The Trajectory of “The Gap” into the Future
(That is, the Trajectory of the Islamic World,
and in particular, the Arab World)

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The trajectory of “The Gap”

(That is, of the Islamic World, and in particular, the Arab World)

Summary

The trajectory of The Gap—that is, of the Islamic world, and in particular the Arab world and the adjacent Persian world of Iran as the heart of the Middle East and of Islam—is very difficult to predict at this moment (mid-2005). In the first place, the outcome in Iraq, the new nature of the Iraqi state and country, is just about unpredictable at this time, unless in a very narrow range: from a Shia state under some kind of Iranian hegemony to a continuing civil war between Sunnis and Shias, with Kurds retreating more and more into their own enclave. In the second place, Islamic terrorism and its suicide bombers are spreading even as they are dispersing.

The Gap is no longer just the Middle East, but the newly recognized threat of Muslims with European passports and anomie isolation in their adopted countries, especially France and Britain. Central Asia once more threatens to fall apart. Despite the small signs of democracy in Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt, we are reminded once more that elections do not automatically lead to stable states that are not breeding grounds for terrorists, in part because the essential economic grounding of what we in the U.S. think democracy is, is not yet evident.

What this means is that U.S. military forces will be stuck in the area for an indefinite period to come. For the 1990s, these forces were ships and sea and aircraft on land bases, adding ground forces for what were thought to be mere battles in Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Some freedom! Now U.S. ground forces are embedded in Iraq for the indefinite
future, supported on the margin by naval and air forces. Transformation has now come to mean ground forces coping with insurgency and hoping to catch up on language and culture. It also means spreading the “management of the trajectory of The Gap” to other U.S. Government agencies—a movement that seems quite stalled so far, given the peculiar presidential organization of our government and the reluctance Congress has to finance anything but the classic (traditional) U.S. military while skimping on homeland defense and international activities other than military.

The trajectory of the Islamic world, that is, the “horizontal scenario” that it will traverse over the coming years, is going to be a dynamic one. There are certain trends that can be mapped—as with oil, population growth and aging, the longevity of leaders—but there are others that cannot, like the strength of governance, whether economies can do anything (other than oil) that plugs them into the global economy, the preservation or loss of civil order, and the emergence of new leaders. Above all, the diversity of the area is great. It is still necessary to examine it through the convention of separate countries.

But the basic fact remains: much of the Islamic world (not all) is not keeping up with the rest of the world (that is, in globalization) and this is the situation that is fomenting retreat in other directions, that is, the rejection of all the pressures of the modern world and the reversion to a simpler life, organized religiously, i.e., where the promise of the other world justifies a miserable life now. The means to accomplish this reversion, as we know, is violence both in and out of the area. And yet, in an odd way, except for the occasional terrorist incident (whether an attack on a resort in Egypt or Syrian assassinations in Lebanon), most of the area is stable even as it continues to fall behind the Core countries of globalization. On the other hand, the globalized world, including the United States, will continue to bore in on the area—while Islam disperses at least into Europe.

It is said that it is oil that keeps the U.S. militarily engaged in the region. It is true that the U.S. forces would not be involved in the Gulf were it not for oil—it would be treated like Africa South of the Sahara or Latin America. But the U.S. is highly schizophrenic, torn between,
on one hand, its commitment to the survival of Israel and, on the other hand, its protection of the oil market (more than the oil itself). If U.S. ground forces want to come home, one necessary (but not sufficient) condition for it is peace between Israel and the Palestinians. That trajectory is a little more hopeful than the one in Iraq at the moment, but, as Lenin said, it always seems to be one step forward followed by two steps backward in The Gap.
The term, “The Gap” comes from Tom Barnett and his book, The Pentagon's New Map. It is the gap between the Core group of countries that are either part of the globalized economy or striving to join it, on one hand, and those countries who cannot seem to make the connections and participate in the prosperity that appears to come with joining the Core on the other. The Gap can be portrayed as follows:

As this chart shows, what we are really concerned with in the new age of terrorism is the Islamic world, which lies across the center, or seam of the world. This seam stretches along the southern littoral of the Mediterranean and on through the Persian Gulf. In this sense, the Gap has a geographical appearance. Afghanistan and Pakistan are
attached to all this, though regarded as South Asia, and then we leap across India (though India has nearly as many Muslims as Pakistan—yet scattered and not a single political bloc) to Bangladesh, then leap across Myanmar to southern Thailand and Malaysia, to Indonesia, and the Sulu Archipelago and southern Mindanao.

The Islamic world also extends:

- Down into Africa, notably along the shore of East Africa and across the Sahel (both areas have a long history of Islamization);
- Up into the Caucasus (notably Chechnya) and Central Asia, in both of which areas it had been suppressed in Soviet times. Should we include Tatarstan and Bashkortistan, embedded deep within Russia and rediscovering their Muslim origins?
- Moreover, there are now something like 20 million Muslims in Europe. Islam is thus quite fuzzy at the edges.

**The diversity of the Islamic world**

The Islamic world is very diverse. In the first place, there is the big split between the Sunni and Shia sects. Second, the religion is a very loose one: no hierarchy of clergy (except among Shia), no standard interpretations of sacred texts (anyone can issue a *fatwa*—a religious edict—it seems), every sect regarding every other sect as apostates, etc. It is so easy to become a Muslim that they must worry that it must be easy to stop being one, too. Every country is different, with different histories, including different colonial experiences and relations to old metropoles, different economies (half have oil, half do not), and different patterns of government—including at least three democracies (Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia). Then there are the mixed countries, like India or Ethiopia.¹

The diversity of at least part of the Islamic world is shown in the following chart:

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¹ Ethiopia is 50 percent Muslim, but it is not a place of sectarian clashes, unlike Sudan.
Given this diversity, treating the Islamic world as a system is risky. But it is a kind of “universe” in which each country—and the country is still a convenient unit of analysis and anticipation—can have its own track. At the same time, we see certain common problems among many of the countries, especially the Arab ones. These include:

- Lagging behind in many of the attributes of globalization, especially the development of self-sustaining economies (Malaysia and possibly Indonesia are exceptions; Iraq might have been an exception, but now has its own uncertain track).

- They may have exploding populations (though Algeria and Tunisia appear to have now fallen below the replacement rate of 2.1).

- Both the education and economic systems are inadequate to absorb the population growth by creating jobs and providing the skilled people to fill them.
• Most of the countries have problems of government and governance. Leaders stay in power too long (with consequent growing corruption draining economies—though it seems monarchies don’t do too badly, given their legitimacy), or are out of touch with the populace (especially where they have oil revenues, all of which flow in to the top, thus obviating the necessity of governments having to stay in touch with publics since they don’t have to rely on them for revenues), or have otherwise lost touch.

• Governments may be challenged by the radical Islamists at some point—it doesn’t take too many people to bring off a revolution if the conditions are right—but actually the cases of revolution in the area have been rare.

• They may be short of resources or running out of them—like oil and water.

Is the Islamic culture of these countries a great drawback to improvements in all these spheres? We do not have a good example of a basically Islamic country overcoming the obstacles arising from these problems. Malaysia may be closest, but it is nevertheless a multi-ethnic society, with large Chinese and South Asian minorities, and the Chinese especially establishing the patterns of the economy and Malays striving to catch up.

Otherwise, what we have seen in these countries over time is a bifurcation in governance and civic activism between military rule—in their Western uniforms, even if dysfunctional in a hot, desert country like Saudi Arabia—and the religious leaderships in the mosques and universities. The military people may turn themselves into businessmen, but clerics do not seem to.

These problems characterize the “breeding grounds of terrorists” that we worry about. Yet all these problems also make it difficult for Osama bin Laden to create a new Caliphate, unifying all these countries, or even just unifying Arabs.
Looking back to 1979-1981 (which was the time of this author’s intense, day-to-day involvement in the region, including Pakistan), the region seemed manageable—despite, and even because of, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the fall of the Shah and the accession to power there of a new theocratic government that took U.S. hostages, and the black hole that was Saddam’s Iraq. The Israeli-Palestinian situation was hopeful after Camp David, especially since Egypt was on our side now. The war in Yemen had faded away. Iraq invaded Iran and the two countries became tied down in what looked like a stalemated world—quite suitable for “dual containment,” especially since the oil continued to flow from both countries, oddly enough. Lebanon was in civil war though—and yet Lebanon seemed of no strategic significance at all, given the overriding Cold War context.

We may portray the evolution of the region as follows:
These are the four sectors critical to functioning nation-states, including the Arab states. They lie in symbiotic relation to one another and the balance among them constitutes what Americans may think democracy is. The major factor that is permitted by the symbiosis is rotation of leadership in government, especially back into society and economy (not into the military—all militaries are pathetic at economics, if they want to touch the subject at all).

It is interesting in this connection to track the evolution of the military side of things—though it was much more interesting 25 years ago. In some ways, the most positive development is a fading away of the military establishments in the region, however much they stay in power and provide the leadership. In traditional terms, though, they are rotting and shrinking away. They don’t have access to free Soviet equipment any more (though much is still lying around, especially in small arms, as we see in Iraq), and many of the countries can hardly afford to replace their old equipment (the Saudis are getting close to this point as their per capita GDP sinks and their population gets restless, although recent high oil prices may have given them a reprieve). The rich little countries—that is, Kuwait, Qatar, and UAE—can afford to buy new equipment, even if they might not be able to man it, much less maintain it.

The military arms race is no longer as dominant an aspect of evolution in the Islamic world as it may have been in the past. Rather, the current evolution of conflict is more of terror, insurgencies, and perhaps civil disorders.

One would hope to see a shift in energies in countries to the more technological, including information technology, but this is not evident yet. Otherwise, there have been relatively stable successions in Morocco, Jordan, and Syria—though Syria, with the only non-monarchical succession, may be in trouble, given its rejection in Lebanon on one side and turmoil in Iraq on the other. Economically, the countries are not generating jobs, especially as the populations soar (though Tunisia and Algeria are now at the zero-growth level) and the oil-rich countries retain their rentier regimes.
The Islamic world’s awkward connections to globalization

Tom Barnett talks of countries in The Gap as generally not being connected to globalization. But I would characterize most of the countries we’re especially concerned with—the predominantly Islamic countries—as awkwardly connected to globalization. The evolutions in the chart shown earlier have been heavily influenced by the outside world—whether Cold War world or the residual globalizing world. We can annotate that chart to show it as follows:

As we see, during the period of decolonization of the Middle East, which also corresponded to the Cold War, that is, from the end of World War II to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 at least, the major intrusions of the outside world into the area were:
• Israel was set up as a separate state in 1948, and Jewish immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe and other parts of the Middle East were resettled there. Wars followed in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973—plus Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which involved skirmishes with Syria. These wars provided the impetus for arms races in the area, with some of the countries supplied by the West (UK, France, U.S.) and some by the East (Soviet Union)—which also gave these outside countries a continuing stake in the region. After the 1973 war, and especially after Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem in 1978, the Middle East process was begun.

• The West developed the oil fields and lifted oil from the area, though the major oil fields in Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia were nationalized as time went on. The oil industry also involved lots of Western nationals in the countries, posing a threat to the local cultures, at least as the rulers and clerics saw it.

• With oil sales, Western cash flooded back into the oil-producing countries, turning them into “rentier” populations, that is, dependent on top-down support from the monarchs or governments in a comprehensive social welfare system.

• The West and the Soviets competed for influence in these countries, especially as the newly decolonized countries, like Egypt, set up socialist welfare systems. The two sides also equipped the military forces in the area.

• The net effect was to solidify both military and monarchical regimes in the area.

From 1973 on, the U.S. became the big outside power to regulate the area, having gradually taken over from the British. Soviet influence dried up across the same period, especially after Nasser died and the Egyptians kicked the Soviets out in order to prepare their own campaign to grab back their canal. In the coming years maybe one can imagine a new competition for big-power outside influence in the region, with the U.S. somehow competing with India and China, though I wouldn’t predict it.
Oil, of course, makes for an awkward connection. The Core world wouldn't be interested much in the area if it weren't for oil; it would let the area go the way of the Congo. All we know is that out toward 2020 and beyond, the Core world, and especially including India and China, will be even more dependent on Middle East oil as reserves are drawn down elsewhere.

For Saudi Arabia especially, the government (or at least the princes of the royal family) is the recipient of most hard currency revenues, and therefore doesn't need to tax its people, and so loses a vital connection with them. Rather, it deigns to share those revenues with its people, again without consultation, thus establishing a population of rentiers. Algeria probably has much the same problem. Democracy appears when a government has to go on a budget based on the revenues they have to extract from their people, from the local economy, not from the sale of natural resources to outsiders. The people naturally don't want all the revenues to go to the government, so they both restrain them and have something to say about how it's redistributed. Saudi Arabia also benefits from the money spent by pilgrims on the Hadj—a form of tourism. Otherwise, Saudi Arabia doesn't manufacture anything.

But other awkward connections exist. If the Islamic countries don't have good higher education facilities, they have to ship students to the Core countries. They are dependent on the Core countries for technology, that is, for the machinery of relative civilization. They don't develop their own machinery—I gather there's practically no patent activity, especially in the Arab world. They publish little, translate little. And then they are bombarded with Core culture (call it Western), which they can hardly filter out given the ease of access to radio, satellite television, etc. That outside culture is considered corrupting, but it is irresistible.

The UAE and Qatar and to a lesser extent Bahrain are the small countries racing to embrace globalization. They don't appear particularly uptight about what this might or might do to their religion and have accepted the fact that they will become increasingly multi-ethnic societies with a wide variety of religions at play. All three of these countries—really city states—seem determined to turn themselves into
hubs in the networked and globalized world. Is this a problem or isn't it? Are these entities holes in the international system or are they emerging pillars, or, alternatively, are they neither?

To summarize, as the chart shows on interaction between the region and the outside world, and aside from the vast intrusion of the United States into Iraq (and Afghanistan):

- The region is regarded as the breeding ground for the terrorists, now to be referred to as “violent extremists.” These extremists have taken advantage of modern communications and ease of movement to create their network, overlaid on the even greater spread of common TV in Arabic.

- The U.S., in order to counter this, is urging democratization in these countries, i.e., the change from old, stagnant, and corrupt leadership. The U.S. sees hopeful signs of democracy in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt. But there is also the fear that radical religious groups might take over through a democratic process.

- Middle East oil has become more important than ever, as the demands in the U.S., China, and India increase and as discovery of new reserves elsewhere shrink.

- Arab populations have been surging, and they are also generating emigrants who go especially to Europe to find jobs. But this means “the Muslim problem” grows in Europe, especially as Saudi-funded preachers and religious material follow.

- The militaries in most countries continue to shrink or otherwise age, with little modernization going on, except in those countries, like UAE, that can’t man their new equipment.
Three overall scenarios

We worked up three grand scenarios for “The Gap:”

1. The best case.
2. The worst case
3. Regional isolation

These scenarios have the advantage of exploring the details on the issues that have arisen in the Islamic world, and in particular in the Middle East. They have the disadvantage of not envisaging the spread of factors into the future; the section following this one explores “trajectories” in a different manner.

Gap Scenario 1: The Best Case

In this scenario, developments in the Muslim world over the next 15-20 years are generally positive. The key drivers include the stabilization of the political and military situation in Iraq, the capture of top terrorist leaders both there and in Pakistan/Afghanistan, the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian conflict, and the diversification of national economies leading to improvements in standards of living and governance throughout the region. I will treat each of these factors in turn and then in conclusion examine how the interactions among them might play out in 2020.

Security in Iraq

Any positive scenario for the Muslim world must begin with the assumption that the security and governance situation in Iraq will improve within the next 2-3 years. Without stability in Iraq, most of the other positive drivers mentioned above will not happen.

While there are at least several possible trajectories to Iraqi stabilization, it seems that one requirement is the elimination of the most rad-
ical Islamist elements led by Zarqawi. His network is responsible for the vast majority of foreigner abductions and suicide bombings. If his network were eliminated, it would reduce the number of bombings and abductions, which would both improve security in the country and increase the perceived stability of Iraq to the outside world. In turn, if Iraq were perceived as becoming more stable, other countries would be more willing to participate in the country's reconstruction. It would be possible to create a virtuous cycle through which Iraq would gradually regain some measure of political stability and have most of its infrastructure rebuilt. This cycle may allow the US to reduce its military presence in Iraq, thus going some way toward eliminating the perception that it is an occupying force in the country. US troops might be replaced by either newly trained Iraqi forces or by peacekeeping forces from other Muslim states. While it now seems highly unlikely that Iraq will become the beacon of democracy in the Middle East that some expected it would be after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, a more stable and peaceful Iraq with fewer US troops would reduce the hamper the recruitment of new terrorists by al Qaeda and its allies and would allow the international community and governments in the region to focus on other priorities in the region, such as solving the Palestinian conflict and improving governance and economic performance.

**Capture or killing of international terrorist leaders**

Stability in the Muslim world will not measurably increase until top terrorist leaders are eliminated. The ability of top al Qaeda leaders, such as bin Laden and Zawahiri, to evade capture over the last three years has increased their standing in the Muslim world. Their status as heroes of opposition to the West has in turn assisted recruiting of new potential terrorists in countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. If they were to be captured, the blow to Muslim radical terrorism would exceed the simple disruption of their operations. Just as the capture of Saddam Hussein in a hole in the ground pierced his heroic image among many Muslims, the capture of Osama bin Laden in a mountain hideout could destroy his image as a fearless opponent of the West.
Since most of the top al Qaeda leaders are hiding in Pakistan, their capture would most likely occur if the hand of that country's secular rulers versus its radical clerics and their supporters were strengthened. One path for this to occur might begin with the settlement of the Kashmir conflict and the establishment of good relations between India and Pakistan. Trade with India and transit income from a new natural gas pipeline connecting Turkmenistan and India via Afghanistan and Pakistan could lead to rapid economic growth in Pakistan. The new prosperity, in turn, would decrease the appeal of Islamic radicalism and lead to the capture of top terrorists hiding in the slums of Karachi and Lahore. The government could use its wealth to secure the loyalty of tribal groups in the mountainous areas of northwestern Pakistan, leading to the capture of terrorist leaders hiding in those areas.

Resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict will continue to drive the political situation in the region. The success of the battle against global terrorism and the ability of the states in the region to undertake political reform depend largely on the future course of this conflict. The signing of a peace agreement between Israel, its Arab neighbors, and the Palestinian Authority, leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in most of the West Bank and Gaza would reduce support for Palestinian terrorists to very low levels. While this agreement would not make Israel and its Arab neighbors the best of friends, it would allow Israel to greatly reduce its level of military expenditures, which, with renewed tourism, would revitalize the country's economy. At the same time, European and Israeli efforts to ensure that the new Palestinian state is viable would make it into a model of democratic governance and economic stability for its Arab neighbors. The US would continue to support Israel politically, but could largely withdraw its military from the region, except for a naval presence designed to ensure the free flow of oil to the West.

While desirable, an early peace agreement is not a necessary step for the resolution of this conflict. If no peace agreement is forthcoming, Israel is likely to unilaterally demarcate a boundary with the Palestinian territory and withdraw from all isolated settlements on the other
side of this boundary. After this, the Palestinian terrorist organizations would lose their ability to conduct suicide bombings inside Israel. Once they no longer face the humiliating presence of Israeli settlers and soldiers on a daily basis, the people of the West Bank and Gaza would be likely to turn its anger against both the corrupt leadership of the Palestinian Authority and the Islamic radicalism of Hamas, both of which would be blamed for the continued economic misery of the population. (The closing of Israeli borders to Palestinian day laborers would eliminate this source of income for the population.) Eventually, the Palestinian government would see no option but to sign a peace deal with Israel and destroy Hamas terrorist groups.

Oil Prices Fall

Although oil prices are currently at an all time high, this is not necessarily going to be the case in the next few decades. An initial rise in oil prices may spur major advances in fuel efficiency and/or the development of alternative fuels on a global scale, resulting in the eventual fall of oil prices. If oil prices fall below the level of $10/barrel (in 2004 dollars), the world economic system would undergo significant changes. Most importantly, the departure of petrodollars would return the Middle East to the status of a relatively unimportant backwater. While the money that funds radical Islamic terrorists would not completely disappear, it would be significantly reduced. Major oil exporting states would have to diversify their economies and reform their political systems or face gradually becoming corrupt economic basket-cases (a la Congo-Zaire) as their infrastructure decays.

Economic diversification and political reform

Economic diversification is the key to improving governance and internal political stability in most of the countries of the Muslim world. In the present situation, most of the Muslim world is not connected to the globalized economic system.

This is especially true for its Middle East Arab core. The oil-rich states of the region have failed to use their oil wealth as a base for other forms of economic development that might benefit broad sectors of the population. Instead, the money has gone to enrich the elites and
to avoid potentially politically difficult economic and political reforms.

As long as governments in the region can maintain their oil financing while deflecting popular anger against external enemies such as Israel and the United States, they can maintain the status quo. Countries financed by oil revenues instead of tax receipts have little incentive for taking popular opinion into account. But if these external threats were eliminated and oil revenues began to dry up, these states would have to choose between initiating economic reform programs or facing a rising tide of popular anger that could sweep radical opponents of the regime to power.

States without oil money have remained largely underdeveloped due to insular business cultures and overwhelming bureaucratic obstacles to business development.

The few exceptions, such as Malaysia and Tunisia, only serve to show that economic development and integration into the global economy are possible in the Muslim world.

If the governments of this region successfully tackle this challenge by plowing some of their oil revenues into the establishment of new industries, they could change the economic dynamic in the region and begin the process of integrating the Middle East into the globalized economy. It seems likely that economic growth would in turn fuel political reform, as newly wealthy business elites seek to have more say in policy making and pressure governing elites to widen the boundaries of the politically active class. At the same time, the decline in reliance on oil revenues would require rulers to increase taxes, which in turn would lead to pressure to increase public participation in governance. However, the current corrupt and inefficient governments would have a difficult time implementing economic reforms that would go against the interests of ruling elites and government bureaucrats, so it may be that political reform would have to precede any serious efforts at economic reform.
The globalization of the gap

How do these factors interact to create an environment in which the Muslim “gap” region becomes firmly entrenched within the globalized world by 2020? In this section we describe one of several potential “best possible case” scenarios that would result in a stable, economically interconnected Muslim world in 15-20 years.

As described above, the process of integration must begin with the stabilization of Iraq. As long as Iraq is consumed by insurgency or hovers on the brink of civil war, the attention of the people of Muslim states, regional governments, and the world community will remain focused on this conflict. The world community will be too preoccupied to press for changes in governance in autocratic states throughout the region; the inhabitants of the region will be consumed by hatred of Western imperialist occupying forces; and regional leaders will be only too happy to point to the conflict as the source of the region's troubles.

Once the Iraqi conflict is settled (or at least) becomes quiet enough so that it no longer dominates the news emanating from the region, other issues will reemerge as priorities. Chief among these will be the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As described above, this conflict can also be resolved, either through a peace agreement or through a unilateral boundary demarcation by Israel.

Once the major regional conflicts are resolved (or at least ameliorated), the way will be open for Middle Eastern states to pursue political and economic reforms. Without Israel and the United States as objects of hatred, poor Arabs will focus their anger on the corrupt political regimes in their home countries. The result would be gradual political reform in most of the region, although a few states (Syria, some of the Gulf sheikdoms) may continue to repress reformers. Given the trends in the region, they would eventually be overthrown. Those states that do reform would not immediately implement Western-style liberal democracy. Although specific institutions would vary from state to state, reform would most likely take the form of the establishment of consultative institutions, perhaps even parliaments, that would have the authority to develop and approve legislation, but with the chief executive retaining the right to veto proposals that he
did not like. This reform trend is already under way in some of the more liberal Middle Eastern states, such as Jordan and Kuwait. Over time, some of these countries may develop into real liberal democracies, but this would probably occur outside of the time frame for this study.

Political reforms are a necessary precondition for the economic reforms that are in turn necessary if the core Muslim states are to join the globalized economy. Without these reforms, corruption and bureaucratic over-regulation will prevent the implementation of economic deregulation measures that would allow foreign and domestic investment in new industries. More specifically, the more populated, less oil-rich states of the region (Egypt, Pakistan, Syria) could follow the example of Southeast Asian states and use their relatively low labor costs to develop textile industries and other labor intensive manufacturing. The underpopulated oil-rich states, which have a much higher average level of education, would be poor candidates for manufacturing. They, on the other hand, could focus on encouraging the middle classes to develop white-collar industries in the technology and service sectors.

The Iran wildcard

The above scenario focused primarily on the Arab states that comprise the core of the Muslim world. Pakistan is also included, as it plays a key role in the future course of radical Islamist forces and is a prime candidate for economic development due to its location on the energy transport routes between Central Asia and India. Most of the other non-Arab Muslim states are either already engaged in the process of economic globalization and political reform (Malaysia, Indonesia, Tunisia, Morocco), or are too peripheral to matter for the region as a whole (Bangladesh, Sudan, Somalia, Mauritania, etc.).

The one exception is Iran, a state that has historically played a major role in the region's political trajectory. On the one hand, it continues to be ruled by fundamentalist Muslim clerics and is pursuing a nuclear program that has worried the international community. On the other hand, the majority of its population is sick of Islamic radicalism, instead seeking to adapt Western culture to the local environ-
ment. They are also concerned that the Islamic state's policies are slowing economic growth. As a result, Iran is now at a crossroads as far as its future political and economic development. Over the last 10 years, the ruling clerics have been relatively successful at diverting and suppressing pressure for political change. It remains to be seen whether it will be possible for them to be equally as successful over the next decade.

Given its highly educated population, relative wealth, and economic potential, Iran has a chance to become the Middle East's link to the global economy. This depends on Iran continuing to trend away from radical politics and pursuing economic reforms. Both changes would be strongly resisted by the conservative clerics and their bastions of support in Iran's power ministries. Yet it seems clear that Iran is continuing its gradual post-revolutionary trend toward moderation that is quite likely to result in the country's connection to the global community by 2020. If this connection develops, it would further increase the pressure on other Middle Eastern, and particularly Persian Gulf, states to follow a similar course of economic and political liberalization.

**Gap Scenario #2: Worst-Case scenario**

In the worst-case scenario, the failure of efforts to solve regional conflicts would provide more recruits to radical Islamist movements throughout the Muslim world. As a result, some of the most important Muslim states may be taken over by the radical forces. States that are not taken over by Islamists may increase repression against societal actors and become even more corrupt and bureaucratic. Their economies would continue to stagnate as a result. The Islamist states, meanwhile, would provide safe havens for international Islamic terrorist organizations, which would use the opportunity to develop new deadly attack strategies against both Western powers and the remaining states in the region that are not controlled by Islamists. These events would destabilize global energy markets, leading to a worldwide economic recession.

**Regional conflicts get worse**

The security situation in Iraq would continue to get worse. American forces' tendency to bomb urban areas where insurgent bases are sus-
pected to be located will alienate more and more of the Iraqi civilian population. Eventually, Sunni and Shiite rebels will come together in an effort to defeat the American occupying force. Faced with mounting casualties, a catastrophic recruitment and retention problem in the US military, and clear evidence that the US has lost the battle for the hearts and minds of the Iraqi population, the US government would decide to withdraw its forces from Iraq. After some skirmishes, Iraq effectively would be divided into three quasi-states, with the north controlled by Kurdish forces, the south by radical Shiites led by Muqtada al-Sadr, and the middle by Sunni insurgents allied with Zarqawi’s terrorist organization. Forced population transfers would ensue, with high death rates among civilians. The Sunni statelet would become a base for Islamic terrorist groups in a manner similar to Afghanistan under the Taliban.

At the same time, a particularly horrible spate of terrorist attacks within Israel on the eve of general elections would be followed by the election of a far right government, which would carry out its pledge to transfer all Palestinians out of the West Bank and Gaza, regardless of world public opinion. The United States may condemn this action but would not intervene to stop it. The resulting wave of refugees may destabilize several Middle Eastern states. Assisted by Zarqawi and al-Qaeda, Islamic radicals would take over Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

**Newly Islamist states become terrorist safe havens**

Saudi Arabia would become a base and financing center for radical Islamic terrorism, leading to a new wave of deadly attacks throughout Europe and the United States. Having succeeded in their most important goal of capturing the Islamic holy places from the “infidels,” the new Islamist rulers of Saudi Arabia will seek to eliminate the remaining Western forces from the remaining pro-Western states, such as Kuwait and Bahrain. They will also seek to overthrow the remaining secular regimes, particularly in large and strategically important countries. To this end, they would open a number of new terrorist training camps in Saudi Arabia and launch a series of suicide and truck bombings in Egypt, Jordan and Syria.
At the same time, the radicals’ success in the Arab states would encourage radicals in Pakistan, who could succeed in overthrowing the military government and launch a war against India, resulting in a limited nuclear exchange and international intervention leading to a cease-fire. The radicals would also provide nuclear technology and/or material to their terrorist allies. The latter would use this material to detonate dirty bombs and small nuclear devices in Europe, the United States, and secular Middle Eastern states such as Egypt and the Gulf sheikdoms.

**The secular-ruled Muslim states stagnate**

Some Middle Eastern states, most notably Egypt, will succeed in preventing Islamist revolutions. But Mubarak’s successor will retain control in Egypt only by initiating large-scale repressions and increasing the government’s control over all aspects of political and economic life. As a result, discontent will continue to bubble beneath the surface and many young Egyptians will seek to leave the country to train at terrorist camps in Saudi Arabia. The economy will continue to stagnate as corrupt bureaucrats hinder the development of an independent business class and the educated youth feel that they have no prospects in the country and emigrate to Europe and the United States. Frequent terrorist attacks will further depress the economy by destroying what remains of the tourist industry and driving off foreign investment. Similar scenarios would prevail in other non-Islamist states such as Jordan and Syria. These countries would be further destabilized by the influx of Palestinian refugees after the latter are expelled from Israel (see above).

**Global recession sets in with restrictions in oil supplies**

The new Islamist Saudi government would launch an oil boycott and austerity program. The resultant oil shortages, combined with the political instability caused by high casualty terrorist attacks, would cause stock markets to crash throughout the world and lead to a global economic depression unseen since the 1930s. While globalization promoted economic growth in the 1990s, the highly interconnected nature of the global economy means that shocks to any part of the world economic system would quickly travel throughout the
world. Some countries would undoubtedly attempt to protect themselves through tariffs and other protectionist measures. The situation would be similar to the aftermath of the US stock market crash of 1929, which initiated a global recession and ended the first wave of economic globalization.

Gap Scenario 3: Regional isolation

In this scenario, the takeover of some of the most regionally powerful Middle Eastern states by radical Islamists will be offset by the elimination of the most powerful international terrorist networks and the emergence of new energy sources that leave the global economy much less dependent on Middle Eastern oil supplies. Given the end of the terrorist menace and Western economic dependence on Middle Eastern energy sources, the West (and East Asia) largely would stop paying attention to this region, leading to its isolation in both the political and economic spheres.

US forces succeed in stabilizing Iraq

By increasing the number of American forces in Iraq and by finally deploying a sizeable US-trained Iraqi security force, the US will succeed in destroying the Zarqawi and Baathist insurgencies. Seeing the strong position of the US forces and the Iraqi government, Muqtada al Sadr will decide to enter Iraqi politics and disband his Shiite militia. The end result will be an Iraqi government that is largely able to maintain security on its own territory and will require only a relatively small number of Western troops to guarantee stability in the country.

The US is similarly successful in dismantling the international terrorist movement

Freed of their commitment in Iraq, US troops will cooperate with Afghan and Pakistani forces to buy off tribal leaders in northwestern Pakistan, infiltrate the mountainous borderland between the two states, and capture or kill most of the top al Qaeda leaders. Other terrorist leaders will be captured in Karachi, Lahore, and Saudi Arabia. While other radical Islamists will undoubtedly take their place as ter-
rorist leaders, the worldwide scope of terrorist activity made possible by al Qaeda’s coordinating function will no longer be achievable.

**New energy sources are developed**

The rapid increase in oil prices in 2004-05 will provide a strong incentive to efforts to develop alternative energy sources, as countries and, perhaps more importantly, corporations finally realize that they cannot depend on supplies of oil from the Middle East for the foreseeable future. The rapid increase in funding for research into alternative energy sources will take ideas like cold fusion and hydrogen powered vehicles out of the universities and academic institutes and into industrial research centers. The increase in effort will result in an innovative explosion much like the explosion in genetic research in the 1990s. While petroleum will still be a necessary ingredient in many industrial products, by 2020 it will not be the main source of fuel for the world’s transportation system. As a result, the global economy will be far less dependent on the Middle East for its energy supplies and the Middle Eastern states will be noticeably poorer without the revenues from sales of petroleum.

**The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is resolved by Israel’s isolation**

It has been Israel’s dream to be accepted in the Middle East and to be able to do business and otherwise interact freely with the other countries. Despite the Camp David agreement with Egypt, and a subsequent peace treaty with Jordan, the situation with regard to the Palestinians and a Palestinian state had hardly been resolved by the summer of 2005. Instead, Intifada II disrupted the Oslo peace process and Yasir Arafat was unable to agree to the conditions that would have established a Palestinian state. Thus, Ariel Sharon and his government decided to build a wall sealing off Israel from the West Bank. Even as Arafat died and Mahmoud Abbas succeeded him as president, construction of the wall continued and Sharon decided to moved the Israeli settlements out of the Gaza Strip.

In this scenario, we assume the wall would be completed and Israel’s isolation would be complete. The Palestinian state would be allowed to take sovereignty, but its economic viability would be strained, especially without access to Israeli markets and for Palestinian workers.
Low-level conflict could be expected to continue, especially with so many Arabs still living in Israel as Israeli citizens—and reproducing faster than the Jews.

**Instability could still plague the Muslim world, even if the Islamic threat to the globalized world is reduced**

Even if the Muslim world were isolated, not all would be rosy in the rest of the world. After a particularly horrible spate of terrorist attacks within Israel on the eve of general elections, far right parties might come to power and carry out their pledge to transfer all Palestinians out of the West Bank and Gaza, regardless of world public opinion. The United States would condemn this action but would not intervene to stop it. The resulting wave of refugees would destabilize several Middle Eastern states. This could culminate in the overthrow of several secular and/or pro-Western regimes by Islamic radicals. Jordan and Saudi Arabia could fall to Islamic radicals while Mubarak’s successor would retain control in Egypt only by initiating large-scale repressions and closing off Gaza refugees in camps in the Sinai.

Fortunately for the West, US forces’ success in capturing the major international Islamic terrorist leaders before these events occur would prevent the radical-controlled Saudi Arabia from becoming a center for international Islamic terror. Instead, the remaining radicals might focus on attempting to overthrow the remaining secular Middle Eastern states, particularly Egypt and Pakistan. The reduced dependence of the global economy on oil would minimize the impact of radical control of Saudi oil reserves.

**“The Gap”—The Middle East—may no longer matter**

The Middle East will continue to be part of the Gap, but this will not matter much to the rest of the world. Freed of its dependence on Middle Eastern oil reserves, the rest of the world would treat the region much as it has treated Sub-Saharan Africa in recent decades. It would be a place that will be largely ignored by the world community, except in situations of humanitarian disaster caused by natural conditions or by internal and/or regional conflicts. In addition, the secular Western states would seek to prevent the emergence of a uni-
fied Islamic bloc by shoring up the remaining secular states in the region and otherwise follow divide-and-conquer policies.

Overall, in this scenario the world would be increasingly divided between haves and have-nots, with the have-nots comprising those states that become involved in regional wars or choose to take themselves out of the global economy after being taken over by anti-Western radical groups. Virtually all of the Middle East and much of the rest of the Muslim world would fall into the latter category. The rest of the world would become increasingly stable and well off and interconnected, assuming it had developed alternative fuel sources and was not so dependent on Middle East oil.
Trajectories

Sorting out all the factors laid out in the scenarios of the previous section may be difficult for the reader. In this section, we have tried to more graphically portray the issues as “trajectories.”

The “trajectory of the gap” does not operate in a vacuum. Rather, it operates in two other systems, as have been laid out earlier:

- The first of these systems is the globalization context, that is, how the Islamic world fits into the global system—awkwardly and badly at the moment, though 25 years ago it didn’t seem quite that way. Globalization presses in on them on one hand, and they provide oil and potential immigrants to the advanced world, or “Core of Globalization,” as Barnett puts it, on the other. Globalization threatens their culture. They can’t live without globalization while being unable to live with it. In a sense, this becomes a clash of two fans, and this clash is displayed later.

- The other system is that of direct Western, and particularly American, intervention into the Islamic system, as is demonstrated now in Iraq. This may be reminiscent of old colonial times. Again, this is a clash of two fans. This one seems to have a large military component to it, unlike the bulk of globalization, which is economic and cultural.

The above says that drawing up one single possible evolution of the Islamic world seems hardly possible. Each country might have its own trajectory. Or the Arab world might. Or the Maghreb or Levant or Gulf. And of the evolution of Islamic terror. One might break out the economics, the population, the problems of governance across time.

All of this makes any single projection into the future—that is, a single trajectory—difficult. The more you know, the more you may get bogged down in the details. But the nature of defense planning
for the future, at least for the United States, is to look at horizontal scenarios—the evolution of situations over time—rather than the vertical, or spike, scenarios that are so beloved in the Pentagon. We are warned not to simply do extrapolations, i.e., more of the same, or trends, because trends peter out and simple extrapolations don’t prepare you for surprises. The “fans” shown below attempt to widen the prospects, rather than narrow them, as the years pass.

**Approach to describing trajectories**

A possible approach—there may be better ones somewhere—is what might be called “fans.” That is, one starts out with a description of the current situation (the base) and projects high and low bounds out into the future—best case and worst case. These are hardly predictions; rather the range expands the further out in time one goes. It doesn’t matter how long into the future—we’re always wrong—but a wide and widening range allows for many possibilities and several paths within the fans. The real question is whether this approach prepares us for the surprises that appear, that is, enables us to put them into context and understand them and their consequences.

Within those fans, one can plant events, or spikes, or, as Tom Barnett calls them, “system perturbations.” A system perturbation is something that would jolt unfolding situations onto another path, or simply jolt it off a recognizable path for a while, after which it may return more or less to its previous path. It might not cause any deviation at all. After all, as time passes and experience is accumulated, human beings in these systems create “path dependencies.” That is, you can’t backtrack on history and you are more or less stuck with what you’ve inherited unless violently propelled off the dependent path onto some other path. In this fan approach, the jolt onto a new path would tend to send the system more toward either the upper or

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2. As civil war in Lebanon never did—until Israel invaded in 1982. It did dislodge the PLO from Lebanon, which eventually made possible their setting up the Palestinian Authority as a forerunner of the Palestinian state, which was supposed to follow from the peace negotiations then made possible.
lower bound (which, naturally, could be reversed in direction in the future as well).

The simplest fan would look like the following:

- At one extreme, the Islamic world over time would make connections to the globalized world, as Malaysia has, by diversifying its economies, educating its people in more than the Koran (I remember visiting an Egyptian elementary school that showed the possibilities), and developing more enlightened leadership (I wouldn’t go so far as to suggest American-style paralyzing democracy: leadership would still be necessary).

- At the other extreme, the Islamic world, with a few exceptional countries, falls deeper into its atavistic funk, with little progress. Islamic radicals take over one or more countries and impose Taliban-like purist regimes. Conflicts break out as a
result and a state of war prevails, with disruptions of oil supplies (which may be all we care about).

We can go into greater detail in this fan, as shown below.

Note that beyond the upper and lower bounds are rather improbable events. On one hand, the Islamic world hasn’t achieved unity since the 7th century. On the other hand, democracy is a very fuzzy concept. Americans may know what their own institutions are that amount to democracy, but the U.S. historical experience, great size, and diversified economy are unique. As for Islamic unity, about the only thing the countries have shown unity about is their antagonism toward Israel, though Egypt and Jordan have signed peace treaties

3. Atavism: Reversion to a primitive or earlier type. Osama bin Laden would like to return the Arab world to the simplicities of the 7th century.
with them. The Egyptians under Nasser had some abortive unions with Syria and with Yemen (i.e., the United Arab Republic).

The notion of “the Islamic world stewing in its own juice” is meant to look at it in isolation from the pressures of globalization. Many of the issues shown on the chart above have dragged on for decades, and they could continue that way. The issue at this juncture in history is whether the several events we are now witnessing can lead to fundamental change. These present events or conditions include:

- The great turmoil in Iraq. The American invasion meant to simply turn out a thuggish, despotic regime that lusted for WMD, followed by some kind of natural emergence of democracy, has turned into a bitter insurgency with no end in sight that has attracted terrorists from much of the rest of the Arab world, especially Saudi Arabia. So the situation could lead to something fundamentally different; we just don’t know what it is.

- The great visibility and salience of the Islamic terrorists following 9/11 (assuming that they did not just grab the attention of the Americans for the first time). They had been breeding since the Americans, Saudis, and others encouraged Arabs to go to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets there.

- The rapid spread of an Arabic media throughout the Arab world, making more people aware of events, including events in Iraq.

- The great surge in populations over perhaps the last 25 years (we were not as conscious of it as a problem back in 1980), with the concomitant failure of economies to generate jobs to employ them, leading to apparently greater emigration elsewhere, especially to Europe.

- The stagnation of governance, as Francis Fukuyama has been laying out lately. As we have seen after decolonization, the longer a regime stays in office, the worse corruption gets and the less the government knows what’s going on in its own country. The biggest question is whether the Saudi government,
under the rule of the aging sons of Abdul Aziz, is still on top of things.

In the next “fan,” we show a more expansive view of the Islamic world, especially the Arab world in its close proximity to Europe and the rest of Africa (I count the Maghreb as “Middle East,” just like the State Department does). This may be a more realistic picture of the dynamic relation between the Arab world and the Core of globalization.

The great challenge for Europe in the coming years is their declining and thus aging population. The replacement figure now is ranging from 1.2 to 1.7, whereas 2.1 is the stable rate to maintain the population. Thus, a growing problem for Europe is the proportion of workers supporting the retired population, given existing provisions for ample social security protection. The United States is at the 2.1 figure, but it would be 1.9 without immigration, especially Hispanic immigra-
tion. Hispanics are of a Christian culture, and not far off from the
general American culture, whatever it is, and their assimilation has
been faster than any previous immigrant group.

In contrast, much of the immigration into Europe is from the Islamic
countries, including Turkey. This has been going on for a long time,
and the numbers are up around 20 million, in an overall population
of 360 million. But, as the bombings in London now reveal, assimila-
tion has been incomplete. Moreover, the Saudis have financed many
of the mosques and provided them with preachers and literature—all
advancing the extreme Wahhabi view.

Note the two outlying points on the chart:

- The social security point, as mentioned above: Europe will have
too few people to pay for retirees if they have to strangle immi-
grant from the south (whereas Hispanics will be providing a
large proportion of U.S. Social Security revenues).

- The challenge to Islam in the course of the assimilation of
people of Islamic faith in Europe. See the issue of banning veils
in schools in France (which, by the way, is working, and the
issue is fading). Rigid adherence to Islam (e.g., praying five
times a day, veiling women, keeping women at home, etc.) is a
cultural thing, i.e., governing the whole of life and not just
Sunday (or its equivalent). It fits only awkwardly in fluid
modern society, so that society becomes threatening.

— The outcome so far (e.g., in Leeds or London) has been for
a select few Muslims who feel quite isolated and uncomfor-
table with European culture to congregate in those Saudi-
supported mosques, to form a brotherhood (all male), and
to talk endlessly how they are being wronged. These are the
source for the suicide bombers and other plotters so far.

— Alternatively, they could assimilate better, but might lose
their religion in the process.

The process in Europe is an ongoing one. It has its own trajectory, or,
to put it in the terms of this paper, an expanding “fan” of possibilities.
As for the spread of Islam into Africa south of the Sahara, and initially into the Sahel, or savanna, this is not a new phenomenon. Islam had been spreading laterally across this area for centuries. The new phenomenon is the terrorists that go with it—or at least the fear that they will (the only group operating in the area that I am aware of is the GSPC, or Salafist Group for Call (Preaching) and Combat, driven out of Algeria. They have sparked incidents from Mauritania over to Chad. There has also been a strong Islamic presence in East Africa for centuries.

In the first place, this spread is into a very inhospitable area: there is no water and no electricity. Islam has come into clashes with Christians when they get to more hospitable areas—in Ivory Coast, northern Nigeria, and Uganda.

Altogether, these expansions out of Arab countries, north into Europe and south into Africa, are also symptomatic of the difficulties of reasonably educated, middle-class, possibly individualistic Arabs continuing to live in their native lands. They have no great opportunities there, they live on the dole (“rentiers”), and they are allowed no political expression. Some become terrorists.

The future of globalized pressure on “The Gap”

The following three charts show the range of counter-pressures on the Islamic world from the Core world.
As can be seen, the range of the fan is from offers or attempts at constructive help at the top down to Western invasions of a rogue or collapsed state. The ultimate scenario might be something like al Qaeda taking over Saudi Arabia and ousting the Saudi royal family as the “custodians of the two holy places,” whereupon the West decides to seize the Saudi oil fields in the north—just to show an extreme.

At the center is Middle East peace, that is, the resolution of the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians and the creation of a Palestinian state to live in peace with Israel.

We can now combine trajectories and speculate what the effects may be. The first case is the Globalization World pressing in on the stagnant Islamic world.
Again, we see extremes. But action is likely to be down the middle—some reform, some progress in Middle East peace, but neither full-scale incorporation of the region in the Core (mostly because it is hard to envisage their economies taking off like those of the Asian Tigers did), nor complete isolation of some countries from the rest of the world (mostly because the oil would still be pumped and the resultant cash earnings would sustain the stagnant countries in their stagnation).

What some advocate as the key solution—democracy—is an illusion. First of all, I have read innumerable articles on the subject and nobody knows how to bring it about, except to urge that old leaders hold elections. But is that what we want the big monarchies (Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia) or the little ones along the Gulf to do? Do we want to see only slight rotation of elites at the top? Or are
we willing to risk the radical extremists coming to power and setting a new Taliban-like state?

The progress and stability of democracy is tied to economic growth such that the elite is diversified and able to generate alternative leadership, while the existing leadership need not cling to government positions and can find remunerative employment elsewhere in the country. The oil-producing countries have particular problems in this regard. Those without oil would have to find other bases for their economies in order to generate jobs and lift people above the subsistence level (especially in those countries that can’t grow much food on their own). One model for economic growth is the service model (banking, financing, tourism, etc.), demonstrated in several small countries (Lebanon, Bahrain, Dubai). Another model might be the equivalent of the Mexican *maquiladoras*, but there is not any news that says those kind of factories are being set up, nor whether the economic growth and jobs they might provide could sustain democracy.

The other combination is the Globalization World clashing with the spreading Islamic world, as shown on the next page. In a way, this seems to be the scenario that is unfolding now between Europe and the Middle East. It imposes much different and more fragmented scenarios than the Western world simply imposing itself on a stagnant Islamic world.
The most positive development would be the assimilation of Muslims within Europe. That might well depend on some drastic economic reform in Europe that would allow for greater economic growth, thus to increase opportunities for immigrants. Right now, that does not seem possible in France, Germany, and Italy, given their restrictive labor laws. East Europe is not sufficiently developed to absorb any immigrants. Turkey is to negotiate over 10 years for entrance to the EU—one issue would be the free movement of Turks into Europe.

At the other end of the spectrum is the attempt to build walls against Islamic expansion—expansion, that is, of immigration. A mini-experiment in this regard is seen in the wall Israel is building between itself and the West Bank.

Underlying all of this clash is the fears of terrorist cells among the immigrants, or, as in Britain, long-term residents becoming terrorists, for whatever reasons (in some cases, trouble with the law, followed by
jail terms, and getting religion while in jail). The opposite side is the take-over of a Middle Eastern country by terrorists, setting up an extremist state. This would tempt an invasion—by the United States (unlikely by the Europeans).

A special case right now is Iran. Iran’s “fan” lies between making connections to the global economy and isolating themselves by becoming a proliferator of nuclear weapons, with an expanding missile program to boot. The country is now dependent on oil for 70-80 percent of its hard currency earnings. But they have an educated population that may be suffering as much as 30 percent unemployment. Given the urbanization of at least Tehran, they have some possibilities of an expanded manufacturing base. But, both for development of their oil and gas reserves and for manufacturing expansion (assuming also that they can find markets for anything beyond carpets), they would need foreign direct investment (FDI). However, theocratic control, in a nervous relation with the Revolutionary Guards at the same time, keeps the country a closed one. And they are also on a track to accumulate fissile material and then build nuclear weapons. These latter factors cut them off from the globalizing world. Their support for terror seems to be diminishing, however—it seems to be down to the support of the Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.
Conflicts in the Islamic World and Their Implications for U.S. Military Forces

Conflict in the Islamic World

How do we fit these trajectories for The Gap into the current DOD security environment chart—the one with challenges in four quadrants—traditional, irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive?

- “Traditional” covers classic military forces. It constitutes maybe 90-95 percent of what the DOD planning system focuses on. Traditional forces are what were developed across the Cold War—for both the U.S. and the military establishments in the Middle East and elsewhere. Leaving aside Southeast Asia, and concentrating on the Middle East and the Maghreb, we see:

  — The countries with a lot of cash—Saudi Arabia (their wealth per capita is diminishing severely as their population soars, despite oil at $60 a barrel), Kuwait, Qatar, and UAE—can spend it on what we would call boutique capabilities: a few F-18s, a few F-16s/Block 60s, etc. But they can hardly man that equipment and, in any case, are not killers, i.e., they are not great fighting forces.

  — The countries with the big classic militaries—Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran—can’t afford to replace their old Soviet (or American, in the case of Iran) equipment, especially since there’s no more free Soviet stuff. Moreover, they may keep their classic divisions and squadrons, but they aren’t getting sophisticated with PGMs and connections to space, even for communications.

- Irregular wars and forces are what we’ve got now with the insurgency in Iraq and that has also plagued Afghanistan since at least the 1970s. Algeria has also been plagued with what
amounted to civil war, though it has been quiet of late. Intifada II can also be characterized as an insurgency of Palestinians against Israelis, punctuated by suicide attacks. Sometimes people in the U.S. call these “small wars,” or low-intensity conflict (LIC), but they are highly disruptive locally.

— This is what the U.S. is coping with right now in Iraq. It is often said that the U.S. had quite suppressed the memories of its experiences in Vietnam, but has had to resurrect them. How do you plan, equip, and train for such wars? And everybody says you also have to change the background conditions from which insurgencies arise, which takes more than the military. This paper has been about the background conditions in the Islamic world, and particularly in the Middle East.

— Insurgents are not a “military establishment,” but emerge out of the circumstances, and may get more proficient and more organized the longer the insurgency continues—as in Iraq now. They also “swim in the sea” of their localities. The key is to break their connections to these communities, i.e., to get the communities to turn against them.

• Disruptive attacks started out in the 1990s as fears of cyber attacks—hackers, especially. In the narrow DOD world, this came to mean all those old putative Soviet techniques of jamming, spoofing, etc. during the course of battles. The best work on “disruptive attacks” was done in anticipation of Y2K. Tom Barnett came forth with analogies: the effects of hurricanes, the effects of tornados, the effects of ice storms, the effects of electrical blackouts. But 9/11 brought it all back to terrorist attacks. Most terrorist attacks are disruptive, though the attack on the World Trade Center verged on the catastrophic. “Disruptive” fits “system perturbation” very well, and usually means some recovery time until the status quo ante is restored.

— The Middle East has long been full of terror incidents. I remember chatting with the Jordanian ambassador to the United States and hearing his story of how he had been sit-
ting alongside the Jordanian foreign minister in a car in Cairo when the foreign minister was assassinated.

— Now we in the U.S. fear the terrorists would try to disrupt power grids, telephone exchanges, and so forth. They may have thought they would bring Wall Street to a standstill by attacking the World Trade Center—and maybe even U.S. defense efforts, but the Pentagon really swallowed the attacking aircraft.

• Finally, we have the catastrophic, which essentially means attacks with Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Across the 1990s, the fear was that the rogue states—Libya, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea were preparing to use WMD in the event of conflict. We may now scratch Libya and Iraq from these ranks. Iran and North Korea now seem to be serious about building nuclear weapons. The great fear now is that the terrorists could get their hands on these weapons and kill thousands, tens of thousands, and even millions of Americans. This needs to be critically parsed:

— The detonation of a nuclear weapon would be truly catastrophic. Can Islamic terrorists bring this off? I rather doubt it, unless they are given them by the Pakistanis, they steal them from Russia, or they buy them from North Korea—except that they probably couldn’t afford what North Korea would really need for their economy (by my guess, at least $100 million per weapon?). Whatever the evils of North Korea, they do not seem bent on breaking up the globalized world, unlike Osama bin Laden, but they are desperate for cash—big cash, though. The terrorists can’t build them themselves—period.

— Chemical weapons are really not good against an opposing force that takes defensive measures. Their production takes an industrial capability, too. See the pathetic attack by Aum Shinrikyo in Tokyo in 1994.

— No one has ever successfully weaponized biological weapons, at least for “delivery from a distance (which would also be necessary for the great dispersion of agents needed if
thousands are to be killed). But the homeland security people in the United States are greatly concerned about them—they predict tens of thousands of deaths, they want to vaccinate everybody, etc.

In summary:

- The prospects of traditional war in the Middle East are in steep decline as the big old forces age and war doesn’t happen. Iraq’s forces have been wiped out and, as Tony Cordesman says, Iran’s conventional forces are rubbish.

- We now see insurgency or counterinsurgency in Iraq and in Afghanistan, spilling over into the tribal areas of Pakistan. Lebanon went through civil war, and Somalia is in anarchy. Southern Thailand may have a real Islamic problem with its Malays or not. Kashmir has long been a mess—a mostly Islamic enclave within India—but India and Pakistan may finally be in a dialogue to settle it down. Aceh and the other remote areas of Indonesia are quiet for the moment (depending on whether the tsunami enables real reconciliation or not; so far it has; a far-reaching agreement has recently been signed between the central government and the Acehnese), but Abu Sayyaf keeps operating somehow in the southern Philippines. We see how insurgencies merge into terrorism (or the reverse: the pace of terror incidents increasing to the point of turning into insurgencies) in these remote areas.

- The disruptive has become a matter of terrorist attacks, especially against the U.S. homeland, or attacks like those in Madrid, London, and Sharm al Sheik, or the rash of Chechen attacks in Russia.

- The catastrophic really brings us back to the only two rogues (one of them—Iran—remaining in the Middle East, unless Pakistan were to turn into a rogue state, in which case India may have more to worry about than we do, and might do something about it) and the terrorists actually using WMD. These possibilities need to be looked at quite critically.
The DOD quadrant chart of challenges in the environment basically focuses “disruption” on the brilliant, organized opponent, who, unable to compete in the traditional, makes himself into a peer competitor by cleverly fighting in either the irregular, disruptive, or catastrophic modes. It has not been obvious to us that the Islamic world, for its part, with its lack of industry, its lack of innovation (as reflected in no patents), and its generally falling behind the globalization curve, is that clever. No peer competitor is going to appear in the Islamic world. Some thought (back in 1990) that Iraq might be, but it turned out to be a hollow force.

Implications for U.S. forces

A short history of the presence and operations of U.S. forces in the region

For the greater part of post-World War II and Cold War history, it was through diplomacy, rather than U.S. forces, that the U.S. attempted to stabilize the Middle East. U.S. diplomacy was particularly engaged in the survival of Israel, including the negotiation of peace after the several Arab-Israeli wars, and now in reconciling the Israelis and Palestinians. It was left to American and other Western private oil companies to develop relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran in particular.

U.S. naval forces in the Mediterranean and the membership of Turkey in NATO were probably stabilizing factors, though it was hard to connect these forces to particular events. In the same way, the U.S. had kept MIDEASTFOR in the Gulf—three destroyers and a flagship—since 1949.

The U.S. carried out a huge resupply operation to Israel during the 1973 war, which marked the first such large security assistance program it had undertaken. Thereafter, and in light of the oil embargo set by the Arabs in 1973-74, the U.S. took steps to patch up its relations with the other (Islamic) states of the region. The U.S. undertook large foreign military sales programs with Saudi Arabia and Iran, with accompanying mobile training teams (MTTs) and Technical Assistance Field Teams (TAFTs), and a smaller program in Jordan. Then, with Camp David and the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, the U.S.
opened a major security assistance program with Egypt in 1979. The U.S. also began to exercise with the countries of the region in the Bright Star series. These programs constituted the major U.S. force presences in the region and also introduced U.S. forces to the rigors of desert warfare.

The fall of the Shah in 1979 and the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980 led to the introduction of more ships into the Gulf and more technical assistance to bolster Saudi defenses. Later, the U.S. prepositioned ground forces equipment at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean as well as negotiating for access to facilities elsewhere in the region. The RDJTF (Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force) was set up with headquarters in Tampa, Florida (not in the area) and it morphed into CENTCOM (The Central Command). The naval ships implemented a containment policy, augmented by AWACS operating out of Saudi Arabia. The U.S. Navy got even more deeply involved when it was decided to escort reflagged Kuwaiti tankers during the tanker war later in the 1980s.

U.S. forces were moved into Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states in great numbers for Desert Shield and in preparation for Desert Storm after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Desert Storm meant for the first time aircraft carriers would enter and maneuver in the Gulf. U.S. forces then mounted Northern Watch, operating from Turkey, and Southern Watch, operating from sea and the Gulf states, to maintain the no-fly zones over Iraq all the way through the 1990s to 2003. The U.S. prepositioned the equipment for two Army brigades, one in Kuwait and the other in Qatar.

Then came Operation Iraqi Freedom, with U.S. forces occupying Iraq, an operation that continues to this day.

In preparation for Desert Storm, the U.S. arranged access to something like 24 facilities in the area. For Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. arranged something like another 13. For Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. kept most of its previous access to facilities, and expanded others.
What does the future hold for U.S. forces in the region?

In the first place, U.S. ground forces, assisted by naval and air forces, and resupplied in a steady stream by air and sea, will be engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan for at least a couple more years.

Following 9/11 and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, the U.S. and its allies began patrolling the Gulf and Indian Ocean, as well as the Mediterranean (Operative Active Endeavor) in case the terrorists went to sea. This patrolling is likely to continue indefinitely. Some of the allies patrolled in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean off Somalia, while the U.S. set up the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in Djibouti. Again, it appears these operations will continue indefinitely.

Given the exhaustion of U.S. ground forces in Iraq and the later need to reset and refurbish those forces whenever the opportunity has arisen to bring them home, it is hard to conceive of the U.S. Administration invading another country, even if Syria or Iran are sometime mentioned by those outside the Administration. The possibility of short raids to capture a terrorist is not precluded.

U.S. force units are out of Saudi Arabia (USMTM—the U.S. Military Training Mission continues). While operations in Iraq continue, facilities are maintained in other Gulf states. It is unlikely that the U.S. will set up permanent military bases in the new Iraq, even if it achieves new stability.

Altogether, after Iraq and Afghanistan, the region is likely to remain a place for U.S. expeditionary forces to go—for training, for exercises, or for contingencies. Twelve years passed between Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Whether that interval constitutes a pattern remains to be seen.

The greater part of the task of reform in the region, as attempts to dry up the breeding grounds for terrorists and to enable the countries to better connect to globalization, lie first with the countries themselves and then with agencies other than military—American, allied, international, governmental and NGO. The military role would be to maintain stability on the margins.
Some people talk about a future need to send U.S. forces into a collapsing chaotic Pakistan, both to evacuate Americans and to attempt to seize Pakistan’s nuclear weapons. Such a scenario is the most remote of possibilities: it does not reflect any real knowledge of Pakistan, plus the fact that Pakistan is a big country of 140 million people. In any case, India would get there first.
Conclusions

The trajectories that the Islamic countries may follow in the coming decades are difficult to conjecture. By trajectory, we mean alternative futures, alternative paths, both collectively and by country, and in some relation to the Core of globalization (but not necessarily to the poverty- and HIV/AIDS-stricken portions of Africa south of the Sahara). We can describe these in some plausible ways—mostly to prime ourselves for sudden twists or gradually developing path dependencies, good or bad. We probably would not care too much about the trajectory if it were not for the fact that 50 percent of the oil reserves of the world lie in the Gulf area.

We also would not be so concerned about this trajectory except that this whole Islamic world is the breeding ground for terrorists—a “new” problem, not anticipated 25 years ago. The area seemed manageable back then. It had survived Black October in 1970, the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973 (in addition to earlier wars), Sadat’s assassination, etc., etc. The countries hadn’t yet been overwhelmed by their population growth. We had lost Iran, and then Iraq and Iran tried to tear each other apart in the war of 1980-1988, but life went on elsewhere in the region as the war was contained by the United States. The Arab-Israeli problem had turned into the Palestinian-Israeli problem (that is, much narrower in scope). The U.S. had gradually taken over security cooperation with many of the countries from the U.K., the last being Oman. We even had a program with a stable Somalia under Siad Barré. A lot has happened in the nearly 25 years since, and more will happen in the next 25 years. We are wary of single trend lines, though—that’s why alternative futures try to bracket the possibilities.

What the U.S. can do to (a) steer within these alternative paths, or (b) actually “drain the swamps” as breeding grounds poses difficult problems, dramatized by the current difficulties of pacifying and reforming Iraq. How to “reform” the Islamic world, or even the narrower
Middle East/Arab world, from the outside is not clear. It is always something of a mystery as to how and why countries develop, though we all kind of know afterwards whether they did or did not, and why they did or did not. Malaysia is a unique example of an Islamic country that turned into a “Tiger,” but they had a diversified commodity base to start with (oil, tin, rubber, palm oil), developed manufacturing capabilities that provided components for the advanced goods of the world market, and were especially blessed to have entrepreneurial Chinese in their midst. None of these conditions, except oil, exist in the case at the other extreme, Saudi Arabia.

The U.S. dream of installing democracy in all of the Islamic states does not have a practical counterpart. Democracy is basically a way to stop governments from doing things and to provide for ways to rotate leaders if they actually do things—while the society and economy do the bulk of real activity. But what if you have neither society nor economy? The United States has always believed that, “that government is best that governs least,” because it has had self-motivating economy and society. This is not true among most of the Islamic countries (or most of the other countries in the world for that matter): they need strong government. But strong government too long in power becomes rigid, corrupt, nepotistic, and ineffective, like all dynasties in history.

It is an interesting question as to whether the war of the terrorists and our war on them would last until the oil ran out. Obviously, we’re involved because of the oil and the overall oil market. Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden would like to control oil and the proceeds from its sale. In the interim, they may be bent on disrupting the flow of oil, but they have not done so except in the case of the bombing of the tanker Limberg just off the coast of Yemen.

The immediate problem for the United States: Iraq

In the meantime, the most immediate nagging problem—at least for the United States—is that of Iraq, following the U.S. invasion and occupation—unless Afghanistan were to revert to chaos and a the Taliban were to resurge. The Taliban at least made sure that “prayers were said on time,” to paraphrase Mussolini’s fascism, and would
recreate al Qaeda’s base, to use a tautology. Iraq now has its own fan, or it may be that it’s the U.S.’s fan for Iraq. We know the upper bound would be the dreamed-of democracy and that the lower bound would be civil war forever, unless the radical Islamists or Iran were to take over in Iraq.

The second problem for the United States: Middle East peace

To all of the above, one must add the nagging problem of Israel and of Israeli-Palestinian Middle East peace. Hostility to Israel is one thing that the publics of the whole Islamic world have in common and which the terrorists feed off. Some governments are moderate on the subject (this partly depends on their distance from Israel). Egypt and Jordan have peace treaties with Israel. The monarchs in Morocco and Oman have always tried to be constructive. Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia took an initiative to recognize Israel’s existence a couple of years ago that doesn’t seem to have been followed up on. Intifada II now has taken on a kind of routine, but the death of Arafat and the succession of Mahmoud Abbas has opened up new opportunities.

In any case, Middle East peace has its own path. We can see in such paths that some issues are never resolved, but drag on forever. Yet this “fan approach” does not lead to “an end of history,” but rather to an expanding frame for any kind of unfolding of history. We just hope that something completely catastrophic doesn’t occur in the interim that takes it beyond even the boundaries of the fans as we have described them.

The longer-range problem of absorbing the Islamic world into globalization

Iraq and Middle East peace are way-stations on a long and uncertain path to absorbing the Islamic world into the globalized system. As noted earlier, globalization is mostly an economic phenomenon. The awkward connections to globalization of the Islamic world—or at least much of it—lie on one hand in the globalized world’s dependence on Middle East oil (and growing dependence as the years pass) while, on the other hand the rest of the economies stagnate in most of the oil-producing countries and stagnate altogether in the rest of the region.
The outcome in Iraq could well set a path for the rest of the region.

- On the one hand, with its oil and urbanization, as well as its historical role as “the breadbasket of the Middle East” given its water supplies, it has a basis to develop an economy that can provide jobs.

- On the other hand, it could have civil war and strife for years to come, it could split in three parts, it could become a theocratic regime like Iran (and in close association with Iran), or the Sunni extremists (a combination of the old Baathists and al Qaeda) could take over by force.

The United States will have much to do in affecting these outcomes. The following linear chart—breaking away from the earlier fan charts—shows the path the U.S. probably has to pursue:

In the first place, Iraq and Afghanistan have to be wrapped up. As far as we know, this could take years. The outcomes are uncertain at this
point. Afghanistan might be left alone to sink back into the 10th century, if it weren’t for all the opium coming out of there. But Iraq has some chance of becoming a balanced and prosperous country.

Just beyond that lie the two other immediately pressing problems: Middle East peace and Iran’s nuclear program. Again, their resolution means some kind of narrowing of the paths ahead. U.S. policymakers can look up and recalculate the broader issues and trajectories at that point.

Beyond that is the problem that is labeled as “reform” across the Islamic world. No one outside or inside really knows how to do it. As noted earlier in this paper, governance reform, democracy reform, and economic reform—or rather, the stimulation of job-creating economic growth—go hand-in-hand, in symbiotic relation with one another. The alternative is to let the people in many of the countries flow north into Europe, but that doesn’t solve the problem of terrorism. The chart shows top-down (regime change) and bottom-up (functional change) approaches. Finally, if all that were to create stable economics, beyond just receipts from oil and gas sales, and jobs were created, civil societies might be created that provide for the alternations of leadership that is the essence of democracy.

That whole process is like the role of the United States in securing Middle East peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and thus between the Israelis and especially the Arab world (at that point, what Iran thinks of Israel would be irrelevant). That is, the U.S. must nudge, nudge, nudge, not getting too discouraged at setbacks, ready to leap at opportunities that arise to get the parties, whether internal political actors in countries or the governments in international negotiations, to reach incremental agreements.

The Middle East (and by extension, the whole Islamic world stretching from Morocco to Indonesia) was not in the past suffering under the scourge of terrorism—except for the PLO—and the hope is the conditions may be set for the current terrorism to fade away. Al Qaeda’s terrorism is much worse than the PLO’s ever was, however.

What are the U.S. military roles across these trajectories, however they may evolve?
Let us first note that the condition that in the past generated major wars between states with major forces have diminished just about to the vanishing point. The conventional forces in the region are shrinking, aging, and obsolescing. Either Israel or the United States would strike them down if they rose up. Arab-Israeli wars were essentially over in 1973 and became an Israeli-Palestinian civil conflict. Iraq and Iran exhausted themselves in war from 1980 to 1988, and then Iraq’s forces were blasted into oblivion by the U.S. from 1991 to 2003. Even Lebanon’s civil war ended, but could flare again. Insurgency has died down in Algeria, but still exists in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sudan is barely governed. In some ways, these developments leave the terrorists as stark evidence of the remaining killing and destabilization.

U.S. forces in the Gulf area have been a major stabilizing factor. If Iraq is ever settled down in a satisfactory way, then major forces permanently on the scene may not be necessary. One can even imagine going back to the times when the three destroyers and a flagship of the MIDEASTFOR were all that were necessary. If Iraq were settled, there would be a deterrent function left against a nuclear weapons-armed Iran. Otherwise, the U.S. military function would be to continue to insulate the region against roving terrorists, if the countries themselves could not do it. But most terrorism is going to be countered by internal and international police work. And the role of the most difficult reforms (top-down and bottom-up) would belong to other U.S. agencies and the international community in collaboration.

Would the need of the United States and other countries for the oil of the Gulf ever disappear so that the countries would not have to be so involved and worried about the affairs of the region? Unfortunately, the need to resolve the conflicts in the region, to dissipate the breeding grounds of terrorism, and to connect the countries to the global economy in a more diversified way in order to provide people in Islamic countries better lives, will have to be carried out well before the oil would run out, especially given the lack of progress among the global community in finding alternatives to fossil fuels.