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AMBITIOUS IRAN, TROUBLED NEIGHBORS

Daniel Pipes
Patrick Clawson

A New Locus of Danger

EVENTS IN IRAN and its neighbors—Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey—generated most of the Middle East's history in 1992. While the more northerly countries played in the shadows of the Soviet collapse, the southerly ones contended with the aftermath of Operation Desert Storm.

Violence and war characterized the year. Iran forcibly expelled residents of several Persian Gulf islets. Fighting continued in Iraq's Kurdish north and Shiite south, fracturing the country into three sections. Confrontation with the U.N.-mandated forces also continued, including U.S. air strikes just days before the change of presidents in Washington. The Najibullah regime in Kabul collapsed, exacerbating Afghanistan's civil war. Civil war in Tajikistan broke out, and fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan took thousands of lives.

This turmoil spurred few responses from Washington. A generally passive Bush administration relegated much of foreign policy to the working level, while the policymakers (especially President Bush and Secretary of State James A. Baker) devoted their attention to domestic issues and the presidential campaign. As a result myriad Middle Eastern problems—oil supply and pricing, terrorism, drugs, refugees, arms proliferation—await decisions by the Clinton administration.

The Growing Iranian Threat

WITH IRAQ WEAKENED and under international sanctions, the principal threat to U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf region may in the future come from Iran.

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In 1992 Iranians sent mixed signals regarding their intentions. Some signs suggest Tehran is prepared to drop the terrorism and belligerent rhetoric that have so isolated it. The most important indication of a moderating trend was the outcome of elections in spring 1992 for the Majlis (parliament). Less than a quarter of the candidates endorsed by the radical Islamic Clergy Association won. President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani apparently had a mandate to bury revolutionary rhetoric and quietly to improve relations with Iran's neighbors and the West.

The deepening of economic reform provided a second sign of increased moderation. Rafsanjani abandoned the radicals' concept of Islamic economics, which consisted of such policies as income redistribution, state direction of the economy along Soviet or Indian lines, and limitation of consumption (as opposed to wealth creation). The goal of self-sufficiency in all products gave way to the pursuit of Iran's comparative advantage in oil; production rose from 2.5 million barrels per day in 1988 to 3.2 million in 1992 and may reach 4.5 million within a few years. Under Rafsanjani's command, Iran resumed ties with the International Monetary Fund, borrowed from the World Bank, and implemented the economic reforms recommended by those organizations. He steeply cut the budget deficit and greatly reduced government control over imports. One exchange rate for the rial, set by the market, will replace several old unrealistic rates.

These steps led to a 20 percent increase in per capita real income during the first three years of Rafsanjani's presidency (1989-92); imports in that period rose from \$11 billion a year to \$25 billion. But three considerations mar this otherwise impressive achievement. First, this growth is relatively modest compared to the 40 percent drop in Iranian income from the shah's rule to today. Second, it depended on an unsustainable rate of foreign borrowing, which reached \$6 billion in 1991-92 alone. Iran went quickly from a good credit risk to a potential problem debtor. Third, Rafsanjani is repeating the shah's economic errors by borrowing heavily abroad and spending some \$10 billion on inappropriate state-run heavy industry such as large steel mills and automobile assembly plants. Tehran pours huge sums into power generation facilities even as electricity rates remain at less than half of cost.

While elections and the economic reform program suggested increased moderation at home, Tehran's foreign policy

remained bellicose. Iranian moderates advocate an aggressive brand of Persian nationalism that is likely to cause troubles in the years ahead. Looking at the world through the combined filters of fundamentalist Islam and a resurgent Persian nationalism, they aspire to a sphere of influence that includes Iraq, the Transcaucasus, Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf.

Tehran demonstrated its hostility to the West in five main ways during 1992. First, Iranian support for terrorism continued. In November the June Fifth Foundation increased the bounty on novelist Salman Rushdie's head, still seeking his death for having written *The Satanic Verses*. Iranian citizens, if not their government, reportedly bombed the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires in April. Iranian agents continued to assassinate Iranian dissidents abroad, killing four Kurdish leaders in Berlin in September.

Second, the regime continues to support Islamic revolutionaries in their efforts to destabilize Western allies. The governments of Jordan, Egypt and Algeria all pointed a finger at Iran, seeing it as the mainstay of radical Islamic elements seeking their violent overthrow. In particular the Egyptian government claims to have solid evidence that attacks against foreign tourists were carried out by agents trained by Iranian revolutionary guards in Sudan.

Third, Tehran reacted furiously to the Arab-Israeli peace process. Its 1992/93 budget formally allots \$20 million for Palestinian rejectionists, and Hamas, the fundamentalist Palestinian group, has opened an "embassy" in Tehran. Hamas received new weapons from Iran for attacking Israel, and within a week Katyushas went off from Lebanon, threatening to disrupt the peace negotiations.

Fourth, in 1992, Iranians acted with calculated aggression in the Persian Gulf—which in Iranian nationalist eyes should be Persian territory. They demanded \$78 million from Kuwait as "parking fees" for Kuwait Air airliners flown to Iran by Iraqi pilots during the Gulf War. They initiated a \$1.7 billion development on the Iranian side of an oil and gas field that is predominantly under Qatari waters. In April Tehran expelled several hundred United Arab Emirates residents from Abu Musa, the largest of three disputed islands in the Persian Gulf that Iran had administered jointly with the U.A.E.; in September Iran declared sovereignty over the territories. Located near the Strait of Hormuz, the islands have strategic

importance because oil tankers must pass within ten miles of either the islands or the Iranian mainland. Iranian troops deployed on the islands stand just fifty miles from population centers of the U.A.E., with obvious intimidating effects.

Fifth, Iran's rearmament program picked up in 1992 as Tehran went shopping for arms in the former Soviet bloc. It ordered three submarines and

large quantities of MiG-29s, Sukhoi-24s, Su-22s, missiles, tanks, armored personnel carriers and artillery. The Iranian five-year plan for 1989-93 allocates \$10 billion for arms.

Of course Iran does have legitimate security concerns, particularly with Iraq, and it did end the Iran-Iraq War with worn-out weaponry. But Tehran has ordered equipment designed for denying others access to the sea, such as Kirov-class submarines and long-range Soviet planes designed to attack aircraft carriers.

"More alarming yet, Iran appears to have launched a program to acquire nuclear weapons."

More alarming yet, Iran appears to have launched a program to acquire nuclear weapons. Nothing else explains its single-minded pursuit of nuclear power plants (including two ordered from China and Russia) in a country deficient in the capital required to build such plants and rich in natural gas that can fire power plants cheaply. Credible reports also point to collaboration on nuclear technology with Pakistan, whose authorities acknowledge possessing the know-how and technology to build a bomb.

Pragmatism on domestic and economic issues, in short, does not translate into cooperation with neighbors or the West. Quite the contrary, Tehran may be on a collision path with its neighbors and with the United States. Rafsanjani might threaten the West's vital interests more directly and with greater effect than did Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Under Khomeini, Tehran promoted terrorism against individuals, quixotic efforts to overturn governments, and concentrated on events like the pilgrimage to Mecca. Under Rafsanjani, it does all that and more, building up Iranian military power and exerting influence over a huge contiguous region.

These various trends in Iran could result in an explosive mix. Iran's government will soon be heavily armed, it claims regional domination and borders the world's richest mini-

states, yet it cannot deliver the promised prosperity. As Saddam proved, this volatile mix might explode with little warning and in unexpected ways.

Washington must prepare for the possibility that Iran intends to challenge vital U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf, where three-fourths of the world's oil reserves are located. As with the Soviet opponent in decades past, Washington has two basic policy options: *détente* or containment. *Détente* means working with Rafsanjani and the Iranian moderates in hopes of modifying Iran's anti-Western behavior. Containment means laying down clear markers, avoiding military confrontation and hoping that internal problems will eventually cause the regime to implode.

Détente has some appeal, especially if the Western allies can reach a consensus on the carrots and sticks to be applied to Iran. But the effort to moderate Iranian radicalism may fail, much as did earlier efforts with Saddam Hussein. Foreign governments have very limited influence on Iran, as the Iran-contra debacle showed. Further, years of U.S.-Iranian venom render so nuanced a policy emotionally impossible on both sides. The U.S. government cannot credibly offer Iran much on trade, and Congress is not likely to rescind its Iran-Iraq Nonproliferation Act of 1992, which applies the most stringent export restrictions to Iran (as well as Iraq). For its part Tehran accuses Washington of moving the goalposts: What benefit did it get for securing the release of Western hostages in Lebanon?

The Europeans and Japanese agree with much of Tehran's criticism; they therefore dismiss American proposals that aid to moderates be delayed until Iran meets certain tests. In effect, most U.S. allies have gone the *détente* route on their own, providing Iran with billions each year in government-backed loans and access to advanced technology, some even with military applications.

Alternatively the U.S. government can proceed on its own with a containment policy. Iranian economic weakness increases the chances for the success of such a policy, as does the growing disillusionment of the Iranian people. Indeed it is by no means clear that the Islamic revolution will last into a second generation. Iranians seem more interested in the reversal of the decline in living standards than in the continuation of Islamic rule. Economic dissatisfaction and anger with rampant corruption led to rioting in four cities in 1992, including large, organized, openly anti-regime disturbances lasting several days

in Mashhad.

Containment will not be easy to sustain. It takes years or even decades to work, and so requires a broad consensus of support within the United States. It means foregoing the commercial opportunities offered by Iran's reemergence as a major oil producer. Further, Americans cannot by themselves make containment work; if Iran secures financing and technology from Europe and Japan, as is now the case, it can blunt U.S. efforts. Therefore the key lies in convincing reluctant allies in London, Paris, Bonn and Tokyo to support a unified Iran policy. Ironically it may be simpler to secure their cooperation if Washington takes a principled stance in favor of containing Iran, rather than a nuanced carrot-and-stick policy for rewarding moderate behavior.

The Iraqi Nemesis

IN 1991 IRAQ symbolized victory at war for the United States. In 1992 it symbolized disaster averted. However dull and unsatisfying, the absence of catastrophe was a considerable achievement. The Iraqi population did not die in massive numbers from starvation, plagues or civil unrest. Saddam Hussein did not sell large amounts of oil or rebuild his arsenal. Neither Iran nor Syria invaded Iraq. Oil prices remained steady.

In fact, circumstances improved in 1992 from the U.S. perspective. The ruling circles in Baghdad began to argue among themselves. The Baath Party proved a less efficacious instrument of power. The Iraqi arsenal weakened under the impact of the embargo and the continued work of U.N. inspection teams. Saddam Hussein did not strongly contest the prohibition of Iraqi aircraft from southern Iraq, the "no-fly zone" that was set up by Gulf War allies to protect Iraqi Shiites who live in the area from attack by Iraq. Iraqi attempts to test U.S. resolve met with firm resistance, including the shooting down of an Iraqi MiG and the destruction of missile installations. Such U.S. action has both further prevented Saddam's assault on the Shia of the south and further narrowed his writ.

But Americans, their expectations raised by Operation Desert Storm, did not appreciate these subtle successes. Instead they saw Saddam Hussein still in power and felt intense frustration. Bumper stickers with "Saddam still has a job, do you?" summed up the sour mood. Congressional

probes into the Bush administration ties to Iraq prior to August 1990 ("Iraqgate") revealed a policy at best myopic, at worst criminal. Together, discontent about 1992 and scorn for

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1989 undid President Bush's 1991 reputation as the architect of victory. More than any other foreign policy issue, Iraq-related developments contributed to his defeat at the polls.

Looking to the future the new administration has but limited options vis-à-vis Iraq. While it can make human

rights issues and the spreading of democracy a more central focus of American policy toward Baghdad, major deviations from the Bush approach—steady pressure on Saddam but minimal involvement in Iraqi politics—seem unlikely.

Instead the real options belong to Saddam Hussein. He might view Bush's defeat as an opportunity to mend relations with the U.S. government. Indeed, the very first press reaction to Bill Clinton's victory (Iraq "will reciprocate in kind to balanced policies") hinted at this possibility.¹ Replicating his actions of a decade earlier, Saddam could eliminate bellicose rhetoric against foreigners and reduce his brutality at home. He could also comply with some U.N. resolutions, for example by cooperating with U.N. inspection teams. In return he presumably would demand the end of economic sanctions and the acceptance of his rule. Such an initiative would present the Clinton team with a dilemma: Should they give Saddam another chance or not?

They could, for the new president has not so far made Saddam Hussein's overthrow an American objective. But they should not. Saddam deserves absolutely no more chances. Giving Saddam no more chances, however, does not imply working actively to overthrow the Iraqi regime. The U.S. government does not have the means to accomplish that end. Moreover turmoil or a power vacuum in Iraq could create severe complications. Eliminating Saddam would leave a power vacuum that could require a U.S. presence for months or years. After establishing order, the occupying authorities would have to establish new institutions in the American image.

¹*Al-Qadisiya*, Nov. 5, 1992.

Implausible even during the euphoria of February 1991, this scenario appears nearly incredible at this time of American introversion. American interests, therefore, may well be served best by restraint.

Where does this leave American policy? Where it is today—calling for full implementation of U.N. Security Council resolution 687 on establishing a permanent ceasefire and resolution 688 on safeguarding the Kurds. Clinton has called for a continuation of U.S. policy: “Whether Republicans or Democrats are in power Saddam Hussein must understand that Washington will insist with the same determination that he respect the U.N. resolutions.”² The U.N. resolutions require Iraq to settle its boundary dispute with Kuwait; acquiesce in the destruction of all chemical, biological and nuclear facilities and weapons; close down its terrorist apparatus; permanently renounce the acquisition of nonconventional arms; return all Kuwaiti property and pay compensation for damage; and respect the human rights of the Kurdish and Shiite minorities. Only when Saddam complies with all these terms might the Security Council lift the sanctions. To this list the U.S. government should add that Iraq remain ostracized so long as those with a long record of violating international law rule the country.

Persian Gulf Insecurities

THE OIL KINGDOMS face many economic and political problems that belie their image as rich and contented. Neither Kuwait nor Saudi Arabia made much progress in 1992 addressing vital issues. The ruling dynasties in both countries continue to depend on family rule and the distribution of largesse. But cash alone cannot indefinitely buy political support; demands on the public purse continue to increase while income does not, and the increasingly educated middle-class population wants a voice in public life.

In Kuwait, war and then reconstruction reduced the government’s estimated prewar assets of \$100 billion to about \$15 billion (after netting out the borrowing). Poor financial management also contributed to this drop: high-profile investments in Spain lost up to \$5 billion, and the postwar rescue of Kuwaiti banks cost several billion dollars more than was nec-

²Interview with Bill Clinton, “Ce que je crois,” *Politique Internationale*, Fall 1992, p. 15.

essary. For Kuwait to regain its financial balance requires exporting its prewar level of two million barrels of oil per day, a goal that depends more on decision-making by the

“...Washington needs to view Saudi Arabia as a temporary ally with whom numerous and profound differences remain, and to keep open other options.”

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and world markets than on Kuwaiti oil field capacity. Kuwait's fields have been largely rebuilt; production is up to 1.5 million barrels per day.

In Saudi Arabia, official assets amounted to around \$225 billion in 1981; now foreign assets of about \$50 billion are balanced by the national debt—most of it held internal-

ly—of about \$60 billion. Huge subsidies deplete the treasury while the tax base remains minuscule. Operation Desert Storm cost Riyadh about \$60 billion. The \$8 billion 1992 budget deficit is about eight percent of GDP, or twice the share of the U.S. deficit in its GDP. The Saudis have taken steps to curtail their deficit, reducing spending from \$83 billion in 1982 to \$48 billion in 1992, but if current trends persist, Saudi Arabia will soon become a major debtor state. Riyadh may yet retain the reputation of a financial giant, but a giant with feet of clay.

Indeed virtually all OPEC member states need money urgently to maintain living standards. OPEC's ability to produce at record levels while maintaining prices higher than pre-Kuwait invasion prices depends on phenomena that may not persist, in particular, Iraq's absence from the market and the collapse of production in the former Soviet Union. However, over the next three to five years, OPEC members may compete rather than cooperate if the market becomes soft. Four factors would most weaken oil prices: Iraq's return to the market, the former Soviet republics reestablishing previous production levels, a sluggish world economy, and higher taxes on oil in the industrial countries (whether out of environmental concerns or for fiscal reasons). Ample supply and stagnant demand on world oil markets may hurt Saudi and Kuwaiti finances and weaken OPEC. Tensions may increase within OPEC between Persian Gulf Arab states and Iran over the latter's hawkish price stand and its relentlessly expanding output.

Turning to political issues, border disputes continued to fester in 1992 without producing major problems. Saudi Arabia and Qatar had a nasty exchange in the fall. Riyadh continues to be hostile to Yemen, due to age-old rivalries, bitterness over Yemen's pro-Saddam stance in 1990-91 that led to the subsequent expulsion of more than half a million Yemenis working in Saudi Arabia, as well as Saudi unhappiness with Yemen's multiparty elections.

While retaining power firmly in their hands, the ruling Persian Gulf families in 1992 took several small steps to broaden political participation. The opposition did unexpectedly well in Kuwait's October elections, taking 31 of 50 seats in the National Assembly. Yet despite the opposition's victory, the emir appointed ruling Sabah family members to the key posts of defense, foreign affairs and interior. The Omani and Bahraini rulers revitalized their consultative assemblies—one broadened its membership, the other renewed a 1988 promise to reconvene an assembly dismissed in 1975. On March 1, 1992, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia issued an unprecedented series of decrees aimed at decentralizing political power and protecting certain individual rights. This "Basic Law of Government" could systematize and regularize procedures that in the past had been largely subject to royal whim. In addition the king announced that he would finally convene the oft-promised Consultative Council, though he kept missing self-imposed deadlines.

As in other Muslim states (Jordan, Algeria) the broadening of political participation in Saudi Arabia may make the country more fundamentalist, thereby threatening its political stability. Indeed, 107 religious leaders complained in a manifesto of Western cultural influences (television programs that "glorify decadent Western life-styles") and Riyadh's alliance with the West (inviting "atheist" troops to defend the kingdom and the failure to fight "the Jewish enemy"). Riyadh continues to be nervous about democracy in the region, as evidenced by its reaction to Yemen's parliamentary elections and the pressure on oil companies not to explore an area generally recognized as Yemen's side of a disputed border.

Americans ought to be very cautious about seeing Saudi Arabia as "an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world," as President Carter so unwisely described Iran just a week before the Iranian Revolution began. Rather than making alliance with Riyadh the foundation for U.S. pol-

icy in the region, Washington needs to view Saudi Arabia as a temporary ally with whom numerous and profound differences remain, and to keep open other options.

Turkey, Island in a Storm

TURKEY OFFERS one of those options. It is the only country in the Middle East with which America has a formal treaty of alliance (through NATO) and, along with Israel, the only democracy in the region. It is also a country at great risk in the years ahead.

Risk is what Turkey has avoided during the past fifty years. From the sophisticated neutrality of World War II to the low profile vis-à-vis the Soviet Union to the avoidance of Middle East maelstroms, Ankara steered clear of problems. The Soviet collapse and Operation Desert Storm—however desirable from Ankara's point of view—have embroiled Turkey in perilous foreign affairs. The country so long at the margins of other people's dramas suddenly finds itself a fulcrum of unrest. Turkey is now beset by wars on three fronts: Kurdish rebels in its southeast (in Turkey and in Iraq), the Armenia-Azerbaijan war on its northeast, and the slaughter of Muslims in the former Yugoslavia to its northwest—in addition to pressures for involvement in Central Asia and continuing problems with Cyprus and Greece.

Kurds number some ten million in Turkey, five million in Iran and four million in Iraq, with smaller populations in Syria and the Caucasus republics of the former Soviet Union. Simplifying a complex situation, Kurds in Turkey and Iraq have rebelled against their own governments and allied with the other power. Baghdad (with help from Damascus and Tehran) works with the main organization of Turkish Kurds, the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (Partiya Karkerana Kurdistan or PKK) against Turkey. The PKK had a terrible record of violence in 1992, mostly against fellow Kurds, and now controls portions of southeastern Turkey. To make matters worse, the Turkish army has responded with its own aggressive war against the PKK. Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, whom military officers have already deposed twice (in 1970 and 1980), seems unwilling to face down his generals this time.

The issue of Turkish Kurds complicates U.S. policy toward Iraq. Turks fear that American encouragement of Kurdish forces in Iraq may spawn an autonomous Kurdish region—or

even an independent state—in the far northern part of Iraq. Ankara fears this would inspire Turkish Kurds to try the same tactic. Were they to succeed, the Turkish Kurds would have challenged the notion of Turkish nationalism, and thereby the very existence of a Turkish nation-state. Such high stakes explain the vigorous debate in Turkey over renewing permission for the U.S. military's relief effort in northern Iraq (variously known as Operation Provide Comfort II and Operation Poised Hammer). For its part the PKK has attacked supplies en route from Turkey to the Iraqi Kurds, obstructing relief efforts in northern Iraq. Turkish strikes into Iraq against the PKK have aroused Iranian concerns that the generals seek to take care of the Kurdish problem by annexing northern Iraq. Tensions are high, violence endemic and a crisis probably near.

Further east, war between Azerbaijan and Armenia continues after violence broke out in early 1988, when the Soviet Union still existed. Sensing the end of the Soviet empire, the Armenian leadership launched an attempt to control Nagorno-Karabakh, an area of Armenian population lying within Azerbaijan. Azeris resisted, and the conflict escalated into a brutal struggle of siege, embargo and massacre.

Turks feel a strong visceral sympathy for Azerbaijan. Turks and Azeris speak almost the same language and adhere to a similar religion (Azeris are Shia). Turks also share with Azeris a history of conflict with Armenians. Azerbaijanis reciprocate these warm feelings. Symbolically, while Central Asian nations have asked Russia to represent them abroad, Azerbaijan relies on Turkey. Azeri politicians make extravagant statements to the effect that "the enemies of Turkey are our enemies too," and that Azerbaijan's independence is sure to "rally all the Turks together." Accordingly Ankara feels strong popular pressure to get directly involved against the Armenians. Within Turkey, for example, voices such as that of nationalist Necati Özfatūra advocate that Turkey "play a deterrent role against Armenian adventurism by openly expressing its readiness to wage a war, if need be, against Armenia in defense of Azerbaijan."³ In Azerbaijan, leaders use a kind of code, calling on Turkey to help the Azerbaijanis "consolidate" their independence—that is, control the territories contested by Armenians.

Although the conflict pulls strongly on Turkish emotions,

³*Türkiye*, Sept. 11, 1991. In expressing these views, Özfatūra undoubtedly has his Azeri readership in mind, for *Türkiye*, like many of the Turkish national papers, is now available in Azerbaijan.

Ankara has good reason to keep amicable relations with Armenia. It has kept out of the Caucasus war because the Turkish leadership understands that siding with Azerbaijan could jeopardize Turkey's carefully nurtured relationship with the United States and Europe.⁴ When arguing for restraint,

“Bosnia confirmed a growing Turkish conviction about European hatred for Islam and Muslims.”

Prime Minister Demirel explicitly acknowledges the danger of “a conflict between Muslims and Christians that will last for years.”⁵ But Ankara may not be able to stay out if atrocities against Azeris continue or Armenians succeed in taking Nagorno-Karabakh. By staying out of the conflict, Turkey not only

avoids confrontation in the Caucasus but might substantially improve its reputation in the West, currently under assault by diaspora Armenians.

For its part too, Armenia has compelling reasons to maintain good relations with Turkey, its primary access to the outside world. Having lost its historical Russian protector and nearly surrounded by Turkic Muslims, Armenia needs to get along with the strongest of its neighbors. Indeed, in return for food shipments to Armenia, Yerevan has already asked its diaspora brethren to ease up on their anti-Turkish campaign.

Bosnia-Herzegovina similarly tempted Turks to intervene in 1992. Bosnian authorities pleaded with Ankara to help them stave off Serbian depredations and prevent “ethnic cleansing.” Demirel vowed not to stand idly by, yet he did. As in the Caucasus, foreign policy considerations prevented the Turks from interceding; as there, developments in Bosnia further raised the political temperature in Turkey. Bosnia confirmed a growing Turkish conviction about European hatred for Islam and Muslims.

Central Asia might also disturb the Turkish political equilibrium, though for other reasons. The unexpected independence of five predominantly Muslim (and four Turkic) republics on the far side of the Caspian Sea has inspired the excited notion of Turkey spearheading a seven-state Turkic bloc. This vision tempts some Turks to pretensions of grandeur. “Current his-

⁴Turkey does admit to training Azeri officers, and Azerbaijan admits to deliveries of fabric for its troops' field uniforms.

⁵TRT Television, May 2, 1992.

torical circumstances,” announced President Turgut Özal, “permit Turkey to reverse the shrinking process that began at the walls of Vienna [in 1683].”⁶ Kamran Inan, a minister of state, declared that “Turkey is a candidate to be the strongest state in the West in the period following the year 2010.”⁷ These delusions could cause mischief in the years ahead, prompting Turks to overestimate their strength and commit major mistakes abroad. At the same time, Turks do have a potentially constructive role in Central Asia, and should be encouraged to play it.

The U.S. ability to respond to these issues has been limited by a persistent tendency to view Turkey as a southern European country like Portugal or Greece. The secular quality of Turkey’s official culture, the use of the Latin alphabet, and the thoroughly pro-Western orientation of its top personalities induce Americans to miss the Muslim and Turkic dimensions of its political life. Thus the State Department includes Turkey in the bureau that handles all of the former Soviet Union, eastern and western Europe, and Canada. Military and intelligence officers view Turkey in terms of NATO, forgetting that Turkey also abuts Iran, Iraq and Syria. Worries about tensions with Greece push aside those with Syria. The Senate concerns itself more with Armenian resolutions blaming Turks for genocide during 1915 than it does with ominous statements coming out of Tehran in 1992 portraying Turkey as Iran’s potential strategic enemy.

The inclination to see Turkey as just another European state makes American relations with Ankara unusually misconceived, for it is also a Middle Eastern country. Moving Turkey administratively into the Middle East would be a small but significant step to begin the process of seeing the country in its proper context.

Moreover Washington would benefit by working closely with Ankara. This means coordinating policy on the Kurdish zone in northern Iraq; helping to ensure that the “howl of the Central Asian wolf” does not distract Turks into thinking they have become a world power; and strongly encouraging Turkey to stay out of the Caucasus imbroglio. By a similar token the U.S. government should make clear to Armenians, both at home and in Armenia, that it entirely rejects their self-portrayal as Christendom’s front defense against Islam.

⁶*Der Spiegel*, Dec. 23, 1991.

⁷*Milliyet*, March 30, 1992.

Central Asia on the Screen

CENTRAL ASIA, historically remote from the United States, now involves American interests in two respects: long-range nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan and unrest caused by fundamentalist Islamic movements throughout the region.

Kazakhstan has a mixed population reminiscent of Lebanon: 40 percent Kazakh, 36 percent Russian, plus substantial numbers of Ukrainians, Germans, Koreans and others. President Nursultan Nazarbayev tries hard to maintain harmonious relations among ethnic groups, which means remaining close to Russia, almost to the point of abridging Kazakhstani independence. But this policy of accommodation disturbs Kazakh nationalists, who demand more assertive policies, and Nazarbayev must acquiesce to them too. For example, to shift the ethnic balance the authorities in Alma Ata encourage immigration by Kazakhs living outside Kazakhstan; they even offer passports to diaspora Kazakhs, without requiring them to immigrate. Many of Mongolia's 150,000 Kazakhs emigrated in 1992 and an unknown number of China's 900,000 Kazakhs may follow. If Kazakh nationalists get their way, a newly assertive Kazakhstan government might take steps harmful to the Russians in the country, provoking the Kremlin and leading to conflict of possibly epic proportions. Alternately, an ultranationalist government in Moscow may seek to enhance its standing through confrontation with Alma Ata.

This almost standard post-Soviet predicament concerns the United States because Kazakhstan hosts 104 SS-18 missiles and 40 nuclear-armed bombers. Today the weapons are under the command of the Commonwealth of Independent States. In the event of confrontation with Russia, Kazakhstan would be hard-pressed to mount a credible conventional defense against Russian forces. It possesses few conventional arms, the officers in its nascent army are overwhelmingly ethnic Russian, and the largely Russian population in the north of the country would probably welcome Russian intervention. Therefore Kazakhstan's best defense may lie in seizing full control over the nuclear weapons on its territory and threatening Moscow with mutual destruction. Kazakhstan may stall on its commitment to go nonnuclear or demand a quid pro quo for this step, such as massive Western aid or security guarantees. Its current policy, that it must be fully involved in negotiations

over the destruction of its nuclear weapons, provides ample opportunity for delay. In any case, the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty permits Kazakhstan to keep nuclear weapons until 1999. Washington will need to develop incentives as a means of influencing Kazakhstan's nuclear decisions.

Fundamentalist Islamic movements in Central Asia, and especially in the heavily populated Fergana valley, present another issue of concern to Americans. The collapse of Soviet authority meant the ending of most restrictions on radical Islam's growth, with impressive results. To date, the resurgence of Islam has taken the form of primarily cultural, educational and narrowly religious activities (such as teaching Arabic script and the Koran). But increasingly powerful elements demand that governments promote Islamic customs and that *sharia*, or Islamic law, be the sole basis of law. While the movements do espouse anti-Western views, they are indigenous and only secondarily assisted by foreign powers, especially Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

In Tajikistan, ethnic Tajiks (the Persian-speaking ethnic group that makes up two-thirds of the republic's population) have been engaged in a civil war that began when Rakhmon Nabiyev, Leonid Brezhnev's Communist Party chief, got himself elected president in November 1991. Opposition forces, including some fifty private armies, rebelled against him in March 1992. Two months later Nabiyev brokered the end of a 51-day rebellion, only to resign at gunpoint in September. Forces loyal to him captured Dushanbe in October, but his replacement, Akhsbarshah Iskandrov, retained power for seven weeks thanks to the intervention of Russian troops.

These events prompted concern that Iranian-inspired fundamentalism could feed unrest. But Tajikistan's troubles result more from local ethnic, regional and inter-elite conflict than from outside interference (as Uzbekistan's leaders forcefully allege) or the influence of fundamentalist Islam.

As in Tajikistan, civil strife could emerge elsewhere in Central Asia. Regional and ethnic splits have erupted into murderous violence, as have differences between the old communist elites and those who would challenge them. The challengers inevitably claim to support more rapid economic reforms—though their programs are vague—and to be democrats—though it is unclear what they mean by that term.

With Central Asia so remote and alien to Americans, the U.S. government is unlikely to get directly involved in that

region. Washington, thus, has two basic options: encourage ties to Turkey or to Russia. President Bush adopted the former policy, calling Turkey a "model to others, especially those newly independent republics of Central Asia." This approach, however, has serious limitations, for Turkey is distant geographically, with no direct links to the area, and it is not much more advanced than Central Asia. After the first flush of enthusiasm (when they called Istanbul "the Mecca of Turks") Central Asians have cooled down on the prospect of emulating Turkey or following its political lead.

Central Asia's connections to Moscow are profound and will likely remain so for years to come. Russia continues to be the *lingua franca* and rubles the currency. Russians command the military, while the old-guard politicians who still run nearly all of Central Asia still habitually look to the Kremlin for guidance. Russia has also taken on new roles in the recent past: Uzbek dissidents now publish in the Russian press and take refuge in Russia. More broadly, Russia leads the way in attempting to emerge from seven decades of communist rule. For all these reasons American planners should encourage continued strong ties between Central Asia and Russia.

This is all the more urgent because Iran, not Turkey, is the real alternative to Russia. Iran has greater financial means, a more dynamic ideology, geographic contiguity, and it offers realistic trade routes to the ocean (across relatively flat land to the excellent port at Bandar Abbas). U.S. oil companies and investment banks should commit their hundreds of millions of dollars to finance pipelines via Russia, not Iran. American interests call for Russian President Boris Yeltsin to survive, not Rafsanjani to gain new resources.

An Uncertain Future

WHEN IT COMES to the Middle East, the lion's share of American attention habitually goes to the Arab-Israeli conflict. But events in 1992 confirm a trend in place at least since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait: the eastern half of the Middle East hosts problems of increasing importance to the United States. Indeed the Turkish and Persian Gulf theaters clearly have greater weight, in both economic and security terms, than does the Arab-Israeli one.

Iraq and Iran are especially problematic—the tar babies of American politics, snagging three presidents in a row. Jimmy

Carter never recovered from the twin blows of the shah's fall and the U.S. embassy seizure. The Iran-contra scandal deeply wounded Ronald Reagan's presidency. Iraqgate and Saddam's retention of power more than vitiated George Bush's success in Operation Desert Storm.

No one knows the problems Bill Clinton will face. But the sooner he and other Americans shift their focus eastward, the better prepared they will be for whatever troubles lie ahead.