

## **Iraq-Iran Conundrums and U.S. Strategic Options in the Gulf Region**

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***Abstract: Since its military occupation of Iraq, the U.S. has been obsessed with its Gulf strategy time and again, and is being challenged by the worsening and spreading crises in the Middle East. Strategically, the Bush administration and possibly its successor, troubled by the Iraq quagmire and Iranian nuclear issue, might have the strategic options including adhering to "dominant and preventive actions," adopting "collapse prevention," resuming "stability, deterrence and containment," and anticipating "cooperative order." However, the U.S. should either shun the hegemonic strategy in the Gulf and readjust its strategic objectives, or stay in the predicament in the region.***

***Key Words: U.S. Gulf Strategy; Great Power Relations; Regional System in the Gulf***

The sea area in the Northwestern Indian Ocean between the Arabian Peninsula and the Iranian Plateau is generally referred to as "the Gulf,"<sup>1</sup> an area that the U.S. attaches great strategic importance to its considerations on geopolitics, energy security, counter-terrorism, arms sale, trade and others. The U.S. is currently faced with a dual challenge in the region, namely, extricating from the Iraq quagmire and addressing the Iranian nuclear problem. Therefore, the Bush administration and its successor might be compelled to readjust U.S. global as well as Gulf strategies to undertake new courses of actions in dealing with the new situation.

### **I. Complex and Multifaceted Strategic Patterns in the Gulf**

The Gulf region remains one of the most sensitive areas in the world regardless of the end of the Cold War, where two important wars took place: the Gulf War in 1991 and the Iraq War in 2003. Recently, the internal turmoil in Iraq has worsened, the U.S. and Iran have been involved in severe confrontations around the nuclear issue, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been at odds with one another and the energy

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<sup>1</sup> Iran calls this area the "Persian Gulf," while the Arab countries refer to it as "Arabian Gulf." The Gulf is applied in this paper for the convenience of writing. The Gulf coast covers eight countries, namely, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman.

security has been a conspicuous issue, all of which have highlighted the uncertainty and instability of the region.

***The complicated international relations in the Gulf.*** The U.S. intervention is the primary external factor contributing to the ongoing turmoil in the region. Following the Gulf War, the U.S. has become one of the sources of instability as it sought permanent military presence in the region in the name of maintaining regional stability. The 9/11 attacks had complicated concerns and disputes over ethnic groups, religions and counter-terrorism between the U.S. and the Gulf countries. The Iraq War launched by the U.S. in 2003 has precipitated the region into the whirlpool of violent conflicts. Moreover, the U.S. and Iran likely coming to the brink of war on the nuclear issue has brought the whole region in the shadow of war.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, regional politics have become further complicated. Vying for a regional leading role, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, the three major countries in the region, are involved in a fast growing conflict over national interests and sectarian contradictions, thus preventing them from playing the role of core countries in the region. In particular, the distribution of the power between the two Islamic sects in the region has been altered in the wake of the Afghan War in 2001 and Iraq War in 2003. The convergence of Shiites in Iran and Iraq, where Shiites account for 60% of the total Iraqi population, has greatly raised the voice of the Shiites in the region. The Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE, where the Sunni reign, are home to legions of Shiite Muslims. They are worried not only that the Iraq situation is out of control but more so about the exacerbating of sectarian conflicts and even the formation of a "Shiite crescent area" that might trigger chain reactions in their countries to endanger their rule. The Saudi royal family is considered the most worried. According to Mr. Obaid, a senior advisor to the Saudi government, Saudi is planning to provide Iraqi Sunnis with funds, arms and other logistical support, and provide Iraqi Sunnis with what Iran has provided for Iraqi militia.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, in the context of the prevalent globalization and regionalism today, the Gulf region is far from obtaining a holistic identity. The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC)<sup>4</sup> is quite limited in its role in shaping regional security. The whole region, again, is divided into two "camps" that consist of Arab countries and Persian Iran, suspecting and fearing each other and involving themselves in an arms race, conventional and nuclear alike. Regional cooperation is faced with great difficulties.

***Lifeline of energy security.*** The Gulf region is endowed with rich energy resources

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<sup>2</sup> An Weihua and Qian Xuemei, *U.S. and "Broader Middle East"* (Beijing: World Affairs Publishing House, 2006), p.311.

<sup>3</sup> Cheng Xingyuan, "Sectarian Conflict Overcasts the Gulf," *Liaowang Newsweek*, Jan. 17, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> GCC members are UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia (in December 2001, Yemen was approved to join GCC health, labor and social minister councils).

and a sophisticated capacity for energy production. It possesses half of the explored oil and a third of explored gas in the world. In 2003, the U.S. consumed about 20 million barrels of oil per day, of which 2.8 million came from the Gulf region.<sup>5</sup> The Gulf states have a far greater economic value in energy extraction and supply than Canada, the Caspian Sea and Venezuela. In a sense, the Gulf energy becomes an irreplaceable source for the world's economic stability and growth. About 40% of world oil transports goes through the Strait of Hormuz, which is deemed as a "valve" of international oil flow.

The U.S. is immensely concerned with its strategic and energy interests which might be endangered by a possible Iranian blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. As John Abizaid, the CENTCOM Commander General, said in his testimony before the U.S. Senate Armed Service Committee, the Iranian navies continue their rapid growth; the IRGC Navy has been strengthened primarily for the Strait of Hormuz scenario in which Iran would attempt to "internationalize" a conflict by choking off oil exports through the Strait; to disperse large quantities of recently purchased small boats, high speed missile boats, torpedo fast attack craft, and midget submarines, Iran has embarked upon an expansion project for naval bases throughout its littoral.<sup>6</sup>

*The U.S. continues to maintain its regional dominance, though being increasingly challenged by pluralizing forces in the Gulf.* Since the end of the 1960s when the U.S. started to establish dominance over the Gulf security, both Republican and Democrat administrations have clearly declared that no other country is allowed to seek hegemonic control over the energy in the Gulf. Washington has maintained close relations with GCC countries and signed military cooperation agreements with them (and joint defense agreement with Saudi Arabia). The U.S. launched the Gulf War in the early 1990s and the Iraq War early in the 21st century respectively. Now, there are 150,000 U.S. troops stationed in the Gulf, with the U.S. 5th Fleet headquartered in Bahrain. The Gulf region is crucial to the projection of U.S. naval and air power in the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia. For the foreseeable future, the U.S. will continue to treat the Gulf region as one of its vital interests, but will face growing challenges posed by major regional powers and regionalism.

The United Kingdom has its own plan while collaborating closely with the U.S. Gulf strategy. The UK had dominated the Gulf region for over 100 years in the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1968, it declared its intention to withdraw its military forces from the Gulf region before 1971. However, the British had returned to the Gulf region following the Gulf War and Iraq war, seeking to expand its strategic and economic interests and to derive part of the U.S. regional domination by virtue of its status as "the U.S. deputy."

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<sup>5</sup> US Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, *International Energy Outlook 2004* (Washington, DC: GOP, 2004), p.30, 40.

<sup>6</sup> See [http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2006-05/10/content\\_4528500\\_1.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2006-05/10/content_4528500_1.htm).

The European Union highly appreciates its cross-regional strategic relations with the Gulf region. The two sides signed a cooperation agreement in 1989. Following the EU enlargement and Iraq War, the EU began to consider the EU-Gulf relations in the framework of its "EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and Middle East countries." The EU and the U.S. share common and fundamental strategic interests in maintaining energy security in the Gulf, though the EU-Gulf cross-regional strategic relations might virtually play down the U.S. domination.

Russia came back to the Gulf region in 1994 in an attempt to wield its great power role again. To Russia, Iran is firm in anti-Americanism and strong in its economic autonomy and self-dependence, which can serve to balance the U.S. threat in the Middle East and prevent the U.S.' expansion in Central Asia. Russia and Iran have developed close cooperation in military industry and arms trade. Russia has endeavored to preserve its interests and influence in Iraq, forge relations with GCC countries and support the latter in the peaceful use of nuclear technology. As a result, Russia's engagement in Gulf affairs balances and checks the U.S. in the region.<sup>7</sup>

Japan follows closely the U.S.' policy in the Gulf region with a strategic attempt of becoming "a normal state." Japanese-Gulf relations have gradually switched from economic relations centering on energy to multi-tiered relations. In economic terms, Japan has sought diversification of economic interactions and conducted free trade area negotiation with GCC since September 2006. In geostrategic terms, Japan has strengthened its coordination with the U.S. and EU and is keeping a close eye on China's role in the Gulf. In security terms, Japan's SDF has "gone to sea by taking the chance of Iraq" and has enacted the Iraq Reconstruction Special Measures Law in 2003. Meantime, Japan has strengthened cultural relations with the Gulf region for civilization dialogues.<sup>8</sup>

India has developed comprehensive relations with the Gulf region since the 1990s. It turned down the U.S.' request to send Indian troops to Iraq during the Iraq War in 2003 but at the same time strengthened Indian-U.S. economic cooperation in post-war reconstruction. India has maintained fairly close cooperation on energy with Iran and both have attached much importance to mutual strategic and political interests. There are 3.5 million Indian laborers in the GCC countries and India has signed the general agreement of economic cooperation framework with the GCC to initiate the negotiation of a free trade area.<sup>9</sup> An Indian scholar expressed clearly that India is likely to play a role in shaping the Gulf security arrangements, for instance, protecting the waterway in

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<sup>7</sup> Liu Yueqing, *Post-Cold War International Relations in the Gulf Region* (Beijing: Social Science Documents Press, 2002), pp.238-277.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/2007/1/0117-3.html>.

<sup>9</sup> According to the official websites of China's Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Commerce.

the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>10</sup>

China maintains its comprehensive relations with all the countries in the Gulf. China has consolidated its relations with the GCC and its member states in economic, political and energy terms. Both sides have accelerated the process of free trade area negotiations.<sup>11</sup> Since the end of the Iraq War and the onset of Iraq reconstruction, China has gradually restored bilateral exchanges with Iraq in political, economic and cultural areas. China maintains normal relations with Iran and plays the role as a UN Security Council permanent member on the Iranian nuclear issue by mediating between Iran and the U.S., and acts as a responsible power.

Finally, the GCC countries hope to change the situation of sole U.S. dominance on security and political matters in the Gulf region. The GCC and its members all the more oppose the potential U.S. use of force against Iran. They conceive that any unprovoked U.S. armed attack on the militarily powerful Iran will trigger a new large-scale conflict at the expense of the Gulf countries which would entail tremendous troubles, including nuclear pollution, military and terror attacks and close-off of the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>12</sup>

## II. U.S. Multi-Blunders

***The Bush administration's policy on the Gulf.*** The U.S. Gulf strategy has its historical continuity and global consistency. No sooner had the Bush administration taken office than it began to face the challenge of 9/11 attacks. The U.S. global strategy is apparently characterized with the Bush Doctrine, i.e., maintaining U.S. military primacy as a sole superpower in the world, withdrawing from the international organizations that would restrict U.S.' fights against terrorism and proliferation, and vigorously pushing for the worldwide market economy and democracy. The Bush administration's *National Security Strategy 2002* pledged to translate U.S. present influence into peace, prosperity and freedom in the coming decades. Thus the U.S. launched the Iraq War in 2003. The strategy for the broader Middle East was formulated in 2004. The words "democracy" and "freedom" were used over 200 times in the *U.S. National Security Strategy 2006*, three times more than those used in the 2002 report.

In sum, the U.S. Gulf security strategy reads: strengthening military presence in the region, maintaining U.S. unilateral dominance over regional security framework, being in control of Gulf energy, countering terrorism and extremism, preventing WMD from proliferation, promoting American-brand democracy, uniting pro-American moderate states and containing Iran, the anti-American

<sup>10</sup> This author discussed the issue with the Indian scholar at the Gulf Research Center at Dubai on January 27, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Xinhuanet telegraph, April 22, 2006, Riyadh.

<sup>12</sup> "The Gulf Countries Face Threat," *Xinhua Daily Telegraph*, July 8, 2006.

regional power. Just as a Chinese scholar pointed out, "it is a long-standing goal of the U.S. to maintain security and stability in the Gulf region in American control and in American interests."<sup>13</sup>

**The Bush administration's multi-blunders.** The Bush administration's blunders largely result from its outdated reading of the era. In the era of peace and development, the Bush administration overestimated the U.S. power and its preeminent military prowess in sending troops to occupy Iraq. This has directly resulted in the pluralization and proliferation of the crises in the whole Middle East region, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Syrian-Israeli conflict, Lebanon-Israeli conflict, Iranian nuclear issue and so on.

Moreover, President Bush acclaims that he is a "transformational" president who will change the direction of history. He tried to impose democratic transformation upon the Middle East as a solution to terrorism.<sup>14</sup> The "democratic transformation" in the Gulf has directly contributed to instability in the region. Iraq is on the verge of civil war. The elected government in Iran holds a hard-line policy towards the U.S. Political Islamism is rising apace. Anti-Americanism soars everywhere. Monarchism in GCC countries is seriously challenged. The moderates and pro-American elites in Gulf countries are forced to alienate themselves from the United States.

The U.S. lags far behind in thinking about regionalism. Globalization and regionalism are developing rapidly in the world today. But the U.S. still rejects the autonomous multilateral economic and security systems in different regions and persists in U.S.-led bilateral or multilateral security systems. The U.S. attempts to maintain its predominance in the Gulf region by virtue of its bilateral security agreements with the GCC countries and the regional security system precluding Iran. As the situation evolves, the Arab countries in the Gulf believe that the security arrangement should include "a prosperous Yemen, a stable Iraq, and a friendly Iran," and be underpinned by guarantees provided by the international community as a whole rather than by just "the only superpower in the world" (said by Saud al-Faisal, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister).<sup>15</sup> The U.S. stereotype towards the Gulf region has instead sped up the diplomatic pluralization in the region. The GCC countries like Saudi Arabia as well as Iran are strengthening relations with the EU and Russia and aggressively advancing "Look East" policies focusing on China, India and Japan, which in fact waters down U.S. domination and leadership.

The U.S. "balance of power" policy is actually counterproductive. The U.S. has been pursuing a "balancing" strategy towards Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia from the Cold War through the post-Cold War period, but ended up with geo-strategic

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<sup>13</sup> Liu Yueqing, *ibid*, p.57.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Transformation Leadership and U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 85, No.4, July/August 2006, pp.139-140.

<sup>15</sup> "Gulf Widens between U.S. and Sheikhdoms," *Asia Times online*, June 7, 2006.

imbalance, defying the original objectives. For examples, the United States had supported Iraq in the wake of the Islamic revolution in Iran only to see the rise of the Saddam Hussein regime. Iran is now trying to vie for regional dominance with the U.S. in the status of number-one power in the Gulf region thanks to the wars launched by the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq that had removed the two rivals of Iran.

Finally, the U.S. blunders have affected its policies towards individual countries. The United States has created too many enemies and busied itself to the benefit of others, and has made strategic blunders in its policies towards Iraq, the GCC and Iran. The rash U.S. military occupation in Iraq has caused sectarian tension in Iraq and an imbalance of power among regional sects, which have left Iraq on the verge of civil war and affected the stability of the entire Gulf region. The U.S. antagonistic policy that listed Iran as an “axis of evil” has exacerbated the nuclear proliferation issue. The point of their struggle is to contend for the dominance of the region.<sup>16</sup> The U.S. attempt to impose American-brand democracy on the GCC countries has reduced the alliance to its mere formality. Countries like Saudi Arabia have further intensified their “centrifugal” position on the United States.

### III. Out-of-the-predicament Options

As pointed out by Dr. Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations and Director of Policy Planning for the U.S. Department of State in the first tenure of the Bush administration, to shape the new Middle East from the outside will be exceedingly difficult, but it -- along with managing a dynamic Asia -- will be the primary challenge of U.S. foreign policy for decades to come.<sup>17</sup> Facing new challenges emerging uninterruptedly in the Gulf region, new strategic alternatives have to be worked out on the part of the Bush administration in its final tenure and for its successor after 2008.

***Continuing the existent strategy of “dominance and preventive actions.”*** This strategy needs the U.S. to take unilateralism on a global scale, implement preemption and regime change, and intensify the democratic transformation in the broader Middle East. In the Gulf region, the United States will continue its military buildup and its escalation of military actions. The final tenure year might embolden the Bush administration to stick to its military occupation of Iraq, impose all-out sanctions or even make a military strike on Iran, and enforce democratic transformation in Arab countries. However, unless taking it as a last resort in an emergency situation, the Bush administration and its successor will unlikely take this strategy which has

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<sup>16</sup> The author discussed it with the scholars at the Institute of Political and International Studies, Iranian Foreign Ministry, while paying a visit to the Institute on January 23, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Haass, “The New Middle East,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 6, November/December, 2006, pp. 2-12.

already repeatedly met setbacks.

***The strategy of “collapse prevention.”*** Since the Bush administration is currently unable to improve the Iraq situation or address the challenge of Iran, it could not but resort to military means in reconstructing Iraq and in dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue to avoid the failure of collapse and to lay the groundwork for a decent U.S. withdrawal. President Bush admitted mistakes on the Iraq issue and announced the “new strategy” in the Middle East in his address to the U.S. nation on January 10, 2007. He attributed U.S. failure in Iraq to “not enough troops and too many restrictions.” According to this new strategy, the U.S. would send more than 20,000 additional American soldiers to Iraq for its stabilization with the priority to fight the “terror camp” formed by Iran, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>18</sup> The Baker-Hamilton Report released a little earlier also recommended maintaining “a considerable military presence” in the Gulf region. In the meantime, the U.S. would form “a union of moderate states” with the GCC countries, Egypt and Jordan to contain the expansion of Iran in the Gulf region. Although these adjustments are mainly tactical, they have, in fact, put off democratic transformation. Secretary of State Condoleza Rice stated on February 27, 2007 that the U.S. would support the Iraqi government by inviting Iraqi neighbors including Iran and Syria to participate at an international conference to stabilize the situation in Iraq.

***To restore the strategy of “stability, deterrence and containment,” or to return to the priority of traditional security at the expense of democratization, a pragmatic strategy in the Gulf region.*** Having all along been frustrated in the Middle East, the Bush administration has returned to the traditional realism with an emphasis on addressing its relations with friends and foes. The first is to stabilize the situation in Iraq. The U.S. would try its best to put the Iraq regime back into a normal country status and full operation, to make sure that Iraq keeps good relations with the U.S. and neighboring states, to prevent Iraq from dominating the Gulf region and regaining weapons of mass destruction and to create favorable conditions and timing for a U.S. withdrawal. The second is to contain Iran. So far as Iran is concerned, the U.S. cannot help but shift its goal of exogenous regime change to that of nonproliferation by supporting indigenous opposition. The U.S. primary aims are to deter and contain Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and to soften and modify Iran by limited democratization and other instrument of low risks. The third is to develop amicability with the Gulf countries on energy and defense, to push for gradual political liberalization, and to make sure that the authorities of those countries strike a balance in addressing the political and social challenges. An American analyst goes even further to suggest that the United States will best

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<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html>.



serve its interests in the Gulf by withdrawing its ground forces not only from Iraq, but from the entire region. By maintaining a strong naval presence in the Indian Ocean, along with some naval forces in the international waters of the Gulf, the United States would be able to thwart an invasion of any oil-producing country in the Gulf region.<sup>19</sup>

*The strategy of "cooperative order."* Advocates of this strategy believe that the United States with the advantages in its economy, culture and diplomacy and in international regimes ought to wield the American soft power, to prop up the legitimacy of U.S. actions and to reach objectives through international regimes.

The strategy of "cooperative order" to be employed in the Gulf region features in the full play of American soft power, and at least in shifting the American burden in the Middle East to the international regimes under the UN auspices, the alliances in its leading and coordination between major powers, so as to realize a soft landing of U.S. Middle East policy. As American scholars suggested, "International policy towards the Persian Gulf should include an arsenal of diplomatic initiatives designed to ease serious regional conflicts and domestic unrest; to create security conventions including the United States and European, Asian and regional powers to safeguard the free flow of oil from the region; and to broaden the international coalitions that coordinate emergency responses to accidental or purposeful disruptions."<sup>20</sup>

On the Iraq issue, the U.S. must look for international institutions and international forces to assist the reconstruction of Iraq as early as possible and seek NATO or the UN to take charge of peace in Iraq, so as to cut U.S. military action to the lowest possible level. On the issue of Iran, the U.S. must change its unilateral sanction on Iran, and instead prevent the nuclear proliferation in concerted actions together with the EU and other countries. Both stakes and dialogues should be employed on the issue of Iran. The U.S. should clearly explain serious consequence to Iran if the latter resists the IAEA and UN. This strategy necessitates multilateral arrangements to insure energy security. For example, to transform the GCC into a regional security partnership would also require including Iraq as its formal member and encouraging the EU and Japan to contribute to the security in the Gulf region. According to this strategy, U.S. deployment of troops in the Gulf would return to the pre-Gulf War status of "over the horizon" and U.S. presence in the Gulf would mainly involve diplomacy and NGO activities. The U.S. would push for political reform and economic development in the region by economic and development aid programs, aiming at improving political governance and human rights. Those

<sup>19</sup> Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press and Benjamin Valentino, "Time to Offshore Our Troops," *New York Times*, December 12, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Joe Barnesand and Amy Myers Jaffe, "The Persian Gulf and the Geopolitics of Oil," *Survival*, Spring 2006, p. 156.

policy instruments and action steps are largely being recommended for the options to the next potential Democratic administration.<sup>21</sup>

**Restrictions to U.S. strategic adjustment.** As noted above, the adjustment of the Bush administration's Gulf policy is in essence tactical, ad hoc and modest in effect. In order to deal with the changing environment at home and abroad, the U.S. has to readjust its global and Gulf strategies. But the challenges to the U.S. are grave.

First, strategic adjustment is a daunting task. The only successful adjustment in the last century was made by the Roosevelt-Truman administrations. U.S. global strategic goals are increasingly diversified. The Gulf issue has become all the more complicated. The U.S. Gulf strategy must therefore be reconciled with the multifaceted factors of counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, major power coordination, energy security, regional mechanisms and intra-regional balance.

Second, it proves difficult to integrate conceptions with practice. The U.S. mid-term election in 2006 was in part a rejection of the Bush administration's policy towards the Middle East and especially towards Iraq. The Bush administration has suffered from double heavy blows: the greatly frustrated neo-conservatism, and a Democratic-controlled Congress. The Democratic Party is blessed with few policy alternatives except the rhetoric of building democratic regimes when envisioning the new global strategies. The competition between the two political forces in the 2008 U.S. domestic election will affect the implementation of U.S. strategy in the Gulf.

Third, major powers might restrict U.S. strategic adjustment. Although the U.S. would maintain its domination over military security in the Gulf, it needs support and coordination of major powers on building regional mechanisms and ensuring energy security. The EU, Russia and China have greatly restricted the U.S. on the issue of Iraq war in terms of legitimacy and morality. Russia and China are opposing the use of force by the U.S. and insisting on diplomatic solutions to the Iranian nuclear issue. Restrictions to the U.S. may also come from the Gulf countries that are seeking pluralization of dominant forces in the region and gaining interests through major-power balance.

Finally, the U.S. is facing multifaceted tasks and challenges. Washington needs to stabilize the situation in Iraq, to avoid escalation on the Iranian nuclear issue, to restart the peace process in the Middle East, to prevent the Israeli-Syrian conflict and Israeli-Lebanon conflict from being out of control, and to consolidate U.S. alliance with GCC countries, and especially to improve U.S. ties with Saudi Arabia. Any mistake occurring on those issues on the part of the U.S. will be devastating, which will directly affect the adjustment of its

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<sup>21</sup> Lawrence Korb, "The Gulf and US National Security," *Emirates Lecture Series 58* (Abu Dhabi, UAE: The Emirates Center for Strategy Studies and Research, 2005), p.32.

**global and regional strategies.**

**Like the case in the Middle East as a whole, the trends in the Gulf region will be dictated mostly by endogenous other than exogenous factors. Thus, the U.S. has to respect the will of the peoples and governments in the region, to be pragmatic in conceiving of its capability limits, and to make corresponding contraction of its strategic ambitions and make changes in its specific policies. To sum up, unless the U.S. gives up its hegemonic conceptions and behaviors in the Gulf, the United States cannot find an optimal way out both dominating the Gulf region and moving out of the predicaments in many places in the region.**