

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

Today, the United States faces different challenges in the Middle East than it did during the Cold War, when U.S. policy in the region was defined by its relationship to the Soviet Union and its allies. On September 11, 2001 an extremist Islamist movement known as al Qaeda killed nearly three thousand people, mainly U.S. citizens, in coordinated attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. For over five years the United States has also been fighting in Iraq and is likely to be there for many years to come. The September 11 attacks, the ongoing Iraq war, and the resurgence of Arab-Israeli violence have caused many U.S. citizens to try to understand more about the U.S. presence in the Middle East.

### *What are the central issues for the United States in the Middle East today?*

In addition to its presence in Iraq, the United States has played a central role in efforts to end the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the United States has also found itself confronted by the wide appeal of Islamist political movements, many of which oppose U.S. policies in the region. Finally, the growing demand for oil around the world means that the global economy is dependant on the resources of many Middle Eastern nations.

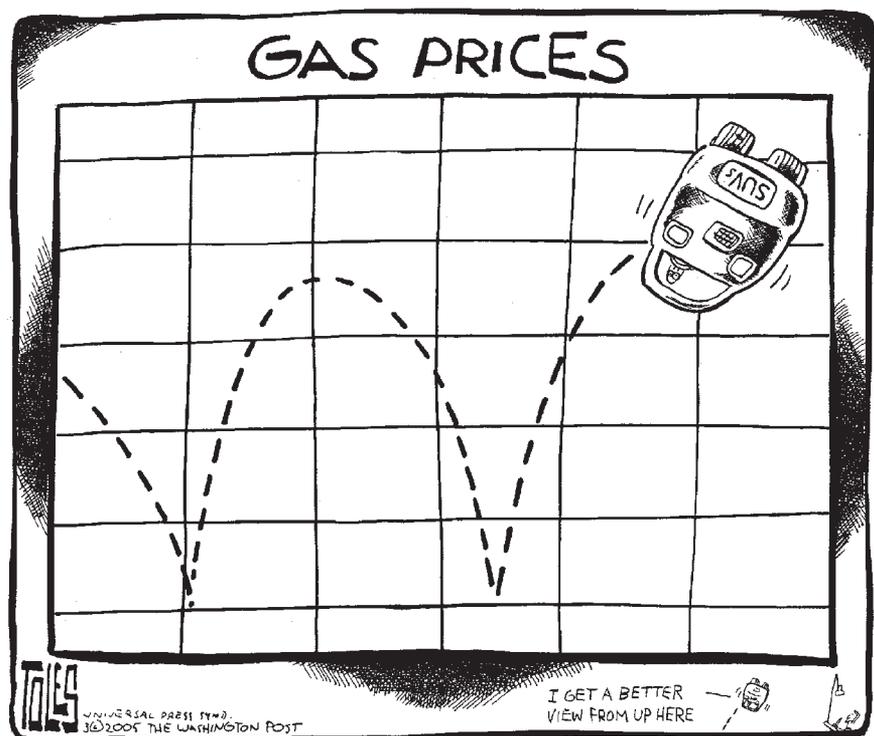
In the following pages, you will learn more about current U.S. involvement in the Middle East. The first section will provide you an overview of the connection between oil and U.S. policy. The second will introduce you to the interplay between Islam and politics. Un-

derstanding this connection is essential to understanding politics in the Middle East. The remainder of the reading will discuss two major areas of concern for the United States: regional security and the Arab-Israeli conflict. As you will see, all of these topics are linked to each other.

### Oil Trends

Political instability in the Middle East tends to shake up the world oil market and increase gas prices. Saudi Arabia has taken steps to calm the world oil market during troubles in the Persian Gulf. In general, the Saudis have been careful to increase production to offset any shortfalls. As a result, in the mid-1990s, gasoline prices in the United States (taking inflation into account) dropped to levels not seen since before the 1973 oil embargo.

With energy prices low, U.S. citizens began buying more fuel-hungry cars and paying less attention to conservation. As a result, U.S. oil consumption has increased 30 percent



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**U.S. Petroleum Consumption since 1973**

<i>Figures are for thousands of barrels of oil per day</i>	<b>Total Net Oil Imports</b>	<b>Oil Imports from the Persian Gulf</b>	<b>Total Oil Consumption</b>
2005	13,527	2,298	20,656
2000	11,459	2,488	19,701
1995	8,835	1,573	17,725
1990	8,018	1,966	16,988
1985	5,067	311	15,726
1980	6,909	1,519	17,056
1975	6,056	1,165	16,322
1973	6,256	848	17,308

Data from the Energy Information Administration.

But while the Middle East’s oil resources are as important as ever in the global economy, the likelihood of a repetition of the 1973 oil embargo seems distant. On the other hand, the importance of Middle Eastern oil to the United States looks to remain constant for the foreseeable future. Because of the U.S. economy’s need for oil, many U.S. policies in the Middle East involve securing and maintaining access to that oil.

since 1985. Meanwhile, U.S. oil production has dropped by about 40 percent since its peak in 1970.

Worldwide demand for oil in recent years has been growing at about 2 percent annually. Economic expansion in the developing world has fueled much of the rise. Increased demand in rapidly growing economies like China and India has led to increased prices. In the United States, dependence on imported oil is creeping up as well. Today, the United States relies on the Middle East for about 16 percent of its oil needs. Oil accounts for about 40 percent of the United States’ total energy consumption.

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

The Middle East remains the unrivaled center of the international oil industry and is therefore likely to remain a critical region for the world’s economy. The region contains more than 60 percent of the world’s proven oil reserves. While recent discoveries in Kazakhstan hold great potential, most of the new fields that were discovered in the North Sea, Alaska, and elsewhere in the West after the 1973 oil crisis have passed their peak production years. Middle East oil is also the cheapest to pump. The cost of extracting a barrel of oil from the North Sea, for example, is typically five times greater than in the Persian Gulf area.

**Political Islam**

It can be difficult for people in the United States to understand the importance of religion in many Middle Eastern countries. In almost all Middle Eastern countries, Islam is officially recognized as the binding force of society. State-run television and radio stations broadcast thousands of hours of religious programming, and Islamic clergymen receive government salaries. The Islamist regimes of Iran and Sudan take a different approach. In those countries, the Islamic clergy actually control the government.

***What is political Islam?***

Political Islam is a movement that seeks to promote Islam within the political arena. Some supporters of political Islam strive to establish as law one interpretation of the Islamic legal tradition, or Shari’a, as the foundation of government and attempt to rid society of non-Islamic influences. (The Shari’a is a wide body of literature that lays out legal principles and norms but is not a legal code or single document.) Many in the Middle East, frustrated by their countries’ politics in the twentieth century, have turned to political Islam. Earlier political movements, such as pan-Arab nationalism, have failed. Corruption, mismanagement, and reliance on foreign support have

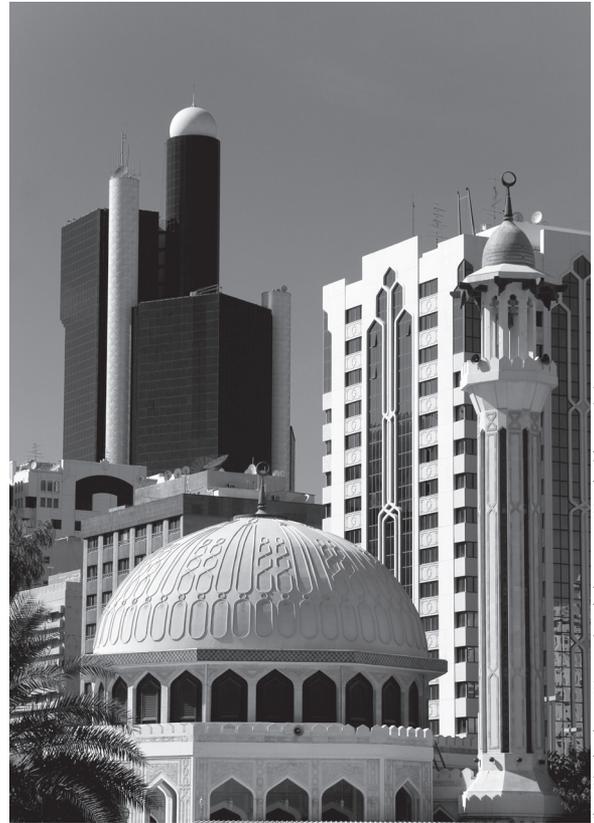
weakened popular faith in Middle Eastern governments. In the midst of these failures, political Islam has gained increasing support.

Islamist movements (movements of political Islam) have grown due to larger economic and social forces as well. In the 1990s, many Middle Eastern countries adopted free-market economic principles that the United States advocated. The reforms called for breaking down trade barriers that had protected local industries, cutting government spending, and selling off state-run companies to private owners. While free-market policies have attracted increased foreign investment to the Middle East, they have also raised unemployment and reduced government assistance to the poor. Economic frustration and insecurity have led many people to turn away from their governments and toward Islamist movements for solutions.

Islamist movements have proven especially strong in the poor neighborhoods of large cities. Many of their supporters are recent migrants from the countryside or the victims of economic reform. For them, Islamist movements are an answer to what they see as reckless change and economic inequity.

### ***How do some political Islamists view the West?***

Political Islam's strength and appeal have increased in the Middle East since the Iranian Revolution in 1979. One of the intellectual founders of modern Islamist radicalism, the Egyptian dissident Sayyid Qutb, argued that existing Arab regimes should all be overthrown as the first step in a war against the



A mosque and skyscrapers in the city of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE is a diverse country whose laws are based on both secular and religious traditions.

enemies of Islam. Some experts believe this is one of Osama bin Laden's unstated goals. In general, the United States regards radical political Islam as a threat to U.S. interests because it often has an anti-Western stance.

## **Islam and the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001**

The terrorist attacks of September 11 raised questions for people in the United States. Many wondered whether terrorism and violence were justified in Islamic scripture or beliefs.

Like all religions, Islam is subject to interpretation. Most interpretations of Islam have given rise to a history of tolerance and peace. (The word Islam is related to the word *salaam*, which means peace.) Islam is a religion that values family and tolerance. Throughout much of history, Muslims have lived peacefully with followers of other religions. For example, many Jews fled the persecutions found in Christian Europe for the relative freedom of the Ottoman Empire. Islam permits the use of force in self-defense, but not the killing of innocents or civilians.

***How has the United States balanced principles and security interests in the Middle East?***

While concentrating on its security and economic interests, the United States has forged many alliances in the Middle East, some based on shared interests and some on shared principles. Balancing principles and security interests in the Middle East remains a challenge for U.S. leaders and citizens.

In general, U.S. policymakers have paid much less attention to promoting democracy and human rights in the Middle East than in other parts of the world. In Latin America, the former Soviet Union, and elsewhere, the

United States often determines foreign aid, trade relations, and other aspects of foreign policy on the basis of political reform. Until recently, U.S. leaders have largely ignored how U.S. allies in the Middle East govern within their borders.

***“For sixty years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in the Middle East, and we achieved neither. Now we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people.”***

—Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice,  
June 2005

### **Alliances: Balancing Principles and Interests**

**Egypt:** The United States has been a firm supporter of the secular government of Egypt because it has helped maintain regional stability. Since the 1979 Camp David Accords, the United States has made Egypt the second largest recipient of all U.S. foreign aid. At the same time, critics note Washington has stood behind Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak’s civil rights violations, including his crackdown on Islamist movements. Egypt has been under emergency law since 1981. Human rights groups complain that torture and imprisonment without trial are widespread in Egypt.

**Israel:** The United States has been a steadfast supporter of Israel for both security and historical reasons. In turn, Israel has stood against U.S. opponents in the region and shared intelligence information with the United States. Some critics note that Israel’s occupation of the West Bank is in violation of international law and complain about repeated Israeli violations of the fundamental rights of Palestinian civilians.

**Jordan:** In recent years, the United States has nurtured good relations with Jordan, a country considered to be a moderate Arab state. In addition to recognizing Israel in 1994, the late King Hussein opened up the political process in the mid-1990s. Whether the momentum to full-fledged democracy can be sustained during the reign of his son, King Abdullah, remains to be seen. U.S. efforts to support Jordan include a free-trade agreement between the two nations that went into effect early in 2002.

**Saudi Arabia:** The United States has carefully cultivated relations with Saudi Arabia since the 1940s because of the Arab nation’s central importance to the world’s oil industry. Saudi Arabia works to ensure an uninterrupted and reasonably-priced flow of oil to the world economy. Critics note that Saudi Arabia is an undemocratic, fundamentalist Islamist regime. For example, Saudi textbooks teach that Christians are infidels, and women are not permitted to vote or drive. Others note the funding for terrorism which flows from Saudi Arabia. Government and industry are dominated by the Saudi royal clan, which numbers in the tens of thousands.

**Turkey:** The United States values its long-standing relationship with Turkey, a secular state and the most westernized Muslim country in the Middle East. Turkey has been a loyal supporter of the United States’ policies and an important member of NATO, the Western military alliance originally formed to oppose the Soviet Union. Turkey’s repressive treatment of twelve million Kurds, an ancient people of the Middle East living in Turkey, has raised concerns for some.

***Why did President Bush call for expanding democracy in the Middle East?***

U.S. President George W. Bush, in a speech in November 2003 on liberty and democracy in the Middle East, called on the United States to promote democracy actively in the region as a way to increase security. He also called on Middle Eastern nations to accept the ideal of freedom.

***“The advance of freedom is the calling of our time; it is the calling of our country.... We believe that liberty is the design of nature; we believe that liberty is the direction of history. We believe that human fulfillment and excellence come in the responsible exercise of liberty. And we believe that freedom—the freedom we prize—is not for us alone, it is the right and the capacity of all mankind.”***

—President George W. Bush

International response to the speech was mixed. Many people in the Middle East and elsewhere supported Bush’s statements, and many others were disappointed or angered.

***“The U.S. has hijacked the noble concept of ‘democracy’ which millions of people have fought for in the Arab world. It is now exploiting the slogan of democracy and human rights for its own known political interests that see nothing in the Middle East but oil pipelines and a secure Israel, without showing any real concern or respect for the region’s inhabitants, citizens, culture, civilization, and history.”***

—Reporter Bateer Mohammad Ali Wardam in the Jordanian newspaper *ad-Dustour*

Whether democracy is universally valued or even universally possible remains unsettled. President Bush has argued that all of the world aspires towards, and is entitled to, liberty. Others argue that democracy reflects

some people’s cultural values rather than universal human values.

There are examples of both positive and negative effects of moves toward democracy in recent years in the Middle East. Coming close on the heels of the elections in Iraq in January 2005, a million Lebanese protestors took to the streets to protest the Syrian presence in Lebanon, and Palestinians elected a new leader following the death of Yasir Arafat.

On the other hand, there may also be some pitfalls of a more democratic Middle East for the United States. For example, Palestinians elected the Hamas party to lead them in early 2006. The United States identifies Hamas as a terrorist organization. Whether it is possible to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict with Hamas in power remains to be seen. You will read more about all of these events in the following pages.

**Regional Security**

Much of the push toward democracy that the Bush administration embraces stems from a belief that a more democratic Middle East will be a more peaceful Middle East. Over the years, security concerns have defined many U.S. policies in the Middle East. After the first Persian Gulf War, the United States geared its policy in the Middle East toward containing both Iran and Iraq. Fears of weapons of mass destruction and concern about Iraq and Iran’s sponsorship of international terrorism fueled anxiety in Washington after September 11, 2001.

***“Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom. Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens—leaving the bodies***

*of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections—then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world. States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger.”*

—President George W. Bush,  
January 29, 2002

## ■ Iraq

For eighteen years, U.S. policy toward Iraq has been headline news. U.S. efforts to contain Saddam Hussein’s regime continued after the first Persian Gulf War. In the war’s aftermath, the United States backed away from pursuing the overthrow of Hussein’s regime. Instead, the United States blocked Hussein from rebuilding his country’s power and hoped that disgruntled military officers would eventually overthrow the government.

At the urging of the United States, the UN Security Council imposed economic sanctions and limited the sale of Iraqi oil in order to keep Saddam Hussein in check. U.S. and British forces prevented the Iraqi air force from flying over northern and southern portions of Iraq.

As part of the cease-fire agreement, UN monitors conducted regular inspections of Iraq

to prevent the production of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. UN weapons inspectors also destroyed vast stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons and their components. In late 1998, Iraq refused to allow UN inspectors a free hand in continuing their search for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and, in response, U.S. and British forces conducted a series massive air strikes. Iraq then refused to allow UN inspectors to operate in Iraq at all until late 2002.

## ***Why did UN weapons inspectors return to Iraq?***

In the summer of 2002, Washington turned the pressure up on Iraq. In a speech before the United Nations, President Bush claimed that Iraq’s alleged WMD program and sponsorship of terrorism posed a danger to the region and to the world. He stated that the United States would confront these dangers and asked the UN to join with the United States.

The UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution calling for Iraq to comply with earlier resolutions and to allow unrestricted access for weapons inspectors once they returned to Iraq. The inspectors returned, but a disagreement quickly emerged among members of the Security Council. The United States and Great Britain argued that the inspections were not working and that twelve years of UN sanctions and resolutions had failed. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell argued before the UN Security Council that Iraq had links to al Qaeda, a charge that turned

## Sanctions and Iraq

Although economic sanctions did not bring about Saddam Hussein’s downfall, they may have helped prevent him from reconstructing his arsenal of weapons of mass destruction—an important contribution. They also prompted accusations that the United States increased the suffering of the Iraqi people. Despite the UN’s humanitarian oil-for-food program, the UN estimated that thousands of Iraqi children died each month because of malnutrition and disease attributable to the sanctions. Observers debate whether the United States or Saddam Hussein was responsible for this tragic situation. Some experts estimate that Hussein had the wealth to feed his people but chose to spend it instead on the military and marble palaces. UN reports, as well as economic and political interests, led France, Russia, China, and Arab nations to oppose U.S. actions and to argue for a reevaluation of policy toward Iraq.

out to be untrue. President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair saw military action leading to “regime change” as the next step. France, Russia, and Germany strongly disagreed with the idea of “regime change” and argued that the UN inspectors should continue trying to ensure the disarmament of Iraq.

U.S. diplomats worked hard to build international support for the U.S. position within the UN as it had for the first Gulf War. In spite of these intensive efforts, President Bush realized that he would not win UN approval for military action against Iraq. Approval would have made the use of force legal.

### ***What did the public think about a war against Iraq?***

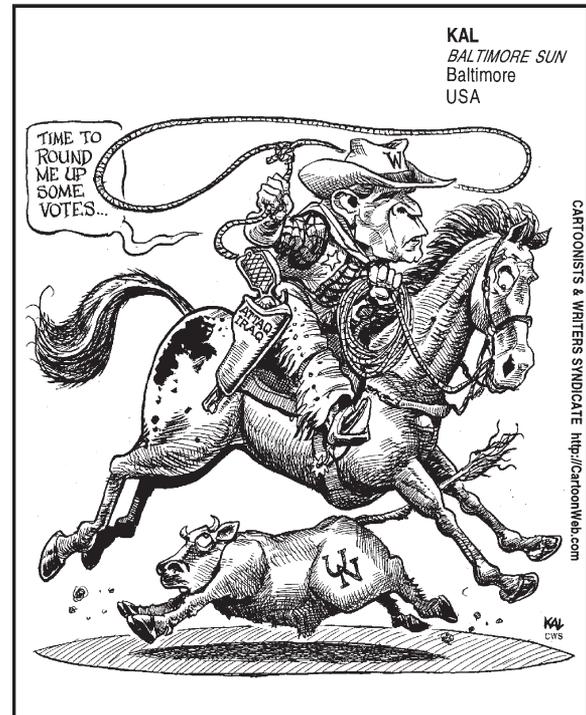
There was widespread public opposition to an invasion of Iraq. For example, on February 15, 2003, millions of people marched in coordinated demonstrations in the United States and around the world.

***“...the huge anti-war demonstrations around the world this weekend are reminders that there may be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world opinion.”***

—Patrick Tyler, *The New York Times*,  
February 17, 2003

Nevertheless, in March 2003, the majority of U.S. citizens favored military action to remove Saddam Hussein from power. A majority also favored taking into account the views of allies before acting. Forty-five percent of U.S. citizens believed that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11 terrorist attacks—an opinion not supported by evidence. (A Senate panel concluded in 2006 that Saddam Hussein’s government had no connections to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.)

President Bush ordered the U.S. military into action. The United Kingdom, Australia, Denmark, and Poland also contributed military forces to the operation. During the military’s advance, U.S. officials worried that the Iraqi



army would use chemical weapons. This did not happen. An intensive search for WMD in Iraq began, but no WMD were found.

***“We are very unlikely to find stockpiles...of weapons. I don’t think they exist.”***

—David Kay, former chief U.S. weapons inspector in Iraq, January 25, 2004

### ***What did the U.S.-led military coalition find in Iraq?***

Although the coalition did not find any WMDs, they did find mass graves of thousands of Iraqis—murdered by Saddam Hussein’s government during his rule. How many Iraqis died at the hands of his regime remains to be tallied, but some believe the final count will approach 350,000.

The U.S. government declared that its primary goals in sending troops to Iraq were to end Saddam Hussein’s regime and to uncover WMD. But the government also had other, more long-term goals for the reconstruction of Iraq. Even before the war began, U.S. leaders believed that a democracy in Iraq could transform the Middle East, providing an example

of freedom that would influence neighboring countries to undergo similar democratic reform.

***“A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region, by bringing hope and progress into the lives of millions.”***

—President Bush, February 26, 2003

### ***What challenges remain in Iraq today?***

In May 2003, the U.S. government established a provisional government in Iraq, led by U.S. officials. Over the next year the United States worked with Iraqis to create an interim constitution and an interim Iraqi government. Since elections in 2005, in which Iraqis voted for a permanent constitution and elected a permanent government, the U.S. government has acted in an advisory role through the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. The embassy has approximately one thousand U.S. government employees, more than any other U.S. embassy. U.S. troops remain to provide security and train the Iraqi police and military.

The new Iraqi government and the U.S. military face multiple challenges. Violence from local militias, insurgents, and terrorist groups continue to wrack the country. This violence makes providing public safety, electricity, water, and other basic services extremely difficult. Deep sectarian divisions within the government and the population limit overall reconciliation and nation-building. Finally, Iraq’s economy has been struggling and many Iraqis are frustrated with the government’s failure to improve the situation.

By May 2008, more than four thousand U.S. soldiers had been killed and tens of thousands wounded in Iraq. Statistics vary widely, but according to UN reports, an average of ninety-four Iraqi civilians died each day in 2006, the worst year in terms of violence since the U.S. invasion. Although the number of civilian casualties has declined since then, about 23,000 Iraqi civilians died from violence in 2007. Some two million Iraqis have fled Iraq since 2003.

Many countries in the Middle East are concerned about the U.S. presence in Iraq. They are also suspicious of U.S. efforts to promote democracy in the region. Since the invasion, governments and other regional organizations have supported or been involved with many of Iraq’s paramilitary groups. Iran in particular has been accused of supplying arms, financial support, and training to a number of groups. Most of the foreign insurgents in Iraq have arrived through the Saudi Arabian and Syrian borders. At the same time, most countries in the region do not want the Iraqi state to fail. Many are worried that if Iraq’s civil war worsens, it will draw other countries into the fight, spilling violence over Iraq’s borders. Many fear that with Shi’i Muslim groups supported by Iran and Sunni Muslim groups supported by countries like Syria and Saudi Arabia, Iraq could turn into a war that might destabilize the entire region.

***“The core of the problem is that if Iraq is divided, definitely there will be a civil war and definitely neighboring countries will be involved in this. The Middle East can’t shoulder this. It’s too much.”***

—Abdullah Gül, former Foreign Minister of Turkey, September 18, 2006

The United States plans to stay in Iraq until it establishes a stable government able to maintain security. How long the United States will remain in the country is uncertain, but many experts predict that it will be years, require additional troops, and cost hundreds of billions of dollars.

### ***How does the conflict in Iraq affect domestic politics in the United States?***

The war in Iraq remains one of the most controversial topics in U.S. politics today, heightened by the failure of U.S. officials there to find any WMD, a principal justification for invading Iraq. While most agree that an end to Saddam Hussein’s brutal dictatorship was positive, many disagreements remain and

are likely to continue to play an important role in U.S. domestic politics.

## ■ Iran

The United States believes that Iran has a well-established program to develop nuclear weapons. The Iranian government has the right to develop nuclear materials to use for nuclear energy. The dilemma for the international community is that it is difficult to distinguish between “good atoms” for peaceful purposes and “bad atoms” for military purposes.



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

In 2002, the international community discovered that Iran had secret nuclear facilities. In a move supported by Washington and Europe, Russian officials proposed supplying Iran with fuel for its nuclear power plants that could be used only for peaceful purposes. This would prevent Iran from having to create its own nuclear fuel. Nevertheless, in 2006 Iran restarted its uranium enrichment program in a move that has heightened concern around the world. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) referred Iran to the UN Security Council, which passed a resolution in December 2006 calling for Iran to suspend its nuclear activities. Iran is currently in violation of that resolution.

France, Germany, and the United Kingdom have negotiated closely with Iran to encourage it to end its nuclear program. Iran's hard-line president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has staunchly defended Iran's right to a civilian nuclear energy program. His public assertion that Israel should be “wiped off the map” has also increased international anxiety about Iran's intentions.

Three other issues affect U.S. relations with Iran. The State Department believes Iran is the leading state sponsor of terrorism. Iran's support for anti-Israeli terrorist groups Hezbol-

lah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad has contributed significantly to violence in the region. Second, the United States believes that Iran's support of the sectarian groups in Iraq fuels violence there. Finally, human rights violations, including the torture and killing of political opponents of the regime, are a continuing cause for concern.

U.S. officials are divided on how best to deal with Iran. Some advocate a hard-line policy to bring about change in Iran's leadership, including military action. Others believe that a policy of diplomatic engagement is a better course.

### *How has Iran changed since the death of Khomeini?*

The record of Iran's Islamic Republic presents a contradictory picture. Well-organized fundamentalist clergymen continue to wield strong influence in the political process and meddle in the private lives of Iranian citizens. The clergy have implemented social codes that classify contact between unmarried or unrelated men and women as a violation of public morality. They have also imposed an ineffective ban on satellite dishes that receive international television signals and have banned western videos and music.

But the Iranian Revolution that first set off alarm bells about political Islam has lost

much of its fire. Since the death of Khomeini in 1989, Iran's leadership has been less eager to export its revolution abroad. Iran's military budget amounts to only one-sixth of Saudi Arabia's and one-half of Israel's, and Iran has not invaded another country since 1736. Iran has also taken steps to encourage foreign investment.

The re-election of a moderate, Mohammad Khatami, as president in 2001 with nearly 60 percent of the vote indicated that Iranian voters wanted to reform the Iranian Revolution. Khatami campaigned for tolerance, social reform, and a greater role for women in public life—a platform that appealed particularly to youth and women. But in February 2004, Iran's clerics disqualified many liberal reform candidates from running for parliament. Many Iranians chose to boycott the 2004 election in protest of the government's action.

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

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

—Anonymous member of Iran's Parliament, June 2003

The presidential election of 2005 seemed to turn Iranian politics on its head once again. The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a religious conservative who supports the system of ruling clerics, ended the reign of the liberal reformers. Ahmadinejad ran on a platform that focused on stamping out corruption and providing aid to the poor. Liberal reformers acknowledged the need to broaden their appeal.

***“We were the party of the intellectuals, so we must change this to develop ideas for the poor and workers. We will still talk about democracy and human rights, but we should explain***

***to people how it will make their lives better.”***

—Former President Mohammad Khatami

### ***How has life changed for Iranians in the Islamic Republic?***

Most Iranians are better off under the Islamic Republic than they were under the shah. Life expectancy in the country has risen from fifty-five years in the late 1970s to seventy years today. The shah neglected remote villages that now have schools, health clinics, roads, and safe drinking water. Nonetheless, economic hardship and widespread unemployment are ongoing problems.

The rights of women in Iran are restricted. They cannot travel abroad without the permission of their husbands, and their testimony in court is worth half that of a man. Nonetheless, Iranian women are ahead of their counterparts in most of the Arab kingdoms of the Persian Gulf. For example, more than 50 percent of the students in Iranian universities are women, and 95 percent of all girls attend primary school.

### **Resolving the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

The Arab-Israeli peace process has commanded a large share of the United States' diplomatic energy over the years. For the past seventeen years, the United States has played an important role in mediating the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. In addition to playing host at negotiating sessions, the United States exerts influence through foreign aid and diplomatic pressure. Israel has long been the leading recipient of U.S. foreign aid, taking in about \$3 billion a year. (Egypt ranks second with about \$2 billion a year.) Arab-Israeli peace is important to the United States today because of the long history of friendship with Israel, because U.S. leaders feel a responsibility to help resolve this violent conflict, and because Israel provides the United States with a powerful ally in an important region.

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

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

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

In recent years, U.S. attachment to Israel has attracted fresh attention. Israel's treatment of the Palestinians under its jurisdiction has drawn more intense criticism. For instance, the Israeli government has limited Palestinians' daily travel to work and elsewhere through checkpoints at the boundaries. The Israeli government built a barrier to separate the Gaza Strip and Israel in the mid-1990s, and is currently constructing a barrier more than 400 miles long to separate the West Bank and Israel. U.S. support for Israel has not wavered, even though it has been a source of resentment in the Arab world. In this section you will read about recent attempts to resolve the conflicts between Israel and its Arab neighbors and between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as current events that have derailed that process.

### **How did the first Gulf War lead to talks between Israel and its neighbors?**

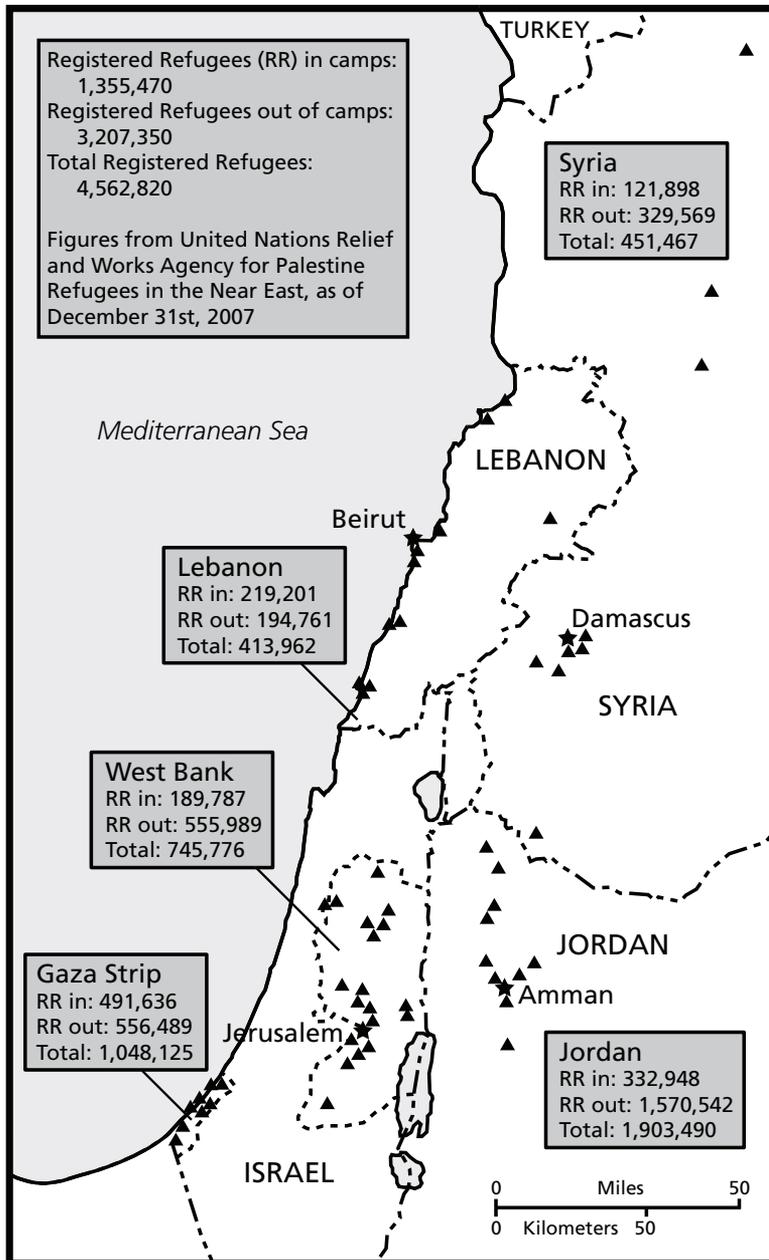
The first Persian Gulf War in 1991 shook



the entire Middle East. A handful of long-range Iraqi missiles struck Israel during the war and reinforced the country's sense of vulnerability. Moreover, some Israelis viewed the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a burden on their society, especially since Palestinians had launched a broad-based protest movement in 1987 known as the first *intifada*. (*Intifada* is an Arabic word that means "shaking-off.")

The 1991 Persian Gulf War also boosted the leverage of the United States. President George H.W. Bush decided to use enhanced U.S. power and influence to try to achieve peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. In October 1991, he persuaded representatives of Israel, the Palestinians, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon to sit down together in Madrid. The participants at the Madrid Conference recognized that the Arab-Israeli conflict was not likely to be resolved with a single treaty. Rather, separate peace talks were initiated between Israel and each of its Arab neighbors. Sometimes these talks have produced positive outcomes, such as the treaty between Jordan and Israel in 1994.

Under the peace treaty, Jordan joined Egypt in officially recognizing Israel. Mauritania is the only other Arab state to extend diplomatic relations to Israel, although Israel has established low-level ties with Morocco, Tunisia, Oman, and Qatar.



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

**What did negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians achieve?**

Many experts consider the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians to be the most difficult element of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Some believe it is the linchpin on which all other elements of the conflict depend. It has

certainly been the most violent in recent years. One reason peace has so far been elusive may lie in the changing leadership on both sides, which has tended to see-saw between more extreme and more moderate approaches. These changes make progress hard to sustain.

During the 1990s, negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians achieved significant breakthroughs. In 1993 during President Bill Clinton’s administration, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasir Arafat shook hands on the White House lawn to seal their first agreement. In the declaration of principles they signed, Israel accepted the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people while the PLO recognized Israel’s right to exist in peace and security and renounced the use of violence. Both sides expressed their support for earlier UN resolutions that called on Israel to withdraw from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights in exchange for an Arab commitment to peaceful relations.

In 1995, Rabin and Arafat met again at the White House to sign a much more detailed treaty. The second agreement laid out a plan to extend Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and to bring Israel’s military occupation of the area to a close.

These agreements produced some concrete changes. A Palestinian government, called the Palestinian Authority, was largely given control of day-to-day affairs in half the Gaza Strip and the main cities of the West Bank, except East Jerusalem. Palestinians also now manage their own police force and elect the officials who govern them.

***How did the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Rabin affect the peace process?***

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators were scheduled to conclude a comprehensive, final

agreement by May 1999. Political developments in the region put that deadline out of reach and the entire peace process in doubt.

In 1995, an Israeli extremist gunned down

**Israel and the Palestinians: What Are the Unresolved Issues?**

**Palestinian Statehood:** Above all, the Palestinians insist on attaining full statehood. They want to control their own borders, form an army, and exercise the rights belonging to independent nations. Some Israelis fear that a full-fledged Palestinian state could endanger their security. They argue that an independent Palestine could be used as a staging ground for attacks against Israel.

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

**Jewish Settlements:** Like the status of Jerusalem, controversy over Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories has stirred passions. Approximately 250,000 Israelis live in the West Bank. Most of them make their homes in modern suburbs ringing Jerusalem. Other Israelis have settled in more remote areas, often for ideological reasons. Many of the settlers, who use a large portion of the scarce resources of the area, vow that they will never accept Palestinian authority. Israel has insisted on maintaining control of the access roads that connect the settlements, effectively carving lands of the Palestinians into isolated pockets. In 2005, Israel withdrew all its settlements in Gaza and plans to withdraw some from the West Bank, a position which the United States endorses.

**The Security Barrier:** In the mid-1990s, the Israeli government constructed a barrier between Israel and the Gaza Strip to prevent the unauthorized entry of Palestinians into Israel and prevent attacks by terrorists. In June 2002, Israel decided to construct a similar barrier in the West Bank. Though not yet completed, the path of the barrier is disputed because it has incorporated disputed Jewish settlements, cut across Palestinian farmland, and made it more difficult for Palestinians in the West Bank to travel freely to work. When completed the wall will total more than 400 miles.

**Palestinian Refugees:** More than 1.7 million Palestinian refugees live in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (The total population of the West Bank and Gaza is 4.14 million). As many as 4.5 million other Palestinians live scattered throughout the Middle East, mostly in Jordan. Palestinian leaders argue that all Palestinians—many of whom were forced to flee during the 1967 War—should have the right to return to their former homes in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Israel. Israeli authorities have resisted opening the Palestinian territories to unrestricted immigration and worry that Palestinians returning to Israel would eventually change the nature of their state. Israelis also note that more than 850,000 Israeli Arabs already live within Israel's borders.

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

Israeli Prime Minister Rabin. Following his assassination a more hard-line prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, came to power. Netanyahu backed away from Rabin's pledge to continue the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the West Bank. His positions brought him into conflict with President Clinton's administration and were not widely popular among Israelis. He lost the elections in May of 1999. Ehud Barak won, largely by promising to negotiate an enduring and comprehensive peace.

### ***What were the results of the Camp David negotiations in July 2000?***

The United States, hoping to conclude an agreement, organized talks with Israel and the Palestinian Authority at Camp David in July 2000. Despite President Clinton's intense involvement, the parties could not reach comprehensive agreement. The status of East Jerusalem, which both groups want to control, was reported to be one of the sticking points in the negotiations. Both Israelis and Palestinians were disappointed and angered by the failed talks. Both sides began to question their leaders.

Shortly after the Camp David talks, violence erupted again. This wave, called the second intifada, killed more than 950 Israelis and 3,200 Palestinians. Many were civilians.

### ***How did Arafat's leadership frustrate the United States and Palestinians?***

Many Palestinians grew frustrated by corruption and mismanagement during Yasir Arafat's leadership of the Palestinian Authority. Most Palestinians faced economic hardship and poverty. In addition, the Israeli government reduced Palestinians' access to job opportunities within Israel for security reasons. Palestinian frustration generated support for hard-line militants who use terrorism and violence in attacks against Israel. Arafat failed to crack down on militant Islamic groups such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas, and to stop them from conducting terrorist attacks on Israel.

Both the United States and Israel saw Arafat's leadership as an obstacle to progress.

His death in November 2004, and the election of Mahmoud Abbas as president of the Palestinian Authority, led to a flurry of new negotiations. After Abbas' election, the United States pledged increased aid to the Palestinians.

Abbas renounced the intifada and made efforts to halt attacks against Israel. Israel, in turn, reduced military activity in the West Bank, and withdrew from the Gaza Strip. The combination of these actions opened the door to negotiations. Both sides agreed to a cease-fire in early 2005. Many hoped that the waves of violence that had wracked the area since 2000 were over. But recent developments have again thrown the future of the peace process into doubt.

### ***How has the election of Hamas affected the peace process?***

In January 2006, Hamas, capitalizing on the frustrations of Palestinians, won a slight majority of votes in democratic legislative elections and assumed control of the Palestinian Authority (Mahmoud Abbas was still president). Hamas, designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union, has both a political and military wing. It is an Islamist organization and its long-term goal is to establish an Islamic Palestinian state on the land historically called Palestine, much of which currently lies in Israel.

The United States, Russia, the United Nations, and the European Union warned Hamas that it would have to recognize Israel's right to exist, forswear violence, and accept previously-negotiated agreements. Israel vowed not to negotiate with Hamas unless it recognized Israel's right to exist and renounced violence. Following Hamas' capture of an Israeli soldier in June 2006, Israel launched a new military offensive in the Gaza Strip, just a year after withdrawing settlements from the area.

Hamas and its rival political party, Fatah (Abbas's party) agreed to form a unity government in September 2006. But factional fighting continued and when Hamas took control of

the Gaza Strip in June 2007, President Abbas dissolved the unity government. Abbas, whose Fatah party retains control of the West Bank, ejected Hamas members from the government of the Palestinian Authority in June. Hamas has established its own government in Gaza. Neither party recognizes the other as the official Palestinian leadership.

In response to Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip, the Israeli government has tightened security on its border with Gaza. Economic conditions in Gaza have become increasingly difficult. Political divisions among Palestinians prevent progress on reconciliation with Israel and achieving political goals within the Palestinian territories. The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, if it still exists, is at a standstill.

### ***Why was there a war on the Israeli-Lebanese border in 2006?***

In mid-2006 a war erupted on the Israeli-Lebanese border between Israel and Hezbollah. Hezbollah is a political and military organization in Lebanon that many consider to be a terrorist.

This violence has a long history. Lebanon borders Israel to the north. Peace between Lebanon and Israel hinges on several factors. First, the relationship between Israel and Lebanon is connected to the relationship between Israel and Syria. Syria insists that it will sign a peace treaty with Israel only if Israel returns the strategic Golan Heights, which have been under Israeli occupation since the 1967 War.

From the 1980s, both Syria and Israel were militarily involved in Lebanon. In May 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Barak ordered a unilateral withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. After huge Lebanese demonstrations against Syria's presence, Syria agreed to withdraw its troops in time for elections in

Lebanon in May 2005. Although Syria's army has left, the Syrian government still influences events in Lebanon.

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

In the middle of 2006, Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers, which led to retaliation from Israel and further violence from Hezbollah. The conflict killed more than a thousand militants and civilians, mostly Lebanese, and made large areas of southern Lebanon uninhabitable because of unexploded bombs. Many foreign nations evacuated their citizens from Beirut during the fighting. Israel invaded Lebanon but failed to find the soldiers.

When the violence subsided, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert came under attack from moderate Israelis as well as from many abroad for what they saw as his overly aggressive and incompetent response to Hezbollah's actions. In Lebanon, increased tension between Hezbollah and government supporters broke out into violence in May 2008. Later that month, leaders signed a peace deal giving Hezbollah more power in the government.

Some Middle East experts view these events—violence in Lebanon and the election of Hamas—as representing a turning point in the peace process. They see some possible positive outcomes from the renewed calls for stability and negotiation. Others are not so hopeful.

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Soaring populations, popular discontent, rising government expenditures, violence in Iraq, and the unresolved situation between Israelis and Palestinians continue to place pressure on Middle Eastern states. How the United States manages the challenges of our dependence on the region's oil, Iran's nuclear ambitions, threats from Islamist terrorists, our presence in Iraq, and the relationship between the Arab world and Israel will be no simple task.

In the coming days, you will have an opportunity to consider a range of options for U.S. policy toward the Middle East. Each of the four options that you will explore is based on a distinct set of values and beliefs. Each takes a different perspective on the U.S. role in the world and its stake in the Middle East. You should think of the options as a tool designed to help you better understand the contrasting strategies from which the United States must craft future policy.

After considering these options, you will be asked to create your own policies that reflect your own beliefs and opinions about where U.S. policy should be heading. You may borrow heavily from one option, you may combine ideas from several options, or you may take a new approach altogether.