

CHAPTER 1

The United States and the Middle East: A Search For New Perspectives

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The Middle East remains the most turbulent of all world regions, a fact reflected in Iraq's recent annexation of Kuwait and the subsequent United States-led war against Iraq. Other potentially explosive conditions include the fragile cease-fire between Iran and Iraq, the unrest caused by the revival of political Islam, the dormant civil war in Lebanon, the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the continued foreign interference in the internal affairs of the region. The far-reaching implications of a Middle East in crisis become clearer when one recalls that the region is the most important source of the world's energy supply and is strategically critical for world peace and economic prosperity. It contains such important waterways as the Persian Gulf and the Suez Canal, is adjacent to a disintegrating Soviet Union, and occupies a central position between the three continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia.

For a variety of historical, ideological, economic, and diplomatic reasons, Americans have been particularly influenced by the regional and international consequences of the crises and events in the Middle East. In recent years, the critical nature of the U.S.-Middle East relations have been highlighted by such events as the United States-led war in the Persian Gulf, the hostage drama, hijackings, the Iran-Contra affair, the explosion of the U.S. Marines' headquarters in Lebanon, the "Tanker War" in the Persian Gulf, Iraq's attack on the USS *Stark* (during which thirty-seven

American marines were killed), and the United States bombing of Libya. Yet, the American people remain disturbingly ignorant of the Middle East, which they often view in terms of such stereotypes as fanaticism, barbarism, and terrorism; these stereotypes are propagated by the mass media and a few political "experts" in and out of the government. Moreover, formal education about Middle Eastern affairs remains the monopoly of a select few in higher education, whereas students in elementary and high schools learn very little about the geography, history or cultures of the region. Equally disturbing is the fact that most Middle East centers, institutes, departments, or programs in U.S. universities and a few "think tanks" function as isolated enclaves divorced from both the real policy process and the internal dynamism of the Middle East.

In the meantime, the changing social, economic, ideological, and political conditions in the region and the world are producing new realities that hardly correspond to the old myths which constitute the basis for existing U.S. policy toward the Middle East. The Cold War ideology, which saw the region in terms of the East-West dichotomy and the "Soviet threat," has outlived its purpose and needs to be replaced by a new perspective. Yet, instead of adjusting to the new situation, American policy makers tend to reinforce the old myths in new forms as many chapters indicate in this volume. The result is a relatively unfavorable U.S. economic and political influence in the Middle East despite its vastly increased military presence and success in the region.

The situation must be also viewed in relation to two critical developments in the world since the 1970s: (1) the growing integration of the largely interdependent nation-states into an increasingly globalized world; and (2) the emergence of a multipolar world system where the use of offensive force has become the least plausible way of achieving foreign policy objectives, whereas negotiation and diplomacy are receiving added attention. In particular, the United States, which enjoyed economic and military hegemony into the early 1970s and was able to unilaterally use force to impose its demands on other nations, is no longer able to do so in many significant cases, the victory in the Persian Gulf War notwithstanding. The prevailing anglocentric and chauvinistic orientations in international diplomacy are also incapable of adapting

to a world in which competing world-views and cultural forces are reasserting themselves as never before.¹ The Americans must, therefore, learn about other histories and cultures, respect their divergent viewpoints and expectations, interact with them on the basis of such universal values as national sovereignty, equality, mutual respect, and shared benefits. The American administration must also work in the direction of promoting negotiations, international education, and cross-cultural dialogue across the globe and must help resolve conflicts wherever possible.

This book provides a critical and historical analysis of U.S. Middle East policy in terms of its objectives, assumptions, means, and consequences. It attempts to present the major pros and cons of this policy and draw attention to alternative perspectives in line with the emerging new realities in the region and in the world. The book is organized into seven parts and thirteen chapters. In the introductory chapter in Part 1, the editor pulls together, *thematically*, the arguments of the contributors to the book by focusing on their specific conclusions and policy recommendations. The themes are organized into the following five general and interrelated headings: from attentive detachment to oblivious engagement; an amalgam of contradictory objectives; inappropriate means and disastrous results; old myths and new realities; and need for a new perspective.

Part 2 gives the historical development of U.S. policy in the Middle East by concentrating on the post-World War II watersheds and diplomatic-military initiatives. In Part 3, U.S. policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian question is detailed. Part 4 discusses U.S.-Iran relations following the Iranian Revolution and the Irangate fiasco. In Part 5, the U.S. Central Command, the reflagging of Kuwaiti oil tankers, and the United States-led war against Iraq in the Persian Gulf is analyzed. Part 6 focuses on connections between U.S. Middle East policy, media and Middle East studies, and education. Finally, in the concluding chapter in Part 7, the editor extends the arguments of the book by bringing into a single framework the many disparate facts and ideas about the pros and cons of U.S. Middle East policy, the ongoing global restructuring and the nature of the emerging world system, and the U.S. quest for world leadership in the wake of the victory in the Persian Gulf War. I shall place my arguments into a larger global

perspective to indicate their relevance for a more plausible American foreign policy in the 1990s.

A relatively comprehensive picture of the U.S.-Middle East relations emerges from the analysis in this book as contributors develop different perspectives, approach their subjects from various disciplines, provide rich and up-to-date information in a historical context, and address a wide range of issues and topics. They include religion and Islamic movements, Arab nationalism, war and military strategy, geopolitical considerations, political economy and oil, social and cultural factors, overt and covert foreign policy initiatives, the role of media and education, and global changes. These and other subjects are considered in relation to each other and in terms of their relevance to U.S.-Middle East relations. The interdisciplinary approach is complemented by a methodology that emphasizes historical-critical analysis and case studies. However, no attempt is made to impose any methodological uniformity or ideological orthodoxy.

Generally convinced that the policy is defective and in a state of turbulence, the contributors argue for a complete overhaul of the policy and search for new perspectives more in tune with emerging regional and global realities. In particular, they view a foreign policy based on the use of offensive force, covert or overt, military or otherwise, as that least plausible in the current multipolar and balance-seeking international environment, where human relations have become globalized and nation-states are more interdependent than ever before. They also call for a reassessment of the assumptions and methods of current policy and for minimization of the prevailing misconceptions and stereotypes about the Middle East.

The book also conveys the idea that for such perspectives to emerge, the existing gap between Middle East studies and foreign policy processes must be bridged by increased interaction between the two, and that the curriculum in Middle East education should be restructured to reflect cultural diversities and commonalities as well as recent changes in the global and regional political economy. The contributors call for a new kind of international education, one which promotes negotiation and cross-cultural communication as the most important tools for fostering improved international understanding. For an effective and lasting change, however,

Middle East education should begin at the secondary schools and colleges and seek necessary channels to disseminate such education to the general populace.

FROM ATTENTIVE DETACHMENT TO OBLIVIOUS ENGAGEMENT

The United States should be considered an old player in Middle East politics rather than a new player in an old colonial quarry, as most Americans and Middle Easterners often tend to perceive the situation. Indeed, American diplomacy has evolved over a long period of time and has gone through several distinct stages, beginning with attentive detachment in the middle of the nineteenth century to oblivious engagement since World War II.² By *attentive detachment* I refer to the isolationist, largely muted, but more or less thoughtful policy that the United States pursued in the Middle East until World War II. *Oblivious engagement*, on the other hand, alludes to the post-World War II interventionist and largely misconceived U.S. diplomacy in the region. The Truman Doctrine in 1947 initiated this approach, which has survived for approximately forty years. At present, however, the United States remains in the same invidious position that Britain was at the end of the World War II, indicating that U.S. policy in the region still awaits a major change.

In Chapter 2 on United States policy in the Middle East, Richard Cottam correctly emphasizes the suddenness with which the United States had to engage in Middle East diplomacy. Specifically, he argues that the United States was “catapulted” into a position of preeminence in the region in the beginning days of the Cold War era after the “abdication” of the British and French involvement in the Middle East. This followed the inability, in the post-World War II period, of these two preeminent Western powers to play a major diplomatic role in the area after decades of active engagement there. Therefore, the American government unexpectedly had to deal with a region in which it had limited interest and little expertise or experience. In Cottam’s opinion, this hasty introduction to the Middle East became a source of difficulty from which U.S. policy never recovered. This also partly explains the subsequent U.S. reliance on Israel as a strategic ally.

In Chapter 3 on United States policy in the Middle East and its tragedy of persistence, Richard Falk periodizes U.S. active involvement in the Middle East into three stages: from 1945 to the end of the Cold War; after the Cold War; and the challenge of the Persian Gulf Crisis. Notwithstanding these changes, asserts Falk, U.S. Middle East policy has remained “remarkably consistent.” The first stage began with World War II: “One of the great shifts brought about by the war against fascism,” writes Falk, “was to move, by stages, Western influence from its British and French locus to that of the United States . . .” That war also became the starting point for the Cold War and the new “bipolar geopolitics” that superseded colonialism. In this containment period, the Middle East was viewed, from the prism of the Cold War, second only to Europe in importance for the Western interests and security defined, in Falk’s words, in terms of “access to cheap and abundant oil supplies, the very basis of post-World War II economic prosperity.” It was also during this period, after the 1967 Israeli victory over the Arabs in particular, that the U.S.-Israeli strategic alliance was formed.

In the post-Cold War era, writes Falk, the United States became “the predominant extra-regional influence in the Middle East” as the Soviet Union withdrew from the Third World following Gorbachev’s “new thinking” and *perestroika*. U.S. policy in this short time, however, in Falk’s words, became “singularly unimaginative” and “geographically complacent.” With the Soviet threat all but vanished, policy makers in Washington began to wonder if any serious threat challenged oil and Israel. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait ended all speculation and gave the Bush administration a new focus. The lack of preparedness, however, explains Falk, became the source of several “blunders,” which resulted in the bloodiest U.S. intervention ever in that part of the world.

In Chapter 4 on United States policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, Naseer Aruri provides a very useful periodization of U.S. Middle East policy based on its strategy for containment of the Soviet Union. He identifies “two general phases” of “containment through military alliances,” followed with an “interlude of attempted containment through nationalism” and “containment through regional influentials.” Aruri dates the first phase from the Truman Doctrine to the Nixon Doctrine, which became the start-

ing point for the second phase that ended with the collapse of the Cold War order in 1990. He also underscores the fact that the United States had to hurriedly fill a vacuum left by Britain in 1971. This is an interesting observation, given that Americans were already well engaged in the Middle East politics.

Aruri's observation indicates a lack of long-term planning and an inattentiveness to changing circumstances in the region. The observation also speaks to the de facto nature of U.S. policy in the Middle East especially from an implementation perspective. This latter characteristic of the policy is demonstrated particularly by the U.S. decision to reflag the Kuwaiti tankers. According to Elizabeth Gamlen in Chapter 8, on United States strategic policy toward the Middle East, the Central Command, and the reflagging of Kuwait's tankers, the decision was taken "hastily" and with little assessment of its military and political consequences. Gamlen also shows that, although the policy intentions were more or less clear, there was confusion regarding how best to achieve them. She also questions the American administration's claim that the policy was successful; indeed, the very limited success had to do more with problems in the Iranian side than with the policy's appropriateness.

The fact that U.S. policy makers often remain oblivious to the cultures, histories, and internal dynamics of the Middle East or to the consequences of their actions is well illustrated in Chapter 6, where Mansour Farhang focuses on the misperceptions and reactive behavior of U.S. policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran. Several other chapters in this volume also point to such oblivious and reactive behavior, including Chapter 7 by Stuart Schaar on the Irangate and the Middle Eastern connection and Chapter 9 by Eric Davis on the myths and realities surrounding the Persian Gulf War. American reactive behavior during the Persian Gulf War is also underscored in Chapter 13 by Hooshang Amirahmadi on global restructuring, the Persian Gulf War, and the United States quest for world leadership.

The fact that important aspects of Middle Eastern life often remain irrelevant to the U.S. policy makers is also reflected in this country's minimal concern for Middle Eastern education, as indicated in Chapter 11 by Richard Parker on Middle Eastern studies and United States foreign policy and Chapter 12 by Hooshang

Amirahmadi, Eliane Condon, and Abraham Resnick, where they give a retrospective and prospective view of Middle East studies and education in American universities, colleges, and secondary schools. Indeed, the present American policy leaders are largely from the generations that came of age in the 1950s and 1960s, when the world outside the U.S. was hardly recognized by most American students and educators except in terms of the Cold War ideology.

AN AMALGAM OF CONTRADICTORY OBJECTIVES AND INTERESTS

The foreign policy of any nation is based on some real and changing national interests rather than any immutable abstract principles. There is often a large gap between propaganda and actual policy. The United States is no exception here, and therefore understanding its real policy in the Middle East requires more than just taking a particular administration's word for it. Yet, the most important fact about U.S. policy in the Middle East is that it tends to simultaneously pursue a multiple of overlapping, conflicting, or inconsistent economic, political, and strategic interests. The "paradoxical" nature of the U.S. policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict is well demonstrated in Chapter 5 by Joe Stork's examination of the U.S. policy toward the Palestinian question. He argues that "U.S. interests in the Middle East, as elsewhere, are determined on the basis of strategic considerations and access to resources and markets. On all these grounds . . . Israel appears to be a relatively insignificant factor, and one would expect a policy more solicitous of Arab, and Palestinian, interests." He then continues: "It is precisely this paradox which underlies a debate in U.S. policy-making circles that is as old as the Palestine-Israel-Arab conflict itself."

Moreover, the mix of U.S. interests, public or private, has changed over time and with administrations and individual players. However, as most chapters in this volume indicate, dominance in the region remains the core purpose of the present Western diplomacy in the Middle East. Carl Brown in his book on *International Politics and the Middle East* has also shown this by comparing the present-day Western diplomacy in the region with that of the "Eastern Question" and finds significant resemblance between the two. In both cases, he argues, the pattern of the regional poli-

tics would have to be explained primarily in terms of external domination of the Middle East, which was once largely self-contained and independent. The way to understand this, he insists, is to focus on the “patterns of behavior” of the “players” or “rules of the game” rather than on individual policy initiatives, crisis, or confrontation.³ In Chapter 4, Aruri also indicates that, since the Truman Doctrine, U.S. Middle East policy has sought to “keep the balance overwhelmingly in the U.S. favor.”

At a more specific level, however, U.S. policy objectives in the Middle East over the past several decades, until the collapse of the Cold War order in 1990, may be identified as follows: (1) containing alleged “Soviet expansionism” in the Middle East and whenever possible excluding that country from the region’s diplomatic games; (2) assuring uninterrupted flow of Middle Eastern oil to the West at cheap, stable prices and recycling the petro-dollars in the interest of the American economic system; (3) protecting the security of Israel and preserving its military superiority in the region; and (4) preserving the status-quo politics in the Middle East as represented by the “moderate” and pro-American conservative governments such as Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms. Additionally, some of the chapters in this book (for example, those by Aruri and Stork) indicate that the U.S. policy has had the effect, if not the intention, of preventing unity or coordination among Muslim and Arab states and at times has led to regional conflicts among ethnic and religious groups and states. For example, in Kissinger’s words, as reported in Chapter 5 by Stork, among his post-1973 goals was to “break up the Arab united front.”

Note that the order of this list does not imply a hierarchy of significance, as various administrations have ranked U.S. interests in the Middle East differently, depending on the policy makers’ preference and the circumstances of the time. Nor is the academic community unanimous on the issue. Cottam in Chapter 2 argues that, ever since World War II and for a surprisingly long time afterwards, three major interests have underpinned the U.S. policy in the Middle East. The “primary” concern was to contain Soviet expansionism and influence in the region. The other two “secondary” interests included ensuring a steady flow of Middle Eastern oil and petro-dollars to the West and defending the security of

Israel. A fourth tactical goal was to maintain the status quo and the conservative regimes. As Cottam notes, reconciliation of these multiple objectives and their safeguard from the three threatening forces of the Soviet Union, nationalism, and resurgent Islam has been the most perplexing issue of U.S. Middle East policy, at times leading to serious inconsistency in practice.

Falk also maintains that these same concerns were indeed responsible for the change in the U.S. policy from isolationism to interventionism following the 1956 Suez Campaign. In particular, he gives the following "lines of foreign policy priority": "ensure that control over the major oil fields remained in friendly hands," "oppose any extension of direct Soviet influence," "resist revolutionary nationalist tendencies," and treat "Israel as an indispensable strategic ally." In Falk's view, "The core tension for policy makers was to reconcile closeness with Israel . . . while sustaining a positive relationship with the moderate Arab regimes . . ." In the post-Cold War period, argues Falk, the policy has been "characterized by a dual preoccupation: ensuring favorable access to Gulf oil and upholding Israeli security as specified by the Israeli government."

Gamlen in Chapter 8 also insists that the U.S. decision to reflag Kuwaiti oil tankers was primarily motivated by its desire both to sustain the flow of the Middle East oil to the West at a stable price and to exclude the Soviet Union from the strategically located Persian Gulf. These were considered overlapping goals as the Soviet threat was assumed to be directed primarily toward the Middle East oil fields. In reality, however, and as Gamlin indicates, reflagging "endangered" the oil supply and flow, especially in the short run. Other concerns included the need to regain credibility with the Arab states in the aftermath of the Iran-Contra affair and U.S. concern that Iraq might be defeated. Gamlen indicates that, to the U.S., the 1973 Arab Oil Embargo underscored the strategic nature of Middle Eastern oil for the West, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan reinforced the perceived Soviet threat to the region. By 1980, Carter declared the Middle East a region of "vital interest" to the United States. Stuart Schaar in Chapter 7 also argues that U.S. policy in the Middle East has pursued a military goal ever since World War II, a goal largely influenced by the Persian Gulf's strategic position and the superpower rivalry in the region.

Eric Davis in Chapter 9 on the United States–led war in the Persian Gulf also underscores the oil and the Israeli factors. In his words, “This then was a war about oil and its economic and political consequences.” But he insists that the U.S.’s “real motive” has to be sought elsewhere, in “a choice between Israel and Iraq”; after the latter began challenging the former’s military dominance and security in 1990, the U.S. apparently chose Israel over Iraq. Aruri in Chapter 4 adds the concern for the Saudi security (“the Reagan codicil”), but like Davis, Stork and Falk, he underscores the U.S.-Israeli special and strategic relations. The strategic alliance with Israel, Aruri argues, was “rationalized as a necessary part of the post-World War II containment of communism.” This occurred after Israel was transformed from a “liability” to an “asset” following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. In Chapter 10 on media, public discourse, and United States Middle East policy, William Dorman discusses in some detail the role of a “pro-Israeli media” in shaping and protecting the “special relationship” between the United States and Israel.

The fact that U.S. interests in the Middle East at times are intermingled with those of Israel was well demonstrated during the Persian Gulf War as indicated by Amirahmadi in Chapter 13 and Davis in Chapter 9. A case study of such entanglement is provided by Schaar in Chapter 7, where he presents a comprehensive analysis of the Irangate or Iran-Contra affair. In explicating the fiasco, he indicates the intricacies of U.S. entanglements in the Middle East, including the important Israeli factor. Using primary Israeli sources not available outside that country, Schaar explains the various American and Israeli motives for the covert operations including the sale of arms to Iran and the divergence of a part of the proceeds to the Nicaraguan Contra. He argues that a major aim was to overthrow the Ayatollah Khomeini regime by the “moderates” in the military. This was an Israeli plan that was in fact adopted by part of the U.S. administration. Other motives included anti-Arabism (the Israelis “peripheral policy”), continuation of the Iran-Iraq War, and opportunity for making exorbitant profits through sale of arms to Iran. This last motive, according to Schaar, was very important and was backed by Israeli military-industrial interests. In particular, Israel initiated the covert operation largely for selfish motives, while the United States was pursu-

ing ill-defined and contradictory strategic interests. The Reagan administration, he maintains, also became interested in the adventure of Israel's sales of arms to Iran partly because of its failure to overthrow the Sandinistas. For the Islamic Republic, however, at the time embroiled in a war of survival with neighboring Iraq, all that mattered was to replenish its military arsenal, an important pragmatic consideration.

Finally, I wish to extend the discussion on the policy interests by reporting here the useful classification of American "interests" offered by James Bill in *The Eagle and the Lion*.⁴ Although his analysis focuses on Iran, it is equally applicable to the Middle East more generally. According to Bill, "organizational interests" are at the root of bureaucratic conflict and rivalry within the administration, between various high-ranking officials and agencies. Elections and other domestic politics tend to reinforce these types of interests, which in turn are inimical to rational foreign policy making. Powerful politicians, businesspersons, bankers, industrialists, lawyers, and even academicians work hard to promote their selfish "private personal interests." "General public economic interests," on the other hand, have centered on Middle Eastern oil; the areas of contest here have changed from control in the 1950s, to production in the 1960s, to pricing in the 1970s. Lastly, there are "international political interests," which are divided into an "offensive protective interest" concerned with security of Israel and a "defensive containment interest" directed against Soviet "expansionism." To rationalize these interests, James Bill argues, an "ideology" of anticommunism had to be propagated. The dialectics between the two sets of interests then led to what he calls "ignorance" of objective political realities, ultimately resulting in a "distorted" foreign policy.

INAPPROPRIATE MEANS AND DISASTROUS RESULTS

Like any other superpower, the United States has used a variety of malignant and benign means to achieve its interests in the Middle East. These have included both peaceful and violent methods carried out by means of covert and overt operations. Generally speaking, malignant means have been used against "unfriendly" forces; that is, forces that have called for change in the domestic status

quo and demanded autonomy from outside dominant powers. Such forces have usually included revolutionary movements, communists, nationalists, religious populists, and radical reformists. On the other hand, benign means have been used with respect to “friendly” forces including Israel, reform resisters, “moderate” and conservative Arab states, and anticommunist–anti-Soviet dictators.

Overt actions have included a variety of violent or peaceful diplomatic, military, and economic measures. Diplomatic means have consisted of persuasion or pressure applied directly or through the medium of the United Nations, friendly states, or influential individuals in and out of the region. Military force has been used in direct confrontation with nationalist or radical forces or indirectly as support for strategic or tactical friends, often anti-communist dictators or conservative governments in control of strategic assets. Economic means have consisted of trade embargoes, economic sabotage and sanctions, and financial blockades through the leverage of the IMF, the World Bank, multinational banks, the GATT, and the OECD, among other international organizations. As Middle Eastern economies remain largely dependent on the West for their export (oil) markets, industrial inputs including technology, and food supplies, such measures tend to cripple the local economies and consequently to delegitimize governments.

Covert operations have also been applied in a variety of forms: fomenting coups against radical leaders, financing pro-Western opposition groups, and reinforcing interstate conflicts have been standard CIA tactics in the Middle East. Power rivalries among certain leaders, ideological differences, border conflicts, religious disputes, and ethnic quarrels have all been exploited at one time or another. Interstate conflicts have been among major sources of the arms race and wars that, in turn, have been the most profitable business for the West (and the East) and a major method for recycling petro-dollars. The huge investment in the defense sector and destruction that have resulted from wars have also tended to perpetuate the underdevelopment and dependency of the Middle East. Iraq, Iran, Kuwait and Lebanon are notable examples. As a United Nations report put it, the United States–led war against Iraq wrought “near-apocalyptic” results on the economic infrastruc-

ture of that country, virtually relegating it to a "preindustrial age."⁵ These outcomes have, in turn, helped reproduce subordination of the Middle East to external powers.

Aruri in Chapter 4 indicates two distinct periods in U.S. Middle East policy with respect to the means it used to achieve its objectives: the containment through surrogates and direct intervention. During a short interval, the United States even tried to use nationalism against its rivals in the region. According to Cottam in Chapter 2, intervening in domestic politics of the states in the region in opposition to nationalist and revolutionary forces and establishing close relations with the anticommunist and authoritarian governments of such "traditional elites" as found in Turkey, Iran (the Shah), and the "moderate" Arab regimes have been among the major means of accomplishing the policy of containment through surrogates. These regimes were also willing to limit opposition to Israel, to expand economic ties with the United States, and to suppress any demand for nationalization of the oil sector. The United States also sought to maintain these regimes' political stability by preserving the regional status quo. As Gamlen points out in Chapter 8, the United States sought to protect its interests in the region by propagating friendly regimes through lavish military assistance. Similar views are also expressed by Falk in Chapter 3, Aruri in Chapter 4, and Stork in Chapter 4. They argue that various U.S. administrations came to view nationalists (e.g., Musaddiq, Nasser, and Palestinian leaders) as cat's paws of the Soviets whereas unpopular dictators (e.g., the Shah of Iran, the Greek Royalists, and Iraq's Nuri al-Said) were propagated as Jeffersonian democrats.

Finally, most authors in the volume indicate that the United States continues to utilize covert actions, offensive force, economic means, military strategy, and diplomatic means to achieve its objectives in the Middle East. They demonstrate this by focusing on the Iran-Contra fiasco, the tanker war, the building of a rapid military intervention force for use in the Persian Gulf, and a variety of economic and extraeconomic measures the United States used to influence the hostage drama in Tehran and Lebanon. The most recent example of an overt military action is of course the war against Iraq. The United States has also used what Stork in Chapter 5 calls the *peace process*, which has not always been under-

taken with good intents; in the Arab-Israeli conflict, for example, Stork tells us that the peace process was used to create an "illusion of purposeful activity." These measures were ostensibly used to protect U.S. interests in the Middle East. But as the authors indicate, they point to profound confusion and indirection in U.S. policy toward the region.

Specifically, American policy in the Middle East, argues Cotnam, was on the verge of total disintegration in the late 1980s, indicated by the Reagan and Bush administrations' inability to deal with a number of seemingly unexpected developments in the Middle East. Examples included the emergence of political Islam as the primary focus of populist appeal, the increasing passivity of the Soviet Union in the region's affairs, the U.S. failure in Iran, and the near total expulsion of Americans from Lebanon. The United States also found itself unable to deal with the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait except in the language of force and destruction. Although Falk argues that, overall, the result for the United States in the Middle East has been "mixed," others in the book point to the collapse of U.S. policy in Iran, Lebanon, and the Persian Gulf; they consider this as indicative of the failure of U.S. postwar diplomacy in the Middle East except for the language of force. The response to these developments also indicate confusion, bewilderment, and lack of coherence. This is not to say that U.S. Middle East policy is senseless; rather the emphasis is hoped to underscore the extent of the problem. Such random, erratic measures as the war against Iraq, the bombing of Libya, and the fixation with terrorism simply underline this conclusion.

OLD MYTHS AND NEW REALITIES

The chapters in this book point toward a number of factors that have been responsible for the deficiency of U.S. Middle East policy. They include obsolete assumptions, conflicting or inconsistent policy interests, belief in the use of force, obliviousness to the history and dynamics of the region, stereotyping and cross-cultural misunderstandings, persisting misjudgments and factional politics within the policy-making process, insensitivity to the changing nature of the world politics, and the lack of informed, high-quality education on the Middle East. These essentially interrelated factors are

largely indigenous to the policy-making process and tend to reinforce the exacerbating effect of one another. Because they “interlock in a system that highly resists reform,” to use the words of James Bill, their resolution cannot be considered but within a holistic framework and in terms of truly systemic change.⁶

In Chapter 4, Aruri correctly emphasizes that: “The [U.S.] policy was built on the proposition that there existed a legitimate world order, for which the United States assumes the major responsibility and that the Soviet Union, together with disaffected Third World nations, including Arab nationalist forces, were intent on challenging that order.” He questions the accuracy of this superpower confrontation thesis and considers the U.S. assessment of Soviet intentions “distorted.” In Chapter 2, Cottam also questions some of the basic tenets of American Middle East policy particularly the one concerning the “aggressive expansionism” of the Soviet policy, an assumption that remained the cornerstone of the U.S. Cold War diplomacy. He indicates that Soviet policy over the past several decades has been characterized by a growing “defensive passivity”; this has resulted from “an altered Soviet purpose” rather than because of any containment strategy of the United States, as American policy makers like to argue. This fact, according to Cottam has been long known to the U.S. administrations who have indeed cooperated with the Soviets on many occasions. Nevertheless, the United States needed to continue in the path of Cold War diplomacy because it did not want to appear allied with the Soviets against its closest friends in the region. The Israeli lobby in Washington was also responsible for the tenacity of the Cold War ideology, as was the need to legitimize the massive peacetime defense budget of some \$300 billion a year.

Cottam indicates that the U.S. policy makers have long been divided over how to deal with the Soviet Union. Advocates of the Cold War ideology continued to insist on excluding the Soviet Union from Middle East diplomatic initiatives (e.g., Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy and the Camp David Accord). In sharp contrast, more moderate members of various U.S. administrations have argued for cooperation with the Soviet Union in Middle East affairs (e.g., the Rogers plan of 1969 and Carter’s Declaration of October 1977). This division persists even after the historic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. For example, in March 1990,

Defense Secretary Richard Cheney argued against CIA Director William Webster's thesis that the Soviet Union was no longer a serious threat to the U.S. national security. However, the Persian Gulf crisis and the Soviet cooperation with the United States against Iraq did change American perceptions toward Soviets but still not completely; the United States continues to remain cautious about developments in the disintegrating USSR and many old Cold Warriors have not changed their attitude toward the old myths even though the Warsaw Pact and Comecon have both been dismantled and *perestroika* has become synonymous with capitalist development in a moribund Soviet Union, where the Communist Party has lost its monopoly and grip over the society and socialism is about to become a legacy of the past.

Gamlén and Davis also question the assumption that the Middle East oil remains threatened by forces unfriendly to the West and that to ensure a steady flow of "reasonably priced" oil supplies from the region to the West, intervention was needed. As Gamlén indicates, the disruption in oil supplies has in the past resulted from faulty U.S. diplomacy rather than the Soviet intervention. For example, whereas the Iran-Iraq War did not disrupt the oil supplies in any significant way, the reflagging policy led to an increased disruption of the Persian Gulf shipping and oil commerce. Ironically, the declared aim of the policy was the reverse effect.

Davis in Chapter 9 also documents the fact that the Persian Gulf crisis did not produce any significant and lasting disturbance in the oil markets although both Iraq and Kuwait stopped producing oil. If any, the U.S. intervention in the crisis led to an increase in oil prices. Various chapters in this collection also point to the faulty nature of U.S. foreign policy assumptions concerning the communist threat to political stability in the Middle East. In the post-Cold War period, no one in the administration seems to take the so-called communist threat seriously, although many remain seriously concerned with Islamic movements in the area. The U.S. fear of nationalism also seems unfounded, as indicated by Falk, Cottam, and Aruri among others in the collection.

As most chapters in this volume indicate, postwar U.S. foreign policy has operated largely on the assumption that force, military or otherwise, may be used to achieve foreign policy objectives. Amirahmadi in Chapter 13 attempts to dislodge this assumption

and argue that the use of force, which may have been effective for the pre-1970s world, is neither necessary nor plausible under the current condition in the world. Force may still be used to destroy the “enemy” but it can hardly be used to achieve meaningful objectives. American policy makers have been disappointingly slow in grasping the epoch-making significance of this extremely important development in international politics. In particular, he argues that the *offensive* force is *diminishing* in its ability to gain intersocietal hegemony, defined as the ability to control foreign and domestic policies of other states within the world system in accordance with the hegemon’s needs and purposes. *Offensive force* refers to any violent capacity used to introduce change in or impose domination over something in spite of its will. This is distinguished from *defensive force*, which most often is successfully used to resist such a change or domination and control.

With these definitions, the United States–led war against Iraq was an offensive war; a war that destroyed Iraq, but achieved only a few of its many objectives while creating many more new problems. Amirahmadi also underscores the irrelevancy of an international diplomacy today that is based on the assumption of a *unipolar* world; that is, a world in which the United States remains the only superpower, with the Soviet Union, Japan, and the Europe as its junior partners. As is increasingly recognized, the world is moving away from the Cold War *bipolar* world system (two-superpower model) toward an essentially integrated but *multipolar* world system. Amirahmadi argues that implications of this change will be far reaching for a harmonious management of international relations and for the U.S. quest for world leadership in the wake of the victory in the war against Iraq.

OTHER FALLACIES

U.S. Middle East policy has also suffered from a number of other fallacies, including ignorance of the regions’s history and internal dynamism, cultural misunderstandings and the resulting stereotypes, and misconceptions or miscalculations. Obliviousness to the culture, history, and internal dynamics of Iran, according to Farhang in Chapter 6, has plagued U.S. policy toward postrevolu-

tionary Iran with illusions, incoherence, and indecisiveness. He illustrates this thesis by drawing from two examples: the Shah's admission to the United States by President Jimmy Carter in 1979, and the secret U.S.-Iran arms for hostage deal (the Irangate scandal) during the Reagan administration in 1985–1986. In both of these episodes, according to Farhang, U.S. policy makers remained "totally oblivious" to the consequences of their decisions. In the Shah's case, he indicates that Americans failed to anticipate that the religious leaders in Tehran would soon find anti-Americanism a potent instrument of mobilization and legitimization in Iranian politics and would use the occasion to take hostage the embassy personnel and consolidate their power. America's hasty reactions (e.g., Carter's Tabas failed rescue mission and Reagan's authorization of the CIA to help overthrow the Islamic Republic) had Ayatollah Khomeini believing that "bold and intransigent" action was the only way to deal with the United States, an attitude that led to Iran's support for hostage taking in Lebanon.

In the Iran-Contra episode, Farhang also finds that the Iranian government made a pragmatic decision whereas the U.S. administration had been fooled by the Israelis, whose declared purpose was to promote "moderates" in the Islamic leadership; in fact they were pursuing an anti-Arab profit-making operation. A similar conclusion is also reached by Schaar in Chapter 7, who finds the Israeli interests even more pervasive in the episode. In other words, Iran and Israel both "outsmarted" the United States by drawing it into the game to achieve their own particular motives. Davis in Chapter 9 and Dorman in Chapter 10 suggest similar U.S.-Israeli relations. In sum, according to Farhang, the United States failed to understand that postrevolutionary Iran had been radically transformed and could not be returned to Pahlavi days, that Israel could not play the mediating role it claimed to play, and that the domestic contexts of the hostage crisis and the Iran-Contra scandal were no less important than their international contexts.

Obliviousness to the domestic context and stereotyping are also illustrated by other examples of U.S. Middle East involvement. One such case is entanglement with the Shi'a Muslims of Lebanon, perhaps the most misunderstood community in that forlorn country. This is a highly relevant subject for U.S.-Middle East relations,

as it was in Lebanon that U.S. policy almost totally collapsed. As Augustus Richard Norton has argued, the prevailing Western stereotypes of the Lebanese Shi'a, including the religious nature of the Shi'ite activism, is unfounded.⁷ For example, Amal, he maintains, is decisively not a religious movement, and Hizbullah is best understood in terms of a radical political organization. Instead, he emphasizes the "milieu of Lebanon" and the political diversity and competition that marks the politics of the Shi'ites. Rather than stressing sensational acts of political violence, Norton demonstrates that any coherent picture of the Shi'ites of Lebanon must also take into account the social and cultural marginality of the community, which has been, in turn, steadily undermined by decades of profoundly significant socioeconomic change.

Obliviousness to domestic Middle East politics is promoted by a variety of institutions in the United States but most notably by the media and the government. In their book-length study of the U.S. press and Iran, Dorman and Farhang argue that "The major shortcoming of American press coverage of Iran for twenty-five years was to ignore the *politics* of the country. This failure was rooted in the assumption that the political aspirations of Iranians did not really matter."⁸ Stereotyping is indeed well ingrained in the minds of many American policy makers, organizations, and individual citizens. As Dorman in Chapter 10 and Amirahmadi *et al.* in Chapter 12 have argued, Middle Easterners are often automatically identified with terrorism, religious fanaticism, fundamentalism, radicalism, violence, nihilism, antimodernism, and barbarism among other similar labels. Americans also commonly confuse ethnic and religious affiliations of the Middle East peoples and have a distorted picture of their ways of life: all Middle Easterners are Arab, all Arabs are Muslim, and all Muslims are terrorists; the Middle East is also considered the land of oil, camel riders, belly dancers, and rulers out of the Thousand and One Nights; oil is to be found in everybody's backyard.⁹

Some of these and other stereotypes have resulted from the lack of an adequate, formal education on the Middle East as discussed in Chapter 12 by Amirahmadi *et al.* and in a recent report titled "One Nation, Many People: A Declaration of Cultural Independence," submitted to the New York State Education Commissioner