
The U.S. and the Middle East In a Changing World

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[The following is a reprint of an address which Secretary Djerejian presented at Meridian House International, in Washington, DC, on June 2, 1992.]

For over 4 decades, the central characteristic of international relations was the dichotomy between the Soviet empire of dictatorial regimes and centrally planned economies and the free world of democratic governments and market economies. Thus, the Cold War reverberated around the globe, affecting virtually everyone everywhere. Much of America's foreign policy and that of many other free nations was either driven by or [was] a derivative of our collective efforts to contain Soviet aggression and expansion.

Today, East-West competition and conflict over the future of Europe and the Third World has been transformed. In the former Soviet Union, new leaders are striving for peaceful, democratic change as the only effective road to sustainable economic and social progress. Partnership has replaced conflict. A new mode of international cooperation, which Secretary Baker has called "collective engagement," is replacing the acrimonious competition of the Cold war.

This sea change in world politics has had a profound effect in the Near East. An early example of the new "collective engagement" was the response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. A historically unprecedented coalition responded forcefully and successfully in reversing that aggression and in preventing Iraq from threatening or coercing its neighbors.

In partnership with Russia, we have been able to bring Israel and all her immediate Arab neighbors—Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestinians together for the first time ever in a historic peace process to negotiate a comprehensive settlement of their long-standing disputes in direct, face-to-face negotiations based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

Further, the United Nations has taken an increasingly active and positive role in enforcing the principles of its charter. Just this weekend, we have seen the UN Security Council enact Chapter Seven sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro following—in Secretary Baker's words—the "humanitarian nightmare" in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where many people, including Muslims, have been brutally victimized by the continued warfare. Besides its many resolutions on Iraq, the Security Council has [also] shown it will not tolerate Libya's use of terrorism. In the Near East and Maghreb, the UN's activities extend from Iraq and the Iraq-Kuwait border to the Western Sahara.

Within the ancient lands of the Near East, the rapid and fundamental change evident elsewhere is also pressing people to see their own futures in a new light and to reevaluate their relationships with other nations, with their neighbors, and with each other in a particularly challenging manner.

U.S. GOALS IN THE NEAR EAST

Amidst these changes, basic U.S. foreign policy objectives remain consistent and clear. Two major goals stand out:

First, we seek a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace between Israel and all her neighbors, including the Palestinians; and

Second, we seek viable security arrangements which will assure stability and unimpeded commercial access to the vast oil reserves of the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf.

These are not new goals, of course. We have striven toward both for decades. What is new is the opportunity afforded us by recent global and regional events to make real progress toward achieving them.

ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS

The first of these goals—the search for peace between Arabs and Israelis—has challenged every U.S. Administration in the last four decades. In the Middle East, where war has at times seemed endemic, the road to achieving lasting peace through negotiation now stretches before us. The first historic steps forward have been taken.

We knew last autumn, before the first negotiations began in Madrid, that the path we had embarked on would not be an easy one. Fundamental and bitterly contested differences separate the parties to the conflict. Nevertheless, there have now been five rounds of direct, bilateral talks between Israelis and Arabs, and a sixth round is being planned for a venue closer to the region—namely, Rome. In addition, we have worked closely with our Russian partners in this endeavor to launch the multilateral phase of the peace process. Let me comment briefly on where we stand in this process.

In the bilateral negotiations, the parties have resolved many procedural questions and have begun to put substantive issues on the table. Israel and the Arabs, including the Palestinians, are all engaging on the basic issues of land, peace, and security which form the nexus of these negotiations.

Israel and the Palestinians are focusing directly on the central issue of interim self-government arrangements for the Occupied Territories as a first, transitional step along the path to a permanent settlement of their dispute, which will be resolved in final status negotiations.

While major gaps remain between the respective positions of the parties, the bilaterals between Israel and Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan have begun down the path of serious negotiations aimed at defining possible areas of agreement and at narrowing differences through compromise where disagreement persists.

This is the essence of the art of negotiation, and it is the essence of the negotiating process upon which the parties first embarked, seven months ago in Madrid.

Another major accomplishment has been the beginning of the multilateral phase of the peace process. As a result of closely coordinated planning by the United States and Russia, 36 countries, including 11 Arab states, gathered in Moscow in January to organize working groups on issues of regional concern, such as economic development, the environment, refugees, water resources, and arms control and regional security. In mid-May, these working groups held their

initial meetings in various capitals around the world. Follow-on meetings will convene later this year.

I just returned from Lisbon, where the multilateral steering committee met on May 27 to coordinate the work of these working groups. I can report that we had a successful and productive meeting. The reports from the five working groups demonstrated again that all parties are approaching the issues seriously and pragmatically, and we achieved agreement on the venues and timeframe for the next round of working group meetings to be held in the fall. These multilateral talks support rather than substitute for the bilateral negotiations, and we hope that those bilateral parties who have so far refrained from participating will join all these important talks as soon as possible.

President Bush and Secretary Baker have committed the United States to play the role of an honest broker, a catalyst, and a driving force to assure the continued progress of the peace process in all its dimensions. We look forward with real hope to the continued dedication and commitment to peace evinced thus far by the regional parties and the international community.

GULF SECURITY AND STABILITY

A second major aspect of our Middle East policy is our shared interest in the security and stability of the Persian Gulf. We all know that the countries of the Arabian peninsula are located in a dangerous neighborhood and confront risks to their sovereignty and independence. Stability in the Gulf is vital, not to only to our own national interest but also to the economic security of the whole world.

Arabian Peninsula. In February, I visited the countries which are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In all my conversations with their leaders and government officials, I stressed the need for individual self-defense and for collective defense planning and arrangements among the six GCC states—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman—with the goal of strengthening their ability to defend themselves against external aggression. I also encouraged security cooperation between the Gulf states and their friends in the region. Much work needs to be done in attaining this goal.

At the same time, I assured the GCC leaders that the United States will cooperate closely with them to meet their legitimate defense needs. This includes both the sales of weapons within the context of the President's Middle East arms control initiative and bilateral security arrangements such as the periodic conduct of joint military exercises, the maintenance of an enhanced naval presence in the Gulf, and arrangements for the access and pre-positioning of critical military materiel and equipment. I emphasized that these bilateral efforts would complement but not supersede the Gulf states' collective security efforts. I reiterated that we do not intend to station ground troops permanently anywhere in the region. The purposes of both arms sales and collective security measures are to deter threats to our shared interests and to raise the threshold of future requirements for direct U.S. military action.

Iraq. The most drastic threat to the security of the Gulf, and indeed of the whole region, has been Saddam Hussein's aggression against his neighbors and against the people of Iraq. Here, the collective engagement of the international community and our coalition partners has been noteworthy in carrying out UN Security Council resolutions. Saddam continues to refuse to comply fully with these resolutions, which were passed by the Security Council to ensure peace and security in the region.

Using "cheat and retreat" tactics, he has resisted dismantling his weapons of mass destruction, including ballistic missiles and the means to produce them, as mandated by Resolution

687. He refuses to end his repression of the Iraqi people or to respect their human rights, as mandated by Resolution 688, and he is intentionally and systematically depriving large populations in the north and south of Iraq of the basic necessities of life for the sake of hanging on to his own personal power. Clearly, he hopes to frustrate and outlast the will of the Security Council. We will enforce the UN sanctions fully. Saddam Hussein's regime has become more brittle, and he is preoccupied by his quest for survival. Clearly, the Iraqi people deserve new leadership which will be representative of the pluralistic nature of Iraqi society and [be] ready to live at peace with Iraq's neighbors.

Iran. Across the Gulf from our friends and allies lies the Islamic Republic of Iran, an important country that can contribute to regional security if it chooses a constructive path. Iran knows what it has to do to be accepted by the international community. Many hope that the recent *Majlis* [parliament] election will lead to moderate policies. We share this hope, but actions must be the litmus test. From our view, the normalization of relations with Iran depends on several factors, particularly an end to support for terrorism. Iran's role in the freeing of American hostages held in Lebanon was an important step. We hope this will lead to the release of all those being held outside the judicial process, regardless of nationality, and that this signals the permanent cessation of hostage-taking.

However, Iran's role in sponsoring terrorism continues in other ways that are deeply disturbing. Iran's human rights practices and its apparent pursuit of a destabilizing arms build-up, including everything from submarines to weapons of mass destruction, also remain matters of serious concern. Further, Iran's policies toward its neighbors in the Gulf, where we have vital interests, and in Central Asia need to be watched closely. Another serious problem is Iran's categorical opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process and its support for those, like Hezbollah in Lebanon, who violently oppose it.

We have made clear from the outset that we are prepared to engage in a dialogue with authorized representatives of the Iranian Government to discuss these issues and U.S.-Iranian relations. To date, the Iranian leadership has declined to engage us in this dialogue.

FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

Reviewing the main thrusts of our policy in the Middle East reminds us that, even in the 1990s, our national security interests in the region continue to exert a powerful claim on our attention. But there is more to our policy agenda than protection of vital resources and conflict resolution. Another pillar of U.S. policy is our support for human rights, pluralism, women's and minority rights, and popular participation in government and our rejection of extremism, oppression, and terrorism. These worldwide issues constitute an essential part of the foundation for America's engagement with the countries of the Near East—from the Maghreb to Iran and beyond.

In this context, there are certain factors which we should underscore in discussing U.S. relations with these countries.

The first is diversity. Not only is this area diverse within itself, so are our relations with the countries that make it up. This diversity requires not only that a clear sense of our own values and interests guide our policy but also that understanding and tolerance be key factors in our dealings with other political cultures.

The second point is interaction. U.S. relations with this part of the world are just the latest chapter in a history of interaction between the West and the Middle East that is thousands of years

old. Our interaction spans political, economic, social, cultural, and military fields. We should not ignore this totality.

The third point is common aspirations. Despite obvious differences, we and the peoples of the Near East share important aspirations, which I will touch on later. These common aspirations provide a promising foundation for future cooperation.

ISLAM AND THE WEST

Politics in the region has increasingly focused on the issues of change, openness, and economic and social inequities. As part of a trend that predates the events I have recounted, the role of religion has become more manifest, and much attention is being paid to a phenomenon variously labeled *political Islam*, the *Islamic revival*, or *Islamic fundamentalism*.

Uncertainty regarding this renewed Islamic emphasis abounds. Some say that it is causing a widening gap between Western values and those of the Muslim world. It is important to assess this phenomenon carefully so that we do not fall victim to misplaced fears or faulty perceptions.

A cover of a recent issue of *The Economist* magazine headlined its main story, "Living With Islam" and portrayed a man in traditional dress, standing in front of a mosque and holding a gun. Inside the magazine, we are told that "Islam Resumes its March!" and that "one anti-western 'ism' is growing stronger." If there is one thought I can leave with you tonight, it is that the U.S. Government does not view Islam as the next "ism" confronting the West or threatening world peace. That is an overly simplistic response to a complex reality.

The Cold War is not being replaced with a new competition between Islam and the West. It is evident that the Crusades have been over for a long time. Indeed, the ecumenical government is the contemporary trend. Americans recognize Islam as one of the world's great faiths. It is practiced on every continent. It counts among its adherents millions of citizens of the United States. As Westerners, we acknowledge Islam as a historic civilizing force among the many that have influenced and enriched our culture. The legacy of the Muslim culture, which reached the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th century, is a rich one in the sciences, arts, and culture and in tolerance of Judaism and Christianity. Islam acknowledges the major figures of the Judeo-Christian heritage: Abraham, Moses, and Christ.

In countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa, we thus see groups or movements seeking to reform their societies in keeping with Islamic ideals. There is considerable diversity in how these ideals are expressed. We detect no monolithic or coordinated international effort behind these movements. What we do see are believers living in different countries placing renewed emphasis on Islamic principles and governments accommodating Islamist political activity to varying degrees and in different ways.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

For our part as Americans, we are proud of the principles on which our country is founded. They have withstood many severe challenges over more than two centuries. We know they work. We, therefore, are committed to encouraging greater openness and responsiveness of political systems throughout the world.

I am not talking here about trying to impose an American model on others. Each country must work out, in accordance with its own traditions, history, and particular circumstances, how and at what pace to broaden political participation. In this respect, it is essential that there be real political dialogue between government on the one hand and the people and parties and other

institutions on the other. Those who are prepared to take specific steps toward free elections, creating independent judiciaries, promoting the rule of law, reducing restrictions on the press, respecting the rights of minorities, and guaranteeing individual rights will find us ready to recognize and support their efforts, just as those moving in the opposite direction will find us ready to speak candidly and act accordingly. As Secretary Baker has said: we best can have truly close and enduring relations with those countries with which we share fundamental values.

Those who seek to broaden political participation in the Middle East, therefore, will find us supportive, as we have been elsewhere in the world. At the same time, we are suspect of those who would use the democratic process to come to power, only to destroy that very process in order to retain power and political dominance. While we believe in the principle of "one person, one vote," we do not support "one person, one vote, one time." Let me make it very clear with whom we differ. We differ

- With those, regardless of their religion, who practice terrorism, oppress minorities, preach intolerance, or violate internationally accepted standards of conduct regarding human rights;
- With those who are insensitive to the need for political pluralism;
- With those who cloak their message in another brand of authoritarianism;
- With those who substitute religious and political confrontation for constructive engagement with the rest of the world;
- With those who do not share our commitment to peaceful resolution of conflict, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict; and
- With those who would pursue their goals through repression or violence.

It is for just these reasons that we have such basic differences with the avowedly secular governments in Iraq and Libya. To the extent that other governments pursue or adopt similar practices, we will distance ourselves from them, regardless of whether they describe their approach in secular, religious, or any other terms. Simply stated, religion is not a determinant—positive or negative—in the nature or quality of our relations with other countries. Our quarrel is with extremism and the violence, denial, intolerance, intimidation, coercion, and terror which too often accompany it.

The facts bear that out. The United States has good, productive relations with countries and peoples of all religions throughout the world, including many whose systems of government are firmly grounded in Islamic principles. Religious freedom and tolerance are integral elements of our American national character and constitutional system. Indeed, as much as any society, the American people understand the meaning of diversity and the virtues of tolerance.

CONCLUSION

The broad policy goals of the United States in the Near East region have been laid down by President Bush and Secretary Baker: Genuine peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, enhancing security and deterring or defeating aggression, helping to protect the world's economic security, promoting economic and social justice, and promoting the values in which we believe.

I believe these are aspirations in which the peoples of the region—whether Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or otherwise—can realistically share. Like us, they seek a peaceful, better future. They aspire to work productively in peace and safety [in which] to feed, house, and clothe their families;

in which their children can be educated and find avenues to success; in which they can have a say and can be consulted in how they will be governed; and in which they can find personal fulfillment and justice. In this respect, the pursuit of viable economic and social development programs, privatization, and adequate educational and vocational training opportunities are key to responding to the basic material needs of the region's people.

Working with an international community of unprecedented solidarity, we have come a long way in the past few years in repelling aggression and in promoting a negotiated peace to a seemingly intractable conflict in the region. We still have a long way to go before these worthy efforts will have achieved success and before the other aspirations we share are realized. We can get there through close engagement and constructive interaction between the United States and all the countries of the Near East region at all levels: government-to-government, group-to-group, person-to-person, and faith-to-faith.