THE EMERGING MIDDLE EAST SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Introduction

In post-September 11th world, Middle East security architecture is undergoing substantial transformation. The U.S. and other great powers have identified new threats. Along with the unimpeded access to oil at a reasonable price, the challenges of international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction have taken center stage. As a matter of national security, the natures of regimes in power have become more important to the West. States in the region are no longer simply (and superficially) considered as allies or foes, without examining their internal composition, values, and goals. Regimes are required to adhere and reform, or they will be made to. *So says the U.S., the restrained turned aggressive hegemon of the 21st century.*

Aside from not shying away from war, the U.S. is demonstrating that it does not fear regional instability to bring about regimes that share the same views regarding weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. September 11th proved to the U.S. that globalization and its processes have made the world smaller. Its oceans do not provide adequate shield. In response, when it comes to national security threats, the U.S. has become less tolerant, or edgy, if you will, and definitely less patient. We saw this in Afghanistan, when the U.S. eliminated regional support for international terrorism, and in Iraq, when it eliminated a regional power it perceived poses a national security threat. As another way of making global interest in the region more secure, the U.S. is seeking to actively create democracies and open markets. Whether with a carrot or a stick, or a combination of both, the U.S. wants to see *likeminded* regimes that are responsive to their peoples' political wills.

Thus, in the Middle East, the game's rules have changed. The U.S. invasion of Iraq, together with the fact that no state balance to American power exists and sub-state actors proven they can challenge states with the amount of destruction they can cause, creates a new sense of urgency to discern the parameters of the emerging security architecture in the region. This essay

contends that, in light of the above realities, the security architecture is changing to one of aggressive U.S. hegemony. The goal is no longer to contain regional powers like Syria and Iran, but to subordinate them to U.S. hegemonic ambitions. In turn, as long as Syria and Iran remain insubordinate, and peace remains absent in Iraq and between Palestinians and Israeli, the Middle East will likely remain a web of security relationships. Functional issues, cultural inclinations, and security dilemmas, rather than a single broad structure (e.g. Europe) will continue to define the Middle East.

Pre-September 11th Security Structures

Middle East security architecture is of the great powers' design, with U.S. command. U.S.'s Middle East security architecture over the decades has been a product of complex interrelationship between political and military variables. The U.S. defines vital U.S. interests, develops a strategy that protects and furthers those interests, formulates policy to implement strategy, and commits military, political, and financial resources to assure the policy is and remains operational. Up until September 11th, U.S. vital interests in the region were constant: Oil. Oil must be accessible and affordable. Oil supplying states must not be vulnerable to hostile forces that could dictate coercive conduct to the detriment of consuming states.

During the Cold War, the Middle East's security architecture was a global balance of power. As a result, *Realpolitik* dominated regional Middle East security thinking and practice – implicit and explicit military threats were the foundation of regional state diplomacy. To contain and influence one's neighbor, states engaged in fluid and dynamic relationships based on calculated gains and losses. Governments relied on outside powers (U.S., China, and Russia) to ensure balance of power, e.g. missiles to Iran and advanced weapons to Gulf States, or actual military deployment by the U.S. National interests for the region's states were defined as territorial sovereignty, domestic identity, and regime security. Small and weak Gulf States needed outside alliances to protect themselves from regional powers. Therefore, there were two-party coalitions across regions, bilateral agreements and outside power, rather than multilateral coalition within the region. When the Soviet Union was a hostile force, the U.S. sought to limit its influence and maintain regional stability by erecting the "dual pillars" of security, Iran and Saudi Arabia. When Shah's Iran fell to Khomini's Islamic revolution, the U.S. turned to Iraq to take Iran's stead. In the end, maintaining a security environment that did not threaten the global balance of power and the flow of oil, this vital interest, guided the U.S. approach throughout the Cold War.

At the Cold War's end, this security architecture changed to one of restrained hegemony. As the lone superpower, America came to focus on creating a "New World Order." The U.S. used military and economic instruments for compliance (e.g. Jordan) and deterrence (e.g. 1991 Gulf War, containment of Iran) to protect and further interests in the region. Security was cooperative, multilateral (and mutual) only between friends/allies who together defend in economic and military terms. For example, we witnessed the creation of broad coalition to repel Iraqi forces from Kuwait, and, we saw Russian join the coalition despite historically having close ties with Sadam's regime. This security structure relied on implicit and explicit threats, but the goal was not balance, rather, solidifying military and economic supremacy among friends and allies. The fact that Sadam was allowed to remain in power after the first Gulf War demonstrates U.S. restrained hegemony. In addition, the U.S. pushed the Palestinian-Israeli controversy through the Madrid Conference in 1991 and the Oslo process, which began in 1993, to legitimize its hegemony and increased military presence in the region. After September 11th, the security architecture changed once more.

Post-September 11th Emerging Security Architecture

Post-September 11th, the Middle East security architecture changed to one of aggressive U.S. hegemony. America today has set out to create "a balance of power that favors human freedom: conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty." The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002, identifies the specific goals of such "American internationalism:"

1. Diffuse regional conflicts;
2. Prevent *enemies* from threatening with weapons of mass destruction;
3. Defeat terrorism;
4. Champion aspirations for human dignity;
5. Ignite a new era of global economic growth through free market and free trade; and
6. Build the infrastructure of democracy.

September 11th events centered U.S. strategic thinking on the threat of international terrorism and away from an aggression across national borders. Although the latter could happen, most in Washington are concerned that, as Pearle, Member of the U.S. Defense Policy Board, states,

"some lunatic will get his hands on a weapon on mass destruction and use it to kill as many people as he can, as many Americans as he can, if he can possibly reach our territory and detonate that weapon." The U.S. has concluded that failed and weak states, like Afghanistan, pose a great danger to American national interest, more than strong states. As such, the U.S. has come to act aggressively against threats from whatever source: a regional power pursuing weapons of mass destruction, a state harboring terrorists, or a terrorist entity, where ever it is. Pearle explains that the U.S. learned from September 11th that it is possible to wait too long before dealing with an observable threat. These are the post-September 11th realities that defined the Axis of Evil (North Korean, Iran, and Iraq) and gave birth to Bush Doctrine of Preemption ("America will act against emerging threats before they are formed"). These are also the premises upon which states in the region will evaluate and predicate new force structures and strategic partnerships.

Since the U.S.'s Middle East position has shifted from securing a regional balance of power to securing U.S. supremacy, the way in which states maneuver has changed. Middle East terrain is now BLACK and WHITE and NO GRAY. Because terrorism is an international problem, so the rational goes, the U.S. demands from states in the region to be with it; if not, they are against it. Actually, in this paradigm, little maneuvering is possible. America will help nations that combat "terror." American will also "hold to account nations that are compromised by terror." Conceivably, a state may be "compromised by terror" if it does not cooperate or stands aside. The U.S. made both charges against Syria before the Iraq war because the U.S. alleged that Palestinian liberation movements, which Syria hosts, are terrorist organizations, and during the war, when the U.S. alleged that Syria opened its borders to Iraq. The former claims comes at a time when no internationally agreed upon definition on terrorism exists and disregarding the fact that the struggle to liberate Palestine is a cause indorsed by the international community in UN General Assembly resolutions since the 1970s.

The U.S. hegemonic security architecture takes into account that the idea of cooperative security, although desirable, is too soon. A Middle East cooperative security architecture would seek to have states reassure one another through promises. Its key is having a reliable, normative and institutional structure that has the ability to initiate and maintain cooperation among states on matters traditionally considered at the sovereignty's heart: national security. This structure assumes that enemies, or potential ones, will accept the same legal and technical constraints as friends, despite mutual suspicion and mistrust.

However, the Middle East context has two complications. First, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains outstanding. Borders of a Palestinian state have yet to be drawn. Peace treaties exist only between Israel-Jordan and Israel-Egypt. Although the U.S. could have considered the Arab-Israeli conflict a strategic concern that demanded resolution, which would have paved the way for a cooperate security to be built, the U.S. chose regime change in Iraq. Second, Arab regimes are weak and unpopular. This has promoted the U.S. to call for fundamental changes in the relationships between Arab regimes/governments and their societies. The U.S. welcomes regional instability today, not a security architecture that offers the contrary and restricts its freedom of action.

The U.S. security architecture wants a friendly regime in Iraq that it can rely on and have close military and economic ties with. The U.S. recognizes that regional peace will always be in jeopardy if Iraq believes the established powers are preventing it from achieving its destiny. The U.S. both wants and needs a strong Iraq, but one that is not a threat to neighbors and not a threat to U.S. interests. The moving of U.S. forces from Saudi Arabia to Iraq is a step in this direction.

However, winning the peace will be the great challenge. In addition, the U.S. wants, aside from regime change in Iran, an Iran free of weapons of mass destruction that can threaten Iraq, Israel, and other U.S. allies in the region. As for Syria, the U.S. wants to see it too subordinated. Recently, the Syrians have moved in this direction by withdrawing further forces from Lebanon. Syria has also called for a resumption of peace talks with Israel – to pick up where they left off in 2000 – without any preconditions. More importantly for the U.S., however, is the Syrian relinquishment of its weapons of mass destruction program. These are some of the immediate pieces of the architecture that the U.S. is seeking to put in place.

In turn, states in the region will likely continue *Realpolitiking*, albeit on post-September 11th assumptions. Arab regimes are now forced to address a host of issues:

1. *Can Arab states have foreign and domestic policies that contravene the goals of 21st Century American internationalism?*

Here, Syrian and Iran come to mind, for example, with respect to supporting Palestinian liberation movements and Hizbollah in Lebanon, which the U.S. dubiously claims are terrorist entities. Are the Syrians, therefore, compromised by terror? Again, for the U.S., this has become a matter of national security; and for the Arab states, such support is a requirement of internal and regional politics, along will Arab popular support. Without a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the U.S., Iran and Syria will likely collide on this issue. The same goes for Iran nuclear program and Syria's chemical and biological programs. Will Arab states have to open their markets irrespective of domestic macro-economic policies in place? Will Arab states have to change their educational curriculum to limit alleged "incitement" against the U.S./the West? Where will the line between history and such a demand be drawn, or is it irrelevant. The U.S. teaches about what it did to the Native Americans and the Black people. Although it may incite people, it is a historical truth. The importance of the market value of ideas cannot function based upon selective decisions on what should be in and what should be out. Yet, we have seen this demand being made on the Palestinians in the Roadmap.

2. *Are Arab regimes/nations today, more than ever, faced with a cultural threat? Is the U.S. forcing a loss of national identity by attempting to rewrite history through war? Will some Arab regimes identify this as a threat to national security?*

Iraq can be cited as an example of the cultural threat Arab states face. America waged war on the *conviction* that weapons of mass destruction existed. Three months later they have yet to be found. Irrespective of the war's legitimacy, the U.S. is occupying the Iraqi people and promulgating laws, rules, curriculums, etc., reminiscent of colonialism. The culture is being changed fundamentally, but the Iraqi people are watching someone else do it for them.

3. *More importantly, has true democratic governance become a national security necessity, i.e. peaceful transferring power to the people to avoid U.S. military action, or sanctions? Or will regimes remain as they are, but follow U.S. dictation on matters of U.S. concern more closely?*

Recently, Kuwaitis "appointed" a Prime Minister. Is real reform required, or are will cosmetic changes pass muster? Most likely, the U.S. will begin by drawing a distinction of whether the regime in question is a friend or an enemy. One case on point is Bashar Asad's Syrian regime. Ample reasons exist to not expect any major internal or even substantial foreign policy changes

because reform could jeopardize hold on power. The question is whether after the Iraq war the risk of embarking on reform is less, or more, than risking to disobey the U.S. Iran may also have a problem that is more complex.

Will the U.S. Succeed In Reshaping the Middle East?

An aggressive U.S. hegemonic security architecture in the Middle Eat, where the U.S., from the top, cooperates with allies (Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, etc.) to suppress or eliminate regional threats all together, requires successfully dealing with key issues:

1. *U.S. occupation of Iraq*

The U.S. must secure the peace in Iraq; however, this is unlikely to occur with the U.S.'s demonstrated track record of "Drive-by nation building!" Domestic structures of other states, after 11 September, were becoming a more immediate concern. Lessons from places like the Balkans and Afghanistan suggest that there are certain things that an outside power must provide if it is to stitch broken societies back together. Law and order must be established in order to provide the political space for local political actors to emerge. However, lack of preparation and the ambivalence over how involved America should be in such nation-building issues is evident.

2. *Weapons of mass destruction threat*

It is exceedingly difficult to see how the U.S. will succeed on quelling Iran's need and desire to obtain the nuclear weapon without a different security structure than the one the U.S. is pursuing at present. Turkish, Israeli, and U.S. hostility make the nuclear weapon a necessity in the eyes of the Iranian regime, especially in light of Iraq's experience. Iran's enemies all have nuclear deterrent. Without a comprehensive dealing with the issue, war will be the only option. But Iran is not Iraq, nor is it Afghanistan. Iran is geographically larger, militarily and economically stronger, and has a much larger population.

3. *Still potent threat of international terrorism*

After September 11th, the U.S. should have dealt with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and pressured Israel to achieve an equitable solution premised on international law. It did not. The U.S. failed to capture the most important opportunity to demonstrate that it is not only the lone superpower, but also mature and recognizes the responsibility world leadership entails. While Afghanistan war may have been justified, the war on Iraq was not. It lacked international legitimacy, which provides added fuel to international terrorism and makes the U.S. a more compelling target. Iraq was not only a distraction but also a blunder, making the U.S. seem to have colonial motives and re-emphasizing the need to fight the U.S. This time it is on Arab soil. Contemporaneously, the threat of international terrorism looms large, with respect to Arab countries (e.g. recent Saudi bombings) and the U.S.

4. *Influence of Islamic movements*

Here, the immediate concern is Saudi Arabia. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia fears Iraq may not be the only Gulf state for which the U.S. plans "regime-change". US-Saudi relations have reached a crisis point in the wake of repeated U.S. charges that al-Qaeda support reaches the highest levels

in the Saudi regime. The Bush Administration may be coming to the conclusion that the Saudi royal family are no longer reliable allies, and that Saudi oil supplies are at risk from a growing

movement of Islamist radicals. On the other hand, for the Saudi regime, every expression of political support for the U.S. comes at a considerable cost to their slowly fading legitimacy. With the royal family, the Americans, and the radical Islamists each striving to consolidate themselves, the once-stable US-Saudi pact is quickly turning into a three-way struggle for the kingdom's future. The U.S. losing Saudi Arabia would spell trouble for the security structure in the region and U.S. vital interest.

Conclusion

American Right-wing think tanks and the hawkish intellectuals have been telling each other and telling U.S. policy makers for years that America needs to re-make the Middle East, refashion the Arab world, topple dictators, and force democracy on other societies. These people try to block the sun with their hands – even though they know, they refuse to acknowledge – that force has its limits. The U.S. cannot do it alone, not because it needs actual help, but because its actions require legitimacy or "soft power." Without legitimacy, the U.S. will fail. Its security architecture will fail. Legitimacy can be gained only by dealing with:

- ➢ *Israeli occupation and Palestinian-Israeli conflict*
- ➢ *Arab perception of U.S. as Colonizer/anti-Islam/arrogant*
- ➢ *U.S. Lacking commitment/unreliable/win wars, not peace*

The U.S. cannot construct a new Middle East by force. It must gain the trust of the Arab people and states in the region first. It must understand Islam and respect it beyond rhetoric, for Arab civilization emerged from Islam, as did Western civilization from Christianity. Subordination strategy may work with despicable regimes but will have a counter-effect on their societies, and, therefore, exacerbate the problem of terrorism. Because U.S. legitimacy suffers today, the Middle East security architecture will likely fail to keep the peace.

Trying times are ahead. Iraq's war has opened between the U.S./Britain and Russian/France/Germany/China a rift in the international community that has yet to be mended. The discussion is ongoing about the U.S. security architecture for the Middle East, and, more generally, on how the U.S. conducts itself on the international plane. The great powers are split. The issue is aggressive U.S. hegemony in the 21st century, beginning with the Middle East.