Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University

Western Hegemony and the Challenge of Wars and Terrorism

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Center for Islam and Global Affairs
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Foreword

Geopolitical Studies remains one of the primary fields of study at the Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA), particularly as it relates to the changes and transformations within the Muslim World. The following two papers were originally presened at the first CIGA international conference by two prominent scholars. The first dealt with the impacts of Western, particularly American, hegemony on the Arab World by Prof. Richard Falk, while the second dealt with the Challenges of Wars and Terrorism by Prof. Flynt Leverett. It gives us great pleasure at CIGA to have such prominent scholars join our conversation on such important topics.

Department for Geopolitical and Strategic Studies (GPSS)
Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA)

I. Impacts of Western Hegemony on the Arab World

Prof. Richard Falk

A. Introduction

My discussion of Western hegemony in the Arab World somewhat arbitrarily adopts the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I as its starting point for an overview of shifting hegemonic and counter-hegemonic patterns impacting on the political, economic, and social life of the MENA countries.

The emphasis of the conference on the 'Muslim *Ummah*' strikes me as an implicit recognition by those who planned this gathering to approach the political future of the Middle East and North Africa in an empowering manner that indirectly invites interrogation of conventional analytic categories of interpretation. I am inclined to suppose, perhaps incorrectly, that this focus reflects a pedagogical intention to avoid having our understanding of the Islamic world remain a captive of the Western civilizational and political imagination, which accords interpretative primacy to European conceptions of nation-states and territorial notions of political identity and community, and overlooks or uncritically suppresses this template of regional order, which is a major component of the colonial legacy.

Quite long ago, Franz Fanon and others reminded us that the most difficult challenge for newly independent countries is the decolonization of the native mind. In other words, the anti-colonial struggle is far from over when political independence is declared and national flags fly in front of government buildings, and even when a new constitution is drafted and adopted. In this fundamental sense, hegemony, as well as classical colonialism, poses a *mental* challenge that is far more entrenched and elusive than the *material, political, and physical* challenges, which as visible are more easily contested. The same idea put somewhat differently, as illustrative of what can be identified as 'internalized Orientalism' or 'self-Orientalism,' which is particularly insidious as it

subverts our capacity to appreciate and hence resist these almost invisible *post-colonial* hegemonic dimensions of domination.

In this respect to speak of *Ummah* consciousness as providing a potential for 'a paradigm shift' is itself a counter-hegemonic move, exhibiting an intention to consider political, economic, and cultural reality from angles other than the highly individuated Western modernist paradigm, which presupposes that the territorial sovereign state alone constitutes an internationally legitimate political community that is entitled to full membership in international institutions and standard diplomatic recognition in global affairs. To approach the primary reality of the Arab world from this perspective of the *Ummah* produces a strikingly different coding of such fundamental categories of thought, ethics, and behavior as 'identity,' 'community,' and 'economy.' In this regard, it is a rather intellectually, ethically, and politically innovative posture to cast doubt on the Orientalizing idea derived from European experience that the sovereign, territorial nation-state is the only *legitimate political community*, that *nationalism* is the most abiding source of *political identity*, and *neoliberal capitalism* (market forces principally entrusted with the allocation of resources and benefits) is the only *legitimate* and *efficient* way to organize economic life. It is to be observed that this European template of political correctness in 21st century political life is almost devoid of ethical concerns except in the purely volitional contexts of charity or philanthropy, as distinct from obligation as centrally embodied in the Islamic prescriptive approach to political behavior.

Against this background, *Ummah* is not only a potential new paradigm for study and reflection, but is itself a significant, conceptually creative, and ethically driven response to the geopolitical hegemony imposed on the Arab world by the colonial and post-colonial West. Such a paradigm offers the prospect of a new (or more truly, the revival and renewal of an old) imaginary for the Muslim *Ummah*. What this would mean, if translated into political, social, and cultural reality, needs to be pondered

under the guidance of informed academic reflection from plural perspectives.

In the section that follows, the attempt is to depict in summary form the main phases of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic developments in the course of the past century. Certain highlights are selected to bring into view the evolving character of hegemony in the Middle East. It should be evident that the European modernist paradigm of state-centric and secularized world order has been largely taken for granted in the transition from colonial to post-colonial status. It is this epistemological complacency that is implicitly being drawn into question by the very idea of '*ummah*' as an alternative paradigm.

B. Hegemonic and Counter-Hegemonic Turning Points

1. After the Ottoman Empire

Although the Arab world was led to believe by British diplomats that if it joined the struggle against the Ottoman Empire during World War I it would be rewarded afterwards with political independence. This promise was cynically ignored by secret European diplomacy even before the war ended, and the Arab world was cynically betrayed by the British Empire, leading to disillusioning consequences.[1] The colonialist maneuvers of especially Britain, but also France, imposed a thinly disguised hegemonic regime on the Middle East substantively depicted in two historically significant diplomatic document: the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) that was initially a secret arrangement between France and Britain to convert Ottoman ethnically and religiously constituted millets in the region into a series of colonies under European governing control; and the Balfour Declaration (1917) pledging British support to the World Zionist

[1] See Kattan, *From Coexistence to Conquest: International Law and the Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1891*-1949 (London: Pluto, 2009), 98-116; but see Eugene Rogan, The Fall of the Ottomans and the Great War in the Middle East (New York: Basic Books, 2015), also David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (London: Phoennix, 2000).

Movement for the establishment of ‘a Jewish national home’ in Palestine, which had been agreed by Sykes-Picot to become part of the British Empire. Britain coveted Palestine as strategically situated with respect to overland trade routes to India as well as its proximity to the Suez Canal. These two initiatives a century later are best understood to be the deep roots of the war, turmoil, and suffering endured by the peoples of the region, bringing chaos and sustaining oppressive forms of governance to the Arab world of the Middle East and North Africa.

In fact, in the peace diplomacy that followed the First World War, American liberal democracy and the impact of the Russian Revolution both pushed back, at least ideologically, against the naked expression of European colonial ambition. As a result, the Sykes-Picot expectation of formal colonization was scaled back, and essentially repackaged in the form of the international mandates system, which gave total administrative and tutelary authority to Britain and France, throughout the Middle East, including over Palestine. At the same time it paternalistically qualified colonial rights by imposing a vague obligation upon the mandatory powers to prepare the mandated peoples for eventual independence. There is little doubt that the global order was in this period experiencing the twilight of colonialism, which was not yet legally discredited or politically shaken, but increasingly under critical moral scrutiny, subject to the early stirrings of non-Western nationalism, and inspired by the aspirational and contagious advocacy of the right of self-determination inhering in every people. Despite these stirrings of discontent with colonialism, the regional regime that emerged amounted to de facto colonialism, which caused profoundly immediate and longer-term destructive impacts on the region and its peoples. Hegemony under Western auspices was shaped and evolved for the next two decades in response to geopolitical patterns expressive of *colonial ambition*, which was only superficially constrained by the non-colonial, yet imperial, geopolitics of the United States, above all, and to an even more limited extent, by the anti-colonial ideological geopolitics of the Soviet Union. Soviet influence was more verbal than behavioral as the country was

forced to give priority to its own economic development and national security in a hostile international environment.

2. After World War II

At first, after 1945 there was no explicit repudiation of colonialist forms of governance despite some language in the UN Charter affirming an abstract right of self-determination, but lacking operational intent of even a rhetorical character. As the nationalist forces of anti-colonialism began experiencing military and political success, the normative order as dominated by geopolitical leadership and rivalry began increasingly to lend support to anti-colonial struggles around the world. As noted, the Middle East was divided into a series of mandates after World War I. These were gradually converted into independent sovereign states, often with inexperienced and ineffective, yet coercive governance.[2] North Africa had remained subject to colonial rule up through the end of World War II, eventually producing political independence in response to diverse national challenges often involving varying degrees of armed struggle, which took the form of a prolonged and bitter war in Algeria that did not end until 1962.

Palestine evolved as a special case, with the British themselves taking the initiative to end their administrative role, largely in response to the sustained Zionist terrorist campaign designed both to blunt Arab nationalism and to make Palestine ungovernable by the British. The Zionist Project benefitted from the international post-Holocaust atmosphere to consolidate the drive to establish an independent sovereign Jewish state on as much of Palestine as possible.[3] Under these circumstances the British sought to shift responsibility for the future of

[2] These early post-colonial regimes gave priority t.o *order* over competing considerations of *development*, *social justice*, and *human rights*, which translated in practice into harsh and repressive forms of governance to contain mass discontent.

[3] This campaign by Zionist forces is depicted in great detail on the basis of archival sources by Thomas Suárez, *State of Terror: How Terrorism Created Modern Israel* Northampton, MA: Oliver Branch Press, 2017).

Palestine to the UN, which duly followed typical British decolonizing practice of recommending in GA Res. 181 a partition of Palestine, but with the conveniently forgotten feature of proposing the internationalization of the city of Jerusalem.[4] The partition arrangement was superficially accepted by those representing the pre-state Zionist movement while being rejected by the Palestinians for obvious reasons. Partition was also rejected by the Arab members of the UN General Assembly, being perceived as a crude European intrusion on indigenous Arab rights rather than as a humane gesture toward a persecuted people as understood in the West. These contradictory ways of 'seeing' the emergence of Israel are quite illuminating, and should not be viewed as symmetrical narrations, but as giving way to the primacy of the Zionist narrative, reflecting both Jewish influence in elite political circles as well as dominance over dissemination via the channels of popular culture (e.g. the *Exodus* phenomenon).[5]

The 1948 War ensued, with Israel prevailing, enlarging its territory from the 55% recommended by the UN partition plan to 78% at the time a ceasefire was declared, which territorially accentuated the demographic imbalance between Palestinians and Israelis. Jerusalem was left divided, with its Eastern half under Jordanian administration at the time an armistice agreement was reached in 1948. Israel established its state on this enlarged territorial expanse having permanently dispossessed as

[4] Apparently, British colonial policy was divided about how to deal with the future of Palestine, with the Peel Commission in 1937 recommending partition, and the report of Sir John Woodhead a year later concluding that partition was impractical. Britain was left with a dilemma, having accepted responsibility for Palestine but weakened by World War II, and no longer willing and capable of maintaining control. Britain thus chose the UN as a way out that took no account of its failure to protect the native majority population. For depiction of the politics of partition see Victor Kattan, Note 1, 146-168.

[5] Zionism understood the importance of what be termed 'discourse control,' shaping the stories and images that sway international public opinion in the desired direction. In this regard, the dominant message disseminated by Zionist discourse control was of unprecedented Jewish suffering (the Holocaust) and the erasure of Palestinian concerns, above all, the awkward reality that despite decades of Zionist induced immigration to Palestine the non-Jews remained in 1947 the majority population in Palestine.

many as 700,000 Palestinians, and yet still unwilling to pronounce its 1948 borders as the extent of its territorial ambitions.[6] Why? Because the dominant Zionist vision of Israel always included control over the entire city of Jerusalem, as well as the West Bank, both regarded as belonging to the biblical entitlement of the Jews, which was always the main drawing card used to induce Jews to return to their 'promised land.'[7]

In effect, a European settler colony was established in what had been Palestine during the period when colonialism was collapsing elsewhere in the world, and not only established by force of arms, but also given almost instant legitimacy by admission to the United Nations and widespread recognition by most important states in the world. One partial explanation of this unexpected and unpopular development outside the West was associated with the Western consensus that the Jewish people

[6] It is important to appreciate that the expulsion of the Palestinians and the denial of any right of return to their homes and long-term place of residence was integral to the Zionist Project from its inception, which not only wanted to establish a Jewish state, but also a democratic state. There was no way to satisfy these two goals without altering the demographics of the portion of Ottoman Palestine set aside by agreement and war as the site of the Jewish state. To sustain this Zionist vision has depended on subjugating the Palestinian people by means of a politics of fragmentation that involved massive ethnic cleansing, followed by a cluster of policies and practices that involve structures of subjugation based on race that constitute the international crime of apartheid. See UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA study) ,of Richard Falk and Virginia Q Tilley, "Israeli Practices Towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid,"
Southern Illinois University Carbonddale, for text of report see <OpenSIUC>
Also Richard Falk, "The Tragic Interplay of International Law and Geopolitics," *Palestinian Yearbook of International Law,* forthcoming 2018.

[7] See text of Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, 14 May 1948, for confirmation of this Zionist vision associated with 'Eretz-Israel,' which while not spelled out by reference to clear territorial claims to be fulfilled, sets forth a framework that can be accommodated to Israeli expansionist goals. It is important to appreciate that the Zionist movement has always double-coded its political intentions, providing one version for essentially public relation purposes and another, often hidden from view, which embodies the real policy agenda. In recent years the public endorsement of the 'two-state solution' is offset by the real policy of establishing Greater Israel through a dynamic of settlement expansion. See also Ari Shavit's influential book, praised widely for its 'warts and all' vindication of the Zionist narrative. Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel* (New York: Spiegel & Graf, 2013).

deserved a secure political sanctuary after the ordeal experience during the period of Nazi rule. Another was the influence of diaspora Jews in using their influence to tip the scales of judgment in many governments of the world. It was not appreciated widely, but many area specialists in Western governments (derisively known in Washington as 'Arabists') opposed overlooking Palestinian rights in this early period, fearing that it would become strategically costly to the West, especially with respect to the security of oil supplies.

The political context also reflected the gradual displacement of European hegemony by the United States, which filled the geopolitical vacuum created by the weakening capabilities and political will of the former European hegemons. The overt colonial order collapsed, but the emergent nominally independent states in the Middle East had been configured by colonial design rather than reflecting organic national growth. This reality contributed to a reliance on severely coercive internal patterns of governance abetted by external supports as the only means to produce political stability in ethnically plural communities that included strong tribal affinities, and never assumed the characteristics of a natural political community, nor had the competence and will to meet the material expectations of their citizens. This dynamic of control and illegitimacy underlies much of the contemporary disorder, which has been aggravated by intra-regional and sectarian tensions reflecting clashing ambitions among leading states, including Israel, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. As the mass spontaneous support given to Arab Uprisings of 2011 demonstrated, none of the governments in the region enjoyed popular legitimacy with their own peoples, and could only sustain control by force of arms, draconian punishment of dissent, and material subsidies.

This period of adaptation to the collapse of European colonialism posed a continuing challenge to the hegemonic policies of the West. The United States filled the geopolitical vacuum, and exerted considerable leverage on the internal politics of newly independent Arab states, both by way of

military training and assistance programs and through varying forms of covert penetration. Over time the balance of forces between Israel and the region eased the tensions experienced in the early post-colonial period of clashing strategic interests that created the perceived need in Washington to be the international guarantor of the security and legitimacy status of Israel without seriously eroding relations with Arab governments, especially Saudi Arabia with its vast oil and natural gas reserves. Until the 1967 War decisively displayed Israel military prowess as compared to its Arab neighbors, this produced a display of diplomatic juggling to keep its dual interests protected.

3. The Iranian Islamic Revolution

Iran, although non-Arab, has been a vital strategic battleground throughout the region ever since 1945. Along with Turkey, Iran was seen as the containment boundary in confronting the Soviet Union outside of Europe, and was the centerpiece of the Truman Doctrine, which can be viewed as the official declaration in the West of the Cold War. Iran again figured prominently in hegemonic geopolitics in response to the election of Mohammed Mosadegh as the fiercely anti-dynastic leader who had the temerity to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian oil company. Such moves against international capital could not be tolerated, especially in the energy sector. In response, a CIA guided coup in 1953 restored the Pahlavi Dynasty to the peacock throne, brought the Shah back to Iran from exile, and most important of all, restored foreign private sector ownership of the oil industry, with American oil giants gaining a far greater role than previously, as well as cementing Iran's strong Cold War role as strategic partner.[8] Iran under the Shah was a reliable ally, unconditionally supportive of American foreign policy priorities according to Kissinger, governing in an oppressive style that significantly adopted a development approach ('the White Revolution') featuring the

[8] For reliable account, illuminating as to the U.S. role see Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2008).

role of international capital, which had the unintended effect of alienating to the domestic entrepreneurial class, and contributing to the erosion of middle class support for the Shah's regime.

Finally, in 1978 a long movement of massive opposition to the Shah and to the American military presence in the country unfolded in street demonstrations. Violent tactics by the Iranian state widened and deepened the popular opposition, and pointed increasingly to the leadership provided by the long exiled religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini. As the mass mobilization intensified, the U.S. did not hide its efforts to find ways to suppress the movement, first encouraging the Shah to use drastic tactics of response and then searching for elements in the armed forces that might produce a military coup that could restore the throne to the Shah for a second time.[9] These attempts failed, and the revolution proceeded to establish its governing authority, initially under moderate Islamic influence presided over by secular political personalities, but it was clear that Khomeini was the dominant political figure, and although he initially withdrew from politics to resume his religious life in the holy city of Qom, after a few months he returned to Tehran to take over the governance and political restructuring of the country until his death a decade later.

It was clear from the outset that the Iranian Revolution was also an Islamic Revolution, and this alone set it apart from other contemporary revolutions.[10] This meant that the religious orientation intended to shape politics in Iran was also seen as a major counter-hegemonic ideological move in the Middle East and North Africa.[11] What was at stake was the

[9] For a still perceptive assessment of the Iranian Revolution see Amin Saikal, *Rise and Fall of the Shah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Saikal, *Iran at the Crossroads* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016)

[10] There remains an ambiguity and uncertainty as to whether the Islamic dimension was meant to be actualized internally or was meant to extend to beyond Iran's borders to enhance Shi'ia influence or more broadly, to Islamic tendencies throughout the region.

[11] See Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power* (New York: Basic, 2012) for a mainstream recognition of the geopolitical challenges

primacy of the *Ummah* as the source of political community and personal identity, a contention that civilizational orientation was a more significant marker than national or ethnic factors.[12] This was the fundamental challenge directed at the comparable ideas evolved in modern, secular Europe and North America, and constituted the ground of both 'political Islam' and the determined and complex pushback by the United States as goaded by Israel. The conflict took a definitive conflictual form with the seizure of the American Embassy and its personnel in November 1979 that both radicalized internal politics in Iran and deepened the confrontation with the United States. Although 'the hostage crisis' was resolved at the first stage of the Reagan presidency, political normalization has never returned either globally or regionally, and indeed the confrontation between the West and Iran assumed new and more menacing forms in subsequent years.

Iran has been at the center of a Washington policy debate as to how best to satisfy American hegemonic ambitions, producing a cleavage among policymakers and Washington think tanks. For the mainstream national security establishment, stabilization and war avoidance was given primacy, culminating during the Obama presidency in the 2014

posed by post-Cold War international political developments. For an alternate view see Richard Falk, *Power Shift: On the New Global Order* (London: Zed, 2016).

[12] This became clear to me in the course of a long interview with Ayatollah Khomeini in Paris on the day before his return to Iran in February 1979. The religious leader was intent on conveying the message that this should be primarily regarded as an 'an Islamic revolution,' and only secondarily as 'an Iranian revolution.' In this central respect, it was very different from the Mossadegh challenge to Western hegemony, foreshadowing the superseding of the Marxist/Soviet challenge via state socialism in countries such as Syria and Iraq with an Islamic challenge. Khomeini's political vision on that occasion included his view that dynastic rule was incompatible with Islam, a position he did not connect with sectarian beliefs, and his sense that Israel was a hostile illegitimate presence that was encroaching on Palestinian rights. From this standpoint it is hardly surprising that Saudi Arabia and Israel should both be opposed to and threatened by the emergence of a robust Islamic state in Iran. There is no doubt also that Khomeini sought to promote a counter-hegemonic agenda in the Middle East, although without using that kind of political language. The Iraq attack on Iran in 1980, encouraged behind the scenes by the United States, represented an unlawful and humanly costly failed attempt to reestablish a West-oriented hegemony throughout the region.

Comprehensive Agreement on Iranian Nuclear Program Agreement (P5 + 1), which limited Iran's nuclear program with an eye toward preventing the acquisition of nuclear weapons in exchange for moves in the direction of lessening sanctions and political normalization. The Israeli/neoconservative approach was far more confrontational, disliking the agreement, seeking to threaten Iran with a military attack unless a series of steps were taken to diminish Iran's regional role in such countries as Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon. In this more radical approach the implicit presumption seems to be that only regime change in Tehran could justify reductions of pressure, suggesting a willingness to promote hardline ascendancy in Iran and a regional war. Such an ill-advised belligerent posture, which seems to reflect the Trump position, and strongly reinforces the central contention of John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt that the Israeli lobby in America pushes the U.S. Government to pursue policies at variance with its national interest in the region.[13]

The clash with Iran is illustrative of the shifting pattern of threats to Western hegemony in the Arab world. Up until the Iranian revolutionary experience, American hegemonic tactics regarded Islamic militants as sharing anti-Communist and anti-Soviet priorities, and were thus blindsided by the Iranian movement that attacked a secular government that was clearly aligned with the West in relation to Cold War objectives.[14] Since 1979, and the hostage crisis, a decade before the fall of the Berlin Wall it was clear that maintenance of American hegemony depended upon thwarting the range of challenges posed by Islamic movements throughout the region. As the Arab Uprisings in 2011 made clear, democratizing also produces Islamicizing, and its inevitable

[13] See John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008)

[14] I recall meeting with William Sullivan, the American ambassador in Tehran when the outcome of the Iranian Revolution was clear. He said that the embassy had prepared 26 scenarios of threats to the Shah's rule, and that not one of them had pointed to Islamic militancy.

counter-hegemonic agenda, which then unleashed a backlash that rolled back political and economic hopes and expectations. Especially in light of the Iraqi debacle of 2003, which waved the banner of 'democracy promotion,' the United States has favored hegemonic priorities over its supposed normative endorsement of democracy whenever the two are in conflict.

4. After the Cold War

The Cold War that started a few years after 1945 with the Middle East becoming one of the regions in which the bipolar rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union was dangerously enacted. It provided the backdrop for a variety of American interventions, most significantly in Iran (1953) and Lebanon (1958), with the unresolved Israel/Palestine conflict playing a big role in conditioning and complicating the American hegemonic presence. After the Israeli victory in the 1967 War the strategic partnership between Israel and the United States began to take shape, and assumed even greater significance after the Iranian Revolution (1978). In this period there were many phases of the struggle for supremacy, containment of Soviet influence, and always at the forefront was the acknowledged strategic importance accorded to maintaining assured Western access to and reasonable prices for Gulf oil and natural gas. Several major American allies were dependent on reliable petroleum supplies, and the normal functioning of oil and gas markets was essential for world economic stability. In this period, especially after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan following soon after the successful Iranian Revolution, there was a genuine sense that defending Western hegemony in the Arab world was worth risking World War III.[15]

[15] The Carter Doctrine was enunciated in Jimmy Carter's State of the Union Address on January 23, 1980 to convey to Moscow a willingness to risk a major military confrontation if the Soviet Union directly or indirectly threatened Western hegemonic control of oil geopolitics, although the language used was the less provocative, namely to "protect interests in the Persian Gulf."

With the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a prelude to the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union a few years later, a new set of realities gained prominence in the Middle East. There was a policy split in Washington between those who wanted to seize the unipolar moment (of Soviet collapse) to restructure the internal political orientation of several key Arab countries with the principal objectives of making their governing outlook sympathetic with Western concerns (oil, Israel, nuclear nonproliferation, political Islam), relying on coercive diplomacy, including even military intervention to uphold this range of strategic interests. In opposition were those of liberal internationalist persuasion who were primarily interested in promoting economic globalization via trade and investment, and wanted to avoid military action in the region. The neocons and Israeli lobby were definitely on the military proactive side, while the political and bureaucratic mainstream were in opposition, seeking stability and opportunities for private investment and economic growth, desiring to avoid expensive military operations, but the two sides shared hegemonic ambitions and policy priorities, and most significantly, the belief that the Middle East, no longer Europe, had become the strategic arena in which the future hierarchy of the post-Cold War world order would be determined. The Obama presidency was itself divided between those that wanted to regard the Middle East as the most strategic zone of rivalry and those that saw the rise of China as the more compelling geopolitical challenge after the Soviet collapse.[16]

5. After 9/11 and 2011: Pretext and Contradiction

The latest phases of Western hegemonic tactics and counter-hegemonic challenges can be best understood as response to two disruptive happenings: the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in 2001 and the Arab Uprisings in 2011 including their counterrevolutionary

[16] The latter view is fully articulated by Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin, 2014), esp. 1-10; 212-233; 321-374.

aftermath.[17] Both of these instances of counter-hegemonic developments gave rise to significant reformulations of hegemonic tactics and rationale. As with prior response patterns, including to the Iranian Revolution, there is a merger of grand strategy and security policy that disguises and confuses the hegemonic regrouping.

For instance, the counter-terrorist war emphasis was merged in 2003 with the neoconservative agenda of democratizing regime change and establishing a major military presence in the Middle East. This approach adopted by the neoconservative presidency of George W. Bush was given its definitive test in the Iraq War. This undertaking rationalizing an unlawful military attack by invoking the pretext of removing from Iraq illegally retained weapons of non-nuclear mass destruction, preventing its development of nuclear weapons, and removing from authority a tyrannical leader who was alleged (falsely) to be complicit in 9/11, as well as incidentally promoting democratization and human rights.[18] A lengthy occupation ensued in Iraq that indirectly contributed to the turmoil and prolonged civil strife that followed the 2011 uprisings elsewhere in the region, spreading throughout the Arab World in the form of war and counterrevolution. Syria and Egypt are two sides of the same tragedy that has befallen the Arab World, expressed by prolonged civil strife for Syria and oppressive counterrevolution for Egypt.

These distinct national tragedies undoubtedly have been aggravated by the persistence of hegemonic ambitions of the United States. As well, Israeli/Saudi belligerence focused on Iran has exerted a radicalizing influence on the American role, pushing it in the direction of their

[17] See Richard Falk, *Chaos and Counterrevolution: After the Arab Spring* (Charlottesville, VA: Just World Books, 2015)*; also* Bulent Aras & Richard Falk, eds.,, "Five Years After the Arab Spring," *Third World Quarterly Symposium*, Vol. 37, Number 12, 2016, 2252-2334.

[18] Considerable damage to the authority of international law and the United Nations resulted from this non-defensive aggression against Iraq that proceeded despite the refusal of the UN Security Council to back the proposed US/UK operation. For negative impacts on world order see Richard Falk, *The Costs of War: International Law, the UN, and World Order after the Iraq War* (New York & London: Routledge, 2008).

regional goals, which include intense opposition to any democratizing development.[19] Israel is worried about the extent to which 'the people' throughout the Arab World support the Palestinian struggle if given the chance to exert their preferences, while, somewhat in contrast, Saudi Arabia is worried about anti-monarchial tendencies of any popular movement. It was evident that Obama's affinity with human rights and democratization were at odds with the priorities of both Israel and Saudi Arabia, and helps explain why Trump's style and substance seems much more congenial. Saudi Arabia, despite its own mixed record on political extremism, especially as the major financier of radicalizing madrasas throughout the Arab World, is even willing to join Trump's counterterrorist war so as to strengthen the coalition among anti-democratic forces throughout the region.

6. The Trump Presidency: An Enigma

It may be too soon to tell whether the pro-Israeli/Saudi Arabia leaning of the Trump presidency will outweigh Trump's strident emphasis on 'America First,' which many Republican members of the national security establishment interpreted to mean a renunciation of hegemonic dimensions of American foreign policy in the Middle East and elsewhere.[20] Also, in the mix is the struggle to attain Trump's goal of 'crushing ISIS' which seems to have achieved some success by

[19] But for Israel's arsenal of nuclear weapons it would be a geopolitical no brainer to establish a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East, an initiative favored by every other country in the region including Iran. Such an influence on U.S. diplomacy is a strong confirmation of the degree to *which* the special relationship with Israel and the Israeli Lobby distort American foreign policy in the region.

[20] See David E. Sanger & Maggie Haberman, "50 G.O.P. Officials Warn Donald Trump Would Put Nation's Security at Risk," *NY Times,* August 8, 2016. It is important to appreciate this unprecedented rupture in political party loyalty arose because Trump's campaign for the presidency in 2016 was perceived by these right-wing national security experts as endangering the American global domination project pursued on a bipartisan basis since 1945.

destroying the ISIS caliphate, but whether this presages the demise of ISIS terrorism around the world is impossible to know at this time.

C. Conclusion

There is no doubt that for the past hundred years, the West has sought to impose its hegemonic priorities on the Arab World, reacting to shifting challenges as these have arisen. When the United States assumed hegemonic leadership for the West in the decades after 1945, the Arab Middle East, as well as Iran and Turkey, were regarded as crucial strategic zones to control and defend, as necessary. The threats to this Western hegemony was focused on the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but then shifted to concerns about political Islam and populist forms of nationalism. The so-called 'special relationships' with Israel and Saudi Arabia definitely influenced hegemonic policies in controversial ways. Many pointed to Tel Aviv's influence in Washington and the Israeli Lobby in the U.S. as magnifying the tensions with Iran and explaining the ambivalence of the U.S. Government to the anti-authoritarian animus of the 2011 Arab Uprisings.

The regime-changing interventions in Iraq and later in Libya (2011) illustrated different forms of failure associated with Western hegemonic ambition. These two instances of military intervention, with the Libyan undertaking given an initial limited blessing by the UN Security Council, achieved such disappointing results as to both discredit intervention and the UN, leading to a kind of geopolitical ambivalence in response to the Syrian strife that antagonized both interventionists and anti-interventionists and led to multi-dimensional intervention by a variety of regional, non-state, and global actors. The terribly bloody tragedies of Syria and Yemen, including the accompanying massive human displacement and forced migration, highlight the severe populist, civic, and normative deficiencies of world order in the 21st century.

II. The Challenge of Wars and Terrorism
Prof. Flynt Leverett

A. Introduction

Understanding the challenge that wars and terrorism pose to the *umma* starts by recognizing this challenge, at its source, as a function of America's determination to remain the Middle East's dominant external power. This determination flows from U.S. policymakers' assessment, over decades, that primacy in the Middle East is central to America's global strategic position.

Access to Persian Gulf hydrocarbons has, of course, been a consistent driver of American Middle East policy. But U.S. interest in these resources has never been primarily about Persian Gulf hydrocarbons meeting America's own energy needs; rather, since the early days of the post-World War II period, U.S. interest in Persian Gulf hydrocarbons has been about controlling who gets access to them, and leveraging that control to bolster U.S. power and influence in other important parts of the world, especially Europe and Asia.[21] Since the 1970s, asserting responsibility for securing Persian Gulf oil and gas flows has also been key to keeping the dollar the world's leading transactional and reserve currency—something that U.S. policymakers have long seen as vital to preserving America's "deficit superpower" grand strategy.[22]

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[21] Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984/2005), 139–41, 150–81, 190–95, 202–06; Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon, 2009), 6–16, 40–62, 107–11; Doug Stokes and Sam Raphael, *Global Energy Security and American Hegemony* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 1-53; and Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, "The Balance of Power, Public Goods, and the Lost Art of Grand Strategy: American Policy toward the Persian Gulf and Rising Asia in the 21st Century," *Penn State Journal of Law and International Affairs* 1, no. 2 (November 2012), 216–18.

[22] David Spiro, *The Hidden Hand of American Hegemony: Petrodollar Recycling and International Markets* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 23-48, 103-116, 121-

For these reasons, successive U.S. administrations have worked since the end of World War II to consolidate a highly militarized, pro-U.S. political and security order in the Middle East. In many ways, the Cold War imposed constraints on U.S. efforts to do this. But since the Cold War ended—and remember that the Cold War's end coincided with prosecution of the first Persian Gulf War—Washington has judged itself freer to forge a highly militarized, pro-U.S. regional order in the Middle East, and to ostracize and undermine those actors unwilling to subordinate their strategic independence to such an arrangement.

This agenda has shaped a consistent and highly interventionist post-Cold War U.S. approach to the region. Of course, one can accurately note that the George H.W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama, and now Trump administrations differed on various elements of Middle East policy—e.g., the role of Arab-Israeli diplomacy, the declaratory balance between democracy promotion and backing pro-U.S. autocrats, and other points one might identify. But those differences are, in the end, tactical. Strategically, all these administrations committed to an ongoing quest for U.S. primacy in the region, grounded in the consolidation of a U.S.-led regional order.[23]

Both before and after the Cold War, the ultimate goal of U.S. efforts to forge a highly militarized, pro-U.S. political and security order in the

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124, 146-148; Miguel Otero-Iglesias and Federico Steinberg, "Reframing the Euro Vs. Dollar Debate Through the Perceptions of Financial Elites in Key Dollar-Holding Countries," *Review of International Political Economy* 20, no. 1 (January/February 2013), 192, 197; and Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, "America's Monetary Stake in the Gulf and the Looming Challenge of the Petro*yuan*," in *The United States and the Gulf: Shifting Pressures, Strategies and Alignments*, ed. Steven Hook and Tim Niblock (Berlin: Gerlach, 2015), 115-116, 118-124.

[23] For critical assessments, see John Mearsheimer, "Imperial by Design," *National Interest* 111 (January/February 2011), 16-34, http://nationalinterest.org/article/imperial-bydesign-4576 (accessed Dec. 7, 2016); Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, *Going to Tehran: Why America Must Accept the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: Metropolitan/Picador, 2013), 1-11, 328-334; and Andrew Bacevich, *America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York: Random House, 2017), 137-371.

Middle East has been to keep truly independent powers from arising in the region. Blocking independent power centers has meant, above all, preventing the emergence of representative political orders in Muslim societies. American policy elites strongly presume that such orders—which are likely to be defined by some version of what can usefully be described as participatory Islamism—will be unwilling to subordinate their strategic independence in fundamental ways to U.S. policy preferences. This is the essential backdrop for understanding the challenge that wars and terrorism pose to the *umma*. It is this agenda that has propelled U.S. invasions, campaigns of militarized regime change, and other forms of coercive intervention in the Middle East. And those invasions and campaigns of militarized regime change have created conditions in which extreme and unrepresentative groups like *al-Qa'ida* and the Islamic State can take root, grow, and evolve.

B. Consequences of U.S. Interventionism

U.S. policy has contributed to the rise of unrepresentative extremists in the *umma* in at least two major ways. First, U.S. interventions in the Middle East have essentially destroyed existing states in key regional theaters; Iraq and Libya are prime examples of this. In their wake, these interventions have left governance and security vacuums that unrepresentative militants—and their various external patrons—have been all too happy to exploit for their own purposes.

Second, as U.S. administrations have worked to bring more and more of the Middle East into the kind of highly militarized, pro-U.S. regional order Washington has long sought, those administrations have themselves regularly resorted to arming, funding, and training unrepresentative militants as a tool to advance U.S. policy goals. U.S. administrations have done this in partnership with regional allies, as in Washington's serial collaborations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states to arm, fund,

and train Sunni militias in various regional theaters.[24] They have also done it in defiance of regional allies' clearly stated opposition, as with America's recurrent support for Kurdish militias.

Whatever the preferences of America's regional allies, when U.S. policymakers have judged that advancing their particular vision of regional order required supporting unrepresentative militants, they have not hesitated to do so. Since 9/11, Washington has compounded the negative effects of these policies by wielding the mantle of "counterterrorism" to justify further interventionism and intensified suppression of potentially more representative politics in the region.

C. Poor Prospects for U.S. Strategic Adjustment

I have long argued such a strategic approach to the Middle East does not actually serve long-term American interests, properly understood. My perspective is grounded in experience. I served in the U.S. government for more than a decade, from 1992 (just after the first Persian Gulf War) until 2003 (just before the invasion of Iraq). These years mark, in many ways, the high point of U.S. power, influence, and standing—in the Middle East, certainly, but also globally. During my time in government, I watched as the United States misused and, as a result, dissipated significant measures of its power and influence. This dynamic has only gotten worse since I left government.

Overall, U.S. engagement in the Middle East over the past quarter century, since the end of the Cold War, is a textbook example of what Paul Kennedy famously described as "imperial overstretch"—a great power's expansion of strategic ambitions and commitments beyond its capacity to sustain them.[25] In the U.S. case, trying to remake and,

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[24] Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, "America's Middle East Delusions," *National Interest*, June 15, 2014, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/americas-middle-east-delusions-10672?page=show.

[25] Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987) and Ezzat Ibrahim, "America Goes Too Far" (interview with Paul Kennedy), *Al*

ultimately, to subordinate the Middle East through military campaigns and other forms of coercive intervention has not just failed; it has been profoundly self-damaging to America's international position. By seeking to dominate the region, the United States has imposed missions on its armed forces that not even the world's most powerful military could accomplish, squandered vast human and material resources on a scale that not even the world's largest economy could sustain, and has eviscerated the perceived legitimacy of U.S. purposes for the vast majority of Middle Easterners.[26] That is the paradox and, one might even say, the tragedy of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East—by seeking regional dominance, regional primacy, America only makes itself weaker, in terms of its capacity to shape important outcomes in a genuinely constructive and positive way.

Of course, the U.S. approach is also problematic for Middle Easterners and for the *umma*. U.S. policymakers present American "leadership" in the Middle East as a source of regional and global public goods—energy security, regional security, counterterrorism, etc. In fact, U.S. efforts to consolidate a highly militarized, pro-American political and security order in the Middle East actually work against energy security and encourage terrorist threats. Pre-9/11 U.S. policy sparked the rise of (for lack of a better short-hand) *jihadi* terrorism; post-9/11 U.S. policies and actions have, on balance, made the threat of violent *jihadi* militancy worse.[27]

But, all that being noted, the United States is unlikely to change its approach to the Middle East anytime soon. As an American who cares about his country's foreign policy, I hope this statement is wrong. Analytically, though, I do not anticipate that U.S. Middle East policy will

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Ahram Weekly Online 814 (September 28-October 4, 2006), http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/archive/2006/814/intrvw.htm.

[26] Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, "Reality Check: America Needs Iran," *National Interest*, April 7, 2015, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/reality-check-america-needs-iran-12561?page=show

[27] Leverett and Mann Leverett, "America's Middle East Delusions."

shift in strategically meaningful ways—certainly not as much as it needs to shift.[28] So it is important to focus on options for what the *umma* itself can do to address the challenge of wars and terrorism, even if American policy does not change fundamentally for the foreseeable future.

D. Options for the Umma

Broadly, there are two such options (not mutually exclusive). One is for Muslim countries, especially in the Middle East, to diversify their relationships with extra-regional great powers and work relatively more with other extra-regional powers. As Russia and China both step up their engagement in the Middle East, on multiple fronts and in different ways, they present the most salient opportunities for regional countries to intensify their engagement with extra-regional powers other than the United States. It is important for regional countries to pursue these opportunities.

Russia and China are both playing expanding and, on balance, positive roles in the Middle East. Both countries have the potential to play bigger regional roles in the future. But, while it is important for regional countries to diversify their relations with extra-regional great powers by deepening their engagement with Russia and China, this option, in and of itself, is inadequate to address the challenge of war and terrorism. While Russia and China are playing, on balance, positive roles in the Middle East, both countries' approaches to the region have aspects that many Middle Easterners can and do see as problematic. Among other things, both have views on "counterterrorism" that increasingly overlap with some of the worst aspects of American and Western perspectives. As I have visited China in recent years, I have been struck by the level of both

[28] For discussion, see Flynt Leverett, "Middle East and North Africa" in *America's International Role Under Donald Trump*, ed. Xenia Wickett (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2017), 37-41. While this assessment was published in January 2017, on the eve of Trump's inauguration, subsequent events have substantially affirmed the main analytic arguments about the direction of U.S. Middle East policy under a Trump administration.

elite and popular alarmism about Islamic extremism, which is, in terms of dominant Chinese narratives on the subject, increasingly synonymous with Islam itself. There are certainly people in China—scholars, analysts, a not small cadre of officials—who know better. But trends are not going in the right direction. So, while Muslim countries need to diversify their extra-regional great power partnerships, it is important to recognize that this is insufficient by itself to address the challenge of wars and terrorism.

The other option is for political actors in the Middle East and across the *umma* to take more initiative themselves to shape a regional order in this part of the world less defined by U.S. ambitions. This starts with independent regional powers checking the worst impulses of other regional actors ultimately dependent on a dominant America.

Iran and Turkey have especially key roles to play in this regard. If you look at the Middle East balance of power in historical perspective, within the geography typically defined as "the Middle East," one finds Arab, Persian, and Turkic power centers. Iran has been a coherent "civilizational state" for millennia (like China). Turkey has also had a coherent political identity, grounded in a coherent civilizational identity, for a long time—and, of course, Turkey has the Ottoman experience and legacy of several centuries as its region's dominant power. In this context, Iran and Turkey can both be described as "natural" states in the Middle East. Arab power and political identity, by contrast, has, for a long time, not been nearly so coherent. This fragmentation of Arab political identity and many other important aspects of "Middle Eastern" regional dynamics over the last two and a half centuries or so are, of course, very much wrapped up with Western penetration of the region. But it is a reality that lends special significance to the strategic choices that Iran and Turkey make.

Iran and Turkey also have especially key roles to play because they are the two Muslim-majority countries in this part of the world that have made the most progress toward genuinely representative government. In Iran's case, this means integrating participatory politics and elections

with principles and institutions of Islamic governance, as that is understood from a Shi'a perspective. In Turkey's case, this means, particularly over the last decade and a half, expanding the space for Turks whose identity is unavoidably defined by religion to engage in politics and be genuinely represented in the political system. These things are important, among other reasons, because they make Iran and Turkey the regional countries most capable of pursuing genuinely independent foreign policies. They also make Iran and Turkey the only regional states which, at their best, engage with their regional environment in ways such that the expansion of political participation in various regional theaters can end up empowering their allies. This is not the case for regional countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia, which are ultimately dependent on a dominant America forging a pro-U.S. regional order and targeting regional actors that will not subordinate themselves to such an order.[29]

This is why Iran and Turkey have unique potential to play critical roles in checking the worst impulses of other regional actors ultimately dependent on a dominant America and consolidation of a pro-U.S. political and security order in the Middle East. Iranian-Turkish coordination to support Qatar is thwarting expansion of coercive Saudi-Emirati micromanagement on the Arabian Peninsula. If Iran and Turkey can cultivate similarly productive coordination on other regional issues—e.g., how Syrians might decide their political future without externally imposed conditions—this would mark an even bigger contribution to more balanced regional order.

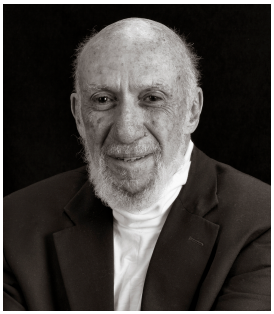
E. Conclusion

Richard Falk has challenged us to envision the "end of hegemony."[30] To that end, think about a Middle East in which major regional powers, including Iran and Turkey, take primary responsibility for managing the region's security problems and broader geopolitics. In this scenario, if the

[29] Leverett and Mann Leverett, "Reality Check."
[30] See his contribution in this booklet.

United States or any other extra-regional power wants to be genuinely helpful on such matters, it will be welcome. But if the United States is not willing to play a truly constructive role, regional powers will still be prepared to manage things on their own. Think about that; for me, at least, this could be a significant step down the road toward an "end of hegemony."

Contributors' Biographies



Richard Falk is Albert G. Milbank Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton University (1961-2001), Research Associate at UCSB, and Chair of Global Law, Law Faculty, Queen Mary University London. Between 2008 and 2014, Dr. Falk served as UN Special Rapporteur on Israeli Violations of Human Rights in Occupied Palestine. In 2017, Falk was the co-author with Virginia Tilley of a report commissioned by the UN Economic and Social Commission (ESCWA) under the title "Israel's Practices and Policies Toward the Palestinian People Regarding the Question of Apartheid." Falk is also Senior Vice President of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. He has been annually nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize since 2008. His recent books include The Costs of War: International Law, the UN, and World Order after Iraq (2008); Achieving Human Rights (2009); (Re) Imagining Humane Global Governance (2014); Humanitarian Intervention and Legitimacy Wars (2014); Palestine: The Legitimacy of Hope (2014); Power Shift: On the New Global Order (2016); and Palestine Horizon: Toward a Just Peace (2017). He has also published a book of poems, Waiting for Rainbows in 2015. A political memoir, Public Intellectual: The Life of a Citizen (2021) was recently published.

Flynt Leverett is one of the founding faculty of the Penn State School of International Affairs, and an affiliate faculty at Penn State Law. He is also a visiting scholar at Peking University's Institute of International and Strategic Studies and a senior fellow at Renmin University of China. Prof. Leverett served in the U.S. government for 11 years (1992-2003) at the

White House as National Security Council senior director for Middle East affairs, on the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff, and as CIA senior analyst. He left government in 2003 because of disagreements over Middle East policy and the conduct of the war on terror. Dr. Leverett has written extensively on the international relations, politics, and political economy of the Middle East and on U.S. Middle East policy. Along with his wife Prof. Hillary Mann Leverett, he co-wrote, Going to Tehran: Why America Must Accept the Islamic Republic of Iran (2013), which was lauded by many public intellectuals. Prof. Leverett's first book, Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire (2005), was a Foreign Affairs bestseller. Dr. Leverett has been a visiting professor at MIT and Yale and has given presentations at top universities around the world, including Beijing, Cambridge, Chicago, Georgetown, Harvard, NYU, Tehran, Toronto, and many others. He has been interviewed on major international news and public affairs programs and his articles and op-eds appear regularly in high-profile media outlets. Prof. Leverett has testified before congressional committees and addressed foreign ministries and strategic research institutes around the world.

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