

*** DRAFT WORKSHOP PAPER ***

**Assessing Alternative Security Frameworks for the Persian Gulf:
Building a Stable Coalition for Conflict Management**

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The opinions in this article are solely those of Michael Kraig as an independent security analyst and do not reflect the positions or programs of the Stanley Foundation.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a firm conceptual and analytical foundation for upcoming workshop discussions on the future shape of security arrangements in the Persian Gulf sub-region. Toward this end, 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 of thought (the latter of which is sometimes also referred to as “liberal internationalism,” “liberal institutionalism,” or “Constitutionalism”). I then outline various challenges in applying the frameworks to the Persian 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 eternal questions about the ways in which states use power (or threaten to use it); the foreign policy circumstances in which power is used; the ends (values, goals) toward which power is utilized; and possible limits on the buildup of surplus military power (Ikenberry, 2001, 3-7, 17, and 37-44). 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, develop its economy and society without undue interference from others, and prosper over time in a way that allows for increased economic and political strength *without* at the same time increasing the level of threat toward one’s neighbors. In this sense, the frameworks described in this paper are on a higher plane of abstraction than defense strategy, military deployments, or economic

strategy. They set a foundation that constrains and shapes defense and economic policy options, hopefully allowing state leaders to choose a coherent set of policies over time that allow for peaceful national growth and prosperity.

In short, all three frameworks posit different solutions to the security dilemma – that eternal problem in international affairs wherein one state’s diplomatic, political, military, and cultural growth may unduly threaten its neighbors, perhaps leading to fears of domination and even attack. The desired end-state of all three schools of thought is roughly the same: a state of stable and predictable relations that would allow all states within the system to allocate their energies and resources towards improving the basic lifestyles of their own citizens, as opposed to allocating most of their surplus economic and human capital toward security measures that at best will protect the existing domestic order – essentially locking citizens into their current state of domestic development and arresting chances for positive growth over time.

In meeting these ends, the frameworks also address the question of legitimacy and authority: What constitutes the lawful versus unlawful use of power, whether that power is diplomatic, economic, or military in nature? 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 because if some prominent states (or even some sub-national groups) believe that the prevailing framework for security is purposefully disadvantageous for them, and purposefully targets their beliefs, values, and economic position for destruction, these targeted actors will of course find ways over time to subvert, weaken, and even destroy the framework of security that they find threatening, ultimately undermining the chances for peaceful development for all states within the region (Ikenberry, 2001, 17 and 52-69)

Hence, legitimacy and authority are intimately connected to questions of sustainability and durability. If a security framework is to last for any meaningful period of time, it must be supported by most (if not all) actors affected by that framework (Ikenberry, 2001, 52-69). Thus, the gains achieved through the creation of a security framework must, to a certain extent, be seen as *mutual gains*. In turn, how widely this net of mutual gains is cast, and how equitably the gains are distributed, will depend on the geopolitical circumstances of the region in question, and whether the ideological, economic, and military circumstances of a given region are amenable to sharing the gains of growth on a positive-sum rather than zero-sum basis.

Two caveats. First, this paper does not assume that any of the three frameworks are automatically applicable to the Persian Gulf. Whether or not any of them can be applied reasonably well to the Gulf sub-region is a question best left for workshop discussions.

Second, the purpose of this paper is not to advance a particular set of policy recommendations or espouse a given ideology. Stanley Foundation publications are based upon open and informal discussion among experts and policymakers, and so this DRAFT analytical piece is simply meant to be a primer for discussions. Any final recommendations or findings of this project will be based upon the workshop discussions themselves.

Three Alternative Frameworks for Persian Gulf Security

This section outlines the 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. It describes the basic operating assumptions of each school of thought, and it briefly sets out the conditions required for each framework to succeed in stabilizing interstate relations over the long-term.

First, the key to the traditional *Realpolitik* school is that diplomacy is based upon a foundation of 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. Alliances and friendships (and enemies) are not defined on a permanent basis. True balance-of-power logic generally does not recognize such a concept as “pure enemy” or “pure friend;” rather, 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 (temporarily) with another one, according to the dictates of the moment.

Supporters of this power-based, competitive framework for security rarely make comparisons between today’s world and the period of European interstate politics out of which most Realist tenets have come. This is perhaps the largest flaw of the framework, because *Realpolitik* foreign policy practices were perfected during the period of nation-state development in Europe prior to the French Revolution, from 1648-1789. During this period, most competition was connected in some way to expansion and strengthening of

the state, and 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 of paid mercenaries, with truces, alliances, cease-fires, and so on being conducted completely at the “top” of the leadership chain and based on legalistic, written documents. The brutality of war was circumscribed by commonly-accepted norms of diplomatic and military behavior, and when central leaders decided it was best to drop out of an alliances, or call a truce to the detriment of one’s allies, or even switch sides and declare war on one’s own “friends,” the new policy generally took hold immediately without negative pressures from factions or groups within one’s own territory. This reality has led one former diplomat and historian to summarize the entire period as “The Age of Sovereignty” (see Luard, 1986).

In short, the methodology of conflict management was one of competing military threats between shifting alliances, which were used to contain and influence one’s neighbors. Through the notion of a balance of power, European monarchies managed to keep the expansionist competition manageable for most of this period. However, after the French Revolution, the aristocracy was weakened and eventually the nationalist aspirations of the developing political systems came to blows over conflicting state ideologies and civil cultures. Once the diverging political practices and ideologies of entire societies came into the picture (as was the case in the earlier Protestant-Catholic wars of 1618-38), the relatively constrained nature of balance of power politics was slowly undermined and Europe again succumbed to deadly internecine warfare in the early 20th century (see Holsti, 1991, for a comparison of different periods of warfare and order in Europe since 1618).

The basic reason for this breakdown of traditional *Realpolitik* was that the probability of mutual misperceptions dramatically increased once starkly different ideological and value systems began to emerge within contending nation-states. According to the dictates of the security dilemma, instability and conflict is often inevitable when one side’s defensive actions begin to look offensive to its main competitor(s). The chances for such misperceptions are rife when defensive actions are viewed through the prism of conflicting ideologies. This is further exacerbated when states seek to secure relative advantage (rather than pure defense) against 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 an immoral society when one can ensure security through weakening or eliminating the source of conflicting values?

Finally, the growth of sub-national or transnational actors in the 19th 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. WW I, for instance, was preceded by a dramatic escalation in terrorist activity on the European continent based upon ideologies or cultures that did not conform to state boundaries. This reality severely aggravated interstate competition and ultimately undermined power balancing as a conflict management tool between the competing Great Powers (Holsti, 1991, 138-174).

Thus, historically, traditional balance-of-power methods of conflict management seem to work best when:

- ⌘ Every state shares some degree of common values and interests, and thus have similar definitions of national security and stability;
- ⌘ Every state trusts their opponents not to wreck the system as a whole in the name of spreading a particular system of values;
- ⌘ Every state respects 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 between competing actors as they take actions to maintain a balance of power; and
- ⌘ There is a high degree of stability in the internal or domestic politics of states, such that rapid and radical changes in values and ideologies do not change the foreign policy actions of a state in ways that undermine the international balance of power.

A second strategy for providing a new regional security framework is *the hegemonic approach to security*, based on the victory of one set of states' interests over others and the operational use of military and economic instruments for *compellance* as well as deterrence (Ikenberry, 2001, 26-29). 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 (precision-guided and more lethal conventional munitions alongside the existing nuclear arsenal); and new, more pro-active methods of defense that rely on preemptive strikes as well as reactive measures. The perfection of defense, deterrence, and preemptive policy options has become the major goal of the US national security planning community.¹

In some ways, the counterproliferation vision of the world is much like that of 18th or 19th century mercantilist diplomacy. Traditional alliances will ensure collective security for “friends and allies” against unfriendly enemies, while at the same time protecting trade routes, international financial holdings, and technological advances from disturbance or exploitation by enemies. Under this vision of global politics, globalization of the free market is selective, insofar as “dual-use” commercial advances with military applications are to be uniformly denied to developing countries that may use them to gain political strength or military power. Security is therefore seen in cooperative, multilateral, or mutual terms *only in the sense of friends and allies*, who band together in their economic and military relations to defend against intractable 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 counterproliferation or competitive approach views diplomatic relations largely in terms of *bilateral and selectively multilateral* relationships, i.e., in terms of 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, who receive preferential US aid, trade relationships, military technology-sharing arrangements, and even large sales of off-the-shelf high-technology military items.² Technological diffusion and development are seen

¹ For a full, detailed description of the military, technological, and defense aspects of the US counterproliferation approach, see “Program Details” of the Stanley Foundation’s Strategies for National Security Program, <http://sns.stanleyfoundation.org/details.html>.

² For example, the United Arab Emirates are buying the most advanced version of the F-16 from US contractors—a version so advanced that the US Air Force and Navy have yet to buy it for themselves.

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 a deterrence and balance of power, a compellance/counterproliferation strategy based upon hegemony relies on both explicit and implicit threats. However, the goal of such threats is not to establish a roughly equal balance among all sovereign actors but rather is based upon the solidification of 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, and there is no attempt to reconcile interests through a partial redefinition of goals that meets the minimum, core requirements of each actor.

Finally, the *cooperative security* school of thought incorporates far different assumptions about world politics and the place of the stronger powers within it. The central idea is that all nation-states seeking to lend certainty, predictability, and stability to their security situations will find greater relative security through mutual obligations to limit their military capabilities rather than through unilateral or allied attempts to gain dominance. Within this approach, 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 exact legal and technical constraints on behavior as friends, despite the existence of substantial mutual suspicions and mistrust. It is also assumed that these legal and technical constraints will be mutually advantageous and mutually 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* (Nolan et. al., 1994).³ 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 that of deterrence: “Unlike deterrence...the key to reassurance is a reliable normative and institutional structure.... It requires an ability to

Another pertinent example is the Israeli Arrow missile defense system, which was co-developed with the US Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO) for use against Syrian, Iranian, and Iraqi missiles.

³ See <http://www.brook.edu/press/books/GLOBalen.HTM> for more details.

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” (Nolan et al., 1994, 65-130).

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 believes 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;

- €# Meanwhile, the more recent US strategic evolution can be thought of as an imbalance of power and interests (hegemony) based upon both offensive (compellent) and defensive (deterrent) threats used in conjunction with one another;
- €# and finally, the relatively recent cooperative model can be thought of as a balance of interests based upon mutual reassurance.

As it happens, two of these strategies have a great deal in common with each other: the traditional, balance-of-power strategy is extremely similar to the cooperative security strategy due to each school's insistence on a *balance of interests*; they differ, however, in their preferred form of guaranteeing this balance. The *Realpolitik* school 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 (Ikenberry, 2001, 43 and 46-47). Both of these schools, in turn, differ dramatically from the evolving US approach of hegemony, which 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. In short, the hegemonic approach assumes that the deleterious effects of competition are best addressed through the *elimination of competition itself*, that is, through the persistent weakening of those actors who harbor opposed goals, views, and values. In marked contrast, the balance-of-power and cooperative security schools both guarantee each actor that their national interests will be met at some minimal level (assuming that a balance of power does not break down, or that cooperative 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 on ordering relations will be viewed automatically with suspicion – or that once entered into, individual states will abuse the new framework to pursue their own particularistic, nationalistic goals at the expense of others. Hence, any gains that nations seek would either be positive-sum gains or they would involve jockeying for position on the margins, rather than committed attempts to undermine or subvert other parties through

internal or external means. Finally, like Realism, the cooperative security school of thought implicitly assumes that parties to the agreement will have reasonably set policy preferences over time, and that they are therefore domestically stable (or at least immune to wholesale revolution). After all, if entire state identities 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 this type of radical change in policy preferences.

Existing Security Practices in the Region

Traditional notions of *Realpolitik* inform the dominant thinking and practice among Persian Gulf states today. Regional governments have relied on outside powers to ensure a rough balance of power to protect their concerns over sovereignty, domestic identity, and regime security.⁴ Extensive contributions from external powers (US, China, Russia) have been utilized to construct and maintain this balance of power, whether in terms of maintaining a proxy balance through importation of weapons technology (missiles to Iran; advanced conventional weapons to GCC states) or in actual military deployments (US "forward" defense measures).

In sum: the preferred form of "coalition" for insuring stability and security seems to be a *two-party coalition across regions* – that is, bilateral agreements with, and dependence on, 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 buildup of surplus military power and the implicit threats of external intervention by a Great Power guarantor to fend off larger neighbors in the event of a crisis (Yaphe, 2003, 37-40). Regional multilateralism plays a decidedly secondary role in the definition of the Gulf security environment (Tripp, 301-307).

This reliance 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 severe shortage of technological and industrial capabilities among many Middle East states

⁴ See for instance Gause, 2002 on Saudi Arabian strategy and Foley, 2002 on the strategy of the United Arab Emirates.

– and in some cases, shortages of human 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 (see for instance Foley, 2002).

However, this evolving reliance on bilateral coalitions with external powers creates several paradoxes and policy conundrums:

- ⚡ They contribute to domestic instabilities, because they demonstrate the inability of the government in power to provide for its own defense indigenously, thereby giving the popular impression of dependence on neo-imperial outside powers (Byman and Wise, 2002, xvi and 53-55; Sokolsky and Rumer, 2003, 154-55);
- ⚡ 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 (Sokolsky and Rumer, 2002, 151-53; Russell, March 2003);
- ⚡ 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 compromise and reassurance;
- ⚡ 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 US, China, and Russia (Sokolsky and Rumer, 2003, 117-143; Foley, 2002). For instance, US disagreements with China over Taiwan could easily lead to uncooperative practices vis-à-vis the Middle East, especially the Gulf sub-region, where China and Russia see aid to Iran as a form of larger global competition with the United States.
- ⚡ 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 US to keep their high-tech arms industries maintained at a level allowing them to keep domestic lobbies and jobs intact (Steinberg, 1997);

€# 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 offensively by the competitor. This is most starkly seen in the Israeli versus Arab perceptions of the Israeli nuclear deterrent, as well as Iranian perceptions of the Israeli-Turkish bilateral alliance, the purposes and effects of US arms transfers to GCC Arab states, and the purposes of US military bases in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf. Meanwhile, 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,

“[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 (McMillan et. al., 164-65).

Can Comprehensive Multilateral Coalitions Ensure Long-Term Peace and Stability?

Given these paradoxes and policy problems, what should be the way forward? Several international theorists have argued that if leaders are concerned with the long-term picture, and not just short-term gains, they can and should construct viable multilateral coalitions that are comprehensive in nature. This recommendation is not just based upon ideals, but on history.

In an examination of armed conflicts and international order from 1648 to 1989, political scientist Kalevi Holsti (1991) 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. Across centuries, there have been major and 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, which can be applied to the Persian Gulf region:

- €# **First**, there must be a “system of governance.” This does not necessarily imply a formal set of 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.”

- €# **Second**, 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.”

- €# **Third**, the international system must *assimilate* those actors (non-state groups as well as nation-states) who 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.”

- €# **Fourth**, there should be a “deterrent system” put in place, to deter aggression or hostile actions that would undermine the new system. Of course, the concept of deterrence is key to US 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.

- €# **Fifth**, “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 to simply exist; they must be fully utilized consistently by members: “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).

¶ **Sixth**, “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.”

¶ **Seventh**, 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.”

¶ **Eighth** and finally, 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” (1991, pp. 336-344).

Why would either strong or weak states want to enter into such agreements? Historian G. John Ikenberry (2001) has argued that strong states or “hegemons” should agree voluntarily to institutional constraints on their power and preferences – that is, they should construct constitutional agreements that purposefully limit their “returns to power.” First, it is advantageous for the strongest states because they can use their highly 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 hopefully 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’s obligation to react to each and every crisis with military solutions would be replaced with less conflictual and less costly institutional 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 massive uncertainties about the stronger states' ultimate intentions – in effect, agreeing to a lopsided set of mutual gains that favors the stronger powers in exchange for some reasonable assurance that the weaker states' sovereignty and national interests will be respected, and that future agreements (whether on economic or security issues) will be the product of norms and rules as well as the power balance.

Thus, both parties would seek to minimize any uncertainties about future instabilities and disagreements by constructing a process-based framework. This framework would then set definite parameters on both allowable methods and allowable solutions to any existing and future disputes, thereby reducing uncertainty to a level where the arrangement is attractive to both parties, but at the same time not stipulating exact solutions for each and every issue at the start of the process (a practice that could sink the agreement from the beginning). Over time, the success of the process would engender trust between parties and also trust in the institutions themselves. Instead of immediate advantage, the strongest powers would seek policy outcomes that are moderated by rule-based institutions so that the policy payoffs are maximized over time, even though there may be less immediate benefit. In Ikenberry's conception, there are no permanent winners or permanent losers; instead, every actor is assured some limited returns on their mutual investments in the new institutional order. Pure, naked advantage is traded for stability and predictability that will, over time, grant higher payoffs to both the strong and the weak than if they were to leave the outcome up to anarchy and the power balance alone (Ikenberry, 2001, 5 and 50-75).

Paradoxically, this type of post-war institution building is most beneficial to the hegemon when the power disparities between the strong and weak are at their most extreme – a finding that has obvious relevance for the US position in the Persian Gulf today. The reasons for this paradox are:

- 1) The hegemon has more power to set the rules and norms, secure agreement from others, and shape their interests than it will have at any other time in the future (McMillan et. al., Summer 2003; Ikenberry, 2001, 5-7);
- 2) The hegemon has more to lose over the long-term as its power inevitably declines, and the institutions act as a form of insurance guaranteeing that the benefits of superiority will continue indefinitely (Ikenberry, 2001, 54);

- 3) The constant use of military force by the hegemon to shore up its superior position would sap its resources and inevitably lead to severe legitimacy problems that would erode its standing;
- 4) Distrust of the weaker parties is at its greatest during periods of extreme power disparity, so that absent an agreed framework for security, the weaker parties will have relatively more incentive to subvert and undermine the hegemon's superior position through "asymmetric" policy instruments such as terrorism. This latter problem is seen immediately in the examples of Iran and Syria, though it could also include other countries as politics in the Gulf evolve over time.

Or as summarized by Ikenberry,

The constant use of power—and the coercion and inducements it implies—to secure specific interests and continuously resolve conflicts is costly....It is far more effective over the long term to shape the interests and orientations of other states rather than directly shape their actions through coercion and inducementsInstitutionalized bargaining is less risky for the dominant actor than the constant expenditure of resources to quell resistance (2001, 53-54).

Barriers to Regional Cooperation

Holsti and Ikenberry present compelling arguments for the construction of security frameworks that involve some degree of multilateral agreement on policy goals and mutual constraints on power. But how do current regional practices stack up against this list of requirements for international order?

First, 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. And the reason for this is simple: the types of coalition currently favored by leading nation-states are inherently exclusionary in focus. Whether one is looking at selective multilateralism (GCC states, together with the United States), bilateralism (US-Israel, US and individual Gulf monarchies), or pure 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 economically (through sanctions) and militarily (through arms sales and deterrent threats on behalf of friends and allies, against their adversaries). And 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. Logically, 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, then how is it possible for those coalitions to construct a system that is seen as legitimate by all, and which assimilates all actor's major interests?

In particular, there are two features of the Gulf regional sub-system that could stymie various forms of cooperation, whether they are based on hard-nosed Realpolitik or "constitutional" forms of agreement: regional imbalances of power; and the difficult domestic situations of Gulf states.

The Realities of Domestic Legitimacy and State Identity in the Developing World

Since WW II, there have been two systems of interstate relations. The one that has gotten the lion's share of scholarly and practitioners' attention has been the First World or Cold War system, which was (and is) based on secure boundaries and broad domestic agreement on nation-state goals (Holsti, 1991). In contrast, the causes of war in the periphery of the world system are qualitatively distinct. Much of the armed violence in the Developing World has involved an *intra*-state dimension that complicates the usual picture given by the long-held assumptions of political "Realism" as well as the cooperative security school of thought:

The other [Third World] system is new. The players are not well established in the sense of having a long history of statehood, secure boundaries, an absence of secession movements, and generally impermeable societies and governmental structures. Regimes, some of dubious legitimacy . . . tend to face more internal threats in the form of attempted *coups d'etat*, secession, ethnic language, religious violence, and subversion, than external threats. Many are conditionally viable, existing on the sufferance of external patrons through military and economic assistance. The stakes of politics for them are primarily sovereignty-related, [such as] establishing some reasonably well-defined national identity, creating stable borders, controlling a permanent population, and in general trying to keep themselves together . . . (Holsti, 1991, 283; see also Brown, 1996).

Similarly, one Arab scholar has concisely described the difficulties of the new Arab Monarchies in the Persian Gulf, whose internal consolidation of government, economy, and territory remains an ongoing, difficult process:

Most GCC countries became sovereign states only after the British withdrawal of 1971....almost every GCC state sees the other states as a potential threat. Small states fear larger ones. The members of one dynasty belong to this tribe and that one to that tribe—and in the desert, tribal relationships are based not on recognizable territories with fixed border lines but on pure, rapidly shifting, power relationships....The concept of a nation-state remains utterly alien to the region....Border disputes have become the most threatening factor within the GCC...where huge pools of oil might lie below any piece of land or water, no matter how remote....[In such disputes], should the border follow colonial lines, historic dynastic domains, tribal areas controlled by a certain dynasty, bilateral agreements between leaders prior to independence, or de facto circumstances at a particular time? (al-Hamad, 2002, 25-26).

Seen in this light, the appropriate historical comparison between the Middle East and Europe is *not* the period of European integration after WW II. Past analytical efforts to draw lessons from the Helsinki process, the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe are flawed in one crucial respect: the evolving Gulf states (and corresponding growth of new national identities) are much more similar to the European states system in the period 1618-1946, when European nations were still developing their national ideologies, cultures, civic institutions, and territorial boundaries. And prior to 1946, European history is a singular example of the triumph of mutual suspicions and military threats over more cooperative forms of international relations.

This is not to say that Persian Gulf states are doomed to repeat the European process of regional and national development. Rather, the point of this historical comparison is just to raise a cautionary, practical note in regard to recent claims (primarily made by analysts in Washington, DC) that the key to peace and stability is the spread of democratic liberalism in the Persian Gulf. It is also a cautionary note about the difficulties facing any new attempts to set up a new security order based on a combination of political Realism and cooperative security tenets. Any institutionalized or norm-based solution would be extremely dependent on the domestic political situations of states in the region, including the need of state elites to legitimate their position to a domestic audience. If, for instance, a regime change in an Arab Monarchy were to create a new state identity that required the labeling of other regimes as pariahs or enemies, as Iran's revolution did in the 1980s, any framework based upon either Realism or cooperative institutions would be severely weakened and perhaps even destroyed.

In short, the institution of a new regional order could require a type of stability in national identities (both in territorial and civic terms) that may not in fact exist among the

new states within the region. All of them suffer, to a certain extent, from a lack of strong connection between rulers and ruled. The dominant social realities that could feasibly provide state legitimacy among the Gulf monarchies – Arab and Islamic culture – ironically cannot be used by state elites for legitimation precisely because these traits are too diffuse to be used for purely national ends; they are inherently transnational rather than national in nature (Hinnebusch, 2002, 30-31). Rather than providing cohesion and trust, the shared, trans-state traits of Arabism and Islam have often made relations more rancorous because of the penchant of regional leaders to make transnational appeals to domestic groups within the boundaries of other states (for the purely national goal of securing relative advantage against those states). 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 levers 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. Simply put, 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, especially when 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 (Tripp, 2002, 301-307; Korany, 1999, 45-48 and 50-54; Noble, 1999, 60-91).

In part because of these domestic realities, and in part due to the security and economic policies of external powers (which have directly fed into the proclivity for regional states to secure bilateral deals with stronger powers rather than multilateral deals with each other), all Persian Gulf states are suffering from stagnant economies, unmet expectations of a new generation exposed to the values of globalization, a growing youth bulge, narrow power bases dependent on patronage rather than popular affection, a lack of domestic political institutionalization, dependence on foreign populations for skilled and unskilled labor, a relative lack of modern infrastructure (education, roads, health), and a lack of cohesiveness between classes, tribes, ethnicities, and religions (Yaphe, 2003, 40-43; Byman and Wise, 2002, 47-53; Sick, 1997, 13-30; Flannagan et. al, 2001). Domestic

politics and internal socioeconomic trends must therefore be incorporated as central features in any planning for a future security order within the region.

Regional Imbalances of Power and the Calculus of Coalition-Building

If one is to recommend the building, maintenance, and strengthening of multilateral coalitions to address the multiple security challenges of the Gulf region, it is prudent to first define exactly what is meant by the term “coalition.” I define it as an agreement of multiple actors to cooperate on common issue(s) of concern, and to coordinate their efforts for the purpose of achieving a valued good that can only be secured through mutual action, *or* which can be secured in higher amounts through cooperation than through individual efforts alone. There are three core aspects of this definition: 1) coalition members, which in this case are nation-states; 2) the existence of a problem (or opportunity) that can only be resolved (or exploited) through a pooling of resources and coordination of efforts; and 3) the existence of significant coalition “payoffs,” or positive rewards to members for their cooperation, which *by definition must be higher than individual members can secure on their own*, taking into account the costs of purely national policies versus the costs of contributing to a coalition. Or put another way: if an individual nation-state can provide a higher amount of a particular “good,” such as security, through its own efforts, why should it join in an international coalition? Thus, all international coalitions are in the end based upon national interests, that by coincidence of ideology, economy, or geography, also constitute shared interests; in the absence of shared policy preferences on particular issues of concern, or significant resources to underwrite and contribute to a cooperative effort, it is doubtful that a durable coalition will form.

The negative implication is that the achievement of international cooperation on any issue of concern is limited by both the *power distribution* and the *distribution of policy preferences* among prospective members. If one member, or subset of members, possesses superior material forms of strength on the issues of concern, then the stronger members could more easily threaten to disband a coalition, or opt out of it, because their very strength might allow them to achieve a higher payoff through individual efforts than through shared sovereignty on issues. This decision to opt out of cooperation, in turn, could take the form of outright “abandonment” through policies of diplomatic and military isolation, or it could take the form of unilateral, hegemonic domination (Ikenberry, 2001, 7

and 51). Policies decided by the coalition will therefore inevitably be skewed towards the policy preferences of the strongest members so as to preserve the coalition. Put another way: international cooperation is based on mutual dependence (or interdependence). In the absence of some degree of mutual dependence, a coalition is not likely to last.

Also, if the policy preferences of coalition members are far apart, and if those policy positions are strongly held (due to ideology, or security concerns based upon geographic constraints, or domestic institutional prerogatives, etc.), then a coalition will not form or will be fragile in its operations. Thus, a very weak state in material terms could still break up a coalition, if its policy preferences are so divisive that it concludes that isolation is the only solution. The holding of a particularly strong ideological view on a specific issue is itself a form of international power.

This logic points to the importance of a *balance of power* and *balance of interests* for achieving true international coalitions on issues of pressing concern. In the absence of a rough balance of power – or institutionally-agreed constraints to limit the use of power (in effect making the strongest actors “punch below their weight”) – stronger states will tend to achieve their policy goals through direct or indirect domination of their environment; while in the absence of common interests, power alone cannot force a state to surrender its sovereignty to a collective good.

How does this analysis apply to the Persian Gulf? While the invasion of Iraq, the deposing of Saddam Hussein, and the recent trend of Iranian foreign policy toward rapprochement and conciliation with its neighbors have raised new hopes for constructing a set of cooperative, overlapping bilateral and multilateral relationships in the region, the existing gaps in power levels between states still makes any balance of power a fragile situation unless it is guaranteed and defined with the help of external powers. For instance, the dispute over strategic islands in the Persian Gulf between Iran and the United Arab Emirates represents more than just a disagreement over territorial boundaries. At first glance, the border dispute is based on the perceived injustices of past colonial dictates and the desire of both nations to consolidate their national independence and sovereignty, an issue that should be amenable to a legal, norm-based solution through mediation of external parties. However, at the same time, there is a much larger (though vague) fear of latent Iranian power by all of its Arab neighbors. Iran is strategically positioned to become the regional “rule maker” if it were able to achieve a stable domestic equilibrium that

would allow the buildup of surplus economic and military power. As one Arab analyst has described these geopolitical realities,

[T]he whole GCC native population is not larger than the population of the Iranian capital, Tehran. The total military manpower of the GCC states (half of it comprised by the Saudis) is less than one third of the Iranian military personnel....Iran perceives its role not as one of dominance, but as one of leadership. The GCC states see the Iranian role as overbearing, dominant, and eager for opportunities to capitalize on the GCC's inherent weakness....The collective air and naval forces of the GCC states, although larger and more advanced than their Iranian counterpart, are largely ineffective and dominated by the Saudis....[T]he GCC states suffer from deficiencies in their joint command and control systems, and past exercises have been mired in communications and logistical problems that are not an issue in Iran's Navy (Alshayji, 2002, 224 and 233).

Similar statements could be made about a newly reconstituted Iraq. If the Iraqi populace can arrive at a cohesive, legitimate, and stable internal arrangement that would allow for a refurbished economy and military over the next decade, then Iraq, like Iran, would inevitably spark fears of hegemonic domination among those Gulf states too small or too weak to credibly defend themselves against coercive threats from larger neighbors. The simple geopolitical realities of Iran and Iraq's existence create a *de facto* security dilemma that would plague any efforts to construct a long-term security framework in the region – regardless of the future domestic ideologies underlying Iranian and Iraqi foreign policy (McMillan et al., 161-62).

In general, the trend in the past several decades has been for the three strongest or largest states in the Persian Gulf – Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia – to use their superior human, economic, and/or military power to dominate the sub-region. Even Saudi Arabia, which is lacking in both indigenous military power and human population relative to Iran and Iraq, has used its pre-9/11 ties with the United States to cement US military aid that would complement its existing superior natural resource base (oil reserves) to become the *de facto* regional rule-maker on questions of oil production levels, diplomatic stances towards the Israeli-Arab dispute, joint military efforts under the GCC, and so on (Gause, 2002, 193-214). Any future cooperative framework, or even an attempt to find a new balance of power, would have to contend with this strong historical predisposition among the stronger regional powers to be the hegemonic guarantor of security in their own backyard (with the help of external powers) (McMillan et. al, 164-65).

Conclusion

How does all of this affect the policy of external powers, especially the United States? Due to the fragile nature of interstate relations and domestic politics in the Persian Gulf, any Gulf security framework will ultimately depend not just on indigenous efforts alone, 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. However, if the outside powers were to embrace the tenets of cooperative security and the historical arguments of scholars such as Holsti and Ikenberry, then any outside contributions would not consist solely of the provision of weaponry, forward basing, and/or rapid deployment capabilities to provide a rough military balance. In addition to such military instruments, external powers would supply credible diplomatic and political guarantees to assure state leaders that cooperative limits on the use of power, alongside purposeful regional measures to increase their levels of mutual dependence in the realm of national security, will ultimately increase rather than decrease their security over the long haul. Furthermore, military instruments would have to be tailored in a way that did not obstruct or impede a gradual movement toward closer security ties within the region itself – for instance, by empowering organizations such as the GCC through taking concrete operational steps to increase their capacity and independence vis-à-vis US forces, or by allowing regional confidence-building measures on a bilateral or multilateral basis with previously excluded states such as Iran (Russell, March 2003; Sokolsky and McMillan, 2003; McMillan et. al, 166-173).

Therefore, 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 under gird a new set of relationships that are sustainable and durable. Ideally, the United States would shape its policies so as to avoid the creation of new animosities and new perceptions of injustice, inequities, and a general sense of illegitimacy within the region that could undermine US national security as well as regional stability in the long-term. A large US military presence in post-war Iraq will contribute to regional stability in the sense that it will ease fears of aggression by Iraq against its neighbors. But it also has the potential to destabilize the domestic political situations of those same neighboring countries where the populations (and many of the governments) fear US hegemony and the possible permanence of a US military presence in

the Gulf. 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 to as to create a real sense of *mutual gain* – whether these initiatives are bilateral or multilateral in nature.⁵

Furthermore, 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 (The Stanley Foundation et. al., May 2003). In furthering these goals, US policy could play an important catalytic role, although Track II initiatives could be useful in filling the vacuums where official dialogue does not take place. Non-Governmental Organizations 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 US 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 (The Stanley Foundation et. al., May 2003).⁶

However, the linkage between national security and international dialogue is dependent on 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? Only by answering this core question can Gulf states and external powers begin to proactively construct a stable, predictable framework for conflict management within the region.

⁵ For detailed recommendations about future defense postures and initiatives, including options for dealing with Iran, see Sokolsky and McMillan, 2003; McMillan, 2003; Yaphe, 2003; and Russell, 2003.

⁶ 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.

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