

The Middle East in Transition The Impact of the U.S. Policy



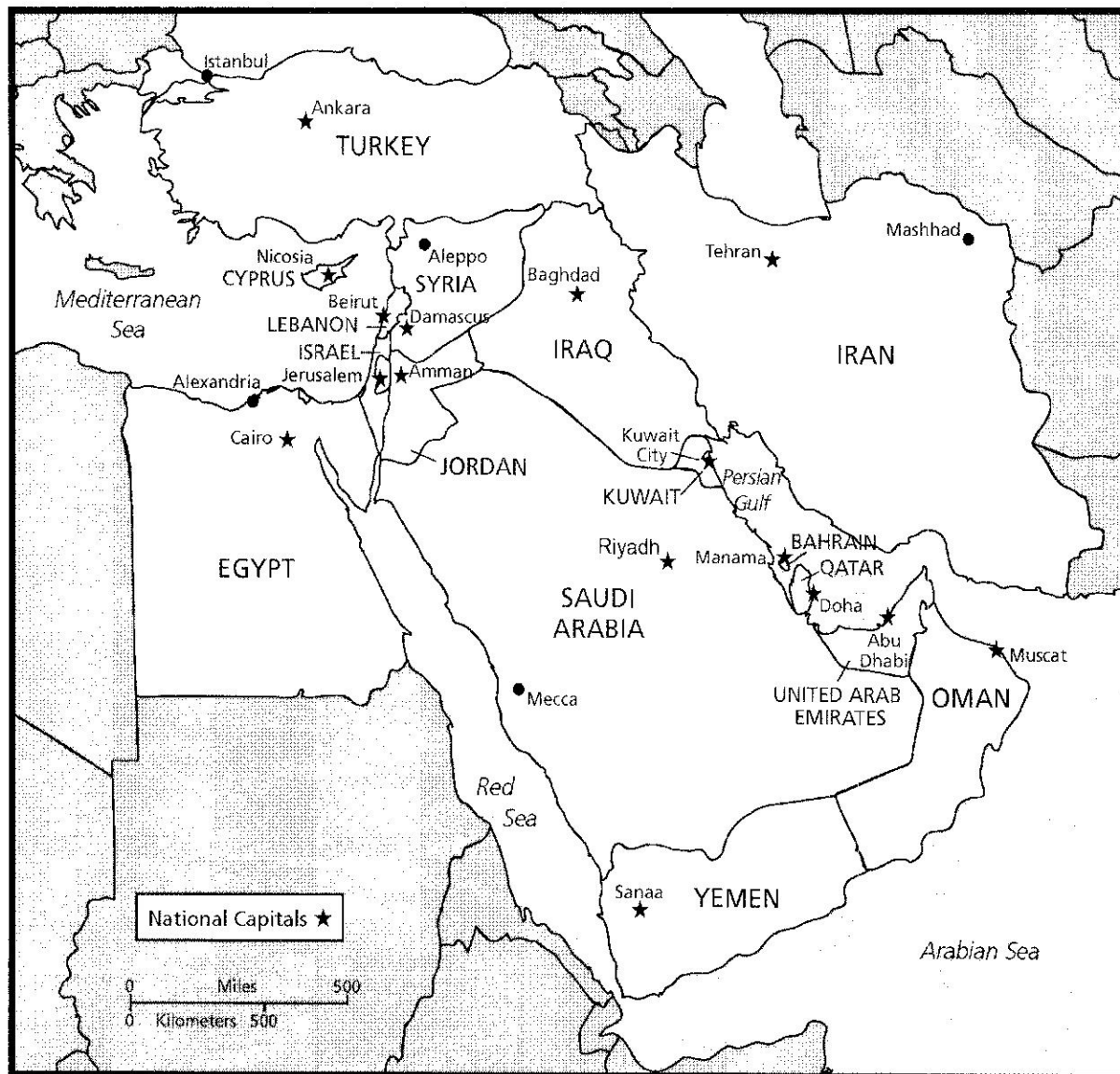
THE **CHOICES** PROGRAM

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The Middle East



Note to Students

Western geographers originally coined the term “Middle East” in the early twentieth century to indicate the land between the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia. Today, the term “Middle East” can be used to describe a region spanning countries as far apart as Morocco in North Africa to Pakistan in Southeast Asia. In this reading, the term “Middle East” refers to the countries highlighted above, stretching from Egypt in the west to Iran in the east. The term “Arab world” refers to the countries in which Arabic is widely spoken. This includes countries in North and East Africa and extends to the Persian Gulf. It does not include Iran, where Persian is the official language.

Introduction: An Era of Change

On September 11, 2001, terrorists angry about the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. role in the Middle East attacked the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. The terrorists were followers of Osama bin Laden, the leader of the al Qaeda terrorist group.

For over ten years, the events of that day shaped U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Before September 11, 2001, the United States had cut its defense budget. Some U.S. troops had been withdrawn from overseas bases. Foreign aid spending on most parts of the world had been slashed. After September 11, the United States went to war in Afghanistan and began to reconsider its policies in the Middle East as well as its role in the world.

In early 2002, President George W. Bush (2001-2009) identified the Middle Eastern country of Iraq as a threat to the security of the United States and the world. In the spring of 2003, U.S.-led military forces invaded Iraq and occupied the country for eight years. The U.S. involvement in Iraq had significant repercussions for U.S. relations with countries across the Middle East and the world.

In 2011, new developments began reshaping the U.S. role in the Middle East. In what has become known as the Arab Spring, protests and revolts have challenged governments across the region. Long-time U.S. allies, including the governments of Egypt and Tunisia, were overthrown by mass demonstrations. A civil war rages in Syria and threatens to spill over borders. The long-term effects of these events remain to be seen, as does the U.S. relationship to evolving Middle East politics.

Why does the United States maintain an active role in the Middle East?

The United States maintains an active role in the Middle East for three main reasons. First, the United States wants to ensure the steady flow of oil, the fuel which currently drives most of the world's economies. Second, the United States is concerned about long-term stability, and about retaining power and influence in this important area of the world. The U.S. involvement in Iraq and its concerns about Iran, which the U.S. government believes is trying to develop nuclear weapons, fall under this category. Finally, the United States has long been involved in efforts to settle the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Each of these reasons overlaps with the others, making the U.S. role in the Middle East very complex.

In the following pages, you will read about the debate regarding U.S. policy in the Middle East. You will confront the same questions facing U.S. policy makers: Which interests and values should provide the basis for U.S. policy in the region? How should the Middle East's enormous oil reserves and the United States' close relationship with Israel figure into policy calculations? How do recent changes from the Arab Spring affect U.S. relationships with countries in the region?

The reading will prepare you to wrestle with these questions. In Part I, you will explore the history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East since World War I. In Part II, you will examine the critical issues facing the United States in the Middle East today. Finally, you will have the opportunity to consider four options for the future of the U.S. role in the Middle East.

Part II: Weighing U.S. Priorities in the Middle East

Today, the United States faces different challenges in the Middle East than it did during the Cold War, when U.S. policy in the region was defined by its relationship to the Soviet Union and its allies.

The last decade has seen dramatic events that have turned U.S. foreign policy on its head and recast the U.S. relationship with the Middle East. On September 11, 2001 a militant Islamist group known as al Qaeda, angry about U.S. policies in the Middle East, killed nearly three thousand people, mainly U.S. citizens, in coordinated terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. While most countries stood by the United States in its efforts to combat terrorism after September 11, this broad support decreased when the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003 and justified the war as part of the fight against terrorism. The war strained relationships between the United States and Middle Eastern countries.

A more recent development has started to affect the U.S. relationship with the countries of the Middle East. In December 2010, massive protests against authoritarian governments began to spread across the region. The protests have become known as the "Arab Spring," reflecting the idea of a new season of political change among Arabic speaking peoples. The struggle for more democratic governance is likely to affect the region in the years ahead.

In the following pages, you will learn more about the Middle East's connections to U.S. policy. You will examine the role of oil, Iran and Iraq, the Arab-

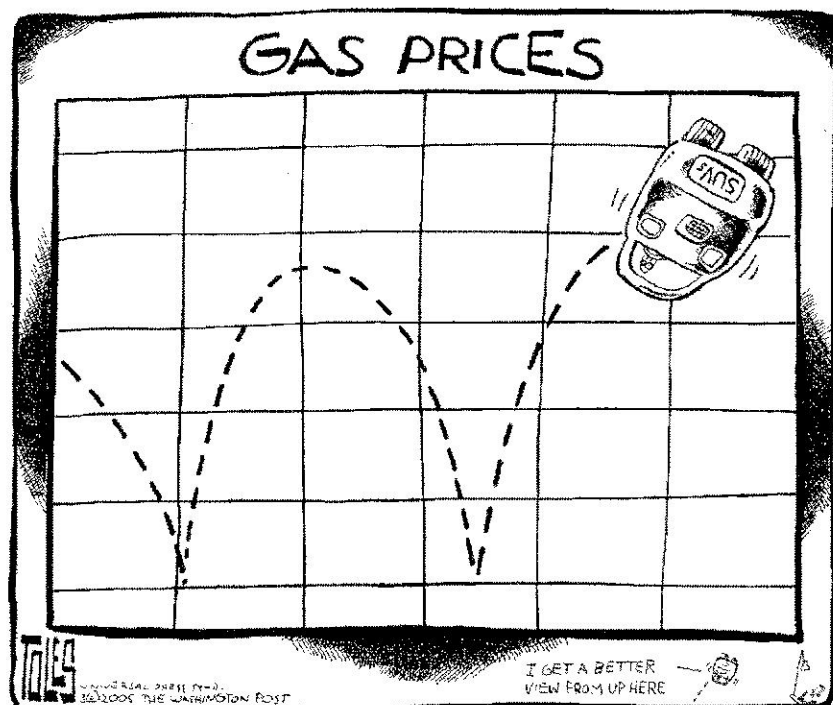
Israeli conflict, and the Arab Spring. As you will see, all of the topics are linked to each other and shape U.S. policy.

Oil Trends

Political instability in the Middle East tends to shake up the world oil market and increase gas prices. For example, oil prices initially climbed during the protests of the Arab Spring. Over the years, Saudi Arabia (the world's leading producer of petroleum) has taken steps to calm the world oil market during troubles in the region.

Worldwide demand for oil has been growing at about 1 percent annually. Economic expansion in the developing world has fueled much of the rise. Increased demand in rapidly growing economies like China and India has led to increased prices.

In recent years, technological advances have led to dramatic increases in the U.S. domestic production of petroleum and natural



gas. But the United States still depends on imported oil. Today, the United States relies on the Middle East for about 7 percent of its oil needs.

Why is the Middle East so important to the world oil industry?

The Middle East is the center of the international oil industry and is therefore likely to remain a critical region for the world's economy. The region contains about 55 percent of the world's proven oil reserves. Middle East oil is also the cheapest to produce. The cost of extracting a barrel of oil from Canada's tar sand fields, for example, is many times greater than pumping a barrel near the Persian Gulf. Despite the increasing use of alternative and domestic energy sources, the importance of Middle Eastern oil to the United States looks to remain high for the foreseeable future.

Because of the U.S. economy's need for oil, many U.S. policies in the Middle East involve securing and maintaining access to oil. For example, the United States has carefully cultivated relations with Saudi Arabia since the 1940s because of its central importance to the world's oil industry. Saudi Arabia works to ensure an uninterrupted and reasonably-priced flow of oil to the world economy. The government and oil industry are dominated by the Saudi royal clan, which numbers in the tens of thousands. Critics note that Saudi Arabia is an undemocratic, fundamentalist Islamist regime. For example, some Saudi textbooks teach that Christians are infidels, and women are not permitted to drive. Others note the funding for terrorism that flows from Saudi Arabia. In spite of this, U.S. criticism of Saudi policies has been muted to maintain favorable relations with Saudi Arabia.

U.S. Petroleum Consumption Since 1973			
<i>Figures are for thousands of barrels of oil per day</i>	Total Net Oil Imports	Oil Imports from the Persian Gulf	Total Oil Consumption
2011	8,432	1,382	18,877
2005	13,527	2,298	20,802
2000	11,459	2,488	19,701
1995	8,835	1,573	17,725
1990	8,018	1,966	16,988
1985	5,067	311	15,726
1980	6,909	1,519	17,056
1975	6,056	1,165	16,322
1973	6,256	848	17,308

Data from the Energy Information Administration, 2013.

Regional Security

Over the years, security concerns have defined many U.S. policies in the Middle East. For example, fears of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and concerns about international terrorism fueled anxiety about Iraq and Iran after September 11, 2001.

“Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom. Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror.... States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger.”

—President George W. Bush,
January 29, 2002

■ Iraq

For twenty years, U.S. policy toward Iraq was headline news. U.S. efforts to contain Saddam Hussein's regime continued after the first Persian Gulf War in 1991. At the urging of the United States, the UN Security Council imposed economic sanctions and limited the sale

of Iraqi oil in order to keep Saddam Hussein contained. U.S. and British forces prevented the Iraqi air force from flying over northern and southern portions of Iraq. (These measures continued for as long as Saddam Hussein remained in power.)

As part of the Gulf War cease-fire agreement, UN monitors conducted regular inspections of Iraq to prevent the production of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. UN weapons inspectors also destroyed vast stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. In late 1998, Iraq refused to allow UN inspectors a free hand in continuing their search for WMD and, in response, U.S. and British forces conducted a series of air strikes. Iraq then refused to allow UN inspectors to operate in Iraq at all until late 2002.

Why did the United States invade Iraq in 2003?

In 2002, the Bush Administration stated that Iraq had WMD and that Saddam Hussein would use them to threaten the United States. U.S. President George W. Bush (2001-2009) denounced Saddam Hussein as a ruthless dictator that endangered his own people, his neighbors, and the world. Additionally, in February 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell argued before the UN Security Council that the United States had evidence of Iraqi links to al Qaeda. Although the UN resumed weapons inspections in 2002, the Bush administration questioned their effectiveness.

Debates about what to do about Iraq intensified. Many could not agree about the nature or urgency of the problem with Iraq or how the international community should respond. The Bush administration argued that the United States needed to take military action, and the U.S. Congress authorized the use of force. Although the UN Security Council did not authorize the use of force in Iraq, President Bush ordered the U.S. military to invade.

What has happened since the invasion of Iraq?

In the spring of 2003, a U.S.-led military coalition invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam

Hussein's government. An intensive search for WMD began, but no conclusive evidence of WMD or direct links to al Qaeda were found. The arguments the Bush administration had used to justify war were false.

By the summer of 2003, opposition to coalition forces had grown into an insurgency (military resistance movement) made up of local and foreign groups fighting against the U.S. presence in Iraq. These groups were also fighting amongst each other, vying for power and often targeting civilians.

The war had a devastating toll on Iraqi society. Estimates from various independent groups ranged from 100,000 deaths to over one million. Almost one in five Iraqis—over five million people—fled their homes after the invasion, often due to violence, unemployment, and insecurity. Violence in Iraq has continued even after the withdrawal of U.S. troops in December 2011.

The new Iraqi government has held successful elections, but challenges to stability and democracy remain. Many Iraqis complain about the government's inability to provide basic services to the people, such as clean drinking water, electricity, employment, and security.

The costs of the war to the United States, in both lives and dollars, have also been high—as have the social effects that cannot be easily quantified. The United States spent at least \$700 billion in Iraq. In human terms, the cost has been steep. Nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers died in the Iraq War and over 32,000 were wounded. The injuries to soldiers are not only physical. Some estimate that 25 percent of soldiers returning from the war suffer from psychological issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and substance abuse.

How has the Iraq War affected perceptions of the United States?

U.S. forces played a complicated role in Iraq. Although these forces were trying to create security and end the violence, the U.S. presence also contributed to the violence.

Many groups throughout the region, already angry about U.S. support for Israel, were unhappy about further U.S. involvement in the Middle East. Civilian deaths, imprisonment, and abuse by U.S. forces influenced many Iraqis to join insurgent groups and fight against the U.S. occupation.

Analysts also note that Iraq, which did not have an al Qaeda presence prior to the U.S.-led invasion, became an active area for al Qaeda and other terrorist operations. They argue that the U.S. military presence in Iraq helped terrorist groups—in Iraq and elsewhere—recruit new members. During the war, many foreign fighters came to the country to fight in the insurgency against U.S. forces.

The war also damaged relationships between the United States and Middle Eastern countries. For example, the U.S. relationship with Turkey, a longtime ally of the United States that borders Iraq, was significantly strained by the war. In addition, U.S. claims of

supporting democracy in Iraq and the region were met with skepticism about U.S. intentions and the use of military force.

“I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years, and much of this is connected to the war in Iraq. So let me be clear: no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by another.”

—President Barack Obama, June 4, 2009

Internationally, the conflict was generally unpopular, and friction between the United States and other countries because of the Iraq War hindered international cooperation on other issues.

The war in Iraq remains one of the most controversial topics in U.S. and international politics, heightened by the failure of U.S. officials to find any WMD. The Iraq War continues



Jeffrey Wolfe, U.S. Army

Iraqi women carry water home. U.S. troops were in Iraq between 2003 and 2011 and were a constant presence in the lives of Iraqis. The last U.S. military forces withdrew in December 2011.

to play an important role in the debate about the U.S. role in the Middle East, including how it deals with Iran's nuclear program.

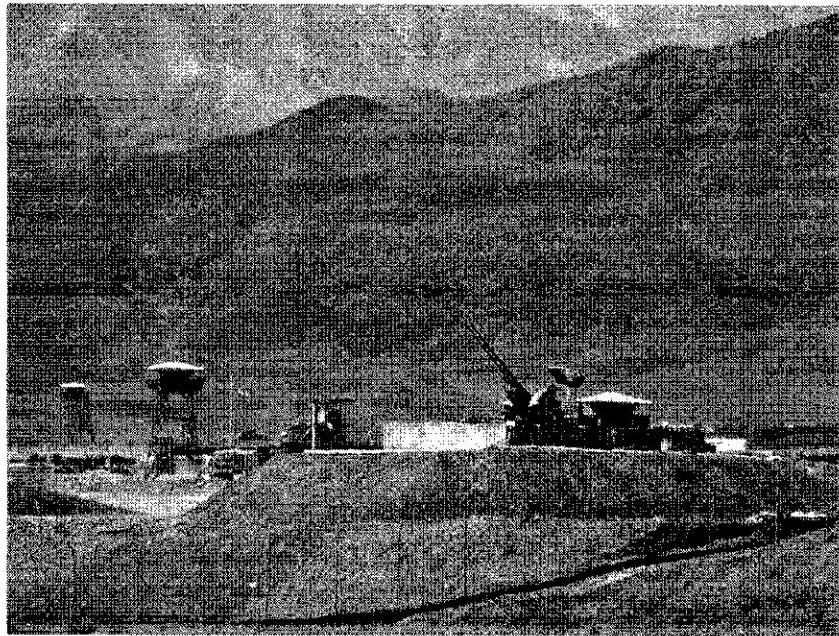
■ Iran

The U.S. government worries that Iran has a program to develop nuclear weapons. The Iranian government denies it is developing weapons, but claims that as a signer of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) it has the right to develop nuclear materials for peaceful purposes. (All countries that have signed the NPT are allowed to acquire equipment, materials, and knowledge for peaceful purposes.) The dilemma for the international community is that it is difficult to distinguish between "good atoms" for peaceful purposes and "bad atoms" for military purposes.

How has the world responded to Iran's nuclear ambitions?

In a move supported by Washington and Europe, Russian officials proposed supplying Iran with fuel for its nuclear power plants that would only be used for peaceful purposes. Nevertheless, in 2009, Iran admitted that it had a secret uranium enrichment plant. In 2011, a UN report stated that Iran's nuclear program could have a military dimension. These events have heightened concern around the world. France, Germany, and the United Kingdom have negotiated closely with Iran to encourage it to end its nuclear program.

The United Nations, United States, and the European Union have also placed economic sanctions on Iran in an attempt to pressure Iran to end its nuclear program. The sanctions have damaged Iran's economy and caused hardships for the Iranian people, but have not led to a resolution of the issue.



Anti-aircraft guns guarding a nuclear facility in Natanz, Iran.

Photograph by Hamed Saber. Licensed under the Creative Commons 2.0 Generic license.

“Iran does not have a right to nuclear military capacity, and we’re determined to prevent that. But it does have a right to civil nuclear power if it reestablishes the confidence of the international community that it will use its programs exclusively for peaceful purposes.”

—U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,
July 15, 2009

In 2010, Iranian nuclear enrichment facilities sustained damage from a sophisticated computer virus, known as Stuxnet. The origins of the virus are unknown, but some experts believe that Israel and the United States were behind the attack. In addition, several key Iranian nuclear scientists have been assassinated in Tehran.

How has Iran changed since the Revolution of 1979?

The Iranian Revolution that first set off alarm bells has lost much of its popularity among the Iranian people. The re-election of a moderate candidate, Mohammad Khatami, as president in 2001 with nearly 60 percent of



Photo courtesy of M. Ravanipour

In mid-2009, hundreds of thousands of Iranians protested the results of the presidential election. Although the government tried to limit international press coverage, Iranians used cell phones and computers to upload video and photos of the protests to the internet.

the vote indicated that Iranian voters wanted change. Khatami campaigned for tolerance, social reform, and a greater role for women in public life—a platform that appealed particularly to youth and women. But in February 2004, Iran's clerics disqualified many liberal reform candidates from running for parliament. Many Iranians chose to boycott the 2004 election in protest of the government's action.

Public demonstrations calling for reform and criticizing Iran's clerics became more common.

“I would not be surprised if we see more of such protests in the future because the ground is ready. Our society now is like a room full of gas ready to ignite with a small spark.”

—Anonymous member of Iran's Parliament, June 2003

The presidential election of 2005 turned Iranian politics on its head once again. The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a conservative who supported the system of ruling clerics, took the wind out of the sails of the reformers.

Why was the 2009 presidential election in Iran significant?

In 2009, President Ahmadinejad stood for election for a second term as president against Mir Hossein Moussavi, a reform candidate, and two others. Ahmadinejad claimed to have won with 62 percent of the vote. The result surprised Moussavi's supporters as well as international observers who expected victory for Moussavi or at least a closer election. Protestors took to the streets and claimed that Ahmadinejad and the ruling clerics had falsified the vote count. Throughout Iran, hundreds of thousands took part in demonstrations to protest what they regarded as a “stolen” election.

The Iranian government responded with force, leaving scores of marchers dead and thousands in jail. The government has admitted to torturing prisoners in the aftermath of the demonstrations. The decision by Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, to declare the election fair and denounce the protests have further undermined the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of many.

“Death to the dictator.”

—Protest chant directed at Ayatollah Khamenei, September 2009

The elections of 2013 ran more smoothly. A more moderate cleric named Hasan Rouhani won the election for president getting the votes of many who support reform. What his election will mean for relations with the United States remains to be seen, but his statements indicate a desire for resolving issues between the two countries.

“The issue of relations between Iran and the United States is a complicated and difficult issue.... After all, there is an old scar. Prudence has to be adopted to cure this scar. Of course, we will not pursue continuing or expanding tensions.... It would be wise for the two nations and countries to think more of the future. They should find a solution to the past issues and resolve them. They should think of the future. But any talks with the United States have to take place based on mutual respect, mutual interests, and mutual stances.”

—Iranian President Hasan Rouhani,
June 18, 2013

While the United States will continue to focus on Iran, the long-lasting Arab-Israeli conflict presents another critical security challenge for the United States.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

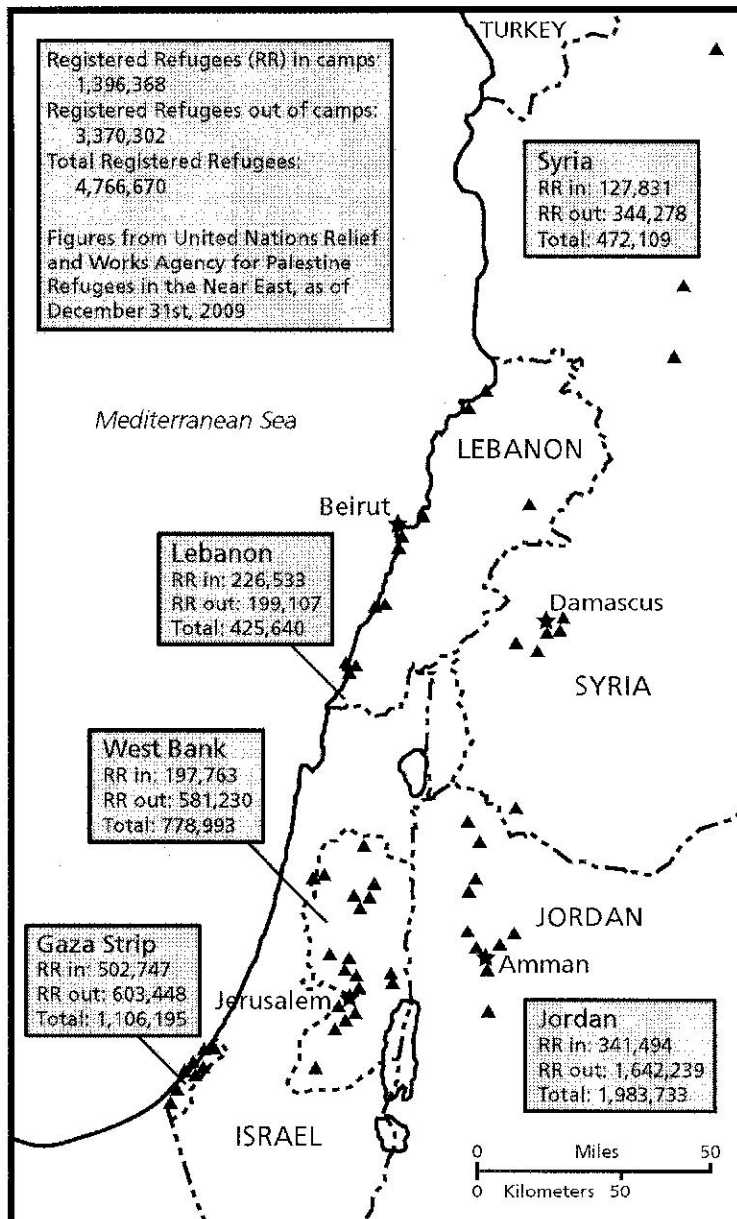
The Arab-Israeli conflict has commanded a large share of the United States' diplomatic energy over the years. For the past two decades, the United States has tried to end the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. In addition to playing host at negotiating sessions, the United States exerts influence through foreign aid and diplomatic pressure. Israel has long been a leading recipient of U.S. foreign aid. Arab-Israeli peace is important to the United States for a number of reasons. There is a long history of friendship with Israel. Israel provides the United States with a powerful ally in an important region. U.S. leaders also see Arab-Israeli peace as a way to reduce regional instability and conflict.

What is the U.S. perspective on relations with Israel?

Since its creation in 1948, Israel has occupied a special position in U.S. foreign policy. U.S. leaders have stood by Israel during the region's conflicts for several reasons. Israel has won the admiration of many in the United States as a model of democracy and Western values in the Middle East. Presidents Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson were particularly committed to Israel's struggle for survival.

Other presidents, such as Richard Nixon and George H.W. Bush, viewed Israel primarily as a strategic ally in the region. They valued Israel for countering U.S. enemies in the Middle East, battle-testing U.S. weapons, and sharing intelligence information. Israel's development of nuclear weapons (which Israeli officials have never admitted) with French help gave Israel added weight in U.S. policy.

In recent years, U.S. support of Israel has attracted fresh attention. Israel's treatment of the Palestinians under its jurisdiction has drawn intense criticism from around the world. For instance, the Israeli government has limited Palestinians' daily travel to work and elsewhere through checkpoints at the boundaries. The Israeli government built a barrier to separate the Gaza Strip and Israel in the mid-1990s, and is constructing a barrier more than



Palestinian refugees live throughout the world. These figures are for the region where the bulk of Palestinian refugees live. The UN defines Palestinian refugees as people and their descendants whose normal place of residency between 1946 and 1948 was Palestine and who lost their homes and livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.

four hundred miles long to separate the West Bank and Israel. U.S. support for Israel has not wavered, even though it has been a source of resentment in the Arab world.

“Together, we share a commitment to security for our citizens and the stability of the Middle East and North

Africa. Together, we share a focus on advancing economic growth around the globe, and strengthening the middle class within our countries. Together, we share a stake in the success of democracy.”

—President Barack Obama, speech to the people of Israel, March 21, 2013

What have been the major successes and failures of recent peace negotiations?

Over the last twenty years, negotiations to end the Arab-Israeli conflict have moved forward in fits and starts. At times, talks have produced positive outcomes. For example, the United States brokered peace talks between Israel, the Palestinians, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon in 1991. As a result of these negotiations, Jordan and Israel signed a peace treaty in 1994, in which Jordan joined Egypt in officially recognizing Israel. (Mauritania is the only other Arab state to extend diplomatic relations to Israel, although Israel has established low-level ties with Morocco, Tunisia, Oman, and Qatar.)

During the 1990s, negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians achieved significant breakthroughs. Israel accepted the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, while the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist in peace and security and renounced the use of violence. A Palestinian govern-

ment, called the Palestinian Authority, was given control of day-to-day affairs in half of the Gaza Strip and the main cities of the West Bank, except East Jerusalem. Palestinians established their own police force and began electing the officials who govern them.

But steps towards peace have been hampered by many setbacks. Israeli and Palestinian negotiators were scheduled to conclude

a comprehensive, final agreement by May 1999. But political developments in the region, including the assassination of Israeli Prime

Israel and the Palestinians: What Are the Unresolved Issues?

Palestinian Statehood: Above all, the Palestinians insist on attaining full statehood. They want to control their own borders, form an army, and exercise the rights belonging to independent nations. Some Israelis fear that a full-fledged Palestinian state could endanger their security. They argue that an independent Palestine could be used as a staging ground for attacks against Israel. In the fall of 2011, the Palestinian Authority asked the United Nations to grant it statehood—a move the United States opposes.

Jerusalem: The status of Jerusalem is another important sticking point. East Jerusalem has religious significance for both Muslims and Jews. Israel captured East Jerusalem during the 1967 War. Prior to this, East Jerusalem and the West Bank were under the control of Jordan. Nearly 200,000 Israelis live in East Jerusalem today. Israel claims complete control over Jerusalem and considers it the nation's capital. The Palestinians want to establish their capital in East Jerusalem, where they represent a majority of the population. (The United States and most other nations do not recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.)

Jewish Settlements: Like the status of Jerusalem, controversy over Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories has stirred passions. More than 300,000 Israelis live in the West Bank. Most of them make their homes in modern suburbs around Jerusalem. Other Israelis have settled in more remote areas, often for ideological reasons. Many of the settlers, who use a large portion of the scarce resources of the area, vow that they will never accept Palestinian authority. Israel has insisted on maintaining control of the access roads that connect the settlements, effectively carving lands of the Palestinians into isolated pockets. The United States, Russia, the United Nations, and the European Union have repeatedly called on Israel to halt construction of new settlements, which they see as an obstacle to peace talks.

The Security Barrier: In the mid-1990s, the Israeli government constructed a barrier between Israel and the Gaza Strip to prevent the unauthorized entry of Palestinians into Israel and attacks by terrorists. In June 2002, Israel decided to construct a similar barrier in the West Bank. Though not yet completed, the path of the barrier is contested because it has incorporated disputed Jewish settlements, cut across Palestinian farmland, and made it more difficult for Palestinians in the West Bank to travel freely to work. When completed, the wall will total more than four hundred miles.

Palestinian Refugees: More than 1.8 million Palestinian refugees live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. (The total population of the West Bank and Gaza is 4.05 million.) As many as 4.7 million other Palestinians live scattered throughout the Middle East, mostly in Jordan. Palestinian leaders argue that all Palestinians—many of whom were forced to flee during the 1967 War—should have the right to return to their former homes in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Israel. Israeli authorities have resisted opening the Palestinian territories to unrestricted immigration and worry that Palestinians returning to Israel would eventually change the nature of their state. Israelis also note that more than 1.1 million Israeli Arabs already live within Israel's borders.

Water Resources: Finally, the right to water and water usage in the region is another significant stumbling block. Limited supply and water sources that cross borders remain significant obstacles to any peace settlement. The Israeli-Jordanian Peace Agreement of 1994 contains a water protocol. Other water agreements between Israel and its neighbors will be necessary to govern the use of this scarce resource.

Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by an Israeli extremist, put that deadline out of reach and the entire peace process in doubt. A year later, Palestinians launched a broad-based protest movement called the second *intifada* that led to clashes with Israeli forces. (*Intifada* is an Arabic word that means “shaking-off.” The first *intifada*, a similar protest movement, took place in the region starting in 1987.) This wave of violence killed more than 950 Israelis and 3,200 Palestinians. Many were civilians.

How has leadership affected prospects for peace?

Oftentimes, progress towards peace has hinged on the leadership at the time. For example, following the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin, a more hardline prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, came to power. Netanyahu backed away from Rabin’s pledge to continue the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the West Bank, contributing to a stall in negotiations. During Yasir Arafat’s leadership of the Palestinian Authority from 1996 to 2004, he failed to crack down on militant Islamic groups such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas, and to stop them from conducting terrorist at-



tacks on Israel. This contributed to worsening relations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Arafat’s death in 2004, and the election of Mahmoud Abbas as president of the Palestinian Authority, led to renewed hopes for peace. Abbas renounced the *intifada* and made efforts to halt attacks against Israel. Israel, in turn, reduced military activity in the West Bank and withdrew from the Gaza Strip.

Both sides made plans for a new round of negotiations. But a split in the Palestinian leadership derailed the peace process once again. In January 2006, Hamas, capitalizing on the frustrations of Palestinians, won a slight majority of votes in democratic legislative elections and assumed control of the Palestinian Authority (Mahmoud Abbas was still president). Hamas, designated as a ter-

2006 Israel-Hezbollah War

In mid-2006, a war erupted on the Israeli-Lebanese border between Israel and Hezbollah. Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers, which led to retaliation from Israel and further violence from Hezbollah. The conflict killed more than a thousand militants and civilians, mostly Lebanese.

Hezbollah’s role in Lebanon also prevents Israel and Lebanon from being able to negotiate peace. The United States and the European Union consider Hezbollah, which cooperates closely with Iran and Syria, to be a terrorist organization. Iran is its single largest financial supporter, though it also receives significant funding from individual donations. Since Israeli forces left Lebanon in 2000, one of Hezbollah’s goals has been to support the Palestinian cause.

rorist organization by the United States and the European Union, has both a political and military wing. It is an Islamist organization and its long-term goal is to establish an Islamic Palestinian state.

Hamas and its rival political party, Fatah (Abbas's party), formed a unity government. But when Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, President Abbas dissolved the unity government. Abbas's Fatah party retained control of the West Bank while Hamas established its own government in Gaza.

The division in Palestinian leadership and the prominent role of Hamas contributed to worsening relations in the region. In December 2008, Israel forces clashed with Hamas fighters. Following Palestinian rocket attacks against Israel, Israel invaded Gaza in January 2009. Weeks of intense fighting killed more than one thousand Palestinians and thirteen Israelis. Economic conditions in Gaza remain very difficult for Palestinians.

What is the status of the peace process?

In May 2011, Hamas and Fatah signed an agreement to begin reunifying their governments in the West Bank and Gaza, a step they believe is necessary before a final agreement with Israel can be reached. But Israel is reluctant to negotiate with Hamas. Israel's unwillingness to stop construction of settlements in the West Bank is also an obstacle to negotiations. Ultimately, key issues between Israelis and Palestinians remain unresolved (see box on page 27).

With progress on negotiations stalled, Mahmoud Abbas requested in September 2011 that the United Nations recognize a Palestinian state. Israel insists that the Palestinians should achieve statehood through negotiations rather than the United Nations, a position the United States supports. In November 2012, the UN General Assembly granted Palestinians admission as a non-member observer state.

The Arab Spring has also shaken up relationships that were the part of the negotiation process. For example, Israel's relationship with Egypt, the first Arab country to recognize

Israel, has been strained since Egypt's authoritarian government was overthrown by popular protest in February 2011.

The United States remains a steadfast supporter of Israel, a position that is a source of anti-U.S. sentiment in the Middle East and beyond. At the same time, the United States remains committed to resolving the conflict. In the summer of 2013, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry renewed U.S. efforts to get talks started again.

“As all of you know, it has taken an awful lot of work and a long time, a lot of time, to reach this new moment of possibility in the pursuit of an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It's taken the leadership of President Obama, who set this process in motion with his historic visit to the region this spring.”

—U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry,
July 30, 2013

The Arab Spring

In December 2010, protests began against the autocratic government in the North African country of Tunisia. Hundreds of thousands of Tunisians took to the streets calling for an end to authoritarian rule. They wanted more democracy, an end to corruption, and economic opportunity. The protests spread to more than a dozen countries in the region. In some, like Egypt and Libya, protests led to a change in government. In other countries, like Bahrain, protests have been met with fierce repression by the government. In Syria, demonstrations led to a civil war that had killed more than one hundred thousand people by July 2013.

The protests marked the beginning of what is proving to be an ongoing transition in the Middle East. As people struggle to establish more representative governments, there has been instability and uncertainty. And while the outcomes remain to be seen, the Arab Spring has affected U.S. policy toward the Middle East. As popular movements force authoritarian governments to change, the United

States has had to reassess its policies in the region. In some instances, the United States has supported demonstrators' demands, but in other cases, it has been reluctant to criticize long-standing allies.

Since the end of World War II, the United States has forged alliances in the Middle East, many with leaders of authoritarian governments. In general, U.S. policy makers have paid much less attention to promoting democracy and human rights in the Middle East than in other parts of the world. U.S. leaders largely ignored how U.S. allies in the Middle East governed within their borders as long as they helped keep affordable oil flowing and remained friendly to the interests of the United States.

The wave of protests that began in the region in 2011—and the United States' varied response to movements in different countries—sheds light on the tension between the values and interests at the heart of U.S. policy in the Middle East. As the Arab Spring unfolds, the United States will continue to have important economic and security interests in the Middle East. Many in the United States have applauded the democratic spirit of the Arab Spring, but some experts worry that divisions in Arab societies—long-suppressed by authoritarian rulers—could boil over, leading to conflict and instability that threaten U.S. interests.

The demonstrations present an opportu-

nity for the United States to consider the basis for U.S. policy in the Middle East. Are economic and political interests more important to U.S. policy than democratic governance and human rights? What should the United States do when these values and interests come into conflict? In the long run, is support for all forms of Middle Eastern democracy in the best interest of the United States?

What is political Islam?

One source of uncertainty amidst the political protests is the role that political Islam might play in any new governments in the region. Political Islam seeks to promote Islam within the political arena.

In almost all Middle Eastern countries, Islam is the binding force of society. Many in the Middle East, frustrated by their countries' politics, have turned to political Islam. Earlier political movements, such as pan-Arab nationalism, failed. Corruption, mismanagement, and reliance on foreign support have weakened popular faith in Middle Eastern governments.

Islamist movements (movements of political Islam) have grown due to economic forces and political necessity. Economic frustration and insecurity have led people to turn away from their governments and toward Islamist movements for solutions. When the region's authoritarian governments suppressed public political participation, political discussion found sanctuary in the mosque. At the same time, not all religiously observant Muslims be-

Osama bin Laden and the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001

Osama bin Laden used his beliefs about Islam to justify his methods and attacks against the United States. For many around the world this raised concerns about Islam. Some wondered whether there are justifications for terrorism within Islam. For others, the events seemed to confirm a perception of Islam as a violent and fanatical faith. In contrast, many Muslims worried that their religion would be wrongly associated with the beliefs of bin Laden.

Like all religions, Islam is subject to interpretation. Most interpretations of Islamic tradition note a history of tolerance and peace. (The word Islam is related to the Arabic word *salaam*, which means peace.) Throughout much of history, Muslims have lived peacefully with followers of other religions. For example, many Jews fled the persecutions found in Christian Europe for the relative freedom of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East. Islam permits the use of force in self-defense, but not the killing of innocents or civilians. After September 11, numerous important Islamic clerics from many branches of Islam and different countries condemned bin Laden.

lieve that Islam should be the basis of politics.

—U.S. President Barack Obama, June 4,
2009

How has the United States regarded political Islam?

Political Islam's appeal has increased in the Middle East since the Iranian Revolution in 1979. In general, the United States has regarded political Islam as a threat to U.S. interests because it often has an anti-Western stance. For example, the hostility of the Islamist government of Iran and the terror attacks by al Qaeda have added to anxiety within the United States about political Islamist movements.

But not all political Islamist movements are extreme or violent. Political Islamist groups are numerous, vary from country to country, and have a range of beliefs. Certainly, they do not all support the violence of al Qaeda or want a government led by strict religious leaders like in Iran. Some observers believe that political Islamist groups will be important participants in the new democratic processes emerging in the region.

President Obama acknowledged tensions between Muslims and the United States in a speech in Cairo, Egypt addressed to the Muslim world.

“I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect; and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap and share common principles—principles of justice and progress; tolerance and dignity of all human beings.”

What role political Islam will play in the ongoing evolution of politics in the Middle East is an open question and only one of many that policy makers must consider.

Below are six cases of the recent rebellions and protests against governments in the region. As you read them, consider how they might affect U.S. policy.

STOP

■ Egypt

The 2011 revolution in Egypt overthrew the undemocratic and repressive regime of President Hosni Mubarak. After eighteen days of protests by millions, Mubarak stepped down from power on February 11, 2011. He had ruled Egypt for close to thirty years.

Egypt under Mubarak had close ties to the United States and was a top recipient of U.S. aid. The United States considered Egypt's secular government to be an important source of peace and stability in the region. For example, Egypt helped broker agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. In the early days of the protests, U.S. officials continued to identify Mubarak as a U.S. ally, but they changed their tone as the protests intensified. U.S. officials



Protestors in Cairo, Egypt, demonstrating against President Mohammed Morsi in August 2012.

Gigi Ibrahim. (CC BY 2.0)

Option 1: Police a Rough Neighborhood

The attacks of September 11 and the aggressive dictatorships of the Middle East prove that the world is a dangerous place. The forces opposed to the United States and its interests did not disappear with the end of the Cold War. Many of them reside in the Middle East. U.S. citizens must accept that the United States' strength and influence in the region and around the world present an irresistible target for hate-mongers and extremists.

To ensure U.S. security and the security of U.S. friends and allies, the United States must draw a clear line in the sand. On one side belong trusted friends and allies in the region. Fortunately, there are many. Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, and most of the Persian Gulf states have been reliable partners for decades. When their security is threatened, either by enemies beyond their borders or within, the United States should stand beside them. On the other side are the forces that have aligned themselves against peace and stability. They must be confronted, with military force if necessary before they unleash more havoc on their neighbors and on the United States.

The United States has destroyed the government of a dangerous and aggressive tyrant, Saddam Hussein. There are also other countries such as Iran and Syria that sponsor terrorism and are trying to acquire dangerous weapons. Terrorists have demonstrated their ability to strike worldwide. Still more chilling is the prospect that Iran, a state hostile to the United States and its allies, could eventually be armed with nuclear weapons. Only the United States has the power and the prestige to confront the outlaw regimes of the Middle East. The job of police officer is not fun, but in a neighborhood as rough as the Middle East the alternative is chaos and war.

What policies should the United States pursue?

- The United States should maintain strong alliances with key friends in the Middle East and provide foreign aid and military assistance to Middle Eastern governments that are fighting against Islamist movements.
- The United States should work for a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict that ensures the security of Israel. The United States should pressure the Palestinian Authority to reign in Hamas and recognize Israel's right to exist.
- The United States should use its economic, diplomatic, and military strength to prevent states in the region from developing nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons or from gaining access to advanced military technology.
- The United States should give measured support to the rebellions of the Arab Spring in the Middle East, but carefully avoid undermining our key allies like Saudi Arabia or supporting political Islamist groups.
- The United States should press its allies and trading partners worldwide to impose sanctions on Iran and control the flow of funds to terrorists.

Option 1 is based on the following beliefs

- The United States has the right to take the initiative to eliminate tyrants who threaten it, its allies, or the rest of the world.
- The U.S. appetite for oil should not overshadow the need for security.

Arguments for

1. Confronting tyrants that oppose U.S. interests will, in the long run, reduce tension and promote stability in the Middle East and around the world.
2. Standing by allies and friends in the Middle East will reassure countries worldwide that the United States honors its commitments.
3. Addressing Israeli security concerns in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict will serve as a solid foundation for lasting peace in the region.

- There is no hope for compromise between the United States and political Islamist groups that despise U.S. values and policies.

Arguments against

1. An aggressive military presence in the Middle East has only inflamed Middle Eastern public opinion against the United States and contributed to the rise of extremists like Osama bin Laden.
2. Branding Islamist leaders as U.S. enemies will only provoke deeper hostility toward the United States within the Muslim world and may result in an increase of terrorist attacks both within the United States and against U.S. allies in the region.
3. Confronting Iran will leave the United States further isolated from the rest of the international community and cost U.S. companies opportunities for business.
4. Entangling the United States further in the Middle East will draw U.S. resources away from urgent problems at home, such as reducing crime and improving education.
5. Continuing support for corrupt, undemocratic regimes in the Middle East will discourage democratic and economic reform and provide fuel for claims of U.S. hypocrisy.
6. Pledging unconditional support for U.S. allies will mean that the United States must continue to support Israel at the expense of the Palestinians, a position that only fans the flames of anti-American sentiment in the region.
7. Imposing economic sanctions to achieve political goals harms innocent civilians rather than oppressive dictators.

Option 2: Focus on Oil

Today's world runs on oil. Without oil, the engines of the global economy would grind to a halt. U.S. citizens have no choice but to recognize the critical importance of Middle Eastern oil to economic and political stability. As the events of the 1970s illustrated, a disruption in Middle Eastern oil supplies would send shock waves throughout the global economy. Not only would people in the United States be jolted, but the economic earthquake would strike key U.S. allies and trading partners in Western Europe and East Asia with even more devastating force. The entire international economy could very well crumble. In the face of such a threat, it should be clear that the flow of oil from the Middle East is vital to U.S. prosperity and security. No other issue in the Middle East rivals the importance of energy.

U.S. policy in the Middle East must be focused on ensuring that the United States and its allies have access to the region's oil resources. With so much at stake, the United States cannot afford to lose track of its priorities. For too long, the United States' absolute support of Israel has complicated its relationship with leading Arab oil-producers. Economic common sense demands a more balanced approach. Likewise, there is no benefit to picking fights with Iran or Syria or demonizing Islamic political movements. U.S. interests require that the United States maintain a military presence in the Persian Gulf, but U.S. troops should be there to promote stability, not to provoke another war. U.S. policies in response to the Arab Spring should encourage stability, promote cooperation with all new political leaders, and above all keep the oil flowing.

What policies should the United States pursue?

- The United States should maintain friendly relations with Middle Eastern governments that respect U.S. oil interests and offer the United States assistance in resolving disputes that threaten regional stability.
- The United States should support the efforts of U.S. oil companies doing business in the Middle East.
- The United States should continue to use its economic and diplomatic leverage to prevent OPEC from again dominating the world oil market.
- The United States should maintain a military presence in the Persian Gulf sufficient to safeguard shipping lanes and to deter attacks against the main oil fields of the region.
- The United States should respond quickly and firmly, using force if necessary, against countries that threaten U.S. oil interests in the Middle East.
- The United States should end economic sanctions against Iran and instead work to draw it back into the international community.
- The United States should scale back its support for Israel and take an even-handed approach to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Option 2 is based on the following beliefs

- The free flow of oil from the Middle East is essential to the security and prosperity of the United States.
- By showing respect and tolerance, the United States can live peacefully with the political influence of Islam in the Middle East.

Arguments for

1. Pursuing a more balanced policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict will boost U.S. prestige and influence in the Middle East and allow the United States to play a more effective role in promoting regional stability.
2. Ending the United States' confrontational posture with Iran will remove a needless source of friction in Middle Eastern politics. Improved relations will also allow U.S. companies to do business in Iran and compete with their European rivals on an equal footing.
3. Emphasizing economic interests in U.S. relations with the Middle East will place U.S. foreign policy on a steadier, more predictable course.

- The United States' one-sided support for Israel has undermined U.S. relationships with Arab countries and contradicts U.S. economic interests in the Middle East.

Arguments against

1. Stabbing Israel in the back after decades of close cooperation will invite an Arab attack against Israel and lead U.S. allies worldwide to question U.S. commitments.
2. Treating the rulers of oil-rich nations as a privileged class will embolden them to crack down on government opposition at home and will inflame anti-American sentiment in the region.
3. Abandoning sanctions against Iran will be seen throughout the Middle East as a victory for U.S. enemies and a defeat for the United States.
4. Ignoring the brutality and corruption of tyrannical regimes in order to gain access to oil will tarnish the United States' international reputation as a force for democracy and freedom.
5. Focusing U.S. resources on protecting the oil supplies of the Middle East will distract from the more important goals of developing new sources of energy and promoting conservation.
6. Focusing on U.S. access to Middle Eastern oil will only prove to the international community that the United States is not interested in collaborating to solve the region's pressing problems.

Option 3: Support Democracy and Human Rights

Over the past two decades, the world has changed for the better. More and more countries have embraced democracy and economic freedom. International standards of human rights have gained widespread acceptance. In the Middle East, democracy has only begun to make headway. For too long, human rights and the rule of law have counted for little in many nations of the Middle East. The rights of women have been neglected. Government officials have kept a tight grip over industry and commerce. Regrettably, U.S. policy has contributed to the Middle East's lack of progress. For too many years, the United States has put its oil interests and security concerns ahead of the principles of democracy and human rights. Our concerns about political Islam have led us to support heavy-handed rulers who have promised to suppress it and abused their own people. This has created anger at the United States. We must accept that political Islam has many variations and does not necessarily threaten U.S. interests.

The time has come for the United States to encourage reform in the region, but this cannot be done at the barrel of a gun. Our reliance on military force has created more problems than it has solved. We must not repeat the same mistake with Iran. The protests of the Arab Spring clearly show that the people of the region want democracy and human rights; we should support these movements. Governments that take steps toward establishing democratic institutions, open societies, and economic freedoms should be rewarded. At the same time, the United States should withhold favors from those that refuse to budge. But no country should be above criticism. For the United States to bring reform to the Middle East, U.S. policies must be seen as fair and even-handed by those in the region and by the wider international community. Change is possible, but only if the United States is willing to commit its strength and its resources and play a fair and even-handed role with all states in the region.

What policies should the United States pursue?

- The United States should use foreign aid, trade benefits, and diplomatic pressure to promote democratic and economic reform in the Middle East.
- The United States should pressure Israel to end human rights abuses against the Palestinians living under Israeli jurisdiction.
- The United States should base its support for Palestinian statehood on whether the Palestinian Authority reins in Hamas, recognizes Israel, and promotes democracy and human rights.
- The United States should stop selling arms to governments that use force against their own people.
- The United States should disavow governments (friend and foe alike) that abuse the rights of minority groups, violate the principles of religious tolerance, or discriminate against women.
- The United States should support democratic movements in the region, even if it means political Islamist groups could gain power.
- The United States should seek to avoid a military confrontation with Iran over its nuclear program.

Option 3 is based on the following beliefs

- More democracy, tolerance, human rights, equality for women, and economic freedom in the Middle East is essential to bringing peace and stability to the region.
- Not all political Islamists are a threat to the interests of the United States.

Arguments for

1. Supporting democracy and economic freedom in the Middle East will restore the United States' reputation as a nation of principle and strengthen the cause of reformers worldwide.
2. Taking a firm stand against abuses of human rights and adopting an even-handed policy toward all countries in the Middle East—friend and foe alike—will strengthen the U.S. position in the eyes of the Middle East and the world.
3. Gaining acceptance for international standards of human rights in the Middle East will serve as the basis for the resolution of disputes in the region.

- The United States has the prestige and influence to nudge the governments of the Middle East toward reform.

Arguments against

1. Israel is the most reliable ally the United States has in the region. Any policy changes that reduce U.S. support of Israel are short-sighted and dangerous.
2. Ruling out military confrontation against Iran over its nuclear program will actually encourage additional aggressive behavior by the Iranian government.
3. Picking fights with countries that control a large share of the world's oil reserves flies in the face of vital U.S. economic interests.
4. Needlessly rocking the boat by encouraging opposition forces in one of the most explosive regions in the world will lead to the downfall of many traditional U.S. friends and allies in the Middle East.
5. A transition to democracy in many countries of the region could lead to regimes that are more, not less, hostile toward the United States.
6. Supporting democratic movements could lead to instability and change that harms the United States.
7. Entangling the United States further in the domestic affairs of the region will inflame public opinion against the United States at home and abroad.

Option 4: Break Free of Entanglements

Since the end of the Cold War, much of the United States' foreign policy attention has shifted to the Middle East. The United States has fought two wars against Iraq, occupied that country, and established an extensive military presence in the region. In addition, it has committed vast diplomatic and security resources to resolving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. And what has been the result? Only increasing anti-American sentiment. The United States has become the target of terrorist attacks aimed at punishing the United States for its involvement in the Islamic world. History has shown that U.S. policy makers have often misunderstood the Middle East. As September 11 and the 2003 Iraq War have demonstrated, U.S. involvement in the region can be an expensive, dangerous adventure.

The United States must break free of entanglements in the Middle East. The military presence it has built up must be eliminated to avoid U.S. involvement in another, potentially far more deadly and expansive war—against Iran, for example. Likewise, the United States should not be held responsible for guaranteeing peace between Arabs and Israelis. Ultimately, disputes in the region must be resolved by those involved, not by U.S. diplomats or U.S. military forces. U.S. relations with the countries of the Middle East should be limited to issues that do not entangle the United States in the controversies of the region. Like the nations of Western Europe and Japan, the United States should concentrate on doing business with Middle Eastern countries, not meddling in local affairs. Political Islamist movements are a fact of life in the region. Not all Islamists are hostile to the United States. By keeping its distance, the United States will avoid strengthening Islamist extremist groups that use anti-U.S. feelings to recruit new members.

What policies should the United States pursue?

- The United States should withdraw its military forces from the Middle East and end its alliances with countries in the region.
- The United States should scale back its involvement in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and instead advise the countries of the region to take the initiative in pursuing the peace process.
- The United States should pursue open trade and business relations with all of the countries of the Middle East regardless of what type of government they have.
- The United States should repeal its economic sanctions against Iran.
- The United States should reduce its dependence on Middle Eastern oil by encouraging U.S. oil companies to invest elsewhere in the world and by promoting the development of alternative energy sources, such as solar and wind power.
- The United States should end its huge foreign aid packages to Israel, Egypt, Iraq, and the Palestinians.

Option 4 is based on the following beliefs

- The United States' expanding involvement in the Middle East has contributed to the rise of anti-American feelings in the region.

- As a region, the Middle East should not be more important to U.S. interests than other parts of the world.

Arguments for

1. As the United States decreases its involvement in the affairs of the Middle East, it will reduce the sources of anti-Americanism in the region that serve as fuel for dangerous Islamist extremists.

2. Reducing the U.S. presence in the Middle East will save U.S. taxpayers billions of dollars.

3. Untangling the United States from the web of Middle Eastern politics will lessen hostility toward the United States and make it possible for U.S. companies to pursue business in more countries in the region.

- Peace and progress in the Middle East can only come from changes within the region, not from U.S. pressure.

Arguments against

1. Walking away from any role as a peacemaker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will only lead to a further escalation of the conflict.

2. Withdrawing the U.S. military from the Middle East will set off an even more dangerous arms race and increase the likelihood that biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons will spread in the region.

3. If the United States withdraws from this region, it will give the rest of the world cause to believe that the United States will sit back and do nothing in other areas as well. This will encourage other states unfriendly to the United States to accelerate their weapons programs.

4. Ending the U.S. military presence in the Middle East will end any hope for change in countries like Iran and Syria.

5. Failing to stand up to Iran could open the door to Iranian aggression in the oil-rich Persian Gulf.

6. A U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East will remove one of the few forces for democratic change in the region.

7. Our military, diplomatic, and foreign aid investments in the region are a bargain. They ensure stability and the continued flow of oil, which we depend on.