

Neighborhood Watch

Republican presidents wage war in the Middle East, while Democrats seek peace. For 60 years, neither approach has worked. Neo-regionalism will.

The Middle East is unraveling, in part because it is returning to its roots of communitarian conflict. In the last great cascade of crises, during the 1980s, the Iran-Iraq war was raging, Lebanon was in civil war, and the Israelis and Palestinians were fighting in Lebanon. Today's situation is much worse: Iraq is ablaze, Iran has political momentum, Lebanon is again imploding, the Israeli-Palestinian scene is mired in a decade of unprecedented violence (first between the two sides and now primarily among Palestinians), the region has become a base of terrorism and a breeding ground for weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and extremism seems to gain from every American misstep. In looking at how to handle this potentially catastrophic combination, what can we learn from previous presidents' Middle East strategies—and can this analysis help pave the way to a more secure and stable future?

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In the 60 years since the United States first became heavily involved in the Middle East, American presidents have been remarkably consistent in the overarching strategies with which they approach the region. There are essentially three different strategies: global, local, and regional. These are, of course, ideal types; no president ever pursues one strategy consistently all the time. Nevertheless, in every administration, one prevails above the others. Moreover, the choice of strategy divides remarkably along party lines. Most Republicans, including the current president, have been visionaries, applying global perspectives onto regional dynamics. Others, all Democrats, have been repairmen, seeking to solve local problems but failing to look at the big picture—global or regional. In the Middle East, at least, Republicans have viewed the area in relation to American concerns everywhere (whether the Cold War, energy,

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terrorism, or weapons proliferation, for example); one vision fitting all of the world's dilemmas seems to help these presidents assess the world and address its problems in a unified and coherent manner. Democrats, on the other hand, seem to understand that one vision cannot fit every problem. They are ready to take the time and

devote the effort to design policies that solve problems. Resolving paramount challenges one by one suits their pragmatic conception of how to maneuver within the international arena.

Interestingly, America has never gone to war in the Middle East under a president pursuing a localist strategy, while the only globalists who did not intervene militarily were the Richard Nixon/Gerald Ford tandem (Nixon refused to invade the Arab states embargoing American oil after the October 1973 war and instead pursued a proto-form of tactical localism). Similarly, all Arab-Israeli peace treaties have taken place under localists (except for the disengagement agreements under Nixon and Ford, and these could hardly be compared in importance to the Egyptian and Jordanian peace treaties, or even Oslo in its time). Why, then, do Republicans wage wars in the Middle East, while Democrats wage peace? And does the answer recommend one strategy over the other?

When a president has a global conception of how the Middle East should be approached, each issue has worldwide implications that raise the stakes and hence make the use of force more justifiable (e.g., Iraq). On the other hand, a local focus allows a president to devote more time and resources to a particular issue,

which increases the chances of a peaceful resolution of that specific problem. But these are theoretical merits; on the ground, in recent years, both strategies have failed. Clinton, after enormous effort, could not achieve an Israeli-Palestinian or Israeli-Syrian agreement, and, in his laser-like focus on these two matters, he allowed the situation in both Iraq and Iran to deteriorate. Conversely, like all but one of his GOP forbearers, George W. Bush relied on big-picture objectives of fighting a war on terrorism and proliferation while spreading democracy, and today we are suffering the consequences.

What's more, both globalism and localism may well be outdated after the attacks of September 11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, developments that have created a worrisome interconnectedness of regional crises. The current administration has demonstrated the danger of "big picture" approaches that avoid dealing with stark local realities. But given the number of crises in the region, it is also more difficult than ever to focus enormous attention on a single problem in the area at the expense of others.

Fortunately, globalism and localism are not the only choices American presidents face. The third option is regionalism: devising policy in terms of the region itself and drawing connections among the various problems of the area. But, despite its utility and relevance, only the George H. W. Bush Administration tried such an approach, an incipient regionalism that it applied unevenly. A truly complex regionalism, one that moves beyond a simple "best of both worlds" combination of localism and globalism, has never really been pursued.

This neo-regionalism would entail looking at the Middle East in its entirety and asking how to address threats and opportunities within the region, how they affect one another, how they may exacerbate or help one another, and how policies can ameliorate conditions in the region in ways that enhance American interests. Rather than being simply a midpoint between globalism and localism, neo-regionalism would balance our concerns with regional realities; recognize the interconnectedness and the individuality of problems; and synchronize our means (diplomatic, political, economic, and military) with our objectives. Make no mistake: Neo-regionalism does not mean regional determinism, that solving one problem is going to make another disappear. In certain cases, it might help; in others, it might hurt; for still others, it might have little effect. And, of course, there is always tension in any regionalist approach, but that just reflects the reality of today's Middle East. Globalism and localism don't have the same tensions, because they try to simplify by focusing on the big or the little picture. Neo-regionalism would force us to understand the contradictions in the area and then to try to find acceptable alternatives that we—and as many competing parties in the region as possible—can live with.

Americans do not utilize this approach easily because it is the most difficult, requires the most knowledge and expertise about local conditions, and demands a complete image of how the obstacles facing the United States will be addressed in a highly complex and unstable region. It is also alien to the United States, a country pursuing a federal system (with national versus local approaches at home) in a part of the world that fundamentally lacks a region (other than bilateral relations with Canada and Mexico). Yet regionalism is essential to handling the tribulations of the Middle East post-September 11. It represents a new strategy that does not repeat old patterns of either developing a global war or dealing with individual problems. Such a new approach is critical if we are ever going to stabilize Iraq, effectively handle Iran, and bring a measure of stability to this critical region. Without this new direction, the next president, whoever he or she is, will lead a country that inevitably will sink even deeper into the Middle East morass.

Globalism

Whether the concerns are containing the USSR, promoting democracy, fighting the global war on terrorism, or ensuring global energy supplies, globalist foreign policies superimpose worldwide objectives on the region regardless of local conditions. Five presidents, all Republican, have approached the Middle East as globalists. The first, Dwight Eisenhower, believed the region was threatened by Soviet expansionism, which he thought would inevitably jeopardize the oil supplies of our European allies and even conceivably lead to Soviet victory in the Cold War. Eisenhower and his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, thus pursued a combination of policies to thwart perceived Soviet agents in the region. Iran's controversial prime minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, was overthrown with CIA help in 1953, for instance, and the Shah was returned to power because Washington feared that Mossadegh would push for rapprochement with the Soviets.

Eisenhower's globalism, in turn, led him to be astonishingly inconsistent on local issues. For example, he first tried to sell arms to Egypt's Gamel Abdel Nasser and offered him support for the long-sought Aswan Dam, but then withdrew the offer because of fear that Nasser was getting too close to Moscow. When Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal in retaliation, the British and French, in collaboration with Israel, tried to overthrow Nasser by force in the Suez Crisis of 1956. Eisenhower then stepped in to save him, only to turn against the Egyptian leader once again. He later commented in his memoirs, "If [Nasser] was not a Communist, he certainly succeeded in making us very suspicious of him." Fear of the USSR also explains the Administration's unusual distance from Israel,

because central to the anti-Soviet strategy was the notion that an American embrace of the Jewish state could become an encouragement to pro-Soviet forces in the region.

Nixon and Ford also pursued globalist policies. In fact, Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, followed one of the most sophisticated global strategies in American history. But until the October 1973 war, the Middle East was a secondary element of that strategy, executed in a manner to keep the local parties in place while a new approach of “negotiation and confrontation” was taken toward China and the USSR in the hope of stabilizing Indochina. Meanwhile, Nixon and Kissinger conceived of the “twin pillar” strategy, relying on Iran and Saudi Arabia to bring stability against potential Soviet advances in the Gulf. On a visit to Tehran, Nixon told the Shah, “Protect me,” and the Iranian leader, in turn, pushed for oil-price increases to fund arms for America’s new regional cop.

Ronald Reagan was the next globalist to occupy the White House, and his position was made clear when his first secretary of state, Alexander Haig, announced a strategic “consensus” in which America’s friends (Arab and Israeli) would

unite against communism regardless of the divisions among them. But instead of uniting, the region fragmented further into overlapping crises: the Iran-Iraq War, the continuing Lebanese civil war, and the lingering struggle between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which ultimately resulted in the Israeli intervention in Lebanon in 1982. The Reagan Administration demonstrated its true preoccupation with the region in 1987, when the Kuwaitis sought protection from attacks against their oil tankers by re-flagging them as American. The Administration refused, until the Kuwaitis reached agreement with Moscow to provide the re-flagging. Reagan then immediately changed his mind. Ironically, the move helped Iraq win its war over Iran and subsequently led to Saddam Hussein’s attack on Kuwait, setting in place the first post-Cold War crisis.

Hussein would stay in power until the administration of the most recent globalist president, George W. Bush. In this administration, globalist assumptions and patterns of behavior have been taken to their extreme. Whatever justification one prefers for the intervention in Iraq—whether it be preventing the spread of WMDs, disrupting the terrorism network, or creating a democratic model for the region, they all share typical globalist origins—a strategic objective applied to the region regardless of facts on the ground or local conditions, namely that

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the global war on terrorism is the preeminent struggle of our time and that the United States must actively spread liberal democracy throughout the Middle East. The Bush approach to Israel, though the precise opposite of Eisenhower's, is generated from these same conceptual origins—both begin with the fact that Israel, the region's only democracy, is on the frontlines of this struggle.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH GLOBALISM

The globalist approach provides vision, coherence, and a clear connection to the rest of America's worldwide objectives and commitments. But it also discourages an understanding of the region's internal dynamics. It creates a type of policy tunnel vision, as ideological blinders seek to compensate for the absence of attention to regional concerns. And by placing greater emphasis on worldwide strategies and ideological motivations in formulating policy, globalists accord less importance to cultural, historical, and local factors. As a result, the United States is placed into situations that Americans do not understand and for which they are not prepared, such as the intervention in Lebanon in 1982 and the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003.

Moreover, globalism encourages American policymakers to pay less heed to conflict management and more attention to big-picture schemes. Prolonged engagement and concentration on the specifics of Arab-Israeli issues, for example, is much less likely to occur. Thus, only Nixon after the October 1973 war, followed by Ford, was prepared to allow Kissinger (who by then had added secretary of state to his portfolio) to devote the time and effort to produce Arab-Israeli agreements. But, even then, the Nixon and Ford administrations dealt only with disengagement accords, not a comprehensive peace. Typical of globalists, they were more interested in how disengagement would help contain the USSR, save detente, and solve the energy crisis than what lasting peace would mean for the Middle East.

Finally, it is not clear that globalism even works, at least in regards to reducing conflict. The globalists' lack of attention to local details results in the emergence of crises, some especially intended by their perpetrators to capture American concern (as was Egypt's explicit strategy in initiating the 1973 war). Other wars occur in part precisely because the United States is occupied elsewhere and a situation spins out of control (the Suez Crisis, the First Intifada, the continuation and escalation of the Second Intifada, the Hezbollah-Israeli war of 2006). Naturally, regional wars have their own local dynamic, but it is surprising how many conflicts can be tied at least in part to dissatisfaction with Washington's policies, to American inattention, or to frustration with the United States within the region. Because globalism encourages American inattention or ideological motivation, more wars have been waged under globalist than under localist presidencies.

Globalism also makes small conflicts larger. If the issues have global implications that seriously affect American interests everywhere, the rationale for using American forces in some kind of intervention is enhanced. Eisenhower intervened in 1958 in Lebanon to stop the fall of pro-Western regimes in the region. Similarly, with the 1982 Lebanon intervention and his re-flagging of Kuwait's oil tankers in 1987, Reagan was trying to stabilize the region to prevent further Soviet gains. These escalations, in turn, almost uniformly ended badly. The re-flagging of Kuwaiti oil tankers in 1987 was intended to assure the free-flow of oil through the Straits of Hormuz; but it also helped to tilt the war's outcome toward Iraq and worsened U.S.-Iranian relations, especially when a U.S. warship accidentally shot down an Iranian civilian airliner late in the war, killing all 290 aboard. And other than unseating an evil dictator, it would be difficult to argue that the U.S. military intervention in Iraq in 2003 produced any positive consequences whatsoever. Only Eisenhower's 1958 intervention in Lebanon was an unvarnished success, in part because it may well have been unnecessary.

To be sure, wars, and in particular U.S.-led military interventions, can be at least theoretically stabilizing. There are certainly cases where they may be required as in frustrating countries' aggression against their neighbors (to thwart an Iraqi attack against Kuwait, or a Syrian attack on Lebanon, or an imminent threat to Israel). But often the blood and resources required for military incursions would be far more wisely spent on economic assistance, forming alliance systems (e.g., a network of defense treaties with local states), strengthening internal institutions to foil the threats of extremism and terrorism, and pursuing creative diplomatic initiatives. Ultimately, by encouraging an ideological policy focused on abstract concerns that are often irrelevant to the Middle East, globalism promotes military interventions that usually weaken American interests, security, and reputation in the region while compromising the security of our allies.

Localism

Where globalists superimpose ideological or strategic concerns onto the Middle East, localists attempt to deal with the area pragmatically, in terms of specific problems as they arise. Instead of viewing the region as a medium through which to carry out global objectives, these presidents look at (or often wait for) specific issues and then address them accordingly in a conflict management or mediation orientation. Localist presidents can, of course, have global strategies of their own. However, they do not utilize their global orientations in the context of the Middle East, instead often viewing the region as irrelevant or a distraction from what they are trying to achieve elsewhere.

Harry Truman, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson all pursued localist Middle East strategies precisely because they did not believe the area was directly related to their prime global preoccupation, confronting the USSR. To be sure, early in his administration Truman briefly took what looked like a globalist stance, challenging Josef Stalin in 1946 over his reluctance to leave Iran. He wrote a stiff note to the Soviets, called for action from the UN Security Council, and prepared troops for possible deployment. But when Stalin withdrew, Truman quickly turned to other problems. Later in his presidency, the prolonged confrontation between the British-controlled Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and Mossadegh was treated as an annoying diversion from the pressures of the Korean War, and he sought to address the problem through a pragmatic accommodation between London and Tehran. Nor did Truman spend much time on the Palestinian situation; when the

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British announced they were leaving, he was happy to hand the issue over to the UN. During the next two years of the crisis, Truman dealt with the Palestine problem only when and as his attention was demanded. Because his concerns were directed elsewhere, the policy was punctuated by sporadic periods of concentration followed by long weeks or even months of inactivity.

Likewise, during his brief presidency, Kennedy celebrated the “special relationship” with Israel, encouraged reforms in Iran, and explored a new approach to Nasser, all with little follow-through or prioritization. Johnson tilted toward Israel and the conservative Arab states like Saudi Arabia and Jordan, but until the 1967 war his preoccupation with Vietnam caused him to pay even less attention to the region than Kennedy. A major international crisis and the possibility of a Soviet-American confrontation changed all that, but only briefly; as soon as a UN resolution was set in motion after the 1967 war for a “land-for-peace” agenda, Johnson, like Truman before him, was pleased to turn the issue over to a UN mediator.

Jimmy Carter took localism in a different direction. Building off the close-contact shuttle diplomacy of Nixon and Kissinger, he focused intensely on the Arabs and Israelis; at one point during the 1978 Camp David talks, Carter even wrote out a draft Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in longhand on a yellow pad of paper. Here was a new, concentrated attention to detail instead of a global vision. But his triumph in achieving the first Arab-Israeli peace treaty did nothing to help him elsewhere in the region. Carter had compartmentalized the area so

starkly that when the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan took place, he was helpless to put the pieces back together again.

Bill Clinton was the most recent localist president and, in some ways, the consummate one. His entire foreign policy was defined by dealing with particular issues separately, from Bosnia to Haiti to Kosovo to North Korea. It could be said without exaggeration that under Clinton, “localism everywhere” had become the new “globalism.” In the Middle East, Iraq and Iran were placed in America’s waiting room with a fancy label of “dual containment,” so the Administration could concentrate first on the resolution of the Arab-Israeli problem with specific approaches to Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinians. But as with Carter before him, individual successes on the Arab-Israeli front did nothing to solve problems in other parts of the region.

WHAT’S WRONG WITH LOCALISM

Localism certainly has its share of problems. Presidents who follow it can ignore the Middle East until there are conflicts to manage (Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson), by which time the challenges are more daunting or dangerous. Or they can turn diplomacy into a fetish (Carter and Clinton) that risks sapping their attention when crises emerge elsewhere in the region. For example, both Carter and Clinton failed to be sufficiently attuned to other dangers, especially those involving Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. Localism also risks inserting the United States into discussions (especially Arab-Israeli) that are not ripe for diplomatic intervention and which are better left to the parties themselves.

On the flip side, localist presidents also can become so preoccupied with solutions to a particular problem that they set their standards too high and just give up when they cannot fulfill them. Certainly, the more Carter and Clinton devoted themselves to, and expended political capital on, a grand Arab-Israeli rapprochement, the more likely they were to suffer political and historical costs if they failed. Moreover, there is no question that Carter and Clinton set a standard of presidential involvement that now plagues the Arab-Israeli peace process, because local participants will accept nothing less than presidential participation, even at times when high-ranking diplomats may be able to handle problems as well or better. The Carter-Clinton standard simultaneously has frightened other presidents (especially George W. Bush) away from becoming more involved. Finally, for localists more than globalists, developing the correct tactics and the correct use of personnel is critical to success, yet hard to execute. No localist administration has entirely succeeded in producing a golden mean, and all—even those who succeeded—ended up, at least in part, frustrated and dissatisfied.

Regionalism

Regionalism attempts to address this gap in localism by dealing with the region in all its parts and problems. Unlike localists and globalists, regionalists address the Middle East on its own terms by considering the interrelatedness of its culture, politics, and conflicts. They understand the region's dynamics, history, and the tradeoffs necessary between issues. Instead of separating problems into more manageable parts in classic localist style, regionalists pursue policies in one sector of the region that may facilitate conflict management elsewhere. And, unlike globalism, regional actions are not delineated by global objectives.

Not surprisingly, a regionalist policy is easier to implement in the post-Cold War era, when the specter of the USSR does not interfere with policies designed to see the region as an end in itself. Nevertheless, only one administration, George H. W. Bush's, has pursued an incipient form of this strategy, and even then in a more elementary manner than may be possible in the future. It intervened to reverse the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, but only after it had gained widespread regional support. Similarly, influenced by the warnings of Iraq's neighbors, the Bush Administration did not attempt to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Its military initiative was balanced by the organization of the October 1991 Madrid Conference, the first regional Arab-Israeli conference attended by the leaders of Israel and its neighbors, which resulted in both a set of bilateral talks based in Washington and a series of highly innovative multilateral talks.

The regional approach, as undertaken by the first President Bush, has inherent difficulties. The act of balancing different issues can easily produce disequilibrium. The Bush Administration's overt conflict with Israel may well have led to false Arab expectations; it certainly (pointlessly) increased Israeli anxieties. This form of regionalism also can lead presidents to overlook countries that have key regional relevance but do not gain sufficient consideration, as the elder Bush did vis-à-vis Iran. In other words, while for globalists the key problem is the relevance of their policies to the region, and for localists it is the ability to devote sufficient time to solve problems, for regionalists it is the delicate balancing between competing interests to produce a viable policy that does not needlessly alienate, destabilize, or mislead specific regional players.

Seeking a New Regional Strategy

Because of the long and unpromising track record of localism and globalism, it behooves the current administration and its successors to examine whether neo-regionalism offers a viable alternative. To be sure, one of the problems of arguing in favor of neo-regionalism is that, because the policy rarely has been tested, it is difficult to envision. Moreover, some, such as Washington Institute

for Near East Policy Executive Director Robert Satloff, see regionalism as impossible because they claim linkages between localities and issues rarely exist. But today that is becoming less the case. Indeed, progress on any of the major trouble spots confronting the region—Iraq, the Palestinian Authority, and Lebanon—would likely have a positive impact elsewhere. For example, progress on the Palestinian question, if sufficient, would assuredly make it easier for Arab moderates to cooperate with Israel against the Iranian arc of extremism. The reduction of Hezbollah’s role in Lebanon would strengthen Israel’s ability to make concessions to the Palestinians, just as the Hezbollah-Israeli war last summer—especially in combination with attacks against Israel from Gaza—disrupted Israeli moves toward unilateral withdrawals on the West Bank.

Similarly, a positive conclusion of the Iraq imbroglio would undoubtedly enhance America’s influence over other conflicts, if only because it would no longer be a drain on U.S. resources and prestige. Indeed, we have seen a sort of negative regionalist dynamic at work in the Iraq fiasco, which has strengthened Iran and encouraged it to intensify its support for Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and Hamas. Such support in turn has weakened Israel, while the new Shia challenge has alarmed moderate Sunni Arab states like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. In addition, the Administration’s pressure for elections in the Palestinian Authority in January 2006, against the best judgment of both the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships, led to the emergence of a Hamas government, emboldened Hezbollah (arguably resulting in the Hezbollah-Israeli war), and further destabilized regional relations.

Granted, for those who accept the idea of regional linkages, there is an opposite tendency to rely upon them too heavily. A very popular approach is to suggest that progress, and certainly resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, is a panacea that can unlock doors throughout the region. British Prime Minister Tony Blair repeatedly focuses on this issue in search of what he calls a “whole Middle East” strategy. “A major part of the answer to Iraq lies not in Iraq itself but outside it, in the whole of the region,” he said in a November 2006 speech. “We should start with Israel-Palestine. That is the core.” Blair was even more clear last August, when he claimed that there is “one cause which, the world over, unites Islam, one issue that even the most Westernized Muslims find unjust and, perhaps worse, humiliating: Palestine.” He is correct in assuming that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the most emotional and unifying rallying cry in the Arab, and even

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the Islamic, world. But Blair is misguided if he believes that somehow resolving a century-old conflict, and expeditiously at that, would stop Iraqi Shia and Sunnis from killing one another (and Americans and British as well). As Daniel Kurtzer, the former U.S. ambassador to both Israel and Egypt, put it, “If the United States brokered peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, do you think a single Iraqi gunman would put down his weapon? Not a chance.” There are limits to regional linkages: Extremists who want Israel destroyed will never be assuaged by sudden Israeli-Palestinian comity.

Similarly, the Iraq Study Group (ISG), saddled with reassessing America’s failed policy in Iraq, put forward as one of its solutions a plan for the United States to adopt an elementary regional approach. It sought to engage Iraq’s neighbors and regional states in Iraq’s future and even suggested a new Ameri-

Conflicts must be approached by looking at the regional dynamics of the Middle East—not in isolation or through a global lens.

can dialogue with Iran and Syria on the subject. It also argued that the “United States will not be able to achieve its goals in the Middle East unless the United States deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict.” The ISG proceeded to recommend intensified U.S. engagement on all remaining fronts in the dispute—Syria, Lebanon, and

the Palestinian territories. But, like Blair, the group failed to show how its goals could be achieved. It argued that dealing with the Arab-Israeli dispute facilitates progress in Iraq. This implies, however, that Israel may be asked to make dangerous concessions in order for the United States to get out of Iraq, an unlikely proposition.

Nevertheless, at the ISG report’s December 2006 unveiling, Co-Chair Lee Hamilton made a clearer statement on regionalism than any presented in the report itself: “You cannot look at this area of the world and pick and choose among the countries that you’re going to deal with. Everything in the Middle East is connected to everything else. And this diplomatic initiative that we have put forward recognizes that.” In other words, with so many multiple challenges in the region, it is actually difficult to avoid regionalism. The question is not really whether or not to adopt regionalism, but how. Or, to put it differently, just because Blair and the ISG are incomplete in their recommendations, they are not wrong in their methodology. Rather than casting them aside entirely, we should see how a regionalist approach can be better constructed. We must realize that a neo-regionalist strategy does not mean that every problem can be solved through action in another part of the region. However, taking a “whole

Middle East” approach permits dealing with issues on their own, while still taking account of their connection to other problems in the area.

So what would an effective regionalism look like? It may resemble a strategy outlined in a little-noticed speech delivered in Athens last fall by the Greek foreign minister, Dora Bakoyannis. In blunt terms, Bakoyannis said, “In the Middle East, there is no way of definitely solving an issue while ignoring the others. This is why we need an integrated strategy for dealing with the Middle East as a whole. Such a strategy would necessarily involve all actors in the region, as well as the international community.” However, she makes it plain that a regional approach does not automatically entail engaging the region on every issue. Rather, the essence of her regional approach is to deal with each problem individually and only to involve others in and outside the region where appropriate. In her regionalist conception, each issue is understood in and of itself, but the primary conception is to have a regional vision for dealing with these individual issues. Thus, among other policies, Bakoyannis called for the “strengthening of the Lebanese state and the government of Prime Minister [Fouad] Siniora”; a program of engagement with Syria comparable to the Bush Administration’s transformation of Libyan policy; and an international conference on Iraq (including Iran and Syria) similar to the one that took place regarding Afghanistan. She identified Iran’s failure to cooperate with the international community vis-à-vis its nuclear development and its refusal to recognize Israel as the two key “barriers” preventing an improvement in ties to Tehran. Finally, Bakoyannis dwelled on the advantages of promoting a national unity government in the Palestinian Authority and on the importance of reviving the Palestinian economy toward “the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian state next to Israel, and in friendly relations with it.”

Some might add other ideas. I would, for example, stress the importance of strengthening a Lebanese army loyal to Siniora; point out the pitfalls of the Administration’s opposition to an Israeli-Syrian dialogue; place a new focus on the Saudi peace plan that now has the expressed interest of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (with no apparent American reaction); call on the Administration to explore moving most American forces in Iraq to nearby safe locations like off-shore carriers or Kuwait while the training of Iraqi forces and police accelerates; and recommend recognizing the current Iranian regime (just as we recognized the communist governments of Russia and China), even as we energetically and consistently oppose its nuclear program and its support for terrorism.

But on top of these locally focused solutions also should be regional ones. We should revive multilateral talks like those that followed the Madrid Conference in the early 1990s and invite all states in the region—including Iran and Syria—to

participate. At the same time, we should broaden the subject matter and the content of the dialogue so that the key regional issues can also be addressed. To be sure, the Madrid talks did not produce specific agreements, but they did serve as a forum for the exchange of perspectives and ideas not otherwise available in the region. Finally, the United States should contribute to international efforts to bring together non-governmental figures from the region to discuss the economic, diplomatic, security, political, and human problems the region faces. It is likely that, if such a program had been in place during the last two administrations, it would have been harder for the current Bush Administration to ignore the dire regional implications of an attack on Iraq, just as it would have been more difficult for the Clinton Administration to insufficiently appreciate the helpful role countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan might have played in bolstering the Camp David process in 2000.

There are, of course, those who argue that a regional policy necessarily involves distancing the United States from Israel. But the fact that the George H. W. Bush Administration was as cool as it was toward the Jewish state does not mean that a future administration pursuing a regional policy need approach Jerusalem in the same vein. It is just as logical to imagine a regional policy that brings the United States closer to Israel, and certainly services its security needs better. Moreover, globalists and localists have been both warm and cool, respectively, toward a closer relationship with Israel: Eisenhower and George W. Bush were both globalists despite stark differences on Israel; localists Carter and Clinton offer a similar contrast.

Analysts of U.S. foreign policy may argue that Americans are not capable of producing the kind of nuanced approach a regionalist strategy demands. True, the current Bush Administration failed to weigh adequately, if at all, the impact on the regional power balance of invading Iraq, especially one accompanied by an ill-prepared occupation. But that does not mean that adequate instruments cannot be devised and strategies envisioned so that this kind of disaster does not occur again. Despite who sits in the White House today, the U.S. government still employs people with the expertise needed to pull off a regionalist approach.

In sum, in approaching the thicket of security challenges entangling the Middle East, what we need is a neo-regionalism that recognizes the interconnectedness of issues but does not expect that progress in any one area will necessarily solve all, or even any, others. Individual conflicts must be approached by looking at the regional dynamics that affect the Middle East—not by viewing them in isolation or through the lens of a global vision. Of course, a neo-regional strategy is not a magic potion; it will take more effort and creative diplomatic and

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economic initiatives. Yet just as we have seen how the current administration's failures in Iraq have led to power imbalances, domestic instability, and local conflicts, a neo-regionalist strategy wisely integrating the pressing problems of the region is most likely to repair this damage and restore the United States to a role providing stability and security in the Middle East. ▀