

# Hegemonic Quicksand

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FOR THE next several decades, the most volatile and dangerous region of the world—with the explosive potential to plunge the world into chaos—will be the crucial swathe of Eurasia between Europe and the Far East. Heavily inhabited by Muslims, we might term this crucial subregion of Eurasia the new “Global Balkans.”<sup>1</sup> It is here that America could slide into a collision with the world of Islam while American-European policy differences could even cause the Atlantic Alliance to come unhinged. The two eventualities together could then put the prevailing American global hegemony at risk.

At the outset, it is essential to recognize that the ferment within the Muslim world must be viewed primarily in a regional rather than a global perspective, and through a geopolitical rather than a theological prism. The world of Islam is disunited, both politically and religiously. It is politically unstable and militarily weak, and likely to remain so for some time. Hostility toward the United States, while pervasive in some Muslim countries, originates more from specific political

grievances—such as Iranian nationalist resentment over the U.S. backing of the Shah, Arab animus stimulated by U.S. support for Israel or Pakistani feelings that the United States has been partial to India—than from a generalized religious bias.

The complexity of the challenge America now confronts dwarfs what it faced half a century ago in Western Europe. At that time, Europe’s dividing line on the Elbe River was the strategically critical frontline of maximum danger, with the daily possibility that a clash in Berlin could unleash a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the United States recognized the stakes involved and committed itself to the defense, pacification, reconstruction and revitalization of a viable European community. In doing so, America gained natural allies with shared values. Following the end of the Cold War, the United States led the transformation of NATO from a defense alliance

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<sup>1</sup>This phrase is meant to draw attention to the geopolitical similarity between the traditional European Balkans of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the unstable region that currently extends from approximately the Suez Canal to Xinjiang, and from the Russo-Kazakh border to southern Afghanistan—almost like a triangle on the map. In the case of both areas, internal instability has served as a magnet for external major power intervention and rivalry. (For fuller discussion, see Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, chapter 5.)

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into an enlarging security alliance—gaining an enthusiastic new ally, Poland—and it has supported the expansion of the European Union (EU).

For at least a generation, the major task facing the United States in the effort to promote global security will be the pacification and then the cooperative organization of a region that contains the world's greatest concentration of political injustice, social deprivation, demographic congestion and potential for high-intensity violence. But the region also contains most of the world's oil and natural gas. In 2002, the area designated as the Global Balkans contained 68 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and 41 percent of the world's proven natural gas reserves; it accounted for 32 percent of world oil production and 15 percent of world natural gas production. In 2020, the area is projected to produce roughly 42 million barrels of oil per day—39 percent of the global production total (107.8 million barrels per day). Three key regions—Europe, the United States and the Far East—collectively are projected to consume 60 percent of that global production (16 percent, 25 percent and 19 percent, respectively).

The combination of oil and volatility gives the United States no choice. America faces an awesome challenge in helping to sustain some degree of stability among precarious states inhabited by increasingly politically restless, socially aroused and religiously inflamed peoples. It must undertake an even more daunting enterprise than it did in Europe more than half a century ago, given a terrain that is culturally alien, politically turbulent and ethnically complex.

In the past, this remote region could have been left to its own devices. Until the middle of the last century, most of it was dominated by imperial and colonial powers. Today, to ignore its problems and underestimate its potential for global disruption would be tantamount to

declaring an open season for intensifying regional violence, region-wide contamination by terrorist groups and the competitive proliferation of weaponry of mass destruction.

The United States thus faces a task of monumental scope and complexity. There are no self-evident answers to such basic questions as how and with whom America should be engaged in helping to stabilize the area, pacify it and eventually cooperatively organize it. Past remedies tested in Europe—like the Marshall Plan or NATO, both of which exploited an underlying transatlantic political-cultural solidarity—do not quite fit a region still rent by historical hatreds and cultural diversity. Nationalism in the region is still at an earlier and more emotional stage than it was in war-weary Europe (exhausted by two massive European civil wars fought within just three decades), and it is fueled by religious passions reminiscent of Europe's Catholic-Protestant forty-year war of almost four centuries ago.

Furthermore, the area contains no natural allies bonded to America by history and culture, such as existed in Europe with Great Britain, France, Germany and, lately, even Poland. In essence, America has to navigate in uncertain and badly charted waters, setting its own course, making differentiated accommodations while not letting any one regional power dictate its direction and priorities.

### *To Whom Can America Turn?*

**T**O BE SURE, several states in the area are often mentioned as America's potential key partners in reshaping the Global Balkans: Turkey, Israel, India and—on the region's periphery—Russia. Unfortunately, every one of them suffers serious handicaps in its capability to contribute to regional stability or has goals of its own that collide with America's wider interests in the region.

Turkey has been America's ally for half a century. It earned America's trust and gratitude by its direct participation in the Korean War. It has proven to be NATO's solid and reliable southern anchor. With the fall of the Soviet Union, it became active in helping both Georgia and Azerbaijan consolidate their new independence, and it energetically promoted itself as a relevant model of political development and social modernization for those Central Asian states whose people largely fall within the radius of the Turkic cultural and linguistic traditions. In that respect, Turkey's significant strategic role has been complementary to America's policy of reinforcing the new independence of the region's post-Soviet states.

Turkey's regional role, however, is limited by two major offsetting considerations stemming from its internal problems. The first pertains to the still uncertain status of Atatürk's legacy: Will Turkey succeed in transforming itself into a secular European state even though its population is overwhelmingly Muslim? That has been its goal since Atatürk set his reforms in motion in the early 1920s. Turkey has made remarkable progress since then, but to this day its future membership in the European Union (which it actively seeks) remains in doubt. If the EU were to close its doors to Turkey, the potential for an Islamic political-religious revival and consequently for Turkey's dramatic (and probably turbulent) international reorientation should not be underestimated.

The Europeans have reluctantly favored Turkey's inclusion in the European Union, largely in order to avoid a serious regression in the country's political development. European leaders recognize that the transformation of Turkey from a state guided by Atatürk's vision of a European-type society into an increasingly theocratic Islamic one would adversely affect Europe's security. That

consideration, however, is contested by the view, shared by many Europeans, that the construction of Europe should be based on its common Christian heritage. It is likely, therefore, that the European Union will delay for as long as it can a clear-cut commitment to open its doors to Turkey—but that prospect in turn will breed Turkish resentments, increasing the risks that Turkey might evolve into a resentful Islamic state, with potentially dire consequences for southeastern Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The other major liability limiting Turkey's role is the Kurdistan issue. A significant proportion of Turkey's population of 70 million is composed of Kurds. The actual number is contested, as is the nature of the Turkish Kurds' national identity. The official Turkish view is that the Kurds in Turkey number no more than 10 million, and that they are essentially Turks. Kurdish nationalists claim a population of 20 million, which they say aspires to live in an independent Kurdistan that would unite all the Kurds (claimed to number 25–35 million) currently living under Turkish, Syrian, Iraqi and Iranian domination. Whatever the actual facts, the Kurdish ethnic problem and the potential Islamic religious issue

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<sup>2</sup>How far the latter in such circumstances could go was dramatically conveyed in a speech on March 7, 2002 at the Ankara War Academy by General Tuncer Kilinc, the secretary-general of the National Security Council, who bluntly stated that "Turkey hasn't seen the slightest assistance from the EU" in its efforts to become part of Europe and that in seeking allies Turkey might hence do well "to begin a new search that would include Iran and the Russian Federation" (as reported by Nicholas Birch, "Once Eager to Join EU, Turkey Grows Apprehensive", *Christian Science Monitor*, March 21, 2002; see also the analysis of the speech's import by Hooman Peimani, "Turkey Hints at Shifting Alliance", *Asia Times*, June 19, 2002).

tend to make Turkey—notwithstanding its constructive role as a regional model—also very much a part of the region's basic dilemmas.

Israel is another seemingly obvious candidate for the status of a pre-eminent regional ally. As a democracy as well as a cultural kin, it enjoys America's automatic affinity, not to mention intense political and financial support from the Jewish community in America. Initially a haven for the victims of the Holocaust, it enjoys American sympathy. As the object of Arab hostility, it triggered American preference for the underdog. It has been America's favorite client state since approximately the mid-1960s and has been the recipient of unprecedented American financial assistance (\$80 billion since 1974). It has benefited from almost solitary American protection against UN disapprobation or sanctions. As the dominant military power in the Middle East, Israel has the potential, in the event of a major regional crisis, not only to be America's military base but also to make a significant contribution to any required U.S. military engagement.

Yet American and Israeli interests in the region are not entirely congruent. America has major strategic and economic interests in the Middle East that are dictated by the region's vast energy supplies. Not only does America benefit economically from the relatively low costs of Middle Eastern oil, but America's security role in the region gives it indirect but politically critical leverage on the European and Asian economies that are also dependent on energy exports from the region. Hence good relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—and their continued security reliance on America—is in the U.S. national interest. From Israel's standpoint, however, the resulting American-Arab ties are disadvantageous: they not only limit the degree to which the United States is prepared to back Israel's territorial aspira-

tions, they also stimulate American sensitivity to Arab grievances against Israel.

Among those grievances, the Palestinian issue is foremost. That the final status of the Palestinian people remains unresolved more than 35 years after Israel occupied the Gaza Strip and the West Bank—irrespective of whose fault that actually may be—intensifies and, in Arab eyes, legitimates the widespread Muslim hostility toward Israel.<sup>3</sup> It also perpetuates in the Arab mind the notion that Israel is an alien and temporary colonial imposition on the region. To the extent that the Arabs perceive America as sponsoring Israeli repression of the Palestinians, America's ability to pacify anti-American passions in the region is constrained. That impedes any joint and constructive American-Israeli initiative to promote multilateral political or economic cooperation in the region, and it limits any significant U.S. regional reliance on Israel's military potential.

Since September 11, the notion of India as America's strategic regional partner has come to the forefront. India's credentials seem at least as credible as Turkey's or Israel's. Its sheer size and power make it regionally influential, while its democratic credentials make it ideologically attractive. It has managed to preserve its democracy since its inception as an independent state more than half a century ago. It has done so despite widespread poverty and social inequality, and despite considerable ethnic and religious diversity in a predominantly Hindu but formally secular state. India's prolonged conflict with its Islamic neighbor, Pakistan, involving violent confrontations

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<sup>3</sup>Demographics play a role as well: The fact that somewhat more than 5 million Jewish Israelis dominate the somewhat less than 5 million Arab Palestinians (of whom about 1.2 million are Israeli citizens) and that the latter are increasing much more rapidly intensifies Israeli insecurity and Arab resentments.

with guerrillas and terrorist actions in Kashmir by Muslim extremists benefiting from Pakistan's benevolence, made India particularly eager to declare itself after September 11 as co-engaged with the United States in the war on terrorism.

Nonetheless, any U.S.-Indian alliance in the region is likely to be limited in scope. Two major obstacles stand in the way. The first pertains to India's religious, ethnic and linguistic mosaic. Although India has striven to make its 1 billion culturally diverse people into a unified nation, it remains basically a Hindu state semi-encircled by Muslim neighbors while containing within its borders a large and potentially alienated Muslim minority of somewhere between 120–140 million. Here, religion and nationalism could inflame each other on a grand scale.

So far, India has been remarkably successful in maintaining a common state structure and a democratic system—but much of its population has been essentially politically passive and (especially in the rural areas) illiterate. The risk is that a progressive rise in political consciousness and activism could be expressed through intensified ethnic and religious collisions. The recent rise in the political consciousness of both India's Hindu majority and its Muslim minority could jeopardize India's communal coexistence. Internal strains and frictions could become particularly difficult to contain if the war on terrorism were defined as primarily a struggle against Islam, which is how the more radical of the Hindu politicians tend to present it.

Secondly, India's external concerns are focused on its neighbors, Pakistan and China. The former is seen not only as the main source of the continued conflict in Kashmir but ultimately—with Pakistan's national identity rooted in religious affirmation—as the very negation of India's self-definition. Pakistan's close ties to China intensify this sense of threat, given that India and China are unavoidable

rivals for geopolitical primacy in Asia. Indian sensitivities are still rankled by the military defeat inflicted upon it by China in 1962, in the short but intense border clash that left China in possession of the disputed Aksai Chin territory.

The United States cannot back India against either Pakistan or China without paying a prohibitive strategic price elsewhere: in Afghanistan if it were to opt against Pakistan, and in the Far East if it allied itself against China. These internal as well as external factors constrain the degree to which the United States can rely on India as an ally in any longer-term effort to foster—let alone impose—greater stability in the Global Balkans.

Finally, there is the question of the degree to which Russia can become America's major strategic partner in coping with Eurasian regional turmoil. Russia clearly has the means and experience to be of help in such an effort. Although Russia, unlike the other contenders, is no longer truly part of the region—Russian colonial domination of Central Asia being a thing of the past—Moscow nevertheless exercises considerable influence on all of the countries to its immediate south, has close ties to India and Iran and contains some 15–20 million Muslims within its own territory.

At the same time, Russia has come to see its Muslim neighbors as the source of a potentially explosive political and demographic threat, and the Russian political elite are increasingly susceptible to anti-Islamic religious and racist appeals. In these circumstances, the Kremlin eagerly seized upon the events of September 11 as an opportunity to engage America against Islam in the name of the “war on terrorism.”

Yet, as a potential partner, Russia is also handicapped by its past, even its very recent past. Afghanistan was devastated by a decade-long war waged by Russia, Chechnya is on the brink of genocidal extinction, and the newly independent

Central Asian states increasingly define their modern history as a struggle for emancipation from Russian colonialism. With such historical resentments still vibrant in the region, and with increasingly frequent signals that Russia's current priority is to link itself with the West, Russia is being perceived in the region more and more as a former European colonial power and less and less as a Eurasian kin. Russia's present inability to offer much in the way of a social example also limits its role in any American-led international partnership for the purpose of stabilizing, developing and eventually democratizing the region.

Ultimately, America can look to only one genuine partner in coping with the Global Balkans: Europe. Although it will need the help of leading East Asian states like Japan and China—and Japan will provide some, though limited, material assistance and some peacekeeping forces—neither is likely at this stage to become heavily engaged. Only Europe, increasingly organized as the European Union and militarily integrated through NATO, has the potential capability in the political, military and economic realms to pursue jointly with America the task of engaging the various Eurasian peoples—on a differentiated and flexible basis—in the promotion of regional stability and of progressively widening trans-Eurasian cooperation. And a supranational European Union linked to America would be less suspect in the region as a returning colonialist bent on consolidating or regaining its special economic interests.

America and Europe together represent an array of physical and experiential assets with the capability to make the decisive difference in shaping the political future of the Global Balkans. The question is whether Europe—largely preoccupied with the shaping of its own unity—will have the will and the generosity to become truly engaged with America in a joint effort that will dwarf in complexity and

scale the earlier, successful joint American-European effort to preserve peace in Europe and then end Europe's division.

European engagement will not occur, however, if it is expected to consist of simply following America's lead. The war on terrorism can be the opening wedge for engagement in the Global Balkans, but it cannot be the definition of that engagement. This the Europeans, less traumatized by the September 11 attacks, understand better than the Americans. It is also why any joint effort by the Atlantic community will have to be based on a broad strategic consensus regarding the long-term nature of the task at hand.

Somewhat the same considerations apply to Japan's potential role. Japan, too, can and should become a major if somewhat less central player. For some time to come, Japan will eschew a major military role beyond that of direct national self-defense. But despite its recent stagnation, Japan remains the globe's second-largest national economy. Its financial support for efforts designed to enlarge the world's zone of peace would be crucial and ultimately in its own interest. Hence Japan—in conjunction with Europe—has to be viewed as America's eventual partner in the long-term struggle against the many forces of chaos within the Global Balkans.

### *Formulating a Strategy*

**I**N BRIEF, America may be preponderant, but it is not omnipotent. It will need a broadly cooperative strategy for coping with the region's explosive potential. But as the successful experience of shaping the Euro-Atlantic community has shown, burdens cannot be shared without shared decision-making. Only by fashioning a comprehensive strategy with its principal partners can America avoid becoming mired, alone, in hegemonic quicksand.

Given that the area's problems involve an almost seamless web of overlapping

conflicts, the first step in a comprehensive response is to define priorities. Three interrelated tasks stand out as central: (1) resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, which is so disruptive to the Middle East; (2) transforming the strategic equation in the oil-producing region from the Persian Gulf to Central Asia; and (3) engaging key governments through regional arrangements designed to contain WMD proliferation and the terrorist epidemic.

Arab-Israeli peace is the most urgent need, because it is essential to the pursuit of the other two. Immediately at issue is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, whose specific resolution has to be the proximate goal. But there is also the larger reality of Arab hostility toward Israel, which breeds tension in the Middle East and ricochets Muslim hostility against America.<sup>4</sup> That condition can only be ameliorated by a fair and viable peace that eventually fosters constructive Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, thereby diluting Arab animus and inducing Arab acceptance of Israel as a permanent fixture on the Middle Eastern scene.

Adding urgency to the issue is the risk that the Euro-Atlantic alliance could split asunder on the Middle Eastern rock. Although America is the dominant external power in the Middle East, its relations with Europe could come under severe duress as transatlantic views diverge over how best to engage the region. For decades since the abortive Franco-British Suez adventure of 1956, the area from the Suez to the Persian Gulf has effectively been an American protectorate. Gradually, the protector shifted from a pro-Arab to a pro-Israeli preference while successfully eliminating any significant European and, later, Soviet political influence from the region. The decisive military victories in the 1991 and the 2003 campaigns against Iraq firmly established the United States as the sole external arbiter in the area.

After the September 11 attacks, the

more conservative elements in the American political establishment, particularly those with strong sympathies for the Likud side of Israel's political spectrum, have become tempted by the vision of an altogether new order imposed by the United States on the Middle East as a response to the new challenge of terrorism plus proliferation. The pursuit of that vision has already involved the forcible termination of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship in Iraq, and it could portend action against the Ba'athi regime in Syria or the Iranian theocracy. In the name of democracy, there have also been calls for the United States to distance itself from the current rulers of Saudi Arabia and Egypt and to press for internal democratization, even at cost to America's interests in the region.

It is already evident that the European Union, as it begins to identify its own foreign policy interests, will not remain merely a passive observer or com-

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<sup>4</sup>According to numerous public opinion polls, this issue gives rise to the most intense anti-American emotions. Reputable journalistic reports reinforce that conclusion. In the early fall of 2002, Jane Perlez reported in some detail that "Anger at the United States, embedded in the belief that the Bush administration lends unstinting support to Israel at the expense of the Palestinians, is at an unparalleled high across the Arab world." See "Anger at U.S. Said to Be at New High", *New York Times*, September 11, 2002. She was echoed by Karen DeYoung, who reported that Arab dislike of America "focused largely on what they saw as a general unfairness toward and lack of understanding of the region, and a particular bias toward Israel in the Israeli-Arab conflict." See "Poll Finds Arabs Dislike U.S. Based on Policies It Pursues", *Washington Post*, October 7, 2002. Arabs have also tended to interpret U.S. hostility toward Saddam Hussein's Iraq as driven by one-sided U.S. support for Israel, according to Zogby International polls conducted in mid-March 2003 in several Arab countries.

pliant supporter of whatever the American policy is in the Middle East. In fact, it is precisely with regard to the Middle East that the European Union is beginning not only to shape its first truly joint and comprehensive strategy but also to challenge America's monopoly in regional arbitration. In the Seville Declaration of June 22, 2002, the EU took the important step of formulating a concept of a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that was significantly at variance with America's.<sup>5</sup> Intensifying U.S.-EU disagreements over the aftermath of the war against Iraq and possible political change in Iran may further encourage European assertiveness.

In the short run, America has the power and the will to disregard Europe's views. It can prevail by using its military might and temporarily prompt reluctant European accommodation. But the European Union has the economic resources and financial means to make the critical difference to the region's long-run stability. Thus, no truly viable solution in the area will be possible unless the United States and the EU increasingly act in common. The Middle East is at least as vital for Europe as Mexico is for America, and the EU—as it slowly defines itself—will increasingly attempt to assert its position. Indeed, it is in the Middle East that European foreign policy, for the first time since the Suez debacle of 1956, could explicitly define itself *against* America.

Nevertheless, the Euro-Atlantic community's emerging cleavage over the Middle East is reversible. There is remarkable international consensus regarding the substance of an eventual Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty. There are even drafts of the likely peace treaty that go considerably beyond the vague "roadmap" that the Bush Administration reluctantly endorsed in the spring of 2003. The real issue, how to get the Israelis and the Palestinians to cross the t's and dot the i's, will be a challenge despite

the actual support for a compromise peace among the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Left to themselves, they have proven unable to bridge their lingering differences or transcend their embittered suspicions.

Only the United States and the European Union together can decisively accelerate the process. To do so, they will increasingly have to spell out in substance, and not just in procedural terms, the outlines of an Israeli-Palestinian peace. Broadly speaking, there is international consensus that its basic framework will include two states, territorially defined by the 1967 lines but with reciprocal adjustments to permit incorporation into Israel of the suburban settlements of Jerusalem; two capitals in Jerusalem itself; only a nominal or symbolic right of return for the Palestinian refugees, with the bulk of returnees settling in Palestine, perhaps in vacated Israeli settlements; a demilitarized Palestine, perhaps with NATO or other international peacekeepers; and a comprehensive, unequivocal recognition of Israel by its Arab neighbors.

The internationally sponsored adoption of a viable formula for the coexistence of Israel and Palestine would not resolve the wider region's manifold conflicts, but it would have a triple benefit: it would somewhat reduce the focus of Middle Eastern terrorists on America; it would disarm the most likely trigger for a regional explosion; and it would permit a

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<sup>5</sup>The Seville Declaration was much more explicit in formulating the specific parameters of a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine—notably on such matters as the sharing of Jerusalem, the 1967 frontiers and the right of the Palestinians to choose their own leaders, including Arafat—than the corresponding U.S. formulations at the time, which made concrete demands of the Palestinian side while not addressing the more contentious immediate issues.

more concerted effort by the United States and the European Union to address the region's security problems without seeming to embark on an anti-Islamic crusade. The resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict would also facilitate American efforts to promote the progressive democratization of the adjoining Arab states without appearing, in Arab eyes, to exploit the democratization issue as yet another pretext for delaying a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian accommodation.

Given America's new prominence in the political life of the Arab Middle East in the aftermath of its occupation of Iraq, it is essential that U.S. policymakers not be seduced by doctrinaire advocates of an externally imposed and impatient democratization—a democratization “from above”, so to speak. Sloganeering to that effect in some cases may reflect contempt for Islamic traditions. For others it may be tactical, rooted in the hope that the focus on democratization will provide a diversion from efforts to press both the Israelis and the Arabs to accept the compromises necessary for peace. Whatever the motivation, the fact is that genuine and enduring democracy is nurtured best in conditions that gradually foster spontaneous change and do not combine compulsion with haste. The former approach can indeed transform a political culture; the latter can only coerce a political correctness that is inherently unlikely to endure.

Similarly, creating a stable Iraq after the 2003 military intervention is a formidable and prolonged task that can only be made easier by U.S.-EU collaboration. The fall of the Iraqi regime could reopen latent border issues with Iran, Syria and Turkey. These could be dynamically complicated by the Kurdish issue, while the internal animus between Iraqi Sunni and Shi'a believers could unleash protracted and increasingly violent instability. Moreover, Iraq's 25 million people, gen-

erally considered the most nationalistically self-conscious of all the Arab peoples, may prove less pliant to external domination than expected. A long, costly and difficult recovery program will have to be managed in a volatile and potentially hostile environment.

More broadly, American-European cooperation in promoting a stable and democratic Iraq and in advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace—in effect, a “regional roadmap”—would create more favorable political preconditions for addressing the unsatisfactory strategic equation that prevails in the oil- and natural-gas-producing areas of the Persian Gulf, Iran and the Caspian Basin. Unlike energy-rich Russia, the states of this zone—from Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan all the way down to Saudi Arabia—are almost entirely exporters, but not major consumers, of the energy that is extracted from their ground. They have by far the world's largest reserves of oil and natural gas. Since reliable access to reasonably priced energy is vitally important to the world's three economically most dynamic regions—North America, Europe and East Asia—strategic domination over the area, even if cloaked by cooperative arrangements, would be a globally decisive hegemonic asset.

From the standpoint of American interests, the current geopolitical state of affairs in the world's principal energy-rich zone leaves much to be desired. Several of the key exporting states—notably Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—are weak and politically debilitated. Iraq faces a prolonged period of stabilization, reconstruction and rehabilitation. Another major energy producer, Iran, has a regime hostile to the United States and opposes U.S. efforts on behalf of a Middle Eastern peace. It may be seeking WMD and is suspected of terrorist links. The United States has sought to isolate Iran internationally, but with limited success.

Just to the north, in the southern Caucasus and Central Asia, the newly

independent energy-exporting states are still in the early stages of political consolidation. Their systems are fragile, their political processes arbitrary and their statehood vulnerable. They are also semi-isolated from the world energy markets, with American legislation blocking the use of Iranian territory for pipelines leading to the Persian Gulf and with Russia aggressively seeking to monopolize international access to Turkmen and Kazakh energy resources. Only with the completion, several years from now, of the U.S.-sponsored Baku-Çeyhan pipeline will Azerbaijan and its trans-Caspian neighbors gain an independent link to the global economy. Until then, the area will be vulnerable to Russian or Iranian mischief.

For the time being, the powerful and exclusive U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf region and the effective U.S. monopoly of significant long-range warfare capabilities give America a very considerable margin for unilateral policymaking. If it should become necessary to cut the potential nexus between the proliferation of WMD and conspiratorial terrorism, the United States has the means to act on its own, as it proved in bringing down the recent Iraqi regime. The problem becomes more complex, however, and the chances of a solitary American success more ephemeral, when the longer-range consequences of a violent strategic upheaval are taken into account.

It is difficult to envisage how the United States alone could force Iran into a basic reorientation. Outright military intimidation might work initially, given the gaping disparity of power between the two states, but it would be a gross error to underestimate the nationalist and religious fervor that such an approach would likely ignite among the 70 million Iranians. Iran is a nation with an impressive imperial history and with a sense of its own national worth. While the religious zeal that brought the theocratic dictatorship to power seems to be gradually

fading, an outright collision with America would almost certainly re-ignite popular passions, fusing fanaticism with chauvinism.

While Russia has not stood in the way of any decisive U.S. military efforts to alter the strategic realities of the region, the current geopolitical earthquake in the Persian Gulf could jeopardize America's efforts to consolidate the independence of the Caspian Basin states. American preoccupation with the mess in Iraq, not to mention the cleavage between America and Europe as well as the increased American-Iranian tensions, has already tempted Moscow to resume its earlier pressure on Georgia and Azerbaijan to abandon their aspirations for inclusion in the Euro-Atlantic community and to step up its efforts to undermine any enduring U.S. political and military presence in Central Asia. That would make it more difficult for the United States to engage the Central Asian states in a larger regional effort to combat Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan and Pakistan. A resurgence of Muslim extremism of the Taliban variety could then even acquire a regional scope.

These risks could be lessened by closer U.S.-EU strategic collaboration with regard to Iraq and Iran. That may not be easy to achieve, given divergent American and European perspectives, but the benefits of cooperation outweigh the costs of any compromise. For the United States, a joint approach would mean less freedom of unilateral action; for the European Union, it would mean less opportunity for self-serving inaction. But acting together—with the threat of U.S. military power reinforced by the EU's political, financial and (to some degree) military support—the Euro-Atlantic community could foster a genuinely stable and possibly even democratic post-Saddam regime.

Together, the United States and European Union would also be better positioned to deal with the broader

regional consequences of the upheaval in Iraq. Significant progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process would reduce the Arab concern that U.S. actions directed at Iraq's regime were inspired by Israel's desire to weaken all neighboring Arab states while perpetuating its control over the Palestinians. Moreover, strategic collaboration between the United States and the EU would make it easier for Turkey to avoid a painful choice between its loyalty as a U.S. ally and its hopes for EU membership.

Active strategic partnership between the United States and the European Union would also make it more likely that Iran could eventually be transformed from a regional ogre into a regional stabilizer. Currently, Iran has a cooperative relationship with Russia, but otherwise either wary or hostile relations with all of its neighbors. It has maintained a relatively normal relationship with Europe, but its antagonistic posture toward America—reciprocated by restrictive U.S. trade legislation—has made it difficult for European-Iranian and Iranian-Japanese economic relations to truly prosper. Its internal development has suffered accordingly, while its socioeconomic dilemmas have been made more acute by a demographic explosion that has increased its population to 70-odd million.

The entire energy-exporting region would be more stable if Iran, the region's geographic center, were reintegrated into the global community and its society resumed its march to modernization. That will not happen as long as the United States seeks to isolate Iran and is insensitive to Iran's security concerns, especially given the presence in Iran's immediate neighborhood of three overt and one covert nuclear powers. More effective would be an approach in which the Iranian social elite sees the country's isolation as self-imposed and thus counterproductive, instead of something enforced by America. Europe has long

urged the United States to adopt that approach. On this issue, American strategic interests would be better served if America were to follow Europe's lead.

A promising start in this regard has been made by the European initiative on the complex issue of the Iranian nuclear program, an issue that should not be addressed in a manner reminiscent of the earlier U.S. exaggerations of the alleged Iraqi WMD threat. In the longer run, contrary to the image projected by its ruling mullahs—that of a religiously fanatical society—Iran stands the best chance, of all the countries in the region, of embarking on the path traced earlier by Turkey. It has a high literacy rate (72 percent), an established tradition of significant female participation in the professions and political life, a genuinely sophisticated intellectual class and a social awareness of its distinctive historical identity. Once the dogmatic rule imposed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wears thin and the Iranian secular elites sense that the West sees a regionally constructive role for Iran, that country could be on the way toward successful modernization and democratization.

Such a progressive alteration of the region's prevailing strategic equation would permit implementation of the Caucasus Stability Pact proposed by Turkey in 2000, providing for various forms of region-wide cooperation.<sup>6</sup> To

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<sup>6</sup>In January 2000, President Suleyman Demirel of Turkey proposed a "Caucasus Stability Pact", based on the successful experience of the "Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe" founded in June 1999. The latter—with strong U.S. and EU backing and under their security umbrella—was subsequently able to raise substantial amounts of money to promote the recovery of the Balkans. A similar initiative for the Caucasian region, involving its three newly independent states, as well as the United States, the EU, Russia and Turkey (at some

make it effective, not only Turkey's and Russia's involvement would be needed, but also Iran's. Iran's reorientation would also permit wider economic access to the energy resources of Central Asia. In time, pipelines through Iran to the Persian Gulf could also be matched by parallel pipelines from Central Asia through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indian Ocean, branching out also to India. The result would be of major economic (and potentially political) benefit not only to south-central Asia but to the increasingly energy-ravenous Far East.

Progress along these lines, in turn, would help advance the third strategic priority for this region, the need to contain both the proliferation of WMD and the terrorist epidemic. Neither issue is susceptible to a quick resolution. But tangible movement on the first two priorities—Israeli-Palestinian peace and the remaking of the region's strategic landscape—would undercut some of the popular support for anti-Western, and especially anti-American, terrorism. It could also make it easier to concentrate on the struggle against Middle Eastern terrorists while reducing the risks of a more comprehensive religious and cultural clash between the West and Islam.

Moreover, an effective halt to further nuclear proliferation in this conflict-ridden region will ultimately have to be based on a regional arrangement. If Iran is to forsake the acquisition of nuclear

weapons, it must have alternative sources of security: either a binding alliance with a nuclear-armed ally or a credible international guarantee. A region-wide agreement banning nuclear weapons—on the model of the convention adopted some years ago by South American states—would be the preferable outcome. But in the absence of regional consensus, the only effective alternative is for the United States, or perhaps the permanent members of the UN Security Council, to provide a guarantee of protection against nuclear attack to any state in the region that abjures nuclear weapons.

**T**HE EFFORT to stabilize the Global Balkans will last several decades. At best, progress will be incremental, inconsistent, and vulnerable to major reversals. It will be sustained only if the two most successful sectors of the globe—the politically mobilized America and the economically unifying Europe—treat it increasingly as a shared responsibility in the face of a common security threat. One should not forget that struggling alone makes the quicksand only more dangerous. □

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point also Iran) could become an important vehicle for multilateral efforts to stabilize the volatile Caucasian region, to help resolve its various ethnic conflicts and to facilitate a peaceful solution to such tragic conflicts as the Russian war in Chechnya.

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*The Compassion of the Conquered*

“I remember how shocked I was when he said he congratulated the victors—and that he pitied them deeply, for the conquered see what they are up against and what needs to be done, while the conquerors can hardly suspect what is in store for them.”

—Ivo Andric, *Letter from 1920*