



A Perspective from the United States on the Impact of International Strategies in the Gulf Security Apparatus

Remarks before the Emirates Policy Center's Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate

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I want to thank the organizers of the Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate and its chair, Dr. Ebtesam Al Ketbi, for the invitation to participate in this conference. I also want to acknowledge my colleague from the Center for American Progress, Senior Fellow Brian Katulis, and my longtime friend and colleague from the Clinton administration, respected former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Walt Slocombe.

Let me also acknowledge Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, representing NATO; our moderator Barry Pavel; and the representatives from the European Union, China, and Russia, who are all part of this panel on the impact of international strategies and security visions in shaping a regional system in the Gulf.

In the Gulf, there is no better—or stronger and more engaged—partner than the United States.

All the talk of alleged U.S. disengagement from the region misses the point that the United States has no rival when it comes to helping ensure the overall security of the region, especially at a time of great uncertainty and turmoil. The United States has a strong security presence in this region, and that is not going anywhere.

Yes, the United States and China are engaged in a dialogue on major power relations in the 21st century to guide their peaceful engagement. But the American strategic focus on the Middle East and the Gulf has not wavered.

The attempts to deal with Iran's nuclear program with diplomacy through the U.N. P5+1 negotiations, and the U.S.-led efforts to enforce sanctions, are a reflection of American strength. The United States is not naïve about the threats Iran poses to the region and to its neighbors, or about Iran's support to militant groups and its efforts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Secretary of State John Kerry and his shrewd senior negotiator, Ambassador Wendy Sherman, are deeply engaged on all of these issues. I very much agree with the sentiments expressed by United Arab Emirates Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Mohammed Gargash that any Iran agreement must be "airtight."¹

The United States remains a strong leader in the world and is better positioned in 2014 than it was five years ago. Our economy is stronger. We are producing more energy at home while consuming less of it. Our military remains the strongest in the world and will be even stronger when Congress resolves its budget impasse and approves a new defense budget.

Despite the political divisions that have at times held us back, we have seen our country move forward on several fronts, including health care reform, and have made investments at home that keep us strong and competitive in the global economy.

The turmoil of the new threats we see—whether it is global pandemics such as Ebola or the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS—requires collaboration and partnership. America's unique assets position it as a leader that is willing and able to work with as many countries as want to work with it.

We have our differences with Russia—especially on Ukraine, as identified in the resolutions of the United Nations. With China, the upcoming Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit will provide another opportunity for closer cooperation and to work through areas of disagreement. But Americans support the steady efforts to try to move us to closer alignment. Gone are the days of trying to avoid diplomacy just because we disagree.

Finally, the specific issue of this policy conference: The Impact of International Strategies and Security Visions in Shaping a Regional System in the Gulf.²

America, across several administrations, has made long-term commitments to the Gulf. It has invested its financial support in the region and paid a high price for the security of the region through the service and lives of its men and women in the armed forces, as well as its diplomats.

The United States has invested in problems that have vexed the region for generations, including economic development, security, and respect for diversity and pluralism.

My first trip to the Gulf was in 1987, visiting with a delegation from the House Armed Services Committee. It was during the Iran-Iraq war, and the United States was using its many capabilities to keep the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz open to all trade and transit. Even then, the nations of the Gulf were coming together to form their own distinctive political community of policy and action.

In the almost 30 years since my first visit, there have been many visits to the Gulf and its neighbors. The region's economic development, diplomatic engagement, and self-defense capabilities are impressive and very significant. On the economic side, the influence of the Gulf States is not confined to this region but spreads to Africa in the west and India and China to the east.

Today, the United States leads the coalition dealing with the ISIS threat, working in cooperation with regional allies and the active engagement of U.S. military forces.

U.S. forces—air, sea, and some ground personnel engaged as advisors and observers—are the embodiment of working with our Gulf and other regional allies in ending this latest threat and supporting their efforts for security.

At the same time, America has now contributed 4,000 soldiers to West Africa to help prevent the spread of Ebola,³ just as it has devoted billions of dollars in the last decade in a sophisticated campaign against HIV/AIDS in Africa.⁴

This is America's approach to play a constructive role in solving problems and seeing progress in the Gulf and throughout the region. We acknowledge the young men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States who serve this region and elsewhere around the world. We are indebted for their service and the sacrifice of their families, especially as we support our allies in facing the current threat.

Thank you to all the participants of this panel.

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Endnotes

1 Barbara Opall-Rome and Awad Mustafa, "Israel, Gulf States Urge Firm Stance As Deadline Looms on Iran Nuke Talks," *Defense News*, November 1, 2014, available at <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20141101/DEFREG04/311010017/Israel-Gulf-States-Urge-Firm-Stance-Deadline-Looms-Iran-Nuke-Talks>.

2 Emirates Policy Center, "Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate, October 18 – 20, 2014," available at <http://www.epc.ae/sites/default/files/ADSD-2014/ADSD2014-Agenda.pdf> (last accessed December 2014).

3 Dan Lamothe, "U.S. military force fighting Ebola virus could grow to 4,000 troops," *The Washington Post*, October 3, 2014, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2014/10/03/u-s-military-force-fighting-ebola-virus-could-grow-to-4000-troops/>.

4 U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, "2014 PEPFAR Latest Results: Fact Sheet" (2014), available at <http://www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/234738.pdf>.