limitations, cooperative military exercises or transparency on arms buildups) would only apply to friends and allies.
- The ultimate goal would be to target those "rogue" states outside the established order, isolate them, and bring about a "regime conversion" or regime change.
- The legitimate right to self-defense would not be recognized for all actors, but only for those who agree with U.S. policy approaches and the U.S. definition of security threats.
- WMD would not be viewed as dangerous in and of themselves. Rather, the character of the state obtaining WMD would be the primary criterion for counterproliferation efforts. Implicitly, Israel would not be the target of nonprolif-

eration efforts, and “friends” next door to the Gulf, such as Pakistan and India, would not be pressured to moderate their nuclear behavior because of the potentially negative effects of their nuclear arsenals and missile programs on Gulf states’ security.

- Arab friends and allies would not base security on their own indigenous capabilities but rather on continued dependence on the United States as an outside power, through bilateral agreements.

The hegemonic strategy does not deviate from U.S. policies in previous periods and thus risks more policy failure. Bilateral ties, by themselves, will neither solve outstanding political conflicts nor prevent new conflicts from arising among the Gulf states. In fact, dependence on the United States is only going to increase the domestic pressures against current Arab regimes.

In stark contrast to the approach of hegemony, a principled multilateral approach to Gulf security would have the following attributes:

- Gulf security would be inclusive. Even if Iran were not integrated into the collective military structure of U.S. allies, Iran would still be included through myriad economic or security ties, as opportunities for common action arose.
- Gulf security would be built on a rule-based order in which universal principles would apply to all actors in the Gulf, including the United States.
- There would be basic recognition of the inherent right to legitimate measures for self-defense on the part of all states in

the region, whether or not the United States considered those states to be friends or allies. Thus, Iran’s right to self-defense, including the maintenance of a viable military, would be recognized and allowed. The demand side of WMD proliferation would be addressed, because every actor’s security concerns would be taken into account.

- The goal would not be to end competition through regime change, but rather to manage competition between all governments as they are currently constituted.

- WMD would be viewed as a general problem requiring equal rules and constraints that apply to all parties, including the United States, Israel, Pakistan and India.

In general, the central assumption of the strategy of principled multilateralism is that security is sought with other states, rather than against them, and that domestic developments in the Gulf will follow a more beneficial course if all states are gradually intertwined in a web of military and economic agreements that create strong interdependence. Time will tell whether the United States and its global and regional partners have the foresight to adopt this revolutionary strategy for providing security in the Gulf in the twenty-first century. Whatever approach is adopted, a genuinely new set of policies for security and prosperity in the region is desperately needed – before the status quo practice of Realpolitik bilateralism breaks down once again, with predictably negative results.

¹ The Stanley Foundation, “Assessing Alternative Frameworks for Gulf Security,” taken from non-attributed rapporteur’s notes for the conference workshop, Airlie House Conference Center, Warrenton, Virginia, June 2003. This workshop involved U.S. and Canadian Middle East experts and former officials.

² G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 3-7, 17, 37-44.

³ Ibid., pp. 17, 52-69.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 52-69.

⁵ Evan Luard, *War in International Society: A Study in International Sociology* (Yale University Press, 1987).

⁶ For a comparison of different periods of warfare and order in Europe since 1618, see Kalevi J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648-1989* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁷ Ibid., pp. 138-174.

⁸ Ikenberry, pp. 26-29.

⁹ For a full, detailed description of the military, technological and defense aspects of the U.S. counterproliferation approach, see "Program Details" of the Stanley Foundation's Strategies for National Security Program, <http://sns.stanleyfoundation.org/details.html>.

¹⁰ Janne Nolan, ed., *Global Engagement: Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century* (Brookings Institution Press, 1994). See <http://www.brook.edu/press/books/GLOBalen.htm> for more details.

¹¹ Nolan, pp. 65-130.

¹² Ikenberry, pp. 43, 46-47.

¹³ Holsti, op. cit.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 336-344.

¹⁵ Ikenberry, op. cit.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 5, 50-75.

¹⁷ The Stanley Foundation, op. cit.

¹⁸ Ibid.; see also Samantha Powers, *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide* (HarperCollins Perennial Press, 2003).

¹⁹ The Stanley Foundation, op. cit.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See, for instance, F. Gregory Gause III, "The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia," *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, eds. Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), pp. 193-212, on Saudi Arabian strategy; and Sean Foley, "What Wealth Cannot Buy: UAE Security at the Turn of the 21st Century," *Crises in the Contemporary Persian Gulf*, ed. Barry Rubin (Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 33-74, on the strategy of the United Arab Emirates.

²² Judith Yaphe, "Gulf Security Perceptions and Strategies," *The United States and the Persian Gulf: Reshaping Security Strategy for the Post-Containment Era*, ed. Richard Sokolsky (National Defense University Press, 2003), pp. 37-40.

²³ Charles Tripp, "Regional Organizations in the Arab Middle East," *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organizations and International Order*, eds. Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 301-307.

²⁴ The Stanley Foundation, op. cit.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Tripp, pp. 301-307; Bahgat Korany, "The Arab World and the New Balance of Power in the New Middle East," *Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration*, ed. Michael C. Hudson (Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 35-59; and Paul Noble, "The Prospects for Arab Cooperation in a Changing Regional and Global System," *Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration*, ed. Michael C. Hudson (Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 60-91.

²⁸ See, for instance, Foley, op. cit.

²⁹ The Stanley Foundation, op. cit.

³⁰ Daniel L. Byman and John R. Wise, *The Persian Gulf in the Coming Decade: Trends, Threats, and Opportunities*, prepared as part of Project Air Force (RAND Corporation, 2002), pp. xvi, 53-55; and Richard Sokolsky and Eugene B. Rumer, "The Role of Outside Powers," *The United States and the Persian Gulf: Reshaping Security Strategy for the Post-Containment Era*, ed. Richard Sokolsky (National Defense University Press, 2003), pp. 154-155.

³¹ Sokolsky and Rumer, pp. 151-153; and James A. Russell, "Searching for a Post-Saddam Regional-Security Architecture," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 2003.

³² Sokolsky and Rumer, pp. 117-143; and Foley, op. cit.

³³ Gerald Steinberg, "The Middle East and the Persian Gulf: An Israeli Perspective," *Cascade of Arms*:

Managing Conventional Weapons Proliferation, ed. Andrew J. Pierre (Brookings Institution Press, 1997), pp. 227-252.

³⁴ Joseph McMillan, Richard Sokolsky and Andrew C. Winner, "Toward a New Regional-Security Architecture," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Summer 2003, pp. 164-165.

³⁵ See, for instance, the arguments of Michael Yaffe and Craig Dunkerley in this volume.

³⁶ Russell, op. cit.; Richard Sokolsky and Joseph McMillan, "Policy Implications and Recommendations," *The United States and the Persian Gulf: Reshaping Security Strategy for the Post-Containment Era*, ed. Richard Sokolsky (National Defense University Press, 2003), pp. 145-158; and McMillan, Sokolsky and Winner, pp. 166-173.

³⁷ For detailed recommendations about future defense postures and initiatives, including options for dealing with Iran, see Sokolsky and McMillan, op. cit.; Joseph McMillan, "U.S. Interests and Objectives," *The United States and the Persian Gulf: Reshaping Security Strategy for the Post-Containment Era*, ed. Richard Sokolsky (National Defense University Press, 2003), pp. 9-36; Yaffe, op. cit.; and Russell, op. cit.

³⁸ The Stanley Foundation, Atlantic Council of the United States, Middle East Institute and Middle East Policy Council, eds., "Future Frameworks for Gulf Security," *Challenges and Choices in the Gulf: A Congressional Briefing Series* policy brief #11 (The Stanley Foundation, May 2003).

³⁹ For example, one NGO, Search for Common Ground, has created the NBC (Nuclear, Biological and Chemical) Preparedness Project and formed a working group of security analysts from the Gulf region utilizing an analytical framework of confidence-building measures to create shared agreements on WMD threats.