The United States and the Middle East: What Comes Next After Iraq?

LIGHTING THE PATH TO UNDERSTANDING

The Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies

Tufts UNIVERSITY

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A report on the conference:
The United States and the Middle East: What Comes Next After Iraq?
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The Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies

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Preface

Since the start of the Iraq War in March 2003, the Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies has tracked the unfolding conflict in Iraq and its consequences for Iraqi citizens, regional powers, and the United States. Through our conferences, lectures, roundtables, and workshops, we have highlighted multiple viewpoints regarding the U.S. intervention, including criticisms of the U.S. government and prescriptions for U.S. policymakers.

In preparation for the upcoming presidential elections in the United States, the Fares Center held a conference entitled "The United States and the Middle East: What Comes Next After Iraq?" on March 27-28, 2008. The purpose of the conference was to identify issues pertaining to the Middle East that will be of concern to Americans in the coming years. Questions and discussions dealt with how Middle Eastern states have been affected by the Iraq War and by other regional challenges.

Conference participants from a wide range of national and professional backgrounds debated how the new leadership in Washington should understand and deal with political and military developments that are unfolding in the Middle East. Experts and audience members offered their perspectives on how the United States should best serve its own interests while helping parties in the Middle East manage ongoing conflicts.

The insights and recommendations expressed at the conference are detailed in this publication, the Fares Center's fourth occasional paper. The introduction highlights developments in the Middle East that are especially relevant to U.S. policy and American voters, underlines common themes discussed during the conference, and catalogues conference participants' prescriptions for U.S. policymakers. Subsequent pages include summaries of the remarks presented by each conference participant.

I must recognize an exceptional group of people whose support, input, and assistance made the conference and this publication possible: H.E. Issam M. Fares, founder of the Fares Center and former Deputy Prime Minister of Lebanon; Mr. Fares I. Fares, trustee and member of the Fares Center executive committee; Provost Jamshed Bharucha and the Office of the Provost;

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Dr. Leila Fawaz
Founding Director
The Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies
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Introduction

The U.S. military surge announced by President George W. Bush in January 2007 and unrolled incrementally for the next six months corresponds with a reduction in Iraqi civilian casualties due to sectarian infighting. Yet progress has not been constant or uniform, and the causal links between the surge and the statistics are not entirely clear. Meanwhile, Iraqi government officials have called for a timetable for U.S. withdrawal, in anticipation of their taking over the mantle of leadership. Ultimately, the prerequisite for stability may rely less upon the performance of the Iraqi security forces or the judgment of the U.S. government, and more upon the disposition of Muqtada al-Sadr and his management of Shiite militias in southern Iraq.

Developments in Iraq have broad implications for the balance of power in the region. As the prospects of an early return become dimmer, almost two million Iraqis join Syrians in their schools, mosques, and neighborhoods. Syria's acceptance of a disproportionate number of refugees has drained its weak economy, conveying the injustices of the Iraq War on an intimate scale. The long-term consequences of this population movement—together with Syria's treatment as a pariah state—could recalibrate its stance on negotiations with Israel, bolster its strategic alliance with Iran, and renew its incentives to open its borders to extremists bound for Iraq and Lebanon.

Suspicious of Iranian meddling in southern Iraq, the U.S. government has heightened its antagonistic posturing toward the regional outsider in recent years. In October 2007, President Bush linked Iran's nuclear program to a probable "World War III." The next month, however, a National Intelligence Estimate released by the U.S. intelligence community asserted with high confidence that Iran had actually suspended its uranium enrichment program in late 2003, and that the decision was likely linked to a rational analysis of political, economic, and military costs and benefits. This seemingly profound declaration had little impact on U.S. foreign policy.

Meanwhile, democracy-promotion funds earmarked for Iranian civil society groups have increased steadily since 2004, and the U.S. Department of State requested an unprecedented $108

million to be allocated for democracy promotion in Iran during fiscal year 2008. This high-profile aid has unintended costs for the Iranian people, as any association with the U.S. government could lead to surveillance, interrogation, and imprisonment at the hands of the Iranian regime. Neither the threat of armed intervention nor the encouragement of internal reform has resulted in regime change in Iran. If anything, both policies have provoked Iran into assuming a more offensive and audacious stance toward the international community.

The Iraq War has taken center stage for U.S. policymakers, eclipsing the Arab-Israeli conflict for much of the Bush administration's tenure. Hamas' electoral victory in January 2006 challenged for many the unassailability of democratic elections and defied the national interests of the United States, which sent weaponry to Fatah to fortify its standing. Despite these efforts, Hamas established control of Gaza after five days of fighting in June 2007. Until January 2008, when Hamas destroyed portions of a cement fence allowing tens of thousands to flow across the border to Egypt, Palestinians had been stranded in Gaza, blockaded physically and economically by Israel and Egypt.

In his final year of office, President Bush resumed a leadership role in the Arab-Israeli peace process by hosting the Annapolis Conference in November 2007. The talks produced a "Joint Understanding" to serve as the framework for high-level dialogue about the establishment of a permanent Palestinian state. Israeli and Palestinian heads of state have been meeting in earnest since the Annapolis Conference, but visible outcomes are limited. Without the buy-in of Hamas, which was strategically omitted from the conference guest list along with Iran, the foundations of Palestinian statehood—and President Bush's imagined legacy of peace in the Middle East—hang in the balance.

With these challenges in mind, the Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies conducted the conference "The United States and the Middle East: What Comes Next After Iraq?" at Tufts University in March 2008. While the conference analyzed internal developments and U.S. operations in Iraq, the proceedings were not limited to a discussion of the Iraq War. Through the prism of Iraq, conference participants made observations and projections about Iran's hegemonic goals, the Arab-Israeli peace process, and the growing influence of Islamist groups. Academics, journalists, policymakers, career diplomats, and military experts from the United States and the Middle East reflected upon political and social trends in the Middle East and offered recommendations to guide future U.S. engagement with the region.

COMMON THEMES

Two keynote addresses reflected upon the shortcomings of U.S. operations in Iraq and offered advice from lessons learned for the United States' continued engagement in the region. Panel presentations dealt with the role of Iran and the Gulf states in regional stability; the relevance of the Arab-Israeli conflict to U.S. interests and regional powers; the progress of democracy and reform in the Middle East; the complex nature of Islamist groups; and challenges facing U.S. policy and public diplomacy in the region. The concluding remarks discussed the manipulation of Arab governments and citizens by external superpowers, drawing similarities between U.S.-Soviet relations during the Cold War and U.S.-Iranian relations today.

A number of common themes arose during the two-day conference:

- *A long-term U.S. presence in Iraq seems inevitable and will require innovative and comprehensive planning.* The fragile state of security in Iraq suggests that, despite its efforts to train Iraqi troops and police forces, the U.S. military will remain in Iraq for the long haul. Achieving stability is not contingent upon efforts made by the security sector alone, however. Political, economic, and social development must be addressed in integrative plans for the reconstruction of Iraq. The decision to launch the Iraq War, as well as post-invasion blunders committed by the United States, make the case for more effective civil-military consultation as well as enhanced roles for non-military experts.
- *Iran's regional hegemony is threatening to Arab states vying for power and security.* Adjacent to Iraq and outnumbered by Sunni-majority Arab states, Iran has been pursuing a policy of consolidating its power in the region. The Shiite-dominated

central government in Iraq, Shiite shrines in Iraq and Syria, and economic links with Central Asia have bolstered Iran's regional hegemony. The growing influence of Iran is especially problematic for Saudi Arabia and smaller Gulf states—and highly relevant to U.S. efforts in Iraq. Internal developments in Iran should be followed carefully, as they will directly impact U.S.-Iran relations and the balance of power in the region.

- *For the Bush administration, the Iraq War and the Iranian nuclear program have overshadowed the Arab-Israeli conflict.* Until the Annapolis Conference in November 2007, the Bush administration had largely neglected its traditional role as a third-party mediator between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Having created chaos and destruction in Iraq and exacerbated tensions with the Iranian regime, U.S. policymakers have now proposed an unrealistic timeline for making the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict the legacy of the Bush administration. Success depends upon Israeli and Palestinian leaders who are constrained by their domestic politics, which makes the sustainable implementation of a peace agreement unlikely.
- *The United States utilizes contradictory means to support democratization in the Middle East.* In striving to maintain security and stability in the Middle East, democracy becomes a lesser priority for the U.S. government. Whether allying with extremist factions that wrangle with authoritarian regimes, discounting legitimate efforts at liberalization by Islamist groups, or abandoning local reformists in order to preserve advantageous patron-client relationships with regional leaders, U.S. policies and U.S. actions are often misaligned. More than being ineffective, this disjunctive approach to democratization does little to engender trust in U.S. intentions among Arab populations.
- *Both public diplomacy and behavior inform Arab public opinion about the United States.* Through misguided operations in Iraq, hostile posturing toward Iran, and selective engagement with Arab allies, the Bush administration has further deteriorated the U.S. government's troubled reputation in the Middle East. Still, opinion polls reveal that the majority of citizens in the region respect American values. Public diplomacy initiatives, which have decreased during the Bush administration, are critical for nurturing cross-cultural understanding. In order to be effective, such initiatives must not be undercut by inconsistent behavior in the region.

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR CHANGE

Strategically, the conference was held in the midst of primaries and caucuses that would determine the political party nominees for the U.S. presidential election in November 2008. Democrat and Republican frontrunners campaigned to win the American public's support and endorsement, reiterating their criticisms of U.S. policy in Iraq, their commitment to the Arab-Israeli peace process, and their proposals for new paths forward with Iran. Welcoming the opportunity for change in personnel and policy, conference participants made a number of recommendations to prepare the incoming administration for protecting U.S. interests and for repairing the image of America abroad.

Conference participants recommended that the incoming U.S. presidential administration:

- Employ a smart power model in Iraq that incorporates international aid, foreign language expertise, public diplomacy, military training, and higher education.
- Make unconditional demands on Iraqi politicians, and introduce disincentives for failing to meet benchmarks and anti-corruption standards.
- Use the robust economic model in Kurdistan as a template for the rest of Iraq.
- Disburse international aid in Iraq with greater speed and efficiency.
- Prepare the U.S. military to fight non-traditional threats and counterinsurgencies with dynamic operational concepts.
- Contextualize intelligence data to prevent its politicization.
- Erode authoritarianism by supporting grassroots community initiatives, defending bloggers and other champions of free speech, and fostering personal relationships.
- Recognize that overtly pressuring authoritarian regimes can be counterproductive for local reformist movements.

- Weigh the negative alternatives to Islamist attempts at democratization, but analyze the underlying tenets of Islamist literature before legitimating its authors.
- Guard against favoritism when forging relationships with political factions, and be consistent in endorsing political parties that win democratic elections.
- Market formal agreements signed by heads of state to Hamas, which is a key player in the Arab-Israeli peace process.
- Expand U.S. policy toward Iran beyond its narrow focus on the nuclear issue.
- Rely upon empirical evidence to better understand and address the priorities and grievances of Arab populations.
- Ensure that U.S. interventions in the region correspond with U.S. policy and align with American values.

* * *

Some of these recommendations reiterate or clarify existing U.S. government policies that may have been neglected or misconstrued during the last eight years. Others signify a more subtle and comprehensive approach to engaging with the region, based on lessons learned during the Bush administration's tenure. The inauguration of a new presidential cabinet in January 2009 will symbolize U.S. intentions to expectant leaders and citizens around the world. If the many arms of the government—the executive branch, the military, the intelligence community, the diplomatic corps, and the development experts—manage to refine, articulate, and implement a foreign policy that reflects those intentions, the United States may actually stand a chance at fortifying rather than undermining democracy in the Middle East.

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MALD 2008
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Note: Conference participants did not review the summaries in the pages that follow. The author is responsible for the depiction of their presentations and views as they appear here.

Keynote Address: "Iraq: Today, Tomorrow, and Beyond"

Speaker: **The Honorable Lee H. Hamilton,** President and Director, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; Co-Chair, Iraq Study Group; Vice-Chair, 9/11 Commission

Chair: **The Honorable Stephen W. Bosworth,** Dean, The Fletcher School

Lee Hamilton observed that the Iraq War has exposed a number of serious flaws in American policymaking in the Middle East. Domestic discourse concerning Iraq has long overlooked the strategic role of regional neighbors and the potential benefits of bilateral initiatives. Terms such as "victory" and "withdrawal" lack specificity, definition, and utility, especially when embedded in highly partisan rhetoric. The implications of conflict in Iraq—the short- and long-term effects of each death on Iraqi widows and children—are overshadowed by concerns for national security. Hamilton commented that the failure to bring about unity between the President and Congress only exacerbates these flaws.

Recalling that the U.S. military has been deployed in Iraq longer than it had been involved in World War I or World War II, he noted that while the security gains over the last year have been substantial, the United States continues to fight against Shiite extremists, al-Qaeda, and the Sunni insurgency. Positive developments—ceasefires brokered by Muqtada al-Sadr, post-surge declines in U.S. and Iraqi military casualties, talks with Iran, and cooperation with local Sunni leaders—are fragile and could be easily reversed. The Defense Minister of Iraq has forecasted that Iraq will not be able to protect its borders without assistance before 2018, suggesting that the United States will be in Iraq for the long haul.

Hamilton asserted that President George W. Bush's objectives in Iraq are unlikely to be attained, especially because U.S. policies toward the Iraqi government have been implemented inconsistently

and incompletely. Of the 18 benchmarks outlined by President Bush in January 2007, only several have been met. Of these, de-Baathification legislation papered over critical differences, the national budget did not address concerns of the Kurdish population, and provincial elections lack the precinct framework necessary for effective management.

The political purpose of the military surge was to provide space for Iraqi leaders to work toward national reconciliation, but Iraqis leaders have largely squandered this opportunity and have failed to get their political house in order, Hamilton commented. The central government remains disorganized and incapable of combating corruption or providing services to its people. The U.S. government continues to pay Sunnis large sums of money (approximately $300/day) to offset their increased alienation from the Shiite-dominated government. The United States has asked Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to do more, but has not penalized him for not doing more. If the United States is ever to vacate its role as the financier, the enforcer, and the guarantor of peace in Iraq, a sterner approach that makes unconditional demands on the Iraqi government is necessary.

Casualties of American soldiers and Iraqi civilians, Hamilton maintained, are already staggering enough to suggest that victory is no longer possible—only the avoidance of defeat. Options for success in Iraq have long since passed, but tolerable outcomes are still achievable, provided that the United States is willing to employ a more inclusive foreign policy that includes development aid, foreign language expertise, diplomacy, military training, and higher education. Any form of progress in Iraq will require a long-term commitment of American leadership and resources, and if a sustainable solution is to be expected, the entire U.S. policy toward Iraq needs to be smarter, broader, and more unified.

Session I: The Gulf

Speakers: **Judith S. Yaphe,** Distinguished Research Fellow, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University
The Honorable Ronald E. Neumann, President, The American Academy of Diplomacy; Former Ambassador of the United States to Afghanistan (2005-2007)
Vali Nasr, Professor of International Politics, The Fletcher School; Associate Director, The Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies, Tufts University
Anthony H. Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Chair: **John L. Esposito,** University Professor and Founding Director, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University

Judith Yaphe asserted that ownership of and control over resources are the underlying drivers of the internal conflicts in Iraq. While the proposed oil law deals with existing oil resources, it does not make projections for the distribution of new resources. Developments in Iraq are also highly dependent on Iran, which, according to Yaphe, considers itself the "great protector" in the region. At the same time, a cost-benefit analysis of risks associated with the Iraq War suggests to Iranian policymakers that the United States should not withdraw from Iraq before stability is achieved. While the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is tired of supporting U.S. efforts in Iraq, Yaphe noted that it is equally wary of Iran and its emerging role.

She suggested that the United States lacks a historical sense of identity in the region and expressed doubt concerning the Kurdistan Regional Government's calls for independence, proposing that its members tend to lobby for more than what is possible and might be prepared to bargain for less. She endorsed abandoning the concept of partitioning Iraq, especially because Kurds at risk would not be able to protect themselves—as shown

by the successful "police action" undertaken in February 2008 by the Turkish military in northern Iraq. In addition, she recommended that robust economic development in Kurdistan should be utilized as a model for the rest of Iraq.

While the U.S. military surge has had some positive results, Yaphe argued that it has not been accompanied by an ample political surge. Until the United States has established clear benchmarks for collaboration with the Iraqi government, a political surge will not be feasible. Those who have ruled in Iraq—including Saddam Hussein—have done so along secular lines, which allows for robust rule on the part of the leadership. Yaphe advised that, to counter this structure, the United States should continue to support grassroots community initiatives, increase expertise in agriculture and education, and foster personal relations with Iraqis.

Yaphe suggested that the United States' alliance with the Sunnis is strictly need-based and should not be interpreted as anything more than that. She emphasized that the Sunnis do not necessarily seek democracy more than any other contingent in Iraq. They are now acutely aware of the danger of boycotting elections, and their participation will likely increase in the October 2008 provincial elections. Perception may indeed be more important than reality in Iraq, and therefore, the United States' support of Sunnis sends the wrong message to the Iraqi people and threatens to promote flawed government. Instead, the United States should develop a dual strategy that incorporates both Sunni and Shiite elements, while taking care to endorse whichever party succeeds in democratic elections.

Ronald Neumann suggested that while U.S. foreign policy is focused on Iran and Iraq, the importance of smaller states in the Gulf region should not be underestimated. In his view, GCC states routinely practice conflict avoidance as well as risk avoidance, yet some have become increasingly bellicose regarding nuclear warfare. Taking GCC states out of the line of fire would provide a level of reassurance that could only improve U.S. alliances and foster moderation in the region. If the incoming U.S. administration better articulates tensions and defines policies

in the Gulf, it might be able to improve the standing of the United States in the region.

Neumann remarked that despite its ability to be manipulated by extremists into generating public passion, the Arab-Israeli conflict is an emotional issue of relatively low significance. Since the fate of Palestine is not central to the priorities of Gulf rulers, it will not spur actions or sacrifices on their behalf. Saudi Arabia, which has put money behind moving the peace process forward, is the only exception to this default position. Overwhelmingly, in Neumann's opinion, the Arab-Israeli conflict complicates rather than determines relations for the Gulf states.

Governments and citizens in GCC states view the Iraq War as unnecessary and believe that the United States is preventing the Iraqi people from seeking their own solutions. Neumann noted that, at the same time, GCC states deeply fear U.S. withdrawal from Iraq because of its potentially destabilizing effect on the region. The small populations of GCC states are extremely wealthy and extraordinarily vulnerable, lacking the capacity to strike back against offensives launched against them. For these reasons, the ongoing chaos in Iraq is particularly terrifying for them.

Neumann explained that GCC states also harbor a historic fear of Iran, which they perceive as a regional hegemon that predates Arab nationalism. In particular, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) maintains that the Iranian administration of the islands of Abu Mousa, Greater Tunbs, and Lesser Tunbs constitutes an illegal occupation of UAE territory. Bahrain is also fearful of Iranian influence on its sizeable Shiite population. Neumann recommended that talks between Iran and the United States would help to subdue the paranoia of some GCC states and contribute to greater regional stability.

Vali Nasr asserted that the Bush administration's hopes for reform in Iran have not been met in the past decade. Instead, conservatives have managed to appropriate a reliable constituency, as indicated by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election in August 2005 and by the parliamentary elections in March 2008. Most Americans still perceive Iran as a regime of mullahs, but

many of those who hold power are former military commanders who emerged from the Iran-Iraq War with little regard for international law. In their calculation, Iran needs to act self-sufficiently and unilaterally in order to compete with Saudi Arabia for regional prowess. Nasr observed that, in this sense, the regime's current consolidation strategies are not much different from those advanced by the Shah.

Iran has made a palpable shift in attention from the Levant to the Gulf, threatening GCC states that host U.S. troops while simultaneously launching a charm offensive toward King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and engaging in the rising economies of the UAE and Bahrain. Indeed, Nasr remarked that Dubai is often considered "the best city in Iran," through which dirty money moves from Iran to the global economy. While suffering from a hobbled economy, Iran has begun exporting goods to Central Asia, where it has a comparative advantage. Furthermore, Shiite shrines in Syria and Iraq attract Iranian pilgrims, thereby strengthening Iran's zone of political, cultural, and economic influence.

Nasr explained that Iran strives to pacify Iraqi territory—as it did successfully in Afghanistan—so that Iraq will no longer harbor enemies of Iran. Through conducting diplomatic missions and investing in non-state groups, Iran continues to be a major determinant in the Iraq War. Inasmuch as it is symbolic of Shiite power, the current governmental structure in the Iraq benefits Iran. This trend of Shiite influence was reinforced by the Lebanon War in 2006, which Iran regarded as an opportunity to build political capital on the Arab street. Now Iranians believe that they have a role in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and in influencing Lebanon's political affairs.

A number of strategies undertaken by the Iranians are problematic for the United States, which does not have a viable Iran strategy and has not thought through how to deal with a Middle East in which Iran is a part. For Iran, nuclear capability would ultimately serve to strengthen its domestic nationalism and solidify its regional presence. Yet Nasr observed that U.S. policy toward Iran is often narrowly focused on the nuclear issue, committed to sanctions, or anchored in regime change. He advised that a more encompassing approach would better serve U.S. interests in the region and would better prepare the Arab world for coexistence with Iran.

Anthony Cordesman presented his view that the United States invaded Iraq with no capacity for nation-building, no operational goals for training Iraqi forces, and no plan for distributing international aid. Operation Enduring Freedom, the Iraq War, and the Global War on Terror have amounted to cumulative costs of almost $750 billion. Yet much of this funding has been reprogrammed to foreign contractors. Moreover, not until 2006 were any of these funds tied to the Iraqi Army. Cordesman reported that 40 percent of international aid has never been disbursed. In his judgment, that which has been disbursed has not resulted in change, and successes that occurred have not translated into concrete results.

In Cordesman's opinion, it is misleading to accuse Iraqis of squandering financial opportunities presented to them by the Americans. He asserted that the United States had a major role in putting the Iraqi people in their current situation. For example, in attempting to computerize the budget of the Iraq government, the United States destroyed a working ledger system and replaced it with a flawed system that requires resources sold on the black market. In addition, the U.S. military did not develop effective methods for training the Iraqi Army until 2006, and it still lacks strategies for training local police forces. The concept of provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) has been unsuccessful in Iraq, due to high turnover and insufficient civilian forces.

The United States has neither a clear strategy in Iraq nor the leverage to enforce a clear strategy. In the face of these realities, Cordesman advised that the U.S. government should strive for a degree of unity among Iraqis rather than contributing to new divisions between various groups. He expressed hesitation regarding the October 2008 provincial elections in Iraq. At present, governorates do not necessarily correspond with ethnic boundaries, and Shiites are struggling among themselves to dominate governorates in southern Iraq. Often their own worst

enemy, the Kurds are trying to maximize a position of power that they cannot sustain. These flawed foundations will likely hamper the peaceful outcome of democratic elections.

Cordesman defined victory as "an Iraq that could stand on its own," but he noted that U.S. military forces in Iraq are employing the language of "accommodation" rather than "reconciliation." While the United States has supported increasing the size of the Iraqi Army, the Iraqis are not yet ready to take ownership of the institution. Nor does the United States have a development plan for any economic sector, not even for the Ministry of Oil. Ultimately, Cordesman cautioned that if the United States leaves a power vacuum in Iraq, without having tried its best to reach sustainable solutions, several generations of Americans will be faced with paying the price of regional instability.

Session II: The Arab-Israeli Conflict

Speakers: **William Quandt,** Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. Professor of Politics, University of Virginia
Shai Feldman, Judith and Sidney Swartz Director, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University
Shibley Telhami, Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, College Park; Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, The Brookings Institution
Aaron David Miller, Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Chair: **Rashid Khalidi,** Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies and Director of the Middle East Institute, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

William Quandt observed that most initiatives launched by the U.S. government in response to the Arab-Israeli conflict have either failed or not been implemented. The efforts that have been met with success are limited and, in Quandt's estimation, have been contingent on three features: an Israeli leader who holds ample domestic power to carry progress forward; an Arab leader who is able to implement principles agreed upon in negotiations; and an American mediator who considers resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict to be in the national interest of the United States.

By these standards, Quandt concluded that the current calculus is rather grim. While Israel has had strong leaders in the past, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is constrained by domestic politics and has made only limited progress in forming a coalition that could withstand negotiations. There have been no equivalent Arab counterparts since Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat, Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad, and King Hussein of Jordan. President Mahmoud Abbas has limited authority and legitimacy, as he does not represent the entire Palestinian population. Finally, President

Bush will soon be entering his lame duck period, which will deplete his ability to make demands on relevant leaders.

While generally pessimistic about the prospects for peace, Quandt did highlight the emergence of several promising elements. In his opinion, fatigue on both sides of the conflict implies that Israeli and Palestinian hardliners might be willing to make some territorial concessions to advance the cause of stability. The parameters for a two-state solution are much clearer now. Moreover, regional consensus on the proposal is much broader, with almost every Arab state having made a commitment to endorse a peaceful solution brokered by the Israelis and Palestinians.

Quandt observed that the United States has distanced itself from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict for seven years, but that the Bush administration is now trying to make a solution its legacy. However, parties in the region might be less inclined to make concessions to the outgoing U.S. administration. He recommended that the incoming U.S. administration revisit its priorities and decide whether or not the Arab-Israeli conflict deserves a prominent place on the American foreign policy agenda. Other issues, such as the nuclear threat posed by Iran, for example, might likely be deemed more pressing.

Shai Feldman identified a number of factors as assets and liabilities for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. He noted that the peace process could benefit from increasing Arab consensus about the negative impact of the Shia crescent reaching from Iran through Iraq to Lebanon—and about the role of Islamic extremism in strengthening that bloc. For example, partially in response to the Shia revival, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have taken productive measures to deal with extremists in their own countries. Feldman emphasized that while President Abbas has acknowledged that Fatah needs a strategy for dealing with Hamas, his support for the peace process should not be underestimated.

In Feldman's opinion, another critical condition for progress is the political leadership in Israel, which, he claimed, is now convinced that it is absolutely imperative to resolve the ongoing conflict. While Prime Minister Olmert's principal motive is demographic preservation, he also realizes that for Israel to maintain its character as a democratic Jewish state, an independent Palestinian state must exist. Additionally, while Syria's involvement in Lebanese affairs remains problematic, Syrians have been using Track II negotiation channels to engage with Israel, and the U.S. stance toward Syria has become increasingly relaxed.

Positive developments could easily be overturned by major liabilities. According to Feldman, the devil is not in the details, but rather in the principles of the right of return, the sovereignty of the Temple Mount, and the status of Jerusalem. The fundamental question of permanent status was omitted from the "Joint Understanding" reached at the November 2007 Annapolis Conference, and various actors lack commitment to this notion. Hamas needs to tolerate—if not accept or sign—formal agreements regarding each of these issues, but the fragmentation of Hamas and Fatah has been further complicated by Hamas' divide with its leadership in Damascus. If peace is to be implemented, Feldman recommended that agreements reached between the Israeli and Palestinian heads of state must be marketed successfully to Hamas.

Feldman identified several building blocks for a peace agreement that he believes are not contradictory: the comprehensive armistice agreement of 1948; Hamas' concept of a *hudna*, or ceasefire, which is not inconsistent with the comprehensive armistice; and the proposal for a Palestinian state with provisional borders, as articulated in the second phase of the Roadmap. The Arab-Israeli conflict has become a recent focus for President Bush, who realizes that without major progress in the peace process, the Iraq War will be his administration's only legacy. Feldman projected that resolution might indeed be achieved before President Bush leaves office in January 2009, especially if actors are willing to lower their expectations and settle for something less than permanent status.

Shibley Telhami reiterated that the Arab-Israeli conflict remains a pressing topic in Arab public opinion today. Based on polling that he recently conducted in the region, 75 percent of Arabs rank

the conflict within the top three issues of importance to them; and two-thirds express favor for a two-state solution based on 1967 borders, though Telhami cited the abandonment of this notion by some elites, who contend that advocating a two-state solution will only maintain the status quo. In the past, a majority of Arabs were supportive of a Hamas-Fatah government in Palestine, but Telhami indicated that Hamas' support has gained momentum among Palestinians. For some, this shift has led to pessimism about the prospects for peace.

Telhami noted that the issue of Israeli deterrence is still relevant to a number of regional actors, especially in light of the Lebanon War in 2006, which is now being portrayed as a factional conflict. In his analysis, Israelis have always strove to put forth two notions—that their presence in the region is there to stay, and that they can inflict more pain on the Arabs than the Arabs can inflict on them. Today, those who believe that Israel is stronger than its Arab counterparts constitute a minority. Telhami suggested that there is a psychological element to the link between diminishing prospects for a two-state solution and the increasingly aggressive Arab stance on Israeli deterrence.

Given its national security interests and troubled relations with Israel, bringing resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict is expressly important for Lebanon. Syria continues to lobby for the return of the Golan Heights plateau, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967. The conflict has also become important for Egypt, which has been faced with assuming responsibility for Gaza in certain instances. Telhami commented that inasmuch as the issue of Palestinian statehood serves as a key opening to influence the Arab world, Saudi Arabia also seeks a formative role in brokering peace. Doing so would increase its ability to counter Iran's influence in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine.

Every contemporary U.S. president has faced the expectation of bringing peace to the Middle East. Telhami reported that the Arab world—particularly government officials in Saudi Arabia—is following the upcoming U.S. presidential election closely to gain a better understanding of candidates' platforms on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Arab leaders continue to request

participation by the Americans, believing that they will deliver on their commitment to peace. Today, however, a significant minority of Middle Easterners insists that the United States should stop meddling in regional affairs. Telhami emphasized that the incoming U.S. administration cannot ignore the implications of this changing mood in the region.

Aaron David Miller laid out several propositions that he believes are indispensable to the Arab-Israeli peace process. First, the solution to the conflict must be equitable and durable. Second, it must follow from the process of negotiation, which is typically long and imperfect due to the involvement of existential concerns and domestic politics. And, third, the United States has a critical role to play because of its exclusive relationship and leverage with Israel. Despite becoming disillusioned on account of his active engagement in negotiations, Miller emphasized the importance of rising above the circumstances to be "idealists without illusions," in John F. Kennedy's words, rather than losing hope and resorting to cynicism.

In Miller's analysis, several factors are currently impeding the peace process. Weak leaders are prisoners of their politics rather than masters of their constituencies. The gaps that separate Israelis and Palestinians on the issues of borders, refugees, and security are substantial. Miller acknowledged that principles are important, but that devils and demons do lie in the details of these issues. In addition, the Israeli government is plagued by dysfunction, and the Palestinian government is divided. In order for Mahmoud Abbas to benefit from the respect of his people and neighbors, he must regain a monopoly over the forces of societal violence. In the end, it is impossible to make peace with one party by making war with another party.

Miller identified a viable deal, a sense of urgency, a partnership of robust leaders, and a credible negotiator as being of paramount importance for successful peace negotiations. While the Annapolis Conference did not produce a large-scale plan of action, it was instrumental in building relationships between leaders based on conversation and thought experiments. By January 2009, President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert might

be able to formalize a peace agreement of a general nature. Miller noted that the trouble often begins when the text of the agreement meets the context of the conflict. Losing hope is easy, but the capacity of individuals to rise above themselves and empathize—if not sympathize—remains great.

Citing milestones achieved by President Jimmy Carter and Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and James Baker, Miller reflected that when it is perceived to be strong, the United States has been productive in brokering peace. Today the United States is a great but distant power that faces an increasing authority deficit in the Middle East. While the Arab-Israeli conflict is not central to ending the Iraq War or repairing U.S.-Iran relations, delivering a solution to the violence would improve the United States' standing in the region. Miller emphasized that garnering regional support is about minds and hearts—not hearts and minds. Switching the wrapping on the package will not be enough to change perceptions in the region.

Session III: Democracy and Reform

Speakers: **F. Gregory Gause III,** Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Vermont
Mona Eltahawy, Syndicated Columnist and Lecturer on Arab and Muslim Issues, New York
Khalil Shikaki, Director, Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Ramallah
Fawaz Gerges, Christian A. Johnson Professor in International Affairs and Middle Eastern Studies, Sarah Lawrence College

Chair: **Robert M. Hollister,** Dean, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service, Tufts University

Gregory Gause focused his remarks on the nature of governance in the Arab world. According to him, the question of why the Middle East is plagued by deficits of democracy should be replaced with an analytical examination of why authoritarian structures have proven so durable. Understanding the structural components that reinforce authoritarianism in the Arab world is critical for policymakers, both those who strive for regime change and those who seek to strengthen authoritarian leaders in order to promote regional stability or to preserve access to resources.

In Gause's opinion, the endurance of authoritarianism in the Arab world is due in part to its position in the global economy. Many Arab states are characterized by rentier economies, in which government revenues—linked to oil resources and international aid—are not mediated through society. This system enables elites to gain wealth without expending political capital and to reinforce patronage networks that prove dependable for political and economic security. Authoritarian leaders also benefit from the Arab world's strategic proximity to Europe and the Strait of Hormuz, as well as from the value placed on stability in the region by the Great Powers. Access to energy resources and control over population movements to Europe are particularly salient trigger issues, and authoritarian regimes have manipulated these issues to play on fears of instability to their advantage.

Gause suggested that authoritarian governments remain dominant in the Middle East because they have proven to be adept at statecraft. Not only have they built reliable patronage networks to preserve their power, but the process of economic liberalization has also served as a cover for the crony privatization that supports them. For example, governments have privatized mobile phone services while micromanaging the distribution of licenses to company owners. Citing the case of "royal non-governmental organizations" in Jordan, Gause also noted that governing elites are skilled at using coercive monitoring and legal systems to control and co-opt civil society organizations. By constructing rigged electoral systems, directing media coverage, and repressing opposition candidates, authoritarian leaders have also used elections to bolster their monopolies on power.

Finally, Gause contended that authoritarian leaders have overemphasized the role of identity politics in the Arab world to support their claims that democracy is not possible. When members of an ethnic or religious minority manage a state's security services, such as in Syria and Iraq, the risks of surrendering or fracturing power become too grave for the head of state. In addition, the rise of Islamist politics has indirectly empowered the state, steering authoritarian leaders away from reforms that could very well lead to their imprisonment or financial downfall in the event of an electoral victory by extremists. Given the ideological clashes that inform the tenor of local and world politics, it is difficult for Arab leaders to envisage a soft landing on the other side of reform.

Mona Eltahawy focused her remarks on the influence of U.S. policy on reform efforts in Egypt, suggesting that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's diplomatic visits to Egypt are indicative of U.S. priorities, which often value stability over democracy. In 2005, Secretary Rice postponed a visit to Egypt in protest of the imprisonment of opposition figure Ayman Nour. After his release months later, she spoke optimistically at the American University of Cairo in support of "impatient patriots" who had been rising up against the ruling regime in Egypt. Indeed, two days following the speech, Eltahawy recalled attending hopeful protests where, for the first time, there was not a massive police presence.

Yet Secretary Rice's visits later that year—following elections in which the Muslim Brotherhood gained one-fifth of the parliamentary seats—focused less on reformists in Egypt. Instead she called for Egyptian support of the Iraq War and cooperation related to Hamas' role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In March 2008, Rice returned to the topic of reform during her diplomatic visit, while simultaneously announcing the release of approximately $100 million in military aid to Egypt—funds that had previously been frozen after Congressional debates about questionable uses of U.S. funding by the Egyptian government. Eltahawy pointed to this contradiction in rhetoric as linked to a shifting perception about the U.S. government's enthusiasm for internal reform and to growing distrust of U.S. intentions among the Egyptian people.

Eltahawy reported that the reality in Egypt was one of internal rather than external pressure. Bread riots had resumed in March 2008 as a result of heavily subsidized government bakeries being forced to contend with spiking commodities prices. Eltahawy sought to explain support for the Muslim Brotherhood within this context of economic strain. In her estimation, the growing support for the Muslim Brotherhood is not ideological, but is a protest against the status quo. Liberal, secular Egyptians are unsure about the Muslim Brotherhood's stance on issues—apart from the fact that the organization is anti-government—and for this reason Eltahawy predicted that the Islamists would likely not win if free elections were held in Egypt.

In Eltahawy's view, hope lies with newspapers such as *al-Misr al-Yawm*, which have retained their independence from government influence. Individuals in the legal profession who have taken whistle-blowing measures against the government are also contributing to increased accountability, and social network websites such as Facebook and YouTube have been useful in gaining attendees and traction for peaceful protests. Eltahawy also identified the young culture of bloggers—who now produce more than 4,000 blogs, some of which are authored by members of the Muslim Brotherhood and highlight police brutality and corruption among government officials—as critical to developing an environment of free speech and democratic reform in Egypt.

Khalil Shikaki discussed reasons why democracy has floundered in the Middle East. First, based on survival instincts, ruling elites in the region have effectively imposed beliefs about the limitations of democratic reform. External pressures exacerbate this tendency by contributing to a prevailing sense of vulnerability among regional leaders. Second, domestic institutions have not been sufficiently robust to allow for the proper functioning of democracy. Political parties and civil society are relatively weak and focused on issues other than regime change. And third, Shikaki observed that interventions led by the United States and the international community have had a detrimental effect on the process of democratization in the region.

There have indeed been some cases of legal and constitutional reform in the region, but in Shikaki's view, the fact that reform on paper does not translate into tangible societal change is deeply problematic. For many societies in the Middle East that do not harbor a historical emphasis on social equality, effecting change requires overcoming traditional deference to political authority. Yet civil society is weak relative to the ruling elite and has limited capacity to realize its goals. Furthermore, distracted by external threats posed by Islamists and government restrictions alike, civil society often becomes divided when faced with competing priorities of peace and democracy.

Shikaki outlined a familiar cycle of measures taken by risk-averse ruling elites to balance internal order while keeping external intervention at bay. Initially, after recognizing that external forces embrace internal attempts at reform, elites wait for external forces to apply pressure rather than respond to the demands of their populations. Subsequently, elites resist that pressure and blame domestic reformers for causing the intervention. To avoid antagonizing the reformers, elites endorse most of their propositions. At the same time, they publicly oppose the content of the reforms, which they convey as linked to external forces. Without wide public support, the reforms themselves lose substance and lack proper implementation, and the reformers must contend with dwindling legitimacy.

Sometimes external forces have failed to realize their negative impact on reform in the region. For the most part, reformers have refrained from identifying with goals championed by the United States and other international actors. Shikaki noted that methods of regime change pursued by the United States—coercion in Palestine, violence in Iraq, and disincentives in the broader Middle East—fail to generate Arab trust in U.S. intentions. In the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict, many reformers believe that democracy is not of high priority to the United States, which is no longer regarded as a viable ally in the peace process. Shikaki recommended that the United States and other actors carefully weigh the productivity of external interventions, as they might reinforce the traditional power structures of ruling elites.

Fawaz Gerges spoke about structural obstacles to liberalization in the Arab world, as well as the ways in which the U.S. invasion of Iraq has exacerbated those variables. Based on his conversations with civil society activists over the last 15 months, he identified three internal barriers to reform in the Arab world. First, the state of confrontation between the mainstream Islamist movement and pro-Western authoritarian governments has long been an impediment to liberalization. Through persecution, leaders have cracked down on Islamist movements with the goal of excluding them from politics rather than limiting their contributions. In Gerges' estimation, these measures encourage the most significant segments of social movements to become underground operations.

Second, across the region, a prevailing culture of apathy has become the curse of Arab politics. For example, with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood, there is no political party that motivates hundreds of thousands of Egyptians to protest in the streets. Gerges observed that once faith in the political process has been lost, it is extremely difficult for civil society actors to mobilize citizens. Third, the fragmentation of social and political groups in the Arab world jeopardizes liberalization efforts. The unilateral, disjunctive nature of reform efforts is due not only to government repression, but also to the unwillingness of both Islamist elements and progressive voices to make alliances for shared causes.

According to Gerges, tremendous internal reform has taken place within mainstream Islamist movements. Both Arab governments and the Bush administration have largely ignored these developments. It is critical for the United States to recognize dissidents within the Muslim Brotherhood who are trying to nationalize, liberalize, and democratize their movement. In interviews with Gerges, leading dissidents in the mainstream Islamist movements have indicated that legalization and legitimization would help to unify and moderate their reform efforts. Rather than endorsing authoritarian strategies of exclusion and persecution, the United States should begin to engage these dissidents, Gerges suggested. This approach is being discussed in Washington, but definitive steps have not yet been taken.

Gerges argued that, contrary to claims made by some members of the Bush administration, the U.S. occupation of Iraq has had no transformative impact on the nature of reform efforts or the relative weight of social leaders in the region. Instead, the Iraq War has increased accusations of collusion between oppressive governments and their superpower patrons. He cautioned that the sectarian model of Iraq is not one that should be replicated elsewhere in the region. In conclusion, Gerges emphasized that in order to encourage reconciliation and genuine democracy in the Arab world, the widening divide between citizens and authoritarian rulers must be bridged.

Webcast Keynote Address: "Iraq: Lessons Learned"

Speaker: **General Anthony Zinni,** Executive Vice President, DynCorp International; U.S. Peace Envoy in the Middle East; Commander of the Combined Task Force for Operation UNITED SHIELD

Chair: **Richard Shultz,** Professor of International Politics, and Director, International Security Studies Program, The Fletcher School

Anthony Zinni discussed shortcomings of U.S. policy that have been exposed by the Iraq War and highlighted lessons learned that have emerged from those gaps. He noted that the politicization and exaggeration of intelligence has harmed the credibility of the intelligence community. Based on his dealings with U.S. and Iraqi intelligence sources, Zinni emphasized that the amassed information never supported the Bush administration's accusations about links between the Iraqi government and weapons of mass destruction. He observed that related agencies have since taken measures to be more careful in their reporting and procedures and that the intelligence community has since met the need to contextualize facts appropriately and balance against political pressures mounted by the White House.

The Iraq War has also reinforced the need for planning from a number of angles. While U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and some officials in the Pentagon regarded military planning as stale and outdated, Zinni contended that military planning is dynamic and subject to annual review and revision based on incoming intelligence, new demands, and changing context. At the same time he acknowledged that the military should not be the only source of planning in cases of regime change. The reconstruction of Iraq has suffered from a lack of forethought on the part of U.S. institutions involved in economic and political development. For example, after years of reassuring members of the Iraqi Army that they would be compensated with alternative livelihoods in the event of Saddam Hussein's overthrow, the United States disbanded the Iraqi Army and has not yet filled in the financing gap caused by de-Baathification.

Zinni criticized the disjointed Middle East strategy used by the United States, which acknowledges neither the competing priorities of ethnic and religious factions, nor the interconnected nature of various conflicts in the region. Thus, the United States has committed a number of blunders that have exacerbated fissures in Iraq while sparking tensions in Lebanon and Iran. Zinni observed that since the end of the Cold War, American politics resemble a popularity contest rather than a model of strategic thinking. After all, the U.S. invasion of Iraq—and the recent surge—is a military tactic rather than a comprehensive strategy. Instead, he argued for a smart power model that relies on the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development to augment U.S. military efforts, as well as upon international organizations to lend legitimacy to efforts made by the United States.

Finally, Zinni commented that the Iraq War has revealed the extent to which civilian counterparts in the government can stifle the voice of the military. In the early stages of preparation for the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, military leaders—including Zinni and his three predecessors—expressed their concerns. For the most part, commanders who voiced their opinions were either not heard or were summarily dismissed. Zinni emphasized that the forefathers of the United States established channels for conveying military expertise to the President and Congress without violating the authority of civilian leadership, but that those channels have been blocked or misused during the tenure of the Bush administration.

In order to respond effectively to transnational threats and global crises, Zinni recommended that the United States update its World War II mentality to account for the fact that launching interventions and achieving moral ground is more complex in today's world. Regardless of the results of the upcoming presidential election, U.S. troops will likely remain deployed in almost every country in the Middle East—as they are in Germany, Japan, and South Korea. Zinni observed that these realities only increase the importance of safeguarding fragile coalitions and initiating active dialogue instead of just "telling people what to do." The United States will preserve its leadership role only if it develops new models that acknowledge the far-reaching implications of global challenges and the limitations of military might in responding to those challenges.

Session IV: Islamic Parties and Groups

Speakers: **Malik Mufti,** Associate Professor of Political Science, Tufts University
Abdel Monem Said Aly, Director, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo
Amr Hamzawy, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
John L. Esposito, University Professor and Founding Director, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University

Chair: **Ibrahim Warde,** Adjunct Professor of International Business, The Fletcher School; Associate Director of Business Programs, The Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies, Tufts University

Malik Mufti suggested that the age of democracy has already arrived in the Middle East, and he identified several conceptual changes in the way that citizens—and particularly Islamists—in the region are thinking about issues relating to democracy. In the 1970s, the tactical turn toward democracy taken by Islamists did not necessarily entail a deeper commitment to democratic values. Over time these tactical changes have led, often unwittingly, to substantive doctrinal changes and a discourse in which democracy has gained a hegemonic role. From Mufti's perspective, key notions of democratic participation, competitive elections, and ideological diversity will only continue to develop into a more liberal political order in the region.

He observed that the prominence of democratic discourse in the Middle East has resulted in increased emphasis on political pluralism. The rising value of pluralism is linked to the Islamists' need to legitimize their participation in competitive political arenas characterized by multiple perspectives. By the mid-1990s, statements issued by the Muslim Brotherhood acknowledged the natural characteristic of human beings to disagree with each other. Mufti suggested that, eventually, the validity of multiple

opinions weakened the Islamists' unwavering commitment to a single articulation of God's will, therefore supporting the notion that human beings are the source of political authority.

Muslim Brotherhood documents indicate a shift among Islamists from regarding citizens as ignorant and immoral to tolerating their increased participation in governance. For instance, Islamist parties in Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey have acknowledged the authority of the people in determining the outcome of recent elections. Related to this development, Islamists have also embraced the need for multi-party competition. After all, Mufti noted, limitations on political associations and parties would infringe upon the activities of the Islamists themselves. Even so, the accommodations that Islamists have made by accepting key foundations of democracy may result in a normative environment that will undercut their aims in the future.

The hegemonic nature of democracy in Islamist discourse will have implications that have not yet been brought to the fore. Mufti suggested that making allowances for diverse perspectives might result in fissures within Islamist parties. While the majority of Islamists believe that they can utilize democracy to realize their political and social goals, the democratic system might instead transform Islamists into a more secular force in the region. In conclusion, Mufti recommended that the United States and other powers consider the alternatives to encouraging Islamists to democratize—namely, their total retreat from democracy—which he regarded as worse than the participation of Islamist groups in fledging democracies.

Abdel Monem Said Aly contended that the nature of U.S. engagement in the Middle East is something that has yet to be defined. The conceptual framework that Americans use to understand the region has shifted. Rather than interpreting the Middle East in terms of colonization and decolonization, the United States now constructs foreign policy through the lens of September 11, 2001 and analyzes the region within the framework of Islam. In Said Aly's view, these factors lead the United States to focus on the players with whom it should engage rather than on the manner of engaging. While the region certainly suffers from repressive regimes, internal Islamist elements that oppose those regimes should not be automatically perceived as allies.

For example, Said Aly asserted that engaging with the Muslim Brotherhood to counter the repressive Egyptian government is an unreliable policy for the United States and other external actors. The literature published by the Islamist movement deals with *fatwas* rather than with legislation, proposes limitations on the participation of women in the judiciary and governmental ministries, relies upon *sharia* as a determinant of war and peace, and endorses a national security strategy of confrontation with the West. In Said Aly's estimation, the antiquated positions of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist parties would destroy societies in the region rather than help to develop and democratize them.

He appealed to scholars and policymakers to ask questions that reveal the underlying tenets of Islamist doctrine. More telling than its position on free elections are the rights that the Muslim Brotherhood would afford Egyptian citizens if it were democratically elected into power. Said Aly also acknowledged the existence of moderate Islamists—for example, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey—who believe in equality and the freedoms of their citizens. But he suggested that moderate Islamists emerge from a limited number of contexts—those characterized by severe totalitarianism, as in the cases of Iraq and Syria; those benefiting from socio-economic conditions associated with market economies, as in the case of Turkey; or those striving for alliances and partnerships with the West, also as in the case of Turkey.

The shifting role of Islam in the Middle East has led to constant questioning and reexamination. Through their platforms and actions, Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat al-Islamiyya contribute to the debate over whether God is a unifying or divisive force for humanity, and whether the source of law rests with God or with human beings. Given the multiple sources of power and legitimacy in their societies, Muslims must now identify which among them carry the divine message—and how those terms of divinity are defined. In some cases, religion serves as liberation from the

status quo, but in other cases, it has become a justification of the status quo. The Middle East, Said Aly concluded, has much ground to cover in answering these questions and debates before it can be characterized as modern.

Amr Hamzawy argued that the institution of the mosque has emerged as a diversified force in the region, used in different manners by existing religious establishments, imams of rising popularity, and, to a lesser extent, Islamists vying for political traction. For example, when state infrastructures have proven inadequate in delivering basic needs to their citizens, Islamist movements have collaborated with mosques to fill the social services vacuum. Hamzawy suggested that the complexity of these partnerships renders the dichotomy of "mosque and state" as overly simplistic for understanding the Arab world and for making policies that encourage democracy in the region.

In his view, Islamist activities in the Middle East can be characterized by one of four patterns. In the first pattern, Islamist movements are exiled from their respective countries. In the cases of Tunisia and Syria, for example, there is a lack of organization on the ground and Islamists are forced to operate from the outside. The second pattern is observable in Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, and Yemen, where political scenes are markedly less polarized, the rules of the game are known, and Islamist parties function openly. In these cases, Islamist parties are afforded legal status and limited but stable participation, and they have achieved notable electoral gains. Internal debates center around "post-participation" issues rather than on the question of participation itself.

Hamzawy described a third pattern of activity typical of Islamist movements that cannot participate in a stable manner. In Egypt and Jordan, Islamist parties must contend with waves of inclusion and exclusion in the political scene, depending upon the shifting confidence of ruling regimes. Therefore, Islamists tend to develop platforms that are highly polarized and averse to cross-ideological alliances that could threaten to erode their constituencies. In these contexts, Islamist movements engage in politics cyclically when opportunities arise, and otherwise attempt to secure and retain monopolies over the legitimate use of religion in their societies.

The final pattern of Islamist activity is exemplified by the cases of Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine. Led by actors who employ military tactics, Islamist movements in these states attempt to become involved in politics but cannot be described accurately as democratic. While commentators and policymakers often focus on this militant pattern of Islamism, Hamzawy warned against explaining Islamist politics with grand narratives. Just as conservative and reform-oriented politicians in the region cannot be easily distinguished from one another, Islamists cannot be grouped into generalized categories that rigidly divide the old guard from the new guard. In conclusion, Hamzawy stressed the importance of empirical evidence for a subtle understanding of shifting Islamist trends.

John Esposito presented the results of 50,000 interviews conducted by Gallup Poll in 30 Muslim-majority countries, which amount to a sample that represents 90 percent of the world's Muslim population. He reported that significant numbers of Muslims want a political system that combines democratic and faith-based values. While a majority of respondents endorse the notion of using *sharia* as a source of law, they do not want religious authorities involved in politics. By comparison, a majority of Americans surveyed believe that the Bible should be a source of legislation, and 46 percent would support religious authorities gaining a direct role in interpreting and amending the Constitution.

The Gallup Poll survey results reflect substantial distinctions between Muslim populations in individual states. While "moderate" and "radical" respondents are equally enthusiastic about the role of mosque attendance and religious observance in their societies, Esposito noted that politically radical Muslims are more likely to commit or support violence in the name of Islam. Yet he emphasized that politically radical Muslims are typically educated, affluent males, who harbor an acute awareness of global affairs. They also tend to believe that democracy is the way forward, though they are highly cynical about how the democratic process will unfold in the region.

Esposito also sought to provide clarity about the growing gap between American and Muslim public opinion. He reconfirmed

that the vast majority of Muslims do not support the acts of violence that occurred on September 11, 2001. Muslims widely cited their respect for Western technology and values such as freedom of speech, democracy, rule of law, and gender equality, whereas 57 percent of American survey respondents reported that they were unsure about their response or that they did not respect anything about the Muslim world. This impression has reverberated among both moderates and radicals in the Muslim world, a significant minority of which contends that the West regards them as inferior and lacks respect for Islam.

Additionally, while Americans tend to believe that diplomatic problems can be solved with educational and cultural exchanges, Muslims do not agree that public diplomacy is sufficient. They claim that American foreign policy must change as well. In Esposito's estimation, the United States must abandon a narrow public relations approach and make substantive shifts in foreign policy if it aims to succeed in the struggle against extremism in the Muslim world. Relying more heavily upon empirical data on religious and political beliefs of Muslim populations, on goals and challenges cited by a diverse cross-section of women, and on opinions of Muslims regarding U.S. politics and American culture should assist scholars and policymakers in penetrating the minefield of highly politicized misperceptions about the region that have multiplied in recent years.

Session V: Challenges Facing U.S. Policy and Public Diplomacy

Speakers: **Richard Shultz,** Professor of International Politics and Director of the International Security Studies Program, The Fletcher School
William A. Rugh, Edward R. Murrow Visiting Professor of Public Diplomacy, The Fletcher School; Adjunct Scholar, The Middle East Institute; Associate, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Georgetown University
Thom Shanker, Pentagon Correspondent, *The New York Times*
Rami G. Khouri, Editor-at-Large of *The Daily Star,* Beirut; Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut

Chair: **Stephen Van Evera,** Professor of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Richard Shultz offered his observations about the ways in which the Pentagon's new thinking about preparing for future challenges is unfolding. His comments were based upon recent military doctrine and operational concept documents, the preparation of which has been heavily influenced by five years of irregular warfare in Iraq, armed conflict in Afghanistan, global operations against al-Qaeda, and smaller engagements in Somalia and the Philippines. While elements in the Navy and Air Force have shown hesitation in endorsing some of the propositions made in these documents, Shultz asserted that the new doctrine has gained an overwhelming constituency throughout the armed forces.

Shultz explained that the recent shift in military thinking is explicitly linked to the changing nature of threats. Since World War II, the U.S. military had been contending with state-centric conventional warfare fought by professional armies. Its operations paradigm is now undergoing a sea change in order to counter the local and transnational dimensions of attacks launched by non-state armed groups. The U.S. Department of Defense has come to

perceive internal threats created by armed groups as posing major challenges to its operations and has adjusted its strategies accordingly, beginning with the decision to deploy the Marines in Iraq.

The U.S. Department of Defense has projected that the security environment of the twenty-first century will be predominated by armed groups. Shultz reported that the Army now predicts that future conflicts are more likely to be fought among the people rather than around the people. He acknowledged that this manner of fighting has been used for quite some time in the Middle East, but recalled that the U.S. military had not previously considered irregular warfare as part of its domain, and was thus unprepared for the complex adjustments it required. Now, Shultz noted, military doctrine prepares its forces to consider the role of non-state actors in armed conflicts.

Some experts criticize the new doctrine for placing limitations on the military's use of force against counterinsurgents. Yet Shultz agreed that in contemporary conflicts, when achieving legitimacy among populations is at stake, force must be less kinetic and more precise. Operations such as securing neighborhoods and protecting vulnerable populations demand strategies that are more defensive than offensive. Shultz commended the new doctrine for reinforcing the notion that local forces must win the war for themselves while also outlining the ways in which the U.S. military can assist police and military forces in gaining the capacity to achieve sustainable peace. For instance, in cases such as Iraq and Pakistan, the U.S. military even recommends that troops collaborate with armed groups rather than fight them.

William Rugh spoke about operational aspects of U.S. approaches to public diplomacy in the Middle East, or the lack thereof. He noted that for decades prior to the Global War on Terror, American officials have quietly practiced public diplomacy as an adjunct to traditional avenues of diplomacy. Dialogue with foreign media services, international student exchanges, and broadcasts such as Radio Free Europe are examples of these unconventional methods of diplomacy. Over the last decade, such outlets have been hampered internally by intensified U.S. security concerns and weakened externally by the continued demise of the American image abroad.

Rugh asserted that the state of public diplomacy began to deteriorate during the 1990s, when government officials believed that it was irrelevant and unnecessary in the post-Cold War era. Budgets and staffing were drastically reduced, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was dissolved, and heightened security measures reduced the number of international students who accessed libraries and cultural centers in the United States. The Bush administration inherited this flawed public diplomacy system, and made it even more difficult for channels to be exercised. Especially after September 11, 2001, opposition to American foreign policy has pushed diplomatic operations to the margins. Attempts to brand American values, as if they were products to be sold, have proven largely unsuccessful.

In Rugh's opinion, the dissolution of the USIA has buried public diplomacy under the cumbersome bureaucracy of the U.S. Department of State, and the Pentagon's mission creep into public diplomacy has endangered the credibility of information and undermined attempts to support ethical journalism. Furthermore, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) has proposed sweeping elimination of Voice of America and English-language programming abroad. Meanwhile, Rugh commented, costly U.S.-funded Arabic language stations have attracted few viewers due to the limited content and poor quality of programming. While the U.S. Department of Defense prioritizes winning the "war of ideas" and has called for the establishment of a civilian agency to handle this task, its public diplomacy activities continuously overshadow those launched by the U.S. Department of State.

Rugh acknowledged that given the United States' troubled image in the world today, public diplomacy can do little more than dispel genuine misunderstandings, engage in honest discussion, and focus on programs that strengthen long-term ties. He mentioned that as Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Karen Hughes managed to expand funding for exchange programs by two-thirds, revive close monitoring of foreign media and correcting of misinformation, and reverse the policy of boycotting al-Jazeera. Rugh advised the incoming U.S. presidential administration to uphold these policies, dramatically

improve Arabic-language programming, find ways of balancing security needs with dialogue in embassies, and pay better attention to the opinions of foreign publics.

Thom Shanker described the significance of the Iraq War for the U.S. military, drawing from his numerous visits with troops on the ground. He reported that the U.S. military is realizing that killing enough "bad guys" in Iraq will not achieve victory and that access to employment, electricity, water, and political empowerment are as important to security as the number of U.S. soldiers in Iraq. The Iraq War has presented new demands for the U.S. military, which has needed to develop operational and strategic responses to guerilla warfare. The Army has long suffered from limited troop numbers and will need additional soldiers and training to contend with counterinsurgents in Iraq while simultaneously preparing for traditional threats posed by hostile powers in the region and elsewhere.

The Marines, whose typical capacity is to intervene in emergencies, have become as entrenched in Iraq as has the Army. Shanker recommended that rather than being assigned to extended deployments in Iraq, the Marines would best serve U.S. interests by resuming their on-call status. The Navy and the Air Force face a different type of challenge, because their presence near potential crisis zones must be less visible and less controversial than that of the ground forces. Shanker noted that achieving this balance will likely be of increased priority in a post-Iraq War era, when the United States has retreated into a period of relative isolationism—as the American public has demanded after land wars in the past.

Shanker observed that progress in the Iraq War is conditional upon the success of the U.S. military surge, the shifting relationship between Sunni sheikhs and the Shia Awakening Movement, and the ceasefires brokered by Muqtada al-Sadr. These developments are subject to interpretation, as is the question of whether or not Prime Minister Maliki is actually standing up to radical elements in southern Iraq and helping the Iraqis take the reins from the Americans. Noting that the fighting in southern Iraq is not about democratic values but about possessing a share of the

Iraqi economy, Shanker suggested that a different approach is necessary for establishing stability in a non-democratic context characterized by strong patronage networks.

Shanker contended that war should not be a laboratory for proving theories of military reform, as he suggested was the case in Iraq under the direction of Secretary Rumsfeld. In comparison, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has successfully prioritized bipartisan support for lowered—if significant—troop presence in Iraq. But still, the U.S. military continues to apply rubrics and strategic planning to the virtual domain of the Arab media, failing to comprehend that it is losing the battle of ideas in the region. After all, democracy cannot be spread through un-democratic means, and the role of militaries is merely to defeat other militaries; only governments are actually able to win wars. Given these realities, Shanker concluded that the United States must look beyond the Iraq War to secure a new arena of influence in the region.

Rami Khouri acknowledged that the Middle East is the last vestige of structural autocracy in the world, and he attributed the region's rejection of democracy to a series of historical grievances related to the degradation of Arab societies. At the apex of these grievances is the notion held by many Middle Easterners that their basic humanity is unacknowledged—repressed either by their own societies or by the foreign powers that intervene in their affairs. Khouri compared the existential crisis that informs the contemporary Arab worldview to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s description of African-Americans "being in exile in [their] own land" during the civil rights movement. Under the umbrella of "nobody-ness," or non-recognition, a number of other political and economic grievances reside.

For example, the region lacks sensible configurations of statehood to resolve or counter internal and external threats to security and stability, which materialize at individual, collective, state, transnational, and pan-Islamic levels. Furthermore, at each of these levels, citizens often do not believe that they are able to express their identities freely and adequately. The prevalence of power vacuums in many states has bolstered new sources of legit-

imacy—from Hezbollah and Hamas to civil society and non-governmental organizations. Arab leaders continue to lack accountability, and rights and obligations of citizenship remain unclear. Most individuals and states feel that they lack the ability to make sovereign decisions related to their resources, values, and destinies. Additionally, pressures on the purchasing power of families and the ability of individuals to meet their basic material needs have been gradually increasing since the 1980s, as demographic growth has superseded economic growth.

At the same time, citizens in the Middle East have taken advantage of expanded channels to express themselves publicly, join social and political networks, and emigrate within and beyond the region. Islamist movements have benefited greatly from these openings, and they have gained popularity and electoral traction because they are indigenous and credible. They have expanded to fill the gap created by the failure of modern ideologies such as socialism, and they have historically adapted to respond to citizens' demands for basic needs, political empowerment, resistance of foreign powers, and redressing of historical traumas. The age of acquiescence, passive suffering, degradation, and dehumanization has been consumed by a wave of assertion across the Middle East. Khouri warned that, thus far, Islamists have been at the forefront of this movement toward self-determination.

Understanding these informal patterns of expressing and addressing grievances in the region, Khouri concluded, would be a prudent starting point for the incoming U.S. presidential administration. He highlighted the importance of better understanding and engaging the distinctive—and sometimes contradictory—elements of Middle Eastern publics, whose opinions are informed by realities on the ground and whose support is tremendously critical for democratic transformation in the region. Indeed, if the United States were to more actively gather and respond to perspectives expressed by constituents in the Middle East, Khouri suggested that it might be regarded as better embodying the democratic processes it claims to promote through its many interventions.

Concluding Remarks: "The New Cold War in the Middle East"

Speaker: **Rashid Khalidi,** Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies and Director of the Middle East Institute, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

Chair: **Jamshed Bharucha,** Provost, Senior Vice President, and Professor of Psychology, Tufts University

Rashid Khalidi proposed that a new "American-Iranian Cold War" has developed in the Middle East and is being played out to the detriment of Arab and U.S. interests and at the expense of core American values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. He identified a number of similarities between this new Cold War and the Cold War between the Soviets and the Americans that began in the 1950s, reflecting that neither the United States nor the Soviet Union acted with any frequency on behalf of their proclaimed values or local clients. American objectives of free markets, regional stability, access to oil, and support for Israel were sacrificed in order to contain the rising power of the Soviet Union. Similarly, when it best suited them to do so, the Soviets abandoned their comrades in the Turkish and Iranian communist parties. The Iran-Iraq War was fueled by the delivery of arms to each side by the respective superpowers. Finally, despite a pronounced hope for stability in the region, the United States failed to bring about a comprehensive solution to the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

In the context of the contemporary American-Iranian Cold War, policymakers have continued to further objectives that do not necessarily correspond with values promoted by the U.S. government. In recent years, the United States has ignored and undermined democracies in Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, and Turkey. It has also failed to bring monarchies under constitutional control, to encourage strong independent judiciaries, or to help elected parliaments stand against the tyranny of overbearing executives or militaries. In Khalidi's opinion, the U.S. government often

invariably touts Israel as the only viable democracy in the Middle East, while giving it what amounts to an endless free pass to continue its treatment of two generations of Palestinians. Beyond tarnishing the image of the United States as valuing self-determination and anti-colonialism, these policies have been detrimental to citizens of the Arab world.

President Clinton paid lip service to the ideals of democracy and rule of law during his presidential terms, through the decades-long sanctions regime against Iraq, hostility toward Iran despite the election of reformist President Mohammad Khatami, and undisputed solidification of U.S. naval presence in the Gulf. In the 1990s, the U.S. government's policies resulted in process rather than peace, failing to establish a position on the expansion of Israeli settlements and Palestinian encampments or the shortcomings of Arab governments in nurturing democracy in their societies. Khalidi asserted that the flaws in U.S. foreign policy during the 1990s increased distrust of the United States among Arab populations and bolstered the ability of extremists to gain new recruits that would be used during future terrorist attacks.

Democracy and other American core values have fallen by the wayside during the Bush administration's tenure, which has focused instead on promoting submissive stability in the region, achieving privileged access to oil, protecting U.S. military bases in the Gulf, and establishing a springboard for regime change in the region. The Iraq War was intended to serve these U.S. objectives. Khalidi asserted that, instead, the power vacuum in Iraq has sparked interventions by almost every regional power that is equipped to make them, has eliminated a natural predator of rising Iranian influence, and has inspired terrorist actions in and beyond Iraq. He concluded that as long as the United States continues its interventionist policies, it threatens to transform the new Cold War between Iran and the United States into a "hot war" and prevent the formation of democratic foundations and processes in the Middle East.

Participants

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