

AMERICA VS. IRAN

The Competition for the Future of the Middle East

By Danielle Pletka and Frederick W. Kagan

With an Introduction by J. Matthew McInnis

JANUARY 2014



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A review of the soft-power strategies of both the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East and Afghanistan makes clear a disturbing fact: Tehran has a coherent, if sometimes ineffective strategy to advance its aims in the Middle East and around the world. The United States does not.

This project began with two *tour d'horizon* reviews of Iranian activities throughout areas Iran has, by its actions, defined as its sphere of influence. From the Persian Gulf through the Levant and into neighboring Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic has consistently invested in soft- and hard-power activities designed not only to extend its own influence but also to limit both American and hostile Arab aims. And while the latter part of the Ahmadinejad administration saw waning rewards for Tehran's efforts—a result more of the growing Sunni-Shia divide in the Middle East than of changes in strategy—the continued existence of a coherent Iranian strategy to dominate or destabilize the region should not be ignored.

This report, the culmination of a process of both examining Iranian actions and surveying American policy, policy responses, and soft-power strategies in the region, focuses on the US side of the equation. Despite the Obama administration's commitment to replace hard power with smart power, what the United States pursues in the Middle East is a set of incoherent, ineffective, and increasingly irrelevant policies.

The withdrawal of all American military forces from Iraq in December 2011 was not followed with the promised diplomatic, political, and economic surge. Instead, Washington has ignored Iraq almost completely as power has spiraled back into the hands of al Qaeda, subjecting the Iraqi people once again to terrorist and sectarian violence.

The Arab Spring's arrival in Damascus, Syria, in 2011 offered an opportunity to unhinge one of Iran's most important allies in the world, yet the US has done virtually nothing to seize it. Aborting the military action President Obama promised after Bashar al Assad's large-scale use of chemical weapons in August 2013, on the contrary, badly damaged America's relations with many allies in the region. The unprecedented entrance into Syria by Lebanese Hezbollah—the first such operation by any Iranian proxy outside the confines of its

own state—offered a chance to weaken Hezbollah's grip within Lebanon. But the United States has offered no material response to Hezbollah's Syria invasion, with either soft or hard power.

Indeed, American soft power, such as it is, remains largely concentrated instead on traditional conceptions of the Middle East revolving around the Palestinian issue. In addition to the high-level efforts to restart Arab-Israeli peace negotiations—efforts not matched in any realm relating to Iran beyond the nuclear program—US aid and foreign military finance patterns still overwhelmingly favor Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan (and, of course, Israel), all areas of little or no relevance to the competition with Iran. The Saudis and Emiratis have increased their purchases of American weapons systems, to be sure, but Washington has done little to turn these transactions into any more stable and certain coalition to contain Iran.

Assistance programs administered by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) may have value when judged on their own merits; however, their integration into a broader strategy to undermine Iranian influence, even among the Palestinians and Lebanese, is nil. Indeed, USAID officials acknowledge unofficially that competing with Iran is not part of their writ. More troubling still, the Iran hands at the Department of State say that they do not coordinate with other “desks” within the Bureau of Near East Affairs at State, and there is no internal dialogue regarding Iranian strategies in the region.

Widespread fear of Iranian expansionism—and of Tehran's pursuit of nuclear weapons capability—leaves numerous opportunities for the US to build upon. If the Obama administration decided to pursue a strategy to compete with Iran in the soft-power realm, it could realize that strategy fairly rapidly. Iran now pursues, on the cheap, cost-imposition tactics in Bahrain, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere. It does so without hope of imposing Iranian will; rather, it takes advantage of existing opportunities, such as beleaguered Shia communities. The United States pursues no corollary strategies.

Pushing back on Iran throughout the Middle East and into South Asia serves several purposes

simultaneously: it limits the spread of Iranian influence, pushes back on Iranian support for terrorism, and provides additional leverage to the United States in negotiations over the nuclear issue. Indeed, such policies may well be the most significant contribution President Obama could make to reduce the likelihood of major conflict with Iran.

This project is intended to outline a strategy built on soft power to compete with Iran's activities in the Middle East, with a view to containing the Islamic Republic with a bulwark of friendly states tied to the United States by common interests and purpose. Such

a strategy is still urgently required, notwithstanding the current negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. Those negotiations, on the contrary, have further eroded the strength of America's relationships with key partners in the region, requiring more effort to maintain them rather than less. It may well be that Iran will be willing to negotiate limits to its nuclear program; however, the Islamic Republic does not limit itself to a strategy reliant solely on nuclear weapons power. It has pursued a sophisticated and multidimensional soft- and hard-power strategy in the Middle East. It is time for the United States to do the same.

INTRODUCTION: LOOKING AT SOFT-POWER COMPETITIVE STRATEGIES FOR IRAN

J. Matthew McInnis

At the center of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy is a constant effort to expand its influence while undermining the US-led world system and Washington's key regional allies. The use of soft power supports Iran's aspirations to become the natural leader of the region, and, conversely, to mitigate its political, economic, and strategic isolation since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Perhaps just as important, by building partnerships and establishing proxies to confront the West, Israel, and rival Muslim powers, the Iranian regime hopes to position itself as the vanguard of a new, just Islamic world.

The Islamic Republic must successfully promulgate its ideology's core ideas and political goals; otherwise, the state and its policies come into question. Iran is still a revolutionary state. Like the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and others before it, if the central narrative, its *raison d'être*, is no longer seen as legitimate, the regime must redefine itself or eventually lose power.

US policymakers must bear in mind that Iran's soft-power "industrial complex," the interconnected external political, diplomatic, economic, religious, cultural, security, and proxy activity, is related to its revolutionary nature. These efforts are what the regime will pursue and defend incessantly, and almost all are inherently counter to US goals. Hard-power threats such as possible nuclear weapons, missiles, and even terrorism ultimately can be seen as tools or enablers of Tehran's more critical soft-power objectives and programs. Even if the United States is able to somehow resolve concerns about Iran's nuclear program, for example, the current Iranian regime will still require its foreign policy to obstruct American national interests.

This also points to a key opportunity. Successfully checking or unraveling components of Iran's soft-power strategy will likely lead to the best chance of eventually pushing the regime to become a normal, rather than

a revolutionary, power. Today, the United States lacks such a policy.

Given America's current fiscal constraints and geopolitical challenges, effective competitive strategies offer an opportunity to achieve objectives while more efficiently using resources and avoiding direct conflict. In this model, one tries to undermine a competitor's confidence in his strategy, or in the tools of his strategy, to ultimately induce self-defeating behavior.¹ The fundamental logic is that competitors always have blind spots or exaggerated threat perceptions that can be exploited. The key to success is identifying where the competitor's vulnerabilities intersect with one's relative strengths. It is extremely difficult to significantly change an adversary's typical strategic behavior. Therefore, it is better to attempt to exacerbate an existing asymmetry or imbalance.

This approach has key pitfalls. Attempting to manipulate a state's fears can risk unwanted escalation and unpredictable behavior. It requires a long-term commitment to the strategy, a difficult proposition given America's political system and often shortened attention span. Competitive strategies also require deep self-awareness and an ability to read the adversary. All of these areas have challenged US policymakers.

The United States also needs to understand and defend against competitive-type strategies that Tehran may be pursuing. Sophisticated adversaries such as Iran are likely aware of and attempting to exploit American weaknesses as we engage in the Middle East diplomatically, economically, and culturally. Washington must consciously push back against Tehran's strategies and policies, not just mitigate their manifestations. In other words, the US needs to fight strategy with strategy.

There is a large body of work on the nature of soft power.² More recently, notable research has also been done on the theory and history of competitive strategies, particularly examining US efforts during the Cold War and the recent emergence of the PRC as a

global power.³ The problem is the relative lack of attention to soft-power competitive strategies. Seeing that the Department of Defense is the organization most concerned about this type of competition in Washington, it is unsurprising that the vast majority of analytic and policy focus has been on military aspects. However, interactions among states always contain complex interactions of hard and soft power. A brief review of long-term, interstate contests in recent history can give insight on competitive soft power that is useful for American policies toward the Islamic Republic.

Arguably, whether the military or the political-economic-cultural arena is emphasized more in competition is tied to the nature of the states involved. Most states see external rivals primarily through the lens of military balances and relative economic strength, supported by political and cultural competition. In contrast, nations that organize their political systems primarily around the sustainment or export of ideology tend to place soft power, supported by hard power, at the center of their foreign policy. The strategic naval competitions between Great Britain and France in the 19th century and between Great Britain and the Germany in the early 20th century are classic illustrations of the former framework.⁴ The rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War is the best example of the latter.

The Cold War is particularly instructive in the relationship between soft- and hard-power competition. For the USSR, Marxist-Leninist ideology required an ever-expanding community of nations to overthrow capitalism in the path toward communism. Otherwise, the fundamental premise of the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent “revolutions” in satellite states would be negated. Conversely, the growth of communism threatened the very political system of the US and other free, liberal democratic, capitalistic societies. The scope of the post-World War II conventional arms buildup, the proxy wars, and the threat of nuclear annihilation were ultimately driven to the level they reached by the mutually existential nature of the contest. This was a soft-power competition undergirded by a hard-power one.

Paul Nitze and his colleagues at the US State Department famously captured the essence of this contest in the seminal 1950 National Security Council (NSC)

Paper NSC-68. Nitze argued the Soviet system was a mortal threat to the United States and, therefore, that America needed to make itself strong politically, economically, and militarily; build up US allies; work toward fostering change in the Soviet system; and frustrate their designs. First and foremost, this was a conflict of ideas that American military strategy served.⁵

After the delegitimization of communism and the subsequent collapse of the USSR, the successor Russian state still posed a formidable nuclear threat, though no longer an existential one. The remaining strategic military or political competition has largely moved into the realm of more traditional state behavior.

The US struggle with the PRC after 1949 also followed a similar arc. As did Lenin and Stalin, Mao Zedong saw himself as a leader in a worldwide effort to overturn the global political-economic system as well as to remake his society and restore its greatness. Although the PRC never posed a direct existential threat to the United States, Mao’s policies until the 1970s were mostly counter to American allies and their interests in Asia and elsewhere.⁶ However, as the PRC started to fear the Soviets more than the United States and the legitimacy of the Maoist-Marxist political-economic system eroded, the Chinese Communist Party leadership began to redefine the central narrative of the state. PRC foreign policy since 1979 has become predominantly nonideological, nonrevolutionary, and based on securing the more typical interests of increased international political sway, economic power, and military strength.

Despite decades of experience to draw upon, this fundamental shift is perhaps a key reason why US defense policymakers have struggled to develop strategic efforts vis-à-vis the PRC on par with those designed to counter the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The US views its contest with China as primarily economic and military, rather than political, and crafts conscious strategy almost exclusively in the hard-power arena. It is unlikely, then, that the United States will ever create a policy for the PRC as comprehensive and coherent as NSC-68.

In general, the move away from the 20th century’s great political system rivalries has been of enormous benefit. The United States does not face truly existential threats now. There are no longer any states capable

of doing us mortal harm *and* actively trying to change the fundamentals of the political-economic system. America has mostly returned to the rules of great-power competitions, at least among state actors.

Iran remains the exception. Even if revolutionary fervor has died down since the 1980s, the Iranian regime is still built on the ideological premise of *velayat-e-faqih*—guardianship or rule of the jurispudent—which should be spread and adopted by other Muslim societies.⁷ Consequently, Tehran’s foreign policy incorporates sustained opposition to the United States, the West in general, Israel, and the rival Sunni Muslim powers, all of whom the Islamic Republic perceives as the primary political obstacles to its great national and international projects since 1979.

As a result, Iran’s conflict with the United States and the West is principally a contest of ideas. The regime’s hard-power capacity serves as an enabler and defender of Tehran’s primary line of operation, its expansion of soft power. This relationship is most evident in the creation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the primary defender of the revolution. The IRGC is the principal executor of Iranian foreign policy on the most contested front lines of the regime’s strategic interests, such as the Levant and Iraq. The IRGC leads efforts to build political and armed proxy groups, to expand Iran’s reach and build a resistance to the West and Israel. In contrast, Iran’s investments in conventional military capacity and even its pursuit of a likely nuclear weapons capability can be seen as more defensive than offensive. These investments are aimed at preserving the regime to enable the critical expansion of the Islamic Republic’s ideas and influence.

What does this mean for developing competitive strategies? As I previously noted, Iran is the only nation engaged in a true contest of ideas with the United States. If the Islamic Republic remains a revolutionary state, the US should build strategic policies more akin to Cold War paradigms than what it attempts now with the PRC. This is not to say America needs to have another massive defense buildup, especially given that Iran does not have the resources to compete with the US military on a global scale.⁸

Rather, the US should take a page from Nitze and prioritize the soft-power competition. America should

shore up its political, economic, and cultural strength both domestically and abroad, while ensuring that its military is able to both deter aggression and project power when needed. The United States should focus its primary strategies on deflecting and unraveling Iranian policies, which expand their influence detrimentally to US and allied interests. America should also look to frustrate the Iranian political system by highlighting the regime’s internal contradictions and Tehran’s inability to meet the population’s civil and economic aspirations. This approach, unsurprisingly, bears some notable similarities to counterinsurgency doctrine, albeit at an international scale, which this study will explore further.

A successful soft-power, competitive strategy will hopefully push Iran from a state devoted to undermining the regional and global political-economic system to become a more “normal” actor. This would not mean the end of competition, but it would significantly diminish the Iranian threat and allow Washington much greater predictability in the region. A strategy that mitigates or even helps alter the regime’s central narrative could transform the dynamics of the US-Iranian relationship, not unlike what occurred with the USSR and the PRC in previous decades.

What would be the key prerequisites to building a tailored soft-power competitive strategy against Iran? First, the United States needs to recognize Iran’s political, economic, diplomatic, and cultural objectives in the region. Iran perceives itself as the rightful predominant power in the region, demanding the removal or neutralization of American, Israeli, and Western presence and influence. Tehran wants to be the model for Islamic governance, the true leader of the Islamic world, and the protector of Shia Muslims. The regime seeks economic independence and to become the vanguard of the nonaligned movement, which challenges Western dominance of the global system. More practically, Iran wants to minimize its political isolation and increase its international support.

Second, US policymakers need to understand the target. Effective competitive strategies usually require an imperfectly rational actor whose irrationalities, specifically those induced by threats to the regime, can be understood and eventually predicted.⁹ Fortunately, in

the area of Iranian soft power, the United States has one such actor in the IRGC, an institution American intelligence and security analysts have been watching for decades. The US needs to dissect further the IRGC's core leadership networks and to more fully understand Iranian decision making and threat perceptions. In US strategic competitions with the Soviets and with the PRC, US analysts had a relatively large community of experts in academia, think tanks, and government focused on those nations' strategic cultures. This type of knowledge community barely exists on Iran and needs to be expanded.¹⁰

Better understanding the Iranian regime's decision making will be critical to identify strategic or organizational blind spots within the IRGC and the larger Iranian senior leadership. Which threat perceptions can be encouraged or exploited? Which typical or routine activities are often ineffective and therefore can be encouraged? Which political, economic, and cultural missteps does the IRGC frequently make with other countries that can be exacerbated and exposed? How could US policy induce self-defeating behavior?

Third, US policymakers need to better understand themselves, US strengths, and political and resource constraints. Iran can also perceive US weaknesses and blind spots, especially in America's attempt to engage the Islamic world. US policymakers must recognize better when Tehran is pursuing efforts that directly harm American interests or those of US allies in the region.

The US should also be conscious of the difficulty in sustaining complex strategies through multiple administrations and a large, diffused national security bureaucracy. It is a key temporal advantage for Iran, as it was for the Soviet Union and PRC, that its authoritarian system has the relative luxury of a long-term institutional focus on competing with the United States.

Fourth, US policymakers need to define the arenas and parameters of the competition. Should the United States place more emphasis on challenging Iranian soft power in the Middle East or work to prevent growth globally? Should policymakers look to primarily defend areas where US soft power is strong and Iranian power is relatively weak or instead attempt to roll back Iran in critical areas? Among the primary areas of soft-power competition—political, diplomatic, economic,

infrastructure, energy, ideological, and cultural—where should the US aim to undermine Iranian activities, and where should its focus be primarily defensive? For example, the growing US advantage in the energy sector should be exploited, whereas investing in competition on the cultural and religious playing fields is unlikely to be as productive for US policymakers.

Armed with these insights, the US can begin building portfolios of soft-power competitive activities that will undermine Iran's confidence in both its strategies and the tools it employs to accomplish them. The most common are denial or containment strategies.¹¹ How should the United States strengthen its allies to resist negative Iranian political, economic, and cultural influence? How can the United States expose and challenge the activities of the IRGC and prevent the movement of its resources and personnel? How can policymakers shape the economic sanctions regime to support US soft-power goals in addition to pressuring Iran on the nuclear program?

Cost-imposing strategies provide another potentially fruitful approach. How would the United States be able to manipulate threat perceptions to induce Iran into overstretching its resources, overinvesting in activities that are not especially worrisome, and underinvesting in areas of the most concern to the United States? Can the United States convince Iran that pursuing soft-power policies against US interests will bear an ever-increasing cost in time and treasure?¹²

Potentially the most powerful, difficult, and risky competitive efforts would directly subvert Iran's strategy and the regime's political system. If IRGC policies are perceived as a failure—through direct challenge, induced self-defeating behavior, deception, or some combination thereof—this could provoke a crisis in confidence in Iran's strategy. The perception that the Islamic Republic's fundamental objectives may not be achievable or that the system is unsustainable will undermine the regime's legitimacy and likely effect an eventual change in the nature of the state.

These are the questions US policy toward Iran must address. This report is one of the first comprehensive assessments of the state of competition between Iran and the United States and its allies. The study examines the heart of the contest in the Middle East through

what Iran considers its Tier 1 priorities, which are vital to the regime—Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq—and Tier 2 priorities, for which Tehran aspires to expand influence as conditions allow—Egypt, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Afghanistan, and the Gulf Cooperation Council states. It also critiques the corresponding US and allied policies and activities.

The United States should be placing soft power at

the center of its strategy with Iran, given the political and ideological nature of the conflict as well as the relative decline of its hard-power presence because of fiscal constraints. As policymakers look for ways to better protect interests in the region, hopefully this report will shed light and spark debate on which arenas and approaches are ripest for US engagement and strategy.

TIER 1 PRIORITIES

The countries considered vital to the Islamic Republic of Iran's power and influence are Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.

Syria

Relations with Iran. It seems almost incredible to imagine that a mere five years ago, the United States and Israel both believed Syria was ready to abandon its alliance with Iran in favor of a historic strategic realignment.¹³ But while there may have been a few straws in the wind that hinted at such a possibility at the time, the reality then is the reality today: the Islamic Republic of Iran is Bashar al Assad's most important diplomatic, political, economic, and military partner.

Conversely, as Iran has invested heavily in ensuring Assad's survival, it has steadily lost even tenuously held ground with Sunni Arab states in the Persian Gulf. For Tehran, Syria is key to its interests in the Middle East, the sole ally on which it can rely without question: its window into the Arab-Israeli conflict; its conduit to Iran's most powerful proxy, Hezbollah; a training ground for its own forces as well as terrorist proxies; a tool against the West; and even a possible cutout for its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) experimentation¹⁴—in short, a vital national security interest.

Our original report detailed the nature of ties between the two nations.¹⁵ And while there was likely a shift in the nature of the Tehran-Damascus relationship in the years 2008–11—from client state to partner, perhaps—the outbreak of demonstrations and the Damascus regime's brutal response ended any ambiguity. Assad needed Iran, and Tehran was there to serve.

Over the years, Iran's rhetorical commitment to Syria often ran ahead of its actual economic commitment. Nonetheless, relations between the two cannot be described as anything other than robust. Without Iran and its proxies in Hezbollah, Assad would likely have followed in the footsteps of the region's deposed tyrants, his nation in the hands of the Sunni opposition.

On March 15, 2011, demonstrations in the city of Daraa set Syria afire.¹⁶ Though the demonstrations were peaceful, the regime's response was anything but. Murder and torture were commonplace, and the

political conflict spiraled into a full-blown civil war that in more than two years has left at least 100,000 dead; seen the Assad regime deploy chemical weapons against its own citizens; driven millions to seek refuge in neighboring states; drawn in Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) troops, as well as regular Iranian forces, Hezbollah, and al Qaeda; and deepened a growing rift between the United States and its erstwhile allies and friends in the Arab world. The current situation is, in short, a disaster.

In early 2011, it was not obvious that Assad's survival would be in question. He had all the resources of the state at hand, including an army that, though weak in comparison to main rival Israel's, was strong.¹⁷ Neither the army nor the regime suffered substantial defections, and it quickly became clear that while some among the Arabs were game to pick winners in the Syrian fight, few in Europe and the United States were eager to intervene to tip the balance in favor of one side or the other. Even Israel, which has historically viewed the Assad regime as the main conduit for anti-Israel terror, appeared loath to become involved.

But outsiders underestimated the strength and commitment of the Syrian opposition, and once arms from Persian Gulf supporters began flowing in early 2012, Assad looked to be in real trouble.¹⁸ In fact, US and European leaders officially called on Assad to step down in August 2011, signifying the growing belief that his fall was imminent. According to one senior US official, "We're certain that Assad is on the way out. . . . That is our assessment. . . . [His] time in power is limited and his days are numbered."¹⁹

The Iranians, for their part, doubled down on all forms of assistance to Syria. A new ambassador, Mohammad Reza Raouf Sheibani, was installed in Damascus in late 2011. Tehran also facilitated Syrian sanctions evasion, aiding in the sale and transport of Syrian oil.²⁰ Tehran has consistently rearmed Syria by air and has also provided crowd-suppression equipment and Internet- and cell phone-blocking technology,²¹ as well as elite IRGC troops to assist in

Assad's fight for survival.²² The US Department of the Treasury designated IRGC Quds Force (IRGC-QF) Commander Major General Qassem Suleimani and Operations and Training Commander Mohsen Chizari in May 2011 as having played a role in "the violent repression against the Syrian people."²³ Senior IRGC-QF Commander Brigadier General Hassan Shateri, assassinated in Syria in early 2013, is another indication of the priority Iran places on Assad's victory. He had managed Iranian operations in Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Iraq.²⁴

Iranian support for Assad has not been restricted to the IRGC. Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security are also part of Iran's support team.²⁵ As a recent report details, Syria's General Intelligence Directorate's internal security branch has routinely received material and personnel support from the LEF.²⁶ Long headed by Mohammed Nasif Kheirbek, a close adviser to Hafez al Assad—Bashar al Assad's father and predecessor²⁷—the General Intelligence Directorate is likely the main interlocutor between Assad and the Iranian regime.²⁸

Iranian rearmament has been crucial to Assad's survival. Going in, he was already well stocked with weapons supplied by Iran, but the steady pace of operations has required regular resupply. Ironically, many of the weapons Syria once deemed key to its deterrence against the likely Israeli threat have proven irrelevant to its civil war. Thus, advanced radar equipment, like the Yakhont cruise missiles that Russia has supplied since 2011,²⁹ has done little to warn about Israeli air strikes on transshipments to Hezbollah, with four such strikes occurring in 2013 alone,³⁰ and has been of no aid in fighting the rebels. Advanced missile work done in cooperation with North Korea has few applications in retaking Damascus suburbs.³¹ Even the Syrian nuclear program that occasioned the Israeli strike on the al Kibar site in 2007,³² and suggestions that work has continued,³³ would seem to have limited relevance to Damascus's immediate needs, though it may serve as a worthwhile endeavor from the Iranian viewpoint.

Yet, Iran has proven to be a flexible supplier: as mentioned previously, reports range from Iran sending rocket launchers and rifles to crowd-suppression and Internet-blocking technology, as well as IRGC

training personnel.³⁴ Among the supplies and dual-use equipment Iran has revamped regularly are light arms and advanced strategic weapons, including unmanned aerial vehicles (drones), shore-to-sea missiles, and surface-to-surface ballistic missiles. Some reports suggest Iran is supplying up to five tons of weapons per arms shipment, which occur as frequently as every week.³⁵

Iran has also been vital to helping paramilitaries, Hezbollah included, which are fighting alongside the Assad regime.³⁶ One such force is the Jaysh al Sha'bi fighting alongside the Syrian military.³⁷ This "people's army" is trained, armed, and guided by the IRGC-QF, using Iran's own Basij paramilitary forces as a model.³⁸ The Jaysh al Sha'bi have been used by the Assads, father and son, for some years, and some reports suggest the group is even larger than the 50,000 claimed by IRGC leaders.³⁹

In addition, Iran supports and arms local groups that have armed themselves either to defend against rebel forces or to support the Assad regime. These "popular committees" were integrated into the Syrian Armed Forces under the sobriquet "National Defense Forces," many armed and trained by Iran.⁴⁰ Then there are perhaps the best known of the paramilitary forces supporting Assad, the Shabiha. Best thought of as criminals organized to support the regime, the Shabiha are infamous for their brutality, and they too have been trained by and inside Iran.⁴¹

Like Hezbollah, these paramilitaries serve both Iran's immediate and long-term goals. Immediately, they have altered the balance of power within Syria, allowing Assad to use his regular military to focus on larger battles, leaving smaller local fights to regional subgroups. In addition, in the event Assad does fall, these militias have the staying power that will enable Iran to fuel an insurgency against Syria's eventual leaders and continue to rearm Hezbollah and other groups through Syria. They also provide increased options for Hezbollah vis-à-vis Israel and a new rationale for the much-beleaguered organization to suggest that it and Iran are opening a new front against Israel on the Golan Heights.⁴²

On the economic side, Iran has for some years been Syria's main foreign investor, as well as its third-largest import partner, at 7.7 percent.⁴³ As we wrote in 2012,

The economic relationship between the countries is defined by an almost impenetrable thicket of bilateral agreements and MOUs [memoranda of understanding], most of which appear to be worth little more than the paper on which they are written: “According to the Syrian government daily *al Thawra*, as of March 2007, the two countries had signed ‘over 30 bilateral agreements, memoranda of understanding, and protocols.’”⁴⁴

As in other countries, Iranian investment has focused heavily on infrastructure, roads, electricity, and to a more limited extent education. A natural and obvious area of cooperation—as both countries are under substantial international financial sanctions—is in the area of banking, yet repeated promises of joint ventures and banking partnerships appear to have been hampered by bargaining, broken agreements, and general lack of focus. Part of the persistent problem is the backwardness of the Syrian economy, a disaster area even before the outbreak of conflict. Fundamentally, any Iranian economic activity in Syria is in the realm of geostrategic, rather than rational, economic investment.

Since the outbreak of civil war, Syrian economic activity has virtually ceased to function: “The percentage of losses in the year 2011 alone stands at 81.7 percent of the value of the local production of the Syrian economy in 2010. . . . Those losses include a drop in local production by 35 percent in 2011, equivalent to \$20 billion. . . . The Syrian economy is expected to have lost an additional 18.8 percent in 2012.”⁴⁵ Thus, the Assad regime has become even more dependent on transfers from Tehran (as well as support from Moscow). Some of the rhetoric of trade continues, and contracts continue to be signed between the two countries, but the more salient information is generally about transfers of basic foodstuffs and lines of credit and cash.

In January 2013, the two signed a \$1 billion credit agreement to import Iranian goods into Syria.⁴⁶ In February, Iran exported 100,000 tons of flour to Syria, reportedly to ease food shortages.⁴⁷ In August, Tehran extended a \$3.6 billion loan for the purchase of oil products.⁴⁸ Long story short: Syria would not be surviving without the Iranian economic lifeline.

Relations with the United States. Any hope of a Syrian-American rapprochement from the earlier years of the Obama administration is now dead. President Obama’s reluctant call for Assad to step down,⁴⁹ coupled with a broader withdrawal from engagement in the Middle East and the increasingly complicated nature of the conflict within Syria, portends little likelihood of deeper Washington-Damascus ties, whether with Assad or a successor government.

Our 2012 report detailed extensively the attempted warm-up between Obama and Assad between 2008 and 2011.⁵⁰ However, since the start of the rebellion against Assad and Syria’s decline into civil war, the United States has pursued a limited role, ceding relations with the regime to Iran and relations with the various rebel groups largely to interested Gulf states and Turkey. Statements from the administration routinely deplore the humanitarian crisis and violations of human rights. Most aid has been basic humanitarian assistance, which totaled \$210 million in 2012.⁵¹ (Final numbers for 2013 are not yet available, but are likely to be higher. On September 24, 2013, President Obama pledged an additional \$339 million in US humanitarian assistance.⁵²) A substantial proportion of that assistance has been delivered through the International Committee of the Red Cross, the World Food Program, the United Nations (UN) High Commission for Refugees, and other international nongovernmental organizations.⁵³ And while it is beyond US abilities to deliver aid on the ground in a war zone, no one can claim that the Syrian people have any sense of where their assistance is coming from.

In April 2013, in the face of heavy congressional pressure, Secretary of State John Kerry announced that assistance to the Syrian opposition would double to \$123 million,⁵⁴ much of which was delayed for several months and is only just now starting to be spent.⁵⁵ The State Department also claimed to be providing “training and equipment to build the capacity of a nationwide network of ethnically and religiously diverse civilian activists to link Syrian citizens with nascent governance structures.”⁵⁶ Notwithstanding, the Syrian opposition continued to suffer from lack of capacity, crippling infighting, and disconnect from fighters on the ground in Syria. On the ground, the Syrian

opposition denied it was receiving the “body armor and additional communications equipment” Kerry claimed the United States was sending.⁵⁷

In June 2013, President Obama announced he would change US policy and begin arming Syrian rebels.⁵⁸ Again, the change was attributed to a growing chorus of criticism from within the United States about American failure to weigh in against both Assad and Iran and fears that rebels affiliated with al Qaeda were gaining ground against the more secular and democratic opposition. The administration had reportedly been covertly vetting and training some rebel forces in neighboring Jordan for some months, but the president indicated a dramatic escalation. Within weeks, reports indicated that the CIA planned to begin arming rebels almost immediately, with debate about the nature of those arms. Conflicting reports suggested light weapons and antitank weaponry would be among the materiel the United States supplied.

In the early hours of August 21, 2013, the Syrian regime launched a chemical attack on suburbs on the outskirts of Damascus. Almost 1,500 were reported killed by what was likely sarin gas, among them several hundred children.⁵⁹ This was the 14th use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime; however, it was the first to kill large numbers.⁶⁰ In the days following, Obama took to the airwaves threatening the use of force against the Assad regime, retaliation for having crossed what he believed was a “red line” he had laid out in August 2012, during the height of the US presidential election.⁶¹

After threatening the use of force, however, Obama began stepping back from military action, ultimately accepting a Russian-mediated offer to destroy Syrian chemical weapons stockpiles. The threat of force and subsequent decision to accept the ongoing conflict with assurances about future use of chemical weapons shocked many in Syria who believed the United States had finally decided to tip the balance of power inside their country. Also frustrated were Gulf nations that had hoped the United States would be willing to engage more actively in light of the hundreds of thousands dead and the use of WMDs. At an Arab League meeting in late August 2013, the foreign ministers passed a resolution pressing international actors, led by the United States, to “take the deterrent and necessary measures

against the culprits of this crime that the Syrian regime bears responsibility for.”⁶²

In addition, renewed focus on Syria revealed that notwithstanding commitments from top US officials, arms deliveries to the rebels had not yet begun. Only in early September were reporters able to confirm that light weapons and ammunition were being delivered in small numbers to certain rebel groups. However, the limited supplies were unlikely to make a dent in ongoing operations inside Syria, let alone change the direction of the conflict. Khaled Saleh, a spokesman for the Syrian Opposition Coalition, told the *Washington Post* that “the Syrian Military Council is receiving so little support that any support we receive is a relief. But if you compare what we are getting compared to the assistance Assad receives from Iran and Russia, we have a long battle ahead of us.”⁶³

Competition. Syria is Iran’s most important Arab ally. Were there any doubt of this, Tehran’s massive investment in sustaining the Assad regime, including dedicating proxy groups such as Hezbollah, committing both IRGC-QF and ground troops, rearmament, vast expenses, and its consequent willingness to brave the almost total collapse of its relationships with its Gulf neighbors should be proof positive. Although Iran has made plans for Assad’s ouster, it has committed unprecedented resources to avert that eventuality.

Why? For the current regime in Iran, Assad is more than simply a protégé; he is a conduit to Lebanon and to Israel, a means of supporting Palestinian rejectionist groups, a venue to test weapons and missiles, and a headquarters to destabilize the Levant, Turkey, and the rest of the region. More importantly, Syria is the only other country from which Iran can do this. Lebanon, while an increasingly important Iranian proxy, nonetheless has several intrinsic limitations that will mean it cannot easily serve as a replacement for Assad’s Syria. And while Iran wields substantial influence in other countries, particularly Iraq, Assad’s is the only government that is almost entirely beholden to its masters in Tehran.

If this is the case—and there is little debate about Syria’s importance to Tehran—then Syria should theoretically be of strategic interest to the United States.

As many have said, Syria rests at the unique confluence of American moral and strategic interests. Leaving Iran without a reliable Arab ally, isolated from almost every nation in the region, Assad's departure would be a serious blow to the credibility and sustainability of the regime in Tehran.

Nonetheless, the Obama administration has chosen to ignore Syria's strategic significance, leaving some to wonder whether it is committed to a competition with Iran or merely to the more straightforward goal of a resolution of Iran's nuclear weapons programs. In fairness, choosing sides in Syria is no simple exercise. What began as a less variegated domestic revolution to overthrow the Assad tyranny has over several years become a complex and troubling proxy war between Syrians, Russians, Iranians, Saudi Arabians, Qataris, Turks, Kurds, the Muslim Brotherhood, and various al Qaeda-related groups. In addition to the battle between forces pro- and anti-Assad, fissures within the opposition threaten the viability of a future Syrian state post-Assad.

These and other considerations, including what many believe is a desire to disengage from a region that has brought the United States to war twice in as many decades, have meant the Obama administration has viewed with distaste the notion of beginning any competition with Iran on the ground in Syria, no matter the stakes.

Should the United States have chosen to engage early in the process of the Syrian "spring," rebel victories may have been decisive enough to end the conflict before groups of a more extremist nature entered the fray. This is, however, unknowable. In addition, the nature of a post-Assad government was never clear, and in several Arab Spring states, what appeared to be democratic progress has ended badly.

The United States has ended with the worst of all outcomes from a strategic perspective. Although billions in aid and some weaponry have been committed to the fight in Syria, Washington has gotten little credit for aid funneled through international agencies and no credit for joining the rebel cause with what many deem is too

little, too late. On the other hand, should Assad survive, those who look to him, whether Alawites, Christians, or other Syrians leery of an unstable future, will certainly not thank a United States that called for Assad's ouster and then did little to contain the growing violence of the conflict on Syrian soil.

But none of these complexities have affected Iranian considerations. Tehran's commitment, its loyalties, and its money and arms have backed Assad to the hilt.

In late 2013, Washington is divided about the wisdom of proceeding to engage in Syria, with a growing number of analysts suggesting it is too late for the United States to affect the course of action or the outcome in Damascus. Certainly, absent a serious commitment of both hard and soft power, it will be difficult for the United States to plot a course that limits both the human and the geostrategic problems. However, it is still possible for the Obama administration to work diligently with the more secular Syrian opposition to shape a government in exile, more decisively arm vetted rebel groups, and facilitate the crippling of key sites used by Iran, Russia, and others to resupply the Assad government. This will not be a silver bullet for the conflict, but it holds out the slim possibility of shifting the tide once again in favor of those opposed to Assad and Iran.

Unfortunately, the other elements of a counterinsurgency, which the United States executed with enormous skill in Iraq, are not achievable in Syria without the commitment of troops on the ground, an unacceptable proposition in 2013. Syrian rebels cannot serve as proxies in this effort to bring security and stability back to the Syrian population. And while a soft counterinsurgency strategy is achievable in a more peaceful environment such as Lebanon, in Syria it is nigh on impossible.

Washington will suffer not only from a failure to achieve desired goals in Syria, but also from its failure of effort. A decision to eschew steps that could advance Assad's fall will affirmatively cede the ground to Iranian leadership in an important part of the Middle East, with implications that are now beyond our ken.

Lebanon

Relations with Iran. As the conflict in Syria drags into a third year with little prospect for a decisive victory for any party, Lebanon moves front and center to fill the role once occupied by Bashar al Assad as Iran's main Arab proxy. Assad's preoccupation with retaining a hold on power has rendered him incapable of fulfilling his erstwhile role of mouthpiece and hub for Iranian-backed groups throughout the region. Once insulated from the need to play the role of key enabler for Tehran, Lebanon has become increasingly dominated by both Iran and its proxy Hezbollah.

As a result of this shift, Iran's diplomatic, political, economic, and military activity has escalated dramatically in recent years. Once-rare bilateral visits are now common, and the Iranian ambassador in Beirut, Ghazanfar Roknabadi, is a frequent spokesman on matters ranging from Syria and Lebanon to political and economic issues throughout the region.⁶⁴

As early as 2008, before the rise of the Hezbollah-controlled Lebanese government, there were assertions of a direct defense partnership between Lebanon and Iran.⁶⁵ However, like so many similar claims, little substance appeared to be behind them. Arms transfers to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) did not appear to be underway; rather Tehran was focused on the rearmament and subsequent buildup of Hezbollah forces in the wake of the Hezbollah-Israeli war in 2006. That buildup and Hezbollah's continued activity as an independent military force answerable only to its Lebanese and Iranian leadership diminish any imperative for direct ties between the LAF and Tehran. In fact, both Iran and Hezbollah leaders have acknowledged that the US- and European Union-designated terrorist group answers to instructions from abroad even as it spreads its net over Lebanon.⁶⁶

Economic, political, and cultural ties between Lebanon and Iran are more substantive. For a sense of the linkages between Iran and Lebanon, consider the back-and-forth visits of then-Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri:

Ahmadinejad's October 2010 visit occasioned the signing of yet more MOUs "in the areas of health,

industry, energy, water and economy" between the two countries. Other reports added the areas of "trade, industry, environment and education." Ultimately, "17 documents on bilateral cooperation in various fields were inked by the visiting Iranian delegation and Lebanese officials," including agreements in the areas of "energy, housing, oil and gas, commerce, physical training, environment, health, agriculture, handicrafts, tourism, media activities and joint investment." Or were there twenty-six? A month later, after Hariri's visit to Tehran, the two signed nine more MOUs and a "13-clause joint statement on adopting common stands in dealing with regional and international developments, and underlined the need to uphold the current level of mutual business cooperation."⁶⁷

Iran and Lebanon have visibly stepped up cooperation in several areas, most notably transportation, electricity, and construction. Not surprisingly, Iranian companies have focused heavily on the Shia-dominated south of Lebanon, building hundreds of kilometers of roads and bridges in the area.⁶⁸

Iran has also displayed a keen interest in Lebanese oil and gas exploration, though talk of a trans-Syrian pipeline has died down for obvious reasons. The two countries have recently discussed the export of Iranian furnace oil and liquid petroleum gas, which would make Lebanon only the second country to receive such exports from Iran.⁶⁹ In addition, Iran continues to profess an interest in refining in Lebanon (perhaps to facilitate delivering sanctioned refining equipment to Iran), as well as oil and gas exploration off of Lebanon's coast.⁷⁰

As we noted in our previous report, however, these negotiations have been anything but smooth:

Proposals for offshore oil and natural gas recovery along the Israel-Lebanon-Syria littoral are controversial. The fields appear to straddle state boundaries, although they are largely under international waters. Tensions over fields similarly located off the coasts of various Persian Gulf states have historically been high and have led to occasional minor conflicts. There is no reason to imagine that Israel, Lebanon, and Syria will find it easier to delineate fields and determine ownership than the Arab kingdoms and emirates in the

Gulf. By involving themselves in such projects early on, the Iranians are making themselves potential players in those tensions and conflicts as well, a prospect that does not bode well for the successful and peaceful conclusion of the negotiations needed to open these new petroleum reserves.⁷¹

Iran also remains active in its attempts to link Lebanon into its electrical grid via Iraq and Syria, though logistics will once again stymie any such efforts for the time being.⁷²

Finally, Iran has used the conflict in Syria to further inculcate itself into the fabric of Lebanese life. Notwithstanding deeply felt anger among Lebanese Sunnis and Christians with regards to Hezbollah's role in sustaining the Assad regime, Iran has poured resources into Lebanon to aid with the refugee inflow from Syria that has brought sectarian, political, and economic trouble in its wake. Iranian Ambassador Roknabadi has insisted that his country is working to insulate Lebanon from the Syrian conflict⁷³ by sending humanitarian aid for Syrian and Palestinian refugees, most of whom are Sunni Muslims.⁷⁴

As Iran's greatest proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah has doubled down on the model that brought it to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s; while its armed wing is undoubtedly the best armed and trained terrorist force in the world today, its political and charitable arms have also made impressive inroads with society. Bolstered with funds from Iran, the Lebanese government, and sympathetic Arab states, Hezbollah has built roads and schools and rebuilt villages wholesale through its building foundation, Jihad al Bina; in addition, the group provides welfare and medical services; "administers and funds primary, secondary, and vocational school;" and participates "in financial sectors, administering micro-loans aimed at increasing agricultural development in regions devastated by the civil war." Its Martyrs Foundation (al Shahid) is a full-service welfare agency for the families of suicide attackers and provides generous subsidies for most living expenses.⁷⁵ Observers note that Shia villages that sustained the brunt of damage from the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war have largely been rebuilt and expanded, particularly in comparison to Christian and Maronite villages in the same area.⁷⁶

Hezbollah's ability to insinuate itself into every aspect of Lebanese life is facilitated by the central government's failure to address the basic economic needs of its historically poor Shia population. Incompetence and corruption in reconstructing the country in the aftermath of the long Lebanese civil war of the 1970s and 1980s and the breakdown of institutions like the Council of the South (a nominal arm of the government dominated by the once prevailing Shia party Amal) have provided a natural opening. And while many in Lebanon are well aware of Hezbollah's ulterior motives, results on the ground cannot be denied. In the Shia-dominated southern Beirut suburb of Dahieh, which was destroyed in the 2006 war, the Waad Foundation (part of Jihad al Bina) took over where the government failed to deliver. Detailing the reconstruction efforts in Lebanon, a reporter explained, "Waad's director Hassan al-Jishi said that 270 buildings in Dahieh were completely destroyed. Waad has reconstructed 239 of them, and financially and technically contributed to rebuilding 19 more after their owners expressed their wishes to reconstruct them themselves."⁷⁷

However successful it has been, Hezbollah's charitable work is not without strings attached. According to some reports, much of the rebuilding and new housing completed in the wake of the 2006 war required private homes to conceal rocket launchers for on-demand use by Hezbollah.⁷⁸

Relations with the United States. Though a tiny country of barely more than four million, Lebanon has punched above its weight for decades. Unfortunately, much of that punch has come as a result of its position between Israel and Syria, its large Palestinian refugee population, and its growing intrasectarian and religious unrest. The Beirut barracks bombing of 1983 that saw 244 Marines murdered, hostage takings of the 1980s, wars with Israel, Syrian and Israeli occupations, and growth of Hezbollah throughout it all have kept Lebanon in Washington's sights. Because of these security concerns, Congress has appropriated more than \$1 billion in military and economic aid for Lebanon since 2006; the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011 has brought tens of millions more in aid directly and indirectly to Lebanon in support of the refugee population.⁷⁹

Like in the preceding Bush presidency, the Obama administration's ostensible goals in Lebanon are to achieve economic stability, secure borders, and strengthen a central government whose writ extends throughout the country. (See appendix 1 for excerpts of US diplomatic statements on Lebanon.) Despite aid programs that either directly or tangentially touch those goals, all three pillars of US policy are crumbling.

The main instrument of strategic planning for the US government appears to be a multiyear, two-pronged attempt to build up, regularize, and train both the LAF and Internal Security Forces (ISF). Both tactics have involved the obligation of tens of millions of dollars in weapons, equipment, and training.

In a press release accompanying the visit of Major General William D. Beydler, director of strategy, plans, and policy for US Central Command, and Brigadier General Guy T. Cosentino, deputy director for Politico-Military Affairs (Middle East) for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Lebanon in May 2013, the US mission in Beirut reported, "Generals Beydler and Cosentino emphasized the strong and sustained military cooperation between the two countries. As part of this cooperation and to strengthen the LAF's capacity and mobility, they noted the over \$140 million in equipment delivered to the Lebanese Armed Forces since June 2012 that includes aircraft, a naval vessel, armored and unarmored vehicles, guns, ammunition, equipment, and medical supplies." In addition, the release "underscored the Department of Defense's support for Lebanon's initiatives to implement its obligations under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701."⁸⁰

The press release neatly encapsulates the widening gap between rhetoric and reality in US policy and US-Lebanon relations. UN Security Council Resolution 1701 requires "full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords, and of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), that require the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, so that, pursuant to the Lebanese cabinet decision of July 27, 2006, there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese state." In reality, not only are there "weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese state," those weapons have flowed in increasing numbers and lethality since the beginning of

the US program, and experts estimate that Hezbollah is now fully rearmed since its losses in the 2006 war.⁸¹

In addition, wide swaths of the country are outside the control of Lebanese security, including areas of southern Beirut, much of southern Lebanon, and areas in the north under the control of Salafist groups.⁸² Multiple bombings in southern Beirut during the summer of 2013⁸³ and the October 2012 killing of Brigadier General Wissam al Hassan, ISF intelligence chief, drive home the fact that the central government's control is hardly growing.⁸⁴

Another major focus of US attention is the ISF. A State Department press release explains, "In 2012, the United States provided \$28 million in assistance to the ISF, including construction of the Aramoun Training Academy, the establishment of a nationwide secure radio program to help dispatch ISF officers quickly in emergencies, and assistance with equipment purchases and training programs for dozens of ISF units." Tens of millions more provide bricks and mortar, vehicles, and additional training.⁸⁵

Intended to provide another counterbalance to extremist groups and professionalize military and policing services in Lebanon, the ISF has become a more reliable professional force but is still incapable of handling many internal challenges to Lebanese government authority. Case in point: the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon's indictment of five Hezbollah suspects in the murder of former prime minister Rafik Hariri. The ISF was charged with finding and arresting the suspects, a task that is undoubtedly controversial given that Hezbollah forms part of the government; nonetheless, the arrest warrants were a test of ISF professionalism. It is, therefore, a sign of waning ISF influence that all suspects currently remain at large.⁸⁶

Economically speaking, the "soft" side of US assistance to Lebanon seems to be dominated by a variety of programs that often lack a clear agenda or theme; while some of the programs are goal oriented, others appear to fall more in the category of charitable work with little to offer in terms of a particular policy agenda or engaging a particular sector of the population.⁸⁷ A lack of consistency also bedevils US assistance programs, as does a lack of realistic objectives. Consider, for instance, the attractively titled Transition Initiatives

Lebanon Project from the US Agency for International Development (USAID):

Through small, in kind grants and technical assistance, USAID/OTI supports civil society actors in marginalized communities of Lebanon to create independent space for civic activism, strengthen civil society organizations to provide a more powerful voice for positive reform, and provide youth with opportunities, knowledge and tools needed to shape their communities independent from traditional power structures. As of April 2012, over 310,000 people have participated in the Lebanon Civic Support Initiative activities, with over 23,800 youth equipped with organizational and advocacy skills, and 102 youth-focused civil society organizations receiving US funding for the first time.⁸⁸

Credible? The numbers are too large to be meaningful. Dig down? Here is what some were doing with US funding: “[O]ne grant provided 350 youth in the marginalized northern region of Sahel Akkar with an independent space for recreation and community projects. In addition to English and IT trainings, youth modeled citizen behavior by rehabilitating a public school, beautifying border checkpoints, and planting trees.”⁸⁹

While the planting of trees is an intrinsically laudable exercise, it veers substantially from the critical path of counterbalancing Iran, building up the Lebanese state, or providing meaningful alternatives to welfare and aid from Islamist extremist groups. Other programs appear to be aimed more toward population needs, including the multiyear Microenterprise Development Program, but there appears to be little integration of various USAID projects to maximize their impact or benefit.⁹⁰ According to an audit of the USAID Microfinance Program in Lebanon performed by the Office of Inspector General, “program indicators did not measure progress towards goals. . . . The monitoring and evaluation plan did not have any indicators to measure sales or income.”⁹¹

Competition. Lebanon is one of the prime battlegrounds of US-Iran competition. The downsides of Iranian influence in Lebanon have long been evident: the creation and growth of Hezbollah into a power Iranian

proxy army, regular outbreaks of conflict along the Israeli-Lebanese border, a hub for training terrorist groups and a force multiplier for Iran’s elite IRGC, a radicalizing force for Palestinians trapped inside UN refugee camps, and an exploitative and dangerous force over Lebanon’s growing Shia population. And the United States has paid heavily for Iran’s creation of Hezbollah with the lives of Americans in Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian territories, Europe, and South America. Hezbollah has served Iran directly for many years and continues to be a proxy army that affords Iran “deniability” in its global terror campaign.

By the crudest possible measure, it is clear that Iran is “winning” in Lebanon and America is “losing.” Iran’s proxy is flourishing politically and militarily, its forces roam Lebanese territory with impunity, and Lebanon is quickly becoming a replacement for Syria as an important Arab proxy. In addition, Hezbollah continues to validate Iran’s model of influence by supporting groups that engage in both social and political work on the one hand while embracing militarism with the other. As a result, the dread costs imposed by Hezbollah’s recklessness on the Lebanese population have been managed and, to some extent, mitigated. Hezbollah and Iran are present in every Shia village, throughout Beirut, and in the Lebanese parliament. In fact, the prime minister from 2011 to 2013 was a Hezbollah-backed politician.

Does Lebanon matter? What should US goals be? Is it a feckless aim to seek to edge out Iran from a nation as dysfunctional as Lebanon? According to President Obama, “Obviously Lebanon is a critical country in a critical region, and we want to do everything that we can to encourage a strong, independent, and democratic Lebanon.”⁹² Thus far, however, the US has failed in this mission. To ensure greater influence in Lebanon, the United States must adopt a clear foreign policy in which strategic goals are better integrated into State Department, Defense Department, and USAID missions.

The most effective counterbalance to Iran would be a shift in US policy that seeks to directly challenge Iran in the areas where Iranian influence has been so successful. The fact that Hezbollah has been the sole instrument of regenerating Shia life after war—no matter that Hezbollah brought on the war—provides

a rationale for Washington to engage in direct reconstruction within Lebanon. Iran's financing of medical services for local populations also serves an acute need; there is little reason the United States should not answer the call. Simply put, the United States can do what Hezbollah does better, and without demanding any quid for its quo.

In addition, the US should focus on bolstering Shia leaders in Lebanon who have rejected Iran and Hezbollah but lack the wherewithal to stand against them. Clearly, according to groups like Haya Bina⁹³ and others, some clerics and laymen flee the dictates of terrorists and their sponsors, yet they are a nonfactor in US policymaking.⁹⁴ In fact, Shia leaders complain of their inability to engage the United States in meaningful discussions about counterbalancing Hezbollah and Iran's influence.⁹⁵ This is yet more evidence that Washington is failing to take the necessary steps to create alliances with Iran's opponents and to ensure their support in the future.

To be fair, the US operates under tighter constraints than many other regional actors. Neither Iran nor Hezbollah is inhibited in administering direct assistance, and quid pro quo arrangements that are illegal for the US remain available to others. A failure to articulate the goal of competition with Iran for influence inside Lebanon presents another important constraint. In addition, Iran, Qatar, and others have proven their willingness time and again to invest in the bricks-and-mortar projects that are generally rejected by US assistance agencies. However, it is reasonable to question whether this is a wise strategy: is the US goal in Lebanon to provide what amounts to charitable stabilization funds, or is the primary US goal the neutralization of Iranian influence in Lebanon and the isolation of Iran? Much depends on the answer to this question.

If the US goal in providing assistance to Lebanon is similar to its goals in sub-Saharan Africa or Latin America, then no course correction is needed. However, Lebanon should be seen as having more strategic importance to the United States and, as such, demands a foreign policy course correction that better aligns with broader global and Middle Eastern priorities.

Despite what should appear an obvious imperative to align programs with strategic goals, US programs

in Lebanon, whether on the military-to-military or the USAID side, appear arranged in a series of soda straws that lack crosscutting synergies or overall policy direction. In other words, the programs bear close resemblance to many other such efforts by the US government. A better model for considering cooperation and assistance to Lebanon may well be the counterinsurgency efforts embraced by the United States in Iraq, and to a lesser extent, in Afghanistan. These programs are focused on population rather than projects, and managed directly by those looking for specific outcomes rather than an aura of overall beneficence.

On the defensive side, the Counterinsurgency Manual published by the Department of the Army in 2006 outlines key elements of such a strategy: these include civil security, civil control, essential services, governance, and economic infrastructure and development.⁹⁶ Indeed, these are the clear elements of Hezbollah's programs within Lebanon. It should not be such a stretch to conclude that the United States must hew to these priorities in its foreign policy strategy with Lebanon as well. Without such a shift, the US is likely to continue its losing battle in Lebanon.

Iraq

The withdrawal of all American troops from Iraq at the end of 2011 has left the United States entirely dependent on soft power for influence in that frontline state. The Strategic Framework Agreement, signed in November 2008, nominally defines the aspirational scope of that soft power, committing the United States to support the Iraqi constitutional process and help Iraq "deter all threats against its sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity, among other things."⁹⁷

President Obama has shown little interest in achieving the aspirations of his predecessor, which is not surprising considering that he campaigned vigorously against them. The exercise of American soft power in Iraq has therefore been tepid and distracted—and misdirected, in fact, in some important ways. The United States has effectively ceded its influence in Iraq, creating a vacuum that Iran and al Qaeda have rushed to fill.

Relations with the United States before 2012. The reduction of US forces in Iraq began in December 2007 with the withdrawal of the first of the “surge” forces and continued through the rest of the Bush administration.⁹⁸ President Obama announced an acceleration of that withdrawal on February 27, 2009, while also making clear his intent to negotiate for an agreement that would keep American troops in Iraq after the expiration of the bilateral status of forces agreement in December 2011.⁹⁹ American troop numbers were down to 50,000 by the beginning of 2011, and plans were in place to reduce them to a final, much lower, number according to an agreement the Obama administration expected to reach with Baghdad that year.

The diplomatic environment of 2011 was complicated by the Iraqi parliamentary elections of that year—the first since the 2006 elections that had established Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al Maliki in power. The 2011 elections were pivotal for Iraq. They represented the first time that Iraqis would choose a government and prime minister without the overbearing presence of American troops and in relative security that allowed most Iraqis to go peacefully to the polls. They also offered the possibility for the first transition of power from one elected government to another, a critical moment in the life of any new democracy.

The elections themselves went smoothly, with no more complaints of fraud than might have been expected. Those claims came more from Maliki than from his opponents—a good sign, in principle, showing that it was not widely thought that the prime minister had been able to hijack the elections. Both Maliki and his principal opponent, Iyad Allawi, ran at the head of crosssectarian coalitions, although Maliki’s was predominantly Shia and Allawi’s mainly Sunni. To the great surprise of many—Maliki most of all—Allawi’s Iraqiyya bloc defeated Maliki’s State of Law Alliance by two seats in parliament, although neither had enough votes to form a government on their own. A protracted period of tense negotiations and chicanery followed as Iraqis jockeyed for control of the premiership.¹⁰⁰

This period of government formation offered the United States the first key opportunity for the skillful exercise of soft power. The Obama administration rightly declined to pick a winner in the election or to

press for a particular outcome. It also declined, however, to take a position when Maliki began to attack the constitutional and legal processes controlling how the government would be formed.

The debate centered on the question of which party got the first shot at forming a government—Iraqiyya or State of Law. Iraqiyya had the plurality of seats in parliament, even after a number of largely indefensible challenges made by Maliki to vote counting in areas in which he had not done well. By the norms of most parliamentary systems, therefore, Iraqiyya should have earned the right to try to form a government, although Iraq’s constitution was silent on that matter.

Much more was at stake in this decision than a technical legal matter. Iraq’s Sunnis felt that they had “won” the election (even though Allawi is a Shia). They believed that Maliki was maneuvering to deprive them of their rightful place in government by usurping the right to form the government. That belief began the process of undermining the tenuous trust Iraq’s Sunni Arabs had begun to place in the political process after the surge of 2007 and 2008. It did not help that Chief Justice Medhat al Mahmoud, believed to be in Maliki’s pocket, formally ruled in favor of the State of Law claims, enabling Maliki to retain the premiership in a technically legal way.¹⁰¹

Maliki was popular among Iraqis, but not among Iraq’s political leaders. He had alienated most of the major players outside his own party, and efforts to replace him were determined and crossed ethnosectarian lines. They foundered on the usual inability of Maliki’s opponents to form an effective alternative bloc because of their own mutual distrust and disagreements.

But external influences also played an important role in this outcome. The Iranians worked assiduously to promote the importance of a Shia government and to fight against any outcome that would put Allawi and his Sunni coalition in control of the government. Tehran appeared to float a number of Shia alternatives to Maliki when it seemed that Maliki might be unable to retain control but ultimately backed him when it seemed that he was gaining the upper hand.¹⁰²

Maliki’s opponents and rivals looked to the US for guidance and support. Did the Americans want Maliki in or out? Would they support Iraqiyya or another

coalition that unseated him? Would they help counterbalance Iran's efforts? The American response was ponderous silence. Repeating that the United States did not wish to interfere in Iraq's politics, the Obama administration refused to take a position on the question of which party should be allowed to form a government first, even though the eventual outcome effectively nullified the parliamentary elections. It did not work actively to mediate disputes among Maliki's opponents, as the Iranians were doing on Maliki's behalf. On the contrary, US statements and actions generally indicated support for Maliki, an impression that hindered the formation of an effective bloc to counter him.¹⁰³ US soft power in 2011 was thus generally aligned with the aims of Iran in the matter of Iraqi government formation, making the political outcome unsurprising.

Negotiations for the extension of the US military presence in Iraq were suspended throughout the government-formation process at the insistence of the United States. This suspension made sense while it remained unclear who would be prime minister. But Maliki's retention of that position did not end the political jockeying, as he and his opponents continued to wrangle over the precise composition of the cabinet. US officials cited the failure to complete the government-formation process as one reason for the delay in the start of the talks.¹⁰⁴ Negotiations did not begin in earnest, therefore, until August 2011—a mere five months before the legal basis for the continued presence of US troops in Iraq expired.¹⁰⁵

The talks did not go smoothly, which should have been no surprise to anyone familiar with the Iraqi political scene and Iraqi negotiating techniques in general. The White House rightly demanded immunities for American service members in Iraq, like those American military personnel enjoy in most countries in which they are deployed.¹⁰⁶ Maliki understandably resisted this demand, which was highly unpopular in Iraq. He attempted to leverage the fact that important political constituencies violently objected to allowing American troops to remain in Iraq, most notably Moqtada al Sadr and his Iranian-backed allies.¹⁰⁷ A similar dynamic had played out during the 2008 negotiations for extending the US military presence in Iraq. The Iranians had gone all out to prevent any such deal, but Maliki had lined

up a solid block of other political power players behind it and overrode Tehran's objections. Things played out differently in 2011.¹⁰⁸

The talks broke down in October 2011 when President Obama insisted that Maliki get Iraq's parliament to approve the agreement, including immunities for US troops and Maliki refused.¹⁰⁹ The prime minister offered instead an executive agreement guaranteeing that immunity, but this the White House rejected. To this day, then-secretary of state Hillary Clinton insists that there was no alternative, but that argument is difficult to accept. The US has large numbers of troops in Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain—all on the basis of executive agreements that were not ratified by the parliaments of those states. The decision to bring a foreign soldier before an indigenous court belongs to the executive branch, moreover, not the legislature. The executive agreement is thus the essential document in this process, while any ratification is secondary. The discussion in the US of a continued US military presence was highly politicized, and President Obama ended it with a resounding speech that appeared to reject the idea that he had ever sought to keep American troops in Iraq.¹¹⁰ His rhetoric recalled his 2008 campaign and referred to ending America's war in Iraq and bringing the troops home.

Obama reaffirmed America's commitment to supporting Iraq in accord with the terms of the bilateral security agreement of 2008—using soft power exclusively. But even these statements were overshadowed by the overwhelming impression that the United States was simply leaving Iraq to its own devices, having tired of the conflict. The net result of American soft-power influence between 2009 and 2012, therefore, was the creation of the impression that the US had sided with Maliki against Iraq's Sunnis and intended to disengage from Iraq as rapidly and completely as possible.¹¹¹

This impression was supported by the discussions of the post-2011 American diplomatic presence in Iraq. As the US military withdrawal accelerated in 2009, planning began in earnest for the transition of key soft-power functions from the military to the State Department. Concepts were considered for keeping an expansive diplomatic presence in Iraq with consulates in Irbil, Kirkuk, Basra, Anbar Province, and Najaf. The

purpose of that footprint would have been twofold. It would have maintained platforms from which USAID and other agencies could oversee continued development and cooperation projects. It would also have demonstrated a continued commitment to Iraq's Sunnis (by keeping a presence in Anbar, the Sunni heartland) and allowed the United States to keep a close eye on the critical Shia religious and political center of Najaf.¹¹²

Planning for this footprint rapidly encountered obstacles, however. For one thing, it was expensive, and the State Department did not want to seek that much money from Congress. For another thing, the plan required a lot of force to protect it.¹¹³ As long as plans continued to have a residual American military force in Iraq, State Department officials expected that these forces would protect the consulates and facilitate the movement and operations of their officials.

When it became clear that there would be no military presence, however, the State Department began to consider how to provide its own protection. It rapidly found that doing so would be extremely expensive and difficult, requiring the State Department to purchase and deploy the equivalent of several battalions of private security contractors armed with mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles, drones, and other high-end military equipment. Nor was it at all clear that Maliki would allow any such deployment of armed contractors, especially considering the resentment caused by the misdeeds of such contractors earlier in the war.

In the end, plans for an expansive footprint were dropped. The US retained its large embassy in Baghdad and consulates in Basra, Irbil, and Kirkuk. This decision was another symbol of the abandonment of Iraq's Sunnis and withdrawal from the heart of Iranian influence in Iraq.

Maliki has never been purely an Iranian stooge. He spent his years of exile in Damascus when most of his contemporaries were in Iran. Iranian-backed militias tried assiduously to kill him throughout 2007 and 2008.¹¹⁴ Tehran seems to have tried to replace him with a more reliable proxy during government formation in 2011. Maliki is, however, a deeply sectarian actor, committed to the well-being of Iraqi Shia and implacably suspicious of the Sunni Arabs, both in Iraq and throughout the region. He constantly believes he

sees Sunni conspiracies to overthrow him and restore Ba'athist control to Iraq, and his inner circle feeds these fears.¹¹⁵ Despite his own tensions with and distrust of Tehran, therefore, his internal policies fundamentally align with those of the Islamic Republic.

Maliki apparently believed that a Sunni conspiracy to seize power was coming to fruition just as the American military forces left Iraq. Two days after the last American troops crossed the border into Kuwait, Maliki sent troops to arrest Sunni Vice President Tariq al Hashemi and his bodyguards on suspicion of plotting a coup against him.¹¹⁶ Hashemi is an unsavory character and not the Sunni leader anyone would have chosen given the opportunity. There is no evidence, however, that he was involved in any coup plotting—or even that there was any coup plotting underway.

Maliki either took counsel of his fears or seized an opportunity to rid himself of a hated rival—or both. In any event, he appears to have given the order to arrest Hashemi shortly after his meeting with President Obama in Washington in December 2011. The silence of the United States even as Hashemi's bodyguards, obviously tortured, were compelled to “confess” to plots and to implicate Hashemi in terrorist activities therefore strengthened the narrative that the US was abandoning Iraq's Sunnis and relying entirely on Maliki and his sectarian policies to protect its interests.

We must note that throughout this process Iraqi political leaders of all stripes were focused much more intently on the United States than the White House was on Iraq. At every key inflection, they reached out to contacts within and outside of the administration with requests for mediation, support, insight, or any indication of American support or concern.¹¹⁷ It took a long time for them to realize that the White House really was not concerned with Iraq, would not exert itself to help any of the players, and seemed not to care much about how Iraqi politics played out, even as the political settlement brokered at the cost of so much American blood and treasure seemed to be unraveling.

Security in Iraq began to deteriorate slowly over the course of 2012, as best one can tell. The withdrawal of US troops eliminated a key source of data on violence in Iraq, making apples-to-apples comparisons after December 2011 almost impossible. Judging from compilations

of other sources, however, it is clear that violence started to increase after the full US withdrawal as al Qaeda in Iraq began to remobilize in the more distant areas from which it had not been completely cleared—and where Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) could not readily reach.¹¹⁸ The Obama administration contested this information, claiming that violence was not rising, and attention quickly switched to a dramatic flare-up of the historical tension between Maliki and the Kurds.

Relations with the United States Post-December

2011. The proximate sources of tension between Maliki and the Kurds after the troop withdrawal were disputes over the sharing of Iraq's oil revenues with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), personal animosity between KRG President Massoud Barzani and Maliki stemming in part from Barzani's determined efforts to prevent Maliki from remaining as prime minister, and tensions along the Green Line separating the KRG from the rest of Iraq.¹¹⁹ The argument over oil revenues goes back to the earliest formation of a post-Saddam government in Baghdad and would not by itself have caused a major kerfuffle. Barzani's feud with Maliki, who had long aligned himself with Barzani's rival in Kurdistan, Iraqi Vice President Jalal Talabani, was also an extended conflict, although the postelection government-formation crisis had exacerbated it.

Violence along the Green Line, however, owed its rebirth in part to the US troop withdrawal. From 2009 to the end of 2011, American troops had manned tripartite security posts all along the Green Line with Kurdish troops (Peshmerga) and ISF. These posts had done much to ease tensions by promoting information sharing and allowing Kurds and Arabs to maintain visibility on each other's movements and preparations. The few thousand Americans devoted to this effort led one of the more successful peacekeeping operations in the Middle East.¹²⁰ But that operation ended in 2011 as US forces withdrew, and violence began to erupt along the Green Line again.

Tensions rose particularly around the disputed city of Kirkuk, where Peshmerga and ISF maneuvered for advantage and occasionally exchanged fire.¹²¹ By mid-2012, all of these sources of tension seemed to be persuading Barzani to seek Kurdish independence from

Iraq.¹²² But he knew that he could not achieve independence without a guarantor, and Iran could not be such a guarantor. Having a significant and restive Kurdish population of its own, Tehran strongly opposes the creation of an independent Kurdish state that could fuel ethnic tensions within Iran.¹²³ Moreover, Iran's principal Kurdish ally is Jalal Talabani, who hails from Suleimaniyah, the Kurdish province that borders Iran. Tehran's ties to Barzani had never been as strong. And Talabani was supporting Maliki, as Iran's leaders desired, and opposing the idea of Kurdish independence.

As negotiations for a continued US troop presence in Iraq faltered, Kurdish leaders tried to explore the possibility of keeping a US base in Kurdistan. They offered a variety of inducements for such a deal, which they believed would have secured Kurdistan from any threat emanating from Baghdad.¹²⁴ But the Obama administration would not consider such a deal without an agreement with Baghdad, rightly understanding that any such arrangement would be tantamount to recognizing Kurdish independence and sanctioning the partition of Iraq, which the White House correctly opposed. Barzani was forced, therefore, to turn to the Turks in hopes of finding a most unlikely support, since Turkey has historically opposed the idea of an independent Kurdistan even more vigorously than has Iran.

But the attitude of the government of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been steadily softening toward the Kurds. Erdoğan drifted into rhetorical conflict with Maliki on a number of occasions over Maliki's treatment of Iraq's Sunnis and even allowed the fugitive Hashemi to stay in Turkey for a time, much to Maliki's fury. The steady collapse of state power in Syria also brought Erdoğan to see Barzani in a new light—increasingly Barzani seemed to be a figure who could maintain control over Syria's Kurds as Bashar al Assad's forces lost the area. Barzani has even appeared willing to help Erdoğan negotiate a cease-fire with the Kurdish terrorist group, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), that had been operating in Turkey—Barzani agreed to allow PKK fighters to relocate to the KRG despite Maliki's opposition and to the relief of Erdoğan.¹²⁵

Barzani's maneuvering room was limited by Talabani's loyalty to the alliance with Maliki. But Talabani suffered an incapacitating stroke in December 2012, and

it does not appear that he will recover enough to reenter Iraqi politics.¹²⁶ From that point on, Barzani has been dominant (and his dominance was just cemented in the September 2013 Kurdish elections, in which Talabani's party came in third), and Irbil's relations with Baghdad have become ever more distant while the Kurdish-Turkish relationship has steadily warmed.

Barzani is looking to Turkey, indeed, to solve his oil dispute with Baghdad by building a pipeline that connects the Kurdish oil fields directly to the Turkish pipeline that discharges at Ceyhan. When this pipeline is completed in December 2013,¹²⁷ it will allow Iraqi Kurdistan to sell its own oil through Turkey without any involvement from Baghdad—and to receive payment for its sales directly from the Turks. It is a big step toward real Kurdish autonomy from Iraq and toward Turkey replacing the United States as the most important Kurdish ally.

As the US focused what limited attention it was willing to pay Iraq on these dynamics, sectarian tensions in Arab Iraq were increasing. The next major inflection point came when Maliki tried to arrest Rafi al Issawi—the finance minister, *de facto* leader of what remained of the Iraqiyya alliance, and prominent Sunni politician—almost exactly one year after he had tried to arrest Hashemi.¹²⁸ The move against Issawi was the beginning of the end of Iraq's political reconciliation. Hashemi had never been a terribly popular figure among Iraq's Sunni population, at least not until Maliki moved against him. But Issawi had a strong following in the key Sunni constituency of Anbar, and the charges against him were so evidently trumped up and baseless that the move seemed to be exactly what it was: a naked act of sectarian malevolence aimed at weakening Sunni representation in the government.

This time, Iraq's Sunnis resisted. A protest movement began in December 2012 with camps set up in Anbar and spread to other Sunni provinces.¹²⁹ The protests were peaceful, although they blocked the main highway from Baghdad to Syria for some periods of time. The Sunni political and tribal leaders went to great lengths to keep the protests peaceful, even searching their own protesters for weapons before allowing them into the camps. But it seemed that the Arab Spring had finally reached Iraq.

This protest movement gave the United States an important opportunity to reestablish itself as a political player in Iraq using the soft-power tools at its disposal. American interests seemed clear to everyone except the administration: keeping Iraq's Sunni population committed to the political process was the essential precondition for ensuring that they would not allow al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) to infiltrate the core Sunni areas. Maliki's sectarianism was fueling Sunni suspicions that he intended to exclude them entirely from the political process, which may very well be his goal. The inexcusable and unjustifiable move against Issawi was a pivotal moment, and the US should have used all its leverage to press Maliki to back down, abandon his pursuit of Issawi, and try to meet the protesters' (rather modest) initial demands.

Despite the withdrawal of American forces, the United States still had considerable leverage on Maliki at the end of 2012. ISF depended on American equipment to operate, and the Iraqi Air Force's only plan to regain combat aircraft was to purchase F-16s from the United States.¹³⁰ Iraq, moreover, still suffered from UN Security Council Chapter VII restrictions dating back to the first Gulf War, and Maliki relied on the United States to help him get those sanctions lifted. He was also working hard to normalize relations with Kuwait, which had never been reestablished after Saddam's invasion of that country in 1990, and with the suspicious court of Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz.¹³¹ The United States was in a position to make it easier or harder for Maliki to succeed in those endeavors. The White House, finally, could simply have denounced Maliki publicly for sectarian misbehavior, which would have strengthened the confidence of the anti-Maliki coalitions constantly swirling around him and might well have forced Maliki to reconsider the aggressiveness of his approach.

The United States used none of this leverage, confining itself to very muted complaints by Ambassador Stephen Beecroft, while largely working behind the scenes to weaken the Sunni coalition opposing Maliki.¹³² US policy toward Iraq, such as it was, relied on Maliki to be "our man in Baghdad," and the administration backed him at almost every turn. Once again, this policy aligned nicely with Iranian objectives in Iraq, since

Tehran was also pleased to see Iraq's Sunnis excluded from the government and marginalized and Maliki, who was increasingly dependent on Iranian support, strengthened.

The protests continued to be peaceful, and ISF was restrained for a remarkably long time. A tragic ISF shooting at a protest in Anbar in January 2013 did not, amazingly, lead to a general flare-up, although it naturally made the protesters more intransigent and their demands—which evolved to include surrendering the shooters to them—harder to meet.¹³³ The tipping point came in April 2013 when Maliki—for reasons not entirely clear—ordered ISF troops to storm a protest camp in Hawija, near the Green Line, and 20 people were killed in the process.¹³⁴ The United States again remained remarkably placid in the face of this attack. Its response was much more muted than, say, the complaints the Obama administration made against Bahrain for violations of human rights that occurred on a far broader, but less lethal, scale. (See section on Bahrain.)

But Iraqis did not react as calmly. The Hawija massacre was a catalyst to violence similar to the destruction of the al Askari Mosque in Samarra in February 2006. AQI expanded the range, number, and lethality of its attacks more rapidly than before, drawing on Sunni anger after Hawija. In July 2012, it announced the start of a campaign that it called “Breaking the Walls,” which consisted of a series of multiple car-bomb attacks every month, then every other week, then every week, culminating with an attack on the Abu Ghraib prison in July 2013 that released 500 inmates.¹³⁵ After that attack, AQI announced the successful completion of that campaign and the start of a new one, “Soldiers’ Harvest,” which has seen the frequency of multiple-car-bomb attacks increase further.¹³⁶ In the meantime, the protest camps have shrunk, but guerrilla-style attacks are taking their place. Well-aimed and disciplined small-arms attacks are rising, especially in Ninewa Province, suggesting that the more experienced and trained former Ba’athist fighters have returned to the battlefield.

ISF has proven unable to manage this rising tide of violence, despite a number of targeted operations and mass arrests. This inability is not surprising, since ISF was built with the expectation that the United States

would continue to provide key enablers, including essential intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, after 2011. Without those enablers, ISF has not been able to conduct precision raids, nor has it been able to clear and hold AQI or other insurgent-contested terrain. The situation has become so serious that Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari asked in October 2013 for direct American assistance to combat AQI, including drone operations in Iraq.¹³⁷ This public request for US hard-power support to Iraq may be the best evidence of the utter failure of the soft-power approach the United States has taken since 2009.

Relations with Iran. The Obama administration remains so committed to its soft-power approach, such as it is, in Iraq, that it leaked a public rejection of the request for drone strikes or any other kind of direct military assistance. It should not be surprising, therefore, that Iraq is turning elsewhere. Maliki announced the formation of a Baghdad division to secure the capital from AQI attacks that is comprised of Shia militia groups including Moqtada al Sadr’s Jaish al Mahdi (JAM), Khataib Hezbollah (KH), and Asaib Ahl al Haq (AAH)—all of which fought the US military with determination and viciousness.¹³⁸

Sadr had demobilized JAM (an order that was at least partially effective), but the militia has been remobilizing in the face of the same kinds of AQI sectarian attacks that had drawn it out in 2005 and 2006. KH is a proxy of the IRGC-QF and reports directly (without Sadr’s cutouts) to the IRGC-QF handler for Iraq. AAH is another reliable Iranian proxy commanded by Qais Khazali, a disciple of Sadr’s father, Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq al Sadr, and a rival to Sadr for control over the Sadrist movement.¹³⁹ Qais recently announced his intention to participate in Iraqi politics. The formation of the Baghdad division legitimizes his militia as an arm of the state.

But Maliki has done more than legitimate Iran’s militia proxies. He has actually begun to sign defense agreements with Tehran. On September 26, 2013, for example, Iraqi Defense Minister Saadoun al Dulaimi and the Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehghan signed a bilateral defense agreement that aims to increase cooperation between the two

countries, strengthen the Iraqi army, and improve security in the region.¹⁴⁰ This agreement, among others, suggests an evolving strategic cooperation among two countries formerly at odds.

The net result of this complex chain of events has been to put Iraq firmly in Iran's camp on regional issues. Iranian shipments of weapons and materiel to the Assad regime regularly fly over Iraqi airspace despite continual American entreaties to Maliki to prevent them. It is not clear in any case how Maliki could do so, since the withdrawal of all American troops in 2011 deprived Iraq of its only air force. But KH and AAH have also ostentatiously deployed fighters from Iraq to Damascus, where they are supporting Assad directly—and the United States has not complained as Maliki incorporates those forces directly into ISF.¹⁴¹ The meeting of the Arab League in Baghdad in 2012 was a notable event for Iraq—but a setback for American efforts to pressure Assad to step down because Maliki has fundamentally supported Assad while maintaining a nearly transparent fig leaf of formal neutrality on the issue. Iraq is also well known to be an entrepôt for the transshipment of sanctioned Iranian commodities, but the United States has not even remonstrated with Baghdad over this issue, let alone taken any action like threatening to apply international sanctions to Iraq (which is not actually exempted in any of the laws, UN Security Council Resolutions, or multilateral sanctions regimes).¹⁴²

Competition. The Obama administration, in sum, has not been pursuing any strategy to compete with Iran for influence in Iraq. On the contrary, American policy in Iraq since 2009 has generally aligned with Iran's in effect if not in intent, and the US has consistently backed Iran's allies at the expense of those who might have preferred to side with the West. The few times the US complained about Maliki's behavior had no effect. Maliki has generally refused the trivial requests for help that Washington has made, and Obama, in a recent private meeting with Maliki, made no commitment of military equipment or other assistance to Iraq.¹⁴³ The US-Iraq relationship is steadily cooling and eroding, therefore, even as Iraq's internal political and security arrangements erode and approach the point of collapse.

Designing a competitive strategy in Iraq would therefore require a complete reversal of the US approach hitherto. Despite the lofty words of the 2008 Strategic Framework Agreement and the Obama administration's repeated assertions that it is turning those words into action, the United States is not well positioned in Iraq to implement or sustain any competitive strategy in concert with the current Iraqi government. Iraq's growing oil exports make US foreign assistance or even technical assistance unnecessary to Maliki—he can buy whatever he needs on the open market. The United States does not provide financial assistance to Iraq's military at this point, and Iraq was only the fifth-largest recipient of US Foreign Military Sales (FMS) deliveries in the Middle East in 2012 behind Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Israel, and Egypt.¹⁴⁴

The FMS accounts tell an interesting story, in fact. FMS sales to most of the Arab states directly threatened by Iran have risen steadily over the past decade as those states have sought to improve their abilities to resist an expanding Iranian threat. The UAE expansion has been most dramatic, increasing by almost an order of magnitude from \$192 million in 2006 to \$1.4 billion in 2012. Saudi FMS purchases increased by 63 percent over that period, Bahraini purchases by 79 percent, and Qatari purchases from \$464,000 to \$27 billion.¹⁴⁵

It is difficult to compare those purchases directly with Iraq's FMS purchases, of course, since ISF was in only the early stages of construction in 2006 and received a great deal of military aid and equipment from the United States outside the FMS program. Even so, FMS deliveries to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar all increased from 2011 to 2012; those to Iraq fell.¹⁴⁶ As other Arab states arm in fear of Iran, Iraq apparently remains largely unconcerned about its neighbor to the east—which says a great deal about the success of any US strategy aimed at containing Iranian influence in Iraq, or lack thereof.

Nor is Iraq becoming heavily enmeshed in the American economy through foreign direct investment. The relative absence of US oil companies from Iraq is remarkable given the conspiracy theories circulating about why America invaded Iraq in the first place. Those conspiracy theories, in fact, help explain the absence. As Iraq was putting oil contracts up for bid

in 2008, a small group of American senators publicly opposed any involvement by US oil companies for fear of stoking the conspiracy theories.¹⁴⁷ Their efforts had a chilling effect on the bidding by those companies, but Iraqi mismanagement of the bidding process also had a lot to do with it. ExxonMobil then found itself embroiled in the Irbil-Baghdad tensions in June 2012, as Maliki threatened to expel the company from southern Iraq if it continued to do business directly with the KRG.¹⁴⁸ The net result has been to throw the Iraqi oil development market largely to European and, secondarily, Chinese and Iranian investment, depriving the US of strong economic ties in Iraq's most important sector on which a long-term relationship could have been built.

Developing a meaningful policy in Iraq would almost certainly require a combination of hard power and soft power. Maliki desperately needs US assistance in dealing with the massive and growing al Qaeda threat he faces, as well as with a Sunni population mobilizing outside of the al Qaeda franchise. He needs American intelligence, air power, and other enablers. But simply providing him with those capabilities would have the effect of increasing his dependence on Iran if it enabled him to ratchet up his campaign of sectarian discrimination, violence, and marginalization.

Any US support against AQI would therefore have to be inseparably joined to meaningful pressure on Maliki to rebuild an inclusive political settlement, stop mass arrests of Sunnis and trumped-up legal attacks on senior Sunni leaders, and use armed force carefully and discriminately against clearly identified al Qaeda

targets. The United States would also have to insist that Maliki expel Shia militias from ISF and disarm them (again). Sectarian violence will only increase if those militias continue to operate, and that violence will continue to create conditions for the growth of al Qaeda. This policy, if successful, might give the United States leverage with Maliki on other issues, such as Iranian overflights in support of Assad. The mere presence of US combat aircraft over Iraq's skies, in fact, might well restrict Tehran's willingness to risk its planes and their cargo.

But Maliki is as unlikely to accept such a deal as Obama is to offer it. It would enrage the Iranians to see US forces return to Iraq in any form, and the demand to disarm Shia militias would be unacceptable to those militias and to their Iranian handlers. At this point in the sectarian struggle, it might well be unacceptable even to many ordinary Iraqi Shia who have lost confidence in Maliki's ability to protect them against al Qaeda attacks.

Iraq is now in the midst of an existential armed conflict and increasingly embroiled in the existential war being waged in Syria. No purely soft-power strategy can succeed in such circumstances. It is conceivable to imagine plausible, albeit unlikely, strategies in which a limited commitment of military power would purchase even greater soft-power leverage. It is most likely, however, that continued US inaction and unwillingness to engage with Iraq seriously will facilitate the continued slide into full-scale sectarian civil war and the reemergence of armed Shia militias supplied and partially directed by Iran that is already underway.

TIER 2 PRIORITIES

The countries where Iran aspires to expand its power and influence include Egypt, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Afghanistan, and the Gulf Cooperation Council states.

Egypt

Relations with Iran. In our 2012 report, we explained:

On balance, Egypt's revolution has thus far delivered little by way of practical results for Tehran. Cairo, likely under some additional pressure from the Gulf and from Washington, has made only miniscule steps in the direction of renewed relations. As for Tehran's promises of major Iranian investments in Egypt—worth \$5 billion, according to one account—Egyptians would be well advised to consider other such Iranian promises and wait for the money to materialize before rejoicing.¹⁴⁹

The collapse of the Mubarak regime in Egypt was eagerly welcomed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Prior to this, Tehran had severed relations with Cairo in the wake of the Camp David Accords and applauded the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. But the Ahmadinejad government was ready to put the Sadat era behind it; Iran reached out with unbridled enthusiasm to Mubarak's successors even before Mohammed Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government was elected in 2012.¹⁵⁰

Despite several reciprocal visits, expressions of interest on both sides, and a notable willingness to open the Suez Canal to Iranian military shipping¹⁵¹ (including port visits to Iran's embattled protégé, Bashar al Assad), the awaited rapprochement between the two countries never truly materialized. Small steps were made, including an increase in bilateral dialogue, joint trade fairs, and the vacillating resumption of direct air service between Tehran and Cairo.¹⁵² But underlying tensions have remained, as Iran's condemnation of the June 2013 military coup¹⁵³ and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's subsequent condemnation of the post-coup violence have upheld frosty overtones in relations between the two nations.¹⁵⁴

Any serious improvement of ties between Iran and

Egypt will likely await a resolution of the Syrian conflict, as both the Egyptian military and the Muslim Brotherhood have ranged themselves firmly on the side of the rebels fighting Assad. Nonetheless, the possibility that the two nations may find common ground—perhaps in Cairo's newfound hostility toward the United States—should not be underestimated. Assumptions that the determinedly secular Egyptian military will not slowly continue the spadework of repairing ties with Iran are incorrect. After all, as Khaled Amareh, chief of the Egyptian interest section in Tehran, promised in September 2013: “The relationship between Iran and Egypt is important to the entire region, and there is a consensus among all national Egyptian groups about the significance of this relationship. Naturally, Egypt is now in transition and it is natural that it is difficult to take important and strategic decisions in this period, but officials of the two countries are keen to improve relations.”¹⁵⁵

Relations with the United States. The traditionally robust US-Egypt relationship is currently experiencing rocky times. Egyptians on all sides of the Arab Spring—liberals, secularists, Islamists, and the military—have perceived the Obama administration as supporting the wrong side. These perceptions commenced with the administration's confused approach to the widespread anti-Mubarak demonstrations in 2011, its equivocal calls for the aged leader to step down, and what many viewed as a seamless transfer of its affection to Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood government. Washington further exacerbated these tensions by continuing its confused approach in dealing with the June 2013 coup ousting Morsi; Obama refused to label the takeover a coup (which would trigger an automatic cutoff in assistance), but this decision was followed by the contradictory cancelation of annual joint military exercises and suspension of substantial portions of aid in October 2013.¹⁵⁶ The lack of any cohesive strategy has left all in Egypt (and many in Washington) scratching their heads.

Obama administration officials claimed that the United States had little leverage with Cairo, dismissing complaints about the failure to adopt a consistent policy toward either the Arab Spring in general or Egypt, specifically.¹⁵⁷ This is despite the fact that the United States is Egypt's largest bilateral trading partner (with trade totaling \$8.4 billion in 2012) and a major investor (in 2010, the US stock of foreign direct investment in Egypt was \$11.7 billion)¹⁵⁸ and that, since 1979, the United States has annually provided \$1.3 billion in military assistance¹⁵⁹ and up to \$815 million in economic support and development funds to Egypt.¹⁶⁰

Competition. In theory, the idea that there could ever be any US-Iranian competition in Egypt appears ludicrous. Egypt is overwhelmingly Sunni and, as such, there is little affection for Iran's fundamentalist Shia doctrine. Conversely, one of the largest US Agency for International Development (USAID) missions in the world is in Cairo,¹⁶¹ and US-financed training, maintenance, and weaponry have been the backbone of the Egyptian military for more than three decades. Moreover, both the United States and Sunni Gulf states that are concerned with Iran's growing regional influence have worked to stymie the Iran-Egypt relationship.

Nonetheless, Iran continues to make slow inroads into Egypt. One small flagship operation is the Misr-Iran Development Bank, 40 percent of which is owned by the Iran Foreign Investment Company with Cairo controlling nearly 60 percent (split between the state-owned National Investment Bank and the semi-state-owned Misr Insurance Company).¹⁶² As we previously noted,¹⁶³ some have suggested that the bank has become a conduit for Iranian sanctions evasion and, as such, it has been placed on the US Treasury Department's Iranian Transactions Regulation list.¹⁶⁴ As of 2012, however, the bank was still providing financing in key Egyptian sectors.¹⁶⁵

Of course, Iranian investments are dwarfed by the size and breadth of US investment and aid. An April 2013 US trade mission, for example, brought almost a dozen major US-based corporations to Egypt, including international powerhouses Google and Raytheon.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, despite confusion about the White House's approach to Egypt, the focus on Egypt's business sector

has continued and in theory provides a stable foundation for private-sector relations between the two nations.

On balance, there is little prospect of a head-to-head competition for Egyptian affections between the United States and Iran. More than 50 US-funded projects are ongoing in Egypt, ranging from antiquities research and agricultural and food security programs to health, education, and micro and mortgage finance. And while it is true that US programs tend to focus more heavily on areas that mirror American political biases (for example, there are currently five programs on "gender equality"), the sheer volume of assistance programs over the years has meant that more-practical areas relevant to a broader swath of the Egyptian public are hard to avoid.

On the military side, Iran has little to offer in competition with the robust supply of sophisticated US weaponry and aircraft to the Egyptian armed forces. And while the cutoff of significant weapons transfers that the Department of State announced in October 2013¹⁶⁷ (after a \$1.4 billion arms sale was approved only five months before¹⁶⁸) may tarnish Washington's reputation as a reliable supplier, the notion of sneering at an arsenal that includes F-16s, M1A1 Abrams tanks, E-2C Hawkeyes, TOW antitank missiles, Stingers, advanced radar and patrol ships, and much more in technical support and related military assistance seems hardly credible. In truth, Iran has little to add to Egypt's readiness, and a shift of allegiance to Russian or Chinese weaponry given the preponderance of US equipment also appears to be a long shot.

Finally, while the current instability in the Egypt-US relationship should be a cause for concern, the overall framework of economic and military assistance—the 1979 Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel—and the imperative of investing in a stable foundation in the Arab world's largest nation make it very likely that Washington will ultimately restore much of its aid. Should that not occur, Iran and other global actors like China and Russia will have an opportunity to make inroads and influence Egypt's future course. However, it should be understood that neither Iran, Russia, nor China, is likely to invest meaningfully in Egypt's infrastructure and development, nor will any of them be capable of competing with Gulf countries who will seek

to maintain a balance of power favorable to Sunnis in the Middle East. Ultimately, therefore, while Egypt may drift from its relationship with the United States, it is unlikely to find itself in the Iranian camp of influence.

The West Bank and Gaza Strip

Relations with Iran. The growing Sunni-Shia divide has complicated Iran's much-vaunted support for the Palestinian cause. Sunni Hamas's 2012 decision to pull out of Damascus and split with the Assad regime meant that the most militant Palestinian rejectionist group was nominally operating apart from its Iranian sponsors. In the years since that decision, however, it has become clear just how much Hamas depended on Iranian largesse for its arms and treasury. Nor has it been possible for the group to turn to other Arabs for support. The Arab League is now on record supporting a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine; a new leader has taken the helm in Qatar, which might have been a ripe target to replace Iran as a major funder for Hamas; and Sunni Islamist extremists are out of favor in many parts of the region.

Iran is keenly aware of the shifting alliances in its neighborhood and believes its loyalty to the Palestinian cause is a trump card against the less committed Sunnis. In 2013, Iran took the unusual step of boasting of its arming of Palestinian militant groups. Then—Majlis speaker Ali Larijani told Iran's Mehr News Agency, “We provide assistance to the people of Palestine, including military assistance, and Palestinians succeeded in striking the mouth of Israel with the help of Iran during the eight-day war [Pillar of Defense],” adding, “We do not conceal our support for Palestine from anyone, and we do not act like some countries which supply arms to Syria and reject this when asked about it.”¹⁶⁹

Iranian support is, however, a double-edged sword for the Palestinians. If Palestinian groups continue to range themselves with Iran and against Sunni Arabs, how does that bode for the long-term viability of those groups? Can Palestine be a Sunni and a Shia cause in the Middle East? If so, it will indeed be unique. But for Palestinian groups, such reflections are a luxury. They need money and arms now.

Before the 2012 split, Hamas enjoyed a unique relationship with Tehran in the sense that it viewed itself less as a proxy of the Iranian regime and more a partner that brought its own credibility to the relationship. That sense brought Hamas to refuse training with Hezbollah and rebuke Iran for its willingness to support Assad against his own people.¹⁷⁰ But the loss of Iranian support has been hard on the group, which has been forced to purchase some arms on the open market, beg for cash from the Qatari government, and otherwise tighten its belt.

Consider what was:

- Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) training for the elite Hamas Izz ad Din al Qas-sam Brigades in both Iran and Syria.¹⁷¹
- IRGC training in missile-launch exercises in Sudan.¹⁷²
- IRGC and Syrian experts training Hamas in the Gaza Strip.¹⁷³
- Antiaircraft missiles.¹⁷⁴
- Sophisticated guidance systems.¹⁷⁵
- Chinese-made C-704 missiles.¹⁷⁶
- Katyusha, Grad, and Fajr rockets.
- Sophisticated antitank guided missiles and specialized training on improvised explosive devices.¹⁷⁷

Reports now conflict as to whether Iran has continued to arm Hamas, with some Israeli sources suggesting weapons transfers have continued unabated,¹⁷⁸ and others noting a major downturn in both cash and arms shipments.¹⁷⁹ Reliable sources suggest that Iran has continued to provide certain arms to Hamas, most notably the advanced Fajr-5 rocket, capable of reaching deep into Israeli territory and believed to be shipped via Sudan.¹⁸⁰

One certain result of the Hamas-Iran tensions was Tehran's turn to Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), a once-prominent terrorist group fallen on hard times. As we stated in our May 2012 report, Ziyad al Nakhalah, PIJ's number two, complained to the pan-Arab daily *Asharq Alawsat* in 2009, “What we can obtain from the donors can satisfy some of our needs, but the Jihad Movement remains a resistance movement; it is poor,

and it always pursues to increase its resources as long as its body and its needs grow.”¹⁸¹ But with Hamas on the sidelines, former Florida native Ramadan Shallah, the leader of PIJ, has made clear that his loyalties are not in question. As a result, Tehran has showered diplomatic and military affection on the group.

During the late-2012 Pillar of Defense operation in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli military found PIJ’s ability substantially improved from earlier battles, thanks, some suggest, to Iranian support. PIJ’s al Quds Brigades boasted primacy in the short-lived fight with the Israeli military, claiming to have been the first to fire (Iranian-supplied) missiles on Tel Aviv and that it destroyed “31 fighters [people], fired 933 rockets, killed 3 Israelis and wounded tens more.”¹⁸² The Quds Brigades also claims to be producing its own long-range rockets based on Iranian blueprints, which Israeli sources have confirmed.¹⁸³

Iran has also lavished aid on the languishing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), another group that sided with Tehran and Assad. The group reportedly met with Iranian sponsors under the auspices of Hezbollah in Beirut. “Following the resumption of Iranian support, there will soon be a dramatic increase in the strength of the PFLP’s military wing, the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, after the internal reorganization of the group is completed,” sources told *Al Monitor* newspaper.¹⁸⁴

Whether because of this competition or because the fruits of the Arab Spring and the restoration of Egyptian military rule on the Gaza Strip have added to Hamas’s burdens, the group has moved to restore relations with Iran. Khaled Meshal, the Hamas leader who made a great show of his distance from Tehran only last year, has reportedly tempered his view that Assad should be ousted, recommending peace talks instead.¹⁸⁵ And the group has even turned to rival Hezbollah to help repair relations with its old sponsor.¹⁸⁶ As of this writing, however, the hoped-for rapprochement had yet to gel.¹⁸⁷

On the soft-power side, Iran continues to provide assistance, but at sharply diminished levels. In mid-2013, Hamas Finance Minister Ziad Zaza acknowledged financial troubles but insisted that these were due to Israeli restrictions and that aid from Iran and others

still ran from \$5 to 12 million a month. Others disagreed off the record, saying that Iranian cash transfers had dropped by more than half.¹⁸⁸ A donation from Qatar for \$400 million in the wake of renewed conflict with Israel eased the sting slightly.¹⁸⁹

Worse yet for Hamas, Iran began in 2013 to distribute assistance to Gazans via PIJ rather than through Hamas.¹⁹⁰ Using the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, a known conduit for funding terrorist groups (and one so designated by the US Treasury Department), Iran and its friends in PIJ handed out \$2 million worth of food aid to Gazans during Ramadan.¹⁹¹ PIJ, hardly squeamish about its ties to Iran, distributed tens of thousands of packages from trucks painted with the Iranian flag.¹⁹²

Consistent with Iranian aid-giving habits in the Gaza Strip, most assistance has been situational, given to promote a particular group or burnish Iran’s own reputation. Examples include aid packages at Ramadan; assistance for rebuilding in the wake of conflict with Israel; budgetary support for Hamas governance; and most often, subsidized or free arms shipments to congenial militant groups.

Relations with the United States. No one can accuse the United States of underinvesting in either the Palestinian people or the peace process. The American taxpayer has transferred approximately \$5 billion to the Palestinians since limited self-rule was established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,¹⁹³ and each president since Jimmy Carter has staked considerable personal political capital on a solution to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Barack Obama is no different than his predecessors in that regard, and despite promising the nation a rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific,¹⁹⁴ the president’s main focus in his first speech to the United Nations General Assembly following his reelection was almost exclusively on the Middle East, Iran, and the Palestinians. Secretary of State John Kerry has also thrown himself into the peace process with gusto, and notwithstanding the faltering US economy, has announced several new USAID and State Department programs in 2013 alone, including a US-backed plan “for private firms to invest \$4 billion in the Palestinian territories to contribute to a solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”¹⁹⁵

Particularly since the 1993 Oslo Accords, American assistance to the Palestinians (which now excludes any governmental assistance to the Gaza Strip because it is governed by a US-designated terrorist group) has covered a wide variety of areas, including basic humanitarian assistance, education, governance, economic reform, institution building, and exchange programs.

US programs like the Palestinian Community Assistance Program,¹⁹⁶ Community Infrastructure Development Program,¹⁹⁷ Infrastructure Needs Program,¹⁹⁸ Palestinian Authority Capacity Enhancement Project,¹⁹⁹ Education Reform Project,²⁰⁰ Investment Climate Improvement Project,²⁰¹ and many more such ventures make clear that, philosophy about aid and its effectiveness aside, the United States has a clear strategy for the West Bank and even the Gaza Strip. The theory behind the projects is straightforward: a better economy, better governance, more responsible and transparent leadership, more investment, and better living conditions will form the foundations of a new Palestinian state.

Certainly, there has been no shortage of criticism of these aid programs over the years. The Palestinians themselves have been shoddy stewards of their own territories, and many aid programs with ambitious titles have had little material benefit. But on paper, these programs hew to a theme, with a coordinated strategic goal closely linked to American interests in both Israel and the Palestinian territories. Again, without regard to the merit of each project or its execution by subcontractors and contractors, as well as USAID officials, the program makes sense in light of US foreign policy ambitions.

If the answer to the question “what does the United States want in Palestine?” is better schools, governance, prosperity, and a peaceful population, these are USAID programs that at least nominally fit the bill. Similarly, US foreign policy, while ripe for criticism in both its vision and execution, is nonetheless coherent. A strategic ambition is peace, and all US agencies sing from much the same songbook. The facts that US ambitions are not realized, that the partnership with the Palestinian Authority is flawed, and that little has in fact improved as a result of these programs are problems we must relegate to a separate report.

Finally, it should be clear that some of these kudos apply largely to work in the Fatah-governed West Bank and not to the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip, where the US profile is diminished because of Hamas’s status as a specially designated foreign terrorist organization. It does however beg the question of the efficacy of US programs in the Gaza Strip prior to the Hamas takeover. If the Palestinian population was pleased to elect Hamas in free elections, rejecting outright the Palestine Liberation Organization and its political wing, Fatah, obviously there is a sustainability and effectiveness problem for US assistance.

Competition. Ironically, neither the United States nor Iran appears focused on the question of competition with the other among the Palestinians. Indeed, the two nations share a similar plight: notwithstanding vast expenditures and the commitment of substantial political, military, and diplomatic resources for the Palestinian cause, neither is particularly appreciated by the Palestinian people. A 2011 poll found 7 in 10 Palestinians mistrusted Barack Obama and fully 77 percent viewed Iran negatively.²⁰² Similar polls show that most Arabs see neither Iran nor the United States as contributing to peace and stability in the region.²⁰³

Unlike US investment, the bulk of Iranian investment among the Palestinians is in arming militant groups for conflict with Israel. The United States is obviously more focused on soft power among the Palestinians (though the relationship with Israel is tipped heavily in the other direction). Despite investments across the spectrum, neither the United States nor Iran has seen great success from its investments, rhetoric notwithstanding. There is no peace with Israel, nor has Israel been destroyed. Fundamentally, both Tehran and Washington invest in the Palestinians for different strategic purposes having to do with credibility in the former case and strategic vision (or reflexive adherence to foreign-policy establishment views, depending on your perspective) in the latter. For all intents and purposes, the United States and Iran do not compete in the Palestinian territories.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a tertiary theater for both sides in the US-Iran competition. With one exception, Iran's objectives there are almost entirely defensive. The United States has never shaped its Afghan policy with Iran in mind, nor must it do so, aside from a couple of considerations. Afghanistan's impact on the overall competition will be limited, although it will generally be positive for the United States as long as America sustains its support for the Afghan government and necessary military presence to help that government survive.

Iranian involvement in Afghanistan is well documented.²⁰⁴ It ranges from cash payments to President Hamid Karzai (which he himself has acknowledged) to limited support to Taliban groups fighting the United States and the Afghan government. Tehran has not sent advanced weapons to the Taliban as it did to Iraqi Shia militias (apart from a few abortive shipments that were intercepted). Nor has its money been able to persuade Karzai or other Afghan leaders to oppose a long-term US military presence, which the Iranians have made clear that they strongly oppose.²⁰⁵ Tehran has been unable to shape the formation of Afghan governments, in stark contrast to the dominating role it played in the formation of governments in Iraq. It has been neither kingmaker nor major spoiler.

Iranian interests in Afghanistan are limited and largely defensive. Tehran does not want to see US bases permanently established on its eastern border, which it would not otherwise have to defend. It certainly does not want to see the Taliban back in power in a way that could threaten Iran. It suffers from the opium trade, which feeds large-scale heroin addiction in Iran, although the IRGC also benefits from facilitating that trade.²⁰⁶ Iran has sought to benefit from India's desire to divert Central Asian trade away from Pakistan through the construction of the Zaranj-Delaram highway that connects with Iran's Chabahar port at the expense of Pakistan's Gwadar. Iranian leaders remain concerned about Afghan water management because Iran is downstream from it. They also remain distressed by the large numbers of Afghan refugees and migrant workers in Iran, whom they see competing for jobs in a depressed economy with high unemployment.

Iran cannot do much to shape Afghanistan on its own, however. The scale of support the Afghan government and security forces need to survive runs into the billions of dollars annually—well beyond what the Iranians could provide even if Afghanistan were a priority for them. Afghans are well aware of this fact, which helps explain why Afghan leaders have been willing to take Iranian cash without feeling obliged to follow Tehran's wishes in any important way. Iran's relationships with China, India, and Pakistan are all far too tenuous to allow Tehran to subcontract its Afghan policy with any assurance of success and, again, Iran has many much more important issues with all three of those powers than it has interests in Afghanistan.

The only positive advantage Afghanistan offers Iran is the ability to attack US personnel directly but somewhat deniably and to hold them at risk to deter an American attack on Iranian nuclear facilities. The American withdrawal from Iraq has left some targets for Iranian militias—notably the massive embassy complex in Baghdad and consulates in Basra, Kirkuk, and Irbil. But US targets in Afghanistan are (at least for now) more widespread and in some respects more vulnerable. They could be hit by Iranian-supported insurgent groups with somewhat more plausible deniability than, say, US military targets in the Persian Gulf.

But American military positions in Afghanistan are hardened and US diplomatic personnel are carefully protected, whereas there is little evidence to suggest that Iranian proxies there are particularly numerous or effective. The US presence in Afghanistan, on the other hand, has caused the Iranian military to beef up the defenses along its eastern border, in particular by constructing a new air base at Birjand in October 2007.²⁰⁷ Concerns about Afghan refugee flows have also led Tehran to spend money on border security and to deploy more troops toward its eastern frontier. Since the United States does not need to use Afghan bases to attack any target in Iran, anything the Iranians spend on defending against such hypothetical attacks is wasted from their perspective. That fact has not prevented them from wasting their money, however.

The United States could take measures to encourage the Iranians to waste more money, principally by retaining a presence at Shindand Air Base in Herat

Province. This large airfield is home to the Afghan Air Force's main training facility and a short hop away from the Iranian border. The Afghans have been fighting to retain this base so as to avoid having to relocate their training to one of the bases in eastern Afghanistan nearer to where the United States plans to continue to maintain its presence. Doing so would very likely cause the Iranians to continue to expend resources on air defense and air force capabilities to defend against a possible US attack from this direction. Even maintaining the ability to conduct regular joint air exercises out of Shindand without actually keeping a permanent American presence there (which would be far cheaper) might have such an effect.

The United States should not make decisions about Afghanistan or expend resources within Afghanistan solely to compete with Iran in that theater. The benefits would not be worth the effort. But we should realize the incidental benefits vis-à-vis Iran that we can derive from pursuing a long-term relationship with Afghanistan aimed at fighting al Qaeda.

Gulf Cooperation Council States

The countries bordering the Persian Gulf and linked politically and economically as members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This section will focus on the latter six countries, in addition to Yemen, which is negotiating for GCC membership. Bahrain will be discussed in its own section.

Several factors have combined to turn the mutual suspicion between Iran and some of the GCC states into open hostility. That hostility has not, however, translated directly into closer ties between the US and those states.

Long-serving Saudi ambassador to the United States Prince Bandar bin Sultan recently announced his kingdom's displeasure with and desire to distance itself from the United States.²⁰⁸ The UAE does not appear to be refusing to launder Iranian money, even as it increases its orders for American weapons systems to defend against Iran. Qatar maintains its customary ambivalence in

choosing between the United States, whose principal air command-and-control center it hosts, and Iran, with which it shares a vast gas field. And Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman has sought to capitalize on Washington's desire for a nuclear deal with Iran by using his close ties with Tehran to facilitate a rapprochement.

Circumstances over the last few years have been extremely propitious for cementing a very close bond between the United States and most of the GCC states, but that bond appears to be weakening instead. And yet it is not too late to repair the damage and build a strong regional alliance aimed at checking the expansion of Iranian power with states that have the financial resources and the incentive to compete seriously in the soft-power realm.

US relations with the Gulf states seem at first glance as though they should be straightforward from the standpoint of cooperation against the Iranian threat. The Saudis have seen Iran as their principal strategic rival since at least the destruction of the Iraqi threat in 2003. Kuwaitis have feared the emergence of an Iranian-supported Shia government in Iraq and are aware that they are a very short drive from the Iranian border. Iranian occupation of the Tunb Islands, which the Emiratis also claim, has alienated Abu Dhabi. Iranian support to Shia opposition movements in all of those states—and to the Shia revolutionaries in Bahrain—antagonizes the Sunni rulers of those states. The Yemeni government has also become increasingly hostile to Tehran in the face of increasingly obvious Iranian support not only to the quasi-Shia Houthi rebels but also to the frankly Sunni Southern Mobility Movement advocating for the redivision of the Yemeni state. Only Qatar and Oman remain on good terms with Iran, suffering little from Iranian depredations. If this were the Cold War and the US cared only about competing with Iran in the Gulf, policy would be simple.

But we are not in a Cold War-style world, and policy is far from simple. American policy toward Iran must address the reality that the United States is threatened also by al Qaeda groups operating with increasing strength and impunity in the Middle East. It is not in America's interest to support Gulf policies that, intentionally or unintentionally, strengthen al Qaeda simply

to build up frontline allies against Iran. The Arab Spring brought this reality home quite sharply.

The United States relied on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to sustain the Camp David Accords with Israel, maintain free passage through the Suez Canal, and suppress the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt for three decades. He performed all three tasks, but only by consolidating an authoritarian and brutal government that alienated a broad swath of Egyptian society. When that society rose up against Mubarak in 2011, he was unable to maintain power—and the Muslim Brotherhood swept in to replace him.

One lesson the United States should learn from this experience is that supporting leaders like Mubarak is not a sound strategy in the long term—or even, with the aftershocks of the Arab Spring continuing to rock the region, the short term. It might seem easiest simply to back the undemocratic or quasi-democratic regimes of Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Kuwaiti Emir Sabah al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman al Khalifa, and so on against both Sunni and Shia dissenters, but such an approach is unlikely to succeed. Tensions between Washington and our Gulf allies are almost inevitable in this context, therefore, as the US pushes for moderation and reform in dealing with threats that the Gulf regimes would prefer to crush.

Tensions with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia indeed peaked over President Obama's refusal to back King Khalifa's suppression of the Shia uprising, and US Ambassador to Bahrain Thomas Krajeski has been publicly assailed by the nation's government for his efforts to mediate the dispute and press for a more moderate policy toward Bahrain's Shia majority.²⁰⁹ Saudi King Abdullah has also resented American ambivalence on an issue that seems to him clear-cut: the Iranians are (he believes) inciting and supporting an insurgency against a major US ally (Bahrain hosts the headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet) that is also a critical Saudi ally. The United States, it follows naturally, should therefore have supported both his and King Khalifa's efforts to defeat that Iranian-sponsored attempt to seize Bahrain. Obama's failure to do so to Abdullah's satisfaction is one of the long-running sources of tension in the US-Saudi relationship.²¹⁰

Efforts to solidify a Gulf coalition using soft-power tools are also complicated by the nature of the economic relationship between the Gulf states and the United States. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman range from very wealthy to moderately wealthy and do not need US foreign assistance in any form. Their economies have long been magnets for international investment, and they do not need American help to attract or maintain foreign direct investment. Bahrain and Yemen, by contrast, are relatively poor and depend on Saudi Arabia for their continued financial survival. The Saudis have effectively given Bahrain the right to exploit some Saudi petrochemical deposits as a sort of permanent subvention.²¹¹ Riyadh has been giving Yemen substantial sums (by Yemeni standards) for years.²¹² But even Bahrain's relative poverty does not offer much of a lever for US economic assistance, since Riyadh is as determined to keep the nation under its effective suzerainty as it is to keep the Sunni Khalifa family in power.

The core element of US soft-power interaction with the Gulf states, therefore, has been through military sales, training, and counterterrorism support. Even in this realm, direct support is very low. Only Yemen receives nonsecurity aid from the United States. USAID's disbursements to Yemen ranged from \$13.9 million in 2009 to \$91.7 million in 2013.²¹³ Yemen is also the only Gulf state that receives more in Foreign Military Financing, International Military Education and Training funds, and counterterrorism assistance than it purchases through the US Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program. The US netted more than \$16 billion in FMS purchases from the GCC states between 2006 and 2012, in fact, making the soft-power strategy in this region one of the most immediately and directly profitable engagements the United States has in the world.²¹⁴

The depth of Gulf military interaction with the US as measured by FMS deliveries has grown substantially over the past six years. FMS purchases have increased in every Gulf state except for Kuwait and Oman. Saudi purchases have grown from around \$1 billion in 2006 to nearly \$1.7 billion in 2012. Emirati FMS deliveries have skyrocketed from \$191 million in 2006 to nearly \$1.5 billion last year. Whatever tensions and resentment toward the United States that Gulf leaders may

express, growing fear of Iran is evidently driving them to ever-greater levels of cooperation with and interdependence on the US military.²¹⁵

The specific weapons systems Gulf states have ordered over the past year suggest that fear of Iran is indeed a key driver of Gulf FMS purchases. Qatar has proposed more than \$17.5 billion in FMS purchases of long-range antiaircraft missiles, Patriot missile batteries, and early-warning radar systems since November 2012. The UAE purchased long-range antiaircraft missiles (\$1.135 billion), JDAMs (\$304 million), Blackhawks (\$217 million), air-to-air missiles (\$251 million), and Apaches (\$5 billion) since 2010.²¹⁶ Proposed Saudi purchases collectively worth more than \$13 billion over the last year include continued support and modernization of the Royal Saudi Air Force, C-130 transport aircraft, and coastal patrol boats. Saudi purchases may reflect, in part, concerns over securing long sea and land borders with unstable states such as Yemen and the Horn of Africa, but Iran is the only state that poses an air or missile threat that would justify Qatar's orders (and the previously ordered enhancements to the Emirati air force and air defense forces).²¹⁷

American relations with the GCC states are also cemented by significant US military bases in several GCC states. Kuwait has hosted a massive infrastructure including both air bases and facilities for ground forces since its liberation in 1991, although the scale of that infrastructure is rapidly declining following the withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq and the major reductions in American military presence in Afghanistan. Bahrain continues to host the headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet—the “sole main naval operating base in the Middle East,” as former US Central Command Commander General James Mattis noted earlier this year.²¹⁸ And Qatar is home to the only Combined Air Operations Center the US has today, which has been overseeing air operations throughout southwest Asia and the Horn of Africa for two decades. The UAE does not provide the United States with long-term fixed basing, but ports there do host the most US Navy ships of any port abroad.²¹⁹ The United States also sustains its military-to-military relationships with Gulf states through regular joint exercises—four so far this year.²²⁰ Gulf militaries sent nearly 1,500 students to train with

US forces, primarily in counterterrorism, between 2006 and 2012.²²¹

Iran has attempted to counter the military-to-military relationships the United States has built in the Gulf by conducting (or, at least, talking about conducting) joint exercises with Oman and with Qatar—and, more significantly, by signing memoranda of understanding on security cooperation with Iraq. However, the Gulf militaries are effectively dependent on and interoperable with the US military, and rising tensions with Iran have increased both that dependency and that interoperability.

Yet recent speeches and statements by senior Saudis known for their historic support for a strong relationship with the United States suggest an unraveling of the partnership between America and its most important regional ally. Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the current Saudi intelligence chief, and Prince Turki bin Faisal, his predecessor, lambasted US policies in the Middle East and threatened to move away from the American partnership.²²² The princes made the obligatory (for Saudis) criticisms of the United States for not pushing hard enough for Israeli-Palestinian peace but focused their anger on American policy in Syria.

Prince Turki said, “The current charade of international control over Bashar's chemical arsenal would be funny if it were not so blatantly perfidious. And designed not only to give Mr. Obama an opportunity to back down [from military strikes], but also to help Assad to butcher his people.” Another Saudi source explained, “Relations with the US have been deteriorating for a while, as Saudi feels that the US is growing closer with Iran and the US also failed to support Saudi during the Bahrain uprising.”²²³ Prince Bandar added that Riyadh's decision to forgo a seat on the UN Security Council, for which it had been lobbying hard, “was a message for the US, not the U.N.”²²⁴

Saudi anger reportedly results from the way the Obama administration has handled the Syria crisis. The Saudis resent that the US has supported the Syrian opposition halfheartedly, despite multiple promises to, alongside the Saudis, assist moderates fighting the Iranian-backed Assad regime. They were reportedly eager for the United States to conduct promised missile strikes against Assad after he used chemical weapons

against his own people, but distressed when American military officials apparently said that they could not necessarily protect Saudi oil infrastructure if the Iranians retaliated.

President Obama's decision to call off the strike in return for a Russian-brokered deal to remove chemical weapons from Syria was seen as a betrayal in Riyadh. Additionally, the Saudis are also suspicious of US approaches to Iranian President Rouhani, which they reportedly fear might lead to a deal on the nuclear issue that abandons other Saudi core concerns about Iranian nonnuclear expansion and adventurism in the region.²²⁵

White House officials sought to play down these statements, offering boilerplate comments about the US commitment to the Saudis, long-standing common interests, and "honest and open discussions" about points of disagreement. Yet another anonymous official added, "Our interests increasingly don't align."²²⁶ That statement gains strength from reports of the deep ambivalence of key officials in the administration about whether supporting the Syrian rebels is a good idea.

According to the *New York Times*, Denis McDonough, the White House chief of staff, "questioned how much it was in America's interest to tamp down the violence in Syria. Accompanying a group of senior lawmakers on a day trip to the Guantánamo Bay naval base in early June, Mr. McDonough argued that the status quo in Syria could keep Iran pinned down for years. In later discussions, he also suggested that a fight in Syria between Hezbollah and Al Qaeda would work to America's advantage, according to Congressional officials."²²⁷

That view is certainly antithetical to the policies that the Gulf states believe to be in their interests and would unquestionably drive an ever-widening wedge between the United States and its regional partners. If current US policy toward Syria continues unchanged, in fact, the divide between Washington and the Gulf states is likely to grow.

Reports of the demise of US-Saudi relations, however, are almost certainly premature. The Saudis (and their Gulf allies) simply do not have other potential patrons more likely to support them against Iranian adventurism or attack. The visible tensions in the relationship, however, may over time undermine Tehran's

perception of a unified front of opposition, still less containment. Reestablishing a strong and solid relationship with Riyadh—not just through issuing meaningless talking-point statements, but through high-profile engagements and substantive actions—has become a priority for sustaining the credibility even of US soft power in the region.

The trouble is that that relationship will be difficult to reestablish through soft power alone. The US-Gulf relationship has long been based on a three-part deal: the Saudis and their Gulf allies keep the United States and its allies supplied with oil, but they also use some of their oil profits to support common objectives in the region, and the United States provides the muscle to protect them and support their interests. That deal is breaking down for two reasons—the Obama administration seems unclear about exactly which interests it has in common with the Gulf states, and it actively desires not to use American military power to pursue such US interests it has identified in the region. Saudi fear and anger in this context is not surprising, but neither will they be easily assuaged.

The future of the US-Gulf relationship likely depends on two key factors—Syria and the nuclear negotiations with Iran. If the United States actually pursues its stated policy of helping the moderate opposition overthrow Assad, then one key irritant between Washington and Riyadh will be removed. If Obama makes clear fairly soon that he is not prepared to accept a bad nuclear deal and, more important from the Saudi perspective, that he is not willing to abandon the interests of his Gulf partners in pursuit of any nuclear deal, then fears of fundamental American betrayal in the Gulf will lessen.

The fundamental dilemma of developing soft-power strategies in the Gulf at this point, therefore, is that such strategies cannot be decoupled from the actual and potential use of US hard power. Even if Obama were to state publicly that he is committed to supporting the moderate Syrian opposition and opposed to bad deals with Tehran, the Gulf states at this point would likely look for concrete actions before accepting his statements.

But the president has long refused even to make any such statements. On the contrary, the administration

has alternated between strong words from Secretary Kerry about the need for Assad to go and private or leaked indications, such as McDonough's statement, indicating that the White House does not necessarily agree with Kerry. There is no prospect for an effective diplomatic strategy in the Gulf as long as the administration seems to disagree with itself over the core issue of the moment.

One can well ask if any of this matters. The Saudis, Kuwaitis, Bahrainis, and Emiratis will continue to fear and oppose Iran, while the Qataris and Omanis continue to prevaricate. Gulf militaries will remain reliant on the US military and on American military equipment and will continue to host US bases. All Gulf states will continue to repress their Shia populations and aggressively (often overaggressively) root out Iranian agents supporting Shia uprisings in their countries. The entire world has an interest in keeping the Strait of Hormuz open. Why should the United States care about Saudi displeasure?

The aim of strategies of deterrence and containment is to prevent conflict and find nonmilitary ways of advancing a country's or an alliance's interests. The purpose of constructing a soft-power strategy of containment is to put political, economic, diplomatic, and psychological pressure on Iran's leaders to dissuade them from adventures and incline them toward moderation. The perception that the US-Gulf relationship is weakening will have the opposite effect in Tehran. It is likely to encourage bold actors in the belief that adventurism will not necessarily be effectively checked. It may cause Iran's leadership to miscalculate and act from the mistaken conviction that the United States and its partners will not respond.

The purpose of building a strong diplomatic, political, and economic—yes, and peacetime military—bloc is not to win the war, but to prevent it. By undermining the formation of such a bloc, current US policy may be making future wars more likely.

Bahrain

In a report on US counterstrategies to Iranian regional influence, a section fully devoted to the question of Bahrain may appear anomalous. Yet in many ways, the tiny Gulf kingdom encapsulates both Iranian soft-power strategy and American opportunity.

Although 70 percent of its population of more than a million identifies as Shia Muslims,²²⁸ Bahrain has long been ruled by the Sunni minority al Khalifa family. Much like the rest of the Middle East and North Africa, the nation was rocked by the Arab Spring movements, which brought disgruntled Bahraini Shia to the streets of the capital, Manama, on February 14, 2011.

In deciding how to manage the protests, which brought long-simmering tensions over mistreatment of the Shia majority to the fore, the Bahraini government embraced the Syrian model over the Tunisian and Egyptian responses. Inviting in Saudi forces (the Bahraini military and police forces are too small for most major operations), the regime and their Sunni Arab partner crushed the protest, arrested many (including nonviolent protestors), and squelched the Bahrain Spring with a firm hand.

Bahraini leaders accused the Iranian regime of complicity in the demonstrations, alleging that Tehran had trained, armed, and financed Bahrain's Shia directly or in cooperation with Lebanon's Hezbollah. In October 2012, for instance, Bahrain summoned the Iranian envoy over "interference" amidst the belief that Iran's "conduct incites sedition and sectarian" in Bahrain.²²⁹

Certainly, there is ample evidence that Iran has supported Bahrain's Shia organizations. Ayatollah Isa Ahmad Qassim al Dirazi al Bahrani, better known simply as Sheikh Qassim and one of the spiritual leaders of the Bahraini al Wafaq opposition party, lived until 2001 in Iran's theological heartland of Qom and has been endorsed as a guide by none other than Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.²³⁰ Sheikh Qassim has also been present in photographs with the supreme leaders and with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.²³¹

Additionally, the Iranian regime, particularly under former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, did not make any secret of its hostility toward the Bahraini

government. Repeated claims by senior officials and mouthpieces of the Tehran government that considered Bahrain as “the fourteenth province of Iran until 1970” have won few friends in Manama, despite other efforts to reconcile with Bahrain and its partners in the GCC.²³²

The Iranian government has also repeatedly sought to insert the question of Bahraini human rights abuses into international negotiations; Khamenei not only labeled Bahraini accusations of Iranian meddling in their affairs a “lie,” but he also suggestively stated, “the claim by the ruler of the Bahrain island about our interference in that country is incorrect because if we had interfered in Bahrain’s issue, another story would have happened.”²³³

But it is important to note that notwithstanding repeated accusations of active Iranian involvement in Shia demonstrations, most Iranian support for the Bahraini opposition was rhetorical and consisting of condemnations, repeated complaints about Manama’s conduct, and offers to hold human rights conferences and *démarches*. Indeed, the officially accredited Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) issued a 500-page report on the 2011 protests that found no “discernible link” between the demonstrations and Iran.²³⁴

Nevertheless, unrest has continued sporadically since the height of demonstrations and violence in 2011, with bombings, attacks, and other signs of bubbling discontent. As recently as October 2013, a Bahrain court sentenced 50 nationals to lengthy jail terms for supposed links to the February 14 Youth Coalition, which has been labeled as a terrorist organization by the government. Some of these were convicted on grounds of spying for Iran and receiving training from Iran’s elite IRGC.²³⁵

Iranian involvement notwithstanding, excessive use of force and numerous documented human rights violations brought condemnation on the Bahraini government from a variety of international actors, Washington included. But the US government is conflicted: on the one hand, US officials believe Iran has been meddling in Bahraini affairs even as they understand that the complaints of the kingdom’s Shia population are well founded. For instance, shortly after Bahrain slammed Iran for its involvement in the Shia-led protests of

2011, then–secretary of state Hillary Clinton stated, “We share the view that Iran’s activities in the Gulf, including its efforts to advance its agenda in neighboring countries, undermined peace and stability.”²³⁶ On the other hand, Bahrain has been home to the US Fifth Fleet since 1948 and, before that, its precursor, the Middle East Force. Indeed, Bahrain is a vital piece of US regional security strategy: the Fifth Fleet and US Naval Forces Central Command manage naval assets deployed to the Gulf, cover substantial territory, employ and deploy up to 6,000 personnel (civilian and military), and serve as headquarters for vital maritime security partnership activity.²³⁷ (See appendix 2 for excerpts of US diplomatic statements on Bahrain).

As a result, US policy has walked a fine line. Congressional objections stood in the way of a particularly ill-timed September 2011 administration decision to sell tens of millions of dollars in armored vehicles and optically tracked wire-guided missiles to Bahrain.²³⁸ Laying out guidance for future such transfers, an unnamed senior administration official explained, “Sales of items that are sort of predominantly or typically used by police and other security forces for internal security, things used for crowd control, we’re not moving forward with at this time. That would include things like tear gas, tear gas launchers, stun grenades—those sorts of things.”²³⁹

In addition, numerous US officials have continued to underscore the importance of a political solution to the unrest plaguing Bahrain, specifically the need to more fully implement the BICI recommendations. The former assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor, Michael Posner, made his way through Bahrain in 2012 with the same message,²⁴⁰ with current Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Tom Melia hard on his heels in 2013.²⁴¹ A variety of meetings have also occurred in Washington in which Bahraini leaders drive home the image of friendship with the United States mixed with continued exhortations to do more.²⁴²

Finally, unlikely to break new ground is the odd effort to “empower” Bahraini women volleyball coaches with a trip to the United States. In one of the only US-Bahrain soft-power initiatives discernible on US

government websites, the American taxpayer brought a group of 10 female volleyball coaches from Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Yemen to meet American coaches in Washington, DC; Louisville, KY; and Knoxville, TN. The US embassy in Manama proclaimed additional goals for their visit: “They will participate in discussions on Title IX, sports psychology, nutrition, and participate in teambuilding and leadership activities.”²⁴³

As for Tehran’s government, Bahrain is clearly not a priority. While the regime is content to expend minor sums of money and political capital in supporting Bahrain’s genuinely beleaguered Shia community, it is difficult to uncover any evidence of a serious commitment to overthrow the Bahraini regime or otherwise achieve any decisive results. More simply, the Islamic Republic enjoys the opportunity to impose costs on its Sunni Gulf adversaries; continue to bolster its image as the only champion of Shia populations, Arab or not;

and force the United States to devote resources to fleet protection, counterterrorism, and counterintelligence against Iranian targets on new territory—for Tehran, a reasonable bang for small bucks.

In turn, the United States has missed repeated opportunities to turn the tables and impose similar costs on Iran: it has avoided dedicating serious programmatic resources to the Bahraini Shia, adopting a harder line with the Manama government on becoming more politically open, and even implementing simple information operations that would expose the nature of Iranian interference in Bahrain. In other words, Iran defines the terrain and calls the plays. Although Bahrain remains of singular strategic importance to the United States, Washington remains entirely unwilling to compete for influence with the people and has instead contented itself with the leadership for as long as it lasts.

CONCLUSION

The future of the Middle East hangs in the balance. There are no clear-cut options of good versus bad, but rather questions about the nature of the region, who will dominate, what direction new governments will take, and whether the overall trajectory serves the national security interests of the United States. Arguably, the answer to the last question is no.

The United States has long struggled with its place in this complex region. Is it the champion of Israel, but not of democracy? The oil consumer obsessed with the security of the supply chain? The moral leader in favor of human dignity? Or the realist hegemon that favors stability? Over the decades, administrations have leapt around, toying with one set of principles, then another. Throughout eight-plus years in Iraq, advocates and opponents of the war sparred over motives and interests, never agreeing, except perhaps on the wisdom of never again venturing into the region in force.

It is in this context that the United States finds itself, by default, in a nominal competition with the Islamic Republic of Iran—nominal because there are few indications that the United States is actually pursuing competitive strategies. In our 2012 report, we outlined Iranian strategies throughout the region. An update of an earlier survey on the same question, we found that the Islamic Republic pursues an integrated soft- and hard-power strategy throughout the Middle East and into South Asia, investing in infrastructure, linking roads, electrical grids, and education systems where possible and in joint ventures, local aid programs, and community-building services in what can only be called a “hearts and minds” effort. It also replicates its Lebanon model where possible, training and equipping militias cum charities so it can burrow into sympathetic communities and amplify Iranian messages and influence.

In 2012, as a result of shifting priorities throughout the region, sanctions against Iran, the growing conflict in Syria, and the inept leadership of the Ahmadinejad years, Iranian influence declined rather precipitously. All the hallmarks of their soft- and hard-power strategies remained, but in many instances Iran failed to deliver on promises or split with longtime allies, their ties riven by the growing Sunni-Shia Muslim divide.

For the American side, influence is Washington’s to lose. There is no real competitor for leadership in the region, and as Iran grows ever closer to a nuclear weapons capability, Gulf nations have looked to the United States for reassurance. Similarly, in the Levant, the spillover from the Syrian civil war, Hezbollah’s growing clout in Lebanon, and the instability of Egypt have added up to a hunger for partnership with an outside power. Certainly, many of the region’s problems are its own to solve; however, historically the United States has made its preferences—against terrorism and proliferation, for security, peace, and markets—known via a variety of soft- and hard-power methods.

Like Tehran’s, Washington’s instruments of power remain in place. Aid programs have not shifted markedly. Prepositioned armaments and other elements of American hard power are still dotted through the region. But increasingly, the Obama administration has chosen not to use those tools to achieve any particular goals. Therefore, the United States has stepped back from Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, leaning in only to talk to Iran and to encourage Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

In addition, programs that might, by default, increase sympathy for the principles America professes to hold dear, or wean local populations away from ideas anathema to US national security, are ill configured, oriented toward charitable rather than strategic goals, and otherwise not integrated into an overall strategic policy guided by the US Department of State. Instead, the US Agency for International Development appears unfettered to State Department policy guidance, its projects existing in a dimension separate from US national interest.

Bottom line: the United States is not competing with Iran for influence. In Syria and Lebanon, Iran has a largely free hand to do as it wishes. Among the Palestinians, the United States seeks influence, but not vis-à-vis Iran, even with Hamas. In the Gulf, the United States is largely absent, neither reassuring through arms sales and military programs, nor using those assets to deter Iranian efforts to expand its own influence. Gulf leaders complain the United States is mostly AWOL.

If the question before us is *what does the United States seek to achieve?* and the answer is *nothing*, then US

policy will require little retooling. If, however, Washington recognizes that the Middle East hangs in the balance, and that Iran is likely to increase its influence with dire consequence to US interests, its direction will require substantial correction.

Iran has divided the region into Tier 1 top-priority countries (see p. 8) and Tier 2 targets of opportunity (see p. 26). Where its attention is focused, Iran has won friends and intimidated adversaries using simple tactics that speak to the population, bolster its friends in government, and address directly Iran's priorities. Want to preserve Assad in power? Arm him. Teach Hamas a lesson? Arm its enemies. Win over disenfranchised Shia in Lebanon? Provide direct services. Domineer Iraq? Be there, even as the United States withdraws.

Elsewhere, Iran free rides on the opportunities Middle Eastern realities have dealt. Shia populations in Yemen, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia are disenfranchised. Do they love Persia? Iran doesn't care, providing resources and diplomatic support where needed.

This is a low-cost way to ratchet up costs for Saudi Arabia, the United States, and other perceived hostile powers.

What are US countermeasures? In short, not much. Whether in Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria, or Lebanon, American policy is to timidly pursue a variety of separate objectives without any clear view to a decisive policy victory. This compares unfavorably with the clarity that Washington brought to, for example, the surge in Iraq: clear goals, clear strategy.

The lessons of counterinsurgency have not been lost on the Iranians. The nation that facilitates essential services—civil security, civil control, essential services, governance, and economic infrastructure, and development—creates an environment in which it is more likely to achieve its own strategic objectives. In each case studied, on a field of battle defined by Iran, the United States is at best oblivious to Iranian efforts and, at worst, willfully pursuing a policy that enables Iranian victory.

APPENDIX 1

EXCERPTS OF US DIPLOMATIC STATEMENTS ON LEBANON

This appendix is composed of excerpts of statements from the US embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, highlighting US assistance to Lebanon, including humanitarian and military support.

Embassy of the United States in Beirut, Lebanon, “Remarks by US Ambassador David Hale Following His Meeting with Prime Minister-Designate Tammam Salam,” September 26, 2013, <http://lebanon.usembassy.gov/pr092613.html>.

In the last 48 hours between President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry, the United States, in fact, has announced over \$112 million in assistance for Lebanon, and I think as you know that’s \$8.7 million for the Lebanese Armed Forces for their security work, but beyond that an additional \$74 million to help address the humanitarian crisis related to the Syrian refugees, and just last night another \$30 million for immediate direct assistance to help the local communities that are dealing with the impact of the refugee crisis.

Embassy of the United States in Beirut, Lebanon, “Continued US Assistance to Refugees from Syria and Host Communities in Lebanon,” fact sheet, May 9, 2013, <http://lebanon.usembassy.gov/factsheet050913.html>.

Yesterday, the State Department announced that the United States is contributing an additional \$100 million in humanitarian assistance to support those affected by the crisis, including \$32 million in additional funding for assistance to refugees in Lebanon. This announcement brings the US total contribution since the beginning of the conflict to nearly \$510 million. The US total contribution is \$83 million to support humanitarian assistance efforts for refugees from Syria who have fled to Lebanon and help mitigate the impact on host communities. The United States continues its long-term and continuing commitment to assist to under-developed Lebanese communities, particularly those hosting Syrian refugees, and to invest in the Lebanese people.

Embassy of the United States in Beirut, Lebanon, “US Generals Visit Lebanon,” May 5, 2013, http://lebanon.usembassy.gov/pr_050513.html.

In their meeting, Generals Beydler and Cosentino emphasized the strong and sustained military cooperation between the two countries. As part of this cooperation and to strengthen the LAF’s [Lebanese Armed Forces] capacity and mobility, they noted the over \$140 million in equipment delivered to the Lebanese Armed Forces since June 2012 that includes aircraft, a naval vessel, armored and unarmored vehicles, guns, ammunition, equipment, and medical supplies.

Generals Beydler and Cosentino also underscored the Department of Defense’s support for Lebanon’s initiatives to implement its obligations under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701.

Embassy of the United States in Beirut, Lebanon, “US Assistance to the Internal Security Forces,” fact sheet, March 6, 2013, <http://lebanon.usembassy.gov/factsheet030613.html>.

Since 2006, the United States has provided over \$100 million to the Internal Security Forces (ISF) through various assistance programs that provide training, facility upgrades and construction, vehicles, and equipment. This assistance is coordinated by the Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) and is part of US efforts to support the development of the ISF into a modern professional police force that is capable ensuring Lebanon’s security and stability while serving and protecting all of Lebanon’s citizens.

One key component of US assistance to the ISF is the Aramoun Training Academy. This \$9.7 million program will provide modern facilities and policing and investigative techniques through a tactical

training village, a forensics investigative laboratory and classrooms, a shooting range, and a vehicle maintenance facility.

Embassy of the United States in Beirut, Lebanon, “Media Fact Sheet: US Assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces,” December 21, 2012, <http://lebanon.usembassy.gov/factsheet122112.html>.

In the past six months, the United States has provided approximately \$140.37 million in equipment and assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) that includes aircraft, a vessel, vehicles, guns, ammunition, equipment, and medical supplies. This assistance is coordinated by the Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) at the US Embassy and is part of US efforts to strengthen the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces

(LAF), recognizing its importance, as Lebanon’s sole legitimate defense force, in securing Lebanon’s borders and defending the sovereignty and independence of the state.

The \$58 million military assistance package to provide six new Huey II helicopters and spare parts for both the Huey II and existing LAF Huey I fleet is the largest single military assistance package in US-Lebanese bilateral military relations. The helicopters dramatically increase the LAF’s air support capabilities in order to provide air cover for troops on the ground, provide search and rescue capabilities, and better secure Lebanon’s borders. The US has also provided a flight simulator device and built a special-purpose building for the device at Rayak Air Base to improve pilot training. The LAF further received five aircraft refueling semitrailers.

APPENDIX 2

EXCERPTS OF US DIPLOMATIC STATEMENTS ON BAHRAIN

This appendix is composed of excerpts of statements from the US embassy in Manama, Bahrain; the US Department of State; and the White House, highlighting US-Bahrain relations, military assistance and cooperation programs, high-level visits, and the stability of Bahrain's government.

US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Gulf Security Architecture: Partnership with the Gulf Cooperation Council*, June 19, 2012, 13–15, www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/74603.pdf.

US Security Assistance and Training: The largest beneficiary of US grant security assistance among the GCC States, Bahrain is slated to receive approximately \$500,000 in Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, and Related assistance (NADR); \$700,000 in International Military Education and Training (IMET); and \$10 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) in fiscal year 2012. Bahrain agreed to purchase close to \$91 million in US defense equipment and training through Foreign Military Sales in fiscal year 2010, and in fiscal year 2011, it was granted US Excess Defense Articles (EDA) worth more than \$55 million. Training has also been a significant component of US security assistance to Bahrain. In fiscal year 2010, 253 students were trained in competencies such as maritime security, leadership, maintenance, and counterterrorism at a value of \$2.8 million.

US Department of State, “Remarks with Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber al Thani after Their Meeting,” March 5, 2013, www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/03/205671.htm.

QUESTION: . . . Could you tell us what you did say to your Bahraini counterpart regarding the human rights situation in this country? The last Human Rights Report from the Department of State in 2012 pointed out, I quote, “egregious human rights problems in 2011 in Bahrain, including the inability of citizens to peacefully change their government.” Thank you very much.

SECRETARY KERRY: . . . We had a very good, constructive conversation about all of the issues of the region as well as the internal issues of Bahrain. And I expressed the concern of all people for the protection of the rights of everybody. And we talked about the dialogue. The Foreign Minister made it clear to me that they remain committed to the dialogue, that they are engaged right now in advancing it, they're at some important stages within it, progress is being made. And what I did was encourage him to continue that dialogue and to reach a resolution with respect to some of these difficult issues.

He assured me that they are going to continue in good faith, and obviously, all of us encourage that and look forward to some positive results.

The White House, “Statement by the Press Secretary on the Situation in Bahrain,” April 11, 2012, www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/04/11/statement-press-secretary-situation-bahrain.

The United States continues to be deeply concerned about the situation in Bahrain, and we urge all parties to reject violence in all its forms. We condemn the violence directed against police and government institutions, including recent incidents that have resulted in serious injuries to police officers. We also call on the police to exercise maximum restraint, and condemn the use of excessive force and indiscriminate use of tear gas against protestors, which has resulted in civilian casualties.

US Department of State, “Senior Administration Officials on Bahrain,” April 11, 2013, www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/05/189810.htm.

Now in light of our own US national security interests, the United States has decided, as the press statement

noted, to release additional items and services for the Bahraini Defense Forces, Bahrain's Coast Guard, and Bahrain's National Guard. And the purpose of this is to help Bahrain maintain its external defense capabilities. We have informed Congress of this decision today and we'll continue our close consultation with Congress on Bahrain in general, including our security cooperation.

We are continuing to maintain our hold on some items. And the items that we're not moving forward with are those that aren't typically used for crowd control and — or, I'm sorry. The items that we are moving forward with are those that are not typically used for crowd control and we would not anticipate would be used against protestors in any scenario. But sales of items that are sort of predominantly or typically used by police and other security forces for internal security, things used for crowd control, we're not moving forward with at this time. That would include things like tear gas, tear gas launchers, stun grenades — those sorts of things.

Embassy of the United States in Manama, Bahrain, "Empowering Women and Girls Through Sports," December 4, 2012, <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/pas-120412.html>.

As part of its global Empowering Women and Girls Through Sports Initiative, the US Department of State announced today that 10 female volleyball coaches from Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Yemen will travel to the United States to participate in a Sports Visitors program, where they will share their experiences as female athletes and coaches as well as learn about sports opportunities for women in the US.

Embassy of the United States in Manama, Bahrain, "Remarks from Assistant Secretary Posner on Visit to Bahrain," December 9, 2012, <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/pas-120912.html>.

To create a climate where dialogue and reconciliation is possible, the government needs to prosecute those officials responsible for the human rights violations that occurred in early 2011. It also should

drop charges against all persons accused of offenses involving non-violent political expression and freedom of assembly. Many of these convictions appear to be based, at least in part, on the defendants' criticisms of government actions and policies. We urge a comprehensive review of all of the medics' cases in the interest of turning the page on the events of last year and repairing the social fabric of Bahrain. The government also should continue work to professionalize and diversify Bahrain's security forces so that the police better reflect the communities which they serve. We also are concerned about the recent revocations of citizenship. Advancing these recommendations in an inclusive way will enhance trust and create the space for dialogue and negotiation, as well as encouraging a more constructive media environment.

Embassy of the United States in Manama, Bahrain, "Remarks by Deputy Assistant Secretary Thomas Melia on the Conclusion of His Visit to Bahrain," March 16, 2013, <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/rem-031612.html>.

We note that Bahraini authorities have in some cases held security personnel accountable in cases of human rights abuses, including the recent decision of the High Criminal Court to sentence two policemen to ten years in prison for the killing of a detainee in April 2011. We urge Bahraini authorities to continue to investigate all reports of torture and excess use of force by security officers, as it has pledged to do. Such measures contribute directly to restoring public confidence in governing institutions, which is vital for Bahrain's stability.

We also encourage Bahrain to enhance its efforts to address important human rights issues. The government should drop charges against all persons accused of offenses involving non-violent political expression and freedom of assembly. We urge a comprehensive review of all of the medics' and teachers' cases, and reconsideration of the revocation of citizenship for 31 Bahrainis, in the interest of turning the page on the events of the last two years and repairing the social fabric of Bahrain. We note that many of those who were dismissed from their jobs in the aftermath of the

unrest of early 2011 have been restored to their jobs or comparable positions, or otherwise received compensation. Social peace would be further enhanced by the return to their positions of Bahraini citizens who have been convicted and served their sentences, and especially of those who were acquitted of charges that were brought against them. The government should continue work to professionalize and diversify Bahrain's security forces. Advancing these recommendations in an inclusive and transparent way will enhance trust and foster the climate necessary for true dialogue and constructive negotiation.

Embassy of the United States in Manama, Bahrain, "Special Envoy Hussain's Visit to Manama," April 2–3, 2013, <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/pas-4313.html>.

Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Rashad Hussain met with senior Bahraini government officials, political leaders, civil society activists, and religious leaders in Manama, Bahrain April 2-3. He underscored US encouragement for all segments of Bahraini society to promote unity and reform through the ongoing National Dialogue. He discussed the importance of rejecting the use of violence and promoting human rights, including religious freedom, for all Bahrainis. Special Envoy Hussain also discussed US engagement and partnerships with Muslim communities around the world.

Embassy of the United States in Manama, Bahrain, "Statement by Ambassador Krajewski on Violence in Bahrain," May 30, 2013, <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/pas-053013.html>.

We are deeply concerned about acts of violence in Bahrain. Bahraini officials have confirmed reports of a blast on the evening of May 29th that injured seven police officers, with at least one officer suffering critical injuries. The blast was reportedly caused by a homemade bomb that targeted on-duty police officers near the village of Bani Jamra.

We strongly condemn this attack on police and extend our deepest sympathies to all those injured. All violence is completely unacceptable and unhelpful in

efforts to rebuild trust and pursue meaningful reconciliation in Bahrain.

Embassy of the United States in Manama, Bahrain, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Caitlin Hayden on Deputy National Security Advisor Tony Blinken's Meeting with Bahraini Crown Prince and First Deputy Prime Minister Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa," June 5, 2013, <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/pas-060513.html>.

President Obama joined Deputy National Security Advisor Tony Blinken's meeting today with Bahraini Crown Prince and First Deputy Prime Minister Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. The President reaffirmed the importance of the United States' partnership with Bahrain and our commitment to further strengthening the ties between our two countries. The President congratulated the Crown Prince on his appointment as First Deputy Prime Minister, and wished him success in this new role.

Embassy of the United States in Manama, Bahrain, "Secretary Kerry's Meeting with Bahraini Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa," June 6, 2013, <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/rem-0607132.html>.

Secretary Kerry met earlier today with Bahraini Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa at the Department of State. This meeting provided an opportunity for the Secretary and Crown Prince to discuss the full range of bilateral and regional issues. Secretary Kerry highlighted the importance of the US-Bahrain partnership as well as our commitment to further strengthening the ties between our two countries. He also welcomed the leadership of the King, the Crown Prince, and the Bahraini Government in launching the National Dialogue. Secretary Kerry and the Crown Prince both agreed that all sides should contribute constructively to reconciliation, meaningful dialogue, and reform that meets the aspirations of all Bahrainis. Secretary Kerry reiterated our belief that all sides must reject violence and pursue actions that will contribute to Bahrain's future growth and prosperity.

Embassy of the United States in Manama, Bahrain, “Readout of Vice President Biden’s Meeting with Bahrain’s Crown Prince and First Deputy Prime Minister Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa,” June 6, 2013, <http://bahrain.usembassy.gov/rem-060713.html>.

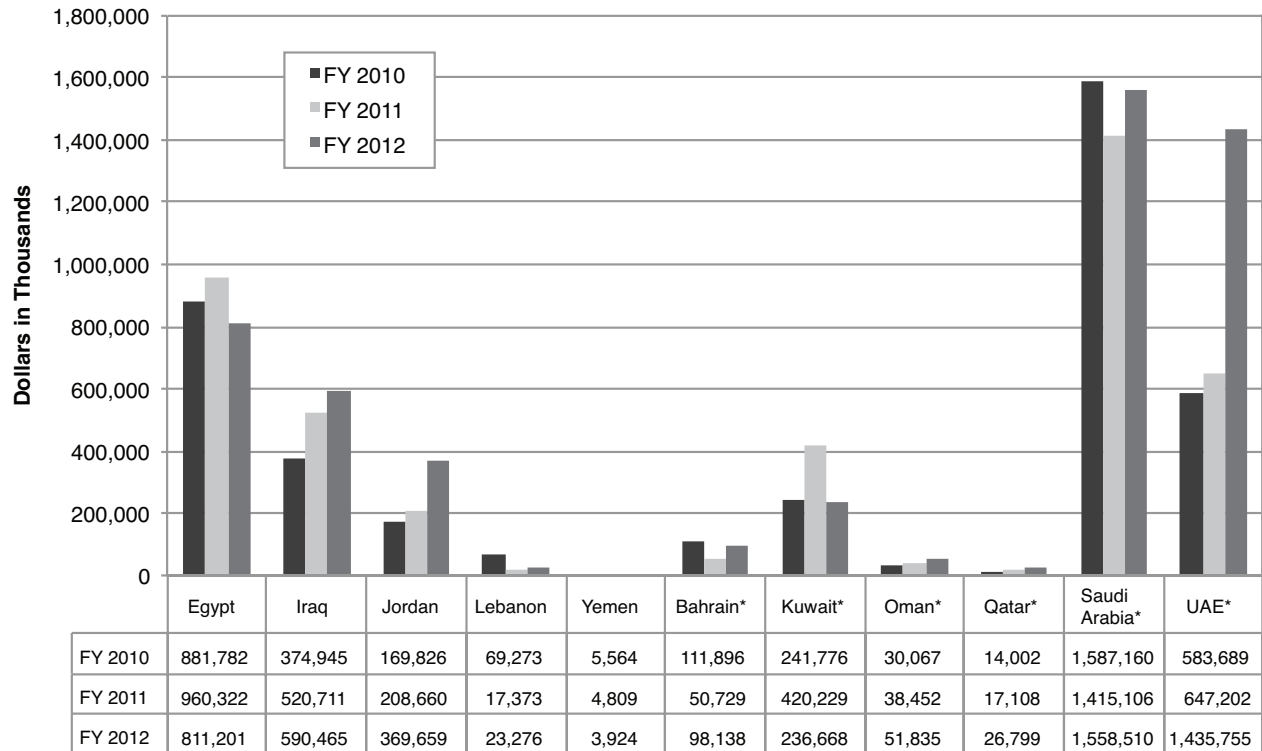
The Vice President met with His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, Crown Prince and First Deputy Prime Minister of Bahrain, this

afternoon in the Roosevelt Room of the White House. The Vice President emphasized US support for Bahrain and America’s shared interest in Bahrain’s security, stability and reform. The Crown Prince and the Vice President agreed that timely and tangible progress on reform is essential. The Vice President underscored that the United States condemns violence inside Bahrain and continues to stand by Bahrain and our partners in the Gulf.

APPENDIX 3

US FOREIGN ASSISTANCE, FISCAL YEAR 2010–12

FIGURE A1
US FOREIGN MILITARY SALES DELIVERIES, FY 2010–12



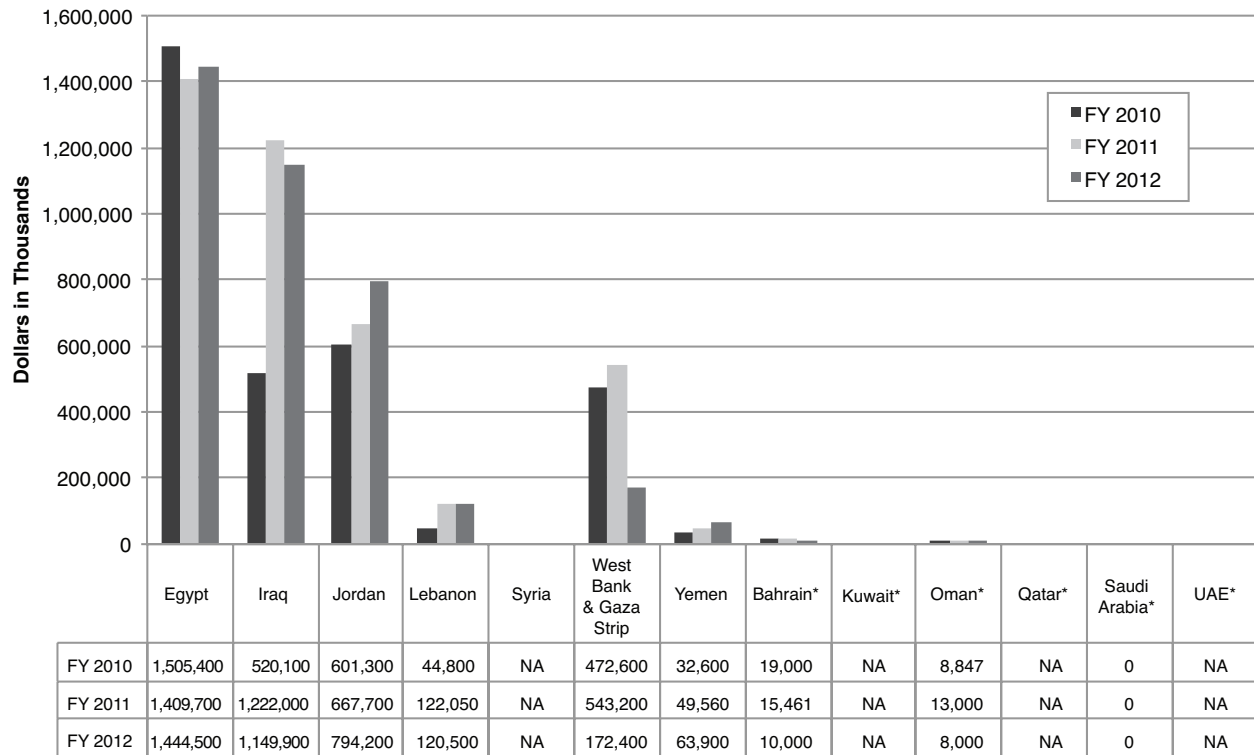
Notes: *Indicates Gulf Cooperation Council state.

We omitted figures for Afghanistan because it is a tertiary theater for both sides in the US-Iran competition, and an American military presence in Afghanistan, not US foreign assistance, is the impetus for competition. See page 31 for the section on Afghanistan.

No US military sales were made to Syria or the West Bank and Gaza Strip during this period.

Source: “Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Construction Sales and Other Security Cooperation Historical Facts,” *Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) Historical Facts Book*, September 30, 2012, www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/historical_facts_book_-_30_sep_2012.pdf.

FIGURE A2
COMBINED USAID EXPENDITURES AND FOREIGN MILITARY FINANCING, FY 2010–12



Notes: *Indicates Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) state.

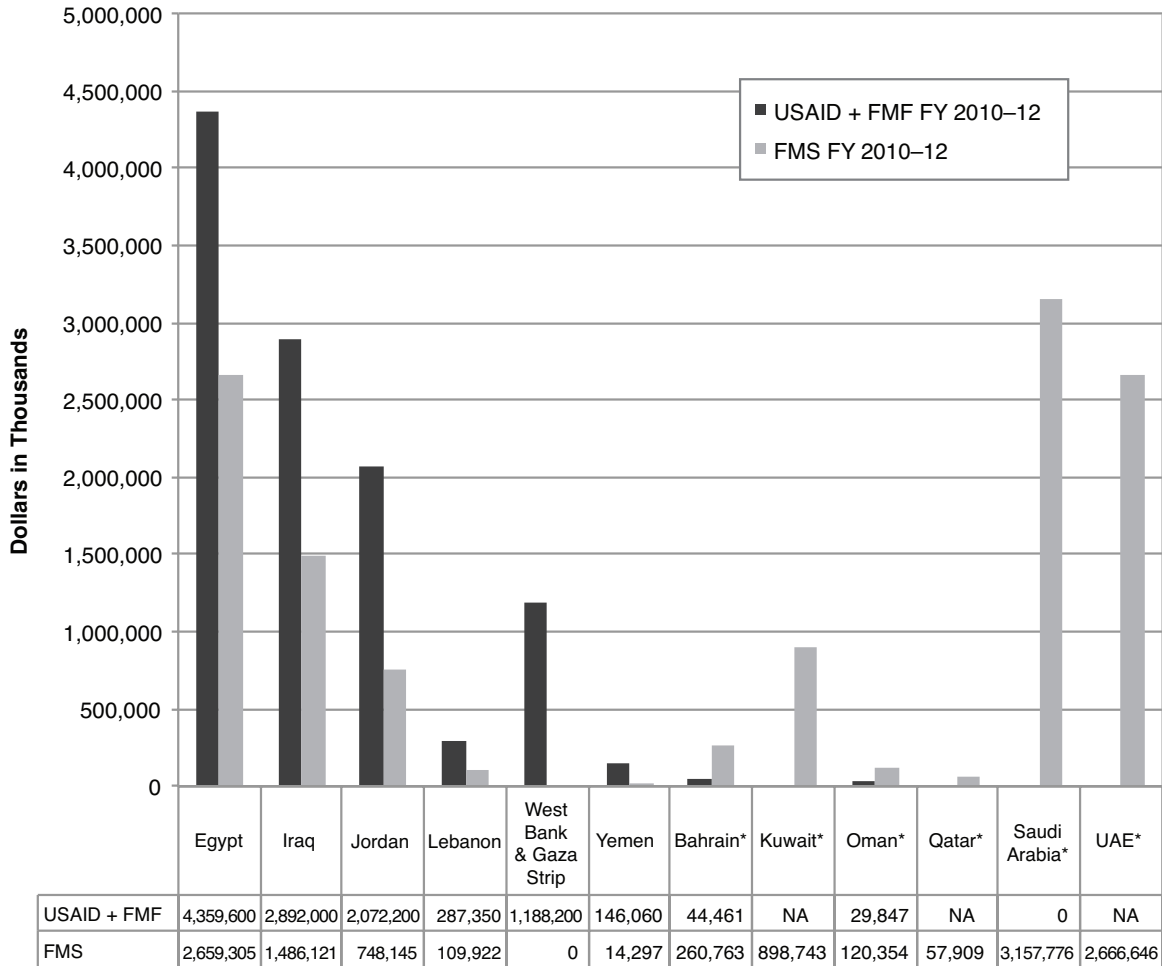
We omitted figures for Afghanistan because it is a tertiary theater for both sides in the US-Iran competition, and an American military presence in Afghanistan, not US foreign assistance, is the impetus for competition. See page 31 for the section on Afghanistan.

No USAID payments were made to Syria or the GCC states during this period. Foreign Military Financing data are unavailable for Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE.

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FIGURE A3

TOTAL USAID EXPENDITURES AND FOREIGN MILITARY FINANCING (FMF) COMPARED TO TOTAL FOREIGN MILITARY SALES (FMS) DELIVERIES, FY 2010–12



Notes: *Indicates Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) state.

We omitted figures for Afghanistan because it is a tertiary theater for both sides in the US-Iran competition, and an American military presence in Afghanistan, not US foreign assistance, is the impetus for competition. See page 31 for the section on Afghanistan.

No USAID payments or US military sales were made to Syria during this period. USAID expenditures were not made to the GCC states during this period. Foreign Military Financing data are unavailable for Syria, the West Bank and Gaza, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE.

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