The Post-American Middle East

"This is a unique book analyzing with depth and breadth why and how the so-called 'War on Terror' had for more than two decades a dramatic impact on the broad Middle East region, contributing to the effective rise of China and Russia in this part of the world. Beyond the policy failures that it underlines, this edited volume is in the end, and more importantly, about governance. It emphasizes for the benefit of policymakers and academia, specific gaps and failures in the Middle East region, but with global consequences."

—Dr. Cristina D'Alessandro, *Centre on Governance at the University of Ottawa, Canada*

"This book makes an important contribution to research on U.S. policy in the Middle East, going beyond the energy security issue by drawing attention to topics such as the question of state formation and migration. The body of work illustrates the inadequate US assessment of the challenges in the region and proves that transforming societies through the use of military means cannot be a viable project in the twenty-first century."

—Dr. Farkhad AliMukhamedov, *Sciences Po, France*

"Along these pages the reader will find unique contributions to understand the configuration of armed conflicts, the great crises of representation, and the dynamic relationship between local governments and international powers in the Middle East. This book presents in a clear and comprehensive manner, reflections and analysis that are key to the concern of researchers and students, but also for policymakers. A new indispensable addition for every library featuring Middle Eastern studies."

—Dr. Ignacio Rullansky, *National University of San Martin, Argentina*

Laurent A. Lambert · Moosa Elayah
Editors

The Post-American Middle East

How the World Changed Where the War on Terror Failed

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Preface

Our universe is catastrophic from the beginning. From the formidable deflagration which gave birth to it, it is dominated by forces of displacement, disintegration, collision, explosions and destruction. It is constituted in and by the genocide of antimatter by matter, and its terrifying adventure continues in the devastations, in the massacres and in the singular dilapidations. The exit is ruthless. Everything will die.

Edgar Morin (1994).

The United States, with other countries, will work to advance liberty and peace in [the Middle East] region. Our goal will not be achieved overnight, but it can come over time. The power and appeal of human liberty is felt in every life and every land. And the greatest power of freedom is to overcome hatred and violence, and turn the creative gifts of men and women to the pursuits of peace.

43rd President of the United States. George W. Bush's so-called 'War Ultimatum Speech' at the White House, March 18, 2003, the day before the start of the war in Iraq.

This book is largely about the tragedy of conflicting worldviews turned lethally wrong in the twenty-first century. While some had believed that the fall of the USSR and the 1990s American moment as a hyperpower meant the end of History of grand ideological battles, this book shows all the contrary. It deals with the paradox of devastating wars in the name of liberty and fighting terror as unilaterally defined by the White

House, the grand narrative of jihadism and its consistently failing governance, the attempts by the governments of the region to navigate the many shockwaves of these conflicts and the sprawling chaos, and the disillusioned masses of Afghanistan, the Middle East and North Africa, who have been trying to survive—often via migrations—the violence, poverty, and instability that have reached unprecedented levels. Following the terror attacks against the World Trade Center in Manhattan, New York City, by the terror group Al-Qaida on September 11, 2001, the US Government undertook one of the most destructive and yet one of the most naïve global projects the country had ever produced. In a matter of weeks and months, the White House and Neoconservatives from within the Republican Party, undertook to eradicate all terrorist organizations, worldwide, and the social fact of terrorism itself. Their ambition—hubris?—did not stop there. They soon announced the United States would also make the Middle East region emerge more peaceful, more democratic, more stable, and more prosperous from a series of US-led wars, local institutions dissolution, and brand-new state- and nation-building efforts across Afghanistan, the Middle East and North Africa. Logically, it failed.

As this book documents and explains, the War on Terror (WoT) has led to a transformed Middle East, in more than one way. Yet none of it is the Middle East the War on Terror and its corollary policy—the 'Greater Middle East' project—endeavored to produce. Many political commentators were initially eager to situate the 9/11/2001 terror attacks and ensuing wars as a validation sign of Samuel Huntington's (1998) contested 'clash of civilizations'. Yet most intellectuals and academics—at least, outside the United States—rapidly undertook the task of deconstructing this fallacy supposedly opposing a Western civilization defending itself from an Arab Muslim civilization which had—Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington had argued—been degenerating for too long out of religious hatred toward modernity and Western culture. Unfortunately, this narrative, largely based on old prejudices and supported by various lobby groups in Washington, became more palatable to the public than the Neoconservatives' more complex agenda. And this ineluctable civilizational clash idea remains to this day powerful among extreme-right militants and white supremacists. Though different—and President George W. Bush made a few short but clear statements exonerating ordinary Muslims from jihadism—, both the Neoconservatives' imperial impetus to reshape Middle East countries to the image of the United

States (a modern, democratic, and free-market country) and the extreme-right/supremacist movements have shared the idea that the use of military force—within or without the legal framework of the United Nations—should be used to deal with the risks arising from the Middle East. Meanwhile, the idea of carefully negotiating peace—for instance between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, or between Algeria and Morocco over the Western Sahara—largely fell out of favor and the dogma of hit hard and impose your deal seems to have been the favored policy of the past two decades.

A first crack in the simplistic narrative of the clash of civilizations came from the sharp division that arose from the looming threat of the American invasion of Iraq, in 2002 and early 2003. Several Western countries, such as France and Germany, staunchly opposed it. They led a formidable diplomatic resistance to these war efforts at the United Nations, which did not endorse the US-British request to support an invasion of Iraq. Across the Middle East, intellectuals and independent public figures from various political long stood against what was, and still is, seen as an illegitimate, unnecessary, and counter-productive series of aggressions of Arab nations, starting with Iraq, and then continuing in Libya, Syria, Yemen, etc.

Understandably, in the Middle East, too, were also some figures who supported the 2003 invasion of Iraq and other wars against Arab regimes. Primarily of course, the old opponents to the regime of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, and later of dictators Muammar Al-Gaddafi and Bashar Al-Assad, but also some governments of countries with long grievances against these, such as the governments of Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, among others. The intellectual fault lines around the 2003 US–British war on Iraq had thus nothing to do with any supposed civilizational frontline of any kind. They reflected more classic clashes of perceived self interests as well as worldviews, especially between those who believe war can and shall solve political issues and those who believe that wars launched against a country without imminent threat from it are illegitimate and will increase instability or even chaos, as colonial history has so often proved in this part of the world. This meant, twenty years ago, a political clash between, largely, the American Neoconservatives' naïveté of seeing the world potentially at peace if led by a benevolent yet hegemonic America—which sometimes had to make war to rebuke evil enterprises and expand the benefits of democratization and liberalized markets worldwide—, and the other, more careful—more

realistic?—worldview according to which humankind, nations, and international relations are already so fragile and too often chaotic, by nature or by design, that all shall refrain from adding any further harm to our frail international diplomatic architecture. This also means, paradoxically, that the more pessimistic—or dystopian—actors may be about the capacity of humankind or the world to ever attain and sustain a form of national or international harmony, the less likely one was to support any such doomed Neoconservative project of democratization of the Middle East by war.

As there was international, intellectual opposition to these 'mad wars', especially those against Iraq, Libya, and Yemen (later also widely called 'forever wars'), it appears logical that this book gives a voice and perspective not solely to either Western or Eastern groups of academics, as is quite often the case. This book is thus an international, inter-cultural, and trans-disciplinary project that has been co-directed by Dr. Moosa Elayah and me. It involves authors principally drawn from or working in the Middle East region, as well as several authors from the US and NATO member countries. Yet this book aims to give a greater voice to people in the region than is generally the case when it comes to the consequences and legacy of the past two decades of US wars in the region.

In reviewing and commenting on the WoT, the movement of intellectuals and academics is not taking revenge against the Neoconservatives who waged unnecessary wars and devastated several nations, despite our collective warnings and call for diplomacy. Instead, this book is a necessary reappraisal of the WoT, its evolution, and consequences onto a deeply disrupted Middle East region, marked by numerous violent conflicts, numerous terror groups and militias, and traversed by millions of asylum seekers fleeing it.

To write this book, an international team of co-authors has been gathered, and several of the authors met, virtually or physically, during a conference in Doha, Qatar, in Fall 2021. Their chapters reflect, as much as possible, the evolution of both the WoT and that of the region over the past twenty years. It particularly focused on the WoT impacts in terms of oft-changing state- and nation-building policies, of redefining the local, national, and international governance, as well as in terms of state and diplomatic stability in the region, including the aspects of energy trade and large-scale migration of those had to live with the WoT. To inform us on the evolution of the Middle East under the WoT, the authors built upon a large number of past and recent interviews, from Afghanistan

to Libya and Yemen, consulted past regional surveys, and undertook additional field work to better understand the conditions in which the WoT unfolded and generated lasting impacts, far from the White House and D.C. think tanks. We argue that no one could truly appreciate, for instance, the chaos of the US evacuation of Afghanistan without having spoken to Afghans who were in Kabul in that period and to some of the thousands of civilians who were evacuated, without having experienced the intense heat, humidity, and dust of the Al-Udeid air base area in Qatar which served as an improvised main transit place until they could go to safe third countries. No one could truly understand the lasting Iraqi resentment toward the US government, despite billion dollars spent in reconstruction, without having witnessed the genuine sense of pride of Iraqis for their nation's rich historical past, and how they had felt humiliated, sometimes on a daily basis and during years, by military men who had not been trained for policing streets or raiding houses at night in an Arab, Muslim nation. No one could understand the tragedy happening in the Mediterranean Sea now, without having seen and spoken to some of the hundreds and thousands of young Afghan and Arab men, women and whole families desperately trying to reach Europe every day to escape the instability, armed violence and surging poverty in the region. Although this is not a book of cultural or political anthropology, field research has been used by several authors to provide the necessary depth to the politics, geopolitics, and policies of the WoT and their legacy in the region.

All authors and co-editors acknowledge and are very grateful for the generally anonymous yet useful contribution of our interviewees for this book, and for the general support we received from people across the broad region. It is simply impossible to thank them all here, and some do prefer to remain anonymous for obvious reasons. We are and will remain, nevertheless, very grateful for the sharing of their personal experience, thoughts, data, and insights, as well as for welcoming us into their offices, houses, or refugee shelters for some. Spending time with us or with our colleagues is not simply a favor done to us, it is also a gift of time to help social scientists triangulate various sources of information and eventually come up with a clearer, more accurate understanding of what has happened in the Middle East and why some policies succeeded or failed the way they did. Thus, this book provides research-based chapters that feature a number of new insights as to what the broad region went through during the past two decades, and why it has affected in

return the US policy and its role in the region—and arguably, the whole world—so negatively.

Also, we want to express our gratitude to the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies for its funding and hosting of the conference '*Governance of public policies during and after conflicts in the Middle East*', from which several chapters were sourced for this book. Finally, we dedicate this book in memory of the dozens of millions of families who have been forcibly displaced by the war on terror and its consequences, the millions of people irremediably injured in their bodies and minds, the hundreds of thousands of persons directly killed by these wars, and to all the grieving families whose life has been irremediably affected by the WoT.

Our planetary system and international relations may be fragile in nature, especially in this age of numerous armed non-state actors and climate change crisis, but this is precisely why this war on terror and the massive bombing of fragile countries should have never happened, and certainly not with foolish and ill-defined policy goals, as this book will illustrate. This book will be no consolation, and will certainly not undo the harm done, but—by debunking the dangerous myths of a 'positive legacy' of the WoT for the USA—it is a small contribution toward the truth and justice about these dark two decades that is deserved to all the victims and their families. This may, perhaps, help prepare a younger generation to refrain from trying again to eradicate by the massive use of military force the social dynamics of terrorism which, as the recent past demonstrated, feeds on and spreads because of military violence and foreign occupation.

Doha, Qatar
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Laurent A. Lambert and Moosa Elayah

Almost exactly twenty years after the terror attacks of 9/11/2001, the world witnessed the humiliating withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan under the 'protection' of the new rulers of Kabul and the country, the Taliban. The two-decade-long 'War on Terror' (WoT), an umbrella term for many US conflicts abroad, had unambiguously failed in that country and well beyond. US-designated terror groups have remained active in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya, and have been spreading across Asia, the Sahel, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The past two decades saw several terror attacks on US soil, including by Al-Qaeda-affiliated jihadists. US allies and partners in the Middle East—chiefly Israel and Saudi Arabia—have been repeatedly attacked by Iranian-supported groups, all considered terrorist organizations by Washington. Meanwhile, the long-term economic cost of the post-9/11 wars has been estimated at more than eight trillion US dollars (Crawford, 2021), as can be seen in

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UNITED STATES COSTS OF THE POST-9/11 WARS, FY2001-FY2022 Estimated Congressional Appropriations and Spending in Current Billions of U.S. Dollars, Excluding Future Interest Payments on War Borrowing	
	$ Billions*
Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) (War) Appropriations	
Department of Defense (DOD) (Incl. $42 billion request for FY22)	2,101
State Department/USAID (Incl. $8 billion request for FY22)	189
Estimated Interest on Borrowing for OCO Spending	1,087
Increases to DOD Base Budget Due to Post-9/11 Wars	884
Post-9/11 Veterans' Medical and Disability Care Through FY22	465
Homeland Security Prevention and Response to Terrorism	1,117
Total War Appropriations and War-Related Spending through FY22	**$5,843**
Estimated Future Obligations for Veterans' Care, FY23-FY50	*> 2,200*
Total War-Related Spending Through FY22 and Estimated Obligations for Veterans' Care through FY50	***$8,043***
*Rounded to the nearest billion. Amounts for FY22 are budget requests.	

Fig. 1.1 United States costs of the post-9/11 wars, fiscal year 2001–fiscal year 2022 (*Source* Crawford, 2021, pp. 6–7)

Fig. 1.1, and the deployment capacity of the American war machine has been seriously eroded by these multiple conflicts abroad (US Department of Defense, 2018).

Although not as deadly for American lives as the war in Vietnam, the WoT has constituted the costliest war defeat of US history, and, this book argues, the most severe one in terms of foreign policy and geostrategic consequences in a region where it once was the unrivalled hyperpower. Several chapters of this book will illustrate these two points, especially regarding what the White House called the 'Greater Middle East' project, i.e., an American-led policy of pacification and democratization of the region, defined as extending from Afghanistan in Central Asia to Morocco in North Africa, and including all the Middle East region as generally delineated. Although no single US President since the Obama administration has labeled one of his major military operations or war in the Middle East under the banner of the WoT, letting some to assume that this has long ended, it is important to highlight that not only the core element of the WoT approach has remained (initiating or contributing to armed conflicts in the Middle East to eradicate terrorist groups and enemy states in the name of fighting terror), but also the legal basis for the WoT have remained. Developed right after the 9/11 terror attacks,

the special legal architecture that has enabled and facilitated the start of these armed conflicts has remained to this day, and has been used by all US Presidents so far this century, from George W. Bush to Joseph R. Biden (Bridgeman & Finucane, 2022; Bridgeman & Rosen, 2022). This particularly bellicose approach to foreign policy, often marked by an exacerbated unilateralism and the disregard for the diplomacies and populations of the Global South, has been heavily criticized in the US and around the world. Not the least because it rapidly backfired against American interests worldwide.

By 2008, political journalist and author Fareed Zakaria had started claiming that America was experiencing a geostrategic decline as emerging economies (China, India, Russia, among others) had been growing fast in economic, diplomatic, and geopolitical importance. For Zakaria, the world had entered a 'Post-American' period and the US should resolutely change its global strategy, "*moving from its traditional role of dominating hegemon to that of a more pragmatic, honest broker*" (Zakaria, 2008), by sharing power, creating coalitions, building legitimacy, and (re-)defining the global agenda. Yet, instead of supporting the multilateral system for peace and building large coalitions, the US has long remained in a position of contested hegemon. It kept on initiating additional conflicts in the Middle East under President Obama's two terms (2009–2017) and then under the Trump administration's foreign policy (2017–2021), which has included the US withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear agreement, the total disregard for Palestinians while moving the US embassy to Jerusalem, and the attempt to depart from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. This escalation in unilateralism eventually put Washington at odds with nearly all of its NATO and non-NATO allies and partners alike.

Despite spending hundreds of billion US dollars for reconstruction, security, and nation building in selected countries of the Middle East and North Africa region, the reputation of the US in the region had heavily suffered from the 2003 invasion of Iraq on bogus claims of weapons of mass destruction threatening America and its allies, and then from the post-invasions violence, insecurity, and harsh treatments of any suspected civilians, including women and children, as well as from thousands of cases of torture, and the severe disruption of the lives of dozens of millions of Afghans and Iraqis, among others. Against such a grim background, the US could hardly remain the foreign yet unrivaled super-power in the region, in what had been from 1991 to the mid-2000s, the "American moment in the Arab Middle East" (Laurens, 2004). As Zbignew

Brzezinski (2007) once put it in the columns of the Washington Post: "[T]*he "war on terror" has gravely damaged the United States internationally. For Muslims, the similarity between the rough treatment of Iraqi civilians by the U.S. military and of the Palestinians by the Israelis has prompted a widespread sense of hostility toward the United States in general*".

This general hostility towards US foreign policy has been surveyed many times in the Middle East and forms a consensus in the literature. For instance, the Arab Barometer academic program has reported the results of large-scale surveys performed in Arabic across Arab countries since 2006. As of 2012, a period with fewer civilian deaths than in the years directly following the American invasion, the Arab Barometer survey reported nevertheless that a strong majority of Iraqis expressed that armed operations towards the US were legitimate, irrespective of their sectarian affiliations. Yet among Shiite Iraqis, the largest demographic group of the country, nearly three-quarters of respondents agreed with the statement: "*The United States' interference in the region justifies armed operations against the United States everywhere*", as can be shown in Fig. 1.2. That didn't mean that the Iraqi people, Shiites, Sunnis, or of any other confession were against American *citizens* or their culture. The majority of surveyed Iraqis, quite paradoxically, showed an appreciation for both in the survey.[1] It reflected instead that the US foreign policy in the region, the War on Terror and its Greater Middle East project, were so hated that people supported armed violence against the US state, and chiefly its military arm, wherever it was in the world. In other words, the war on terror was not only failing to protect the US, it was backfiring.

The overall negative image of the US has remained and in 2019, another Arab barometer survey of Iraqis showed that the US elicited little trust and support, while its strategic competitors had become much more popular among Iraqis.

> *Iraqis' preferences for whom they want stronger international relations with have shifted away from the "Western bloc" and more toward the "Eastern" one. Roughly half prefer that economic relations become stronger with China (51 percent) and Turkey (47 percent), followed by Russia (43 percent) [Against only 35% with the USA, a minority of Iraqis, according to the*

[1] The Arab Barometer. (2012). *Iraq Public Opinion Survey*. https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/Iraq_Public_Opinion_Survey_2012.pdf.

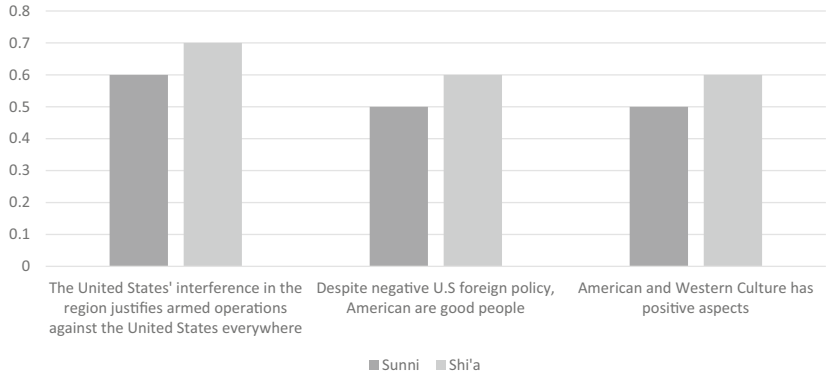

Fig. 1.2 Iraqi attitudes towards the US, by Sect (*Source* Authors, based on data from the Arab Barometer [2012])

> *report, p.15.] (…) More than twice as many Iraqis believe that Putin's (38 percent) and Erdoğan's (37 percent) foreign policies are better for the region than those of Trump (16 percent). Similarly, majorities prefer greater aid from China (57 percent), the European Union (55 percent), and Russia (53 percent). (…) Results on attitudes toward the United States appear to reflect general fatigue with nearly 15 years of continued American military presence in the country.*
>
> Source: Arab Barometer (2019).[2]

This lasting impopularity of the US in Iraq and the region has made the 2021 withdrawal a geostrategic win for what the US government considers as hostile states within the region, such as Iran and Syria, and 'near-peer competitors' outside of the region, such as China and Russia, as this book will further develop.

[2] Arab Barometer. (2019, pp. 14–15). *Arab Barometer V Iraq Country Report*. https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/ABV_Iraq_Report_Public-Opinion_2019.pdf.

Why This Book?

After two decades of WoT, it is particularly important, for both academic and policy purposes, to clearly understand *why* the formidable mobilization of means and might has transformed into such a blatant geostrategic defeat of the US government and its allies in the broad Middle East region. The magnitude of this defeat was so substantial that some international relations specialists have called for a rethinking of their discipline and its main paradigms, with for instance Bertrand Badie explaining this bewildering paradox of our time: "Power is becoming powerless, the US superpower does not win the wars and even weakness seems currently more efficient than power" (Badie, 2020, p. 1). This situation is all the more perplexing that the WoT has achieved a remarkable series of tactical victories—such as toppling hostile regimes in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya; the crippling of enemy states Iran, North Korea, and Syria's economies by sanctions; the successful targeted killings of lead terrorist Usama Bin Laden, ISIS cult leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, and Iran's most eminent Revolutionary Guard officer, general Qasem Soleimani, among many others. Leaving the broad theories of international relations largely aside, we will pay greater attention to policy paradoxes that need to be explained: why have so much military, diplomatic, and financial power, and so many clear tactical victories, not mechanically led to what was supposed to become a new and greater Middle East? Or at the very least, why hasn't it led to a more pro-US Middle East? What has happened in this broad region that has made it the place where the WoT, in its various declinations, so wretchedly failed?

There has been a lot of partisan finger-pointing and blaming over the past decade in the US. For instance, (Republican-nominated) Ambassador Paul Bremer, in charge of Iraq's Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003 and 2004, openly blamed the (Democrat) Obama administration for the chaos in the country that enabled the rise of ISIS in 2014; while a substantial part of Donald Trump's 2016 primary campaign against candidate Jeb Bush (brother of former President George W. Bush) focused on the Bush administration's lies supporting the 2003 invasion of Iraq and highlighted the disastrous political, economic, and security outcomes it had long generated. By contrast with these partisan analyses, what the authors of this book—all professional observers of the region, many working there—, provide as an added value and insight, is a non-partisan

and external perspective, an eye on what the US has brought, generated, and left behind in the Middle East. This regional perspective brings insights, understanding, and details that no other book on the war on terror has ever provided, ranging from the field study in Libya of the flows of forcibly displaced persons within and from the region, to an interview with a Taliban government representative, as well as the analysis of the faltering public administration of oil by the Houthi militia in Yemen, and insights from Doha, Qatar, about the multiple diplomatic tensions and spats over natural gas exploration and trade within the region. These examples—that could seem disconnected from the WoT to foreign observers—not only shed light on poorly documented facets of the new Middle East that has emerged over the past two decades, they also enable us to better understand why the region never transformed into what the WoT and corollary policies initially anticipated. It explains this lasting policy failure and how it created instead an unsustainable position wherein the US kept on spending trillion dollars and yet eventually had to withdraw to somehow cut its losses, without having met its main policy goals: eradicating jihadist groups, pacifying the region, and supporting a growing number of pro-American democracies there.

We do acknowledge that several domestic US events and trends have had an influence, limited for some, more important for others, on American foreign policy over that period. Yet most of these will be considered out of the scope of this MENA-centered book, such as the role of domestic economic factors—chiefly, the 2008 economic crisis—, or the US political infighting in the White House, particularly under the Trump administration, or the role of the changing mediascape in what is a vibrant democracy, inter alia. Instead, this book takes the perspective of the retrospective *why*, and does so from a specific Middle East perspective.

The book focuses on what has happened in the broad Middle East and what was of importance for the region (its governments and inhabitants first and foremost), and eventually transformed it over the past two decades. That doesn't mean that the book will not consider the most salient issues in American foreign policymaking over that period. But that does mean it will only address those that were important enough to explain *why* the WoT evolved as it did. This book will include chapters about dynamics which have been poorly covered by fellow researchers and the press, or at least not against the background of the two decades of WoT (sometimes inherited and renamed) and the 'transformational diplomacy' promoted by US Secretary of State Condolezza Rice, President

Obama's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), and President Trump's 'maximum pressure' approach. As all of these have influenced the broad Middle East, they will be integrated into our analysis, though they will not constitute the main objects of research, as this is no book of American foreign policymaking as much as it is about its various impacts and legacy in the Middle East. Of great importance, several chapters will document the changing policy rationales, regional legacies, and geostrategic consequences of two decades of war, with a perspective from what we will simply call 'the broad region'. This terminology shares the same geographic scope of the 'Greater Middle East' political notion, but it does not support the idea that the Republican Neoconservatives' project ever became a reality. It is important to highlight that the failure of the Neoconservative project is unambiguous, and that we are entering, as we will explain, the era of a post-American Middle East.

A New Era

A post-American Middle East does not mean that the US has totally withdrawn or is absent from the region. Nor does it mean that Washington is non-influential there. The US remains, after all, the world's leading economic and military power of our times, and its economic and military support is still very important to countries like Jordan, Israel (to keep its regional military supremacy), and Egypt, where bilateral aid provides a substantial support to the governments' military capacities. The US' economic might is also still particularly understood in countries like Iran and Syria, where sanctions have stifled the nation's economic vitality. But the Middle East is not the America-led region that it largely was between 1991 and 2004 anymore, following the exceptionally powerful 1991 crushing of Iraqi troops and liberation of Kuwait, the disbandment of the pro-Iraq diplomatic axis (Yemen, Jordan, Libya, and the Palestinian leadership), and the dissolution of the Soviet Union that same year. This era of American supremacy lasted until the combined effects of the 2004 escalation of asymmetric, anti-US warfare in both Afghanistan and Iraq; until most people in the US and around the world realized that the threat of mass destruction weapons was a deception, and pictures and reports of systemic torture in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib prisons eroded trust in both US values and reliability across the broad Middle East.

In the 1990s, no country could challenge the supremacy of the US, be it economically, militarily, or diplomatically. At best, enemy states could

survive the US hegemony and make incendiary comments, but no military attack on its troops. It was this American Middle East that saw the birth and development of the Oslo Peace Process between Israelis and Palestinians, the 1994 Israel–Jordan Peace Treaty, and the first Gulf cities hosting Israeli delegations, as in Doha and Muscat for some years. Even the media and academic landscapes benefited from this American moment in the region. The launch of the more liberal Al-Jazeera news channel in 1996 and of branches of major American Universities across the Gulf countries that decade, pioneered an increasingly diversified and liberalized mediascape and intellectual life. Although the region was characterized by autocratic regimes, there was an air of reform and increasing overture towards political liberal ideas. Even in Iran, the election in 1997 of reformist President Khatami, who had campaigned for reforms and a pragmatic thaw in tie with the West in general, seemed to announce the possibility of improving bilateral relations with Washington, then an attractive potential economic partner with formidable soft power for the Iranian youth.

The regime in Teheran, which had remained one of the US' most vocal foes in the region since the so-called 'Islamic Revolution' of 1979, had started in 1990 to implement cautious liberalization policies of its economy, diplomacy, and media. Reformist President Khatami's highly mediatized meeting with Pope John Paul II in 1999 seemed to confirm that a new diplomatic era with the West had started. Although the Iranian conservative deep state fought back as much as it could against this liberal wave, by closing some newspapers and violently clapping down on pro-democracy student demonstrations, the nail in the coffin of Khatami's diplomatic agenda eventually came from abroad. It came from other Islamists, far overseas.

9/11/2001 and the War on Terror

The Al-Qaeda terror attacks against the US in 2001 radically transformed America's foreign policy towards the Middle East region. This transformation is now well documented, though most of the WoT literature has become particularly outdated as we will see. What is much less documented, and not studied in a comprehensive manner, is how the WoT influenced the broad Middle East region in many ways. This approach, however, is fundamental to be able to understand why the WoT didn't work and couldn't work, despite formidable means being invested. This book endeavors to understand the *why*.s of this dual political and

geostrategic failure, by focusing on the world region which has been at the core of the 'Global War on Terror', as officially declared by George W. Bush on September 16, 2001.

Much has been written on the genesis of the WoT and its early evolution, on the American hyperpower era following the 1991 Gulf war against Iraq and fall of the USSR on the one hand, and the rise of the terror group Al-Qaeda in Taliban held Afghanistan during the 1990s on the other (see e.g., Coll, 2004; Laurens, 2004; Roy, 2008; Scheuer, 2004). There is also an abundant literature on the Neoconservative faction from the Republicans which has been influencing a messianic—and largely delusional—President George W. Bush after the 9/11/2001, implementing their ideology of transformative wars in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and North Africa (Suskind, 2004; Woodward, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008), a region the White House used to designate as part of the 'Greater Middle East', for propaganda purposes.

Fundamentally, the literature on the WoT is difficult to delimitate given the fuzziness of the WoT idea itself. Shall it simply focus on anti-terrorism and the wars against the regimes supporting it, as initially devised? Does it include all the ethical and legal problems of the anti-terrorism legislation and the archipelago of torture sites abroad (Bridgeman & Finucane, 2022; Hannah, 2006; Taguba, 2008)? Shall it include the whole literature about the psychological aftermath and related public health issues (Baker, 2014; Sirin et al., 2021), as well as the 'culture of fear' and islamophobia it has disseminated across the US and well beyond, via mass media and hate-loaded cultural products (Brzezinski, 2007; Gresh, 2009)? Because of this vast array of sub-topics, the literature on the WoT appears fragmented, and indeed generally deals with only one or two specific aspects at once. Hence our desire to dedicate to it a whole book, updated, academically rigorous, and non-partisan. The WoT is not solely a Republican policy.

The Obama Presidency (2009–2017) initially tried to take its distance with the WoT ambitions, terminology, and worst practices, including waterboarding torture. The first Obama administration highlighted instead the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) preventive approach,[3] in the US first, but also abroad, and renamed the US wars as 'Overseas Contingency Operations'. Despite this change in semantics, the Obama

[3] Office of the President of the United States, Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States, Dec. 2011, www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/sip-final.pdf.

administration did inherit the de-territorialized war against spreading jihadist networks and the territorialized wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In both cases, the US was facing asymmetric conflicts that proved extremely difficult to sustain. The Obama administration gradually found itself increasing the number of countries of direct military interventions, including Libya and Syria, and especially so via drones and special forces, as in Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, and various Sub-Saharan African countries. Although by the early to mid-2010s, a generalized war fatigue made the WoT topic of decreasing interest to academics and journalists alike, the WoT was continuously involving more countries, reaching 85 countries in 2020 (see Savell, 2021).

There is an abundant literature on *how* the war on terror has long been failing, most particularly since the controversial US invasion of Iraq in 2003. This ranges from relatively dry and to-the-point military and intelligence reviews of US military activities (e.g., Taguba, 2008; US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2014), to more detailed first-hand accounts by the protagonists (e.g., Bush, 2010; Feith, 2009; Gates, 2014; Powell, 2012; Rumsfeld, 2011). Of particular importance is Richard Clarke's (2004) book. In it, the former counter-terrorism highest official under President Georges W. Bush described how that administration and the Neoconservatives had ignored intelligence warnings about Al-Qaeda before 9/11/2001 and had subsequently utilized these terror attacks to start a totally unrelated war on Saddam Husein's regime in Iraq. To do so, Clarke (2004) explained, the Bush administration had been misleading the American people about the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein, which was not related to 9/11 or Al-Qaeda efforts against the US. Another important acknowledgment candidly explained in several of these books, is the explanation, years too late, of how unprepared the American leadership was to deal with Iraq, and the hidden tensions between the ideologues surrounding the President and the more pragmatic policymakers at the Pentagon. Former Secretary of State General Colin Powell (2012) summarized with diplomacy this matter.

> I wanted to make sure that [the President] understood that military action and its aftermath had serious consequences, many of which would be unforeseen, dangerous, and hard to control. Most of the briefing he had been receiving had been focused on the military option -- defeat of the Iraqi army and bringing down Saddam Hussein and his regime. Not enough attention had been given either to non-military options or

> the aftermath of a military conquest. (...) According to plans being confidently put forward, Iraq was expected to somehow transform itself into a stable country with democratic leaders ninety days after we took Baghdad. I believed such hopes were unrealistic. (...)
>
> By early March 2003, the President and other world leaders decided that UN efforts would not succeed, and the war came. Military victory quickly followed. Baghdad fell on April 9, 2003. Hussein and his regime were brought down, we declared "Mission Accomplished" and celebrated victory... And chaos erupted. We did not assert control and authority over the country, especially Baghdad. We did not bring with us the capacity to impose our will. We did not take charge. (Powell, 2012, pp. 209–211)

A number of journalistic publications have significantly enriched our knowledge and understanding of the WoT, often by depicting the incoherences, hubris, and even denial of realities by key protagonists (see e.g., Suskind, 2004; Woodward, 2006, 2007, 2008). Academic publications have generally been critical about the multiple policy and conceptual incoherences of the WoT, mounting ethical issues (including widespread torture), and overall negative to very negative outcomes only a few years after its start (see e.g., Ahmed, 2013; Bellamy et al., 2007; Fouskas & Bülent, 2005; Lustick, 2006).

A key limitation with this broad literature on the WoT is that it has been written long before any withdrawal date from Afghanistan was announced or before negotiations had even started with the Taliban, or with the Iranian regime over a nuclear agreement, or with armed radical Shiite militias in Iraq for elections to be held in peace. In 2021 and 2022, however, several articles and commentaries on the twenty years of the WoT were published. They essentially acknowledged *how* the Americans found themselves mechanically drowning into a desperate situation overseas (see e.g., Kissinger, 2021), the particularly chaotic situation of the Middle East now, and the need for more US political pragmatism in that specific region (Gause, 2022), an area that the US troops should not totally leave to its strategic competitors (chiefly China but also Russia and Iran), despite its decreased status in a region that can now be referred to as a 'Post-American Middle East' (Elayah & Lambert, 2021; Kaye, 2022).

Structure of This Book

This book is divided into two sections. The first one is about the wars, the subsequent chaos that rapidly spread within and without Afghanistan and Iraq, and the failed American and Jihadist nation-building endeavors in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. The second section of the book focuses on some major consequences and legacy of twenty years of the WoT in the region.

Chapters 2 and 3 of the book provide a useful background about the post-9/11 US context and the development of the wars and nation-building efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, respectively. Both illustrate the new visions and unchecked ambitions that have transformed the two countries with particularly ill-prepared American policies of transformation of states and societies for both countries. Amid various forms of American military interventions and political near-chaos in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, radical religious groups (both Sunnis and Shiites) have thrived across the region, sometimes with only the desire to capture energy resources and deep anti-Americanism as their common denominators. The fourth and fifth chapters deal with the specific contexts of Yemen, Northern Iraq, and Syria, and how non-state actors, sometimes helped by foreign powers, have been engineering, with various degrees of success, state and nation-building efforts, based on both access to oil resources and religion-derived ideologies: Salafi jihadism in Northern Iraq and Syria; Shiite revolutionary jihadism in Northern Yemen.

Chapter 4 shows how the Houthis have been using the matter of oil resources control to bolster their governability and claims of controlling Yemen as the sovereign government of the (still divided) country and most impoverished nation, even when they lacked physical control over fields and export terminals. The staunchly anti-American Houthis have been able to capture large swathes of Yemen and some of its oil resources to legitimize their war against the internationally recognized Yemeni government, currently based in Aden, and its Saudi and Emirati backers. Despite the increase in drone attacks under the Obama administration and the Trump-supported Saudi Emirati-led full-scale war on Yemen, the Houthis' sustained efforts to build a rebel oil regime are part of larger measures to establish and legitimize their (rebel) governance of the country. So far, international attempts to disrupt this oil regime under progress by using international sanctions have proven ineffective and even counterproductive. Houthi rulers have found ways to shift and offset the

costs of sanctions onto civilians, worsening an already dire humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

Chapter 5 illustrates how the political and military shocks of the WoT have very negatively affected the state sovereignty, general security, and the oil industries in Iraq and Syria. It illustrates how the US invasion of Iraq and subsequent intervention in Syria, a decade later, failed to stabilize the countries and to restore and rapidly increase their pre-invasion oil productions, as initially planned. It led instead to the rise of anti-American (many of them pro-Iranian) armed groups, and favored anti-American policy actors, with strong Russian and Iranian military support for Bashar Al-Assad in Syria; Iranian support of specific Shiite political parties in Iraq; and Chinese financial investments in Iraq's vast oil resources. Neither the Syrian nor Iraqi peoples nor the American energy companies have been able to benefit as initially planned from these countries' respective oil wealth since the American interventions. Meanwhile, three geostrategic adversaries of the US—namely China, Iran, and Russia —have gained the upper hand in these countries and are positioned to greatly benefit from their oil wealth in the years and decades to come.

Though the targets of the WoT, both Shiite and Sunni Jihadist experiments at state and nation (re-)building have constituted direct and antithetical efforts against the Greater Middle East project. Although the jihadist experiment eventually collapsed in Iraq and Syria, the US plan to utilize Iraq's oil wealth to rebuild the country and make it a new, pro-US democracy never could materialize.

The second section of the book deals with the impact and main legacies of the War on Terror. Chapter 6 deals with the mass migrations that rose out of post-invasion chaos. It shows how the political destabilization of several countries following foreign interventions (American-led first and foremost, but then also Iranian and Russian interventions) have generated an estimated 38–60 million of internally displaced persons and refugees (Vine et al., 2021). Most of them, tellingly, being Afghans, Iraqis, and Syrians.

Chapter 7 documents a more positive case. In line with the Obama administration's focus on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), it documents how the Gulf monarchies have deeply reformed their approach and policies towards the prevention of Jihadism. This is of particular interest, as most of the literature has long highlighted how they had tolerated or even promoted it in the 1980s, with the US President Reagan administration's indirect support because of the Cold War and the international

fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during that decade (see e.g., Ahmed, 2013; Coll, 2004; Roy, 2008).

Chapter 8 then addresses how the Trump Administration's failed attempt to transform and fix the Israeli-Arab issue once and for all, was deeply flawed in favor of the American-Israeli alliance and could only be logically resisted by the Palestinian government. If the Trump diplomacy and 2020 Abraham Accords can be seen as a sign of diplomatic progress by some, with diplomatic relations having been established between Israel and two Arabian Gulf states as well as Sudan and Morocco, the chapter shows how this imperial logic of external transformation of the Middle East to fix its complex political problems could lead to no peace at all between Palestinians and Israelis, as illustrated by the grave escalation of tensions and violence between the two nations in 2022 and 2023.

Chapter 9 illustrates how the Trump Administration's policy to polarize regional politics and delegate to the Egyptians, Emiratis, Moroccans, and Saudis the inherited WoT—largely redefined by the Trump administration as a fight against Iran and political Islamism—has led to two poorly known yet very disruptive events across the region. First, the 2021 rupture in diplomatic relations and energy trade in the Arab Maghreb, as Algiers' stopped providing natural gas to Morocco following Washington's pro-Rabat positioning on their long dispute over the Western Saharan region, and for which Rabat accused Algiers of supporting the Front Polisario 'terrorist' organization. Second, and of greater geostrategic importance, the initial Trump policy of strong support to a few client Middle Eastern states (i.e., Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) has led to the 2018 creation of a second international gas forum for exporting countries to be based in the Middle East. The Cairo-based *East Mediterranean Gas Forum* (*EMGF*) was launched despite the presence of an already well-established international gas forum, based in Doha, the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF), because the latter included Algeria, Iran, Qatar, and Russia, as influential member countries. At a time when President Trump pressured Qatar for allegedly supporting Iran and political Islam, this additional gas forum in the Eastern Mediterranean area of the Middle East enabled some of its members (Egypt, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the US, as observer) to try to counterbalance the energy geopolitical weight of some of their diplomatic rivals from the other forum, especially Iran, Qatar, and Russia, in a form of competition for the hard power that gas exports towards the EU market could provide. Despite a recent thaw in ties in

the region, one may consider that this new gas forum remains unnecessarily divisive, especially considering the 2022-23 international gas crisis (Lambert et al., 2022).

This book, in the end, illustrates why the changing and ill-defined American foreign policies towards the Middle East, under the name of—or simply inheriting—the deeply unilateral WoT, were incapable of devising locally coherent, locally accepted, locally implementable, and stable policies that could serve American interests and the vision of a democratic, prosperous, and pro-American Middle East. Despite trillions of dollars spent, and at the human costs of close to a million deaths because of the post-9/11 wars, and dozens of millions of internally displaced persons and refugees (Vine et al., 2021), this book illustrates why the WoT has failed and led, so far, to the largest geostrategic defeat of the USA since the Vietnam War. This has contributed to the *de facto* revision of the Carter doctrine, which had explicitly made the security of the Persian Gulf oil states part and parcel of America's vital interests since 1980, and it has also meant that the countries of the region had to increase their international alliances with other powers to compensate for the withdrawing American forces, thereby accelerating the regional emergence of a new multilateral order: the Post-American Middle East.

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CHAPTER 10

Conclusions

Laurent A. Lambert and Moosa Elayah

In early 2001, prior to the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror (WoT) that followed, only the Palestinian Territories and some rural areas in Sudan and Yemen were featuring armed conflicts within the Arab Middle East and North Africa. The situation in the Western Sahara/South of Morocco was overall calm, Algeria had virtually completed its transition to a post-civil war new order, and only Somalia and Afghanistan, then both considered on the outskirts of the MENA region, were facing particularly difficult times after the fall of their respective internationally recognized government, the decade prior. Twenty years of WoT after, nearly two thirds of all Middle Eastern and North African countries are either facing a situation of civil war (e.g., Libya, Syria, Yemen), of frequent armed incidents or armed conflicts (e.g., Iraq, the Palestinian Territories, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan), or are dangerously close to economic collapse while hosting millions of vulnerable refugees and/or internally

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displaced people (i.e., Afghanistan, Iran, Lebanon, and to a lesser extent, Jordan and Turkey). Tellingly, the vast majority of these dozens of million refugees and IDPs originate from the region, chiefly Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, i.e., countries of various American interventions in the name of fighting terror.

Meanwhile, in the global terrorism index 2022 of the Institute for Economics and Peace, Afghanistan ranked first and Iraq second, as they were by far the countries most affected by terrorism in the world.[1] Syria, a country which still hosts US troops to fight terror groups like Daesh/ISIS, ranked five, out of 178. Unfortunately, the year before, the ranking was overall similar, and it has been so for several years. At the time of writing this book, no one can anticipate what will happen in the short or medium term, as the situation on the ground seems far from settled. But the WoT's outcome becomes clear if put into perspective.

The United States has never fought for so long a war (more than 20 years, as it is still legally continuing), and the political structures of the Middle East never had been so fundamentally challenged—and in a few countries, destroyed—since World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, a century ago. With these failures to rebuild states and nations that were supposed to become pro-American, as it had done in Germany and Japan after World War 2, this is also the image of the United States and its influence in the region and the world which has become a matter of speculation. The US government has repeatedly announced, since the Obama administration, a change in geostrategic priorities with a de facto relegation of the Middle East region. A trend which has accelerated—despite great difficulties—under the Biden administration at the time of writing this book. In clear terms, the War on Terror, under its various forms, has completely failed in eradicating terror organizations and in building more stable, more democratic, and more pro-American states in that region. And with the catastrophic 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan, the WoT leaves a tarnished and much-diminished image of the United States' role in the broad area. At the very least, the Pax Americana is no more in the region, and the American hegemony has left the place to a Post-American Middle East.

[1] The Global Terrorism Index 2022 ranks countries of the world according to four quantitative annual terrorism activity indicators: the numbers of terrorist incidents, of fatalities and of injuries caused by terrorists, and the total property damage caused by it. Retrieved from: https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/.

Understanding the reasons behind the failure of the WoT and this new geopolitical regional order constituted the main goal of this book. As developed in the first section, the post-9/11/2001 imperial project of state- and nation-building has transformed the countries where the United States directly intervened into failing, more unstable and/or adversary places: the Taliban are now ruling over fragile Afghanistan again, with Al-Qaida allies and the Haqqani network as part of their government. More importantly maybe, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been able to shrewdly maneuver its way amid all these crises and further spread its influence and power regionally. Sanaa and large swathes of Yemen are now under the control of the Iranian-influenced Houthis rebels. Baghdad is now under the influence of hardline Shiite parties and pro-Iranian militias and critically dependent on Beijing and Teheran for its economic activity and its own energy provision. And the Syrian regime of Bashar Al-Assad is now heavily dependent on Russian and Iranian military, diplomatic and economic support, while remaining in a state of strategic Cold to Mild War with Washington and its regional allies, via the Lebanese Hezbollah and Shiite militia groups. Finally, the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" toward Iran and its polarization of the Middle East, at play in the launch of the US-supported East Mediterranean Gas Forum to counterbalance the larger Doha-based Gas Exporting Countries Forum, because it included Iran and Russia, has led to a certain fragmentation of the gas industry landscape in the Middle East and a once dangerous rise in tensions around gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, as explained in chapter nine, shortly before the invasion of Ukraine by Russia actually made gas cooperation in the MENA more needed than ever (Lambert et al., 2022).

It might have been impossible to imagine a worse geopolitical outcome two decades ago, when the idea of the WoT was announced. Ironically, chapter seven shows that where the US did not intervene violently, as in the Arabian Gulf monarchies, the policies of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), which were locally designed and only supported by the Obama administration, were overall successful. Yet even there, the fight against terror had its limitations and serious shortcomings, with several thousand citizens of Gulf countries—mainly from Saudi Arabia—joining ISIS over the past decade. The idea of fixing the Middle East—which reflected a neo-colonial approach—is now totally discredited, and the last attempt to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by the Trump Administration without truly involving the Palestinians as key actors in the

process, as analyzed in chapter eight, was doomed from the start. Sadly, the subsequent rise in violence in Palestinian and Israeli cities at the time of writing this conclusion is simply unsurprising.

But the most concerning aspect from a Middle East perspective has been the human toll and humanitarian impact of the whole strategic folly and failure of the USA named War on Terror. Both militarily and politically, the WoT has generated vast humanitarian consequences. Chapter six highlighted the region's unprecedented migration flows of the past two decades, that have largely been generated by the successive military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also in Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, and Syria, among others. The populations of refugees and IDPs in the Middle East have increased and reached all-time high proportions, with between 38 and 60 million persons forced to leave their home due to the WoT operations (Vine et al., 2021), and with more than two dozen millions of them still living in tents and temporary shelter far from home, often in awful conditions. Against this background, the EU's major project of migration control, especially in Libya, and the (US-equipped) Saudi-Emirati disastrous military intervention in Yemen in the name of fighting pro-Iranian "terror", have only added to the political and economic misery in MENA countries. For these vulnerable and disenfranchised millions of individuals and families of Afghanistan and the Middle East and North Africa, clearly, the American vision of a "Greater Middle East" that should be constituted of stable, democratic states, and more prosperous societies, never materialized. Despite vast sums of money injected in development projects and despite undeniable education gains for girls and minorities in Afghanistan, the WOT has overall led to such disastrous situations in Afghanistan and across the region, that millions have been fleeing their country however perilous is the journey.

The Four *Why*.s of the WOT Failure from a Middle East Perspective

As mentioned in the introduction, there is an abundant and detailed literature on *how* some policies of the WoT failed. This book, however, took the perspective of the retrospective *why*, and essentially from a Middle Eastern perspective. We share our conclusions via the four following main points, acknowledging that other elements have also played a role, such as the US political tensions between succeeding administrations at the White

House, a general war fatigue among NATO allies, and denunciations of "forever wars" on social media, *inter alia*. The following points, nevertheless, reflect what was of major importance and direct consequence for the broad Middle East region, in terms of transforming it over the past two decades into a region that is today less stable and certainly not free from terror groups or enemy states of the USA.

1. **The US Authorities mis-read the geostrategic moment**

In late 2001, the US and their allies easily won the first battles against the Taliban and captured or killed dozens of terrorists from Al-Qaida in Afghanistan, with then the support of the international community (Iran and Russia included), only to realize within a few years their lack of lasting accomplishments and strategic victory. The White House had too rapidly believed that they had won the Afghan war or was close to it. Based on this flawed analysis, the Bush administration believed it could also easily win the peace as well as the hearts and minds of the population, with generously funded state- and nation-building programs across Afghanistan and the region, while antagonizing neighboring Iran and other countries (including Russia with pro-US 'color' revolutions in former Soviet nations). This major analytical mistake about Afghanistan and its neighborhood, first, and then about Iraq and its neighborhood (which also includes Iran), a year and a half after, led to asymmetric and bloody armed conflicts that the US imperial project, despite its formidable conventional military might, could not win anymore. It was taken by surprise on two main fronts and not militarily fit for purpose to win over Islamic and tribal militias and Internet-savvy terror networks. Meanwhile, the US didn't recognize until too late the rising strategic challenge being posed by three powers of increasing influence in the Middle East, namely China, Iran, and Russia. These three nations have increasingly benefited from the American difficulties there, its deteriorated image in many countries, and its gradual strategic withdrawal from the region without any capable pro-US force to replace it, as chapter two and five illustrated well with the case studies of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

2. The US Authorities poorly and inconsistently defined its enemies, main mission, and policies

If the unrecognized, simply organized, and economically poor regimes of the Afghan Taliban and Yemeni Houthis seem to have locally won the WoT against the US so far, alongside the hardliners of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the above-mentioned near-peer competitors of the US, it has largely been by occupying the political spaces the US had left vacant due to deep policy flaws and inconsistency. While the first course in any public policy program introduces students to the public policy cycle, which starts by a clear policy formulation, the Bush administration had by contrast very hastily planned its reaction to the 9/11/2001 attacks. The invasion of poorly known Taliban Afghanistan started less than a month after the attacks, without updated maps of the entire country and without having a single Pashtun-speaker among some of its national intelligence agencies. Worse, it had never decisively proclaimed any lasting definition of its enemy: Was it Al-Qaida or all terror groups? Shall it always include the hosts and sponsors of terror groups as well? Shall all enemy states be included? Did that end with the original "Axis of Evil" list (Iran, Iraq, and North Korea) or did that include Cuba, Libya, and Syria, as added later in 2002 by John Bolton? And what about Venezuela and Nicaragua, as added by the same Bolton in 2018? Over the past 20 years, the official enemy designation shifted from only Al-Qaida in mid-September 2001 to, at times, include all the above, as in 2018, during President Trump's term in office. And there also was a lot of ambiguity as to how the Government of Pakistan should be treated under the Presidencies of Bush, Obama, and Trump.

Beyond the fundamental issue of clearly and consistently defining the enemy until it is defeated, there could be no understanding about the *why*.s of the failure of the WoT if there was no mentioning of the often-changing goals and priorities of the US foreign policy in the Middle East, or even in a single country. As chapters two and three illustrated well, the inconsistent set of US ideological goals crashed into Middle Eastern field realities, where state- and nation-building proved much harder, slower, and costlier than initially anticipated. Additionally, the two administrations of Georges W. Bush (2001–2009) never devised a sufficient set of clear, detailed, coherent, stable, and complementary post-war policy documents. Instead, they rushed the US military forces into the very

simple yet time-proven trap of Al-Qaida's ideological leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, by triggering a powerful yet *hubris*-blinded superpower into asymmetric warfare in the mountains of tribal Afghanistan. It was there that the British and Soviet empires had been militarily defeated in the previous two centuries, and it was precisely to trigger there the Americans, and for that same purpose, that Al-Qaida had meticulously prepared the 9/11/2001 attacks.

After some changes in priorities following the transition from the Bush administrations (2001–2009) to the Obama administrations (2009–2017), with the latter being eager to disengage from the region, in theory after a military surge to gain the upper hand for diplomatic negotiations, the return of Republican national security advisor John Bolton at the White House in 2018 under President Trump let a seasoned commentator to observe that "*the spirit of George W. Bush has once more begun to inhabit the White House*".[2] This renewed spirit included the fact that the most hawkish US form of unilateralism didn't mean having either an elaborate policy for the new Latin American countries who were simply being added to a new Axis of Evil list, or for the already failing US efforts in Afghanistan, let alone for the Greater Middle East project.

There are now many official US reports on the wars and post-war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq that show the lack of a clear and consistent strategy and clear directives that could have enabled more realistic nation-building efforts.[3] This latest, fundamental geostrategic mistake is exactly what has rendered the formidable military might of the US, once a hyperpower in a unipolar world, decreasingly capable to change the complex political situation on the ground, thereby illustrating Bertrand Badie's (2020) paradox of the contemporary powerlessness of power.

[2] Heilbrunn, J. (May 8, 2018). *Sorry Europe, President Trump doesn't have an Iran plan. The Spectator World*. https://usa.spectator.co.uk/2018/05/sorry-europe-president-trump-doesnt-have-an-iran-plan/.

[3] See e.g., Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. (2021). *What we need to learn: Lessons from twenty years of Afghanistan Reconstruction*. United States Government. https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-21-46-LL.pdf.

3. Over-estimation of US capacities; under-estimation of the enemies'

As the first chapters have shown, the *hubris* and political delusion in the Bush administration reached alarmingly high levels under the leadership of key figures such as Vice-President Dick Cheney or Karl Rove, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the White House (2001–2006), Director of the White House Iraq Group (2002–2004), and principal adviser to President Georges W. Bush. In early 2004, he claimed that "*[w]e are an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality*".[4] At that time, Al-Qaida leaders Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri had not been captured; the Taliban in Afghanistan had already proven their resilience on the ground, had taken control of some of the lucrative traffic of opium, and were fighting back for their return to power, with a strong presence in the South of the country; Iraq was rapidly sleeping into a civil war as formerly secular Iraqi rebellion leaders were coordinating attacks on US troops with foreign Sunni jihadists; Syria provided temporary refuge to some Iraqi insurgents; and Iran was supporting and influencing various Shiite political parties and militias in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and beyond, and would eventually resume its nuclear program. We can clearly say now that not only were the US authorities not achieving their own over-ambitious plans at that time, but they were largely in denial of the true extent of their failures and that US troops were being fought back hard by a large and diverse group of resilient enemies. The latter were more resilient than expected and, despite their ideological oppositions, they sometimes managed to collaborate as they shared the common goal of breaking the American hegemony over the region, for their very own survival initially, and then to evict the Americans from the area by causing it losses too heavy to bear in a democracy.

During the many years of the WoT, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and later Libya and Syria kept on siphoning American military budgets and

[4] SUSKIN Ron, "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush", *The New York Times Magazine*, 17 October 2004. https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/faith-certainty-and-the-presidency-of-george-w-bush.html. In that press article, published before the November 2004 election, Karl Rove was not named directly. It's in 2014, in the review *Mother Jones*, that journalist Ron Suskin revealed the name of K. Rove see: ENGELHART Tom, "Karl Rove Unintentionally Predicted the Current Chaos in Iraq", *Mother Jones*, 19 June 2014. https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/06/us-karl-rove-iraq-crisis/.

human resources at a daunting scale, over the long term and at very heavy costs, as the expenditure has largely been financed via public borrowing. As detailed in the introduction, the economic costs have been colossal, in trillion dollars, and will be felt by the US government for decades, due to the costs of health care of veterans, families, and pensions for disabled service men and women. It didn't lead, though, to a situation of imperial military overstretch leading to collapse (Kennedy, 1987), as expected by jihadists. But the military failures, civilian victims, and systemic corruption fed by foreign aid and military occupation became unacceptable to the public in the region and in the US, especially as American citizens saw an increasing number of civilians and military men and women suffering with life-long traumas, amputations, or premature death. By that time yet, the US military was already deeply engaged in several conflicts in the Middle East. Though terribly costly, the US could not rapidly withdraw anymore without losing its credibility and international status. It needed some forms of lasting achievements. Hence the military surge in Afghanistan, which failed to achieve lasting results as the Taliban knew they needed to wait for the already announced American withdrawal.

The Taliban victory was also made possible with the discreet help of foreign powers that the US hegemony had coalesced against itself: Pakistan, whose secret services were decreasingly trustful of, and trusted by, the US to the benefit of arch-rival India while it could certainly not keep an Indian-friendly Afghanistan on its Northern border; Iran, which initially helped Americans in 2001 to invade Afghanistan, only to find itself placed in 2002 on the Bush Administration's "Axis of Evil" list; as well as Russia and China, as the former sold modern armaments to the Taliban and as both countries provided early diplomatic goodwill gestures and commercial reassurances to the conquering rebel movement in early 2021. If both Russia and China have long and deeply resented the Taliban's religious extremism, both countries managed to better read the geostrategic moment than the White House. Moscow and Beijing understood that the defeat of the USA in Afghanistan could lead to the removal of US military bases and installations from the whole area and that the Taliban represented a much lower menace, especially if some trade arrangements could be put in place to create some commercial dependency in a post-conflict setting. And while the Taliban, some other insurgents, and various enemy states managed to repeatedly collaborate, America's unilateralism regularly generated frictions or even tensions with its allies.

4. A failed public diplomacy

Despite the widespread international support of the USA following the 2001 terror attacks, including in the Middle East, the reputation of the US rapidly deteriorated there and beyond. By late 2002, it became increasingly clear that the US would invade Iraq with or without a green light from the United Nations Security Council, thus violating international law and causing a heated and divisive debate at the United Nations between the US-led coalition and some of its own allies in Afghanistan, such as France, Germany, and several other EU member countries. Additionally, the US leadership wrongly anticipated to be welcome to Iraq as liberators by the oppressed Iraqi people, as defended by Vice-President Dick Cheney, Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz, and their academic mentor on the region, the sulphurous historian Bernard Lewis.[5] Yet decades of Shiite clerics' and secular Baath party's staunch anti-US propaganda, the disastrous legacy of the US-led international embargo over Iraq (1990–2003), Washington's continuous support to Israel, the lies about the Iraqi program of weapons of mass destruction, the broadcasted images of lootings in un-securitized invaded Baghdad, the graphical images of torture emanating from the Abu Ghraib and Bagram prison camps,[6] as well as the arrestation and deaths of many civilians at the hands of the US-led coalition and private companies (like the infamous Blackwater group), led to a distrustful relationship between the US—and especially its army—and the Iraqi people. It rapidly deteriorated into a feeling of oppression and alienation among vast sections of the Iraqi and Arab societies as various survey polls have monitored over the years.

[5] Late medial historian Bernard Lewis has been a controversial figure in academia. He has been heavily criticized for his Orientalist, outdated and generalizing views on Muslim populations, especially in the Arab Middle East. See on the Iraqi invasion file Cookson, J. R. (2018, May 21). The Legacy of Bernard Lewis. *The National Interest*. https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-legacy-bernard-lewis-25909.

[6] 780 men and boys were deported to the camp of Guantanamo Bay, where over a hundred persons were interrogated by the CIA in what was officially reported as torture (Frank, 2018; Higham & Stephens, 2004; Singh, 2013; Taguba, 2008; Tayler & Epstein, 2022). In the end, though, only two prisoners have ever been convicted of any crime. Twenty years after its opening, the prison camp is still functioning and costing the US its credibility as to the defense of human rights in Afghanistan and the MENA region (Higham & Stephens, 2004; Taguba, 2008; Tayler & Epstein, 2022).

Meanwhile, the "invasion" narrative of Baghdad, one of the most powerful symbols of the Arab Muslim heritage, was very skillfully used against the Americans by its ennemies. It was regularly reinforced by the graphic images and appalling reports of torture, of innocent victims being gunned-down at home, of the large-scale destructions of urban areas in Iraq (especially in Sunni urban areas) and in other countries of the region. This was shrewdly utilized by media- and technology-savvy Jihadists to generate a strong and lasting resentment towards foreign military presence—though, ironically, many of the jihadists were foreigners too. The occupation of Iraq only became a net gain to the strategy of the theoreticians of "global jihad", as part of an elaborate propaganda war. While the US tried to stop the damage done by the videos of destruction and random arrests and the critical voices on Arabic media outlets, most particularly from the Al-Jazira news channel,[7] the damage to the US reputation nevertheless became permanent and benefitted its enemies within and without the region as was developed in the book introduction.

Even President Obama's emphasis on "countering violent extremism" to replace the more aggressive approach and terminology of "war on terror", has not managed to repair the image of the US in the Middle East. His drone policy particularly, supposed to provide surgical strikes against well-identified targets while keeping a lighter footprint in the region, actually led to the deaths of thousands of Afghan, Pakistani, Iraqi, Syrian, and Yemeni civilians, among others.[8] Generally denied, or simply not investigated, the few acknowledged victims of these drone strikes, which have logically fuelled much anti-American resentment in rural areas of these countries, were generally dismissed as tragic but exceptional collateral damage. Yet the processing of data of incidents by investigative journalists has repeatedly shown that it was nothing but exceptional, with one in five drone strikes ending up killing a civilian (Khan, 2021;

[7] The Doha-based Aljazeera Arabic tv news channel rapidly became the main source of critique of the US operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Though US officials were invited to and did talk and debate on the channel, the US tried to decrease its influence across the region, including by bombing its offices in Iraq and by launching its own tv channel in Arabic (*Al-Hurra*, 'the free one', in Arabic).

[8] *The New York Times* has published several articles which have demonstrated that coalition air strikes have been causing many more civilian deaths than initially anticipated, at a rate calculated to be 31 times higher than officially acknowledged. See e.g., the elaborate and meticulous reporting of Khan and Gopal (November 16, 2017) as well as Khan (December 19, 2021).

Khan & Gopal, 2017). It was revealing that even the last drone strike of the US in Afghanistan's capital city during the chaotic withdrawal of August 2021, didn't kill any terrorists but took the life of civilians. A week after the American press revealed the affair, the U.S. military finally admitted their mistake that had killed 10 persons, including seven children and, ironically, an Afghan humanitarian professional who had long worked for an American aid NGO.[9] This whole story was itself abundantly mediatized worldwide as the US were leaving Afghanistan to the Taliban after 20 years in the country. The whole sequence gave to the withdrawal process and, by extension, to the whole War on Terror, the appearance of an Afghan fiasco. It was worse than that.

The Uncertain Post-American Middle East

The jihadist quest for a never-ending war with the West never really unfolded as planned (Roy, 2006). Though the US eventually became resented in all the countries it militarily intervened in, jihadists never could durably capitalize on it as developed in Chapter 5. Their life-stiffening moral constraints, death cults-like support for kamikaze missions, and heavy retaliation towards any supposed moral deviance made them rapidly resented by the populace wherever they managed to temporarily establish their control. While there are more than 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, jihadist movements were never joined by millions, nor even hundreds of thousands of foreign volunteers. At the peak of their recruitment, several thousands of foreigners joined the Sunni jihadist movements in the Near East campaigns, but this rapidly dwindled after the self-titled "caliphate" of ISIS fell, in 2017. By then, there were mostly people fleeing the so-called caliphate, disenfranchised by the propaganda of a new Islamic geopolitical renaissance. Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri, and Daesh leaders after them, had vastly over-estimated the potential appeal of a global jihad against the military occupations of Muslim lands, and even more so how long the attracted Muslim fringe groups would support their new state under the heavy bombing of an international coalition.

Paradoxically, after 20 years of guerrilla warfare and their military victory in August 2022, the Taliban have been facing the same problem

[9] Aikins, M. (2021, September 10). Times Investigation: In U.S. Drone Strike, Evidence Suggests No ISIS Bomb, *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/10/world/asia/us-air-strike-drone-kabul-afghanistan-isis.html.

than the Americans in 2002, or that their enemy Daesh/ISIS in Iraq and Syria in 2015. The Taliban believed that the hardest had been done (winning battles and re-establishing their rule) and that peace and stability shall eventually be won, only to gradually realize that even if the war had been won, the peace may be harder to win for them too. The 2022 US and IMF sanctions against the Taliban regime, including the freezing of Afghanistan's financial assets abroad have been pushing the country to the brink of total economic collapse. At the time of writing this conclusion, more than 95% of the country is food insecure and for months, people have been queuing in front of banks to withdraw a minimum of cash to pay for food. There is no clarity as to whether Afghanistan will fall back into a period of deep political instability and civil war, wherein warlords, important opium traders, and Al-Qaida-linked groups could thrive and transform Afghanistan into a major platform of trans-national drug smuggling, weapons trading, and terrorist activities. In Yemen, too, the Houthis Islamist militia works hard at presenting itself as the sovereign government of Yemen, by developing a narrative of sovereignty and legitimate oil governance, amid the ongoing war and devastation, in what actually remains one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.

In Syria and Iraq, surviving cells of ISIS are expected to keep on fighting the national governments of these countries and also clash with Iran-aligned Shiite militias. The latter have grown in influence, especially in Iraq, but equally failed to transform this military advantage into sufficient parliamentary seats and political clout at the time of writing this conclusion. If by now it is clear that global jihadism cannot take control of the region, nor even keep whole countries under their tight control for long, it is also clear that Islamist terror groups are a regional feature that is not expected to disappear anytime soon despite the very vast military means utilized for that purpose by the US and its partners during two decades. Against this fractured political landscape, actors from outside the region have been gradually replacing the political and economic spaces abandoned by the Americans.

Joint Threat from China and Russia to the US Role in the Region

At the time of writing this conclusion, the important state visit of Chinese leader Xi Jinping to Saudi Arabia in December 2022, which included a high-level China-Arab States forum, followed a few months after by the China-brokered reconciliation deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran,

in April 2023, have been widely commented as further proof of Washington's loss of political clout in the region to the favor of other international powers. This had indeed followed the refusal by the Saudi and Emirati leadership to increase oil production at the demand of the US President Joe Biden at a time of high oil prices, and while the two Gulf states followed instead the Russian proposal to decrease oil production quotas as part of OPEC+ policies to stabilize the level of crude prices. Although it is too early to draw definitive conclusions, these symbolic developments indicate that things have changed in the region, including what used to be one of its main stability partnership since the post-World War 2 deals with Saudi Arabia and later with the other Gulf petro-monarchies: in essence, US protection against the free flow of crude oil. And none of these changes seem to currently benefit the US and its place in the world order.

Within and without the Middle east region, the US government acknowledged that it is facing various threats from so-called "near-peer competitors" to an extent unseen since the Cold War.[10] This tougher competition from China and Russia had become one of the key ideas of the 2018 Department of Defense's National Defense Strategy (NDS) of the United States. Produced every four years, the NDS replaced the US Quadrennial Defense Review and now gives broad strategic direction to the department of defense (DoD) and armed forces. Realistic and straight to the point, after nearly two decades of ill-defined policies and sandcastles in the skies, the 2018 NDS recognized the stiff and increasing competition from China and Russia, the weakened military standing of the US, and that the narrow focus of the uniquely long and costly War on Terror across the world was ill-placed and debilitating on the strategic level and tactical levels.

> Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding. (….) Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security. China is a strategic competitor using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea. Russia has violated the borders of nearby nations and pursues veto power

[10] US Department of Defense. (2020). *Statement of Matthew P. Donovan SASC confirmation hearing to be under-secretary of* ***defense*** *for personnel and readiness*, March 10, 2020. https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Donovan_03-10-20.pdf.

> over the economic, diplomatic, and security decisions of its neighbors. (...) Iran continues to sow violence and remains the most significant challenge to Middle East stability. Despite the defeat of ISIS's physical caliphate, threats to stability remain as terrorist groups with long reach continue to murder the innocent and threaten peace more broadly. This increasingly complex security environment is defined by rapid technological change, challenges from adversaries in every operating domain, and the impact on current readiness from the longest continuous stretch of armed conflict in our Nation's history.
>
> Source: US Department of Defence (2018).[11]

Shortly after the start of President Biden's administration, and amid the most acrimonious presidential transition in recent US history, the new administration could have easily taken its distance from Secretary Mathis' 2018 NDS on many issues. Yet, its first major strategic document, the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance,[12] is remarkably in line with all the points mentioned above. And regarding the Middle East more particularly, the Biden Administration goes even further, clearly stating that "*we do not believe that military force is the answer to the region's challenges*" (Biden, 2021, p. 11). Published less than two months before the May 2021 deadly week of armed conflict between Israel and the Hamas, in the Gaza Strip, the words of the US administration have clearly not influenced all the Middle East's longest political issues, grievances, and deeply entrenched problems. Yet Washington is not supportive anymore of military threats to settle each and every issue in the region. The May 2022 assassination of American-Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh by an Israeli sniper was even condemned by the White House and showed that the time of quasi-systematic full support of Israeli military actions was over. The logic of systematically transforming the region by force or the threat of it, has largely been discredited and abandoned to more multilateral approaches and, whenever possible, negotiations. The US supported meetings in 2021 and 2022 between Saudi and Iranian officials to develop a *modus vivendi*, something which constitutes a major difference with the previous American administrations over the past two decades, from the

[11] US Department of Defence. (2018, p. 1). Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy. https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf.

[12] NSC-1v2.pdf (whitehouse.gov).

Bush administration's Axis of Evil approach towards Iran, to Obama's cautious threats, negotiations, and *on and off* sanctions, to the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" policy towards Iran.

The 2022 National Defense Strategy reinforces this new approach, which is much less aggressive and ambitious than the WoT. It aims to achieve its goals via three main ways: integrated deterrence, campaigning, and actions that build enduring advantages.[13] This is very far from the imperial philosophy of reshaping a region by force or the threat of it, extending US core values of democracy and liberalism to many other nations, and eradicating terrorism worldwide.

Despite clear diplomatic fatigue, Western diplomats are still trying to convince the Iranian leadership to commit again to a form of Obama-era Iranian nuclear deal (technically, the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action") and peacefully contain its nuclear ambitions, even if the country has been engulfed in a troubled period of mass demonstrations and civic disobedience against the regime following the killing of a young female Iranian by the morality police due to her supposedly non-conform wearing of the compulsory hijab. In parallel, the Taliban regime, which is under heavy international sanctions, has kept a line of communication opened via mediators in Doha.

Also, Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Lebanon have managed to de-escalate their maritime demonstrations of force in the Eastern Mediterranean. The problems are certainly not solved and there are still two international gas fora in the MENA region and not enough cooperation, yet there is no longer an imminent risk of armed conflict surrounding offshore gas drilling operations. Remarkably, during the Fall 2022 World Cup hosted in Qatar, the previously hostile leadership of neighboring countries Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates went to Qatar to mark the end of hostilities between and among the Gulf monarchies. And this is largely due to the push of the Biden administration in that direction, and the 2022 elevation of Qatar as "Major Non-NATO Strategic Ally" by the White House. This highlights too, that the White House's regional policy shift from a two-decade long and counter-productive paradigm of constant military engagement and diplomatic

[13] US Department of Defense. (2022). *Fact Sheet: 2022 National Defense Strategy*. https://media.defense.gov/2022/Mar/28/2002964702/-1/-1/1/NDS-FACT-SHEET.PDF.

tensions towards a new paradigm, marked by greater roles for negotiations and military disengagement, has been understood by several MENA countries as an opportunity to decrease tensions, if not solving old issues.

New Priorities

As articulated in March 2021, Joe Biden's foreign and military policies have abandoned most of what remained of the WoT and the geostrategic center of gravity is being reoriented towards other world regions. Only Iran was considered an important state opponent in the region, worth the attention of Washington, yet for which a lower level of military presence was established.

> The United States should not, and will not, engage in "forever wars" that have cost thousands of lives and trillions of dollars. (...) [W]e position ourselves to deter our adversaries and defend our interests, working alongside our partners, our presence will be most robust in the Indo-Pacific and Europe. In the Middle East, we will right-size our military presence to the level required to disrupt international terrorist networks, deter Iranian aggression, and protect other vital U.S. interests.
>
> Source: Biden (2021, p. 15).[14]

In line with President Obama's "Pivot to Asia" strategic orientation,[15] announced a dozen years prior, the Biden administration has been reorientating its forces and diplomatic capacities towards the Indo-Pacific region, wherein the US has already positioned 300,000 service men and women, and to a much lesser extent towards Europe, where the focus is about Russia, especially since its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.[16] While the strategic departure of most American troops from the Middle East and towards the Indo-Pacific region and Europe might sound like a relief to the ears of many in the region, the US public might well wonder

[14] Biden, J. R. (2021). *Interim National Strategic Security Guidance*. The White House. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf.

[15] Lieberthal, K. (2011). The American Pivot to Asia. *Foreign Policy*, *21*, 20–35.

[16] US Department of Defense. (2022). *Fact Sheet: 2022 National Defense Strategy*. https://media.defense.gov/2022/Mar/28/2002964702/-1/-1/1/NDS-FACT-SHEET.PDF.

if this is a durable change or yet another temporary shift that may not survive much longer than the Biden Presidency.

For now, one of the very few positive elements of legacy from the WoT catastrophe, alongside the greater scrutiny of offshore banking centers and the greater state prevention of violent extremism in Gulf monarchies, has been the deeper appreciation by some leaders in the Middle East region of the limits of military tools and the value of diplomatic settlements achieved via negotiations, rather than threats or coercion. The 2021 normalization of diplomatic relations between Qatar and blockading Arab neighbors, and the 2022 thaw in ties between Israel and Turkey, for instance, show a change in Middle East inter-state relations and strong departures from the polarizing Bush administrations' emphasis on "with us or against us" geopolitics. Nevertheless, the legacy of the Trump administration's 2021 divisive policy in the Maghreb region is still negatively impacting the sub-region, as explained in chapter nine.

Finally, and to conclude, with all its military might and policies of pressure and threats, the US has solved no major diplomatic or security issue in the Middle East region in over 20 years and the security level in the MENA countries, and from the region towards the US, is no better than prior to the so-called "forever wars". The latter had to come to a halt, and the War on Terror might well be remembered as a period of actual US terror among the populations of the broad Middle East. These wars have even failed to secure more oil and gas supplies for the international market, as the 2022 international energy crisis blatantly revealed. Yet the unilaterally decided withdrawal from the region, decided under President Obama, after a surge in troops and violence, has only produced disappointment among traditional allies. Israel, Egypt, and the Gulf monarchies have decided in Spring 2022 not to abide by the US sanctions against Russia following its invasion of Ukraine. Twenty years of unilateralism at all costs and this strategic withdrawal could certainly not entice these allies to antagonize a new and growing regional hegemon, Russia, when Washington decides to become more distant. China, after becoming the main importer of the region's oil and gas exports, has become a key broker of diplomatic agreements. In the end, the War on Terror, as such or under different names, was a two-decade period of grand, ill-prepared, and delusional policy aims, American unilateralism in regional decision-making, failed American diplomacy and welcomed Asian alternatives to it, failed counterinsurgency with massive violence, large-scale destruction, and unprecedented levels of forced migrations

from and across a transformed Middle East that will need decades to reconstruct itself and heal from deep scars and profound trauma.

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Annex A: Detailed Description of the Methodology for Chinese-Iraqi Energy Forecasting

First Scenario: The Energy Transition Scenario

In 2015, during the negotiations for the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, China declared its commitment to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and reduce its carbon intensity by 60–65% from 2005 levels (Anthony, 2016). This bold declaration put pressure on China to vastly increase its efforts to reduce carbon emissions, as China has become in recent years the world's largest emitter of Carbon Dioxide (CO_2). Accordingly, Beijing has adopted an energy transition strategy to move forward its clean energy generation capacities and to sharply decrease its oil demand by 2050. It represents a shift in its energy system as it goes beyond the replacement of one source of fuel to another cleaner source, such as simply replacing thermal generation from coal to gas to generate electricity. The strategy of energy transition involves deep changes in the technology, infrastructure, market, production equipment, and consumption patterns (Oxford Institute, 2018). This is very likely to negatively affect China's demand for oil, compared to any business-as-usual scenario.

First, we introduced a group of indicators for the energy transition in China in the coming years. According to the 13th five-year plan, China aims to largely change its consumption of energy from coal to gas since the capacity of the latter should reach 220 billion cubic meters, with a share from the total consumption of energy amounting to 10%, while the share of coal is expected to decrease below 58%. On the other hand, in

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Table A1 Power generation by different sources from 2012 to 2017

Unit: TWH	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*	*2017*
Total	4987	5372	5680	5740	6023	6417
Share of renewables	19.9%	20%	22.7%	24.2%	25.7%	26.4%
Coal	3713	3981	4027	3898	3946	4150
Gas	110	116	133	167	191	205
Oil	6	5	4	4	3	N/A
Other fossils	97	119	139	162	191	N/A
Nuclear	98	112	133	171	213	248
Hydro	856	892	1060	1113	1175	1195
Wind	103	138	160	186	241	303
Solar	4	8	24	39	67	117
Biomass	30	37	44	53	65	79
Other renewable	0.48	0.28	0.54	0.15	0.12	N/A

Source China Energy Outlook 2019

2017, the Chinese power generation increased significantly, with a high percentage of renewable energy, reaching 26.4%. Table A1 shows the power generation by different sources of energy, and it indicates a significant decrease in using oil resources versus other clean sources (Outlook, 2018).

This Energy Transition scenario investigates the future changes that will affect the imports of Iraq's oil due to changes in the energy transition policy in China. The analysis of the scenario is based on a group of assumptions. First, the oil demand of China will be considered equal to the amount of oil imports. Second, data will be taken from the China Renewable Energy Outlook 2018, as it is expected that the oil demand by 2027 will rise by 17% above the 2017 level before decreasing to about 71% of the 2017 level by 2050. Thirdly, to identify the volume of imports of China from Iraq in 2027 and 2050, we calculated the average of imports of four years from 2014 to 2017, assuming that China will import from Iraq in an overall constant average, equal to the overall oil imports from all exporting countries.

Figure A1 shows the volume of China's oil imports from all oil-exporting countries to China, prior to the exceptional period of the COVID-19 that started in the country and severely disrupted its energy market in 2020. The volume of imports will continue to increase towards 2027 to reach more than 160 billion barrels per year, i.e., 17% more

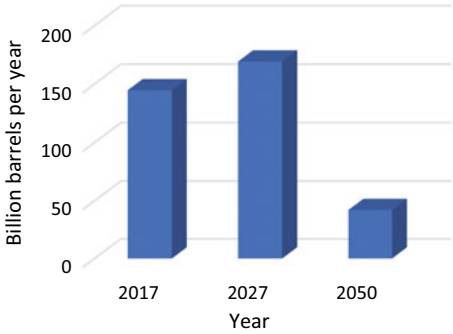

Fig. A1 China's oil imports from all countries

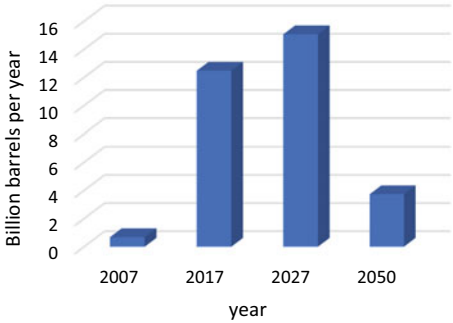

Fig. A2 Iraq's oil exports to China

than the volume in 2017. By contrast, it will dramatically decrease in 2050 to reach about 40 billion barrels per year. There will be a very rapid transition towards clean energy and away from oil and its derivatives. Meanwhile, the rapid energy transition in China will be reflected on the volume of China's imports from Iraq. As shown in Fig. A2, the trend of imports from Iraq has the same trend of overall oil imports of China, the average of four years (2014 to 2017) of China's imports from Iraq equal 8.9% based on the expected 15 billion barrels to be imported in 2027. In 2050 the imports will sharply decrease to reach less than 4 billion barrels per year. Moreover, Fig. A3 shows an increase in the oil revenue of Iraq in 2027 before dramatically decreasing in 2050.

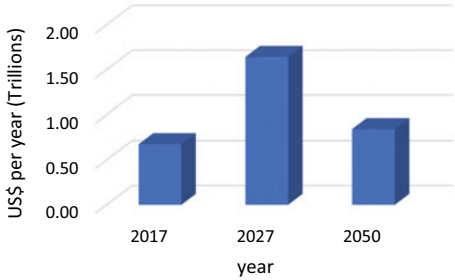

Fig. A3 Iraq's oil revenues from China

Second Scenario: Energy Diversification of Suppliers

Under this scenario, we forecast the changes in the mentioned indicators of oil and infrastructure based on the concept and policies of energy diversification. It implies a greater diversification of the sources (essentially the exporting countries) and providers (essentially energy companies) of energy supplies and of the Chinese energy portfolio, but no radical changes in the fundamental energy mix (i.e., the different energy products being consumed). It is based on the policies of oil import diversification and diversification of a portfolio in the financial field. It is adopted by the energy cooperation strategy proposed by the Belt & Road Initiative. Achieving the diversification of energy in China could be reached through the following processes: enhance suppliers' diversity, enhance spatial diversity, improve technology, developing transport routes of energy, and diversification of settlement currency.

In the beginning, before conducting the forecasting for the selected indicators, we investigated the energy diversification in China at two levels: that of the diversification of energy suppliers, and that of the energy security mix.

Diversification of Energy Supplier

We investigated whether China has diversification within its energy suppliers BRI or not by using what is known as the Herfindahl-Hirshman index (HHI) to evaluate the dependency of energy supply (Li et al., 2018).

$$HHI = \sum_{i=1}^{n} S_i^2 \tag{A1}$$

Since S_i is the energy export share of country i from the total volume of China's energy import. Thus, we use this index to evaluate the diversification of oil sources in China. Then, to test the robustness of the results, we normalize the HHI index to compare between different years with different sources of oil sources in China as the following

$$HHI^* = \frac{HHI - 1/N}{1 - 1/N} \tag{A2}$$

Since N is the number of energy exporting countries to China, in our study (countries exporting oil to China), we compared the value of HHI* for two years, one before the BRI (year 2011) and one after the BRI (year 2017) to evaluate if the BRI has created a diversification in oil sources in China. The results in Table A2 indicate indeed a diversification in oil import sources in China since the value of HHI is between $1/N$ and 1, the value of HHI* sets between 0 and 1.

Accordingly, as shown in Fig. A4, an increase in Iraq's share of oil imports of China is expected. Although there is a diversification in oil import suppliers, nevertheless, Iraq's share will increase gradually to reach 18% in 2027 and 24% in 2035. Then, it should reach a peak of 35% in 2050 in this scenario. On the other hand, it is expected that the pattern and value of studied indicators of oil, including the volume of China's oil imports from all countries, the volume of Iraq's export to China, and Iraq's oil export revenue will have, overall, the same trend and values of increase as in the scenario of business as usual. This can happen because the diversification of oil suppliers to China should not affect its oil demand, in quantity.

The energy security mix is one of the significant fundamentals of energy diversification billers. We investigated the energy diversification through this concept using the index of Shannon-Weiner (Li et al., 2018). To use this index, we considered that China has four main categories of

Table A2 Diversification index of energy import suppliers in China

	Oil HHI	*Oil HHI**	*N of oil-exporting countries to China*
Before IBR (2011)	0.09	0.070	48
After BR (2017)	0.07	0.058	45

Source Authors' calculations based on data from Statista

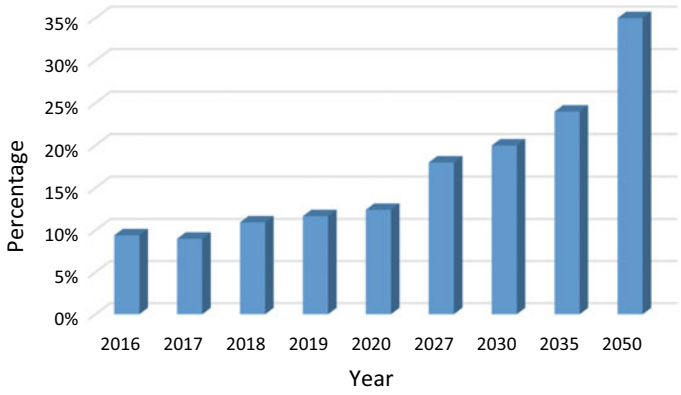

Fig. A4 Share of Iraq from all China's oil imports

energy sources, crude oil, natural gas, coal, and other sources, including waterpower, nuclear power, and wind power. The index is formulated as:

$$\mathrm{SWI} = -\sum_{i=1}^{4} p_i \ln(p_i) \tag{3}$$

Since pi is the share of type i from the consumption by total energy sources that include gas, oil, coal, and other resources. To evaluate diversification in energy sources in China after the launch of the BRI, we compared the value of SWI before and after the launch and the value of SWI increased from 0.90 in 2011 to 1.12 in 2017. The increase in value indicates diversification in energy sources by China.

Accordingly, we forecasted the change in the share of each source from all energy consumption in China. As shown in Fig. A5, the share of coal from energy consumption will decrease dramatically over time from 60% in 2017 to about 17% in 2050. In Contrast, the share of both renewable resources and natural gas will increase noticeably since their share will up from 14 and 7% respectively in 2017, to 35% and 21% in 2050. Moreover, oil demand will stay high and increase from 19% in 2017 to 27% in 2050, in this diversification scenario. The existence of a well diversified energy consumption mix in China strongly suggests that China is moving toward a new paradigm of energy policies in the future, which includes a diversification of energy resources. This

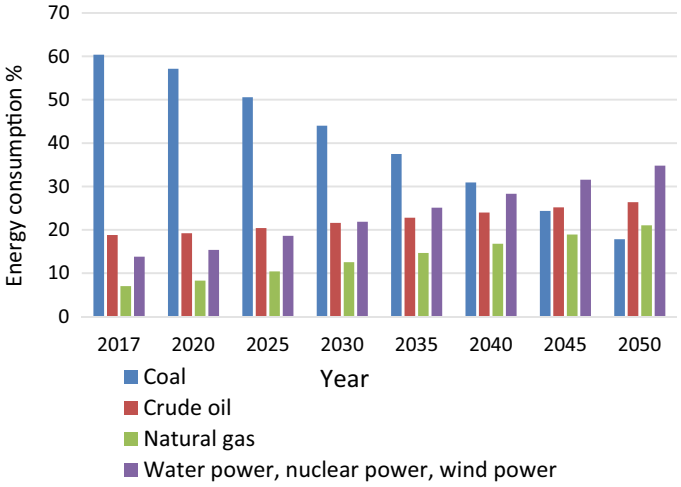

Fig. A5 Energy consumption by source

could constrain the total oil export potential and opportunities of a country like Iraq.

Third Scenario: Business as Usual Scenario

This base scenario provides information about current and known energy policies in China and assumes that non-conventional oil resources can help the energy industry overcome the daunting challenges of (conventional) peak oil. It analyzes how these policies affect the relationship between China and Iraq in terms of oil trade, especially after Iraq has signed five key agreements in 2015, as mentioned before. Therefore, the scenario covers the period from 2015 to 2020 and provides a projection for the years 2027, 2035, and 2050. It states that the relationship between both countries has been improved noticeably after 2003 due to China's contribution in the reconstruction of Iraq. This improvement in cooperation has enhanced Chinese commercial investment in Iraq, especially in the field of oil.

On the other hand, the amount of crude oil imports of China from Iraq reached $23.7 billion in 2019, with a percentage of 9.9% from 90.1%

of the total crude oil imports of China from the top 15 exporting countries to China (Workman, 2020). Moreover, the last statistics of the first quarter of this year show a noticeable increase in oil exports from Iraq to China comparing to the average of 2019, and China emerged as the biggest buyer for the Kurdish crude. In addition, the amount of Chinese imports among imports from the Iraqi southern port of Basra increased to 3.6 million barrels per day in average in February 2010 compared to 3 million barrels in January earlier that year (Di Paola, 2020).

According to the results of forecasting the changes in our indicators specified in Table 5.2, we expect a gradual increase in the amount of China's imports from all countries in 2027 and 2030, respectively. Then, the amount will reach its peak in 2050, something which sharply contrasts with the results of the above-mentioned energy transition scenario. As a result of the increase in imports in China, Iraq's oil exports will increase in this business as usual scenario. Then, it should reach an unprecedented high volume in 2050 and the revenue of Iraq from oil exports to China could vastly increase as well.

Regarding the improvement of infrastructure, Iraq has increasingly made efforts to improve its civil and industrial infrastructure, which is the main variable that enhances the capacity of Iraq to boost oil production. To measure improvements in the infrastructure in Iraq due to its partnership with China under BRI and the changes in Chinese energy policies in line with this initiative, we forecasted the change in Iraq oil production and compared it with the past values before the BRI. The production in 2005 decreased due to the war of 2003, which damaged most of the infrastructure, including the oil infrastructure significantly. But years later, the production rose rapidly, especially in 2015, which is the year of signing the BRI agreement between China and Iraq. Since then, China has widened its investments in oil infrastructure in Iraq. Table A3 shows a group of these investments until 2019 and the freeze due to the COVID19/global lockdown economic crisis. In the future, irrespective of the energy policies in China, we expect a rise in the oil production of Iraq under the BRI.

Evaluation Matrix

As shown in Table A4, the criterias include total value, economic value, and environmental value that have been set to assess three proposed scenarios. Then, one selects the best scenario according to the highest

Table A3 Chinese investment in Iraq after 2015

Year	*Company*	*Project*	*Description*
2018	Geo-Jade Petroleum Corp	Naft Khana and Huweiza	Naft Khana (Diyala) and Huweiza (Missan) oil blocks
2018	United Energy Group (UEG)	Sindbad	Sindbad block in the southern province of Basra
2018	Zhenhua Oil	Eastern Baghdad	Oilfield development
2018	China Oilfield Services Limited (COSL)	Missan	Drilling and well completion integrated services contract in the Missan oilfield
2018	Power Construction Corp. of China (PowerChina) and Norinco	Fao	Announced plan to construct a 300,000-bpd oil refinery that will include a petrochemical plant
2019	CPEEC	Halfaya	Build and operate natural gas processing facilities
2019	Hilong Oil Service and Engineering Co.	Majnoon	Develop and complete 80 oil wells

Source The Middle East Institute

score. These criteria are set based on the expected value of two indicators, Iraq's oil exports and revenues of oil exports, which should benefit Iraq after being a part of BRI with China. As illustrated below the matrix, each criterion was weighted according to its relative importance for achieving the highest value for Iraq. The criterion with a higher score is more important than others. In addition, the criteria have been classified with a rating scale ranging from low, medium, and high. Each scenario is given a score for each criterion based on their expected results and outcomes of forecasting. Economic value was given the highest score (most critical), followed by the total value with a lower score (medium to highly critical). While the environmental criteria is given the lowest score (the least critical). Based on the total scores, the scenario of energy diversification is the scenario with the highest added value to be obtained by Iraq as being a part of the BRI. In addition, the business-as-usual scenario shows a good added value for Iraq. The major difference between the two scenarios is the environmental impact. While the energy transition

Table A4 Evaluation matrix

Criteria	*Scale*	*Scenario 1* *Energy transition*	*Scenario 2* *Energy Diversification*	*Scenario 3* *Business as usual*
Total value (2)	(Low = 1, medium = 2, High = 3)	The value of Iraq's oil exports and revenue will decrease (Low total value) Score: 1*2 = 2	The value of Iraq's oil exports and revenue will increase (High total value) Score: 3*2 = 6	The value of Iraq's oil exports and revenue will increase (High total value) Score: 3*2 = 6
Economic value (3)		The total value will not achieve economic improvement (Low economic value) Score: 1*3 = 3	The total value will achieve economic improvement (High economic value) Score: 3*3 = 9	The total value will achieve economic improvement (High economic value) Score: 3*3 = 9
Environmental value (1)		It is expected that China moves toward renewable and clean resources. Therefore, Iraq could try to follow the change in energy policy by looking for more renewable resources (High environmental value) Score: 3*1 = 3	China will diversify its energy sources and a dramatic decrease in coal and increase in its renewables. Therefore, this encourages Iraq to use environmental-friendly technologies (High environmental value) Score: 3*1 = 3	The current energy policies of China still support using oil with a slight increase in the share of renewable resources. Therefore, Iraq will not change its environmental policy (Medium environmental value) Score: 2*1 = 2
Total score		**8**	**18**	**17**

should certainly improve the environment in both Iraq and China, and probably for the whole world, it is not the scenario that generates the best economic value for Iraq.