

CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

Middle East: Attitudes toward the United States

December 31, 2001

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Summary

Despite close cooperation between the United States and some Middle Eastern states, serious tensions have often marred U.S. relations with Arabs and other Muslims in the Middle East. Popular sentiment in the Middle East, sometimes referred to as the “Arab street,” has become increasingly important in its ability to influence regional policies as it has benefitted from the expansion in reach, availability, and sophistication of media outlets. Although there is much ambivalence on the “Arab street” regarding the United States, popular attitudes among Arabs and other Muslims in this region appear unfavorable toward the United States on various issues, which are summarized below.

As the lone remaining superpower, the United States has become a convenient target for discontent among much of the world’s population. In the Middle East in particular, there is a tendency to blame U.S.-led globalization for the region’s economic ills, despite the failure of Middle Eastern regimes themselves to adopt policies that would contribute toward greater economic growth.

There is a widespread perception in the region of U.S. society as fundamentally alien, if not hostile, to Islamic beliefs and values. At the same time, many Middle Easterners are attracted to the democratic principles and economic opportunities they find in the United States.

The deployment of U.S. armed forces contingents in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia (where Islam’s holiest sites are located), offends many in the region. These forces, however, maintain a generally low profile.

Many in the region blame U.S. containment policies for the continued sufferings of the Iraqi people. U.S. officials counter that Iraqi policies have caused the country’s economic privations and warn that it would be risky to abandon containment measures until Iraq honors pertinent U.N. resolutions.

A common perception that U.S. policy is biased toward Israel has been a frequently cited cause of Arab and Muslim resentment. U.S. administrations, however, have devoted major efforts to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Among the “Arab street” there is some resentment over the U.S. role in bolstering regimes that are perceived as oppressive, corrupt, or un-Islamic. These governments play important roles, however, in U.S. policy, and several have instituted reforms.

Various measures have been suggested to improve Middle East perceptions of the United States: expanded aid and trade enhancement programs; efforts to counter unfavorable images; attempts to secure wider backing for containing Iraq, while fine-tuning economic sanctions; agreement on a new framework for Arab-Israeli negotiations; encouragement of more open political systems in the Middle East. Local resentments, however, will not vanish overnight.

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Overview

The United States has enjoyed close relations with Arab and Muslim states in the Middle East since the region emerged in its present configuration after the two world wars. U.S. economic and military assistance has played a major role in the development of important regional states such as Egypt and Jordan. Oil rich countries in the Persian Gulf region have been essential suppliers of energy resources to the United States and its industrial allies and major purchasers of U.S. commercial and military equipment. These ties have helped create a network of organizational relationships, official and personal contacts, bilateral economic and military commissions, and joint commercial endeavors between the United States and friendly countries in the Middle East.

Despite this extensive cooperation, serious tensions have often marred U.S. relations with Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East, both at governmental and popular levels. Some governments and sub-national groups in the region are avowedly hostile to the United States, oppose its policies on a broad spectrum of issues, and seek to damage U.S. interests in the region, sometimes through violence. This is particularly true of those governments that the U.S. State Department identified as supporters of international terrorism, as well as a number of militia-type groups that the State Department lists as foreign terrorist organizations. Even friendly governments in the Middle East are ambivalent in their relations with the United States, either because they disagree with specific aspects of U.S. policy (such as the Arab-Israeli conflict) or because they are constrained by anti-U.S. sentiment within their own populations.

Popular attitudes are even more complex and difficult to assess. The image of the United States as a “land of milk and honey” as well as a land of freedom and opportunity co-exists with another image of moral decadence and hostility to Islamic society in the minds of many residents of the Middle East. These conflicting images can lead to wide swings in popular attitudes toward the United States. The friendliness that many Americans encounter in casual contacts with ordinary citizens of Middle East countries can turn quickly to hostility and, on occasion, to violence when the United States adopts a policy seen by locals as inimical to Arab or Muslim interests.

This report will review the nature and evolution of attitudes toward the United States among Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East, discuss factors creating resentment toward the United States, and look briefly at the implications of various policies the United States might adopt to deal with these attitudes. Emphasis will be

on attitudes in the Middle East, which remains the heartland of Arab and Muslim civilization. This area extends from Morocco in the west to Iran in the east, and comprises 18 Arabic-speaking countries (which are largely Muslim) and Iran (Muslim but not Arab). Israel, where the majority is neither Arab nor Muslim, is not covered, nor is Turkey, a Muslim country with a highly secular political system and a member of NATO. Also, this report does not deal primarily with several other Muslim countries located in southern or central Asia. Attitudes in these more distant Muslim countries, however, sometimes echo those encountered among Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East, albeit at a generally lower level of intensity.

Evolution and Nature of Attitudes

Historical Legacy

The United States fell heir to a complex relationship that developed between Islamic society and the west over a period of 14 centuries. Although the various Islamic empires that existed during that lengthy period were sometimes allied with one or more European states, Islamic-western relations tended to be a story of conflict: the early Arab conquests after the emergence of the Islamic religion; the European-led crusades from the 11th to 13th centuries; the expansion of the Ottoman Turkish empire into southeastern Europe in the 15th and 16th; and the establishment of colonial or quasi-colonial regimes over much of the Arab world by France, Britain, and to a lesser extent Italy in the 19th and early 20th. As Arab states acquired full independence following World War II, their citizens continued to harbor strong sensitivities over anything that suggested “western imperialism.” Iran, occupied by Britain and the Soviet Union during World War II, retained similar sensitivities toward any form of interference from external powers.

The United States, a latecomer to the Middle East, enjoyed a more favorable image in the region than did its European counterparts in the 19th and early 20th centuries. With the brief exception of the Barbary wars, the United States was not involved in any regional conflict and had no discernable colonial ambitions in the region. U.S. visitors—mainly educators, travelers, and diplomatic envoys—were well received on the whole. A high point in regional perceptions of the United States may have been reached at the end of World War I, when inhabitants of the Middle East welcomed President Woodrow Wilson’s call for self-determination and some of them saw in the United States a potential counterweight to the colonial ambitions of France and Britain.¹

This period of minimal U.S. involvement in the Middle East came to an end after World War II, as the United States undertook expanded worldwide commitments and acquired three major interests in the Middle East region: maintaining access to the

¹In 1919, a congress of Syrian notables expressed the view that “the American Nation is farthest from any thought of colonization and has no political ambition in our country” and went on to state that it would request technical and economic assistance from the United States. Text is contained in J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, Volume II, Princeton, D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1956, p. 63.

region's oil resources, blocking Soviet attempts to achieve hegemony in the Middle East, and safeguarding the security of the newly created state of Israel. Pursuit of these interests compelled the United States to become an active player in Middle East affairs and adopt periodically conflicting policies that were sometimes resented in the region. In particular, the U.S. role in the creation of Israel in 1948 was decried among most Arabs and Muslims, who believed that a Palestinian state should have been set up in the disputed territory.

Moreover, in the decades that followed, U.S. policy collided with the two principal political movements in the region: secular pan-Arab nationalism, which was spread by the late Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser, and Islamic fundamentalism, which began to replace secular nationalism in the 1970s.² Both movements to varying degrees developed anti-western and anti-Israeli underpinnings. A discussion of Islamic fundamentalist movements (sometimes referred to as Islamism, Islamic resurgence, or political Islam) is beyond the scope of this report; however, three points are worth noting. First, Islamic fundamentalism is not monolithic; it is espoused by a number of groups that vary in orientation and intensity. Second, the more militant fundamentalist groups with a penchant for violence have shown considerable drawing power among youth and lower middle classes. Third, the efforts of more extreme fundamentalists to undermine pro-U.S. regimes in the region, oppose Arab-Israeli peacemaking, and promote international terrorism have increasingly put Islamic fundamentalists at odds with the United States.³

Extent of Resentment

Attitudes toward the United States among Muslims and Arabs of the Middle East appear to be mixed. In the absence of reliable or consistent polling data, the extent and depth of opposition to the United States are hard to measure. Anecdotal evidence is varied and contradictory. One commentator, writing in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, opined that “only a hard core of Muslim fanatics hates us enough to kill themselves and thousands of others ...”⁴ Another commentator, while noting that the vast majority of Muslims and Arabs were shocked and horrified by the attacks, goes on to say that “a mood of resentment toward America” has become so commonplace in Middle East countries “that it was bound to breed hostility, and even hatred.”⁵ Contrasting viewpoints appear to exist side by side, and reflect long-

²Non-Arab Iran had its own version of secular nationalism which was effectively stunted in 1953 when groups loyal to the late Shah led a counter-coup (with U.S. and British support) against the left-leaning Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh. Twenty-five years later Iran's leading Islamist, the late Ayatollah Rouhallah Khomeini, proved more successful in bringing about the overthrow of the Shah's pro-western regime.

³One commentator notes that “[s]ecularists, moderate Muslims, orthodox thinkers and extremists are proffering competing versions of Islam.” Caryle Murphy, “A Hatred Rooted in Feelings,” *The Washington Post*, September 16, 2001, p. B-1.

⁴Holger Jensen, “Here's Why They Hate Us,” *The (Fairfax) Sunday Journal*, October 28, 2001, p. A9.

⁵Peter Ford, “Why do they hate us?,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 27, 2001, (continued...)

standing ambivalence in regional attitudes toward the United States. Some individuals who express admiration for U.S. values such as freedom and opportunity often criticize aspects of American popular culture. Likewise, some who praise U.S. democracy may at the same time condemn U.S. policies on issues related to Israel and Iraq.

There are noteworthy differences between governmental attitudes and popular attitudes toward the United States, and some commentators believe that popular attitudes are winning out in their ability to influence regional policies. Most Middle East governments tend to see public opinion as a potential threat to the status quo. Friendly governments like those of Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, are economically or strategically dependent on U.S. ties and will go to considerable lengths to support or acquiesce in U.S. policies even when they are domestically unpopular. Even less friendly governments, while using or instigating popular sentiment as a means of attacking specific U.S. policies, are uneasy over popular movements they see as threats to their regimes; Syria, for example, has long suppressed the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood. Both friendly and hostile governments, however, seem to feel increasingly constrained by popular attitudes. To an increasing extent, they are walking a fine line between attempting to control popular attitudes and seeking to coopt them.

Popular sentiment, on the other hand, operates under no such constraints. Often referred to as “the Arab street” (which loosely includes public opinion in non-Arab Iran as well), this popular sentiment has benefitted over the years from a steady expansion in the reach, availability, and sophistication of media outlets. In the late 1950s, the proliferation of transistor radios did much to spread the vision of Arab nationalism propagated by then Egyptian President Nasser. Twenty years later, cassette tapes enabled the late Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini to enlist supporters for his campaign to establish an Islamic republic in Iran. In recent years, the emergence of videotapes and satellite television has popularized Islamic fundamentalist views that in some cases have fueled outbreaks of terrorism. A political scientist in the Middle East observes that the Arab street is becoming increasingly Islamicized and adds: “The street counts.”⁶

A key question which defies easy answers is the degree to which “the street” is hostile to the United States. The strongly Islamist orientation which seems to be a current feature of the street can easily be translated into anti-U.S. sentiment at the hands of skilled manipulators like Osama bin Laden. As explained below, U.S. policy has frequently been at variance with prevailing popular sentiment in the Middle East. A Saudi journalist, discussing the popular Qatar-based Al-Jazeera TV network, commented that “[t]hey know the taste of the Arab street, and the Arab street is anti-

⁵(...continued)
p. 5.

⁶John Kifner, “The New Power of Arab Public Opinion,” *New York Times*, November 11, 2001, Sec. 4, pp. 1,5.

American.”⁷ Moreover, skepticism and a conspiratorial mentality among much of the population feed inflammatory theories that deepen popular distrust of the United States. For example, some Arab media have suggested that the September 11 attacks were carried out by the Bush Administration to solidify its hold on power.⁸

The street is not monolithic, however, and is probably not uniformly anti-American. Attitudes seem to vary according to the background and orientation of the individuals expressing them. There are indications that those who are most attracted to Islamic fundamentalism—for example, youth, poorer classes, some professionals and intellectuals—are more likely to view the United States in an unfavorable light. Conversely, ethnic and religious minorities such as the Kurds in Iraq and some Christians in Lebanon have long regarded western nations and particularly the United States as potential protectors against Arab or Muslim majorities. In Iran, in a curious reversal of popular sentiment, opinion leaders such as intellectuals and students are now reacting against the country’s hard-line clerics, who remain among the most resolute opponents of the United States.⁹ On balance, though, popular attitudes—at least among the most vocal groups—appear unfavorable toward the United States on a variety of issues.

Leading Issues

The following discussion summarizes some of the leading issues that continue to stir resentment toward the United States among Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East. The list of issues is not exhaustive and the resentments that they arouse are not universally shared, but they are among the more commonly cited factors coloring regional attitudes toward the United States.

International and Economic Factors

As the lone remaining superpower, the United States has become a convenient target for complaint on a range of issues. Particularly in the Middle East, there is a sense that the United States can impose its will on international organizations and exercise military muscle in pursuing its objectives with little regard to the view of other countries. In summarizing Middle East attitudes, one observer writes that “[m]ost of the time, Washington does what it pleases in the region, paying little heed to criticism from Cairo or Riyadh or Amman. But then comes along an emergency,

⁷Sharon Waxman, “Arab TV’s Strong Signal,” *The Washington Post*, December 4, 2001, p. C1.

⁸Warren Richey, “Muslim opinion sees a conspiracy,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 6, 2001. The author quotes other conspiracy theories variously putting the blame for the September 11 events on Israeli intelligence, Japanese seeking to avenge Hiroshima and Nagasaki, McVeigh-type militia movements, or Chinese and Russians trying to block a U.S. missile shield.

⁹See, for example, Hugh Pope and Peter Waldman, “Iran’s Islamic Leaders Face Sudden Unrest Since Terror Attacks,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 5, 2001, pp. A1,A10.

and suddenly the Americans expect Middle East governments to do our bidding.”¹⁰ Superpower envy on the part of Arabs and Muslims is not new; however, it has been heightened during the past decade by the absence of a second superpower which could act as a counterweight to unilateral action by the United States. At a more basic historical level, many Arabs and Muslims lament a world order in which there is no longer an overarching Muslim empire, which could balance other superpowers. They recall that such a Muslim empire had existed in one form or another from the early years of Islam until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I.¹¹

From an economic standpoint, there is a sense of relative deprivation among large numbers of Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East. American affluence, widely seen by Middle East residents in western media broadcasts, is contrasted with privation in key segments of the Middle East population: Palestinian refugees, Yemeni villagers, urban underclasses in Egypt, and especially Iraqis struggling under a decade-old economic embargo. Even oil producing countries have seen some of their earlier prosperity erode as the oil market has become increasingly erratic; in Saudi Arabia, for example, per capita income has declined in real terms by as much as 50% since the early 1980s, with resulting cutbacks in social services.¹² Some in the region blame the United States for allegedly exerting pressure on oil producers to keep supplies plentiful and prices low. Others question the seeming reluctance of U.S. business to invest in the Middle East.

These economic discontents may have been exacerbated by the phenomenon known as “globalization”, defined by one source as “the integration of political, economic and cultural activities of geographically or nationally separated peoples.”¹³ One commentator observes that “[g]lobalization has caught it [the Middle East] at a bad demographic moment.”¹⁴ As the youthful population expands, growing numbers of young men compete for fewer opportunities in the traditional job market and often lack the skills to qualify for more technically sophisticated employment opportunities. The United States, seen as the vehicle of globalization, has become vulnerable to criticism from poorer classes and an increasingly alienated youth. In a public opinion poll of Palestinians conducted by Birzeit University (the leading university in the

¹⁰Steve Chapman, “Making friends and enemies in the Middle East,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 20, 2001, p. 29.

¹¹Fundamentalist zealots such as Osama bin Laden have exploited this resentment. In his taped message aired on October 7, 2001, bin Laden referred to humiliations visited upon the Muslim world “for more than 80 years.” [Text in *The Washington Post*, October 2001, p. A12.] Historian Bernard Lewis believes this comment refers to the western role in overthrowing the Ottoman Empire, whose ruler carried the dual title of Sultan (temporal ruler) and Caliph (religious successor to the Prophet Muhammad).

¹²See Thomas Omestad, “The kingdom and the power,” *U.S. News and World Report*, November 5, 2001, p. 34. According to DRI-WEFA, an econometric forecasting firm, per capita GDP declined in real terms from \$12,681 in 1980 to \$7,729 in 2000 (constant 1997 dollars). Some estimates show an even steeper decline.

¹³For further definitions and discussion, see CRS Report RL30955, *The Issue of Globalization—An Overview*, May 3, 2001, by Gary J. Wells.

¹⁴Fareed Zakaria, “Why Do They Hate Us,” *Newsweek*, October 15, 2001, p. 32.

Israeli-occupied West Bank territory) in October 2001, 86.5% of respondents agreed with the statement that the United States is “[r]ich at the expense of poor nations.”

Countervailing Considerations. The United States has shown restraint as a superpower, conducting military operations mainly to defend itself against terrorism (Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan) defend vital economic interests (Operation Desert Storm against Iraq in 1991), or check widespread disorder and relieve famine (Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1993). In several cases it has deployed forces to protect Muslim communities, notably in Bosnia and Kosovo (as well as Afghanistan in the 1980s). During these military interventions, U.S. administrations have made a point of acting under U.N. Security Council resolutions. While seeking to replace avowedly hostile leaders like Saddam Hussein, the United States has not pursued a colonial vision or tried to establish long term military occupations in the Middle East.

Economic ills that affect much of the Middle East appear to result more from local policies than from the role of the United States. High birth rates, low productivity, unresponsive economic structures, and inadequate educational systems have retarded economic growth and kept countries in this region from becoming competitive in the international market. A financial expert on the Arabian Peninsula described the 1990s as a “lost decade” in the Middle East, noting that GDP growth had averaged about 1% throughout most of the region.¹⁵

In actuality, the United States has been a major benefactor of Arab and Muslim countries in the Middle East. Even if Israel is excluded, the United States has provided a disproportionate share of its foreign aid to Middle Eastern countries. In FY2001, the United States provided \$2.396 billion in bilateral assistance to Arab and Muslim states in the Middle East, or 26% of total worldwide U.S. bilateral assistance (\$9.199 billion). Since the inception of foreign assistance programs in 1946, the United States has provided \$53.9 billion to Egypt, \$5.1 billion to Jordan, and significant amounts to several other Middle East countries and groups in bilateral assistance. Some would argue, however, that at least a portion of this aid goes to strengthen existing regimes, which are not always popular (see below).

Unfavorable Images

For some years, there has been a widespread perception among Muslims in the Middle East that U.S. society is fundamentally alien, if not hostile, to Islamic beliefs and values. This perception is not confined to militant clerics; rather, it is shared by large numbers of people in the region. Critics tend to focus on problems in American society that often figure prominently in the media, such as the overuse of alcohol, drugs, and the breakdown of the traditional family. Many in the Middle East disapprove of American sexual mores, and American films and television shows are seen as promoting promiscuity. Western and particularly U.S. media are seen by some as a vehicle for corruption of Muslim society.

¹⁵Brad Bourland, Chief Economist, Saudi American Bank, speaking at a conference on Redefining U.S.-Arab Strategic Relations, held on September 9-10, 2001, under the sponsorship of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations in Washington, DC.

Arabs and other Muslims also complain that they are often unfairly portrayed in U.S. media. They cite caricatures appearing in American comic strips, cartoons, situation comedies, and movies as evidence of a built-in bias among Americans against their culture and beliefs. A scholar who researched Arab stereotypes in some detail stated that “the Arab remains a favorite whipping boy” and went on to list a number of contemporary TV programs which depicted Arabs in an unfavorable light.¹⁶ In a similar vein, they object to the frequent use in the U.S. press of disparaging clichés and phrases, arguing for example that American media too often link the word “terrorist” with “Arab”, “Muslim.”, or “Palestinian”. They maintain that U.S. media do not use such pre-judgmental phrases when dealing with terrorism perpetrated by groups outside the Muslim world. In the Birzeit poll, 88% of respondents believed that perceived American animosity toward Islam is a very important factor in shaping U.S.-Arab relations.

Countervailing Considerations. These criticisms, however widely felt, do not fully capture the ambivalence of Middle Eastern attitudes toward the United States. Many Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East, including those most critical of U.S. society and policy, are attracted to the democratic principles and economic opportunities that the United States has developed. Some find that the Sodom-Gomorrha label associated with the United States among many Middle Easterners does not generally apply. One commentator has noted that “America is easily the most religious of all the industrialized nations.”¹⁷ (Ironically, the less religious Europeans draw less criticism from the Muslim world.) For many years, long lines of visa applicants in front of U.S. embassies and consulates in Middle East countries have attested to the positive feelings that co-exist with negative impressions toward the United States.

A scientist from Yemen expressed some of this ambivalence about the United States in commenting that “[w]hen you go there, you really love the United States...You are treated like a human being, much better than in your own country. But when you go back home, you find the US applies justice and fairness to its own people, but not abroad.”¹⁸ In a similar vein, the Birzeit poll found that 66.5% of respondents believe the United States respects the human rights of its citizens and 52.6% believe it practices democracy within its borders; however, much lower percentages believe it promotes these values abroad (see below). An Egyptian actor, recounting a trip to the United States, said “I loved the American people.” But he adds that “If you want the Arab people to prove they love America, let America prove they love the Arab people.”¹⁹

¹⁶Jack G. Shaheen, *The TV Arab*, Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1984, pp. 122-123.

¹⁷Dan Morgan, “A Fervor Americans Can Recognize,” *The Washington Post*, October 21, 2001, p. B1.

¹⁸Peter Ford, “Why do they hate us?,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 27, 2001, p. 10.

¹⁹Sharon Waxman, “I Love You, Now Go Away,” *The Washington Post*, December 17, 2001, pp. C1, C8.

Observers have noted that some Middle Easterners secretly like the less conservative moral strictures they encounter in Euro-American societies and enjoy the very activities that many Muslim spokesmen decry. One commentator points out that Middle East residents themselves, not the United States, have created a demand for such cultural symbols of the United States as Coca-Cola, MTV, and blue jeans.²⁰

Western Military Presence

The deployment of U.S. and other western military forces in the Middle East strikes a discordant note among many Arabs and other Muslims in the region. Since the U.S.-led coalition expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991, the United States has maintained a force of approximately 25,000 military personnel in the Persian Gulf region, including approximately 5,000 in remote bases in Saudi Arabia. (The total figure has increased as the campaign against terrorism got under way in October 2001.) Many Arabs in the Middle East resent the presence of non-Muslim western forces, which evoke memories of European colonialism. In particular, the presence of western military forces on Saudi soil is seen by some as a desecration of the Islamic holy places of Mecca and Medina, which are located in Saudi Arabia. Significantly, the first grievance listed by Osama bin Laden in his *fatwa* (Muslim legal opinion) of February 1998 was the U.S. military presence in the Arabian Peninsula, and this complaint seems to have resonance in the region. Even some individuals and leaders who are less concerned with the U.S. military presence on religious grounds tend to suspect a long-term U.S. plan to maintain military bases in the Middle East.

The rulers of Saudi Arabia, torn between their need for western protection against renewed aggression by Iraq and their position as guardians of the Islamic holy sites, are sensitive to any discussion of their role in hosting U.S. military personnel. To a lesser extent, the same is true of the leaders of the smaller Gulf states who, like the Saudi leadership, are vulnerable to domestic and regional criticism from opponents of a U.S. military presence. (A partial exception is Kuwait, where memories of the seven-month Iraqi occupation and the U.S. role in terminating it are still fresh.) Consequently, Gulf leaders are reluctant to advertise any U.S. or other western use of bases on their territories, especially to launch allied strikes against targets in fellow Islamic states such as Iraq or more recently Afghanistan.²¹

Countervailing Considerations. The United States and its allies have made efforts to avoid offending Muslim sentiment or embarrassing friendly governments in the Middle East. President Bush and senior U.S. officials have repeatedly said the war against terrorism is not aimed at the Islamic religion. The U.S. military presence is generally unobtrusive. U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia, for example, are stationed at isolated locations at considerable distances from the Muslim holy sites of Mecca and Medina. All three U.S. administrations since the 1991 Gulf war have avoided detailed

²⁰Michael Collins Dunn, "Trying to Get at the Whys," *The Estimate*, September 21, 2001, p. 2.

²¹A senior U.S. military official emphasized the importance of maintaining secrecy or "plausible deniability" when seeking to use facilities in Saudi Arabia. Vernon Loeb and Dana Priest, "Saudis Balk at U.S. Use of Key Facility," *The Washington Post*, September 22, 2001, pp. A1, A19.

public discussion of U.S. troop locations, military deployments, or combat operations in an effort to avert criticism against Middle East countries hosting U.S. military contingents in the Persian Gulf region. Although many Arabs and Muslims opposed the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan, U.S. officials have stressed that most Afghans welcomed their liberation from the Taliban regime.

More broadly, the United States does not have a history of seeking a large-scale military presence in the Middle East. For many years, the United States maintained only an “over-the-horizon” presence consisting of a small naval force stationed in the Persian Gulf, despite the economic and strategic importance of that region. Even since the 1991 Gulf war, the United States has tried to minimize the need for stationing forces in the region through measures that do not require permanent deployment of troops. For example, the U.S. Armed Forces have prepositioned military equipment in several Gulf states for use in a contingency, engaged in combined military exercises, and carried out short term training missions. The United States has withdrawn from bases when requested to do so by a host government, as it did from Libya and Morocco in the 1970s. U.S. participation in regional peacekeeping operations, notably the Multinational Force and Observers established under the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979, has elicited little or no opposition within the Middle East.

Containment Policy Toward Iraq

The U.S. role in implementing economic and military measures to contain Iraq has become increasingly unpopular in the Middle East. Regional reactions were mixed when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, but Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s accompanying denunciation of oil rich regimes resonated among many ordinary citizens, especially in less affluent Middle East countries. Since the U.S.-led coalition expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991, public opinion in the Middle East has increasingly blamed economic sanctions imposed by the U.N. Security Council for the continuing hardships that the Iraqi people have suffered for the past ten years. The United States, widely seen as the principal force in maintaining sanctions, has drawn the lion’s share of such criticism and is portrayed as insensitive to the plight of Iraqi citizens unable to obtain the basic necessities of life. As one commentator put it, “[w]hile many in the Arab world do not like Saddam Hussain, they believe that the United States has chosen a particularly inhuman method of fighting him—a method that is starving an entire nation.”²²

The U.S. and British role in the military aspects of containing Iraq is also a focus of criticism in the region. Since the early 1990s, both countries have conducted regular overflights of northern and southern Iraq to deter the regime from oppressing internal opposition groups or from threatening neighboring states. These overflights have resulted in frequent clashes as U.S. and British aircraft have responded to challenges from Iraqi air defense units, and Iraq asserts that allied strikes have inflicted significant collateral damage. On several occasions, most notably in December 1998 (Operation Desert Fox), the United States and Britain have conducted more extensive air strikes against major Iraqi installations. Even the

²²Fareed Zakaria, “Why Do They Hate Us?,” *Newsweek*, October 15, 2001, p. 36.

leaders of friendly Arab states—Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan—have deplored the use of force against Iraq and the allied strikes have been decried in local media. On the “Arab street”, reactions have been even more hostile. A popular conspiratorial theory holds that the United States—despite periodic military action against Iraq—actually wants to keep Saddam in power. According to this theory, “Saddam Hussein had been lured into Kuwait by an American green light—and then kept in power and let off the hook—so that Pax Americana would have the pretext for stationing its forces in the region.”²³

Of particular concern to many in the region is the possibility that the United States may expand the current campaign against Osama bin Laden and the Taliban to target Iraq or possibly other Muslim countries on the State Department’s terrorism list (such as Iran, Syria, or Libya). At a meeting of the 56-member Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on October 10, 2001, attendees refrained from criticizing the U.S. campaign against bin Laden/Taliban forces in Afghanistan but rejected the targeting of any other Arab or Muslim country. Key allies such as President Mubarak of Egypt and King Abdullah of Jordan have urged the United States not to take this step, which they think could cause a major backlash in their countries and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Countervailing Considerations. U.S. officials have consistently maintained that the economic ills that beset post-war Iraq are of Saddam’s making. They point out that Saddam temporized for five years before grudgingly accepting a plan offered by the United Nations to purchase essential supplies for the Iraqi people with revenues from UN-supervised oil sales (the “oil-for-food” program). Since 1998, Iraq has been allowed to sell unlimited quantities of oil under this plan; however, a number of observers believe that Saddam’s government has obstructed the intent of the plan by siphoning off up to \$1.5 billion of these revenues per year to build palaces, reward key supporters of the regime, and finance military purchases.²⁴ Moreover the northeastern Kurdish region, which has enjoyed de facto independence from Iraq since 1991, is in much better economic shape than those parts of Iraq under Saddam’s control, even though the Kurdish region is under the same sanctions regime. In the spring of 2001, the U.N. Security Council did not agree to a U.S.-sponsored plan to expedite humanitarian supplies to Iraq while interdicting goods with potential military uses. In November, however, the United States and Russia obtained Security Council agreement to raise this “smart sanctions” proposal again in 2002.

Regarding the military aspects of containment, U.S. administrations since 1991 have maintained that overflights to enforce no-fly zones over parts of Iraq are grounded in U.N. Security Council resolutions adopted after the 1991 Gulf war. (Not all U.N. members agree with this interpretation.) They discount the numbers of civilian casualties reported by Iraq and point out that in some cases Iraq has used

²³Fouad Ajami, “The Sentry’s Solitude,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2001, p. 11.

²⁴Colum Lynch, “US Agrees to Compromise on Trade Restrictions on Iraq,” *The Washington Post*, November 28, 2001, p. A31; Carola Hoyos, “UN chief seeks to ease controls on Iraqi oil cash,” (*London*) *Financial Times*, August 1, 2001, p. 7. Iraqi officials say the United States and Britain frequently place holds on contracts for essential civilian supplies ordered under the oil-for-food plan.

civilians as human shields by emplacing air defense units near populated areas. More massive allied strikes were brought on by major Iraqi violations of cease-fire terms; in December 1998 (Operation Desert Fox), the four-day allied bombing campaign, took place after almost two years of mounting Iraqi interference with U.N. inspectors seeking to find and dismantle Iraqi programs for developing weapons of mass destruction.

U.S. officials believe it would be risky to terminate economic sanctions or military overflights in the absence of clear evidence that Iraq is prepared to honor its obligations to abandon weapons of mass destruction programs and refrain from oppressing internal groups, threatening neighbors, or supporting international terrorism. U.S. officials fear that Iraq may be exploiting the absence of any inspection regime since December 1998 to move forward with its weapons programs. An essential step in demonstrating good faith would be for Iraq to readmit U.N. weapons inspectors with full access to Iraqi installations in accordance with Security Council resolutions, as President Bush demanded during an interview on November 26, 2001.

U.S. Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict

Perhaps the most frequently cited source of resentment against the United States among Arabs and Muslims is their conviction that U.S. policy regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict is biased toward Israel. Resentment is particularly strong among the Palestinian community: Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza chafe under a 30-year-plus Israeli occupation; Palestinians in other countries feel that much of the world, including the United States, is indifferent to their plight. At present, two aspects of the long-festered Arab-Israeli problem are creating particular concerns in the Middle East. First, the collapse of U.S.-brokered Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in July 2000 led to an on-going Palestinian uprising (*intifada*), amid widespread Arab complaints that U.S. administrations have been unwilling to press Israel on key issues of Palestinian concern. Second, U.S.-sponsored talks between Israeli and Syrian representatives broke down during the same year, followed by continuing clashes in the Israeli-Lebanese-Syrian tri-border area.²⁵

Feelings vary in intensity, but concern over this issue is not confined to the people directly involved, i.e., the Palestinians and Syrians. Palestinian efforts to achieve statehood, in particular, have long stirred emotions throughout the Middle East. According to a poll conducted in the summer of 2001 by a Middle East expert at the University of Maryland, nearly 60% of the people in four Arab countries—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Lebanon—considered the Palestinian problem to be the single most important issue to them personally. An even higher percentage of Egyptians, 79%, gave the same answer.²⁶ This widespread

²⁵For further background on the Arab-Israeli conflict and recent efforts to resolve it, see CRS Issue Brief IB91137, *The Middle East Peace Talks*, by Carol Migdalovitz; CRS Issue Brief IB 92052, *Palestinians and Middle East Peace: Issues for the United States*, by Clyde Mark; and CRS Report RL31078, *The Shib'a Farms Dispute and Its Implications*, by Alfred B. Prados.

²⁶The pollster, Professor Shibley Telhami, reviewed the results of his poll during his keynote
(continued...)

preoccupation in the Middle East with the Palestinian issue often takes the form of animosity and violence against the United States, which is seen as Israel's principal supporter. The Birzeit poll indicated that 90% of Palestinians regard perceived U.S. bias toward Israel as a very important factor shaping U.S.-Arab relations. In addressing the many aspects of this conflict, Arab and Muslim interlocutors voice a series of long-standing complaints.

Perceived Leverage. Many Arabs and Muslims doubt that the United States is serious in pressing for a solution to the conflict. They believe that large-scale U.S. aid to Israel should have provided U.S. leaders with sufficient leverage to obtain concessions that would have led to an agreement on terms that Arab leaders could accept. Palestinians, in particular, believe the United States could influence Israel to relax onerous features of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and cease such activities as expansion of Jewish settlements in these territories.²⁷

Consistency. Many Arabs and Muslims assert that the United States operates under a dual standard in which other countries are held to a stricter standard than Israel in meeting international obligations. They compare U.S. economic and military pressure on Iraq to honor the terms of U.N. resolutions with a seeming absence of pressure on Israel to comply with other U.N. resolutions or agreements that address occupation issues, the status of Jerusalem, and weapons of mass destruction. Similarly, they criticize U.S. silence regarding Israeli use of U.S.-supplied military equipment to strike populated areas in the West Bank, Gaza, and southern Lebanon.²⁸

Terrorism Definition. Arabs and Muslims uniformly disagree with U.S. definitions of terrorism, which they believe unfairly target Palestinian and Lebanese groups seeking to end Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza territories and (until May 2001) a portion of southern Lebanon.²⁹ They maintain that the term "terrorism" should not be applied to "national resistance movements."

Countervailing Considerations. Since 1973, successive U.S. administrations have devoted intense efforts to the quest for a solution to the Arab-

²⁶(...continued)

speech at the Middle East Institute's 55th Annual Conference held in Washington, DC, ON October 19, 2001.

²⁷Amr Moussa, Secretary General of the Arab League and former Egyptian Foreign Minister, enumerated some of the major Palestinian complaints: "As long as the Israeli government continues its policy of assassinations, building settlements, destroying homes and blockading towns, the violence will continue." Douglas Jehl, "Arabs Say It Was Israel That Set Off Cycle of Violence," *The New York Times*, December 4, 2001, p. A-8.

²⁸On rare occasions, the United States has temporarily suspended military shipments to Israel over this issue. For further discussion, see CRS Report RL30982, *U.S. Defense Articles and Services Supplied to Foreign Recipients: Restrictions on Their Use*, May 30, 2001, by Richard F. Grimmett.

²⁹Lebanese argue that even the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 was incomplete. For more information, see CRS Report RL31078, *The Shib'a Farms Dispute and Its Implications*, August 7, 2001, by Alfred B. Prados.

Israeli conflict. U.S. diplomacy played a major role in the conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty (1979), the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty (1994), and a series of Israeli-Palestinian agreements that resulted in limited Palestinian self-rule over 70% of Gaza and approximately 40% of the West Bank in the 1990s. U.S. administrations have frequently pressed Israeli counterparts to take further steps in advancing the peace process. Many commentators believe Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular have missed numerous opportunities for a comprehensive peace settlement. In July 2000, after two weeks of U.S.-sponsored negotiations, Palestinian Chairman Yasir Arafat rejected a reported offer by then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to recognize a Palestinian state in over 90% of the West Bank and most of Gaza. Earlier that year, then Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad had rejected an Israeli offer to return virtually all of the Golan Heights territory, which Israeli had also occupied in the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Both Arab leaders viewed Israel's proposals as insufficient. Asad insisted that Israeli withdrawal should be total (as it was with Egypt). Arafat argued that Barak had not offered contiguous territories to the Palestinians nor had he offered any Palestinian sovereignty in Jerusalem. In showing little flexibility, however, Arafat and Asad appear to have bypassed the most comprehensive offer any Israeli government is likely to make. Just before leaving office in February 2001, then Prime Minister Barak stressed that ideas raised during Israeli-Palestinian negotiations during the previous year were now null and void.³⁰

Acts of terrorism perpetrated by extremists and the frequent failure of even mainstream Arabs and Muslims to condemn such acts have been an important factor in creating an unfavorable image of Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular. Among foreign terrorist groups designated by the Department of State under 1996 legislation, seven are Palestinian and four more represent other Arab groups (notably the Lebanese Shi'ite Muslim organization Hizballah). Of seven countries designated by the State Department as state sponsors of terrorism, five are Arab or Muslim states in the Middle East. (Arabs and Muslims complain that the list is skewed to target Middle Eastern countries.)

More fundamentally, some experts on the region question the degree to which Arab-Muslim hostility toward the United States can be attributed to the Arab-Israeli conflict rather than to other grievances. Some of the most virulent outbursts of anti-American hostility, such as the seizure of the U.S. embassy by militant Iranian students in 1979 or the attacks on U.S. military facilities in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996, have had little to do with U.S. support of Israel. Historian Bernard Lewis suggests that "resentment of Israel is the only grievance that can be freely and safely expressed in those Muslim countries where the media are either wholly owned or strictly overseen by the government. Indeed, Israel serves as a useful stand-in for complaints about the economic privation and political repression under which most Muslim people live, and as a way of deflecting the resulting anger."³¹ To the extent that Middle East publics also blame the United States for these problems, Arab and

³⁰"Barak, Powell discuss Palestinian issue, Russian technology transfer to Iran," *Voice of Israel*, Jerusalem, in English, 0500, February 25, 2001–BBC Monitoring.

³¹Bernard Lewis, "The Revolt of Islam," *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001, p. 56.

Muslim hostility toward the United States might well continue, some argue, even if the Israeli-Palestinian problem were to be resolved.

U.S. Support for Unpopular Regimes

As noted earlier, attitudes toward the United States often differ on the governmental and popular levels. Ironically, long-standing U.S. support for various regimes in the Middle East in some cases has adversely affected the U.S. image among mainstream residents. Much of the “Arab street” is critical of U.S. support for governments that are perceived by some segments of the population as dictatorial, corrupt, narrowly based, or un-Islamic. These labels are variously applied to important U.S. allies including Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. Although these countries have opened their political systems to a degree, most of them face challenges from dissident elements often with an Islamic fundamentalist bent, and regularly use the coercive organs of the state to suppress dissent, even when it is non-violent. The United States draws blame from many in the region for its role in bolstering these regimes through political support, arms transfers, or financial aid.

Results of the Birzeit poll, which dealt with Palestinian public opinion, gave Arab regimes low marks, and these negative feelings are transferred by some to the United States. Only 18% thought Arab regimes practice democracy, 25% thought they allow freedom of the press, and 27% thought they respect rights of citizens. Fifty-four percent of respondents described “perceived U.S. support of undemocratic regimes” as a very important factor in shaping U.S.-Arab relations. In a related criticism, only 22% and 17.8%, respectively, believe the United States promotes democracy and human rights around the world, although as mentioned above, respondents gave fairly high marks to U.S. performance at home. Dissatisfaction with U.S. ties to existing regimes, though hard to quantify, extends well beyond the Palestinian community. Dr. Lewis observes that Middle Easterners increasingly voice complaints not over U.S. ties to Israel “but something nearer home and more immediate—American complicity with corrupt tyrants who rule them.”³² There is some evidence that terrorist acts directed against U.S. targets are aimed primarily at Arab regimes that deal with the United States.³³

Countervailing Considerations. Some commentators may overestimate the degree of popular anger at U.S. support of allied Middle Eastern regimes. Political systems in friendly Middle East countries, though not democratic by U.S. standards, are attuned in many respects to their societies. In Jordan, King Hussein and his successor King Abdullah have stayed in touch with their subjects through a

³²Bernard Lewis, “The Revolt of Islam,” *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001, p. 56.

³³After the bombing of a U.S. Air Force facility in the eastern Saudi town of Khobar in 1996, a young Saudi told a U.S. reporter that “I did not like it, but only for one reason: it hit only the Americans, when the target should have been the [Saudi] Government itself.” Douglas Jehl, “Saudi’s Heartland Is Seething With Rage at Rulers and U.S.,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 1996, p. A1.

network of personal and semi-official contacts.³⁴ In Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, monarchs operate under a consultative or *shura* system which includes both advisory councils and mechanisms for rulers to hear the concerns of common citizens.³⁵ While critics have long questioned the legitimacy of Middle Eastern rulers, various factors have helped them retain a degree of popular acceptance: roots in a prestigious dynasty, as in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco; developing constitutional procedures (Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Kuwait); and innovative political reforms (Bahrain, Qatar, Oman).

Most friendly Middle East governments have weathered numerous political crises and do not appear on the verge of collapse. Rather, they have provided a degree of stability which has furthered U.S. strategic, political, and economic objectives in the region. Moreover, they have acted as counterweights to radical regimes in the Middle East and in some cases as intermediaries between the United States and such regimes, notably Syria. U.S. economic, military, or political support for these friendly states demonstrates to less friendly leaders that alignment with the United States carries practical advantages. The dramatic reorientation of Egyptian policy under the late President Anwar Sadat in the 1970s remains a powerful example of the attraction of a good bilateral relationship with the United States.

Implications

Issues that affect Arab and Muslim attitudes toward the United States are long-standing features of U.S. relations with the Middle East. It is unlikely that resolution of any one of these issues by itself would usher in a new era of U.S.-Muslim amity or avert possible attacks on the United States or its interests. Various remedies have been suggested to deal with problems in U.S.-Middle Eastern relationships, but such suggestions are not panaceas. One commentator, discussing some of the causes of U.S.-Middle Eastern friction and the September 11 terrorist attacks, observes that “[n]one of this [discussion] is to give into to the simplistic response some have made: that if the US changed this or that policy, this would not have happened.”³⁶ It may be possible, however, to mitigate hostility among many inhabitants of the Middle East through a careful review of the most common irritants in U.S. relations with the countries and people of this region.

³⁴Both kings have had a penchant for taking the peoples’ pulse through incognito visits to government offices and other public facilities. Jeffrey Goldberg, “Learning How To Be King,” *The New York Times Magazine*, February 6, 2000, pp. 43ff; King Hussein ibn Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head*, London, xxx, p. x.

³⁵As one commentator put it, “The Saudi royal family has long argued it has its own form of democracy in the tradition of the *majlis*, or “sitting,” when subjects are allowed into palace reception halls to press petitions on princes—and often the king himself.” Nora Boustany, “Saudis’ New Consulting Council Speaks to King in Muted Tones,” *The Washington Post*, August 19, 1994, p. A30.

³⁶Michael Collins Dunn, “Trying to Get at the Whys,” *The Estimate*, September 21, 2001, p. 2.

Listed below are several illustrative steps that U.S. policy-makers could consider in dealing with issues enumerated above, together with a brief discussion. These steps are not mutually exclusive and in some cases could be pursued in combination. Implicit in each step is the option to reverse course if rapidly changing developments in the Middle East scene should so dictate.

- Continue attempts to bridge economic inequities through aid and trade programs.

Current threats to worldwide U.S. interests and the need for stable friendly regimes to cooperate with U.S. efforts in the Middle East may argue for some incremental increases in aid to countries like Egypt, Jordan, and other less affluent regional states. (At present, economic aid to Egypt is being reduced to half its 1998 level under a phased ten-year program.) Such increases might enhance internal stability by providing short term help to these governments in dealing with hardships brought on by austerity measures needed to reform their economies. However, according to a counter-argument, bilateral government-to-government aid is sometimes subject to waste or abuse and runs the risk of further alienating elements of the “Arab street” that view their governments unfavorably. An alternative approach might be trade enhancements, such as conclusion of a free trade agreement with Egypt and support for Saudi Arabia’s candidacy for membership in the World Trade Organization. Another approach might be encouragement of increased humanitarian support from the U.S. private sector. Another alternative might be to make economic aid conditional on steps by recipient regimes to encourage greater transparency and rectitude in government.

- Try to counter unfavorable images.

U.S. public diplomacy programs could be expanded in an effort to help counter perceptions of the United States as a center of vice and anti-Islamic sentiment and to explain U.S. objectives in fighting terrorism and seeking peace in the Middle East. A commentator has noted that “the administration has struggled with finding Arab and non-Arab Islamic allies to speak to the region on America’s behalf.”³⁷ Fledgling efforts by the administration like the appearance of an Arabic-speaking former U.S. ambassador on the popular Arabic TV channel *al-Jazeera* may represent a new and fruitful approach in reaching a wider audience in the Middle East. Some observers, however, question the efficacy of satellite television in attracting Middle East viewers and suggest concentrating more on broadcast TV and several newspapers with wide circulation.³⁸ Other potentially fruitful approaches might be to expand State Department speakers’ programs and people-to-people exchanges. A long-term effort to expand U.S. informational programs in the Middle East is likely to proceed gradually since there are many obstacles, including a limited pool of linguists, competing demands for resources, and ingrained skepticism toward the United States, among much of the target audience.

³⁷Michael R. Gordon, “U.S. Tries To Rally Public Support Overseas,” *The New York Times*, November 6, 2001, p. A1.

³⁸One notes that only 10% of Arabs have satellite dishes. Mamoun Fandy, “To Reach Arabs, Try Changing the Channel,” *The Washington Post*, December 2, 2001, p. B2.

- Seek wider backing for U.S. policies toward Iraq.

The ten-year-old embargo against Iraq has become increasingly unpopular in the Middle East as sympathy for the plight of the Iraqi people has grown throughout the region. A renewed U.S. effort to replace current trade restrictions with a regime of “smart sanctions” that would broaden the range of products available to the Iraqi people could ease a serious irritant in U.S. relations with Middle East states, particularly Jordan, whose economy is linked in many ways to that of Iraq. Russia, the principal obstacle to a previous U.S. effort to modify sanctions, appears to have dropped its objections.³⁹ Sanctions revision, however, would not be a viable option if Iraq were linked to the September 11 attacks or to the subsequent cases of anthrax. Also, Iraq’s continued challenges to U.S. and British enforcement of no-fly zones is likely to ensure continued allied retaliatory strikes, which are not popular in the Middle East.

- Consider a new framework for Arab-Israeli peace negotiations.

Former mechanisms for Arab-Israeli negotiations set up during the George H. W. Bush and Clinton Administrations largely evaporated as talks foundered and violence increased in 2000. Further progress in the current campaign against terrorism might offer a fresh opportunity to reinvigorate negotiations, as former President Bush did in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf war. Many regard the Arab-Israeli conflict as a leading source of discontent and potential unrest among citizens of several Middle East countries; they argue that an increased U.S. effort to resolve this conflict could decrease internal threats to Arab regimes and make them more willing to cooperate with other U.S. regional endeavors. Others are more skeptical, pointing out that popular opposition to the United States results not only from local perceptions of U.S. bias toward Israel but from other factors described above. They also point out that the parties failed to reach agreement on key issues despite a major expenditure of time and energy by both previous administrations. They doubt that the United States should devote extensive resources to another peacemaking endeavor until there is a reasonable assurance of success.

- Encourage more open political systems within the Middle East.

A weak link in U.S. efforts to establish a more stable and productive relationship with Arab and Muslim countries in the Middle East is the gap between the “Arab street” and the governing regimes, which are often regarded as being out of touch with popular sentiment. Over the past few years, a younger generation of rulers have made limited attempts to open their political systems to wider participation. Several traditional monarchies in the smaller Gulf states, for example, are moving toward elected parliaments. The United States might find it beneficial to encourage these trends in friendly Middle East countries. U.S. officials could point out that by tolerating dissent and creating more democratic institutions with greater accountability, these governments could provide a safety valve that might lessen

³⁹On November 29, 2001, Russia voted for U.N. Security Council Resolution 1382, which provides for the implementation in May 2002 of a “Goods Review List” that will facilitate most shipments to Iraq while blocking military or dual use items.

challenges from opposition groups. This would have to be done with care, however, to avoid the appearance of U.S. interference in the political life of regimes already vulnerable to criticism by opponents of their U.S. ties. More fundamentally, U.S. policy makers may find it prudent to weigh the benefits of encouraging a more open political system against the risks of a takeover by political groups that oppose U.S. objectives in the Middle East.⁴⁰

Resentment toward the United States within the Middle East may be part of the landscape for some time to come. It will probably continue to ebb and flow as it has done in the past, and the more dramatic manifestations of this hostility are likely to be the exception rather than the rule. Current issues, including the ones examined in this report, may metamorphose or be replaced by others over time. Even if these issues do not lend themselves to ready solution, an understanding of them can help signal the likelihood of potential threats to the United States or its interests. Moreover, U.S. cooperation with selected countries of the Middle East is of long standing, and it is likely that a fund of good will toward the United States still exists within various Arab and Muslim circles in the Middle East. Historical cooperation and residual good will may provide a basis for more positive relationships in the years ahead.

⁴⁰A U.S. scholar and former diplomat opines that “[m]ore Islamists, imbued with a congenital hatred for Israel...would doubtless be elected” if unfettered elections were held in Jordan. Hermann Frederick Eilts, “Islamic Fundamentalism: A Quest for a New Order,” *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Fall 1990, p. 36.