

The Effects of the War in Iraq on Regionalism in the Middle East

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* What is the likelihood that repercussions of the US.-led war in Iraq will
Generate a new regionalism in the Middle East.

Introduction

During World War 2, the myth of European invincibility was destroyed by the failure to defend Asian possessions against the Japanese. The pace of nationalist aspirations was accelerated by the war and former European territories had no wish to return to their pre-war colonial status after stubbornly resisting Japanese occupation. The 20 years after 1945 saw remarkable changes taking place in Asia, the Middle East as the European states gradually relinquished their hold over their colonial empires, and Asians in areas such as the Dutch East Indies, French Indo-China and the British territories of Malaya and Burma broke free to form a large number of independent states. Their success in gaining independence encouraged similar demands in the Middle East and Africa.

At the end of the war, as the foremost military power at the time, the United States of America occupied a position of hegemony, which allowed it to impart its own particular brand of democratic, capitalist, anti communist, culture to the rest of the world. With the rise of the Soviet Union, the bi-polarity of the Cold War era provided a (somewhat uneasy) balance of authority, and brought a degree of mutual respect and responsibility between the major 'superpowers', probably stimulated by a mutual fear of nuclear war. However, since the breakdown of Communist rule in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991, and in the first years of the twenty-first century, a 'New World Order' has evolved. In this 'New World Order', the world is now polarized unilaterally and the US. As the unilateral power, has almost, (but not quite),

returned to the military, economic and political dominance it held in 1945. The old, cautious equilibrium of the 'Cold War' has given way to 'hegemonic stability' which has had a significant impact on the political allegiance of newly emerging regional powers, who have dispensed with their exploitative former colonial masters and 'Superpower' benefactors.

With the collapse of communism, the US has failed to find any new powerful ideological rivals to challenge its continuity of military supremacy, and has taken on the role of the 'World's Police'. Just as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor spurred the US into war in the Pacific, in the aftermath of the Al Qaeda attacks on the American mainland on September 11, 2001, their ongoing campaign against global terrorism was given greater emphasis and the Middle East is the new front line. While many countries worldwide expressed their support for the US led 'War on Terrorism', America used its status as the remaining Superpower to transfer the focus of its offensive from the Taliban supporters of the Al Qaeda terrorist network in Afghanistan to Iraq. US President Bush's use of passionate, nationalistic propaganda forced the less conservative members of the 'Western Alliance' in the United Nations (UN), into a position of uncertainty in supporting his relentless pursuit of a war of retribution and most refused to participate. Because they were attributed to Al Qaeda, the September 11 events affected the Middle East more than other regions, in that it gave legitimacy to a new concept of US totalitarianism; in the Middle East, you are either with the US or against it.

The objective of this paper is to consider the likelihood that, in the aftermath of the war in Iraq, a political backlash against the US and its supporters will generate a new regionalism in the Middle East. The paper conjectures that with the redistribution of power and the restructuring of the regional economy, the resulting regional development will be reminiscent of the Asia Pacific Region, post WW2 and Korea, and will bring similar outcomes. In support of this rationale, the paper will examine historical aspects of the potential for regional cooperation and how changes in international relationships have brought a political and economic conditions common to both regions. In a comparative analysis of the development of regionalism in Asia, and the possibility of a similar situation developing in the Middle East, the principal factors, which will most likely constitute a future threat to the current position that the US commands in both regions, will be addressed. Although forecasting how the major power players of both regions will relate in the future will naturally be largely speculative, I believe that it is possible to identify several important contingencies which will conceivably influence the inevitable change and to further hypothesize on possible outcomes of these developments.

Asian regionalism Asia for Asians

'Asia' as marked on a world map is a hugely diverse collection of nations, cultures, ethnicity's, traditions and religions, a continent edged by Russia in the far north and East, the Middle Eastern states in the west and Indonesia in the south'

Japan's World War II policy was to liberate East Asia from Western colonial rule and establish 'The Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere'; an independent political, economic and security region under Japanese custodianship. During World War II, most of Asia was under Japanese influence and their seemingly easy defeat of the European colonial powers significantly raised the spirit of nationalism in the countries that they occupied. Within ten years of the Japanese surrender, all Southeast Asia countries, with the exception of the Kingdom of Brunei Darussalam, had achieved independence, and some, particularly Indonesia, were increasingly coming under communist influence. By 1949, Mao Zedong's communists had established the People's Republic of China, (PRC), on the Chinese mainland and driven Chiang Kai Shek's Nationalist Kuomintang onto the island of Taiwan, bringing 'Cold War' tensions to the Asian region.

'The Soviet Union agreed to assist China in its socialist construction, while the United States adopted a uniformly hostile stance against the PRC'

In the aftermath of World War II, Japan was subjected to a period of occupation under the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP), headed by General Douglas MacArthur, and of which most of the headquarters staff were Americans. *'(President Truman) placed the occupation solely in MacArthur's hand'*

With the onset of the Cold War in Asia, America's containment policies required a strong ally in the region. The U.S. *'took advantage of its occupation of Japan, and incorporated Japan into the American side.'* Japan regained independence in September 1951, when the 'San Francisco Peace Treaty' was signed and on the same day, the Japan-U.S. Alliance also was concluded. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1953, the US provided extensive economic support so that Japan could function as a 'buffer' against communist expansion.

Although Japan owed its development during and after the period of occupation to the comprehensive support it received from the US, and came

to consider itself part of the Western bloc, because of domestic pacifist sentiments and its unwillingness to get involved in the Cold War, it never fully committed to US international foreign policy. It also conducted its own foreign policies in pursuit of regional peace and stability, even occasionally in direct conflict with US. In its own national interest, Japan built new relationships with Asian countries, even with communist countries that were regarded as opponents of the Western bloc, through political, economic and security policies, war reparations and provision of economic assistance. In particular, Japan reinforced political and economic relations with Southeast Asian countries, which it regarded as significant for its economic development. Despite the WW2 legacy of distrust and suspicion, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries came to regard Japan as one of the most important countries for their economic development and adopted policies using Japan as their economic model. The Japanese transition from a vanquished, demoralized nation to a major economic force in the Asia-Pacific region has demonstrated that it is possible to bury past enmities for the sake of prosperity for all. It would appear that now, almost 60 years after Japan's WW2 defeat, its 'Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere', (somewhat modified), could be a reality.

China threat?

The rapid expansion of China's economy has had far-reaching implications, both positive and negative, for US influence in the Asia Pacific region. As early as 1978, Deng Xiaoping an economic pragmatist, had already perceived the need for the People's Republic of China to take its place as part of the globalized World economy.

Since the advent of Deng Xiaoping's policies of reform and opening in the late 1970s, most observers have agreed that China is likely to recover its rightful place in the world as a great power in the twenty-first century.

Deng, and subsequent enlightened Chinese leaders initiated a multitude of economic development reforms and social policy changes designed to expand and strengthen the Chinese economy.

'In Deng's China, the politics of Communism was joined to the economics of Fascism'

By the late 1990s China had developed its global vision and had demonstrated to the rest of the world, and to the US in particular, that it has risen sufficiently in status to be considered a significant economic 'World Power', with the capacity of realizing its fundamental goal of developing as the principal and dominant

power in Asia. Such was the strength of the Chinese economy that in the Asian financial crisis and the corresponding global recession of 1997-98 it; *'seemed to absorb the shock at the onset of the crisis, and was the only country which contributed to stabilizing the region.'*

In 1999 China concluded a trade agreement with the United States, substantially relaxing its investment and trade regulations, by which it aimed to fully implement its integration into the global capitalist regime and further, reinforce its position in the region.

'All this has been achieved with remarkable stability. Something that would have ripped apart any other country in the world was managed in China with relatively little social protest. Now the dismantling of the state must be followed by the construction of a new state.'

The Chinese Communist Party leadership has now begun to explore the possibility of popular elections, at both at local and central levels, to bring about a degree of limited democratic self-governance and a stronger bureaucratic state.

'if the trend toward elections is combined with that of separation of power, we will have actual democracy'.

These type of reforms have brought China into a closer alliance with the United States and improved the economic relationship with other countries of the region. However, despite currently good Sino-US trade and economic relations, there still exists considerable mutual mistrust, particularly in military terms. The PRC deprecates what they view as America's arrogant materialism and economic tyranny, deploring the idealism by which America feels entitled to act as the 'world's police' in monitoring and regulating global peace and security in the international political economy and to actively intervene when and wherever it sees fit.

'....., it uses the means of 'hard hegemony', embargoes, sanctions, threats and military attacks, to punish the 'dictator' and 'rogue states' who are reluctant to accept western values or follow the will of the US, forcing them to accept its systems.'

China wants to be regarded:

'as a responsible, constructive, and co-operative player in both security and economic deliberations.'

In addition, are hypersensitive to any real or imagined interference by the US in their affairs likely to hinder the acceleration of China's development or obstruct its regional and global ambitions.

Chinese rhetoric that consider the US as the 'main enemy' and its continued militant stance over Taiwan, only serve to reinforce the mistrust. The PRC's relation with the US over Taiwan has been one of the most difficult issues of the post cold war era. China -Taiwan political relations remain at an impasse and the People's Republic continues to block Taiwan's efforts to expand its role in international economic organizations. Despite the rancor however, there is a notable improvement in cross strait relations between the People's Republic and Taiwan, in terms of trade, culture, travel and social interconnections. Maintaining sound business relations while there remains an atmosphere of overt political hostility between the two is nothing short of remarkable. Cooperation in commercial joint ventures has taken precedence over political issues and China appears to be less vocal in its demands for reunification.

It is not lost on US military authorities that China, the last remaining powerful Communist country, with a long established military nuclear capability, in parallel with its economic reform, was expanding its military capacity and actively strengthening military alliances with other countries in the Asia Pacific region. The 'China Threat Theory' however, is repudiated by most economists who insist that the PRC has been ready to accept both the benefits and some of the restrictions which accompany a positive role in the globalized economy and would be anxious to avoid any conflict which would endanger their economic relationship with the other countries in the Asia Pacific region.

'China has become less of a challenger to the status quo in East Asia and more of a net contributor to regional order - at least in the short to medium term.'

Nevertheless, fears remain that the increasing challenge to America's supremacy by the worlds most populous and fastest-growing significant economic power, seeking a greater influence in world and regional affairs, could develop into another great power rivalry, which could herald a new Asian Cold War.

ASEAN

The Southeast Asian region was in turmoil at the time of the foundation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in Bangkok in 1967.

"(ASEAN).....was created in 1967 with two fundamental purposes. The first and most immediate was to alleviate tensions among member states; the second was to provide the small states of Southeast Asia with some degree of influence over regional events".

The countries in the region were in an unstable situation and the former colonial powers were still influential in determining the region's future. ASEAN was formulated as an attempt to manage regional order and reduce the political and military presence of non-regional powers and as a means of maintaining peace by providing a forum for the discussion and resolution of regional issues. Originally consisting of five member countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Philippines, by 1999, it had added five more countries: Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia.

“a major continuing motivation of the international policy of the ASEAN members has been the desire to reduce the degree of dependence on large outside powers, particularly that arising from economic relations”.

Since its inception, ASEAN members have endeavored to develop regional cooperation through consultation and consensus among member countries and social regionalization based on their Asian cultural traditions.

“ASEAN has made possible contacts between the governmental and social elites of its member states. It is, therefore, fundamental to constructing both a sense of regional identity and ties of personal obligation and familiarity between national leaders”.

This sense of consensual obligation and familiarity has resulted in the reaffirmation of what could be termed “Asian values” and has resulted in the region adopting the unique ‘ASEAN way’. Broadly speaking, “the ASEAN way” could be defined as a reaction to what the ASEAN states see as “Western bullying” of their governments over issues of human rights and democracy. Over recent years, the various Asian leaders have rejected Western criticisms of authoritarian rule, instead pointing to their significant economic successes as justification for “the policy of putting economic development first and giving priority to order and stability”. They deeply resent the West lecturing them about those same values which they believe were notably absent during their colonial history. Distrustful of the West's true motives, which many believe is the future economic domination of the region, the Asian feeling is that they should try “to avoid the problems of rampant crime, welfare-induced sloth and a breakdown of society”, which they have seen as characterizing the West.

“It is difficult to identify the genesis of the Asian values debate, although it became most prominent in the media in 1990s..... The United States as a rising hegemony proceeded to lead Western nations in pressing other nations, especially in Asia to adopt values that some in the West claimed were not just superior but were indeed ‘universal’. This included the push for others to meet Western conceptions of human rights and democracy”.

ASEAN members have rejected western ideals and attitudes and turned instead to the ‘Confucian’ Asian values of the major powers in the region. By

economic interdependence, Japan and ASEAN have succeeded in building a good relationship as partners in development, while ethnic Chinese businesses from ASEAN countries have helped make China a greater economic influence in the ASEAN region. Japan became an economic model for ASEAN with Mahatir's "Look East" policy adopted by Malaysia and "Learn from Japan" by Laos and Singapore. However, while ASEAN positively welcomes its further political and economic involvement in Southeast Asia, Japan's endorsement of US policy in the region has sometimes produced anti-Japanese sentiments.

Since the 1990s, Japan has been trying to play not only an economic role but also a political one in the region, joining the ASEAN Regional Forum, (ARF), a multilateral regional security scheme which includes ASEAN members, Japan, South Korea, China, Laos, Russia, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Papua New Guinea, and the EU.

By inviting all of the major powers in the region to discuss strategic issues, ASEAN is vital in maintaining a strategic stability in the region, rather than to exclude, much less to construct a military alliance against, any of them (Van Ness, 1998: 163).

China is also playing complementary role in maintaining South East Asian regional stability. China, the most significantly important player in the region has become more accepted among ASEAN members as a strategic partner, becoming a member of the ARF upon its launch in July 1994. The relationship between ASEAN and China has gained remarkable advances in economic, political, and security cooperation. With both agreeing to hold consultations on political and security issues of common concern. China attended the July 1996 ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (ASEAN- PMC) as a 'consultative partner'. For its part, all ASEAN members are commitment to the "One China" policy and recognize bilateral diplomatic relations with China in Beijing.

'... from the regional point of view, if there are two Chinas, there will always be tension. Whatever the policies of the new administration in Taiwan, Malaysia will not recognize it (Taiwan) as an independent country. We (Malaysian) will regard it as a trading entity, and our (Malaysia and Taiwan) relations will be based on that'

For the purpose of creating better economic, political, and security cooperation in the region, ASEAN attempts to position itself independently between Washington and Beijing by avoiding "tight alignment with or forced submission to either capital." In doing so, ASEAN has entered a joint venture with China, Japan, and South Korea as a part of its strategy to become a 'middle power' in the region and to balance the influence of China, Japan, and the United States in the East Asian region.

The Middle East

The Middle East is identified as most of Arab countries to the east, as well as the non-Arab states of Turkey, and Iran. It also contains the Jewish state of Israel. As in Asia, the Middle East is a region of diverse cultures and traditions, defined more by geographical location than cultural affinity. Much of the region is composed of artificially created confederations superimposed over disparate tribal societies and traditions, loosely united under a common language, Arabic, and the majority religion, Islam. For much of the twentieth century the Middle East has been of primary vital importance to the West, due to its strategic geographical position and the fact that the area produces over a third of the world's oil supplies. In the twenty-first century, the Middle East is at a critical turning point in history. The focus of the world's attention is now centered on the war in Iraq and what will happen in the region in the aftermath of that conflict.

Throughout the Cold War the Arab states attempted to achieve some political and economic unity, however the dominant issue which united the Arab states was the intended destruction of Israel, whom they view as an intruder in the region. The Suez crisis of 1956, the four Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973, the Iranian revolution of 1979, the war between Iran and Iraq, the invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent Gulf War and the current war in Iraq have resulted in the constant political and military intervention from the major World Powers. This interference is interpreted by the Arabs, as simply a mechanism to facilitate the exploitation of Arab oil reserves and has generated strong anti-western nationalist feelings, much of it now directed at the US, and an upsurge of Arab nationalist factions, even in those

Countries, which are deemed to be pro-western in their outlook. Because of the latest Gulf War and the subsequent civil unrest, (some may even say civil war), the focus of the Middle East is Iraq. It is the aftermath of this war and the method by which the West undertakes the reconstruction of the Iraqi state, which will be the pivotal factor of the development of a new era of regional stability in the Middle East

Iraq is one of those artificially created states that proliferate in the region. After World War I, under the terms of the treaty of Sevres, the United Kingdom and France were given the mandate by the League of Nations, to manage the affairs of much of the Middle East formerly controlled by the Turkish Ottoman Empire, France having authority over Syria while Britain controlled Palestine, Trans-Jordan and Mesopotamia. As well as creating a 'Jewish homeland' (Israel), in Palestine, Britain merged three former Ottoman administrative regions, (vilayets), Mosul, Baghdad and Basra, to form the modern state of Iraq. Despite the existence of Iraq on the map and its status as a member of the United Nations, it appears that the British rationale for creating a Mesopotamian state was simply to ensure the flow of petroleum and it has never realized the legitimacy of a truly united country.

'From its very creation, Iraq was an artificial entity with no clear source of national Identity'.

From 1979, under the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi populace was terrorized into submission. The oppression of minorities and violation of their civil rights, rape, torture and murder of political opponents to the regime were commonplace. Saddam modernized the Iraqi Army and utilized the loyalty of local tribes, members of the Sunni Muslim sect and auxiliaries from Jordan, Egypt, and Palestine to maintain his leadership. Proclaiming the philosophy of pan Arabism, Saddam appealed to other Arab Gulf countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Yemen and Kuwait for support.

Saddam also made his regime more acceptable to these Arab states by foregoing the radical rhetoric of the 1970s and aligning his policies with the moderate Arab axis presented by Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan'.

Saddam also capitalized on the Arab fear of the potential for Iranian hegemony over the Gulf.

Prior to the Islamic revolution in Iran 1979, both Saudi Arabian and Iran were pro- western monarchies; however, they could not arrive at a consensus in managing the concept of Middle East regionalism or any other kind of cooperative forum. After the revolution, Saudi Arabia's relations with Iran were further strained over the legitimacy of 'pan Islamism' and the leadership of the Muslim world. They were suspicious of the Ayatollah Khomeini's extreme, dogmatic Shiite brand of Islam and for Saudi Arabia, representing the majority Sunni sect, and as the custodians of Islam's holiest shrines, (Mecca and Medina), the ambition of Iran to have a greater role in the Islamic world, made the relationship between those two countries even more complicated.

"With Iran expressing undisguised ambitions for hegemony over the Gulf and further afield in the Arab world, Iraq's struggle became transformed into a defense of the Arab world as a whole. The Gulf states especially Kuwait and Saudi Arabia began providing substantial economic and diplomatic support.

In September 1980, using the dispute between Arabs and Iran over the three Islands Tumb al sughra, Tumb al Kubra, and Abu Musa, sovereignty of the largely Arab Iranian province of Khuzestan and control of the Shatt-el-Arab waterway, part of the frontier between the two countries, Saddam launched a brutal war with Iran that lasted more than eight years. The war was supported by the US, who opposed the Khomeini regime, and who wanted to preclude the growth of Soviet influence in the region, and the pro-western conservative Arab states, Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Throughout the war Saddam tried to establish regional summits with the Arab states to

solicit support to fight Iran emphasizing that he was fighting on behalf of Arabs to prevent the ascendancy of Iranian Shiite, the minority sect in Islam. He was unable to command Arab unity however, and the war was opposed by Syria, Libya, Algeria and South Yemen, who were averse to the US presence in the Gulf and more in favor of a concentration of force against Israel. The opposition states, led by Syria, refused to attend an Arab Summit Conference in Amman, Jordan. (Nov. 1980). With the unlimited support of the west and the conservative Arab countries the Iraqi army fared better than Iran, however, despite that support, Saudi Arabia who dominated the Islamic political environment, '*launched a mediation initiative to end the war through the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO)*', and the war ended inconclusively with neither side able to claim a substantial victory. Saddam continued to oppress the people of Iraq, subjecting Kurdish villages in the Northern 'Kurdish Autonomous Region' to government sponsored genocide, using chemical weapons on Halabje and many other Kurdish cities. Thousands of Kurds disappeared without a trace and many more were massacred and buried in mass graves. Saudi Arabia took advantage of the war between Iraq and Iran to establish closer ties with the smaller Gulf countries, until the second Gulf war and the invasion of Kuwait, when the threat of Iraq became a greater concern for the Saudis and the Gulf region.

In August 1990, two years after the culmination of the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam mobilized the Iraqi army again and invaded former ally Kuwait. Just one night before the Kuwait invasion; Iraqi TV put to air patriotic songs and announcements that a revolution had overthrown the ruling dynasty in Kuwait. To enhance public opinion, and deliberately misrepresent the situation to the rest of the world, Iraqi government propaganda reported that a former Iraqi General had led a legitimate coup and had called on Iraq for help, but the reality was quite different, the Iraqi Army had in fact already invaded Kuwait City. The Kuwait invasion was a further setback for the concept of Middle East regionalism, affecting the interaction of states within the Muslim world and precipitating worldwide condemnation and military intervention by a coalition of world powers, the main players being the US, UK and France; along with most of the Arab nations. The economic sanctions imposed on Iraq by the Western Coalition were to last over 12 years and inspire much anti-American sentiment in the region.

While the US denounces international discord, its use of sanctions, embargoes and military operations, which it justifies as in defense of world peace, cause much suffering and deprivation among the civilian populations of target nations. Terrorism directed against the West has risen progressively in the world, particularly over the last decade as the current critical social, economic and political reality of the world means that people are increasingly influenced by mounting religious fundamentalism, disenchanted by frustrated nationalistic objectives or displaced socially, if not geographically, by economic and territorial expansionism. In the Al Qaeda bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City in 1993; six people died and an estimated \$600 million in economic damage was sustained. Al Qaeda

leader Osama Bin Laden, a Saudi from a distinguished family background, and his followers, are also allegedly responsible for the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen, the 1998 bombing of American embassies in Africa, and the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11 2001.

The events of September 11, 2001 seriously influenced the politics of the Middle East. Western hypocrisy and the 'politics of fear' directed towards the Middle East over the years has deepened hostility in the region towards the US and provoked a violent response from many Arabs and Muslims throughout the world. Unconditional support for corrupt regimes by past and present US administrations has contributed to breeding extremism in the region. In the unresolved Middle East conflict between the Arab nations and Israel, the US has consistently supported Israel against the Palestinians, despite blatant and brutal violations of human rights and was prepared to ignore the Iraqi regime as it destroyed 4,000 villages in Kurdistan and killed more than 300,000 people by the 1980s. It is only now, after they have defeated the bloodthirsty dictator of Iraq, and they don't need it any more, that they label the Iraqi regime as evil. The Sept. 11 incidents demonstrated to the Arab world that the world's most powerful nation, by the very nature of its open society, is still vulnerable to a concerted attack by a determined and desperate adversary.

In the Arab world America is seen as the 'Great Enemy', intent on the exploitation of Arab oil. On the other hand the US State Department designated Iran, Iraq, Syria, (and Libya), as Middle Eastern countries that sponsor both domestic and international terrorism claiming that Iran provided support to the Lebanese Hezbollah, HAMAS, and the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) however Iraq supported Palestinian reactionist groups, as well as the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), an Iranian terrorist group that opposes the current Iranian regime, Syria provides safe haven and support to several more terrorist groups while Libya, although it has gone quiet over recent times and appears to be attempting to mend its international reputation, still remains suspect. Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001 the neo-conservative Bush Administration, under which patriotism is confused with extreme nationalistic societal values and ethnocentric attitudes, took advantage of the severe psychological trauma and nervousness of the US populace to incite the will for an immediate response. The resulting American patriotic fervor and the public cry for revenge prompted an invasion, beginning in Afghanistan, but which Arabs believe was aimed at the whole of the Middle East.

The lead up to the war on Iraq was viewed by many as a transparent farce, with France and Germany refusing to bow to US pressure to become involved. The United States, critical of the efforts of UN weapons inspectors in locating 'weapons of mass destruction', was prepared to defy world opinion and the United Nations Security Council, and 'go it alone' if necessary. As a result of the propaganda leveled against the so called 'Axis of evil', Arabs and other Muslims throughout the world have become the subject

of hostility in the west, while hatred of Americans in the Middle East has intensified. Believing that the United Nations was too passive and slow to react, the Bush Administration preferred the more dynamic policy of retaliation, directed initially at anti-American terrorist action anywhere in the world. Ostensibly a 'War on Terrorism', skilful propaganda was used to shift the focus of hostility from Afghanistan's Taliban supporters of Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden to Saddam Hussein's regime in oil rich Iraq. With his 'Coalition of the willing', which included the UK and Australia, the Bush Administration unleashed a holocaust on Iraq, with little concern for 'collateral damage' and civilian casualties, until they finally succeeded in toppling the regime and capturing Saddam Hussein. Despite the announcement by US President George W Bush that the War was over, the 'civil war' still goes on, with daily reports of American soldiers and Iraqi civilians killed or injured.

The potential for Middle Eastern Regionalism

The US, as the world's self-appointed 'police force' in the maintenance of global peace and security is coming under increasing criticism for its endeavors to coerce other countries into accepting its western 'democratic' political control over the international arena. It now appears that when the US, Britain, or any of the lesser 'western' powers deploy troops to recognized 'trouble spots', it can be regarded as a 'police action' or a 'just war', and anyone who stands against them are labeled as insurgents or even a terrorists. US President Bush's recent statement in relation to the War in the Middle East that "you are either with us or against us" bears a significant warning, as the US has demonstrated that it is prepared to use trade embargoes, economic sanctions, threats and even military strikes to punish those who are reluctant to comply with its world view.

'Many governments, particularly in the developing world, are supporting the

'War on terror' not so much because of their high priority in stamping out

Terrorism but to save themselves from the wrath of the United States and

its allies.'

This US arrogance, used in many cases to advance its own capitalist economic objectives, flouts the human rights conventions of most countries and is leading to an anti-American backlash worldwide.

It was the threat of communist world domination that prompted US support for rebuilding the Japanese economy, allowing Japan to become the major regional economy in Asia. Similarly, the ASEAN states, emerging from colonialism, were carefully diverted from too close an affiliation with communist interests. As the threat of worldwide communist domination no

longer presents a problem, the threat of uncontested American hegemony has taken on an equal priority in the Asia Pacific region. In Asia the major players, China and Japan, one originating as pro-American the other as anti-American, are both striving in a common purpose, (for different reasons possibly), to reduce the complete dominance of the US in the region. Although the two economies are interdependent, and share a common interest in promoting regional stability and prosperity, both aspire to the status of major powers, and to heighten their prestige in the regional economy. In the 'New World Order', Japan needs a more equalized role in Japan-U.S. relations, to re-assert its standing in the Asia-Pacific region, in order to gain more like-minded allies and avoid being labeled as a US 'puppet'. While, from their new materialist perspective, China admires and even envies the US for its considerable economic achievements, and aspires some day to enjoy the same levels of wealth and power, the PRC frequently expresses its objections to what it views as unrestrained U.S. domination, which militarily and politically continues to overshadow the region.

'To set up the self proclaimed 'world rule of law' and 'democratic politics', the US has been trying to coerce other countries into accepting control and arrangements over international issues. On the one hand, it attempts to integrate other countries through 'soft hegemony', before any country or bloc can challenge its position as the superpower.....its ultimate goal is to guarantee US dominance over the thinking and ideology of the world, to strengthen its control over international affairs and to expand global interests for itself and its allies.'

The ASEAN countries still have vivid memories of colonialism and wish to control their own destinies in cooperation with like-minded neighbors. While the 'hegemonic stability' guaranteed by the US presence in the region provided the stable environment and the international confidence that enabled the region to achieve the substantial and rapid economic development of the last few decades The ASEAN countries are critical of US hegemonic behavior as a manifestation of the blatant expansionist tendencies that the West has always exemplified.

'Just because America's hegemonic behavior is understandable from a historical perspective does not mean it is acceptable'.

Even US allies in Europe are questioning why the political and social mores of the US appear to be setting the pattern for all western democracies. European Union members, notably France and Germany, are asking the question: Are the enemies of the US necessarily our enemies? Both have demonstrated in the United Nations, in the lead-up to the war in Iraq, which they are prepared to stand against US domination of international politics

Throughout the Cold War, the US imposed its western style, democratic, capitalist ideals on the world as a bulwark against communist expansionism..

Now as the only remaining 'superpower' it does so simply because it can and feels that it has the right to shape the world in its own image. The US will try, (indeed has already begun), to impose a western style democracy in Iraq. The futility of establishing a democracy in the middle of a region, which has never experienced that type of government, appears to be lost on the Bush Administration.

Imposing a democratic system in Iraq is doomed to failure, because the imposition in itself is not a democratic act. It is like imposing a dictatorship on a democratic nation, despite the outcomes. I still personally do not believe that the US really wants a democratic system in the midst of its petroleum resources, because there is always the possibility that it could lead eventually to a true democracy, which could return a hostile regime to power. Besides this, the US conduct of the war, including the degrading treatment of Iraqi prisoners by the US military, has generated a high level of anti-American feeling throughout the Arab world, and a US supported western style democracy will never be accepted by Iraq's neighbors in the region. The civil war that is now still raging will continue unabated while there remains a US presence in Iraq, and there will be no shortage of suicide bombers willing to martyr them for the cause. If the US removes its troops from Iraq, the results will be the same. Inevitably there will be corruption, (there is in the west), and it is likely that the democratic experiment will end, not with the vote, but with the usual procedure for changing government in the Middle East, the military coup. Moreover, the US will not stop with Iraq. If Middle East countries are wondering who will be next, the most likely candidate appears to be Syria. In an all too familiar fashion, the Bush Administration has now accused Syria of possessing 'weapons of mass destruction and of having aspirations to develop a nuclear capacity, lately accused, by US and Britain harboring Iraqi Ba'hist members and supporting terror in Iraq. US propaganda now states that the reason why Iraq's 'weapons of mass destruction' were never found after the fall of Baghdad 18 months ago was that they had been relocated to Syria. US Under Secretary of State, John Bolton, accuses Syria of stockpiling reserves of Sarin gas and of maintaining a program to develop chemical weapons. Buthaina Sha Aban, a Syrian Cabinet Minister and spokesperson for Syrian President Bashar al Assad denies all of this and states that Syria, along with Iran and other Arab states are seeking a Resolution in the UN to ensure that the Middle East remains a zone free of WMD's. Sha'ban sees these new allegations against Syria as a ploy to *'change the nature of the Middle East'..... 'we are next on their evil plan'*

After Syria, America's long time adversary, Iran, could also find itself under scrutiny. Although under President Muhammad Khatami, Iran is in the process of social transition, and his government made efforts to negotiate with Washington during the current crisis, any progress towards a dialogue with the US has been thwarted by the supporters of Iran's spiritual leader the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, whose rigid Shiite fanaticism views the US as the supreme enemy of Islam. Despite Iran's denunciation of the September 11

attacks, it is still suspected of harboring terrorist groups and it is unlikely that America will find an ally in Iran.

America's best chance of gaining a sympathetic ally in the region is to grant some long overdue support for the reunification of Kurdistan. The Kurdish People had lived for centuries on their land until, in the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire; the British dispersed the nation's population between the newly created states of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Despite the British guarantees for their cultural rights and representation in the state organs, the Kurds' experience with their integration has not been a happy one, however, as minority groups in these states, unable to realize their social, economic, and political objectives, they have maintained their separateness, even in the face of persecution. The Turks have indulged in 'ethnic cleansing' in their Kurdish region, Iran refuses to acknowledge their separate identity and Iranian Secret Service agents have assassinated several Kurdish leaders in Europe. Persecution of Kurds by Saddam Hussein was used by US President George Bush to justify the war on Iraq. Although, since the Iraqi Kurds established the Kurdish Autonomous Region in 1991, in at least part of their traditional homelands, it has been to all intents an independent state, it still lacked all forms of international recognition.

It is somewhat ironic that Saddam Hussein's stated objective for war with Iran was the prevention of a Shiite ascendancy in the Middle East and now the US is anxious to do the same. It appears that, in the American view, the Kurds are needed in Iraq to prevent the outbreak of Sunni-Shiite conflict. The Kurds are not an Arabic people, and as such are not bound by conflicting loyalties, as Jordan and Saudi Arabia tend to be. In addition, the Kurds are not prepared to idly wait for the west to intervene in their plans for a regional identity. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and international business investors to develop and implement economic policies and development projects within the stable and prosperous region of Iraqi-Kurdistan in Northern Iraq established the Kurdistan Development Corporation (KDC), which has offices in London and the Kurdish capital, Erbil. In addition, the Kurdish Regional Government has taken steps to establish interconnection with Asian regional governments. The Kurdish Prime Minister, Mr. Nechirvan Barzani has led a delegation to Taiwan, which has focused on political, economic, agricultural and technological exchanges. A month prior to that visit, another delegation from the regional government/Suleimani, by a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, (P.U.K.), visited China, for trade and other regional government issues.

"According to Minister of Foreign Affairs Mark Chen, because of their frustration in being unable to establish their own country, the Kurdish representatives have well understood Taiwan's unique experience of suffering under China's threats"

The visit was more about recognizing the Kurdish government as a legitimate government for the Kurdish region, and legitimizing the situation of the Kurdish enclave, than anything else. Mr. Barzani also visited Seoul in July for

a series of meetings with high-level South Korean officials including Prime Minister Lee Hai-chan, Foreign Affairs- Defense Minister Yoon Kwang-ung, and Trade Minister Ban Ki-moon, organized by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

The Kurdish concept of a new regionalization is looked upon suspiciously by the neighboring countries, both Arabic and non-Arabic. It seems that Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria do not agree on any other issue but Kurdish issues. In addition, conflict between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, (PUK), and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, (KDP), has weakened the Kurdish position. From the Turkish point of view

“Jalal Talabani had already a "strategic vision" vis-a-vis Turkey. Perceiving the Iranian and Iraqi Shiite and Iraqi Sunni Arabs' with the rest of the Arab world having a strategic dimension that could be detrimental for the fortunes of the Iraqi Kurds, he is ambitious to promote similar relationship between themselves and the reliable, powerful neighbor on the North, Turkey”.

For the Kurds, today numbering more than 35 million people, to assume a powerful regional role in the Middle East they will require American assistance in:

economic and security support, as was given to Japan during the Cold War,

a continued security guarantee, as is applied to Taiwan in its relationship with China,

access to US and Asian import and export markets as that which aided China's rapid development

Speeding up economic development in its industry sector, (including exploitation of its oil resources).

If these requirements appear somewhat implausible, one only has to consider the prospect of establishing an outpost of 'western' democracy' in the midst of hostile Arab territory. If anyone is to plant the seeds of regional cooperation in the Middle East, it will not be the Iraqi Arabs, who have no sense of nationhood and whose loyalties are split by religious differences, Shiite and Sunni. A lack of self-determination, the fragmentation and the differences between the people in Iraq makes it hard for them to live in accord.

“There is still ... no Iraqi people but unimaginable masses of human beings devoid of any patriotic Idea ... perpetually ready to rise against any government whatever. Out of these masses we want to fashion a people which we would train, educate and refine ... the circumstances being what they are, the immenseness of the efforts needed for this can be imagined”.

Conclusion:

Throughout the World, there still exists considerable mistrust of America's motives in taking its self-appointed position as the defender of world peace. That uncertainty increased when the US unilaterally deployed its considerable military power, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. Taking unilateral action, in defiance of the United Nations Security Council has generated anti-American sentiments worldwide even among those nations of the world whom the United States regards as their allies. In the Middle East, where people directly affected by US aggressiveness, that anti-Americanism has been magnified tenfold to a fanatical hostility to all things American. Although the Bush Administration will 'tough it out' and continue to maintain an agenda of war in the region, the US, even if it takes a change of government, will in the end have to bow to public opinion. The American people, as well as other countries, want a speedy end to the present conflict.

The change in the international outlook brought about by the emergence of the US as the world hegemony could possibly work in the favor of regionalism in the Middle East. In Asia, and to a certain extent in Europe in the post-Cold war era, increasing resistance to the total US dominance of the Global Economy has acted as a spur to the growth of cooperative, preferential regionalism in economic and security terms.

'More than likely, the entire world system will have to undergo a basic restructuring. The cost of maintaining the world system has become too heavy for a single country to bear, even a country on the scale of the United States. The end of colonialism, the unthinkability of large-scale warfare, and the acceleration of technological diffusion that weakened the United States' economic domination make the maintenance of a world order dependent on a 'hegemonic power'(Robert Gilpin) seem unlikely.

In the Middle East, although the circumstances, which have generated resistance to US hegemony, may be somewhat different, the consequences are essentially similar. The US position in maintaining peace in the Middle East presents something of a dilemma. If they try to establish sole hegemonic control of the region, several million Arabs, who have already proven their willingness and ability to strike at US targets both at home and abroad, will oppose them. On the other hand, if they try to change the nature of the region by imposing a western style democracy, they are faced with countless years of economically and militarily propping up an artificially created political abnormality in an unequivocally hostile environment. In addition, as long as they are denied a homeland, the Palestinians will continue to attract a degree of world sympathy at the expense of US ally, Israel, and the Kurds will continue to be oppressed by their various rulers, necessitating future international intervention. There is also the very real chance that the pre-war 'moderates' Jordan and Saudi Arabia, will become marginalized in the region. What these events will mean to regional

composition is of course pure conjecture as, at the time of writing, events are changing day to day.

Perhaps the answer lies, not in trying to change the nature of the region, but rather in redefining the geographical boundaries of what now constitutes the antiquated British designations of the 'Near East', 'the Middle East' and the 'Far East'. A possible solution to the dilemma would be for the US to seek new allies in an expanded concept of the Middle East, to incorporate more non-Arabic Islamic nations, the starting point being a newly reconstituted Kurdistan. Under the direction of the US, regionalism the Middle East is taking shape, and the Kurds with their challenging political diplomacy are playing a great role as a model for democracy in Iraq and the rest of the region. With their democratic political institutions and the only official army in Iraq, 'Peshmerge', they are the only enclave in the whole region that established its political administration in a democratic manner. The visits of Mr. Barzani to Taiwan, Korea; and P.U.K. delegation to China is evidence that the Kurds are playing a role in motivating regionalism in the Middle East. However, regarding the Kurdish referendum movement for Kurdistan to be a separate country, Ghazi al-Yawar interim president announced, *'that's betrayal; we will hit it with all our power if the Kurds choose to separate from Iraq'*.

How he hopes, in a 'democracy', to compel three hostile minorities to live together in one community is inconceivable.

A weak central government in Baghdad would be impotent in holding the country together and it would be likely to disintegrate into its component parts. Despite opposition from the sunnies to be elected Iraqi government the Kurds are already well on their way to establishing an independent state, and should they succeed fellow Kurds in the border areas of Turkey, Iran and Syria would no doubt agitate to join their comrades, angering the governments of those states. In the southeast, the Shi'a majority in Basra will likely move for closer ties with Iran possibly prompting an attempt by Iran to annex South East Iraq, and no doubt alarming the pro-western Gulf States and Saudi Arabia. The US is in a dilemma. If they withdraw their troops they will lose credibility as the world hegemony, if they leave them in the region, they face many more years of expensive, (in economic and human terms), civil war. Perhaps the more practicable solution is to find someone else like Saddam, or to install Saddam back in power! Regretting his removal, because to all appearances, he is the only person who can hold Iraq together.

Since it is not an option to bring Saddam back to power or to find another one like him is a possibility less than a decade, than more likely Iraq will not stand as it was; unified as a geographical patch, covering the Kurdish minority injury.

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