US Foreign Policy in the Middle East
The Case for Continuity
Bledar Prifti
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Bledar Prifti

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The Case for Continuity

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Bledar Prifti
St. Petersburg College
Seminole, Florida, USA

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I dedicate this book to my wife, Suela, and two children, Joel and Helen. To you I say: Never take for granted anything in this great country called the United States of America.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

For the USA and its Western allies, the Middle East (see Fig. 1.1) has been one of the most strategically important regions of the world, at least since the end of World War II (WWII) (Brzezinski 2003; Le Billon and El Khatib 2004; Chomsky 2005). Following the unremitting social and political turmoil in the Middle East, the reactivation of Russia's expansionist ambition in Eastern Europe, the increasing Chinese threat in the Pacific region in the last few years, and the quick response of the Obama administration to deal with the threat by reallocating military resources and political attention, some experts have argued that the geostrategic importance of the Middle East is fading (Miller 2012; Logan 2014). It may be true that the ongoing conflicts and instability in the Middle East and the growing Russian and Chinese threats in Europe and the Pacific are real US foreign policy concerns; however, they do not diminish the geostrategic importance of the Middle East.

According to the former Prime Minister of Great Britain, Tony Blair (2014), the importance of the Middle East rests on four major factors. First, the Middle East continues to be one of the world's largest producers of oil, and despite the struggle of the USA to revolutionize its energy industry, the world and the stability of global markets will continue to be dependent on the Middle Eastern oil. Being a hub that connects major regions in the Northern and Eastern Hemispheres makes the Middle East an important trade route and gives it a high leverage in global trade.

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Fig. 1.1 The map of the Middle East (*Source*: The US Central Intelligence Agency)

Many scholars and experts have also argued that instability in the Middle East is a threat to the flow of oil and the economic and political stability of the states that depend on this resource, including many European states (Chomsky 2005, 8; Cohen 2009; Harvey 2010, 210). Second, its

geographic proximity to Europe makes unrest in the Middle East a clear and present danger for most European countries, threatening global stability and security. The cases of the *Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant* (ISIL) and of the Syrian crisis and its immigrations waves toward Europe are just the latest examples of such danger. Third, the importance of the region is also dependent on the strategic alliance between Israel and the USA and the need to support the only filo-American/Western ally in the region. Lastly, Blair believes that the political development in the Middle East will likely decide the fate of radical Islam around the world, which has an expansionist nature at the expense of other types of political and value systems. A potential defeat of the radical Islamic forces in the region would result in their global defeat and the salvation of the current international system of politics.

President Reagan recognized the importance of the Middle East and the entire Eurasian region in his National Security Strategy of 1988 in which he stated:

> The first historical dimension of our strategy is relatively simple, clear-cut, and immensely sensible. It is the conviction that the United States' most basic national security interests would be endangered if a hostile state or group of states were to dominate the Eurasian landmass—that area of the globe often referred to as the world's heartland. We fought two world wars to prevent this from occurring. And, since 1945, we have sought to prevent the Soviet Union from capitalizing on its geostrategic advantage to dominate its neighbors in Western Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and thereby fundamentally alter the global balance of power to our disadvantage. (National Security Strategy Archive 1988, 1)

Along the same lines, Zbigniew Brzezinski (2003, 5–10), a former National Security Advisor to President Carter and a very influential scholar, argues that maintaining political dominance over the Middle East is vital to secure US hegemony around the world. He also emphasizes the geostrategic importance of *Euroasia*, the combined landmass of Europe and Asia, as follows:

> For America, the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia… Now a non-Eurasian power is preeminent in Eurasia—and America's global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained… How America 'manages' Eurasia is critical. Eurasia is the globe's largest continent and is geopolitically axial. A power that dominates

> Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions. A mere glance at the map also suggests that control over Eurasia would almost automatically entail Africa's subordination, rendering the Western Hemisphere and Oceania (Australia) geopolitically peripheral to the world's central continent. About 75 per cent of the world's people live in Eurasia, and most of the world's physical wealth is there as well, both in its enterprises and underneath its soil. Eurasia accounts for about three-fourths of the world's known energy resources. (1997, 30–31)

Halford J. Mackinder (1943) also identifies the geostrategic importance of Eurasia; however, he limits its geographic location to the landmass portion of it, excluding the Middle East. Mackinder called this landmass the Heartland and argued that who rules the Heartland commands the world (1943).

Unlike Mackinder, Nicholas John Spykman argues about the geostrategic importance of the Euroasia's Rimland or the inner crescent (1944). This area includes the Middle East, Siberia, South East Asia, China, and the Korean peninsula. Spykman considered the Rimland as a buffer zone that divided the landmass of Eurasia from the oceanic mass. In addition, Spykman calculated that this area contains the largest portion of the world's population and a large share of its resources. Because of its geographic location and wealth in people and resources, Spykman argued that who rules the Rimland commands the world and prevents the emergence of a global power (1944, 43).

From this perspective, the Middle East enjoys a unique geographic position. The combination of its geographic location with the possession of abundant oil resources makes the Middle East a region of high geostrategic importance. This view dates back to WWII. Analyzing the plans of the Nazi Germany to create a German hemisphere, Spykman ([1942] 2007, 121) identified the geostrategic importance of the Middle East in the following statement:

> The Near East [The Middle East], which controls the routes to the Indian Ocean and contains the oil on which European industrial life depends, will be integrated, economically and politically, in the form of semi-independent states controlled by Berlin.

The end of WWII and the beginning of the Cold War provided some support for the Heartland theory but, at the same time, unraveled the weakness of its main assumption. While Halford J. Mackinder (1943, 601) was

right when he argued that the Soviet Union "must rank as the greatest land power on the globe" if it conquers the Nazi Germany, he underestimated the importance of the Rimland as a geographic force that would contain Soviet expansion and diminish its power. Also, Mackinder did not predict the rise of the USA as an unmatched maritime power of the world, being capable of controlling maritime routes, projecting power across the world, and preventing other powers from threatening US territorial sovereignty in the Western Hemisphere directly.

Mackinder, basically, underestimated the sea power theory of Alfred T. Mahan ([1890] 2007), who argued that in order to dominate the world, a state should have supreme sea power and control over strategic land bases that would help facilitate power projection. Following his belief that oceans are not *barriers* to protect the USA but *highways* to project power and prevent other states from projecting power, Spykman ([1942] 2007, 448) also emphasized the importance of sea power and controlling maritime *highways*.

The geostrategic importance of the Rimland regions was also tested successfully during the Cold War when the USA used it to contain the Soviet expansion as a dominant global power. In the Middle East, the USA increased its influence especially in Turkey and Iran, blocking the Soviet Union from expanding in the region and beyond. It also improved its relations with China and maintained a controlling presence in Japan, Australia, and Western European states, encircling the Soviet Union and preventing it from gaining maritime power and threatening the Western Hemisphere. The control of the Rimland by the Soviet Union would have given it the ability to expand the control over what Spykman called "the insular outposts", leading to a potential political and geographic *encirclement* of the USA ([1942] 2007, 194–199). This concern was also expressed in the 2002 National Security Strategy of the USA, which states that:

> To contend with the uncertainty and to meet the many security challenges we face, the US will require bases and stations within and beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia, as well as temporary access arrangements for the long-istance deployment of US forces. (National Security Strategy Archives 2002, 30)

At the same time, the USA utilized the containment approach in the Western Hemisphere to prevent any hemispheric state from becoming a Soviet ally. While it is debatable that during the Cold War the USA utilized

the Spykman's geographic containment ideas, it is fair to claim that it contained the Soviet Union by controlling the main gateways in the Middle East and Western Europe, including Iran, Turkey, and Western Europe. The USA also used its territory in Alaska and the alliance with Japan to contain the spread of the Soviet Union from the east side of the Heartland while China blocked the Soviet expansion in Southeast Asia.

However, the technological advancements of the twentieth century led to emergence of a new type of power—air power. To Giulio Douhet ([1942] 1998), air power is supreme to sea power and land power because it is offensive in nature and makes defense impossible. Douhet argues that controlling the air space means controlling the sea and land, thus, controlling the world. The USA has been aware of the importance of air power and has been willing to take advantage of it when necessary. According to a newly declassified document of the *Strategic Air Command* (SAC), *Atomic Weapons Requirements Study for 1959*, by the mid-1950s, the USA had designed a detailed plan to use its air power to destroy the Soviet air power and diminish its capabilities to use strategic bombers to launch nuclear attacks against the continental USA and the US forces in Europe and East Asian (The National Security Archive 2015). The USA had identified more than a thousand nuclear targets and target systems to be attacked in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China in case of a nuclear conflict. What makes this important is the fact that in order to deliver the nuclear attacks against the Heartland states, the USA had planned to use its military bases and allies in the Rimland region. According to the plan, as a delivery system, the SAC would use B-47 bombers based in the United Kingdom, Morocco, and Spain to destroy the targets.

As technology has become an important element of power in addition to land power, sea power, air power, and nuclear power, there is no doubt that the USA is the most technologically advanced country on earth with the most modernized military force. In addition, there is no doubt that geography has also been generous to the USA. Spykman ([1942] 2007, 43) realized the unique geographic position of the USA in the world, that is, its location between the most important economic, political, and military zones. Captain Mahan ([1890] 2007, 29–89) had come close to predicting American global ascendancy when he argued that sea power dominance would lead to global dominance, and that the USA satisfied all the principal conditions affecting sea power dominance. It is for this reason that George Cressey (1945, 245–246) argued that North America may actually be the true Heartland of the world. According to him, the

central and insular geographic location, the access to two major oceans, and technological supremacy make the USA the dominant force in the world.

The US leaders have not taken geography for granted and have rarely squandered opportunities to take advantage of it to advance its foreign policy objectives. Unlike other states, it has been able to tame geography for its own interests. With taming I mean compressing time and space and being able to project land, sea, air, and nuclear powers from any corner of the globe in an effective and efficient way. Even more importantly, while geography does not impede the ability of the USA to project power across the globe, it acts as a formidable tool to prevent other powers from projecting power against the Western Hemisphere and the USA. However, geography still "counts in a strategic and tactical military sense, a political sense, and a culturally defined sense, and it counts in terms of the spatial distribution of resources, peoples, and physical systems" (Cohen 2009, 2). Spykman (1938, 236) emphasizes the importance of geography by arguing that:

> Although the entire [foreign] policy of a state does not derive from its geography, it cannot escape that geography. Size, shape, location, topography, and climate posit conditions from which there is no escape, however skilled the Foreign Office, and however resourceful the General Staff… With these facts foreign policy must reckon. It can deal with them skillfully or ineptly; it can modify them; but it cannot ignore them. For geography does not argue. It simply is.

The USA and the Middle East

In the last seven decades, US foreign policy has shown an increasing involvement in regional politics, including economic dealings, wars, and covert operations to overthrow anti-American regional leaders (2004). Following the 1928 *Red Line Agreement*, which created the first oil monopoly by prohibiting its shareholders from advancing individual interests, the USA signed the *Anglo-American Petroleum Agreement*, which divided the Middle Eastern oil between the USA and Great Britain. The next major involvement dates back to 1953 in Iran when US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in cooperation with British secret service orchestrated the coup d'état to overthrow the Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammed Mosadegh, who had nationalized oil at the expense of foreign oil companies, most of which were British. Another major involvement

occurred in 1956 when Great Britain and France, in coordination with Israel, launched an attack against Egypt in an attempt to take back the main passage of oil to Europe—*the Suez Canal*—which had been nationalized by Egyptian Prime Minister, Gamal Abdel Nasr. The American disapproval of this attack led to the humiliation and departure of the European powers and the falling of the Middle East under the US sphere of influence. The US dominance in the region continued throughout the Cold War as it aimed to contain the spread of Soviet influence in the region and across the world.

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union signaled the beginning of a new American century in the Middle East. Unfortunately, it started with a war. Following the Iraqi invasion of the oil-rich Kuwait in the early August of 1990, the USA reacted immediately by building an American-led military coalition and forcing Iraq to retreat. Over seven years later, in December 1998, the USA launched a four-day bombing campaign to *degrade* Iraq's capability to produce and use weapons of mass destruction and force it to comply with the agreed UN Security Council Resolutions. The next major involvement of the USA in the region would be the invasion of Afghanistan, following the 9/11 terrorist attack on the American soil and the accusations that Afghanistan had supported the terrorists who perpetrated the attack. Two years later, the USA would engage in the most controversial conflict of the new century so far: the 2003 invasion of Iraq. However, the Iraq War did not put an end to the US influence or engagement in the Middle East. Instead, the war opened a new chapter in US foreign policy toward the Middle East, which continues today with the direct involvement in military actions against the ISIL in Iraq and Syria and diplomatic engagement with the Islamic Republic of Iran and other regional states.

US Foreign Policy and the Middle East: Change or Continuity?

While many thought that the Iraq War was an exceptional feature of US foreign policy and a consequence of the President Bush's *neoconservative ideology*, most believed that his successor, President Barack Obama, would pursue a different foreign policy toward the Middle East. As a presidential candidate, Obama had declared that the Obama Doctrine would not be "as doctrinaire" as *the Bush Doctrine*, referring to its controversial

principles of *unilateralism* and *preemption*. He campaigned on a foreign policy platform that would rely on collective security and "common prosperity" with other nations (The New York Times 2007). He also promised to end the politics of fear and change the mentality that had engaged the USA in conflicts and wars around the world for a very long time (Ackerman 2008). In his early days as president, Obama continued to emphasize the need for a new era of foreign policy toward the Middle East and the Muslim world. Following this objective, the president made his first overseas trip to Turkey, which has been one of the most powerful states in the region and a traditional ally of the USA. Soon after Turkey, President Obama visited Egypt, and in his address to the Egyptian representatives and people, he promised *A New Beginning* in US foreign policy toward the region (Holzman 2009).

However, as Mark Twain used to say, "Action speaks louder than words but not nearly as often." The very principle seems to apply to US foreign policy under President Obama. The aggressive usage of predator drones to kill members of terrorist organizations in the Middle East, including the killing of four American nationals (Cratty and Johns 2013), the support for the military intervention in Libya in 2011, the decision not to intervene in Syria despite the war crimes committed by the Syrian government against its own people, the unilateral actions against the ISIL without the UN approval (Liptak 2014), the sending of more military troops back in Iraq (Collinson 2014), and the latest decisions to maintain 10,000 military troops in Afghanistan and send army troops in Iraq for training purposes have revealed the gap between the words and deeds of the Obama foreign policy.

Faced with this discrepancy, it would be reasonable to question whether US foreign policy under President Obama represents continuity or break from previous foreign policy of President Bush. Nevertheless, the answer to this question would be limited in its explanation if it does not explain whether or not US foreign policy under President Bush represents continuity or change from previous foreign policies on the Middle East. Thus, this task also demands an understanding of the characteristics of the pre-Bush foreign policy. Indeed, the further one goes into the past of US foreign policy, the more accurate and comprehensive the study will be to discern foreign policy patterns and practices as they relate to change and continuity in foreign policy toward the region over a particular period of time.

Because US foreign policy is very broad in nature and relatively old in age, this book focuses on an comparative historical analysis of US foreign policy toward the Middle East that deals *only* with national security issues in the last seven decades. In the 1988 National Security Strategy, President Reagan realizes the propensity of foreign policy experts to argue that US foreign policy from one administration to another changes *erratically*. This view, he argues, is wrong, and "in reality there is a remarkable consistency over time when our policies are viewed in historical perspective" (National Security Strategy Archive 1988, 1). President Reagan also argues that continuity in US foreign policy strategies is grounded in unchanging geographic considerations and designed to preserve the survival of the USA and its fundamental values (National Security Strategy Archive 1988, 1–3). The same argument is made by President George H. W. Bush in his National Security Strategy of 1991 when he states that US national security strategy has not changed since the outbreak of the Cold War (National Security Strategy Archive 1991, 1).

In an attempt to test the aforementioned claims presented in the official national security strategies of the USA and those made by other experts, this book aims to answer the following question:

- Has US foreign policy toward the Middle East been characterized by continuity or change and what factors have influenced it?

In order to answer this compound question, this book will answer the following sub-questions:

1. During the Cold War, was US foreign policy toward the Middle East characterized by continuity or change, and why has that been the case?
2. Did US foreign policy toward the Middle East under President George H. W. Bush represent continuity or change, and why has that been the case? How does the case of Iraq explain it?
3. Does US foreign policy under President Obama represent continuity or a break from previous foreign policies in the region, and why is that the case?
4. Has US foreign policy toward Iran followed the patterns of US foreign policy in the Middle East? If yes, why? If not, why not?

US Foreign Policy Objectives and Strategies

Foreign policy incorporates the international goals of a state and the strategies how national capabilities are used to achieve those goals (Rourke and Boyer 2010, 141). States' primary objectives are interrelated and can be viewed as a hierarchic structure of instrumental goals (Levy 2004, 32). The most important foreign policy objective of any state is to ensure survival, which is defined in "terms of some combination of territorial integrity and autonomy" (Levy 2004, 32). For example, the survival of the USA as a *free and independent nation* is ranked number one in all of its official national security strategies. Of the secondary objectives, the most important one is preventing the emergence of another hegemonic power that would challenge the status quo of the international system and the dominant power (Levy 2004, 32).

In our case, as the only regional hegemon, the most important objective of the USA is to maintain the status quo of the international system by preventing the emergence of another regional hegemon (Mearsheimer 2001, 41). Failure to fulfill this objective will lead to a potential *encirclement* of the Western Hemisphere by the aspiring regional hegemon(s) and then a direct attack on the US soil (Spykman [1942] 2007, 194–199). The cases of the Nazi Germany and the Imperial Japan during WWII and their attempts to encircle the Western Hemisphere and attack the USA are the latest examples of how aspiring regional hegemonic powers threaten to destroy the international system and the regional hegemon behind it (Spykman [1942] 2007, 457). In order to prevent the rising of another regional hegemon and, consequently, the attempts to encircle the Western Hemisphere, it is important for the USA to maintain *approximately equal distribution of power*, which can be defined based on capabilities of an individual state or coalition of states, in the current international system (Levy 2004, 32).

US foreign policy, meaning objectives and strategies, is dependable on its position in world politics as the only regional hegemon, its geographic location as a maritime power, and its unique military power projection across the world. According to Spykman ([1942] 2007, 446–447),

> A sound foreign policy must not only be geared to the realities of power politics, it must also be adjusted to the specific position which a state occupies in the world. It is the geographic location of a country and its relation to centers of military power that define its problem of security.

Also, John J. Mearsheimer (2001, 40) argues that the USA has been acting as the only world's *regional hegemon* since the early nineteenth century when it proclaimed through *the Monroe Doctrine* that the Western Hemisphere had become its own sphere of influence, prohibiting other powers from interfering in it. Mearsheimer also argues that the primary objective of the USA is to prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon in any region of the world that would threaten the world's distribution of power and the US national security interests as the only regional hegemon. As a result, unlike other states in the international system that strive to challenge American dominance, the USA can be viewed as a status quo power that has a vested interest in maintaining and strengthening the current world order (Mearsheimer 2001, 386–392; Layne 2002). Zbigniew Brzezinski goes even further when he predicts that the USA would probably be the last global superpower the world had ever seen (Brzezinski 1997, 209).

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, its disintegration, and the successive birth of the Russian Federation (referred to in this book as *Russia*) led most scholars and experts to agree that a unipolar international system had emerged, with the USA being the sole superpower of the world. However, in the last decade or so, many experts have been talking about the decline of US hegemony and the emergence of a multipolar system. This perception of the American decline spread significantly among experts with the increasing losses during the Iraq War and the great economic recession of 2008. Richard Haass (2008, 44) argues that the international system is shifting from a unipolar system under the American leadership into a *nonpolarity* system in which dozens of state actors possess and exercise various types of power.

Along the same lines, Fareed Zakaria (2009) argues that the world had shifted into a post-American order characterized by "the rise of the rest, referring to the increasing power of developing states, such as China, Russia, Brazil, India, Turkey, etc." A few years earlier, Zakaria (1999) had been arguing about the American world order and how wealth and strong centralized government had led to the American global ascendancy. Because the American central government has remained strong (for not saying has become stronger), it would be reasonable to assume that Zakaria attributes "the rise of the rest" to their economic performance. Stated differently, American economic power was declining relative to the rising power of "the rest." The same economic approach on "the rise and fall of great powers" was provided much earlier by Paul Kennedy (1987),

who argued about the inevitable fall of great powers due to their economic decline. Moreover, Fawaz A. Gerges (2012) applies the alleged decline of the USA to its influence in the Middle East. He argues that the ability of the USA to act unilaterally and hegemonically unconstrained by the local context has come to an end (Gerges 2012, 12). The rise of China, Brazil, and Russia and the growing independence by many regional states in the Middle East have made America look weak, shattering the image of an omnipotent and invincible power (Gerges 2012, 15).

On the other hand, Robert Kagan (2013, 103) disagrees with the proponents of the American decline by looking at four main indicators of a nation's relative power decline: First, he examines whether the size and influence of US economy relative to that of other powers has declined. Second, he analyzes the magnitude of military power compared to that of potential adversaries. Third, he looks at the degree of political influence the USA exercises in the international system. Lastly, he looks at the temporal factor. He argues that instead of determining the American decline by analyzing its politic or economic performance in a short period, we should look at the fundamental changes in the international distribution of various forms of power over a long period. Great powers are not created overnight, and their decline cannot happen overnight unless a major war occurs. Kagan uses the rise and fall of the British Empire (and we may add many more cases) to support this claim.

Also, by looking at each indicator, Kagan concludes that the American economy continues to dominate the international system, its military power is second to none, and its political influence around the world continues to be as strong as it used to be a decade ago (2013, 105–108). Despite any temporal economic setback due to economic crisis and the mismanagement of foreign policy strategies, such was the case of the 2003 Iraq War, US global dominance still remains firm. This premise was also accepted by the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, when he stated at the annual investor forum held in St. Petersburg, Russia, that "America is a great power, probably the only superpower today… We accept that" (Arkhipov and Tanas 2016).

Its favorable geographic location, the control and influence over important areas in the Rimland regions, and the military bases established around the world have given the US supreme power projection capabilities to squelch any attempt by other great powers to expand their influence and challenge US global dominance. In addition, while many challenging states want to put an end to the US hegemony, none has been willing to

contribute or sacrifice itself for this purpose. Following Mancur Olson's "logic of collective action," one would argue that it is better for many great powers in the system to either pass the burden of fighting the USA to other states or join a coalition led by the USA than to challenge the latter directly.

While destroying US hegemony is a desirable outcome for each great power, such as China, Russia, Germany, France, Brazil, India, or Iran, the unpredictability of what follows the fall of the USA raises concerns among all challenging states as none wants to substitute the current hegemon with another other than itself. For example, while France, Germany, Brazil, India, and Iran would like to see the decline of US hegemony in their respective regions, none of them would be willing to sacrifice itself, fearing the potential emergence of a Chinese or Russian hegemony. Even China and Russia would play the same game because they fear each other equally or more than the USA. The desire of each state to rule the world or prevent another great power from ruling it will eventually lead to *buck-passing*, a strategy through which a state hopes to destroy the current hegemon by destroying the aspirant ones at the same time (Mearsheimer 2001, 234–267).

Thus, it is not simply a matter of collective action problem; indeed, it is a matter of collective interest problem among the challengers. Because all challenging states would prefer buck-passing instead of a direct confrontation with the USA, none of them would engage directly in collective actions against the hegemon. As such, only a major geographic change (or disaster) and/or a significant change in the distribution of capabilities in the international system at the disadvantage of the USA would put an end to the American world system, a scenario that is far away from being reality.

The American world order dictates that the main objective of US foreign policy in the Middle East is to prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon in the Northern and Eastern Hemispheres. Many experts agree with this claim, but they also argue that US foreign policy has been about controlling the flow of oil, protecting the territorial integrity of Israel and its military superiority, and settling the Arab-Israeli conflict (Rosecrance 1980, 31; Telhami 1990, 50; Amirahmadi 1993, 11). While controlling the flow of oil and protecting Israel have been part of US foreign policy objectives, they are secondary and in the service of the main objective—preventing the emergence of a regional hegemon. The control over the flow of oil is closely related to the geostrategic location of the Middle East

and the latent power of oil that can be converted into military strength, which would determine the distribution of capabilities and the structure of the balance of power (Mearsheimer 2001, 55).

Also, the alliance with Israel has been conditioned by its capability to act as a balancing force in the region to prevent the emergence of a dominant power. Indeed, despite its support for the creation of the State of Israel, the USA did not establish strategic relationship with Israel until *the Six-Day War* in 1967 when the latter demonstrated superior military capabilities and influence in the region (Gilboa 2009, 70; Gerges 2012, 17). Also, during the Cold War, Turkey and Iran (until 1979) were as privileged by the USA as Israel due to their capabilities to balance other regional powers and their geostrategic location to contain the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East. In addition, even Iraq and Pakistan temporarily resumed an important geostrategic role in regional politics when they agreed to become members of *the Baghdad Pact* (later named *The Central Treaty Organization*) in 1955, which aimed at preventing the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East.

With regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the USA does not have a real strategic interest in fully settling it. However, it has an interest in containing the conflict to avoid regional destabilization, the emergence of a regional hegemon, and/or interference from extra-regional great powers. The USA feared regional destabilization during the Cold War when the Soviet Union was eager to interfere politically and militarily, and it was proven right during the recent Syrian crisis when Russia wasted no time taking advantage of the regional chaos by engaging in direct military actions, trying to establish its presence in the region.

Despite this developments, the current balance of power in the region ensures that neither Israel nor any Arab state will emerge as a winner (Miller 2004, 247). The geostrategic location of Israel demands a formidable land power in order to exercise control over other regional states. Military strength is determined by a blending of interdependent components, including sea, air, and land powers (Johnsen 1998, 16–21). Of all these components, land power is the dominant one, and dominant states possess the most powerful armies (Mearsheimer 2001, 83). Israel may have a supreme military strength; however, it does not have a supreme land power. Because the terrain on which conflicts take place in the Middle East is mostly land, the state or coalition of states with the greatest land power will be the *victor* to dominate the region. As Spykman (1938, 225)

argues, "whichever power is stronger at the moment of conflict, and on the terrain where the conflict is taking place, will be the victor."

Despite its highly trained soldiers, its technologically advanced military, and its weaponry arsenal, including allegedly nuclear weapons, Israel is not able to dominate the region because it does not have sufficient manpower to extent its influence over the Arab states. Manpower is one of the main elements of land power because it is likely to influence the economic potential of a state and the number of people available for military use (Johnsen 1998, 8). As such, it is likely that this factor will not change significantly in the near future because it takes a very long period of time for the population (manpower) to increase. Israel still may win wars and defend itself by using its nuclear weapons as the last resort; however, it will not be able to dominate the region unless its population increases significantly to compete with those of other regional states. While not all states that have large population become great powers, all states that are great powers have a large population available for military use. The land power is the decisive military force (Mearsheimer 2001, 83–84), and Israel does not and is not expected to have it in the near future.

On the other side, the Arab states have enormous manpower available for military use, and in combination with wealth used for military purposes, they may be able to build the most powerful army in the region. Even though the Arabs are spread into different states, history has shown that they can easily come together under the emblem of either *Pan-Arabism* or *Pan-Islamism*. Pan-Arabism can be viewed as an ideology or policy (Doran 2002, 5). As an ideology, it is a popular idea that espouses the unification of all Arab nations under one set of values, beliefs, and political system. As a policy, Pan-Arabism is a set of objectives and strategies to bring together all Arab states to confront an external threat and establish political dominance (Doran 2002, 5; Snyder 2009, 330). Two major waves of Pan-Arabism can be identified since the outbreak of World War I (WWI). The first wave occurred during the 1914–1916 period when the *Grand Sharif of Mecca*, Sharif Hussein ibn Ali, reached an agreement with the United Kingdom to revolt against the Ottoman Empire in favor of building a Pan-Arab state in the Mashreq (Mufti 1996, 19).

The second wave of Pan-Arabism started with the founding of *the Arab League* in March 1945 and the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948. Following the establishment of the new state and the threat that it posed to the sovereignty of the Arab states, the Arab League dismissed

the UN partition plan of Palestine and ordered a pan-Arab attack to abort Israel. This attack started what is known today as *the Arab-Israeli conflict*. This conflict continued even after the 1956 Suez Canal crisis. It culminated in 1967 with *the Six-Day War*, at the end of which Israel managed to defeat the Arab armies and conquer much of their territories. Six years later, the Arab states managed to score a petty victory in the Yom Kippur War of 1973 but without recovering from the losses of the previous war. The military defeat in the *Six-Day War* was followed by a slow demise of Pan-Arabism as major foreign policy of the Arab states (Ajami 1978; Tibi 2002, 95; Susser 2012, 38; Zisser 2013, 75). The actual event that signaled the demise of Pan-Arabism is debatable. It is believed that it was sealed at the end of the Gulf War when the USA for the first time used its military might to force Iraq out of Kuwait (Susser 2012, 13).

The fall of Iraq in 2003 and the growing influence of Iran and Israel seem to have generated a new need for the Arab states to create pan-Arab coalitions. One coalition was initiated by the Egyptian president, Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, in 2015, which was followed by a pan-Arab response against the pro-Iranian coup in Yemen in February 2015 (Kirkpatrick 2015). Under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, in March 2015, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain used their military power to attack the pro-Iranian forces in Yemen. In addition, in May 2015, the *Gulf Cooperation Council* member states organized a meeting that aimed at creating a joint military force of 40,000 soldiers to provide defense from external threats (Hudson 2015). Because the Arab states have considerable manpower and wealth to buy advanced weaponry and recruit well-trained soldiers, they have a much higher probability than Israel to become a dominant power in the near future. However, this does not mean that the Arab states will win the conflict with Israel because the latter possesses nuclear power that can be used as the last resort to ensure the survival of the state. The Arab-Israeli conflict has proved this argument over many decades (Mearsheimer 2001, 132).

The balance of power in the Middle East becomes even more complicated when adding into the equation Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. This division of power among states makes the Middle East resemble a chess game and the region itself an important component of *the grand chessboard* in which the plurality of regional players guarantees collective actions problems at the advantage of the USA. Looking back in history, it would be logical to say that regional states fear each other more than

they fear the USA. For this reason, they are more likely to fight each other and cooperate with the USA than to cooperate with each other and fight America.

USA As an Offshore Balancer

As a regional hegemon located in the Western Hemisphere, the primary objective of the USA is preventing the emergence of another regional hegemon or hemispheric power in other regions. The USA has been achieving this strategic objective by utilizing the grand strategy of offshore balancing (Mearsheimer 2001, 234–267). First, with *grand strategy*, I mean the coordination and direction of all the political, military, economic, and moral assets of a state or a coalition of states for the purpose of attaining foreign policy goal(s) defined by fundamental policy (Hart 1991, 322). Stated differently, it is the level at which intelligence and diplomacy interact with military power to determine foreign policy outcomes in the international system (Luttwak 2009, 409). All states must have a grand strategy, and whether they know it or not, they each have one, different ones (Luttwak 2009, 409).

Second, with *offshore balancing*, I mean a grand strategy conducted by an offshore state with the purpose of maintaining the regional balance of power and preventing the emergence of a regional hegemon. This definition assumes that offshore balancing is dictated by the status of the USA as a regional hegemon and its geographic location. Because there has been no changes in the US status as the only regional hegemon and it geography, it is reasonable to claim that this strategy has not changed since the USA became a regional hegemon in the nineteenth century. Quoting Walter Lippmann, President Reagan argues that geography dictates national interests and foreign policy of the USA, and because *the facts of geography are permanent*, national interests, objectives, and strategies experience no significant change (National Security Strategy Archive 1988, 1–4). The same view is held by President George H. W. Bush, who states that US foreign policy throughout the Cold War has been guided by the grand strategy of containment (National Security Strategy Archives 1991, 1). In almost every official national security strategy of the USA, offshore balancing is referred to as *the grand strategy of containment*. Even though with a different name, the grand strategy of containment is identical to offshore balancing as it aimed at balancing the Soviet Union in Europe and preventing the expansion of Soviet influence around the world, which

could lead to a potential encirclement of the Western Hemisphere and the *strangulation* of the USA.

Despite the official statements made by US presidents in their national security strategies and actions that have followed them, experts disagree on the type of grand strategy that the USA has followed during a particular period. These experts can be grouped into two major camps. On one side are those experts who use the term *offshore balancing* to describe a grand strategy that aims at maintaining US hegemony while shunning away from the non-security-related objectives of maintaining considerable military presence overseas, spreading democracy, and conducting humanitarian missions (Layne 1997, 2006; Mearsheimer 2001, 234–266; Mearsheimer and Walt 2016). On the other side are those experts who use the term *liberal hegemony* to describe a grand strategy that aims at maintaining US hegemony, building international institutions based on liberal norms, and spreading democracy around the world (Ikenberry 2005, 2011; Brands 2016). While both camps disagree on the type/name of the grand strategy, they both agree that the USA has followed different grand strategies at different periods because different presidents have had different ideologies and followed different foreign policy strategies.

However, because of their considerable similarity, these two approaches can be brought together under a third approach that combines the liberal elements of maintaining hegemony by spreading democracy and following international institutions with the realist elements of maintaining hegemony by relying on the balance of power approach. The third approach, a revised version of offshore balancing, would argue that states pursue non-security strategies of spreading democracy and following international institutions for as long as pursuing these strategies does not conflict with the *balance-of-power-logic* and threaten national security interests of states (Mearsheimer 2001, 46).

Whenever national security interests of any level conflict with non-security interests (i.e. providing humanitarian aid or spreading democracy), any ideological predisposition of individual leaders, and/or national values/culture of a great power, national security interests always prevail. Also, whenever there is a conflict between different national security interests (i.e. global vs. regional vs. local), those with the highest geostrategic importance at the global level prevail. I call this *the supremacy doctrine of foreign policy*. It is true that the USA has been the torchbearer of creating international institutions and following their rules and decisions; however,

it is also true that the USA (or any other great power) has always ignored international institutions whenever its national security interests have been at stake.

Another reason why the disagreements between the two aforementioned camps are not substantial and relevant is because states use different strategies to achieve their grand strategies. With *strategy* I mean the use that is made of force and the threat of force to achieve foreign policy objectives (Gray 1999, 17). Whether through international institutions or state institutions, the USA would issue threats to use force or use force whenever its national security interests are in jeopardy. As a maritime power, the USA implements the grand strategy of offshore balancing by relying on two strategies: the *buck-passing strategy* and the *balancing strategy*. The official national security strategies of the USA refer to the buck-passing strategy as the *deterrence strategy*, implying no direct involvement in military actions against the aggressor. However, being aware that deterrence may fail to contain the aggressor, these strategies also emphasize the need to maintain supreme military power to deal directly with the threats or cases when the buck-passing strategy would fail.

Buck-passing is the ideal strategy because it allows the USA to pass the burden of containing the aggressor to other regional states, which often have no other choice but to *carry the buck*. For example, the USA does not have to use its own resources to contain the spread of Russia in Europe, China in Asia, or Iran and the ISIL in the Middle East because regional states have no choice but to contain the threat or face their own demise. Having a multitude of players with a diversity of interests facilitates the buck-passing strategy. The larger the number of players in the game, the higher the possibility for collective action problems among regional states, and the easier it will be for the USA to find a regional power to balance any aggressive state.

Buck-passing has been the preferred strategy of the USA for two main reasons. First, it preserves the military capabilities of the USA while diminishing those of the states in conflict. At times, the buck-passing strategy may be risky because the *buck-catcher* may successfully stop the aggressor and become powerful enough to challenge the balance of power (Mearsheimer 2001, 157–162). However, because nothing occurs overnight in power politics, the hegemon is still able to prevent this scenario by implementing a dual-containment strategy, containing both the aggressor and buck-catcher by prolonging the conflict and preventing the emergence of a winner. The dual-containment strategy implemented during

the Iran-Iraq War is a perfect example of how to avoid the shortfalls of the buck-passing strategy.

The second major reason why the USA relies on the buck-passing strategy is the geographic location. It follows the assumption that "the closer a great power is to a rival the more likely it is to balance because it would be first in line should the other choose to attack" (Toft 2005, 388). Likewise, the larger the distance between rival great powers and the greatest the natural barriers that divide them, the more likely that they would rely on buck-passing to contain the aggressor. For example, the long distance from the Middle East and the difficulty to project power across the oceans the more likely is the USA to rely on the buck-passing to contain the aggressor. It is a cost-efficient and suitable strategy to preserve US military capabilities. While in the last seven decades the USA has been able to overcome the constraints of geography, it still has not been able to overcome its costs. Also, the geographic proximity of regional land powers, such as Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and so on, to each other or the area controlled by the ISIL is another factor that makes it likely for the USA to rely on buck-passing to balance any of the aforementioned powers or the ISIL.

If the buck-passing strategy fails or is expected to fail, then the USA would implement direct balancing by either sending direct diplomatic threats, creating an anti-aggressor coalition, and/or using its own economic and military resources. In some cases, though, it would use direct balancing in combination with the buck-passing strategy without engaging in direct confrontation with the aggressor.

US foreign policy during the Cold War to contain Soviet expansion is an example of such mixture. During this period, the USA could not use buck-passing because there existed no great power capable and willing to carry the burden of containing the Soviet Union, nor was the USA eager to directly balance the aggressor by relying 100% on direct balancing and usage of its military capabilities. The Vietnam War and the 2003 Iraq War are examples of the cost of relying on direct balancing. Instead, the USA pursued a foreign policy that demanded regional powers to play a direct role in containing the spread of Soviet or pro-Soviet influence while receiving economic and military assistance from the maritime power. The USA has been consistent in devising and implementing the grand strategy of offshore balancing at least since the end of WWII. As this study will show, a significant amount of evidence supports this argument.

The Organization of the Book

Chapter 2 positions US foreign policy in an offensive realist theoretical perspective. It starts by analyzing the importance of theory and different theories of international relations and foreign policy. While recognizing that no theory can and should explain everything, it proposes offensive realism as a theoretical framework that focuses exclusively on great powers politics and on issues involving national security and geostrategic interests of the USA. Offensive realism is suitable to explain US foreign policy because of its aggressive behavior to maintain the status as the only regional hegemon in the international system. The chapter concludes by discussing the comparative case study methodology through which the data will be collected and the theoretical claims will be tested.

Chapter 3 provides a comparative case study analysis of US foreign policy toward the Middle East during the Cold War by focusing on major presidential doctrines. The cases of the Truman, the Eisenhower, the Nixon, the Carter, and the Reagan Doctrine successfully test the claim that US foreign policy was characterized by continuity rather than change. Its foreign policy objectives to maintain regional hegemonic status by preventing the emergence of Soviet hegemony remained unaltered throughout the Cold War. The absence of a supranational government, possession by the Soviet Union, uncertainty of its intentions, and the need to survive dictated the aggressive reaction of the USA. Also, given its geographic location, the USA relied consistently on the grand strategy of offshore balancing to achieve its objectives.

Chapter 4 incorporates a comparative case study analysis of the Bush Doctrine in an attempt to test the claim whether it represents continuity in US foreign policy toward the Middle East. In doing so, it analyzes the policy that led to the 2003 Iraq War because of its overall impact on US foreign policy toward the region. Focusing on the strategic aspect of the policy, not on the managerial one, this chapter also analyzes whether there was a change in US geostrategic objectives and the strategies it implemented to achieve those objectives. The study finds that there is no change in the geostrategic objective to prevent the emergence of a rival regional power and the grand strategy of offshore balancing used to achieve the objective.

Chapter 5 will incorporate a case study approach of US foreign policy under President Obama. It also proposes the real Obama Doctrine and its principles. In order to test the claims, the study conducts a comparative

case study analysis of US foreign policy toward Iran, Turkey, Syria, and the war against the ISIL. It finds that US foreign policy under President Obama represents continuity and the principles of the Obama Doctrine are in line with the geostrategic objectives of the USA in the Middle East and the strategies it has been implementing to achieve those objectives. What makes the Obama Doctrine different from other doctrines is its emphasis on the *speak softly and carry a big stick* principle of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.

Chapter 6 utilizes a comparative case study analysis to explain US-Iran relationship after the dethroning of the Shah in 1979. It challenges the conventional wisdom by arguing that Iran is a rational actor and, despite the regime change and the political rhetoric that followed it, US foreign policy toward it has remained unchanged on issues involving geostrategic interests because there has been no change in the geostrategic objectives and strategies of both states. Geostrategic objectives and strategies have remained the same because there has been no change in their geography and positions in regional and global politics. While there are limitations to their relationship, the USA and Iran share mutual geostrategic interests and are prone to cooperation rather than conflict. The cases on the Iran-Contra affair, the 2001 Afghanistan War, the 2003 Iraq War, and the war on the ISIL provide sufficient evidence to support the claim.

The book concludes with a summary of the findings and an analysis of what the future holds for US foreign policy in the Middle East and around the world. The main finding is that US foreign policy toward the Middle East in the last seven decades is characterized by continuity in foreign policy geostrategic objectives and strategies to achieve them. The main objective has been maintaining regional hegemonic status and preventing the emergence of another regional hegemon. For this reason, the USA has pursued the grand strategy of offshore balancing to maintain the balance of power in every region. Also, applying a well-established theoretical framework to explain US foreign policy in the last seven decades allows to engage in some form of conditional prediction. Indeed, one of the most important benefits of applying a well-established theoretical framework to explain foreign policy is predicting future events occurring under similar conditions and factors. Based on the aforementioned findings and principles of offensive realism, it is reasonable to predict that if there will be no change in its hegemonic status and geography, US foreign policy will continue to remain the same in substance.

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CHAPTER 2

Putting US Foreign Policy in a Theoretical Perspective

In order to better understand the nature of US foreign policy toward the Middle East in the last seven decades, it is important to put its analytic explanation in a theoretical perspective. Theory has a bad connotation when it comes to explaining reality. Many believe that theory is not reality, and they are right. Theory is not reality; it is a tool. Theory is an important tool to explain reality and predict future developments. It is born out of a systematic analysis of several phenomena that share similar characteristics. A theory that is used to explain a foreign policy phenomenon is the same as a legal precedent that is used to decide on a similar legal case. A judge uses a legal precedent to make his decision on a similar case, while scholars of international politics utilize a theory to explain how a new foreign policy phenomenon fits a particular theory. What makes a theoretical explanation more important than and different from other nontheoretical approaches is the fact that the former has the capability to predict foreign policy events. While a legal precedent predicts the decision of the judge on a future similar legal case, a theory predicts what will happen in the future, given the presence or absence and interaction of similar factors or variables.

Theory is a set of propositions and concepts that aims to explain political phenomena by specifying the relationship among variables (Mingst 2008, 56). It provides selective criteria of facts on the ground, a basis for coherent organization of facts, and a source of "cross fertilization" of related

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fields (Parsons 1938, 14–15). Any empirical science cannot be developed to a high point without reference to theory, and our study of facts is always guided by "the logical structure of a theoretical scheme" (Parsons 1938, 14–15). In the field of international relations, Brian Schmidt (2008, 8) argues that a theory is "necessary and unavoidable" in order to understand international politics because (1) theories determine what factors are relevant for the study and (2) both policy makers and scholars rely on theories that are generated from their world views.

In addition, it is important to note that none of us could understand the world we live or make decisions in without applying a theoretical approach (Mearsheimer 2001, 8). According to Mearsheimer (2001, 9), "some are aware of it and some others are not, some admit it and some do not; but there is no escaping the fact that we could not make sense of the complex world around us without simplifying theories." Parsons (1938, 20) makes the same point when he argues that we are like the Moliere's hero, speaking prose all our lives without knowing it. Thus, researchers cannot avoid using some form of theory whenever explaining foreign policy.

Explaining Foreign Policy

Explaining foreign policy is always a very interesting enterprise, but often a challenging one for two main reasons. First, it is a methodological challenge because researchers are faced with the dilemma of whether to apply a singular foreign policy or a comparative foreign policy approach. Some researchers support the singular foreign policy approach and argue in favor of using a case study analysis, applying middle-range theories, and aiming at providing rich, contextual explanations of political phenomena rather than law-like generalization (Hearman and Peacock 1987; Carlsnaes 2002; Hudson 2013). On the other side, some other researchers support a comparative approach that involves cross-national study analysis, applies grand theories, and aims at providing generalization across units (Rosenau 1968; Kaarbo and Beasley 1999).

Second, arguably more important than the first, explaining foreign policy imposes a theoretical challenge. Because the foreign policy field of study is oversupplied with theories, the real challenge becomes selecting the appropriate theoretical approach (Ikenberry 2005, 7). To make the matter worse, there is a disagreement among experts about the differences between foreign policy theory and international relations theory. Foreign policy analysis is recognized as an actor-specific theory that pro-

vides the theoretical micro-foundations upon which an international relations theory is grounded (Hudson 2005, 21). It is a *multilevel theory* that incorporates elements from more than one level of analysis and is *multidisciplinary* in nature, borrowing from other disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, organizational behavior, or economics (Hudson 2005, 2). On the other hand, international relations analysis is based on an *actor-general* approach and views structure as the most important element that dictates the behavior of micro-factors.

However, both analyses can be viewed as being mutually inclusive rather than mutually exclusive. In order to understand the relation between foreign policy and international relations, it is important to have an understanding of different levels of analysis (Waltz 1959; Jervis 1976; Ikenberry et al. 1988) or variables (Rosenau 1966), or "explanans" (Hudson 2013, 5) employed to explain foreign policy. Waltz (1959) recognizes the individual, the state, and the international levels of analysis through which foreign policy can be explained. Ikenberry et al. (1988) recognize the three-level analysis but name each level differently—society-centered, state-centered, and system-centered. Similarly to Waltz and Ikenberry et al., Jervis (1976) follows level-bases analysis but uses four different ones—the decision-making level, the bureaucratic level, the state level, and the international level. Unlike Waltz, Ikenberry et al., and Jervis, James N. Rosenau (1966) focuses on variables related to individual characteristics of the leaders and the governing elite, the bureaucratic structure, the governmental structure, domestic politics of a state, and the external environment of the international system. Moreover, following the same structure, other experts focus on source categories, which include the individual characteristics of foreign policy-making elites, the roles occupied by policy makers, the societal environment of the nation, the governmental setting in which policy making occurs, and the external environment (Wittkopf et al. 2008, 18).

Despite different names and for the sake of simplicity, almost all theories can be grouped into three general levels of analysis: the individual level, the state level, and the international level (Rourke and Boyer 2010, 64–100). At the individual level of analysis, researchers explain foreign policy by focusing on personal traits and characteristics of state leaders, such as President Bush, President Obama, President Putin, and so on. The assumption is that foreign policy is mostly determined by individual leaders, and their personal traits and characteristics influence their decisions. For example, they explain foreign policy by looking at *leadership person-*

ality and cognitive characteristics (Winter 1992). Some other researchers emphasize the importance of *presidential character* (George 1974; George and George 1998) and how *ideas and beliefs* of leaders influence foreign policy (Goldstein 1988; Goldstein and Keohane 1993). Also, some researchers have explained foreign policy decisions by looking at the impact of *emotions and motivations* of leaders at the decision-making level (Walker 1983; Crawford 2000; Mercer 2013), while others have focused on the impact of *leadership psychological traits in selecting foreign policy advisors*, who assist in foreign policy decision making (Walker et al. 1999; Garrison 2001).

In contrast, from the state-level analysis perspective, researchers focus on the impact of domestic factors of a state on its foreign policy. For example, some researchers have explained foreign policy by evaluating the impact of *norms and national identity* (Onuf 1989; Wendt 1999; Kubalkova 2001), while others have emphasized the impact of different types of *decision units and political structures within a state* (Stern and Sundelius 1997; Hagan and Hermann 2001). Also, other researchers have paid attention to the role of *advisory structure to leadership* and the significance of *groupthink* in dictating foreign policy (Janis 1989; Preston 2001; Badie 2010). In addition, many researchers have explained foreign policy by analyzing the *importance of religion* (Huntington 1996) and *culture* of a state (Hudson 1997; Hudson and Sampson 1999). Other potential domestic factors that researchers have considered to explain foreign policy include also *domestic political calculations and strategic choice* (Putnam 1988; Bueno de Mesquita 2002) and *bureaucratic and organizational behavior* (Allison 1971; Allison and Zelikow 1999).

Unlike the first two levels of analysis, the international system analysis focuses on the governing status of the international system—anarchy—and the importance of state as rational and the most important actor in world politics whose main objective is to survive through self-help (Morgenthau 1948; Waltz 1979, 105–107; 2008; Mearsheimer 2001, 3). The anarchic nature of the international system put constraints on actions of the individual and other domestic factors, and it is for this reason that Waltz (1979, 121–122; 1996) argues that an international relations theory is not a foreign policy theory; instead, it is a theory of constraints on foreign policy. However, that does not mean that international relations theories cannot explain foreign policy of a state despite their shortcomings for excluding individuals and domestic factors (Elman 1996). Waltz also argues that the multilevel and multidisciplinary nature of foreign policy

analysis may lead to wild proliferation of variables and subjectivity (1979, 65). Instead, he argues in favor of a more simple approach by applying a theory of international relations to explain foreign policy. He bases his claim on the belief that the international level of analysis provides a better explanation of a state's behavior because the structure of the international system imposes constraints on its behavior (1979, 74).

Nevertheless, experts also disagree on when to use the international-level analysis. Some researchers argue that international-level variables may be most important in times of international crises, while domestic variables are most important in times of peace (Jervis 1976; Ikenberry 2005, 9–10). In addition, some argue that the need to analyze international-level factors is more important in the study of small states foreign policy than in the study of great powers because those factors impose fewer constraints on great powers than on small states (Rosenau 1966; Jervis 1978; Snyder 1991). Waltz (1979, 72–73) disagrees with this position and argues that great powers are concerned about threat coming from other great powers and tend to focus more on the international-level constraints and ignore the role of the small states. As a result, small states will experience fewer constraints from the international system and larger ones from individual- and state-level factors. Although the distribution of capabilities defines the structure of the international system, the latter is not a direct cause because its actions are conditioned by states' socialization and competition within the system (Waltz 1979, 74).

While some experts argue that a domestic system imposes greater constraints than the international system on foreign policy of a state (Joyner 2005), many others admit the primary role of the international level of analysis. They argue that international relations analysis is grounded on the actions of human decision makers as individuals and groups (Hudson 2005, 7–14; Ikenberry 2005), and incorporating different levels of analysis would provide a better explanation of foreign policy (Singer 1961). While attempts have been made to mix individual- and state-level factors with systemic factors to better explain foreign policy (Rose 1988; Snyder 1991; Taliaferro et al. 2009), most of them lack the methodological and theoretical rigor and synthesis (Legro and Moravcsik 1999, 28; Tang 2009, 800–802). In a few words, trying to explain everything related to foreign policy may result in explaining nothing, and experts should make peace with the fact that no theory can explain or should explain everything. Instead, each theory has its own view of the world, its advantages and disadvantages, and provides its own explanation of foreign policy.

Selecting the Theoretical Framework

Revealing the theoretical approach used in this book will help the reader understand the process of how facts are collected and analyzed and how arguments are supported or rejected by those facts. As mentioned previously, the selection of a particular theory depends on the world view of the researcher, which, in turn, dictates the kind of topic to be studied, the evidence to be collected, the argument(s) to be made, and the way the argument is to be tested. Understanding the importance of other theories of international relations and foreign policy, I believe that offensive realism theory of international relations provides a comprehensive explanation of US foreign policy toward the Middle East in the last seven decades. There are several reasons why I selected offensive realism as the theoretical framework for this study.

First, the USA is considered well-suited to be "the poster child for offensive realism" because of its consistent aggressive behavior during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Spykman [1942] 2007, 65–89; Mearsheimer 2001, 238). Offensive foreign policy is not a choice for the USA. It is a *must* in order to avoid a potential encirclement of the Western Hemisphere and, consequently, a direct attack on the US soil by other great powers (Spykman [1942] 2007, 194–199). Pursuing an isolationist foreign policy or even relying on hemispheric defense (defense only of the Western Hemisphere) would be suicidal for the USA. According to Spykman ([1942] 2007, 457),

> Hemispheric defense is no defense at all. The Second World War [or any war] will be lost in Europe and Asia. The strategic picture demands that we conduct our military operations in the form of great offensive across the oceans. If our allies in Old World are defeated, we cannot hold South America [consequently, the Hemisphere]; if we defeat the German-Japanese Alliance [or any other alliance] abroad, our good neighbors will need no protection.

This argument goes along with the widely held perception of many scholars, politicians, and people that the USA is *addicted to war*. In an article written for the *Foreign Policy* magazine, Stephen M. Walt (2011) raises the rhetorical question whether or not the USA is "addicted to war." Joel Andreas (2003) also analyzes this phenomenon in his book, *Addicted to War: Why the US Can't Kick Militarism*. It is true that as a hegemonic power, the USA retains an exceptional position in the international system. It is also true that its status is often compared to those

enjoyed previously by the British Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Roman Empire, the Hellenic Empire, the Persian Empire, and other empires or great powers.

However, one major drawback of being a hegemonic power, as history tells us, is that other great powers in the system will challenge it. For example, the Persian dominance was frequently challenged by the Arabs, the Mongols, the Greeks, and others. The Hellenic dominance was challenged by the Persians and barbarians in the Balkans, Asia Minor, and beyond. The Roman dominance was challenged by the Carthaginians, the Spartans, the Macedonians, the Gauls, the Ottomans, and other "barbarians." The dominance of the Ottoman Empire was challenged by the Byzantine Empire, the Mamluks, the Holy Roman Empire, the Russian Empire, among others. And the list continues. Because they live in a permanent state of fear of losing hegemony, hegemonic powers are always in offensive to defend themselves from their challengers. Indeed, a hegemonic power is in offensive to defend the status quo of the international system, while other great powers are in offensive to change that status quo by directly or indirectly attacking the former (Mearsheimer 2001, 35).

Because a hegemonic power will have to respond to challenges or threats coming from different great powers around the world, at the first glance, it would seem reasonable to think of it as being "addicted to war." For example, if a hegemonic power, that is, the USA, is to engage in conflicts against Russia, China, and Iran at the same time or in a consecutive order, it would be reasonable to see the number of conflicts that the USA got involved in being three times that of Russia, China, or Iran. In this case, many would rush to the judgment that the USA is inherently addicted to war or that conflict is part of its culture or political system. This conclusion is premature because the researchers make a blind assertion without looking at the context of those conflicts. As the aforementioned example shows, the number of conflicts is high because the USA is being challenged by all three great powers, forcing it to act in an offensive way to defend its status in the international system. In a few words, from this perspective, one would argue that indeed it is the world that is *addicted* to challenging the US dominance, not the latter being addicted to war.

Every hegemonic power (or empire) has been prone to conflicts in an attempt to defend or ensure its privileged status in a troubled world. The USA is no exception to this rule. Its hegemonic status has been continuously challenged by other great powers, including *the Holy Alliance*, the Great Britain, and Germany during the second half of the nineteenth century

and the beginning of the twentieth century, Germany and Japan during WWI and WWII, and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Today, the US hegemony is being challenged by other great powers, such as Russia and China. As argued previously, allowing other great powers to become regional hegemons would lead to a potential encirclement of the Western Hemisphere and direct attacks against the US soil. Consequently, while the aggressors seek regional hegemony at any cost, the USA is left with only one option: preventing the emergence of another hegemon at any cost, including waging wars in every corner of the world. And this is the *tragedy* of US foreign policy, a tragedy that has accompanied all previous dominant powers or empires.

The second reason for selecting offensive realism is because it blends theories of international relations with theories of foreign policy (Schmidt 2004, 429–430). Offensive realism is a theory of international relations, but at the same time, it has the power to explain foreign policy of individual states. While Waltz (1979, 70–71, 73–74) positioned structural realism as a theory of international relations that had little to say about foreign policy of individual states, Mearsheimer empowered offensive realism by using the structure of the international system to explain foreign policy of certain states, great powers, that are deemed powerful enough to influence the system. What makes offensive realism unique from this perspective is the fact that unlike neoclassical realism (Rose 1998; Zakaria 1998), which sacrifices the core assumptions of realism by incorporating assumptions from other nonrealist theories (Legro and Moravcsik 1999, 27–34), it retains the core assumptions of realism, providing a coherent and distinctive explanation of great power foreign policy.

The third reason for selecting offensive realism is based on my realist conviction that the international system and strategic interests of a state put constraints and dictate the actions of individual leaders, of the government, and of the society, regardless of their values and beliefs. National security and geostrategic interests of a state supersede any *conflicting* ideological or non-security-related predispositions of individuals, groups, or institutions within a society. This is what I previously called *the supremacy doctrine of foreign policy*. Senator Arthur Vandenberg used to say that "politics stops at the water's edge," meaning that US foreign policy is devised and implemented to advance the strategic interests of America, not the ideological predispositions, values, or beliefs of individual leaders or groups in the American political system and society. It is for this reason that offensive realism can also be viewed as a theory of constraints on

foreign policy. It is the assumption of offensive realism that individual and societal factors, including beliefs, values, culture, and so on, succumb to the powerful forces of the international system and the strategic interests of the state. Because of this assumption, offensive realism has little explanation to offer about the impact of individual and societal factors on US foreign policy.

The fourth reason for utilizing offensive realism is that, despite claims made after the Cold War that offensive realism was useless and the world had entered "the end of history," the reality has been showing that offensive realism is alive and practical. The conflictual situation in many different regions of the world are strong indicators that support this argument. For example, the annexation of Crimea from Russia in 2014 and the continuous threat to annex additional Ukrainian territories have reminded the world that the Cold War may be coming back. Soon after the annexation of Crimea, and following the 1947 argument of George F. Kennan about *The Sources of the Soviet Conduct*, Richard N. Haass (2014) argues that the goal of Russian foreign policy is to restore the hegemonic status lost in 1990. Likewise, Alexander J. Motyl (2014) argues that these developments in the Eastern Europe represent a "new case for containment" of the Russian threat to the USA and the rest of the world.

China is another example that shows that offensive realism is still relevant in international relations. More than a decade ago, Mearsheimer (2001, 401) used offensive realism to predict that China would become the biggest threat to the USA because the former has the potential—economic and military—to challenge US regional dominance and become the hegemon in Northeast Asia. In November 2013, China unilaterally announced the creation of an *Air Defense Identification Zone* over several islands, which are subject to disputes with Japan (Starr and Botelho 2013). While this action targets Japan, the ultimate target is the USA. This is the first direct and military challenge that China is posing to US influence in the region, and offensive realism predicts that the problem will exacerbate in the future as the power of China will continue to increase.

The fifth reason for selecting offensive realism as a theoretical framework is because it provides an explanation of the relationship between military capabilities, the place of the USA in the international system, its geography, and its foreign policy in the same way as Nicholas John Spykman (1938; [1942] 2007) envisioned more than seven decades ago. Foreign policy, meaning objectives and strategies to achieve those objectives, is likely to change whenever there is a change in military capabilities

of a state (the ability to pursue a strategy), its status in the international system, and/or its geography. Because the status of a state is determined first and foremost by its military capabilities, changes in military capabilities will likely result in a change of status in the system (Spykman ([1942] 2007, 446–447). Thus, changes in the distribution of capabilities across the units (states) in the system will result in structural changes within the entire system (Waltz 1979, 88, 97–98). For example, prior to WWI and WWII, the international system was characterized by multipolarity; during the Cold War, it was characterized by bipolarity; and after the Cold War, it has been characterized by unipolarity (Krauthammer 1990). Many scholars argue that because the power of the USA has diminished and that of China, Russia, and other states has risen in the twenty-first century, the international system is becoming multipolar (Murray and Brown 2012).

Also, because military capabilities determine the position of a state in the international system and how foreign policy is formulated and implemented, the USA approached the issue of the Barbary Pirates in the Mediterranean Sea differently before and after building its naval force. Before building the navy, the USA relied exclusively on paying tribute to pirates in exchange for captured sailors and merchandise. The USA even signed the *Treaty of Tripoli* (1797) through which it "admitted" that its roots were not Christian only to please the awkward demand of the Muslim pirates. Once the navy was built and the USA gained sufficient sea power, it declared war on the "Barbary States," a war that was won in 1815.

In addition, Russia, as a super power, had an aggressive foreign policy approach during the Cold War. However, it changed into a mild foreign policy soon after the fall of the Soviet Union and the rapid deterioration of its military power. Yet again, once the economic and military power of Russia increased by the beginning of the new millennium, its foreign policy returned to its aggressive behavior of the Cold War. This behavior was characterized by an active role in global politics, especially during the Syrian crisis, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the continuing attempts to expand its influence in Eastern Europe and in global politics. Table 2.1 explains how military capabilities of the Soviet Union at least correlate with its foreign policy behavior.

Geography is the second most important factor that dictates USA foreign policy. Sir Halfort J. Mackinder (1904), Nicholas John Spykman ([1942] 2007), John J. Mearsheimer (2001), Zbigniew Brzezinski (2003), Robert D. Kaplan (2013), and many other scholars have emphasized the

Table 2.1 Foreign policy behavior of the Soviet Union/Russia (1945–…)

Period	1945–1955	1956–1966	1967–1977	1978–1988	1989–1999	2000–2010	2011–
Military capabilities	High	High	High	Moderate high	Low	Moderate high	High?
Foreign policy behavior	Aggressive	Aggressive	Aggressive	Moderate aggressive	Peaceful	Moderate aggressive	Aggressive?

Source: Author's compilation.

importance of geography in global politics. Geography dictates two major elements of foreign policy. First, it dictates the amount of resources given to a state (Spykman ([1942] 2007, 292–317). In return, the amount of resources often determines the wealth of a state, including the size of its population. The wealth and population represent the latent power of a state and the two most important components for generating military might (Mearsheimer 2001, 60–61). However, it is important to note that not all states may have the willingness or the capability to use their resources properly and convert them into wealth and military power. Some of them may be too weak or latecomers in the international system, such as the developing states of the third world, and their resources may be misused by their own governments or taken away from more powerful states in the system. Also, some states may not have the willingness to convert their wealth into military might. Nevertheless, most, for not saying all, great powers, sooner or later, take advantage of their given natural resources to increase their wealth and build up their military capabilities.

Second, geography influences the geostrategic threats and opportunities of a state and its strategies to achieve foreign policy objectives. While geography can be used as a tool to advance foreign policy objectives, it cannot be modified because, as mentioned previously, "For geography does not argue. It simply is" (Spykman 1938, 236). Geoffrey Sloan and Colin S. Gray (1999, 3) take a similar perspective and argue that

> …geography can be described as the mother of strategy, in that the geographical configuration of land and sea, with respect to a state's strategic policy, or an alliance between states, can exercise a twofold strategic conditioning influence: on locations important for defense, and on the routes and geographical configurations which favor an attacking force, be it on land or sea. Geography, it is worth adding, is pertinent at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of conflict, although its use or misuse by commanders at different levels can have very different consequences.

For example, being surrounded by the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean in the West and the East, the Arctic in the North, and nonaggressive small states in the South makes the USA more protected geographically than Russia and China, both of whom share land borders with each other and other great powers. As stated previously, while the oceans cannot be considered barriers, they still do provide support to the USA by diminishing the power projection of the adversaries or limit it to only those who possess formidable sea and/or air powers. Theoretically, this geographic

location would also make US power projection around the world difficult; however, the technological advancements and the dramatic increase in sea power and air power have nullified this disadvantage. The same argument can be made about the geographic proximity of Iran, Syria, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia to the ISIL. The closer a state is to the ISIL-controlled territory, or the lower the natural barriers that divide the two entities, the higher the chance for that state to engage in direct balancing. Neighboring states cannot pass the burden of containing the ISIL to other states, such as the USA, because the former are the primary targets of the aggressor.

The last reason for selecting offensive realism is academic in nature. It has to do with the fact that offensive realism is a relatively new theory and additional testing is needed to cover a wide range of cases over an extensive period. The strength of a theory depends on how well it explains a political phenomenon, to what extent its findings can be generalized, and whether it matures or weakens with passing of time. As a new theory, offensive theory needs further testing in order to see its explanatory depth, whether its propositions can be generalized to other cases, and whether or not it will pass the test at all. This book aims at filling these gaps and expanding the application of offensive realism to other foreign policy cases. In addition, because of the striking similarity between offensive realism and *geographic realism* of Nicholas John Spykman, this study will combine both to enrich the former as a well-established theory of international relations. Offensive realism will borrow from geographic realism the in-depth explanation of the impact of geography on foreign policy and combine it with the factors that dictate the aggressive behavior of great powers in the international system.

Several studies have been conducted directly or indirectly from the offensive realist perspective. Even though he does not follow the offensive realist approach, in his work, Christopher Layne (1997; 1998) prescribes the grand strategy of offshore balancing as the best course of action for the USA to maintain its hegemonic power. Layne argues that throughout the Cold War, the USA pursued a grand strategy of *preponderance*, which was based on the direct usage of American power to confront adversaries. However, according to Layne, the changing distribution of powers in the international system and the relative decline of the US power make the grand strategy of preponderance untenable (1997, 87). As a result, he argues that the USA should change its grand strategy to offshore balancing to prevent the emergence of other aggressor states. This grand strategy would minimize the risk of the US involvement in a future great power

war (nuclear war included) and would enhance America's relative power in the international system.

While Layne's argument has many connections to offensive realism, it has two slight differences. Offensive realism postulates that US foreign policy during the Cold War was based on an offshore balancing strategy (Mearsheimer 2001), while Layne argues that it was based on a grand strategy of preponderance. Second, while Layne (1997, 88) argues that the grand strategy of preponderance was based on America's goal to create a US-led world order and maximize its political, military, and economic power, offensive realism argues that the foreign policy was driven by the offshore balancing strategy to prevent the emergence of the Soviet Union as a new regional hegemon.

In addition, Carlos L. Yordán (2006) explains US foreign policy from an offensive realist perspective. Yordán uses the case of the 2003 Iraq War to test offensive realism. He argues that after the 2001 terrorist attack, the USA pursued a revisionist foreign policy. He also concludes that offensive realism provides an accurate explanation of the foreign policy that led to the war, claiming that the primary goal of the USA was to maximize power and become a global hegemon, even though the correct term would be "regional hegemon."

However, the arguments of Yordán do not fully fit in the offensive realist framework for several reasons. First, Yordán focuses mainly on the goal of the USA to become a global hegemon, and by doing so, he misses the main argument of offensive realism: the primary objective of the USA as a regional hegemon is to prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon (Mearsheimer 2001, 41–42). Second, besides not identifying the USA as a regional hegemon, Yordán does not mention the grand strategy of offshore balancing, nor does he make any explanation of the buck-passing and direct balancing strategies. Lastly, Yordán's argument gives the impression that US foreign policy after the 2001 terrorist attack experienced a major change and that the USA is a revisionist state. As discussed previously, the USA is a status quo power, aiming at maintaining its status as the only regional hegemon in the world and preventing other great powers from projecting power against the Western Hemisphere.

The Offensive Realist Theoretical Framework

Explaining the theoretical framework of offensive realism is important to understand the nature of the argument(s) made in this book, the relationship between depended variables and independent variables, and the way

how and the reason why empirical data are selected and used to explain the relationship between the variables. While offensive realism does not and should not explain everything about US foreign policy in the Middle East, it is a powerful tool that can be used to explain foreign policy actions in an anarchic world embroiled in conflicts and wars. John Mearsheimer (2001, 11), the founder of offensive realism, considers his theory "a powerful flashlight in a dark room: even though it cannot illuminate every nook and cranny, most of the time it is an excellent tool for navigating through the darkness."

In addition, offensive realism is a theory of great power politics because decisions and actions of great powers dictate the structure of the international system and the way how it operates (Mearsheimer 2001, 5). For example, colonial powers dictated how the world would look like after WWII when they created artificial states around the world. Also, the fate of Kosovo and Iraq was dictated by the American willingness to intervene, while the fortune of Crimea (and maybe Ukraine's) was dictated by the expansionist desire of Russia. Nowhere else is the role of great powers better defined and even institutionalized than in the structure of the United Nations Security Council in which five permanent members, great nuclear powers, hold veto power to decide even whether a state should exist or not. It is the same international body that when it comes to major issues involving great powers, it makes no decision and leaves the issues in the hands of great powers to deal with them their way. The case of the 2003 Iraq War and the invasion of Crimea in 2014 are just the two latest examples.

Offensive realism also explains the foreign policy of great powers by focusing on national security interests and survival as primary objectives. This implies that offensive realism does not deal with those aspects of foreign policy that involve non-security objectives. However, the theory does provide its own explanation of why and when great powers pursue non-security objectives. It argues that great powers pursue those objectives when they do not conflict with *the balance-of-power logic* or when they are in service of national security interests (Mearsheimer 2001, 46). Because survival ranks the highest in the hierarchy of state needs, states will never jeopardize it for the sake of other interests.

Furthermore, in order to explain the aggressive behavior of great powers, offensive realism relies on a combination of five "bedrock assumptions" (Mearsheimer 2001, 30–31). The first assumption is that the international system is in a state of anarchy, meaning that sovereign states

obey to no higher authority (Spykman [1942] 2007, 446; Mearsheimer 1995). It means that the international system lacks a central authority or a supranational government. As a result, conflicts and wars happen in an anarchic international system "because there is nothing to prevent them" (Waltz 1959, 232).

The second assumption is that great powers possess some offensive military capabilities that can be used to cause damages or even destroy each other (Layne 1993; Mearsheimer 2001, 30–31). The most dangerous powers are those that possess greater military strength. For this reason, states rely on the relative power vis-à-vis other states rather than on the absolute power. In an anarchic system, relative military power determines the place of a state in the international system and conditions its behavior (Waltz 1979, 88). Of all the components of military power, land power is the decisive one. States with large armies are the most dangerous ones (Mearsheimer 2001, 135). Spykman (1938, 225) argues that because the terrain in which the conflict occurs determines the winner, great sea powers are victorious on seas, while great land powers are victorious on land.

However, because human beings are terrestrial creatures, not aerial or amphibious ones, conquering land means conquering things that matter most: people, nations, or states. Land is a destination, while air and sea are not; the latter are simply ways to the destination. This is not to belittle the importance of sea and air powers. The Normandy landings during the *D-Day*, the Vietnam War, and the Six-Day War highlight the importance of air and sea powers. But, at the same time, they also highlight the fact that there can be no domination without using land power. The war against the ISIL is a powerful evidence of our time.

The third "bedrock assumption" is that great powers are suspicious of the intentions of their peers (Mearsheimer 1995, 11). They fear each other and believe that there cannot be any guaranty that they would not attack each other. Intentions of great powers are dynamic and depend on opportunities given to them. For example, the USA has publicly and consistently expressed deep suspicion about the intentions of China in Asia and Russia in Eastern Europe, as it fears that both great powers are waiting for the opportune moment to attack US vital interests. At the same time, the USA is suspicious of Iran's nuclear program because it fears an attack against American geostrategic interests in the region. Another example of this suspicion is the Iraqi invasion of Iran 6 years after both states had signed in a "brotherly" manner what is known as *The 1975 Algiers Agreement*. Iraq

viewed the domestic turmoil that followed the dethroning of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and the loss of the American support for Iran as opportunities to expand its territorial ambition.

The fourth assumption, which is also shared by almost all realists, is that survival is the primary goal of every great power. There is no higher priority for a state than its survival. All the other goals succumb to the instinct of survival. Mearsheimer argues that states can also pursue nonsecurity goals "as long as the requisite behavior does not conflict with the balance-of-power logic" (Mearsheimer 2001, p. 46).

The last assumption of *offensive realism* is that states are rational actors, and their actions are dictated by the need to survive and the constraints imposed by the international system. Mearsheimer argues that states involve in *game theory* through which "they consider the preferences of other states and how their own behavior is likely to affect the behavior of those other states, and how the behavior of those other states is likely to affects their own strategy for survival" (2001, 31).

It is important to note that none of these five assumptions alone mandates that great powers behave competitively or aggressively. Taken together, however, these assumptions create powerful incentives and motivations for states to think and act aggressively toward each other (Mearsheimer 2001, 29). These bedrock assumptions taken together lead to fear, self-help, and power maximization as three behavioral patterns that influence the actions of states (Mearsheimer 2001, 32). In an anarchic international system, states realize that in order for them to survive, they have to rely on self-help and power maximization.

Because states are not certain about how much power is needed to ensure survival, they will aim at becoming the most powerful state on Earth because global hegemony provides the highest level of security in the international system. Great powers will never accept the *status quo* of the international system until they dominate the entire international system. This view is also supported by Immanuel Kant when he states that "It is the desire of every state, or of its ruler, to arrive at a condition of perpetual peace by conquering the whole world, if that were possible" (as cited in Mearsheimer 2001, 34). In his own version, Mearsheimer (2001, 35) argues

> Given the difficulty of determining how much power is enough for today and tomorrow, great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony now, thus eliminating any possibility of a

> challenge by another great power. Only a misguided state would pass up an opportunity to become hegemony in the system because it thought it already had sufficient power to survive.

However, Mearsheimer (2001, 41) believes that a *global hegemony* is not possible because of the stopping power of water that hinders the ability of states to project military power all across the globe. Due to this obstacle, he argues, "the world is condemned to perpetual great-power competition" (Mearsheimer 2001, 2).

As a result, great powers are forced to pursue four main objectives: (1) become regional hegemon and prevent other states from becoming regional hegemons, (2) maximize the amount of the world's wealth under their control, (3) dominate the balance of land power, and (4) have nuclear superiority (Mearsheimer 2001, 140–147). Thus, becoming a regional hegemon, not global hegemon, becomes the ultimate goal of great powers (Mearsheimer 2001, 236).

According to Mearsheimer, the USA is the only great power that has achieved the status of regional hegemon because it controls the Western Hemisphere but does not have control over all the regions of the globe, including the Northeast Asia and Europe. Even though the USA does not have nuclear superiority, it dominates the balance of land power in all regions. As a regional hegemon, the primary goal of the USA is to maintain the status quo of the international system and prevent the emergence of a competitor regional hegemon (Mearsheimer 2001, 41, 236–237). As argued by Spykman through the cases of the Nazi Germany and the Imperial Japan, the final objective of an aspiring hegemon would be to encircle the Western Hemisphere and strangulate the USA until its total surrender.

The best way for the USA to prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon is to maintain the balance of power in every region. The balance of power is a regional distribution of powers that allows regional states to check and balance each other, thus preventing the emergence of a dominant state. Because of the geographic location of the USA as an offshore hegemon, this grand strategy is considered *offshore balancing*. In order to implement offshore balancing, the USA relies on the strategies of buck-passing (see Fig. 2.1) and direct balancing (Mearsheimer 2001, 237). Both strategies are mutually inclusive and often complement each other. Through back-passing, the USA attempts to get another state to bear the burden of preventing or even fighting against a regional aggressor that

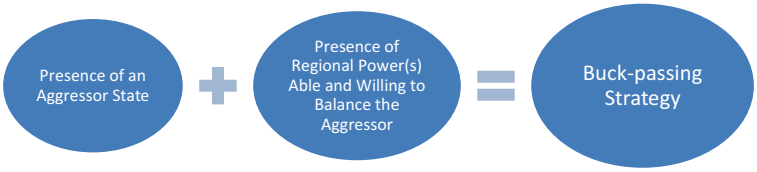

Fig. 2.1 The buck-passing strategy

upsets the balance of power. This strategy requires high diplomatic sophistication in order to *pass the buck* to other regional state (Mearsheimer 2001, 157–159). There are four main measures taken by a great power to facilitate buck-passing.

One measure is to establish good diplomatic relations with the aggressor state, hoping that the latter will focus its offensive power against the intended "buck-catcher" state. Second, the *buck-passer* decides to maintain strain diplomatic relations with the buck-catcher in an attempt to avoid a possible scenario of being dragged into war in support of the buck-catcher. Third, the *buck-passer* can increase its power by mobilizing additional resources in an attempt to threaten the aggressor and make it engage in war against the intended buck-catcher. Lastly, the *buck-passer* may allow and even facilitate the growth in power of the buck-catcher state in order to increase the real chances for the latter to deter the aggressor state.

The buck-passing strategy is prevalent in a multipolar international or regional system because there is a high probability of finding states that are willing and able to contain the aggressor (Mearsheimer 2001, 270–272). On the other side, buck-passing is less likely to be implemented in a bipolar international system because there exists no third state to *carry the buck*. It is for this reason that it is in the best interest of the USA to create a multipolar system in every region. The larger the division among states, the higher the chance for them to balance each other. Thus, *divide-and-conquer* should be considered a prerequisite for an effective balance of power strategy.

When buck-passing fails or is expected to fail, the USA relies on the direct *balancing strategy* (see Fig. 2.2) to prevent the aggressor from disturbing the balance of power (Mearsheimer 2001, 156). Direct balancing is implemented by either sending diplomatic threats to the aggressor, creating defensive alliances, which is also known as *external balancing*, or

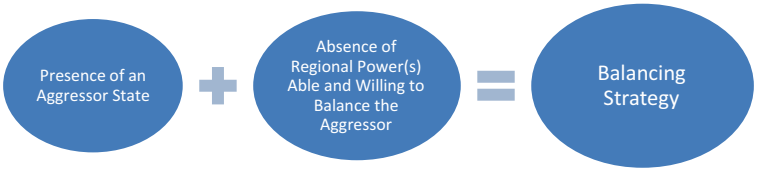

Fig. 2.2 The direct balancing strategy

balancing against the aggressor by mobilizing additional resources of its own, which is also known as *internal balancing* (Waltz 1979, 118). Often, the first two measures of direct balancing are combined with buck-passing. In a few cases, though, the USA has relied on using its own resources, including military power, to maintain the balance of power, such was the case of the Vietnam War and the 2003 Iraq War.

Offshore Balancing and US Power Projection

As mentioned previously, military power is vital to determining the place of a state in the international system, its foreign policy objectives, and strategies it pursues to achieve those objectives. As a result, understanding how the USA has organized its military forces and how it has projected land, sea, and air powers across the world is important to understanding its foreign policy objectives and strategies. For this purpose, this section briefly analyzes the structure of the US military force, how responsibilities are distributed, and the power projection system, how those responsibilities are fulfilled. Following the offensive realist view of the world, this section assumes that power structure and projection are structural components of a grand strategy to achieve foreign policy objectives. As a result, individual behavior, bureaucracy, or other forms of nonstructural behavior operate within the constraints of that strategy. A quick look at the US military power structure and projection reveals that both correspond to the offshore balancing.

During World War II, because the USA was engaged in many different war fronts, it decided to create a Unified Combatant Command system (UCC) in which every major region was assigned an Area of Responsibility (AoR). Each AoR had available army, aerial, and naval forces to engage in military operations whenever needed. The mission of every regional command incorporates four main objectives: deter and defeat transnational

Fig. 2.3 DoD AoRs. *Source*: The US Department of Defense

threats, protect US security interests, prevent future conflicts, and support humanitarian and disaster relief. As shown in Fig. 2.3, every region of the world corresponds to an AoR within the Department of Defense (DoD). For example, USEUCOM is responsible for the European region, USAFRICOM is responsible for the African region, USPACOM deals with issues in the Pacific region, USCENTCOM deals with the Middle East region, USNORTHCOM deals with North America, and USSOUTHCOM deals with Latin America. The boundaries of each AoR are identified under a *Unified Command Plan*, and every change is signed by the president. The latest change dealt the redrawing of the boundary lines for the high northern latitudes between USEUCOM, USNORTHCOM, and USPACOM and was signed by President Obama in 2011.

What is even more important, the USA has projected power in every major region of the world. It has done so by establishing military bases (ground, sea, and air) in several states within each AoR, such as in Germany and Italy for USEUCOM, Djibouti and South Africa for USAFRICOM, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Israel for USCENTCOM, South Korea, Japan, and Australia for USPACOM, and

so on. It is logical to believe that this power projection corresponds to the grand strategy of offshore balancing to achieve the main objective of US foreign policy: prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon that would challenge US regional hegemony. Thus, it is legitimate to claim that the offshore balancing is a grand strategy that dictates how the USA deals with other great powers in different regions of the world (Layne 1997; 1998; Mearsheimer 2001, 234–266).

Theoretical Arguments

The main theoretical claim of this study is that US foreign policy in the last seven decades has been characterized by continuity rather than change because there have been no considerable changes in the US relative military power and its geography that could change its foreign policy objectives and strategies. The military capabilities, which determine the position of the USA in the international system, have remained unaltered and superior to those of other great powers, and as a result, the USA has been able to maintain its regional hegemonic status and prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon. To fulfill this objective, as a maritime power, the USA has been relying on the grand strategy of offshore balancing by either *passing the buck* to regional states to confront the aggressor or relying on direct balancing. The buck-passing strategy has been the preferred one because through it the USA could keep its power intact or increase its relative power while diminishing the power of both the aggressor and the regional balancer. Whenever the buck-passing strategy failed or was expected to fail, the USA pursued the balancing strategy by sending diplomatic threats, creating anti-aggressor coalitions, and utilizing resources of its own resources, including military troops. Very often, especially during the Cold War, the USA would pursue a buck-passing strategy with a splash of direct balancing. In extreme cases, such was that of the 2003 Iraq War, the USA would engage fully in direct balancing.

Several major factors influenced the aggressive behavior of the USA to maintain hegemony and prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon. Those factors include the anarchic status of the international system, or the absence of a global government, aggressor states' possession of military capabilities that could harm or destroy US strategic interests, suspicion of other states' intentions toward the USA, the need of the latter to ensure its survival in an anarchic system, and the need to maximize relative power vis-à-vis other states as the best way to ensure survival. All these factors

combined together led to three major patterns of behavior: *self-help*, *fear*, and *power maximization*. The USA exhibited these behavioral patterns on all instances that involved its national security and strategic interests.

Following the main argument, this study will separately test the following arguments. First, US foreign policy toward the Middle East during the Cold War was characterized by continuity rather than change. Its main objective to contain Soviet expansion and prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon, and its grand strategy of offshore balancing to achieve that objective remained unaltered throughout the war. Second, the Bush Doctrine represents continuity in US foreign policy, and its major objective was to maintain US hegemony and prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon through an offshore balancing strategy. The third theoretical argument is that the Obama Doctrine aims at maintaining US regional hegemony and preventing the emergence of another hegemon by pursuing the grand strategy of offshore balancing. As such, it represents continuity in US foreign policy.

Following the continuity patterns of US foreign policy in the last seven decades, this study analyzes the US-Iran relationship by adopting several presidential doctrines that have dealt with Iran throughout the aforementioned period. This chapter challenges the conventional wisdom by arguing that because the relative military capabilities of the USA and Iran, their status in the international system, and their geography have remained unaltered in the last seven decades, their strategic interests and foreign policy objectives have remained unaltered as well. Also, because their strategic interests converged prior to the coming into power of the Islamic forces, it would be reasonable to believe that those interests remained unchanged even after the deposition of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi by the Islamic forces in 1979.

Following the supremacy doctrine of foreign policy, this study assumes that strategic interests of Iran always supersede any conflicting non-security interests, any ideological predisposition of its individual leaders, and/or its cultural values, beliefs, and customs. Because the USA and Iran continue to share mutual strategic interests, their relationship should be characterized by cooperation rather than conflict. As explained later in this book, there are many cases that support this argument. While the political rhetoric shows the opposite, Iran's strategic relationship with the Christian Armenia and its continuing partnership with the Christian Russia should expose the clandestine nature of international relations. And if someone argues that it is about the 1953 coup d'état and/or the American support

for the Shah, I would like to remind everyone that seven decades ago, about 60 million people (depending on the source) were killed during WWII.

Case Study and Comparative Case Study Analysis

At this stage of the study, it is important to describe how relevant data are collected, how the data will be analyzed, and how the arguments will be tested. First, the relevant data will be collected from a series of events related to US foreign policy toward the Middle East during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Because foreign policy is dynamic and deals with a plethora of events, this book will focus on major events that had or could have a significant impact on US strategic interests in the region. For better clarity and simplicity, these events are grouped into several presidential doctrines, as each one of them may incorporate or deal with several events at the same time. A presidential doctrine is a set of ideas, beliefs, and policies that dictate how foreign policy goals are pursued at a given period in history. It usually incorporates responses to opportunities and threats a state, in this case the USA, may face in the international system. A doctrine explains not only events but also the context in which they occur. Utilizing presidential doctrines helps identifying not only continuity or change from one doctrine to another but also consistency or discrepancy within each of them.

Justification for Case Study Selection

The primary factor for selecting the aforementioned cases is their relevance to the research objective of this study. All cases share common traits, such as opportunities for the USA to expand its influence, threats to US influence in particular regions of the world, and aggressive strategies to achieve US international objectives. The expectation is that they will produce results that support the theoretical claims made in this book. Robert K. Yin (2009, 54) argues that each case study should be selected carefully to either predict similar result compare with previous findings or predict contrasting results. In addition, I selected these cases because they are related to issues of high importance for US government and people around the world. John Gerring (2001, 257) argues that the trick is to use social science research to solve our daily problems "without sacrificing the rigor that qualifies it as a science.… It is not an easy trick, but it is the trick of the trade." Thus, out of a plethora of cases or issues, a researcher selects those that have scientific value but that at the same time provide solutions

to the real-world problems. George and Bennett (2005, 69) follow the same line and argue that it is important to employ variables of theoretical interest that provide explanation or solutions to real-life problems.

In addition, these presidential doctrines are selected because they allow for some control over the state-level and individual-level variables. For example, all presidential doctrines were launched by different US presidents who had different individual political ideologies, experiences, and overall characteristics. Presidents Truman, Carter, and Obama were affiliated with the Democrat Party and were known for their liberal ideology, while Presidents Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan, and Bush were affiliated with the Republican Party and were known for their conservative or neoconservative ideology. Also, all these presidents served in different periods of American politics. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower served during the Cold War and prior to the Civil Rights Movement. Presidents Nixon and Carter served after the Civil Rights Movement that was engaged in the Cold War. Presidents Bush and Obama served in a post-Civil Rights Movement and post-Cold War era. Other factors that distinguish these presidents include their education, profession, social status, race, and so on. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that these presidential doctrines allow for some control over individual- and state-level factors. It means that if different foreign policy leaders and their administrations come out with similar decisions about problems of the same nature, then it is reasonable to believe that those decisions were not about individuals.

When it comes to the case of the US-Iran relationship, there are three major reasons for selecting Iran. First, Iran was the primary benefactors of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, as it was able to expand its sphere of political influence after the overthrowing of Talibans in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The second main reason for selecting Iran is because it is considered regional power, which is able to dictate or shape regional politics. This claim is supported by offensive realism theory, which claims that great powers like Iran have the capabilities to influence global politics. While states with minimal capabilities have their place in the international system, they are not powerful enough to dictate global politics. The third reason has to do with the recent controversial deal that was signed by Iran and the USA on July 14, 2015, and its coming into force after the failure to block the agreement in the US Congress on September 10, 2015. President Obama considered the agreement a "historic chance to pursue a safer and more secure world" (Nelson and Lee 2015), while the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, considered it an "historical mistake" (Mullen and Robertson 2015).

Next, the data obtained from the aforementioned case studies will be analyzed by utilizing case study and comparative case study analysis of foreign policy events within or between different presidential doctrines. Case study analysis is "the detailed examination of an aspect of historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events" (George and Bennett 2005, 5). It is also defined as the intensive study of a single case that aims at generalizing on a large set of cases (Gerring 2004, 341). A case is an instance of a class of events, and the latter is a phenomenon of scientific interest, such as conflicts, wars, revolutions, and so on (George and Bennett 2005, 7). On the other side, comparative case study analysis involves comparing two or more cases in an attempt to explain a particular social phenomenon. It is important to note that scientific research is inevitably comparative in nature (Lasswell 1968, 3; Lijphart 1971, 682). In a single case study analysis, the researcher engages in comparing different observations within the case, while in a comparative case study analysis, the researcher compares different cases and observations therein.

Lastly, the arguments will be tested by utilizing the congruence method of analysis. The congruence method will test whether the theoretical arguments of offensive realism explain foreign policy actions of the USA or predict the outcome in particular cases. In order to accomplish this task, I will define the value of the independent variable in a case and then ask what predictions or expectations about the outcome of the dependent variable should follow from the theory. If the outcomes in the cases analyzed in this study are consistent with the offensive realist theoretical arguments, then it would be just to claim causal relationship or support for the aforementioned arguments of the book. Tracing the relationship between factors throughout the lifespan of an event will help establish a clear causal mechanism and avoid claims about relations that may be spurious in nature.

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CHAPTER 3

The Cold War and the Trumanization of US Foreign Policy in the Middle East

This chapter deals with US foreign policy toward the Middle East during the Cold War, which began soon after WWII and ended with the official disintegration of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991. The main reasons for selecting this period is because the end of WWII was immediately followed by significant economic and political changes in the Middle East. From the economic perspective, the region soon became important due to the increased production of oil and the dependence of the world on it. Second, the end of WWII led to the restoration of the independence or the emergence of several new states, including Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Israel. Especially the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948 led to an increased tension and instability in the region. A combination of its economic importance and geographic location made the Middle East an important geostrategic region. This was proven true soon after WWII when the USA and the Soviet Union engaged in a prolonged conflict of geostrategic interests, which came to be known as the Cold War. On one side, the former aimed at maintaining and increasing its influence as a hegemonic power and preventing any regional or extra-regional power from having control over the region. On the other side, realizing the importance of the Middle East, the latter aimed at expanding its control over the region, and consequently, increasing its influence over other regions and facilitating power projection across the world.

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Thus, the main argument that will be tested in this chapter is that US foreign policy toward the Middle East during the Cold War was characterized by continuity rather than change because its foreign policy objectives and strategies to achieve them remained unchanged. Foreign policy objectives and strategies remained unaltered due to the continuous status of the USA as the only hegemonic power and its geographic location in the Western Hemisphere. Its primary foreign policy objective throughout this period was preventing the expansion of the Soviet Union and the emergence of another regional power that would challenge its geostrategic interests and influence in the region. The USA feared another WWII scenario in which a potential expansion of the Soviet Union around the world would lead to the encirclement of the Western Hemisphere and the de facto strangulation and capitulation of the former. This fear was tested positive in the case of the *Cuban Missile Crisis* and the continuing attempts of the Soviet Union to establish allies in the region for the purpose of facilitating power projection against the USA. In service of the first objective, the USA also aimed at preserving the oil-rich Persian Gulf and controlling the free flow of oil from the region to the global market. The control over the oil flow was crucial to prevent any regional power and the Soviet Union from increasing its power and influence by threating to cut vital oil supply to European allies.

Also, several secondary but important factors influenced US foreign policy in the Middle East: the anarchic status of the international system, the possession by the Soviet Union and regional great powers of significant military capabilities that can hurt or even destroy US interests, suspicion about their intentions toward the USA, the need to survive in an anarchic system, and the need to act rationally against the threats by maximizing power vis-à-vis other states. All these factors forced the USA to exhibit three main patterns of behavior: fear from the Soviet Union and its expansion at the US expense, reliance on self-help in an anarchic world, and reliance on relative power maximization as a mean to maintain its hegemonic status and guarantee its survival.

In order to achieve its foreign policy objectives, the USA consistently pursued the grand strategy of offshore balancing by utilizing the buck-passing and direct balancing strategies. While buck-passing is always the preferred strategy because of its nature *to kill two birds with one stone*, the USA sought to contain the Soviet Union by relying on a mixture of strategies, combining the buck-passing strategy with some elements of the direct balancing strategy. Primarily, the USA utilized the buck-passing strategy

by using regional powers to balance each other and prevent the spread of Soviet influence. In cases when buck-passing failed or was expected to fail, the USA would engage in direct balancing by either sending diplomatic threats to the Soviet Union, creating anti-Soviet alliances with regional states, and/or providing economic and military assistance to regional states. In addition, the USA used its resources to maintain supreme military capabilities to deal directly with the aggressor in cases when deterrence would not succeed.

In order to test the aforementioned claims, this chapter conducts a comparative case study analysis of five important presidential doctrines that were implemented during the Cold War. These doctrines include the Truman Doctrine, the Eisenhower Doctrine, the Nixon Doctrine, the Carter Doctrine, and the Reagan Doctrine. All these presidential doctrines cover very important foreign policy matters of the twentieth century. They are linked respectively to the following foreign policy developments: (1) the British withdrawal from Greece and Turkey in 1947 and the fear of Soviet expansion in Europe and the Middle East, (2) the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, which resulted in the departure of Great Britain and France and the creation of a power vacuum that could be exploited by the Soviet Union, (3) the *twin pillars policy* to provide military assistance to Saudi Arabia and Iran as a way to maintain the balance of power and prevent the Soviet expansion, (4) the response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the need to contain the further expansion of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, and (5) the support for Mujahedeens in Afghanistan and the Iran-Contra affair to roll back the Soviet Union.

A systematic analysis of each case will reveal whether or not US foreign policy was consistent throughout the Cold War. For this purpose, the analysis will consider foreign policy objectives and strategies of the USA and the main factors that dictated its aggressive behavior. As secondary factors, it will consider the factors that made the USA act in an aggressive way toward the Soviet Union and its regional proxies. These factors include (1) the presence of anarchy in the international system, (2) the possession by the Soviet Union and its proxies of considerable military power that could harm US geostrategic interests, (3) fear from and suspicion about the intentions of the adversaries, (4) the need of the USA to survive in an anarchic international system, and (5) reliance on rationality to design and implement strategies to deal with threats.

As mentioned previously, these doctrines were selected not only because they have dealt with important geostrategic developments in

the Middle East but also because they can be used to control other variables that may impact foreign policy. For example, these doctrines control the temporal factor and other factors related to it as each doctrine was launched at a particular moment in US history. The Truman Doctrine was launched soon after the end of WWII and the use of the atomic bombs against Japan; the Eisenhower Doctrine was launched in response to the demise of Great Britain and France as world leaders; the Nixon Doctrine was a response to the national shock created by the Vietnam War; and so on. But more importantly, these doctrines control the variables at the individual level of analysis, including personality traits and ideology of US presidents, as they were launched by different presidents, among whom were two liberal presidents and three conservative ones. The Truman Doctrine provides the starting point and the foundations of US foreign policy toward the Middle East throughout the Cold War.

The Truman Doctrine: Containing the Soviet Union in the Middle East

During WWII, the USA pursued the grand strategy of offshore balancing by utilizing both the buck-passing and balancing strategies to prevent the emergence of Germany as a regional hegemon in Northern Hemisphere and of Japan as a regional hegemon in the Eastern Hemisphere. By doing this, the USA aimed at preventing the encirclement of the Western Hemisphere and its strangulation until demise by the Axis Powers (Spykman 2007 [1942], 194–199, 457). The agreement of the Axis Powers in early December of 1941 was an indication of the geostrategic objectives that they had to encircle the Western Hemisphere and attack and destroy the USA. The Japanese attack against the US military base on the Pearl Harbor in December 1941, which followed the aforementioned agreement, and the growing naval power of Germany were two strong indicators that both great powers were aiming at controlling the oceanic outposts as the first step in attacking the North America.

The USA had become concerned about the growing power of Germany earlier during the *Venezuelan Crisis* when President Teddy Roosevelt was forced to invoke the Monroe Doctrine and threaten to use military power unless Germany withdrew from the Hemisphere. Seeing that Germany had emerged as an aggressive great power at the

outbreak of WWII, the USA rushed to militarily assist European great powers through the *Lend-Lease Act*, also known as *An Act to Further Promote the Defense of the United States*, in an attempt to contain the spread of German influence all over Europe. The *Lend-Lease Act*, signed months before the *Pearl Harbor* attack, provided military assistance to Britain, France, and the Soviet Union in confronting Germany. This buck-passing strategy aimed at containing Germany and making sure that no state would emerge victorious out of the conflict (Kennedy 1987, 341). When European powers failed to contain Germany, following the British and French failures and the nullification by Hitler of the *Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact* when he decided to attack Russia, the USA was forced to balance the Axis Powers by declaring war on them (Mearsheimer 2001, 255–256).

The need to contain Germany forced the USA to indirectly create an alliance with the Soviet Union. In late January 1942, following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and Iran signed *the Tripartite Treaty of Alliance*. According to the treaty, the Allied forces would use Iran as a route to provide supplies to the Soviet Union as was agreed upon in *the Lend-Lease Pact*. At the same time, the treaty sanctioned that great powers must withdraw their troops within six months after the end of the war. However, alliances in international politics are *temporary marriages of convenience* (Mearsheimer 2001, 33). Once the war ended, the USA and the Soviet Union emerged as two fierce competitors for global domination. Following the end of the war, the Soviet Union refused to withdraw its troops from Iran and incited conflicts that led to the formation of the People's Republic of Azerbaijan and the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. Faced with this situation, the USA intervened by employing strong diplomatic pressure to force the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops from Iran as agreed under the treaty.

In addition to the Iranian crisis, in 1944, Great Britain and the Soviet Union agreed to divide Eastern Europe into spheres of interests, agreement which assigned Turkey and Greece to Great Britain (Jones 1989, 5). After the war, the Soviet Union also directed its foreign policy objectives toward Turkey in an attempt to have control over the *Dardanelles Strait*. In 1945, the Soviet Union called for a revision of the 1936 *Montreux Treaty*, which gave Turkey the whole control over the strait, and demanded a joint Soviet-Turkish control of the strait (Jones 1989, 8–9; Bostdorff 2008,

30). At the same time, the Soviet Union threatened to terminate the 1925 treaty of friendship with Turkey. While Turkey refused the Soviet demand, it agreed on the US-proposed international conference on the Dardanelles as long as Turkish sovereignty and territorial integrity remained intact (Jones 1989, 8). In 1946, the Soviet Union rejected the option to put the Dardanelles under the international control and reinstated the claim that the waterways should be controlled by a joint Soviet-Turkish defense system (Jones 1989, 8).

The *Dardanelles Strait* was of a very geostrategic importance for the Soviet Union because it provided access to the Middle East and opportunity to establish permanent presence in the Eastern Mediterranean (Jones 1989, 8–9). The USA reacted by advising Turkey to turn down the Soviet demand. It also sent a message to the Soviet Union, stating that Turkey had authority over the Dardanelles (Jones 1989, 9). To show support for Turkey, President Truman ordered aircraft carrier *Franklin D. Roosevelt* to join the battleship USS *Missouri* already stationed in Istanbul for an unrelated task (Jones 1989, 9; Paterson et al. 2010, 244). The Turkish crisis became of significant importance for US foreign policy given the fact that the Soviet Union was simultaneously engaged in Iran.

In the midst of this situation, in March 1947, Great Britain notified US Department of State that it would no longer keep Greece under its sphere of influence for economic reasons (Paterson et al. 2010, 244). Fearing that Greece and then Turkey would succumb to the Soviet pressure if the USA did not intervene, President Truman, in a speech to a special joint session of Congress, asked for an economic assistance of $400 million for both states, a request that was soon approved (Hastedt 2011, 13; Margolies 2012, 339). This speech gave birth to *the Truman Doctrine*. The main goal of the doctrine was to contain the Soviet expansion in the Middle East and around the world by providing economic and military assistance to troubled democratic countries.

Several factors dictated US response against the Soviet Union. First, the offensive foreign policy under the Truman Doctrine was a reaction to the anarchic status of the international system of which the Soviet Union could take advantage (Leffler 2007, 57–69; Wyss 2013, 42). The end of the WWII followed a shift in the structure of the international system from multipolarity into bipolarity, with the USA and the Soviet Union emerging as the two most powerful states in the system (Kennedy 1987, 347; Mearsheimer 2001, 356). There was no supranational government

to resolve disputes among states. The creation of the United Nations in 1945 did not change the anarchic structure of the international system as it was too weak to deal with strategic issues involving great powers. The President was aware of this fact when he addressed the issue of Greece and Turkey to Congress.

> We have considered how the United Nations might assist in this crisis. But the situation is an urgent one requiring immediate action and the United Nations and its related organizations are not in a position to extend help of the kind that is required.

The second factor that influenced US behavior against the Soviet Union was the possession by the latter of significant military power that could cause harm to US vital interests. During the period 1939–1945, the Soviet Union counted around 22.4 million people mobilized for war (Mearsheimer 2001, 320). At the end of the war, it had the largest defense establishment in the world, and its military power consisted of 175 divisions, 25,000 front-line tanks, and 19,000 aircrafts (Kennedy 1987, 363). As an example of the Soviet naval power, the Soviet Pacific Fleet possessed two heavy cruisers, about 20 destroyers, and 60 submarines (Friedman 2001, 53). In addition, after the war, the Soviet Union engaged in a rapid process of transforming its air and naval forces and developing a Soviet "A-bomb" (Kennedy 1987, 363–364). Moreover, in 1948, the Soviet Union was spending the largest percentage (13%) of its GDP on defense compare to other great powers, and military expenditures increased progressively every fiscal year, reaching an astounding 72% in 1970 (Kennedy 1987, 384).

The third factor that impacted US aggressive response was the suspicion and fear that the Soviet Union would use its military power to attack US vital interests around the world, including the Middle East (Leffler 2007, 57–69). The USA was deeply involved in collecting information about the intentions of the Soviet Union against US strategic interests. In a top secret report provided by the *Office of Reports and Estimate* (ORE), an office within the *Central Intelligence Agency* (CIA), the intelligence agency analyzed the possibility of a direct Soviet military action against the US interests during 1948 (US Central Intelligence Agency 1948a). The report concluded that such actions would occur if the Soviet Union had seen US moves as direct attacks on the Union and its satellite states. In the same year, another top secret report of the CIA feared the scenario

in which the Soviet Union would conquer Western Europe and the Near East (US Central Intelligence Agency 1948b). Suspicion and fear of the Soviet Union continued even after the formation of the *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO). They were also expressed in another top secret report in which the CIA concluded that the Soviet Union was ready to undertake a major war given its formidable military strength and ambitions (US Central Intelligence Agency 1951).

Thus, on one hand, the USA had deep suspicions and fear of the Soviet Union, a position that was analyzed in detail by then the US Ambassador to the Soviet Union, George F. Kennan. In *The Sources of Soviet Conduct* ("X" 1947), which is a publicized version of a long secret cable of US Department of State, also known as *The Long Telegram* (1946), Kennan argued that the actions of the Soviet Union were expansionist in nature, and the USA had to implement a containment strategy. On the other hand, the Soviet Union followed the same approach. In response to the Kennan's argument, then Soviet Ambassador to the USA, Nikolai Novikov, sent a telegram to Moscow, arguing that the main goal of the USA was to establish world dominance (Duiker and Spielvogel 2010, 774). Fearing each other, both superpowers engaged in a security dilemma in which each party aimed at increasing its security at the expense of the other (Mearsheimer 2001, 36). Both sides engaged in a rapid process of militarization, which led to an arms race between the two superpowers, including the development and multiplication of nuclear weapons (Ojserkis 2003; Burns and Siracusa 2013).

The fear factor is closely related to another factor that impacted US foreign policy in dealing with Iran, Greece, and Turkey, which is the survival of the state. Some believe that President Truman was the first president to face a growing existential threat for the USA, or even the entire Western World, coming from the Soviet Union (Sand 2004, 8; Colucci 2012, 311). The US government believed that Europe and Asia had very strategic regions, which, if controlled by the Soviet Union, would provide the latter with superior manpower, resources, and territory that would threaten the survival of the USA (Dobson 2002, 80). President Truman emphasized the importance of state integrity and survival in his address to Congress,

> …It is necessary only to glance at a map to realize that the survival and integrity of the Greek nation are of grave importance in a much wider situation.

> If Greece should fall under the control of an armed minority, the effect upon its neighbor, Turkey, would be immediate and serious. Confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East… Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East… If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world—and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own nation…

The last factor that impacted US foreign policy outlined in the Truman Doctrine was its rational behavior. This means that the USA was aware of the anarchic status of the international system and acted strategically in order to survive (Mearsheimer 2001, 31). At the same time, it was important for the USA to understand other states' positions in the system, their intentions and behavior, and the threats they posed to US strategic interests and act accordingly. As indicated above, the USA was aware of the military capabilities of the Soviet Union and its intentions to increase its power at the expense of the USA and its ally states. The Soviet refusal to withdraw from Iran, repeated attempts to have control over the Dardanelles Strait, and other events provided the rationale to believe that the Soviet Union had expansionist goals in the Middle East (Jones 1989, 74–75; Harbutt 2002, 19–20). Government documents, such as the *Long Telegram* and the *Clifford-Elsey Report* to the President that followed, corroborated this position.

Aware of the anarchic status of the international system, the USA relied on self-help and relative power maximization in order to achieve its foreign policy goals. As a regional hegemon, the USA was interested in maintaining the status quo balance of power and preventing the Soviet Union and any great power from disturbing it. In an attempt to control the rising Germany in early 1940s, the USA "passed the buck" to the Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain by providing them economic aid and military assistance (via the *Lend-Lease Act* of 1941) and letting them directly confront Germany. The USA then intervened to "finish the job" after Germany and the Soviet Union had bleed each other white and when France and Great Britain failed to balance Germany in Western Europe (Mearsheimer 2001, 160–161, 254–255). After the war, the Soviet Union emerged as the only superpower that has the capabilities and the willingness to challenge the status quo and US dominance. As a regional hegemon, the USA had to prevent this from happening. Masking it with a

non-realist rhetoric, President Truman emphasized the importance of maintaining the status quo in his address to Congress.

> …The world is not static, and the status quo is not sacred. But we cannot allow changes in the status quo in violation of the Charter of the United Nations by such methods as coercion, or by such subterfuges as political infiltration…

The USA had two alternative strategies to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining power and disturbing the balance of power in the Middle East. First, it could utilize the buck-passing strategy. As explained before, the buck-passing strategy was using regional great powers to prevent the aggressor state from disturbing the balance of power. However, the problem with this strategy in late 1947, and throughout the Cold War, was that there was no regional great power that could challenge or control the Soviet Union alone. The best thing the USA could do was providing support to pro-American forces in the Middle East and preventing the pro-Soviet forces from coming into power. Accompanied with these buck-passing attempts, the USA utilized the second strategy—the balancing strategy. Based on this strategy, the USA could implement three potential measures. First, it could send clear diplomatic messages to the Soviet Union stating that the USA would never allow a change in the status quo. The USA utilized this measure but without any effect on the Soviet aggressor.

The other measure was creating a defensive alliance against the Soviet Union. In April 1949, the USA announced the formation of NATO and created several permanent military bases in Europe, including in Germany and Italy. This strategic move was accompanied by a significant increase in the number of military forces and means (Mearsheimer 2001, 256). Its objectives were not clearly specified, but according to the NATO's first Secretary General, Lord Ismay, the purpose of NATO was "to keep the Russians out, the Germans down, and the Americans in" (as cited in Krige 2006, 17). Soon after the conception of the organization, the USA also hustled to grant the strategic states of Greece and Turkey full membership status in an attempt to officially incorporate these two areas under the direct sphere of the NATO military operations. NATO was first mobilized at the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 to contain the political and military expansion of the Soviet Union in East Asia and elsewhere.

Besides sending repeated diplomatic threats and creating regional military alliances to contain the Soviet expansion, the USA also mobilized additional resources of its own to balance against the aggressor. This resources included

economic aid and military assistance to ally states that were deemed potential balancers of regional anti-American forces. Within a five-year period, from 1948 to 1953, the US defense expenditures increased from about $11 billion to $50 billion (Kennedy 1987, 384). At the end, the USA successfully managed to contain the Soviet Union by resolving the Greek crisis and making Turkey and Iran two main barriers that prevented the Soviet Union from expanding in the Middle East and other adjacent regions.

The Eisenhower Doctrine: Establishing US Influence in the Middle East

On July 26, 1956, Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, declared the nationalization of the Suez Canal, which was a geostrategic hub that connected the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean through the Red Sea (see Fig. 3.1). The Suez Canal was of significant importance for the transportation of oil from the region to the European markets. By 1955, about two-thirds of Europe's oil was transported through the Canal (Yergin 1991, 480). As a result, the decision to nationalize it would directly impact the economic and military interests of France and Great Britain, two European powers that de facto had been acting as the rulers of the Middle East. At the same time, Egypt had blockaded *the Straits of Tiran*, preventing Israeli ships from having access to the Red Sea and, consequently, to the Indian Ocean. Both these decisions were made at a time when Egypt had publicly expressed its desire to create a pan-Arab state in the Middle East and had engaged in a much closer relationship with the Soviet Union.

As a result, these decisions brought France, Great Britain, and Israel together in an anti-Egyptian coalition. While France and Great Britain aimed at regaining control over the Suez Canal, Israel found it as an opportunity not only to gain shipping access in the Red Sea but also to diminish the growing military power of Egypt. As agreed, Israel launched its attack on Egypt on October 29, 1956, followed by an Anglo-French attack on October 31. Egypt responded by sinking about 40 ships in the Suez Canal, blocking the passage. Besides facing strong resistance from Egypt and other Arab nations, France, Britain, and Israel faced strong political opposition from the United States and the Soviet Union, who attempted without success to pass a UN Security Council resolutions to prevent the invasion. Both France and Great Britain used their veto power to prevent such a resolution. However, the Security Council managed to pass Resolution 119, authorizing a General Assembly meeting about

Fig. 3.1 The Suez Canal (Source: The US Central Intelligence Agency)

the matter. On November 2, 1956, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 997, demanding that "all parties" withdraw to the previous armistice lines. The resolution got adopted by the UN General Assembly, and the British unilaterally agreed on a ceasefire on November 6. While the USA was against the invasion, it was also against a rapid withdrawal of the French and British forces from the region. By the end of December, the UN peacekeeping forces took control over some strategic areas.

The departure of France and Great Britain created a new political reality in the Middle East, characterized by a power vacuum and deep hostility toward the West. Following this challenging situation, on January 5, 2057, President Eisenhower delivered a speech to Congress in which he proposed a preemptive foreign policy that would halt the expansion of Soviet influence around the world in general and in the Middle East in

particular, given "the special situation" in the region. The essence of what became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine was based on four main foreign policy strategies. First, it authorized the USA "to cooperate with and assist any nation in the general area of the Middle East in the development of economic strength dedicated to the maintenance of national independence." Second, it authorized the President to provide military assistance and engage in military cooperation with regional states willing to do so. Third, the Doctrine authorized the employment of the US Armed Forces in the region "to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid, against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism." Lastly, the policy authorized the President "to employ, for economic and defensive military purposes, sums available under the Mutual Security Act of 1954, as amended, without regard to existing limitations."

Like in the case of the Truman Doctrine, the Eisenhower Doctrine aimed at preventing the expansion of Soviet influence in the region and the emergence of a regional aggressor state. Likewise, US foreign policy was influenced by the same factors. First, the world continued to be in a state of anarchy and there was no global government to prevent the expansion of the Soviet Union in the Middle East or prevent any threat to US strategic interests. As a result, despite his consideration for the United Nations, President Eisenhower deemed that only the USA alone or in cooperation with other regional states would be able to contain the Soviet expansion. According him, "The United Nations can always be helpful, but it cannot be a wholly dependable protector of freedom when the ambitions of the Soviet Union are involved." The second factor that impacted US foreign policy was the possession by the Soviet Union of considerable military power to severely damage US strategic interests in the region and elsewhere in the world.

The third main factor that triggered an aggressive behavior by the USA was the deep suspicion related to the objectives of the Soviet Union in the region. According to President Eisenhower, the Soviet Union has no significant economic interest in the Suez Canal crisis besides preventing or controlling the oil flow from the Middle East to Europe, Asia, and Africa. Thus, the only reason for the Soviet Union's interest in the region was that of "power politics," gaining power by damaging other states. The fourth factor that influenced US reaction was the need to ensure survival in an anarchic system and preventing the Soviet global domination. The

last factor was the willingness of the USA to deal with the threat in a rational way by pursuing well-calculated strategies.

Like in the case of the Truman Doctrine, the combination of this five factors led to three main patterns of behavior of the USA: fear from the Soviet domination of the Middle East, the need to rely on self-help to encounter this threat, and the need to maximize its power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. As a distant hegemon, the USA determined that its foreign policy objectives could be reached by pursuing two main strategies. First, it pursued the buck-passing strategy by having regional powers contain the Soviet influence or other regional forces that were supportive of the latter. However, because of the economic hardship of most states in the region, buck-passing could not be fully successful without the support of the USA. For this reason, the USA utilized direct balancing by either sending direct diplomatic threats to the Soviet Union or any pro-Soviet force in the region, building a coalition of states against the aggressor, and utilizing additional economic and military resources of its own.

As part of the Eisenhower Doctrine, and similar to the Truman Doctrine, the USA provided economic aid and military assistance to regional anti-Soviet and pro-American forces. For this purpose, President Eisenhower requested Congress to make available for foreign policy usage in the region $200 million in addition to the funds for mutual security programs for the region. Another strong indicator of balancing strategy was the US reaction to the Lebanese crisis in 1958 by sending military troops to maintain order and prevent the coming into power of pro-Soviet forces in Lebanon. This action convinced the Soviet Union that the Eisenhower Doctrine was as real and powerful as the Truman Doctrine.

The Nixon Doctrine: Realizing the Cost of Direct Balancing

Besides preventing the expansion of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, the USA also aimed to prevent such an expansion in other regions, including East and Southeast Asia. In addition to the Soviet expansion, the USA also aimed at preventing the emergence of China as a regional hegemon that would directly threaten US interests. Following its involvement in the Korean War (1950–1953) in an attempt to prevent Communist expansion in the Korean Peninsula, the USA engaged in another conflict that aimed at preventing the fall of Vietnam in the hands of Communist

forces. Fearing a potential expansion of Chinese and Soviet influence in the region, the USA decided to provide economic aid and military assistance and engage its own troops in military operations. By early 1960s, the conflict had escalated to the extent that American troops were deployed in Vietnam to conduct regular military operations. By late 1960s, the number of American troops fighting in Vietnam reached around 545,000 men, casualties increased significantly as 1968 and 1969 became the bloodiest years, and the cost of war escalated to $30 billion per year (Kissinger 2003, 49; Schmitz 2014, xiii).

Faced with this tragic situation, President Nixon decided to make a tactical change in US foreign policy. In an informal speech given in the American territory of Guam, the President cited the President of Pakistan, Ayub Khan, who had advised President Nixon that the role of the USA in all countries with internal subversion should be helping them fight the war but not fight the war for them. President Nixon agreed and hoped that this approach would become the cornerstone of US foreign policy throughout the world. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this tactical change meant that the USA would not use ground troops in other conflicts, but at the same time it would continue to use its air power and nuclear shield if deemed necessary for the national survival. Despite the claims about a "détente" foreign policy approach to ease diplomatic tensions toward the Soviet Union, the USA continued and even increased its military assistance to regional pro-American and anti-Soviet forces (Hastedt 2011, 17). In a formal address to the nation on November 3, 1969, President Nixon outlined what would be the three pillars of US foreign policy under his leadership.

> First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitments.
>
> Second, we shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security.
>
> Third, in cases involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.

While the Nixon Doctrine was launched in response to the Vietnam fiasco, it had a significant impact on US foreign policy toward the

Middle East. A quick look at how the Doctrine was implemented in the region would reveal a striking similarity to the Eisenhower Doctrine. As in the case of the Eisenhower Doctrine, five main factors influenced US foreign policy mood under President Nixon. The first factor was the absence of a global authority to prevent conflict and ensure the survival of states, in this case the USA and its allies. The second factor was the possession by great powers, such as China and the Soviet Union, of considerable military capabilities that could threaten US strategic interests around the world. The third factor was the suspicion that the USA had about the intentions of China and the Soviet Union, fearing their power expansion at the expense of the USA. The fourth factor was the ultimate objective to ensure survival in an anarchic system, which was clearly stated in the President's speech. The last factor was the rational behavior of the USA to encounter threats by formulating and implementing strategies that would increase its power vis-à-vis other powers in the system.

Again, these factors, combined with each other, created three main behavioral patterns in US foreign policy: fear from aggressors, reliance on self-help, and power maximization as the best way to ensure survival. As a regional and distant hegemon, the US power maximization could be reached by relying on the grand strategy of offshore balancing. This means that the USA had the option to either implement the buck-passing strategy when possible or apply the direct balancing strategy if the former strategy could not succeed or was expected to fail.

Implementing a pure buck-passing strategy in the Middle East to contain the Soviet expansion was impossible, given the immense military power of the latter. As a result, US foreign policy under President Nixon relied on direct balancing by launching consistent diplomatic threats to the Soviet Union, creating anti-Soviet regional coalition, and utilizing additional resources of its own. As part of the Nixon Doctrine, the United States identified Saudi Arabia and Iran as "twin pillars" of regional stability that together would help to contain the Soviet expansion (Litwak 1986, 121; Miglietta 2002, 229; Gerges 2012, 69). It is important to note that the USA had already established close relationship with Israel, and it demonstrated this relationship during the *Yom Kippur War* of 1973 by providing military assistance to Israel to reverse the attack by Soviet-backed Egypt and Syria. In addition to the support for Israel, the USA provided considerable economic aid and military assistance to Saudi Arabia and Iran (Gause III 2009, 22). Given the oil price increase by the *Organization of*

Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in early 1970s, regional countries were also able to purchase a significant amount of weapons. The US arms transfers in the Middle East increased by 150% from 1968 to 1977 (Hastedt 2011, 266).

Iran was the greatest benefactor of the US arms transfers to the extent that it could purchase any type of weapons but nuclear ones. From 1970 to 1978, Iran purchased around $9 billion in weapons of different types, including F-14 high-performance aircraft, F-5E and F-5 fighter planes, F-4 phantom fighter bombers, F-16 fighters, missile destroyers, transport planes, assault vehicles, and so on (Miglietta 2002, 64–69). There were several reasons for the USA to provide this special treatment to Iran, three of which were of geostrategic importance: (1) to make Iran "policeman of the Gulf" in order to control other regional states with expansionist tendencies; (2) to empower Iran and make it capable of containing the spread of Soviet influence in the region; and (3) to enhance US influence over Iran (Miglietta 2002, 59).

The Carter Doctrine: How Ideology Succumbs to the Constraints of Reality

The Nixon Doctrine in the Middle East was of a proactive nature, and while it did not deal directly with any particular foreign policy issue in the region, it set the stage for the Carter Doctrine and US power projection in the Middle East. Like the Truman Doctrine, the Eisenhower Doctrine, and the Nixon Doctrine, which were implemented in reaction to the Iranian, Turkish, and Greek crisis of the late 1940s, *the Suez Canal crisis* of 1956, and the Vietnam fiasco, respectively, the Carter Doctrine was launched in reaction to another major international event—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. It is also viewed as a successor to the Truman Doctrine, which is patterned according to the core element of containing the Soviet expansion around the world (Davis 2011, 69). At the same time, the Carter Doctrine can be considered a reinstatement of the Eisenhower Doctrine whose goals were to protect US oil interests and contain the spread of Arab nationalism and the Soviet expansion in the Middle East due to the power vacuum created after the departure of the French and the British (Yaqub 2004, 58; Kupchan 2011, 21).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan can be considered as the tipping point that made the USA aware of the potential threat coming

from the Soviet expansion in the oil-rich Persian Gulf (see Fig. 3.2). In the *State of the Union Address* in 1980, President Carter recognized that US foreign policy was being challenged by three major global developments:

> …the steady growth and increased projection of Soviet military power beyond its own borders; the overwhelming dependence of the Western democracies on oil supplies from the Middle East; and the press of social and religious and economic and political change in the many nations of the developing world… (Carter 1980)

Fig. 3.2 The Persian Gulf (Source: The US Central Intelligence Agency)

While considering each of these factors as being important, President Carter also emphasized that the "excessive dependence on foreign oil is a clear and present danger to our Nation's security" and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan represented "the most serious threat to the peace since the Second World War" (Carter 1980). The importance of the Middle East oil for US national security was previously emphasized by President Roosevelt and President Truman in their messages of support for Saudi Arabia (Yergin 1991, 428; Klare 2004, 33). Because it was considered a threat to US geostrategic interests in the region, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan made President Carter change US foreign policy toward the Soviet Union from a détente foreign policy into a balance-of-power aggressive foreign policy (Kennedy 1987, 410). This led the President to make a precise statement, which became the cornerstone of the Carter Doctrine and of US foreign policy toward the region:

> Let our position be absolutely clear: Any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

US foreign policy under the Carter Doctrine is very much similar to the two previous presidential doctrines. Foreign policy under the Carter Doctrine was dictated by five main factors: the anarchic status of the international system, the possession by the Soviet Union of significant military capabilities that could harm or destroy the USA, the fear from and suspicion of the USA had about the intentions of the Soviet Union, the need to survive in an anarchic system, and the rationality to pursue its strategic interests. These five main factors, in combination, led to three major patterns of behavior: fear, self-help, and power maximization. First, the international system was in a state of anarchy and characterized by bipolarity, a fierce competition between the two superpowers, the USA and the Soviet Union, for global domination (Kennedy 1987, 395–412; Sayigh and Shlaim 1997, 1; Mearsheimer 2001, 355–356; Hurst 2005, 85; Magstadt 2013, 463). Second, as a superpower, the Soviet Union possessed significant military capabilities that could harm or even destroy the USA and its interests around the world. By mid-1970s, both states possessed enough nuclear capabilities to have a second strike capability, meaning the ability to retaliate in case of a nuclear attack (Kennedy 1987, 395).

In addition to the anarchic status of the international system and the possession by the Soviet Union of considerable military capabilities, fear from and suspicion of potential aggressive actions of the Soviet Union are two other factors that contributed to the foreign policy actions under the Carter Doctrine. The USA had reasons to see actions of the Soviet Union with deep suspicion and fear its intentions. Both states had engaged in indirect or non-military conflicts on several occasions, starting with the struggle over the control of Berlin soon after WWII and continuing with the Vietnam War and the Cuban missile crisis. Also, the USA saw with deep suspicion and feared the growing influence and military engagement of the Soviet Union in the Third World countries (Porter 1984). The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan triggered the American counteraction because the latter feared that the aggressor could expand its dominance in the Persian Gulf, thus controlling the flow of oil to the global markets. This situation was exacerbated by the loss of influence over Iran due to the domestic political turmoil that led to the overthrowing of the Shah and coming into power of religious forces. The fear from Soviet expansion was made public by President Carter during his speech.

> The region which is now threatened by Soviet troops in Afghanistan is of great strategic importance: It contains more than two-thirds of the world's exportable oil. The Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Straits of Hormuz, a waterway through which most of the world's oil must flow. The Soviet Union is now attempting to consolidate a strategic position, therefore, that poses a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil. (US President 1980)

Furthermore, the need to survive the Cold War was an important factor that dictated actions of the USA. The survival element takes into account other elements as well, such as the anarchic structure of the international system, the military capabilities of other states, and their aggressive intentions. All these elements were present at that time, and being aware of them, President Carter stated that it was vital for the USA to face the world as it was in order to ensure survival. Thus, rationality became a final major element of the Carter Doctrine. As a liberal politician who had promised during the presidential campaign to advance global peace, human rights, and humanitarian actions, President Carter soon realized that there is an enormous gap between how we want the world to be and how it is in reality.

During the presidential campaign, President Carter had promised to bring a drastic change in US foreign policy, focusing it more on human rights issues and peace initiatives and moving away from previous realist foreign policies of Nixon (Colucci 2012, 372). Also, during the first years of his presidency, the President was able to advance his non-realist objectives. In 1977, he issued a directive stating that the promotion of human rights would be a core element of US foreign policy and created the *Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs* (Colucci 2012, 374). In addition, impacted by his liberal ideology, Carter's approach on global human rights became a double-standard enterprise (Kirkpatrick 1979; Colucci 2012, 374). On one side, Carter strained relations with pro-American authoritarian governments because of their human rights violations while continuing to maintain cozy relations with totalitarian governments despite their human rights violations and often anti-American foreign policy. Applying an inconsistent, double-standards foreign policy and ignoring US strategic interests led to a dangerous national security strategy that would soon show the results (Colucci 2012, 375).

Major developments in the international system threatened US national security and forced President Carter to move away from his initial non-realist foreign policy and reinstate a foreign policy based on rationality and realism. Two major consecutive events dictated this shift in foreign policy: the fall of the pro-American regime in Iran in hands of anti-American Islamic forces in November 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan a month later (Lorentz 2007, 66). The fall of the Shah can also be viewed as a decrease of US influence in the region, while the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan can be viewed as a direct threat to US influence and interests.

Besides the fear of Soviet global expansion at the expense of America's interests and reliance on self-help in an anarchic international system, power maximization would be the last pattern of behavior of the USA. However, seeing that the USA was already a regional hegemon, its primary objective was not to maximize its power but to prevent the emergence of the Soviet Union as a rival regional hegemon and maintain the status quo. President Carter made it clear in his address to Congress that maintaining US hegemony was a top priority for the state. The President stated that he was "determined that the United States will remain the strongest of all nations…" (US President 1980). Power maximization at the expense of other states is desirable, but it is a secondary strategy to the need to prevent the emergence on another regional hegemon. Often the

need to prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon may lead to power maximization as was the case with the security dilemma during the Cold War.

As a regional hegemon, the USA had two alternative strategies to contain the spread of Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf. First, it could apply the buck-passing strategy—using a regional great power to contain the Soviets. The problem was that there was no regional power that had the will or capability to contain the Soviets. Because of this fact, the USA was forced to rely on the direct balancing strategy. As part of this strategy, the USA could send direct threats to the Soviet Union through diplomatic channels, could form a coalition to encounter the aggressor, or could utilize additional resources to encounter the threat. Because blackmailing through diplomatic channel could work to contain the Soviets, the USA relied exclusively on the other two measurements.

First, the USA provided economic aid and military assistance to regional states, like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel, in order for them to contain the Soviet expansion in the region (Congressional Quarterly, Inc. 1983, 180). In addition, the USA provided financial aid and military assistance to Mujahedeen forces that were fighting the Soviet troops in an attempt to directly force them out of Afghanistan (Joes 2010, 216–217). Second, the USA utilized additional resources to increase its military power, including spending for NATO forces (Sanders 1983, 262–263; Yetiv 1995, 54–57; Busch 2001, 403). Along with the military spending increase, the USA took steps to project its military power in the Persian Gulf (US Congress 1983). Soon after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, President Carter authorized the creation of the *Rapid Deployment Joint Task Forces* (RDJTF) as a military force that would be responsible for military operation in the region in case of a potential Soviet threat (Romm 1993, 39; Hurst 2009, 27; Flint 2012, 243). Under President Reagan, RDJTF would become what is today *US Central Command* or USCENTCOM.

The Reagan Doctrine: Rolling Back the Rogue Empire

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and, especially, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in December 1979, followed by long-time kidnapping of US diplomats in Tehran, resulted in a political disaster

for President Carter, who lost the presidential elections of 1980 to the Republican presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan. The new president inherited an international political system dominated by anarchy and conflicts. In Asia, Africa, and Latin America, most conflicts resembled proxy wars as the Soviet Union aimed at spreading its influence by installing pro-Soviet regimes, while the USA aimed at containing the threat by supporting pro-American regimes (Trofimenko 1981; Katz 1982; David 1986). The détente foreign policy during the Carter presidency had given the Soviet Union the opportunity to expand its influence around the world at the expense of American hegemony. The launching of the Carter Doctrine immediately after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 initiated a new phase of US foreign policy, which was viewed as an offensive foreign policy that aimed at rolling back the Soviet expansion from many regions of the world (Zwick 1988, 100; Isenberg 1989, 177). This objective was clearly stated in the national security strategies of the Reagan administration.

Thus, while the Carter Doctrine focused exclusively on the geostrategic importance of the Persian Gulf, the Reagan Doctrine aimed to deal with the Soviet expansion not only in the Persian Gulf but also in other geostrategic regions. Because both doctrines were similar in substance but different in the magnitude of the scope, many scholars viewed the Reagan Doctrine as the *Reagan Corollary to the Carter Doctrine* (Khoury 1990, 74; Tanter 1999, 71–72; Kuniholm 2001, 292–293). Other experts view the Reagan Doctrine also as corollary to the Truman Doctrine because of its reliance on the grand strategy of containment (Mott 2002, 45; Staib 2011, 69). This striking similarity was also claimed by President Reagan in the 1988 National Security Strategy in which he identified an *impressive continuity* in the US national security strategies (National Security Strategy Archive 1988, 1–2).

Like in the previous presidential doctrines, US foreign policy under the Reagan Doctrine was influenced by five major factors. First, the international system was in a state of anarchy because there was no supranational government that could regulate relations among states and enforce those regulations. The system continued to have a bipolar structure with the USA and the Soviet Union trying to expand their influence around the world. Second, the Soviet Union possessed significant military capabilities that could harm or even destroy US strategic interests around the world. According to a 1984 national intelligence report, the Soviet Union had access to distant air and naval facilities, had an increased capability

to mount airlift and sealift to distant places, and had "substantial means for undercutting US interests in the Third World by encouraging and supporting opposition groups, subversion, and insurrection" (Director of Central Intelligence 1984, 3).

Third, the USA was suspicious and fearful of the intentions of the Soviet Union. Like President Truman and President Carter, President Reagan viewed the Soviet interventions in foreign countries with deep suspicion and feared its intentions. Following George F. Kennan's ideas on the sources of Soviet conduct, President Reagan believed that the Soviet Union aimed at spreading its influence around the world at the expense of the US hegemony. This suspicion was corroborated by intelligence information, which stated that the primary objectives of the Soviet Union were to obtain political support from developing countries in its fight against US hegemony. In addition, the Soviet Union aimed at gaining, or denying to the USA, access to air and naval facilities that could be used to promote the foreign policy goals of the former especially during crisis or wartime situation (Director of Central Intelligence 1984, 4–5). Moreover, the same intelligence report states that another objective was to enhance the Soviet access to regions rich in raw materials or prevent the USA and the West access to those regions. These findings go in line with President Reagan's concern about oil-rich Saudi Arabia and his strong statement that he would not allow it to become another Iran, implying that the USA would not allow Saudi Arabia to fall in the Soviet hands (Yetiv 2004, 19–20; Tietelbaum 2010, 11).

Fourth, and related to the previous factor, the primary objective of the USA was to ensure national survival and territorial sovereignty. These concerns were expressed in the intelligence report, which states that the "overall Soviet advance has bolstered the USSR's claim to be a global power, and has created new threats to the USA and Western interests" (Director of Central Intelligence 1984, 3). The National Security Strategy of 1988 also defines the survival of the USA as a free and independent nation as the primary objective of US foreign policy.

Lastly, the USA acted rationally to achieve its objectives. As a regional hegemon and offshore balancer, it had two alternative strategies to pursue: the buck-passing and balancing strategies. The buck-passing strategy could not work because there was no great power capable of balancing the Soviet Union. Because of this absence, the USA was forced to balance the Soviets by itself. In order to accomplish this objective, it had to rely on two alternative measures: (1) creating a defense alliance of regional

states to contain the Soviets and (2) mobilizing additional resources to encounter the adversary. The implementation of the first alternative measure in a bipolar system was almost impossible because of the absence of a powerful regional state or coalition of states that were willing and able to contain the Soviet expansion (Mearsheimer 2001, 156). As a result, the USA was forced to rely on minor powers to contain the Soviet Union. On the other side, the Soviet Union, too, relied on minor powers to attack US interests. It was for this reason that both superpowers indirectly fought proxy wars in Third World countries like Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua.

A 1984 US intelligence report states that the Middle East and Southwest Asia were the most important regions for the Soviet Union because of their geographic proximity to the Union and the fact that those two regions constituted the center of the East-West conflict (Director of Central Intelligence 1984, 5). The geostrategic importance of these regions was also emphasized by President Reagan in the 1988 national security strategy (National Security Strategy Archive 1988, 1). On the other side, Africa and Latin America were considered less important but, nonetheless, "useful for diverting US resources and fortifying an image of expanding Soviet power" (Director of Central Intelligence 1984, 5).

The second measure taken by the USA in order to balance the Soviet Union was mobilizing additional resources and projecting power more effectively. The Reagan administration engaged in the largest military buildup in the American history in the time of peace (Wirls 2010, 19). Defense spending increased significantly from $134 billion in 1980 to $253 billion in 1985 (Busch 2001, 404). Another source indicates that US defense spending increased from $325.1 billion in 1980 and 339.6 billion in 1981 to 456.5 billion in 1987 (Schneider and Merle 2004). Defense spending increased to support military projects, including spending on the Strategic Defense Initiative program, also known as "Star Wars," which aimed at defending America from a potential nuclear attack, deployment of middle-range missiles in Europe to challenge *the Warsaw Pact*, and the production of a variety of fighting jets, missiles of different range, and other military weapons (Holland 2013, 43–44).

In addition to increased military spending, the USA also focused on overseas power projection. In April 1981, President Reagan announced the intentions to upgrade the RDJTF into a unified command, named CENTCOM, and the plan got executed officially in January 1983. The

"area of responsibility" (see Fig. 3.3) under the CENTCOM jurisdiction included 19 countries in a region stretching from Kenya to Pakistan (Amirahmadi 1993, 219). Following on the Carter Doctrine, the main task of the CENTCOM was to ensure free flow of oil from the Persian Gulf and react to any possible advancement of the Soviet Union in the region (Bell 1989, 19). In addition, the Central Command was created to also "get to the war on time," meaning that the USA would have mili-

Fig. 3.3 USCENTCOM *area of responsibility* (Source: US Department of Defense)

tary bases in the Middle East that would make it possible for the USA to respond to potential threats on time (Wenger 1984). For this purpose, the USA sought to have access, establish, or maintain temporary or permanent military bases in several regional or surrounding countries, including Turkey, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, among others. In December 1989, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the USA emerged as the only superpower in a unipolar international system.

Conclusion

The case studies of the Truman Doctrine, the Eisenhower Doctrine, the Nixon Doctrine, the Carter Doctrine, and the Reagan Doctrine reveal that US foreign policy in the Middle East throughout the Cold War was characterized by continuity rather than change. The continuity in foreign policy was a result of the unchanged status of the USA as the only regional hegemon in the world and its continuing geostrategic interests to contain the spread of the Soviet Union, prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon, and maintain control over the oil-rich region (Deibel and Gaddis 1987; Powaski 1998, 169–171; Viotti 2005, 222). For example, the foreign policy objective under the Eisenhower Doctrine was preventing the Soviet expansion in the Middle East due to power vacuum created by the departure of Britain and France after the Suez Canal imbroglio (Yaqub 2004, 88). Like the Eisenhower Doctrine, the Nixon Doctrine grew out of the fear of Soviet expansion in the Persian Gulf and emphasized the responsibility of the threatened states to confront the Soviet Union while the USA would continue to provide economic aid and military assistance (Powaski 1998, 169–170). Also, the main objective of the Carter Doctrine and the Reagan Doctrine was containing the Soviet Union and controlling the Persian Gulf and the free flow of oil.

This aggressive behavior against the Soviet Union and its regional proxies was dictated by a combination of several factors, which include the presence of anarchy in the international system, the possession by the Soviet Union and its proxies of considerable military capabilities that could hurt or even destroy US geostrategic interests in the Middle East and around the world, fear from and suspicion about the intentions of the Soviet Union of its proxies, the need to survive in an anarchic system, and the rationality to think strategically about how to survive. All these factors, taken together, caused three main patterns of behavior in US foreign policy: fear, self-help, and power maximization.

In addition, the strategy to advance that interest was dictated by its geographic location. Its insular geographic location and the distance from the Middle East prescribed the grand strategy of offshore balancing. Because its geographic location remained unaltered throughout the Cold War, the grand strategy to achieve its foreign policy interests remained unchanged as well. To implement the grand strategy of offshore balancing, the USA relied on two strategies. First, it utilized the buck-passing strategy whenever there was a regional power or a coalition of states able and willing to balance the aggressor. This strategy was more effective and efficient when used against other regional powers that aspired to challenge US influence in the region by cooperating with the Soviet Union. However, relying solely on buck-passing to contain the spread of Soviet influence was not totally effective and efficient because of the inability of the regional states to challenge directly the almighty power of the Soviet Union.

For this reason, the USA was forced to complement the buck-passing strategy with direct balancing, which consisted of three major actions. First, the USA sent direct diplomatic threats to the Soviet Union and its potential regional allies. It did so through the Truman Doctrine in the cases of Soviet threats toward Iran and Turkey, through the Eisenhower Doctrine in the case of the Suez Canal crisis in 1956 and the potential Egypt-Soviet Union alliance, and through the Carter and Reagan Doctrines following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Second, the USA created formal bilateral and multilateral alliances with other regional states to confront the aggressors. The formation of the NATO, which made Turkey a member, and the Baghdad Pact (later transformed into CENTO) are simply two examples of multilateral alliance in addition to several other bilateral ones. Lastly, the USA utilized additional resources of its own, including economic aid and military assistance for countries that were willing to confront the pro-Soviet forces. This policy was predominant and involved almost all regional states who feared Soviet expansion more than US dominance.

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CHAPTER 4

The Bush Doctrine in the Middle East: A New American Century

The official disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 changed the international system from bipolarity into unipolarity, with the USA being the only "unchallenged superpower" (Krauthammer 1990, 23). With the newly created Russia Federation (Russia) struggling to manage internal conflicts, feed its people, and maintain its nuclear arsenal from falling into the hands of domestic and international *mafia*, and with China at the early stages of economic and political transformation, the USA did not encounter any significant threat to its national security until the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack. While the USA directly blamed the al-Qaeda terrorist organization for the attack, it emphasized the danger coming from the states that allegedly sponsored anti-American terrorism, including Afghanistan and Iraq. Following the evidence that linked al-Qaeda to the Taliban regime, about a month after the terrorist attack on the American soil, the USA attacked Afghanistan and overthrew the anti-American regime of the Talibans. In March 2003, following disagreements in the United Nations Security Council and disapproval from major world powers, the USA took a unilateral action to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime, who was deemed to be a supporter of anti-American terrorist organizations.

Apparently, the Bush administration had a strong realist belief that al-Qaeda, as a non-state actor, could have not been born or strengthened to that extent without some military and political support from state actors. The rationale behind this belief is that an international terrorist organization of al-Qaeda's dimensions cannot be created or survive without some

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support from a state actor whose political objectives converge with those of the terrorist organization. Also, the assumption behind this rationale is that international terrorist organizations are tools at the disposal of some states to advance their geostrategic interests at the expense of others (Byman 2005, 4–6; Whittaker 2012, 332). States either support terrorist organizations directly by providing financial, military, and political support or simply allow them to thrive in an attempt to use them in the future to diminish or destroy the power and influence of another or other adversary state actor(s).

However, the US-Iraq relationship that lead to the 2003 war changed the way how many perceived US foreign policy under President Bush. The unexpected economic and military losses following the attack that turned into a prolonged war led many to believe that US foreign policy had taken a dramatic shift. In explaining the alleged shift in US foreign policy, some experts argue that neoconservatives like President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, the Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, and their assistants designed and implemented foreign policies that aimed at protecting domestic security and remaking the world order based on their neoconservative ideology that was embodied in a presidential doctrine that they recognized as *the Bush Doctrine* (Mead 2005, 7; Kaplan 2008, 4; Badie 2010).

Other experts consider the Doctrine as a foreign policy position of the USA that aimed at maintaining US preeminence and spreading democracy across the world by engaging in offensive realist/preemptive actions, creating strategic stand-apart alliances, and relying on selective multilateralism (Jervis 2003, 365; Renshon and Suedfeld 2007, ix). In addition, Robert Jervis (2003, 365) argues that the Bush Doctrine represents a sharp break from the pre-September 11 foreign policy because the USA was moving away from its traditional role as a global peaceful leader to becoming "something very like an empire." Deemphasizing the *spread of democracy* element and reinforcing the *empire* vision, Jervis argues that maintaining American hegemony around the world is what really builds the foundations of the Bush Doctrine, bringing all other elements of the Doctrine together (Jervis 2003, 376). Along the same lines, Carlos Yordán (2006, 125) argues that US foreign policy under the Bush Doctrine was a revised version of the one pursued before the September 11 terrorist attacks. While the pre-9/11 US foreign policy was status quo oriented, he argues, the post-9/11 foreign policy was expansionist in nature, aiming at making the USA a global hegemon.

Moreover, John J. Mearsheimer (2005) argued that the 2003 Iraq War was a result of the neoconservative ideology espoused by the members of the Bush Administration. He defines *neoconservatism*, and the Bush Doctrine by default, as being "essentially Wilsonsianism with teeth," meaning an approach that aims at spreading democracy by using military power (2005, 1). This approach is similar to the argument made by other experts who claim that neoconservatism encompasses "contradictory imperatives," which are the utopian goal of spreading democracy and the use of power to advance that goal (Lieberfeld 2005, 17). This argument is based on the realist assumption that states do not use their resources to pursue utopian goals, such as spreading democracy, helping failed or troubled states, or engaging in humanitarian actions (Layne 1997, 112). In an attempt to convince the Bush administration not to attack Iraq, many prominent scholars of international relations (mostly of realist background) argue in a letter published by *The New York Times* (2002) that the war would not be in America's national interests. They consider it an "unnecessary war" (Mearsheimer and Walt 2003) or a "war of choice" made by the Bush Administration (Haass 2009). In a few words, the aforementioned experts claim that under President George H. W. Bush, the *peaceful*, *rational* America had suddenly become the *aggressive*, *irrational* America.

However, one major factor that these experts have ignored is the difference between political rhetoric and political action of the USA, which often do not match. In the best scenario, states view the spread of democracy as a secondary objective of their foreign policy or a consequence of their advancing of the national interests. For example, Condoleezza Rice (2000), former Secretary of State and national security advisor to President Bush, views the spread of democracy as a consequence of the USA expanding its hegemony around the world, not as a goal in itself. On the other hand, in the worst case scenario, states talk about their goals of spreading democracy and prosperity but act only to advance their strategic interests. G. John Ikenberry (2005, 286) argues that the promotion of democracy by the USA is a pragmatic and sophisticated approach on how to create a stable international political order and a friendly security environment. Ikenberry calls this approach *liberal grand strategy*. In addition, Stephen M. Walt (2010)—another realist scholar who paradoxically opposed the war on the same grounds as Mearsheimer—argues that realists accept the use of a liberal and idealistic rhetoric in order to advance their realist agenda.

Moreover, Mearsheimer (2001, 25–26) agrees that despite the liberal political rhetoric, behind the closed doors "the elites who make national security policy speak mostly the language of power, not that of principle, and the United States acts in the international system according to the dictates of the realist logic." He also argues that "when power considerations force the United States to act in ways that conflict with liberal principles, 'spin doctors' appear and tell a story that accords with liberal ideal" (2001, 26). Thus, Mearsheimer accepts that even when America's foreign policy actions contradict liberal ideals like the spread of democracy or liberalism, the government rushes to promote a political rhetoric that would provide a cover for the real objectives. In addition, Lynch and Singh (2008, 36–43) argue the USA has always used alliances and institutions whenever they fitted its strategic interests rather than for other non-realist purposes. Along the same lines, Paul Wolfowitz (1994, 37), former US Deputy Secretary of Defense under President George H. W. Bush, cautioned the USA to participate in multilateral actions when these actions do not conflict with the national interests of the state.

Unlike the previous experts, there are some who view US foreign policy under President Bush as based on continuity rather than change. Sylvan and Majeski (2009, 2) argue that US foreign policy in the last 100 years is characterized by continuity and has resorted in the use of the same strategies, or "policy instruments," such as surveying the political and economic activities of other countries, providing political, economic, and military assistance to its allies, and running covert operations or waging wars against its adversaries. According to these experts, the USA resorts to these foreign policy initiatives because it has the capabilities to do so; thus, capabilities are those that impact its foreign policy. The process of policy making, they argue, does not aim at achieving long-term or structural objectives by any means; instead, it aims at choosing a particular means that "corresponds to whatever the immediate problem is faced by a client or represented by an enemy" (2009, 2).

Like Sylvan and Majeski, by using a cybernetic approach, Lynch and Singh (2008) argue that US foreign policy under President Bush represents continuity, not a break. They divide US history of the last century in two major periods. The first period was the fight against communism (the Cold War), which they call the First Cold War. US foreign policy during this period was embedded in the Truman Doctrine, and it dominated the entire First Cold War era. The second period is the fight against *the Islamist terror*, which they call the Second Cold War (Lynch and Singh

2008, 9–15). They argue that US foreign policy during this period is and will be embedded in the Bush Doctrine, which is equivalent to the Truman Doctrine, and the former will also "outlast the president whose name it bears" for reasons deriving from the international system and domestic politics (2008, 3).

The Bush Doctrine and the 2003 Iraq War

By utilizing a different theoretical framework—offensive realism—for the reasons explained in Chap. 2, the current chapter argues that President Bush's foreign policy toward Iraq represents continuity in US foreign policy. An analysis of the US-Iraq relationship that led to the 2003 Iraq War will test the claim that the US foreign policy objectives and strategies have remained unchanged because of the lack of changes in its global status as the only hegemonic power and its geographic location. The primary objective of the USA was to maintain its influence in the region and around the world by preventing the emergence of Iraq as an anti-American great power that would threaten the American strategic interests directly or indirectly through a third party (The White House 2002, 14–15, 29–30). At the same time, the USA aimed at destroying state-sponsored terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda that aimed at diminishing US influence in the region and abroad. In order to fulfill these objectives, the USA relied on the grand strategy of offshore balancing. However, unlike in many other cases, the absence of a regional power being able and willing to contain Iraq left the USA with no other choice but to use direct balancing and military power to contain the threat coming from Iraq.

US foreign policy toward Iraq was influenced by several factors, including the facts that (1) the international system was in a state of anarchy with no supranational authority to control Iraq, (2) Iraq possessed some military capabilities that could cause damage or destroy US interests, (3) the USA was suspicious of Iraq's intentions and there was no guarantee that the latter would not attack the interests of the former, (4) survival was the highest priority of the USA, and (5) the USA acted rationally, and its actions were dictated by the need to survive and maintain regional hegemonic status. These factors are embedded in the Bush Doctrine as well. First, the suspicions and fear the USA had from a military powerful Iraq led the USA to rely on preemptive actions. Second, the absence of a world government, its anarchic nature, compelled the USA to rely on self-help and unilateral actions (Elman 2008). Lastly, the need to survive

and defend its strategic interests around the world forced the USA to increase its relative military capabilities in order to maintain hegemony and encounter any other potential regional hegemon.

The aforementioned factors led to three main pattern of behavior: fear, self-help, and power maximization. These patterns of behavior are clearly reflected in the Bush Doctrine and can be classified as fear from terrorist attacks and state-sponsored terrorism, self-help through unilateral and preemptive actions, and power maximization to maintain US regional hegemony. In combination, all these factors led to an aggressive foreign policy against Iraq. Figure 4.1 describes the process how several factors contributed to the aggressive behavior of the USA against Iraq.

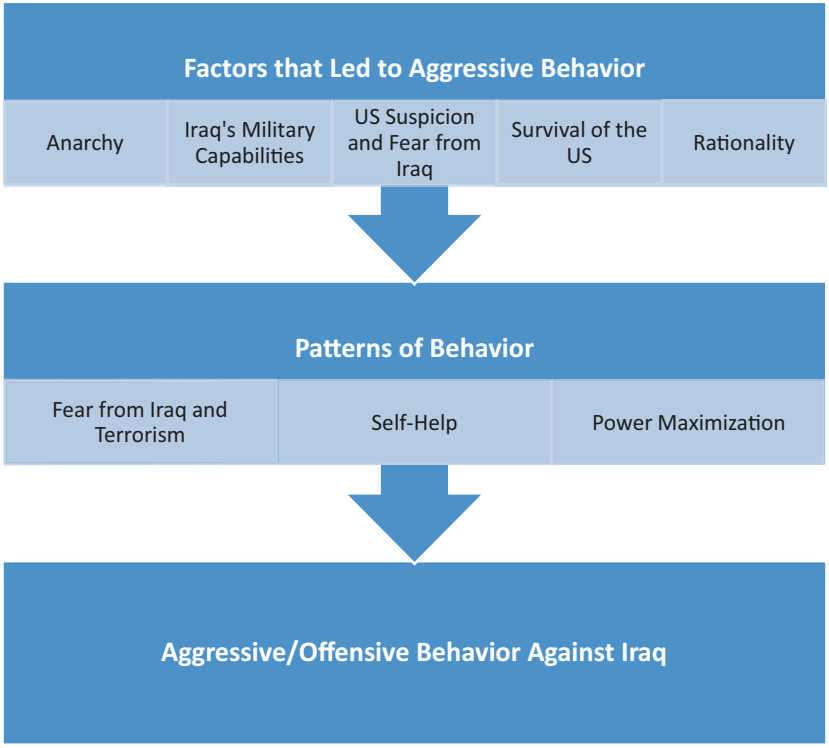

Fig. 4.1 Factors that led to aggressive actions against Iraq

The international system has a long history of anarchy, or absence of a supranational government, starting with the creation of the state system under the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Because states value sovereignty more than anything else, they tend not to accept the authority of a supranational government, especially when their strategic interests are at stake. The absence of a supranational government has led to continuous conflicts and wars around the world as states strive to pursue their national interests. International institutions like the UN have defaulted in their promise to bring about world peace by resolving conflicts through peaceful means (Mearsheimer 1995). Had the world had a supranational government in place, it would have controlled the Iraq's alleged development of weapons of mass destruction and/or the mistreatment of its people, or it would have prevented the USA from attacking Iraq in 2003. Thus, the war itself is a testament that the international system is in a state of anarchy.

Anarchy, by its very nature, often produces unilateral actions because states (great powers included) are responsible for their own survival, and often they do so at the expense of others. They achieve this objective by either acting alone when necessary or in cooperation with other states similarly situated when more effective or efficient. Great powers may build alliances; however, those alliances are "temporary marriages of convenience" and fluctuate together with their national security interests (Mearsheimer 2001, 33). For this reason, states should always be prepared to act with other states that share mutual strategic interests, and that is what America did in 2003 (Wolfowitz 1994, 37).

However, whether a foreign policy action is unilateral or multilateral should be dictated by the type of interest(s) that motivate(s) the actions of each state, not the number of states involved in an action. Any action that is taken to advance, directly or indirectly, security interests of a state, should be considered *unilateral.* On the other hand, actions that are taken to advance idealist or humanitarian interests per se that states agree with are considered multilateral. Such actions are rare in world politics because states do also pursue seemingly idealistic and humanitarian actions to advance their national security interests.

Defining multilateralism, and by default unilateralism, is a difficult task, and for some experts it is even impossible (Lunch and Singh 2008, 36–43). Many experts have tried to define it based on the number of states that coordinate their foreign policy actions with one another. Robert O. Keohane (1990, 731) defines multilateralism as coordination of foreign policy actions between three or more states "through ad hoc arrangements

or by means of institutions." The problem with this definition is that every action can be defined as being multilateral, including the 2003 American intervention in Iraq, which was supported by more than 40 other states. Would that intervention be considered a multilateral action if only the four great powers, Russia, China, Germany, and France, joined the *coalition of the willing* while dropping all the 40 states that actually joined *the coalition*? Then the question would be whether multilateralism would be determined by the number of states or their amount of power. Also, relying on institutions as "persistent and connected sets of rules, formal and informal," as defined by Keohane (1990, 732), still leads to arbitrary definition of multilateralism and unilateralism because *persistent and connected* sets of formal and informal rules may include anarchy as well. Anarchy, for that matter, is not only a status; it is also the oldest institution of the international system, which proscribes states' roles, constrains their foreign policy, and shapes their expectations based on the distribution of capabilities.

Despite its definition, multilateralism is not recognized as being a predominant tradition in world politics, For example, the Soviet Union attacked and put under its sphere of influence then-Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European states in the late 1960s or invaded Afghanistan in 1979. In 2014, Russia invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea, and the world simply accepted it as a fact without taking any real action. Also, Iraq took unilateral actions when it invaded Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990. In addition, Israel and the Arab states have been engaging in unilateral actions during the 50-year long Arab-Israel conflict. And the list of unilateral actions continues.

At the same time, multilateralism has not been part of US foreign policy tradition. For Charles Krauthammer (1990, 26), US foreign policy actions can be defined as unilateralism dressed in the multilateralist clothing. As explained previously, throughout the Cold War, the USA ignored or circumvented the authority of the UN and regularly took unilateral actions to contain the Soviet threats. In the case of the 2003 Iraq War, the USA decided to circumvent the UN Security Council and take unilateral actions against Iraq to preserve the America's national security and geostrategic interests.

Another factor that influenced US aggressive behavior was the possession by Iraq of considerable military power that could harm American interests in the region and abroad. Power, from this perspective, is considered the possession by a state of specific assets or material resources that can be used to advance strategic interests of a state (Mearsheimer 2001, 57). External threats to its national security and the need to maxi-

mize power vis-à-vis other states have urged Iraq build formidable military capabilities. Historically, Iraq, or also known as Modern Mesopotamia, has been known as a major political and military power in the Middle East (Held and Cummings 2014, 412). Its geostrategic location and natural wealth make Iraq a very important state in the Middle East (see Fig. 4.2).

Fig. 4.2 The map of Iraq (*Source*: The US Central Intelligence Agency)

According to *US Energy Information Administration*, as of 2010, Iraq has the world's fifth largest proven oil reserves in the world after Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Canada, and Iran (2013, 1). Natural wealth has allowed Iraq to build formidable military capabilities and influence regional politics. Because military capabilities are subject to secrecy, they vary depending on the source. Different sources provide different data; however, data differences fall within a reasonable range.

Iraq's military capabilities increased significantly during the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) and prior to the 1990 invasion of Kuwait and remained considerably strong until the 2003 intervention. Iraq significantly increased its military capabilities during the period between 1972 and 1980. In 1972, Iraq spent approximately 14% of its GDP in advancing and strengthening its military power (Geller and Singer 1998, 147). In 1980, the military expenditure increased drastically to 21% of the country's GDP (Geller and Singer 1998, 147) due to Iraq's fear of the post-revolutionary Iran and opportunities emerging as a result of the US-Iran conflict. By 1984, Iraq's spending on weapons went up to $14 billion or close to 50% of its GDP (Timmerman 1991, 16). Main weapons providers of Iraq were the USA, France, Germany, and Great Britain (Timmerman 1991; Friedman 1993; Phythian 1997). At the same time, Iraq numbered 212,000 men in the armed forces, of which 28,000 were part of the air forces and 4000 in naval forces (Geller and Singer 1998, 148). In order to provide its army with sufficient expertise, Iraqi government collaborated extensively with 2000 Soviet advisors and received considerable weaponry assistance (Geller and Singer 1998, 148; GlobalSecurity.org n.d.).

By the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the beginning of the Gulf War, Iraq had turned itself into a regional superpower. Iraq had managed to build up a military force of about one million soldiers (Otterman 2003). Its military arsenal included seven corps and over 50 divisions, around 5500 main battle tanks, 10,000 other armored vehicles, 3700 major artillery weapons, and 160 armed helicopters (Cordesman 2001, 2). In addition, Iraq possessed around 600 operational combat aircraft, 1800 light and major surface-to-air missile launchers, up to 6000 anti-aircraft guns, and some modest navy power, such as Italian frigates and anti-ship missiles (Cordesman 2001, 2). In December 1989, Iraq claimed to have produced and tested the satellite launch missile, *al-Abid*, and the ballistic missile, *Tammuz 1*, each with a range of about 1200 miles; however, this claim has not been validated (Nolan 1991, 55–56; Hoyt 2007, 146). On top of the conventional arsenal, Iraq developed programs to produce weapons of

mass destruction, including chemical and biological weapons, which were used during the Iran-Iraq War.

While Iraq suffered considerable losses in military assets during the Gulf War, it managed to increase its military capabilities within a short period. As of 2000, the Gross Domestic Product of Iraq was 59 billion, of which 1.3 billion were spent for military purposes (Cordesman 2001, 5). In addition, it was estimated that Iraq had a total of up to 2000 tanks, about 3700 armored vehicles, 300 combat aircraft, 300 helicopters, and an air defense force of about 15,000 man equipped with more than 850 surface-to-air missile launchers and 4000 anti-aircraft guns (Otterman 2003). Another source claims that Iraq possessed around 2200 battle tanks, 2200 artillery weapons, up to 90 armed helicopters, 360 combat aircraft, around 800 major and light surface-to-air missiles, and nearly 3000 anti-aircraft guns (Cordesman 2001, 5). Moreover, Iraq counted more than 400,000 active servicemen in the military and the same number of reserve troops (Cordesman 2001, 5).

Besides conventional military power, there was a belief among most countries and scholars that prior to the 2003 US intervention, Iraq also possessed unconventional weapons, such as chemical and biological weapons, and was in the process of building nuclear weapons. However, in report sent to the President of the Security Council on January 27, 2003, from Director General of *International Atomic Energy Agency*, Mohamad ElBaradei, it was revealed that Iraq was not engaged in any prohibited nuclear activity. Despite these findings, the USA and its allies maintained that Iraq was actually engaged in prohibited nuclear activity.

Besides the anarchic status of the international system and the possession by Iraq of considerable military capabilities that could harm US interests, fear from a militarized Iraq influenced aggressive actions of the USA against Iraq. The intensity of fear was determined by three major factors: (1) whether states possessed nuclear weapons of second-strike capability to retaliate, (2) whether they were separated by a large body of water, and (3) whether their military capabilities were shared evenly (Mearsheimer 2001, 43–45). The intensity of fear was high because the USA feared a nuclear Iraq and a potential transfer to and use of the nuclear weapons by terrorist organizations. And when states fear each other, they have the propensity to ensure their national security by either increasing their military capabilities, which becomes part of the security dilemma, or attacking the adversary state through preemptive actions. The USA did both. Realizing that a good offense is the best defense, the Bush administration empha-

sized the importance of building and maintaining *unparalleled* military forces and *bases and stations within and beyond* the Rimland region to facilitate power projection when needed (The White House 2002, 6, 29–30).

The USA had several major reasons to fear Iraq. First, Iraq had a long history of being an aggressive state with expansionist ambition. The first major case was the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980. One scholar argued that Iraq was "motivated by fear, opportunism, and overconfidence, a mixture of defensive and offensive calculations… Iraq's decision to resort to force was a compound of a preventive war, ambition and punishment for a regional rival" (Hiro 1991, 39). After the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, Iraq feared that the revolution could expand to other states of the Persian Gulf, and a potential Islamic Shi'a movement could also be a serious threat to the regime in Iraq. In addition, Saddam Hussein perceived Iran as an easy target due to the vulnerability created internally by the Islamic Revolution. Most importantly, following the growing hostility between the Islamic government and the USA, the cancellation of military assistance for Iran, and the demoralization of the Iranian armed forces, Iraq decided to take advantage of the situation and expand its territorial ambition by invading Iran.

Another case that shows Iraq's ambition to become a regional leader is the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, soon after the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988. The Iraqi aggression was followed by immediate reactions of the USA and the UN Security Council. The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 660 in which it condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and demanded a full and prompt withdrawal of Iraqi military from Kuwait. In November 1990, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 678, authorizing the states cooperation with Kuwait to use "all necessary means" to force Iraq out of Kuwait by early 1990. This led to what is known as the Gulf War. Unable to encounter the US military might, Iraq surrendered and accepted the UN Security Council Resolution 687, which, among others, demanded Iraq to destroy its weapons of mass destruction. In both cases, Iraq aimed at increasing its power and expanding its sphere of influence in the region. It may be even for this reason that Richard McCutcheon (2006, 11) argues that the 2003 Iraq War was indeed the end of the 1991 Gulf War, and both these wars should be analyzed as one.

Another reason why the USA feared Iraq was the continuous support of the latter for terrorist organizations. Iraq was considered major sponsor of terrorism as it provided financial support to the families of the suicide bombers that had lost their lives during terrorist attacks (Layne 2002;

Esterbrook 2009). In addition, Iraq provided logistic support to many terrorist organizations, including the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO), Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), and the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). Iraq's support for these terrorist organizations was based on pure realist reasons, which aimed at advancing Iraq's strategic interests in the region by harming other countries (Byman 2003). For example, Iraq supported MEK because the latter was a fierce opponent of the Iranian regime. At the same time Iraq supported PKK in order to cause damage on the neighboring Turkey. Fearing these strategic tactics and believing on Iraq's ongoing nuclear program, the USA feared that Iraq would provide al-Qaeda with nuclear arsenal to attack American interests around the world.

Besides Iraq's past aggressive history and its support for terrorist organizations, the alleged pursuance of the nuclear program (and continuous defiance of US requests to stop the program) was another major element that made the USA fear Iraq. Iraq was notorious for the use of chemical weapons against the Iranians and the Kurdish population during the Iran-Iraq War. Also, Iraq engaged in a program to develop biological and nuclear weapons. In mid-1970s, Iraq purchased a nuclear reactor from France (Ramberg 1980, xvii; Cordesman 1999, 605). At the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, Iranian air forces attacked Iraq's nuclear facilities, and in 1981, Israeli air forces launched another attack against the same target (Ramberg 1980, xvi–xvii; Scott Billingsley and Michaelsen 2009, 182). On April 3, 1991, Iraq accepted the UN Security Council Resolution 687 to destroy its chemical weapons but denied possession of biological weapons (CNN Library 2013). In August 1991, Iraq admits the possession of biological weapons only for "defense purposes." This admission urged the UN Security Council to pass Resolution 707, demanding that Iraq reveal all its prohibited weapons (CNN Library 2013). However, Iraq reacted by declining to cooperate with the UN inspectors. Following the continuous defiance of the UN authority, in December 1998, the USA and Great Britain launched a four-day long aerial attack on Iraq in what is known as *Operation Desert Fox*.

Since then, US-Iraq relationship was characterized by deep suspicion and conflict. Major clashes between the USA and Iraq were related to the nuclear program of the latter. In February 2000, Iraq declared that it would not allow the UN weapons inspectors to investigate its disarmament program, which had halted in 1998 after the American and British airstrikes against Iraq's nuclear facilities. In 2001, President Bush demanded

Iraq to let inspectors back in Iraq. In the same year, US Congress authorized the president to use armed forces to constrain Iraq (US Congress Joint Resolution 2002). Following the joint resolution of US Congress, the UN Security Council approved Resolution 1441, which gave Iraq the final warning to comply with its disarmament obligations. In 2002, British intelligence provided US Department of Defense with information alleging that Iraq was trying to buy *yellowcake uranium* from Nigeria (Hersh 2003).

Lastly, and in combination with the aforementioned factors (the anarchic status of the international system, Iraq's possession of considerable capabilities, and the USA's fear of Iraq), the need to maintain US hegemonic power dictated its aggressive behavior against Iraq. President Bush declared the objective to maintain US hegemony during a graduation ceremony of the army cadets at the West Point military base when he stated that America's goal was to build supreme military capabilities and surpass any challenge. This goal was officially outlined in *The National Security Strategy* of 2002. According to the preamble of the strategy, defending America against its enemies is "the first and fundamental commitment" of the government. In doing so, the USA would provide security and protection to allies and friends in an attempt to deter the adversaries, prevent future military competition, deter threats against the USA and its allies, and defeat any adversary in cases when deterrence would fail (The White House 2002, 29–30). Also, the strategy emphasized the imperative need for the US armed forces to "be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States" (The White House 2002, 30). Aware of the importance of alliances to deter threats and the fact that the latter may fail, the strategy provides guidelines to take unilateral actions when US strategic "interests and unique responsibilities require" (The White House 2002, 31).

As a hegemonic power that had strategic interests in maintaining the status quo in the international system and preventing any disturbance of the balance of power, the USA relied on the grand strategy of offshore balancing by utilizing either the buck-passing strategy whenever possible or the direct balancing strategy whenever the former strategy would fail or was expected to fail (Mearsheimer 2001, 139). In the language of the 2002 National Security Strategy, those two strategies can be referred to as *deterrence* for the buck-passing strategy and preemptive or unilateral actions for the balancing strategy. The *dual-containment* policy toward

the Iran-Iraq War during the 1980s (Everest 2003, 30–31) and the direct balancing of Iraq during the 1990 Gulf War are just two examples of the offshore balancing strategy used by the USA to prohibit the emergence of a potential regional hegemon.

However, the back-passing strategy was not viable in the case of the 2003 Iraq War because there was no regional great power able and willing to balance the aggressive Iraq. First, Iran, as a traditional balancer of Iraq, feared that another war with Iraq would be devastating to its long-term geostrategic interests. The memories of the bloody Iran-Iraq War and how the USA helped to prolong it prevented Iran from directly balancing Iraq. Also, Iran feared a strong US presence adjacent to its borders, but at the same time feared its traditional adversary, Iraq. This caused Iran not to take a stance on whether to attack Iraq or not. In addition, Turkey could not be used as a balancer because it feared that the war would destabilize the Middle East, and a chaotic Iraq would cause Kurds to seek independence to establish their own state; thus, threatening Turkey's sovereignty. Moreover, even Saudi Arabia could not be used as a balancer for several reasons. First, it did not perceive Iraq as an imminent threat to its geostrategic interests. This position was made public by Prince Saud Alfaysal, who claimed that Saudi Arabia had no intention to join the USA against Iraq because there was no proof about an imminent threat coming from Iraq (Iraq Watch 2002). Also, Saudi Arabia feared potential emergence of a Shi'a regime that would be hostile to its regional interests. Lastly, Saudi Arabia feared that after the war, the USA would take advantage to install a puppet regime in Iraq that would increase American regional influence at the expense of Saudi Arabia.

Because the buck-passing strategy did not function for the aforementioned reasons, the USA had to rely on direct balancing. Offshore balancing dictated that when regional great powers fail to stop the ambitions of another great power, then the distant hegemon would intervene to balance against the rising power (Layne 1997, 113–116; Mearsheimer 2001, 237). The balancing strategy can be achieved through three measures. First, the hegemon sends clear diplomatic signals to the aggressor to change its behavior, threatening to use force without actually using it. Second, the hegemonic power takes measures to create defensive alliances against the aggressor, thus sharing the cost of containing the threat. Third, if the first two measures do not succeed or if additional resources are needed, the hegemon may mobilize its own or additional resources to contain the threat (Mearsheimer 2001, 156–157).

The USA used all these three measures to contain the Iraqi threat. Initially, and over a long period, the USA sent clear diplomatic threats to Iraq, demanding changes in its foreign policy and acceptance of the UN nuclear weapon inspectors. In his *State of the Union Address* in January 2002, President Bush threatened Iraq by considering it a member of the *axis of evil* and a target of the *war on terror*. These threats continued in September 2002, with the President Bush's address to the UN General Assembly in which he demanded aggressive actions against Iraq. In addition, in October 2002, the US Congress voted in a bipartisan fashion to pass the *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution*, which aimed to "defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq; and enforce all relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions regarding Iraq" (US Congress Joint Resolution 2002).

About a month later, the UN Security Council adopted *Resolution 1441* as the last opportunity for Iraq to comply with the disarmament obligations set forth in previous resolutions, which included not only weapons of mass destruction but also prohibited missiles and armaments and payment of reparations to Kuwait caused by actions of Iraq during the Gulf War. Around the same time, President Bush declared that the USA would not seek a regime change if Iraq complies with the UN Security Council resolutions related especially to weapons of mass destruction and prohibited missiles and armament (Kemper 2002). In January 2003, President Bush reiterated the demand for Iraq's disarmament, stating "…Resolution 1441 gives us the authority to move without any second resolution. And Saddam Hussein must understand that if he does not disarm, for the sake of peace, we, along with others, will go disarm Saddam Hussein" (CNN 2003).

While continuing its diplomatic threats against Iraq, the USA was engaged in creating a military alliance against Iraq. In November 2002, President Bush made clear his intentions to build a "coalition of the willing" made of countries that were willing to join the USA in a fight to disarm Iraq (King 2002). According to the Bush Administration, coalition member states would provide a variety of contributions, including logistical and intelligence support, military support, humanitarian and reconstruction aid, and political support. While the coalition was created prior to the military attack on Iraq, the USA proclaimed it a few weeks later, claiming the membership of about 49 states that had already joined in the *war on terror* (The White House 2003).

On March 16, 2003, President Bush launched the last threat toward Iraq when he declared that Saddam Hussein had to leave Iraq within 48 hours or face the US military intervention (CNN 2003). On March 19, the US armed forces started what is known in the military terms as *the Operation Iraqi Freedom*. Within a week, Iraq capitulated and a long period of asymmetrical warfare was about to begin. However, what followed the capitulation of Iraq temporarily obscured the geostrategic importance of destroying Iraq as an anti-American center of power in the region. It is understandable that implementing rational foreign policy strategies is not a guarantee for success because human error or other factors beyond human control may adversely impact the outcomes.

Nevertheless, while not all rational strategies may lead to success, all successes come from pursuing rational strategies. The US foreign policy that led to the 2003 Iraq War can be viewed as being strategically successful for two main reasons. First, it destroyed a regional center of power that was a direct threat to US regional interests. Second, it serves and will continue to serve as a teaching example for all regional states to understand and be aware of what may happen to them if they decide to challenge US influence. What happened to Saddam Hussein and Iraq will make them understand that joining the USA is more beneficial than challenging it. Despite its temporary losses due to mismanagement, the Iraq War paved the way for a new American century in the Middle East.

Conclusion

The mismanagement of the 2003 Iraq War at the operational and strategic levels, which led to military and economic loses, strengthened the perception that US foreign policy toward Iraq was an aggressive, irrational one. The desire to strengthen this perception almost reached the level of deception due to the ongoing political battles during the US congressional and presidential elections in 2004, 2006, and 2008. This can be easily understood by looking at the reaction, or the lack thereof, to the US-backed attack on Libya in 2011, which led to the overthrowing of Muammar Gadhafi and instability that jeopardized US interests. Unlike Saddam Hussein and Iraq, Gadhafi and Libya did not invade independent states, Iran and Kuwait, did not use chemical weapons to kill innocent people, and did not openly threaten or defy US authority. Yet, many experts rarely engaged in a public debate about this war even though they still continue

to argue today about how the 2003 Iraq War was a strategic blunder of the Bush administration and a break in US foreign policy.

The analysis of US foreign policy that led to the 2003 Iraq War shows that it bears striking similarities to the Cold War foreign policy. It was influenced by the same factors, pursued the same objectives, and implemented the same strategies that the USA had dealt with, pursued, or implemented during the Cold War. Fighting state-sponsored terrorism is the only new element, which, arguably, can also be viewed as a tool in the hands of state actors to advance their strategic objectives. There was no question that the fall of the Soviet Union made the USA de facto the only dominant power in the world. However, by the beginning of the new millennium, new challengers to US dominance emerged in almost every region of the world. In the Middle East, Iraq emerged as the main challenger. The invasion of Iran in 1980, the usage of chemical weapons to kill soldiers and civilian, the invasion of Kuwait in 1989, the political and financial support for anti-American terrorist organizations, and the continuous challenge to US influence in the region made Iraq a real threat to the regional balance of power and American geostrategic interests in the Middle East. And the USA responded to this threat accordingly.

The main factors that influenced US foreign policy against Iraq include the presence anarchy in the international system, the possession by Iraq of considerable military capabilities that could threaten US strategic interests, the fear from and suspicion of Iraq's intentions, the need to survive in an anarchic system, and rationality to behave strategically in order to achieve its strategic objectives. All these factors combined led to three main patterns of behavior that were clearly stated under the Bush Doctrine: fear from terrorism and aggressor states like Iraq, which urged the USA to engage in preemptive actions, self-help in an anarchic system, which forced the USA to take unilateral actions (if we apply the international law requirements), and power maximization, which focused US foreign policy on maintaining hegemony and maximizing its military capabilities.

In addition, as a regional hegemon, the USA was forced to pursue the direct balancing strategy because there was no regional power capable and willing to balance Iraq. The USA pursued this strategy by applying three main measures. First, the USA sent clear diplomatic threats to force Iraq to comply with US demands. Once this measure had failed, the USA took a second measure by creating an anti-Iraq alliance to confront Iraq. Third, because all other options had been exhausted, the USA was forced to launch an attack on Iraq on March 20, 2003. Thus, the very military capa-

bilities that dictated US hegemonic status and its objectives and strategies throughout the Cold War dictated the foreign policy toward the Middle East in general and Iraq in particular. While the Iraq War led to significant economic and military losses for the USA, it still represents a brilliant strategic policy managed poorly. By destroying Iraq, the USA set in motion a process that further changed the regional balance of power in a way that it created several small centers of power, making it easier to prevent the emergence of a potential aggressor in the near future.

But this change in the balance of power resulted in another controversial outcome—the empowerment of the Islamic State of Iran. Iran's support for anti-American terrorist groups during the Iraq War and its continuous threat against the USA led many to believe that the war was also a strategic blunder. This development was of high concern because it was the second time within two years (with the first time being the Afghanistan War) that US actions in the Middle East had resulted in the empowerment of the fiercest adversary—Iran. And it was the turn of the Obama administration to deal not only with the empowered Iran but also with the new power configuration in the region, including the emergence of the ISIL. Thus, the Obama Doctrine was about to be launched.

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CHAPTER 5

The Real Obama Doctrine in the Middle East: Continuing the American Moment

By 2008, the image and reputation of the USA as the most powerful state on earth was severely damaged. Fareed Zakaria (2009, 5) argued that "the war on terror," and especially the Iraq War, led to the formation of a "post-American world" which is now defined and directed from many places and by many people. From a similar perspective, Richard Haass (2008, 44) argued that the international system was shifting from a unipolar system under the American leadership into a *non-polarity* system in which dozens of state actors possess and exercise various types of power. Adding more to the grim picture of the US global position, Fawatz Gerges (2012, 13) argued that the American moment in the Middle East had come to an end due to the growth of other states and its inability to act unilaterally and hegemonically unconstrained by the local context. To make the matter worse, the USA got hit by a severe economic recession by the end of 2008, at the peak of the presidential elections. This perceived reality led many to believe that the USA had really lost its prestige, power, and status in the world, and as a result, it would abstain from taking an active role in international affairs (Pew Research Center 2013). While it may have been true that the USA had temporarily lost some relative power, it was far away from losing its status as a regional hegemon.

Despite the grim portrayal of the situation in the Middle East, in reality, US influence in the region after the departure of President Bush remained unchallenged by any regional or global power (Fawcett 2013, 31–40). The 2003 Iraq War eliminated Iraq as an anti-American center of power and de facto increased the influence of Iran as the Iraqi

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government became a quasi-satellite of Tehran (Yaphe 2009, 197). Contrary to the conventional wisdom, as the next chapter will show, the empowerment of Iran did not adversely impact US influence in the region because both states share mutual strategic interests which are dictated by their positions in regional and world politics and their geographic locations. In addition, the Iraq War added to the regional power configuration two important non-state actors: the Kurdish entity and the Islamic State of Iraq, which would later develop into the ISIL. While the Kurdish nation had been living in the region for centuries, it became a powerful entity with a real chance of building its own state only after the 2003 Iraq War. Moreover, the war created new opportunities and challenges for other regional states like Turkey and Saudi Arabia to engage in the region.

Furthermore, the social uprising that swept most Arab states from late 2010 to mid-2012, which is known as the Arab Spring, led to political turbulence and instability. Initially, the USA publicly supported the uprising and opposition forces, but later changed its position by taking a pragmatic approach that served its strategic interests. While it supported the social uprisings in states that were deemed hostile or unimportant to its strategic interests, the USA was reluctant to support social and political changes in allied states or those of geostrategic importance (Haass 2014). For example, while the USA supported the uprising in Libya to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi, it did not do so in Egypt when military forces staged a coup d'état that successfully overthrew the democratically elected government of the Arab Spring, nor did it support the opposition forces in Syria, which followed the emergence of the ISIL. Other experts viewed US foreign policy toward the Arab Spring as a "do-nothing policy," arguing that the USA stood neutral and did not help fostering democracy and democratic governance in the Middle East (Hamid 2015).

The aforementioned changes have led to the further fragmentation of the region and the formation of multiple centers of power that have increased the opportunities for USA to contain any emerging regional threat. The higher the number of actors in the region, the higher the diversity of interests, the higher the probability to have regional states contain each other, and the weaker the centers of power that could challenge US influence in the region. Thus, instead of being the end of the American moment, US foreign policy under President Obama represents the continuation of the new American century in the Middle East.

The Birth of the Obama Doctrine

This chapter proposes the Obama Doctrine and argues that the foreign policy of President Obama toward the Middle East represents continuity in US foreign policy. The main objective of US foreign policy has been maintaining the status quo and preventing the emergence of a regional hegemon that could destabilize the balance of power and challenge American hegemony in the world. This objective is also the main theme of the 2010 National Security Strategy; however, it is camouflaged under the phrase *Renewing American Leadership* (National Security Strategy Archive 2010, 2–3). According to the official strategy, American leadership is a global force that is *grounded in the enduring national interests*, of which the security of the USA, its people, and its allies and partners is the top priority/purpose (National Security Strategy Archive 2015, 2). In order to achieve this objective, the USA has pursued the grand strategy of offshore balancing by either using regional powers to deter the aggressor or utilizing its diplomatic, economic, and even military power as the last resort. The 2015 National Security Strategy, in a striking similarity with the 1988 and 1991 national security strategies, outlines US strategies as follows:

> U.S. forces will continue to defend the homeland, conduct global counter-terrorism operations, assure allies, and deter aggression through forward presence and engagement. If deterrence fails, U.S. forces will be ready to project power globally to defeat and deny aggression in multiple theaters. (National Security Strategy Archives 2015, 7–8)

Like the policy of President Bush, the foreign policy of President Obama is influenced by the same factors, is formulated around the same objectives, and is implemented through the same strategies. The anarchic nature of the international system, the possession by other powers of significant military capabilities that could hurt American geostrategic interests in the Middle East, the fear from and suspicion of the intentions of other great powers, the supreme objective to ensure national survival, and the rational behavior to achieve this objective lead America to exhibit three main behavioral patterns: fear from aggressors, need to rely on self-help, and maximization of relative power.

Following the Iraq War, the Middle East entered a new phase of political changes as the Arab Spring swept through the region, resulting in

the overthrowing of several long-time dictators and the destabilization of several states. In Egypt, it led to the overthrowing of the long-term ally government of the USA and the coming into power of the Islamic forces. In a matter of months, though, the Islamic regime was overthrown by an anti-Islamic coup d'état, which led to the coming into power of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, a pro-American figure. In Yemen, the Arab Spring led to the ousting of the government and an increased influence of al-Qaeda and the Houthi rebels. Four years later, in January of 2015, Iranian-backed Houthi rebels managed to successfully stage a coup d'état, which led to more tension in the region. In addition, the Arab Spring spread into other states, such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, and Bahrain, but without causing any regime change. The scenario was different in Syria, though. Nowhere was the Arab Spring more influential to cause massive casualties and bring about change in regional politics than in the case of Syria. According to the UN, by July 2013, 120,000 people had lost their lives and about six million were displaced from their homes, of which two million had left the country (Guinness World Records 2015, 124–125).

Even though the uprising did not lead to the overthrowing of the Assad regime, it developed into chaos and civil war as many regional forces got involved to advance their interests. On one side were the Arab states who wanted to overthrow the Syrian regime and supported the opposition forces. On another side was Turkey, whose goal was to establish a pro-Turkish government in Damascus and protect its territorial sovereignty from the Syrian Kurds and other forces. On the opposite side of the conflict stood Iran. The primary objective of Iran was supporting the Syrian regime and preventing the coming into power of anti-Iranian forces. In a few words, Syria became a battleground for regional powers to expand their influence, and from a civil war, the conflict turned into a proxy war (Negron-Gonzales 2015, 100). Following the Iraq crisis, the developments in Syria created a fertile environment for the conception and establishment of the ISIL.

The volatile nature of Middle Eastern politics and the tarnished reputation of US foreign policy after the Iraq War forced President Obama to promise a fundamental transformation of US foreign policy in the region. In his early days as President, Obama continued to emphasize the need for a new era of foreign policy toward the Middle East and the Muslim world. Following this objective, the President made his first overseas trip to Turkey and emphasized strong strategic connections between the two states. Soon after, the president visited Egypt, and in his speech he

promised "A New Beginning" in US foreign policy toward the region (The White House n.d.). Guiding this new approach was the Obama's previous convictions that the USA has much to apologize for acting aggressively, arrogantly, and wastefully for more than one century and that multilateralism offers the best hope for restraining US power (Feith and Cropsey 2011). President Obama's beliefs were also incorporated in the National Security Strategy of 2010, which shunned away from making any reference to "Islamic terrorism" or "Islamic extremism," and, instead, specified its target as al-Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates. In addition, the strategy included the President's beliefs on global engagement, including engagement with "hostile nations," such as Iran, and cooperation with "other key centers of influence," such as Russia and China (National Security Strategy Archive 2010, 3).

About a year after the release of the National Security Strategy, the USA participated in the overthrowing of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. This action was viewed by some as being part of an Obama Doctrine, titled *leading from behind* (Lizza 2011). The main idea of the proposed doctrine was that the USA would stay passive in international affairs and engage other states to contain particular threats. Charles Krauthammer (2011) disagreed with this view and argued that *leading from behind* is not a doctrine because it does not incorporate ideas about foreign policy. He called it a mere abdication from global politics.

While the *leading from behind* is not a doctrine, at the same time, it is baseless to argue that it means abdicating from global politics. Nor can it be classified as a buck-passing strategy because the USA did not have any strategic interest in overthrowing Gaddafi because he, unlike Saddam Hussein, did not support anti-American terrorist organizations, he agreed to dismantle its nuclear program at American request, and he never challenged US authority and influence in any significant way. Instead, *leading from behind* can be viewed as a standard policy that made a clear distinction between US foreign policy pursued to advance strategic interests and the policy pursued to advance non-strategic interests.

According to this standard and referring to the case of Libya, President Obama stated that the USA would lead from behind in cases involving non-strategic interests, including threats to American ideals and values and regional crisis (Politico Staff 2011). On the other side, he stated that the USA would rely on *unilateral and decisive military force* "when necessary to defend our people, our homeland, our allies, and our core interests." Obviously, those who proposed and supported the *leading from behind*

doctrine were selective in their analysis and ignored a very important part of the speech.

From a different perspective, the Obama Doctrine was viewed as an *antidoctrinal doctrine* (Gerges 2012, 89). It referred to a statement made by President Obama in which he stated that his doctrine would not be "as doctrinaire as the Bush Doctrine" because of the complexity of global politics. President Obama believed that one doctrine could not be applied to all states and regions around the world. However, as Obama's words failed to become actions, it became clear that his attempt to devise an *antidoctrinal doctrine* failed as the President was co-opted by the *structural-institutional continuity* (Gerges 2012, 89–149). As a result, US foreign policy under Obama succumbed to *pragmatic realism* (Gerges 2012, 110). Along the same line, a source claims that President Obama is *an admirer of foreign-policy realism*, and he has openly expressed his admiration for the realist foreign policy of President George H. W. Bush (Goldberg 2016).

Stephen M. Walt (2016) does not agree with this perspective and argues that President Obama is not realist and his foreign policy has not followed the main principles of political realism. Walt argues that sending additional troops to Afghanistan in 2009, participating in the failed Middle East peace process between Israel and Palestine, supporting the overthrowing of the Libyan regime in 2010, being passive and ambiguous during the Arab Spring, failing to keep the promise to overthrow the Syrian regime, and failing to stop Russia from annexing Crimea are all examples that violate the realist doctrine. Walt goes even further to state that the Obama administration never articulated a clear and coherent framework to identify the US *vital interests*, regions where those interests were present, and the strategies how to advance those interests.

There are several issues with the Walt's claims. First, foreign policy cannot be judged simply by the outcomes of a strategy because even realist strategies may produce adverse outcomes due to mismanagement or matter(s) of *fortune*. What if the Walt's proposals to convert *special relations* in the Middle East to *normal* ones and not to send additional troops to Afghanistan had not worked out as intended? Would that have made his proposals not realistic? Second, at the same time, it is not a realist perspective to judge a foreign policy strategy or the process of implementing it by looking at the emotional or moral outcomes of it. The claims that President Obama did not keep his *promise* to attack Syria, changed his mind when dealing with the Arab Spring, became *embarrassed* because

of the failure to properly handle the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and failed to prevent the Russian invasion of Ukraine are moral claims, and as such, they are irrelevant from a realist perspective. Lastly, it is not quite accurate that the Obama administration had not articulated US vital interests and how those interests were to be achieved. Instead, those objectives and strategies were clearly outlined by the President in his 2010 and 2015 national security strategies and several formal speeches that he gave throughout his presidency.

The Real Obama Doctrine

Given the different interpretations of the Obama Doctrine, and as if the President was aware of these different perspectives on his foreign policy, in a speech given to the UN General Assembly on September 24, 2013, President Obama introduced US foreign policy toward the Middle East and North Africa by stating "So let me take this opportunity to outline what has been US policy towards the Middle East and North Africa, and what will be my policy during the remainder of my presidency" (The White House 2014). He then continued by outlying the following elements of his foreign policy, which I consider to be the core elements of his doctrine.

> The United States of America is prepared to use all elements of our power, including military force, to secure our core interests in the region.
>
> The U.S. will confront external aggression against our allies and partners, as we did in the Gulf War.
>
> We will ensure the free flow of energy from the region to the world.
>
> We will dismantle terrorist networks that threaten our people. Wherever possible, we will build the capacity of our partners, respect the sovereignty of nations, and work to address the root causes of terror. But when it's necessary to defend the United States against terrorist attack, we will take direct action.
>
> And finally, we will not tolerate the development or use of weapons of mass destruction.

In addition to these elements, it is important to incorporate also the element of maintaining military superiority, which can also be connected to some of the previous elements of the doctrine. In the introduction of the 2010 National Security Strategy, President Obama states that "as we

face multiple threats—from nations, non-state actors, and failed states—we will maintain military superiority that has secured our country and underpinned global security, for decades." In addition, he states that "Our Armed Forces will be a cornerstone of our security," but they must be complemented with diplomacy and cooperation with allies and partners for better results (National Security Strategy Archive 2015, 7, 23–28).

A quick look at the elements of the Obama Doctrine presented here would reveal that it is one of the most straightforward and, arguably so, the most aggressive realist doctrine ever launched in the history of US foreign policy. Like the previous presidential doctrines, the Obama Doctrine encompasses elements that deal exclusively with strategic interests of the USA. Unlike its predecessors, the Obama Doctrine is free of the clichés of political rhetoric, such as "spreading democracy," "defending freedom," and the like phrases. He also believes that the USA should not use its vital resources, including the military forces, "to prevent humanitarian disasters unless those disasters pose a direct security threat to the United States" (Goldberg 2016). In addition, the President has openly supported drone attacks against anti-American Islamic terrorists, including those who were American citizens at the time of execution. It is possible that the stature and reputation of President Obama as one of the most liberal president in US history hypnotized foreign policy experts and forced them to ignore the importance of the President's speech in front of the UN General Assembly and his realist, cold-blooded actions against threats to US national security.

Having identified the elements of the Obama Doctrine, this study continues with a brief comparison of its elements to those of the previous presidential doctrines. The objective is to determine whether the elements of the Obama Doctrine can be found in the previous presidential doctrines discussed in this book. If the elements match in substance, then it can be argued that the Obama Doctrine represents continuation in US foreign policy. The next step is identifying whether the elements introduced in the President Obama's speech match their foreign policy objectives and actions. While words may be considered a form of action, they do not contain the same meaning as the latter. Our words may have different meanings, but it is only through our actions that we reveal their true meaning.

To begin, the first element of the Obama Doctrine—using all elements of power to secure core interests in the region—is found in all previous presidential doctrines, starting with the Truman Doctrine and ending with the Bush Doctrine. Also, the second element—protecting allies and

partners from external aggression—has been a core element in all previous presidential doctrines of the Cold War. In the Bush Doctrine, this element was emphasized in the protection that the USA provided especially to Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, the third element—ensuring the free flow of energy—can be found in all previous doctrines, given the importance of energy as a latent power that can be used to build military power or to prevent others from building a formidable military. According to David Harvey (2010, 210), the control over the flow of oil is vital in world politics, and whoever controls the *global oil spigot* controls the world. In the post-Cold War era, states are using "the logic of war in the grammar of commerce" (Luttwak 1990, 126).

Moreover, the fourth element—dismantling terrorist networks by taking direct actions if necessary—can be found in the Bush Doctrine but not in other doctrines, because communism, instead of terrorism, was the issue during the Cold War. However, what is important in this element, which can be found in all previous doctrines, is the fact that it sanctioned unilateralism through direct action and did not exclude sovereign states from the meaning or being part of *terrorist networks*. Furthermore, the element regarding US intolerance toward states that develop or use weapons of mass destruction can be found in all previous doctrines. It is related to the goal of preventing regional states from acquiring or using their military capabilities to expand their influence. The distribution of capabilities determines the structure of regional and global politics. Preventing a state from becoming a nuclear power is crucial to preventing it from becoming a regional hegemon. Lastly, maintaining military superiority has been a cornerstone policy throughout the Cold War and during Bush foreign policy. Maintaining military superiority is crucial to maintaining US regional hegemony. Throughout the Cold War, it was present in the form of (nuclear) arms race and *Star Wars*. During Bush foreign policy, maintaining military superiority was demonstrated in the form of increased investments in military affairs.

The elements of each presidential doctrine do not necessarily need to be identical in order to claim continuity in foreign policy. What defines continuity in US foreign policy are the strategic objectives of each presidential doctrine, factors that dictate those objectives, and the strategies to achieve them. An analysis of Obama foreign policy toward two of the most powerful regional states—Iran and Turkey—and the emergence of the ISIL will test the aforementioned claims about the Obama Doctrine and its continuity in US foreign policy.

The reason for selecting these three cases is because they have considerable influence on regional politics and US geostrategic interests. On the other side, the reason for excluding Afghanistan and Iraq is because these cases are discussed in other sections of the book and because both states have currently lost their status as influential states in the region. Also, this study does not include Saudi Arabia because it has not expressed serious ambitions to become a dominant power in the region despite its growing influence.

The Obama Doctrine Toward Iran and Turkey

Iran and Turkey have historically been two major political actors in the Middle East and in the Muslim World. With each state having an economic power of about $1.4 trillion in Gross Domestic Products and with a manpower available for military service of more than 45 million, Iran's and Turkey's economic and military capabilities significantly surpass those of any other country in the region (Central Intelligence Agency n.d.). In addition, both countries are located in very strategic geographic locations that provide them with high leverage in regional and international political and economic matters. From the political perspective, both countries are considered bridges or gates that connect Euroasia with the Middle East, and as such, they serve as geostrategic posts to contain threats or facilitate power projection. This claim was tested positively during the Cold War when both countries served successfully to contain the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East and abroad. From the economic perspective, both countries provide trade routes to facilitate economic cooperation between regions and continents (Fig. 5.1).

Iran, which is discussed in the next chapter also, has a geostrategic location that links the Middle East to the South Asia and the Caucasus (Central Asia) with the Persian Gulf. This area includes two critical zones of energy, the Persian Gulf in the South and the Caspian Sea in the North, which contain considerable oil and natural gas reserves. Iran has a 1570-mile coastline on the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, giving Iran high leverage in controlling the *Strait of Hormuz* gateway to and out of the Persian Gulf. On the other side, located in Southeast Europe and Southwest Asia, Turkey is a node that connects a diversity of people and political and economic interests. This geostrategic location makes Turkey a critical route for the exportation of oil from the oil-producing states of the Middle East and Caspian Sea to the high-consuming European markets. Moreover,

Fig. 5.1 The map of Iran (*Source*: The US Central Intelligence Agency)

the Bosphorus Straits provide Turkey with an even higher leverage over the control of movements between the Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea (Fig. 5.2).

What makes the case of Iran and Turkey unique is that both states are also successors of the Persian Empire and the Ottoman Empire, respectively, which have dominated the region in different periods of history. As such, it is understandable that both states may have the aspiration to rule the region again or become decisive regional powers. However, while Iran is currently fully involved in the Middle East, Turkey has taken a

Fig. 5.2 The map of Turkey (*Source*: The US Central Intelligence Agency)

more passive role because of its *double gravity*, one pushing it toward the European Union (EU) and the other pushing it toward the Middle East (Robins 2013, 397). The argument goes that if the EU fails to make Turkey one of its members or if the latter loses interest in European politics, then Turkey will be inclined to increase its involvement in Middle Eastern politics. The continuous rejection of the Turkish candidacy from the EU and the recent developments in the Middle East have increased Turkish involvement in the region. Nevertheless, one may also claim that Turkey aims at expanding or using its influence in both regions. Its latest spread of influence in the Balkans while taking an aggressive stance in dealing with the ISIL and the Syrian crisis is an example of Turkish engagement in both regions. Regardless, both Iran and Turkey remain important regional actors that influence US foreign policy in the Middle East.

The Obama Doctrine and Iran

The US-Iran relationship became of geostrategic importance at the outbreak of the Cold War as Iran was considered a gateway that would help prevent the expansion of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Until the overthrowing of the Shah, Iran was recognized by the USA as the *policeman of the region* and was given significant economic aid and military assistance to serve US interests in the region (Sylvan and Majeski 2009, 121). However, the coming into power of the religious forces in 1979 and the 1979–1981 hostage crises, in which Iranians held captive the US diplomatic personnel for 444 days, severed the relationship between the two countries to the degree that both states terminated all forms of diplomatic relations. Despite this fact, Iran did not side with the Soviet Union but continued a non-alignment foreign policy that aimed at playing out the two superpowers (Sadri 2012, 384). On the other side, the USA did not take direct military actions to retaliate against or overthrow the Islamic regime.

The end of the Cold War and the beginning of the new millennium presented new opportunities and challenges for the USA to engage with Iran. The 2001 Afghanistan War and the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War brought a new era in the US-Iran relationship as both states were forced to cooperate in pursuing mutual strategic interests and fighting against common enemies. The emergence of the ISIL further strengthened the relationship to the extent that both states engaged in public diplomacy and managed to reach an agreement on April 14, 2015, which is known as the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPA). The agreement was a result of two-year secret negotiations between the USA, Iran, and the *P5+1*, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany. The USA has been viewing Iran as a secret ally in its quest to deter and contain regional threats and maintain the balance of power at the US advantage. Obviously, the geographic location and the position that Iran holds in the regional system of power make it suitable to act as a balancing force. However, at the same time, the USA has also viewed Iran as an opportunist state that would take advantage of any opportunity to expand its influence at the expense of other states, including the USA.

Under President Obama, US foreign policy toward Iran has been guided by the strategic need to maintain US influence in the region, ensure the free flow of oil, protect allies and partners, dismantle terrorist networks by also taking direct/unilateral actions, and prevent the development and

use of weapons of mass destruction by state and non-state actors. As stated frequently, Iran's nuclear program is the most important issue that has preoccupied the Obama administration when dealing with Iran. The USA has been well aware of the fact that in order to maintain its regional influence intact, it must prevent the acquisition or use of nuclear weapons by regional states or non-state actors. The National Security Strategy of 2015 clearly considers the acquisition and use of nuclear weapons as the gravest danger that the USA faces today (National Security Strategy Archive 2015, 11).

Since coming into power in 2009, President Obama declared the willingness of the USA to cooperate with Iran if the latter decides not to pursue the nuclear program. However, soon in the same year, it was discovered that Iran was building a secret uranium-enrichment site at Fordow (Sanger and Broad 2009). The USA reacted by imposing economic sanctions. In late December of 2011, the US Congress passed and President Obama signed into law the *National Defense Act* for the 2012 fiscal year, which, among other measures, imposed new economic sanctions on Iran. On July 30, 2012, expanding on sanctions provided under the 2012 National Defense Act, President Obama issued an executive order prohibiting any individual or entity from "conducting or facilitating significant transactions with a private or public foreign financial institution or other entity for the purchase or acquisition of Iranian oil."

In addition, the US-Iran relationship was also influenced by the need of the USA to maintain the free flow of oil from the region to the global markets and the continuous attempts of Iran to disturb the flow of oil by threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz. Amid growing tension due to the discovery of Iran's secret nuclear activity and the retaliation of the USA by imposing sanctions, Iran declared that it would cut off global oil supply by blocking the Strait of Hormuz (Hafezi 2012). Faced with situation, the USA reacted by dislocating the aircraft carrier *John C. Stennis* to the Persian Gulf and increasing its naval presence in order to act immediately in case of a potential Iranian closure of the Strait. At the same time, while the EU was imposing sanctions on Iran, Great Britain and France reacted against the Iranian threat by sending their flotilla of warships. The encounter continued for several months, and in the end, Iran withdrew its threats to close the Strait of Hurmuz while considering its actions normal naval operations to test its national security.

Moreover, the US-Iran relationship is characterized by conflict over Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas terrorist organization, which aim

at diminishing or destroying the influence of the USA's closest ally in the region—Israel. This issue is also intertwined with the objective of the USA to prevent the acquisition or use of nuclear weapons by state and non-state actors against the USA and its allies and partners. For this reason, the USA has made it clear to Iran that any direct or indirect action against Israel or other allies would be encountered with immediate and full-scale military attacks. Also, while classifying it as a state sponsor of terrorism, the USA has continuously threatened Iran not to use terrorist groups as proxies to advance strategic interests at the expense of America's allies, nor provide them with weapons of mass destruction.

There have been several factors that have influenced the US-Iran relations. The first factor is the anarchic structure of the international system, which forces the USA to rely on self-help to advance its geostrategic interests. The second factor is the fact that Iran already has significant military capabilities that could harm or destroy US geostrategic interests in the region. In this case, a nuclear Iran would increase the risk significantly to the point of being uncontrollable. Third, the USA views Iran, its nuclear program, and the support for terrorist organizations with deep suspicion and fears that the objective of Iran is to gain control over the oil-rich region at the expense of other powers, including the USA. The geostrategic location of Iran coupled with military supremacy would make it a real regional and global threat to the USA. While it has become part of the conventional wisdom that a nuclear Iran would challenge US influence and the stability in the Middle East, Kenneth N. Waltz (2012) argues that a nuclear Iran would provide more stability. For the moment, it seems that the USA does not want to play the *Russian Roulette*. The fourth factor that dictates US foreign policy toward Iran is the need to ensure survival in an anarchic international system. Having control over the Middle East is vital to US interests because it maintains stability in global economy and politics. Losing influence in the region would have a domino effect in other regions as well. Lastly, US foreign policy is dictated by the rationality to deal with potential threat through well-calculated strategies.

All these factors have caused the USA to be fearful of Iran, to rely on self-help in addition to the help from the UN and other international institutions, and to maximize it relative power. The national missile defense program is one of the major military programs through which the USA aims at confronting potential nuclear threats coming from nuclear states in the system. In 2012, it was reported that the USA was building missile-defense radar station in Qatar in addition to the X-band missile-defense

radars in Israel and Turkey (Enteus and Barnes 2012). The goal of these stations is to detect missile launches from southern, northern, and western Iran.

In order to encounter Iran's growing influence in the Middle East, the USA has acted as an offshore balancer by pursuing either the buck-passing strategy or the direct balancing strategy when the first strategy would fail or was expected to fail. The buck-passing strategy has been implemented by using regional states to contain Iran. It has been easy for the USA to implement this strategy because Iran has many enemy states in the region that are willing and able to balance it (Gerges 2012, 181–182). For example, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt consider Iran an *existential threat* and have frequently been willing to attack Iran's regional interests (Black and Tisdall 2010). The strategic necessity to attack Iran's regional interests has increased significantly following the fall of Saddam Hussein, the empowerment of Iran as a result of it, and the emergence of the *Shi'a Crescent*. While doing so, the Arab states have also been trying to pass the buck to the USA by continuously persuading it to launch a military attack against Iran and its nuclear facilities (Cooper 2015). In many instances, Israel has also considered conducting surgical air strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities the same way as it did in 1981 against Iraq's nuclear reactor (Brumfield and Liebermann 2015). Despite the potential threat, the Obama administration has always been categorically against *carrying the buck* for other states or launching military attack against Iran. This position is understandable because besides the conflict of interests in some areas, the USA and Iran share mutual strategic interests in many other areas of high geostrategic interests.

As analyzed previously, US foreign policy toward Iran satisfies many of the elements of the Obama Doctrine. First, the Obama administration has declared in many instances that it is prepared to use all elements of power, including military power, to protect its geostrategic interests in the region that are threatened by Iran. Second, the Obama administration has openly declared that it would provide unlimited support to Israel and other allies in the region in case of an aggression from Iran. As in the case of the first element, it remains to be seen whether this policy will follow an Iranian aggression in the future. In addition, ensuring the free flow of oil is present in US foreign policy toward Iran, given Iran's geostrategic location in the Persian Gulf and its influence and jurisdiction over the Strait of Hormuz, through which passes about 30% of the world's seaborne-traded petroleum (US Energy Information Agency 2014).

Moreover, even though dismantling the Iranian-backed terrorist organizations has not been as important as halting Iran's nuclear program, Obama's foreign policy has repeatedly criticized Iran for supporting Hezbollah and Hamas. While these two terrorist organizations do not directly challenge US geostrategic interests in the region, they are used to increase Iran's influence at the expense of other regional states, including Israel. Furthermore, preventing the development and use of weapons of mass destruction has been one of the primary elements of the Obama Doctrine toward Iran because it would determine the distribution of capabilities in the region, and as a result, the status of each state in regional politics. For example, a nuclear Iran would likely create a regional system revolving around Iran, eschewing the USA. To understand this fear, one would have to imagine a scenario in which Iran becomes the North Korea of the Middle East. Lastly, maintaining military superiority, which is tantamount to maintaining US hegemonic power, has been the primary element of the Obama Doctrine because it dictates the ability to implement other doctrinal elements. Military superiority can be achieved by either increasing military power or preventing others from increasing it, thus maintaining the status quo. The USA has encountered Iran by investing in the national missile defense program and preventing it from developing the nuclear bomb.

The Obama Doctrine and Turkey

Like the US-Iran relationship, the US-Turkey relationship during the Obama administration is influenced by the strategic need of the USA to maintain its hegemonic influence in the region, confront external aggression against allies and partners, ensure the free flow of oil from the region to the global markets, dismantle anti-American terrorist organizations, and prevent the development and use of weapons of mass destruction. Unlike its relationship with Iran, the relationship with Turkey has been less conflictual for the USA because the latter has not pursued the development of a nuclear program and has been reluctant to directly support anti-American terrorist organizations or attack US allies. Despite sharing mutual strategic interests with Turkey over many geostrategic issues, US foreign policy under President Obama has been challenged by the growing desire of Turkey to expand its influence in the Middle East, its increasing threats against Israel, and its indirect alleged support for the ISIL.

The relationship between the two states became of a strategic importance back in 1947 when the USA classified Turkey as a geostrategic ally of the Cold War that would help contain the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East. Even though there exists an agreement that US-Turkey relationship have been solid throughout the Cold War, there is sufficient evidence to claim that there have also been areas of contention between the two states that have been ignored due to the strategic importance of fighting the Soviet Union (Lesser 2008, 44) . For Ian O. Lesser (2008, 44), US-Turkey relationship since the 1960s have been characterized by recurring tensions, including widespread anti-Americanism, arms embargoes, and disagreements over the Aegean, Kurds, northern Iraq, and the Kurdish Workers Party. During the Cuban missile crisis, without approval from Turkey, the USA reached a deal with the Soviet Union to remove the Russian missiles from Cuba in exchange for the removal of the US missiles deployed in Turkey (Loğoğlu 2008, 31). In another case, in 1964, Turkey threatened to intervene in Cyprus during the Cyprus crisis. In response, President Johnson reacted by sending a letter to the Turkish prime minister, warning him that if the Soviet Union attacked Turkey in an attempt to protect the Greek Cypriots, the USA and its NATO allies might not react to defend Turkey (Loğoğlu 2008, 31). In addition, as a reaction to the Turkish attack, the USA imposed an arms embargo, which was removed two years later.

Despite these conflicts, the strategic relationship between the two states remained solid due to the mutual threats coming from the Soviet expansion. After the end of the Cold War, the demise of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of a unipolar international system, the US-Turkey relationship entered in a new era of change as Turkey had temporarily lost its geostrategic importance and the USA had become a *hyperpower* facing no real and imminent threat. The relationship between the two states experienced further change after the coming into power of the pro-Islamic forces in 2002 and the growing economic power and political influence of Turkey in the region. In March 2003, the US-Turkey relationship experienced a major setback when the Turkish parliament failed to approve the entry of US troops into northern Iraq from Turkey. In an attempt to *transform* Turkish foreign policy and increase its influence in the region, its leadership decided to challenge the USA by also building stronger relations with Iran, supporting its nuclear program.

Following the aforementioned fluctuations, Saul B. Cohen (2011, 219–220) has identified three main phases in the US-Turkey relationship.

The first phase started with the outbreak of the Cold War, and it is called *the dependency phase* due to the need of Turkey to maintain a strong military force. The second phase—*close strategic partnership*—began with the admission of Turkey as an official member of NATO in 1952. Lastly, the third phase (the current)—*the distancing phase*—is marked by wariness and suspicions between the two states.

The *distancing* phase began in 2003 after the refusal by Turkey to allow the use of the Mediterranean port of Iskenderun as a staging area for American military forces to launch their attacks against Iraq (Cohen 2011, 219–220). The refusal may have been a result of the Turkey's vision of itself as a pivotal country in the region and a result of a new foreign policy paradigm under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu (Aliriza and Aras 2012), who are also known as Turkey's transformers (Abramowitz and Barkey 2009).

After about six decades of cooperation, the US-Turkey relationship cannot be considered a *model partnership* anymore (Cook 2010). In a report for the US Congress, Carol Migdalovitz (2010) cautions lawmakers about the changing Turkish foreign policy and its tendency to become independent from US foreign policy. Also, the volatile nature of Middle Eastern politics, especially after the emergence of the ISIL, makes the relationship fragile and prone to change. While Turkish involvement in the region brings new opportunities for the USA to balance other regional powers, it also raises challenges that set limits in the US-Turkey relationship. Even though President Obama continues to view Turkey as a "county of enormous strategic importance that has always been a crossroads of East and West," he also realizes the double gravity of Turkey, one pushing it toward the EU and the other pushing toward the Middle East. If Turkey is not accepted as a member of the EU or loses the hope to become as such, then the *gravity* will push it toward the Middle East (Valentino 2010).

The then Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, revealed the prospect of Turkish foreign policy when he stated: "Like in the 16th century, which saw the rise of the Ottoman Balkans as the center of world politics, we will make the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East, together with Turkey, the center of world politics in the future. This is the objective of Turkish foreign policy, and we will achieve this" (Knaus 2010). Davutoglu recognizes the historical and geographic importance of Turkey and believed that these two components represent its *strategic depth* for a Neo-Ottoman power.

While Turkey has shown signs of expansionist desire, it has not taken aggressive steps to expand its influence in the region. It seems that Turkey has taken an evolutionary approach rather than a revolutionary approach by following a two-step process. The first step in this approach is its Islamization. Turkey cannot expand its influence in the region without creating first its own brand of Islamism that would appeal to other regional forces. And there is no better way to start designing an Islamist brand than by challenging the alleged archenemy of the Islamic states in the Middle East—Israel. The other way is fighting the secular forces within Turkey, especially those in the military establishment who are loyal to the ideas of the founder of the country—Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. The failed coup of July 15, 2016, seems to have given President Erdoğan a good pretext to forever destroy the last cells of Ataturkism in the Turkish military and in other spheres of Turkish life (Parkinson and Peker 2016).

Also, unlike other regional states, Turkey has also been able to create the Turkish brand of Islamism by mixing a pro-Islamist regime with a successful liberal economy that has contributed to the formation of a very strong military force. The second step would be its direct engagement in Middle Eastern affairs by creating a coalition force under its leadership. Traditional coalition forces in the region have been the Sunni-Arab coalition, the Iran-Iraq-Syria coalition, or the Israeli-Iranian coalition. The only coalition that is fit for Turkey is the Sunni-Arab coalition, which also includes the growing ISIL.

Even though Turkey's engagement in the Middle East has not been substantial, it has been growing as the region continues to be engulfed by conflict. Turkey signaled its return to the Middle East by publicly supporting the establishment of a Palestinian state and dramatically changing its foreign policy toward Israel. The Turkish government changed its position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by condemning the Israeli policy as *crime against humanity* and *state terror* (Rainsford 2009). The Turkish-Israeli conflict reached a new level at the *World Economic Forum* in Davos in January 2009 when the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, publicly condemned Israel for killing innocent people (Bennhold 2009). Almost a year after the Davos debate, the two states clashed on what is known as the *Gaza Flotilla Incident* in which Israeli special forces killed several Turkish citizens in an attempt to stop a convoy of several ships, one of which was under the Turkish flag, from reaching the Gaza Strip (Zacharia 2010). While Israel called the raid an act of self-defense that aimed at preventing terrorist forces in the Gaza Strip

from acquiring vital supplies, Turkey condemned it an act of "state terrorism." This incident created the posture of Turkey as the new leader of the Middle East (Barkey 2010).

Indeed, Turkey can be considered as the state with the highest chance of becoming a regional dominant power, or becoming even the next caliphate, because of its military capabilities, its strategic geographic location, and its history as the successor of the last Caliphate—the Ottoman Empire. Unlike other regional states like Saudi Arabia or Iran that possess only the religious credentials or the military capabilities, respectively, Turkey possesses all the main components that are needed for a state to become a dominant power. It has a formidable military, arguably the largest army in Europe, a geostrategic location to facilitate power projection, religious credentials as the most powerful Sunni state, and the historic legacy as the state that represents the last caliphate in the world. The failed coup of July 2016 raises serious concerns for the USA regarding the Islamization of Turkey and the future of military and strategic cooperation between the two states (Browne 2016).

Arguably, the creation of a caliphate rather than the emergence of a nuclear Iran could be the most serious and imminent threat to US interests in the region. The rationale behind this hypothesis is based on the information about a suspicious relationship between Turkey and ISIL. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a US government official has stated that Washington believes that Turkey is playing a double game in Syria, publicly condemning terrorism while secretly supporting terrorist groups (Hogg 2014). The official also stated that for long it has been the policy of the ruling party in Turkey to secretly come to terms with Islamic groups. In addition, the US Vice President Biden has also stated that Turkey and other Sunni allies in the region have inadvertently provided "millions of dollars and tens, thousands of tons of weapons" to the ISIL fighters in an attempt to depose the Syrian regime of President Bashar al Assad (Usher 2014). Whether Turkey supported the ISIL inadvertently or deliberately remains to be seen; however, there is no question that Turkey and ISIL do share mutual strategic interests in deposing Assad and destroying the Kurdish forces.

Simultaneously with political attacks on Israel, Turkey publicly supported the nuclear program of Iran in an attempt to advance its economic interests and expand its political influence in regional politics (Khetani 2012). Turkey's support of Iran's right to develop a nuclear program for energy-related purposes became official in 2010 when it voted in the

UN Security Council against applying sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program (MacFarquhar 2010). In addition, Turkey has also been directly involved in the Syrian crisis and the fight against the ISIL because of its fear of an increasing separatist movement by the Kurdish minority in southeastern Turkey and its desire to take advantage of the situation and expand its territory. For this reasons, Turkish foreign policy toward the ISIL has been at odds with that of the USA. While Turkey has a strategic interest in containing the Kurds and expanding its influence by using the ISIL, the USA has a strategic interest in containing and destroying the ISIL by using the Kurds and other regional states.

While Turkey aspires to spread its influence in the Middle East even at the expense of the USA, it still does not present an imminent threat. Being aware of the fate of Saddam Hussein, the Turkish leaders have been very cautious not to challenge or threaten the US strategic interests directly through cooperation with anti-American terrorist organizations and the development of weapons of mass destruction. Instead, Turkey seems to be aware of the benefits being provided by geography and alliance with the USA. At the same time, despite areas of conflict, the USA still views Turkey as a regional balancer of power to contain potential threats to its geostrategic interests. The increasing tensions between the USA and Russia and the potential outbreak of another Cold War makes a US-Turkish alliance even more important. The alliance becomes even more important for Turkey as Russia has established air and naval bases on the Syrian coast under the pretext of helping the Syrian regime fight terrorism (Piven 2015).

For this reason, the USA has continued its strategic cooperation with Turkey by pledging to defend the latter from any external threats coming from regional and extra-regional forces. The USA is also well aware of the fact that Turkey is an important geostrategic ally because it hosts the Incirlik Air Base and the Izmir Air Base, which facilitate US power projection in the region. It is also important to note that as of December 2012, Izmir hosts the NATO headquarter for land forces, named *Allied Land Command*. In addition, the USA has deployed AN/TPY-2 Ballistic Missile Defense radar station in the Malatya province in south-central Turkey to protect the latter from a potential missile attack from Iran (Kaya 2013, 86–87). At the same time, the USA has been very careful not to support the idea of establishing a Kurdish state or officially recognizing what is known as the Armenian genocide, which would anger Turkey.

The US-Turkey relationship during the Obama presidency is characterized by conflict and cooperation. This is not new, nor should it be

considered an anomaly. During the Cold War, the relationship demonstrated the same behavioral patterns as well. The US-Turkey relationship is another example when geostrategic interests prevail over conflicting local security interests or non-security interests that do not follow the balance-of-power logic. A quick look at the reasons why both states engaged in conflict and cooperation during the Cold War reveals that while they would conflict over issues that were deemed secondary to their national security, such as lack of democracy in Turkey or its engagement in local conflicts, both states would cooperate on issues that involved their geostrategic interests to contain Soviet expansion.

Likewise, during the Obama administration, both states have clashed over several issues, including also the growing profile of Turkey as a pro-Islamic state and its aggressive behavior toward Israel. Despite its aspiration to become a decisive power in the Middle East, Turkey has been cautious not to challenge US influence in the region. Because of its geographic location and military potential, Turkey remains an important geostrategic actor whose actions may have a direct impact on regional and even global politics. And Turkish leaders have been shrewd to capitalize on this gift of geography by squelching their expansionist ambitions to a certain extent and allying with the USA For its part, the USA has acted as an offshore balancer to maintain the balance of power, prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon, and preserve Turkey as a geostrategic ally that is needed during challenging times as was the case of the Cold War. While the current status of the relationship is satisfactory, its future depends on how Turkey and the USA deal with the emergence and expansion of the ISIL in the region.

The Obama Doctrine and the ISIL: Playing Poker Power Politics

The emergence of *the ISIL* has created a new dynamic in Middle Eastern politics. Its proclamation of the caliphate has raised serious concerns amidst the regional states who fear for their territorial sovereignty and the USA who fears the disturbance of the balance of power at its expense. As shown in Fig. 5.3, as of April 2016, the ISIL has been able to maintain under its influence several major areas in Iraq and Syria while threatening to expand its influence in other regions. The anti-ISIL military campaign conducted under the leadership of the USA has made significant progress

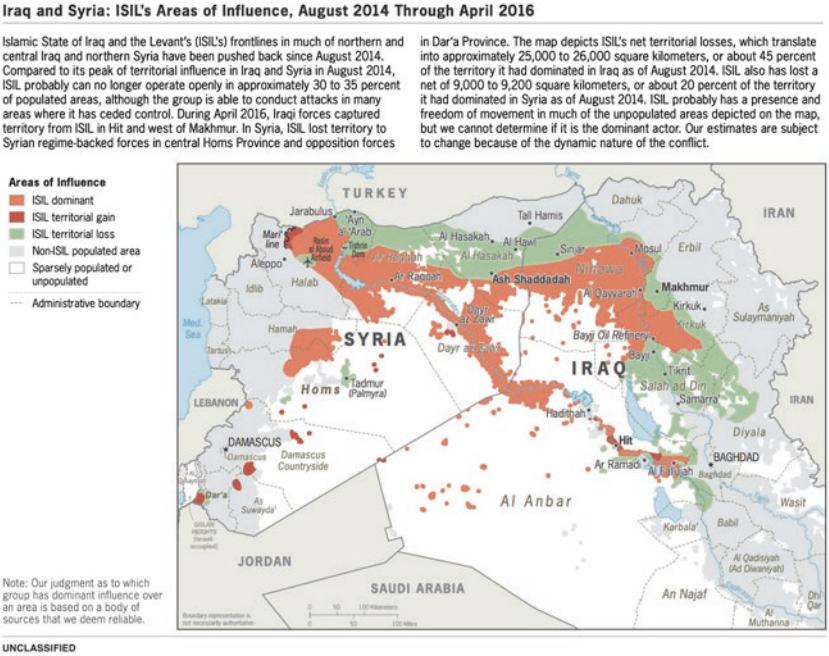

Fig. 5.3 ISIL's areas of influence (*Source*: The US Department of Defense)

during the last two years; however, the situations still remains fragile, as the Syrian and Iraqi ground forces lack sufficient military training and resources to deal with the threat adequately.

The hustle to withdraw troops from Iraq proved negative with passing of time, as terrorist groups who were defeated by the surge reactivated themselves and came back to Iraq to challenge its fragile government. The Islamic State of Iraq emerged as the most powerful force in Iraq and, within a short period, regained control over important Iraqi areas, including Tikrit and Fallujah. Besides the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, the Syrian Civil War created opportunities for the ISI to expand its influence in Syria. Within a short period, ISI announced the establishment of the *al-Nusra Front* in Syria, which had considerable popular support against the Syrian regime. In April 2013, the leader of ISI, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared that al-Nusra Front merged with the ISI and proclaimed the establishment of *the Islamic State of Iraq and the*

Levant (Cordesman and Khazai 2014, 176). Even though this merger was denied by the al-Nusra leader, al-Joulani, the al-Bukamal branch in Syria pledged loyalty to the ISIL anyway. The final transformation of the ISIL occurred in June 2014 when al-Baghdadi declared the establishment of the caliphate under the name of *the Islamic State* and proclaimed himself caliph.

While the ISIL is also known by other names, such as ISIS or IS, the US Department of State recognizes it as a terrorist organization under the name *the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant* (US Department of State 2014). The ISIL has impacted regional politics since its conception as *The Monotheism and Jihad Group* in 1999 by the Islamic radical, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Byman 2008, 225). The group was the first to introduce suicide bombing as a major component of asymmetrical warfare in Iraq. The group did so in August 2003 by hitting on two separate occasions the Jordanian embassy and the UN Headquarters in Baghdad, which killed more than 30 people, including the head of the UN mission (Ensalaco 2008, 271). In 2004, al-Zarqawi pledged loyalty to Osama bin-Laden and joined al-Qaeda to form *al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia*, also known as *al-Qaeda in Iraq* (Nance 2015, 10). Casualties from suicidal bombings against the non-Sunni population and (pro)American forces increased significantly and led to severe sectarian division within Iraq, the major one being the Sunni-Shi'a division. Two years later, in 2006, *al-Qaeda in Iraq* merged with other terrorist groups in Iraq to form *the Mujahedeen Shura Council*, and in a few months, it proclaimed the establishment of *the Islamic State of Iraq* (ISI) (Pirnie and O'Connell 2008, 15).

In order to cope with the rising violence in Iraq, the USA decided to deploy additional 30,000 ground troops in what is known as *the surge*. The surge was part of *The New Way Forward* strategy that aimed at helping "Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods, to help them protect the local population, and to help ensure that the Iraqi forces left behind are capable of providing the security" (Katzman 2009, 33–34). It produced noticeable progress within months of its implementation despite the political controversies that surrounded the issue. This was also recognized by President Obama, who decided to withdraw the American troops from Iraq and allow Iraqi forces to control their territory and build an all-inclusive government. Amid the political battle about the potential negative consequences of rapid troop withdrawal, the last American troops left Iraq by December 18, 2011, following a bilateral agreement between the two countries.

The ISIL: A Terrorist Organization or a Military Force?

There is no doubt that at its conception, the ISIL was a terrorist organization. However, given its transformation over the 15-year period, it is reasonable to ask whether it continues to be a terrorist organization today. Many would consider this a rhetoric question, but it is not. In order to properly identify the nature of the ISIL, it is important to define terrorism and make a distinction between an act of terrorism and an act of war. The word *terror* comes from the Latin word *terrere*, which means *to frighten*. As a result, the word *terrorism* incorporates actions perpetrated by terrorists who aim to instill fear in the population at large (Maras 2014, 3). Terrorist actions are perpetrated deliberately for the purpose of advancing social or political objectives. Such actions are often perpetrated against property and civilian targets, but in some cases they may be launched against military targets as well. However, in both cases, while the victims may be the immediate targets, the ultimate goal is terrorizing the entire population (Maras 2014, 3). Terrorization is a feature that is often found in asymmetrical conflicts, and terrorism is recognized as *the weapon of the weak* to indicate that it is used by entities that lack sufficient military capabilities to confront the adversary (Hoffman 2006, 155; Stepanova 2008, 14).

While the aforementioned elements have led to many definitions of terrorism, the most cited one is provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). It defines an act of terrorism as "the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives" (Federal Bureau of Investigation n.d., iv). Following the definition, one may be able to differentiate an act of terrorism from an act of war. The September 11, 2001, attack is an example of an act of terrorism perpetrated by civilians against civilian targets. Ten bombs that exploded in Madrid, Spain, in March 2004, killing 198 innocent people, is another example of a terrorist attack. On the other side, an act of war is an "organized violence, often on a large scale, involving sovereign states or geographic parts of the same state or distinct ethnic or social groups within a given state" (Magstadt 2013, 414). The Pearl Harbor attack is an example of an act of war, which is committed by military forces of the Japanese government against American military targets. The 2003 US attack on Iraq is another example of an act of war.

The actions of the ISIL in the Middle East do not fit any of the aforementioned definitions. They do not satisfy the elements of an act of ter-

rorism because they are not perpetrated exclusively against civilian targets. Instead, those actions are perpetrated systematically by men in uniform against military forces of Iraq, Syria, and other coalition forces. In this case, civilian casualties can be viewed as *collateral damages* because the primary objective of the ISIL is not to threaten or kill innocent people but to expand its controlled territory and influence all over the Middle East. Nor can its actions be classified as acts of war because they are not committed by a sovereign state or distinct ethnic or social group within a state. The ISIL is not a state actor because it does not have well-identified borders, population, and government, all of which internationally recognized in the system.

Obviously, the ISIL is neither a terrorist organization, a non-state actor, nor a state actor. In this case, it is fair to say that it is some sort of a hybrid actor, encompassing at the same time some elements of state and non-state actors. Today the ISIL is not a threat because it is spreading fear. Instead, it is a threat because it has gained considerable military power and has been able to put under its control vast areas in Iraq and Syria. The fall of Ramadi into the hands of the ISIL after months of military fighting is nothing else but a strong indicator of its military capabilities.

The ISIL patterns and practices are not much different from those of the last caliphate, the Ottoman Empire, under the last caliph, *Abdülmecid II*. The establishment by the ISIL of the caliphate is nothing else but the establishment of an entity governed by the Islamic law, *Sharia law*, under the leadership of the caliph. Also, there is no doubt in history that the Ottoman Empire spread its influence through ruthless conquests of territories and people much like the ISIL is doing today. In addition, in the Ottoman Empire, Christians and Jews were protected as *people of the book* but treated as second-class citizens and had to pay much higher taxes than Muslim people. On the other side, the people of polytheistic religions and other denominations of Islam were considered *heretics* and often persecuted and killed. The practices of the ISIL fall not far from the practices of the last caliphate.

Dealing with the ISIL

Despite its view of the ISIL, whether it is a terrorist organization or a quasi-state actor, first, the USA should have a very clear understanding of the fear that the ISIL poses to its geostrategic interests. If a threat level were to be assigned to all regional states and the USA, Iraq and Syria

would fall in *level one threat* because they are the primary targets of the ISIL. Iran would fall in *level two threat* because it is highly likely that it will be the next target of the ISIL if Syria and Iraq fall. Other regional powers, such as Turkey, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, would fall in *level three threat* because they will be the next target if Syria and Iraq and then Iran fall to the ISIL. The fall of all regional states will then make many European states the next target of the ISIL due to their geographic proximity to the Middle East. This means that Europe has a *level four threat* coming from the ISIL expansion. On the other side, because of its geographical distance from the region, the USA would fall in the *level five threat*. Despite the terrorist attacks conducted by its sympathizers on the US soil, the ISIL cannot launch an organized and powerful attack against the USA unless it acquires enough territories and accumulates or develops significant military power to facilitate power projection and challenge the USA in the Rimland regions or elsewhere with air, land, and sea powers.

Besides the threat level, several other factors influence US foreign policy toward the ISIL. The first factor is the absence of a global government that could prevent the expansion of the ISIL or any other power in the Middle East. Despite the atrocities committed by the ISIL against innocent people in the last few years, no international organization, including the UN, has taken any action to prevent and punish it. The second major factor is the possession by the ISIL of considerable military power to challenge US interests in the region. The number of ISIL fighters range from 20,000 to 200,000, depending on the source of information. In September 2014, the CIA assessed that the number of jihadists fighting for the ISIL may range from 20,000 to 31,500, which was three times higher than previously estimated by the agency (Sciutto et al. 2014). Another source based in Baghdad estimated that around 100,000 fighters had joined the ISIL by August 2014 (Mohammed 2014). In addition, the ISIL possesses large quantities of weapons, which were captured during the Syrian Civil War and its advancement in Iraq. Its weapons include assault rifles and machine guns, surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft guns, anti-tank weapons, Humvees, battle tanks, and more. The fact that the ISIL was able to capture the important city of Ramadi after a long fight is also a strong indicator of the superiority of land power.

The third factor that influences US foreign policy toward the ISIL is the fear from and suspicion that the ISIL will attack US strategic interests in the region once given the opportunity. These concerns are expressed often by President Obama and other members of the government, referring also

to the anti-American propaganda of the ISIL. In an address to the nation regarding the ISIL, President Obama stated that "If left unchecked, these terrorist organizations could pose a growing threat beyond that region, including to the USA. While we have not yet detected specific plotting against our homeland, ISIL leaders have threatened America and our allies" (The White House 2014). In addition, while the ISIL does not represent an imminent threat to the survival of the USA, it continues to be a threat to the balance of power in the region, which may directly impact US geostrategic interests. Great powers are proactive by nature, meaning that they will not wait for the threat to become real and imminent in order to fight it. America did not wait for the Soviet Union to come to North America in order to consider it a threat to its survival nor will it wait in the future for the ISIL or any other power. The last factor that has been impacting US foreign policy toward the ISIL is it predisposition to act rationally by following well-calculated strategies. In his address on the ISIL, President Obama also stated that "Our objective is clear: We will degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counter-terrorism strategy."

The aforementioned factors in combination with each other have led to three main foreign policy patterns of behavior: fear, self-help, and power maximization. First, the USA fears that ISIL expansion could damage geostrategic interests in the region and abroad. Second, the USA is aware of the fact that the absence of a global government that would take care of the ISIL mandates that USA relies on self-help. Lastly, the USA is also aware of the fact that the maximization of relative power is the best way to confront the threat. Power maximization can be achieved when the degrading and destruction of the ISIL is done by consuming the least amount of power. The ideal scenario would be using the power of other states that have a higher threat level from the ISIL. By doing this, the USA *kills two birds with one stone*; it destroys the current threat and prevents the emergence of new one in the future. For this reason, the USA acts as an offshore balancer by, first, passing the burden of containing the ISIL to regional states and, second, using direct balancing when the first strategy fails or is expected to fail.

It is obvious that in containing the threats to its national security, the USA first looks for other states to contain the potential aggressor. Passing the buck on other states to contain the aggressor is the main alternative to balancing (Mearsheimer 2001, 157). If the buck-passing strategy fails, then the USA relies on direct balancing by sending diplomatic threats

to the aggressor, building defensive coalitions against the aggressor, and using its economic and military resources. As stated previously, it is reasonable and rational for a state to pass the buck to other states because through this strategy it "kills two birds with one stone": (1) contains the aggressor and (2) increases its relative power at the expense of the *buck-catchers*. Indeed, what has been going on in the Middle East with the ISIL can be viewed as a product of the buck-passing strategy that has been followed by parties in conflict. While the USA has been trying to pass the buck on regional powers to contain the ISIL, the regional powers have been trying to pass the buck on each other and the USA.

President Obama has outlined four major elements of US strategy against the ISIL (The White House 2014). First, the USA will increase its support to local forces fighting the ISIL on the ground. For this purpose, in June 2014, President Obama had ordered the deployment of several hundred American military specialists to Iraq to assess how to best support Iraqi security forces. Additional 475 troops were also scheduled to be deployed for the purpose of training Iraqi and Kurdish forces and providing intelligence and equipment. In addition, the President stated that he will support Iraq's efforts to establish National Guard Units to help Sunni communities protect themselves from ISIL's threats. Second, the USA will conduct a *systematic* campaign of airstrikes against ISIL terrorists and any terrorist organization that threatens the USA. The third element of the strategy was that while the USA would continue to rely on its counterterrorism capabilities to prevent ISIL attacks, it would cooperate with state partners and international organizations on important issues, including cutting ISIL's financial sources, improving intelligence, strengthening defenses, and curtailing the flow of foreign fighters into and out of the region. The last element of the US strategy against the ISIL was providing humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians of different communities who had been displaced by the terrorist organization.

Even though the total withdrawal of US troops in December 2011 created opportunities for the ISIL to emerge and expand, yet, it is a perfect example of a buck-passing strategy pursued by the Obama administration. By withdrawing the troops, the USA passed the buck on Iraq and other regional states to deal directly with regional issues, including the containment of terrorist organizations like the ISIL. President Obama reiterated this approach again in 2014 when he stated: "But [degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL] is not our fight alone. American power can make a decisive difference, but we cannot do for Iraqis what they must do

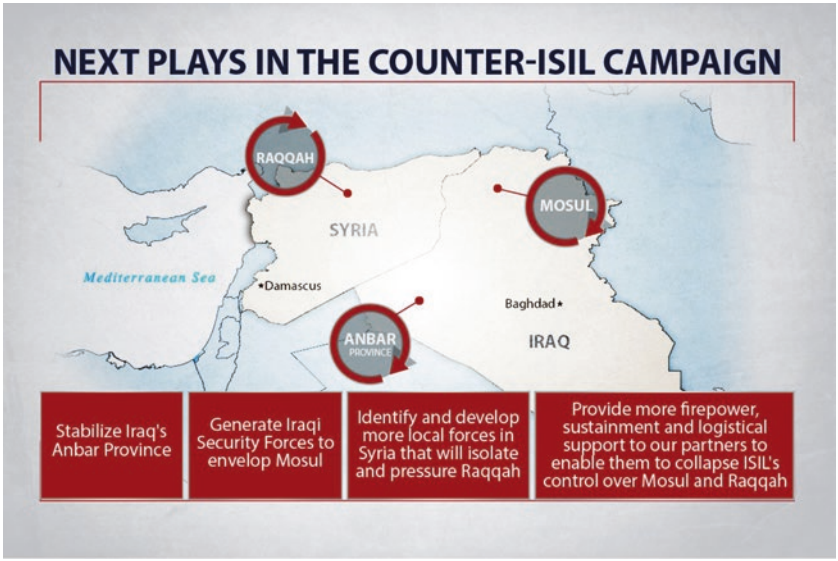

Fig. 5.4 The counter-ISIL campaign (*Source*: The US Defense Department)

for themselves, nor can we take the place of Arab partners in securing their region" (The White House 2014). As shown in Fig. 5.4, this strategy is specified in the anti-ISIL military campaign of the US Central Command, which relies mostly on the Iraqi forces to fight the ISIL directly.

However, Iraq has proved to be too weak to carry the burden of containing the ISIL. As a result, the USA was forced to look for other ways to deal with the ISIL. In the multitude of actors in the Middle East, two other regional states—Iran and Syria—had their interests aligned with those of the USA with regard to dealing with the ISIL. Besides being a direct threat to Iraqi survival, the ISIL is also a direct threat to the territorial sovereignty of Syria and Iran. Neither Syria nor Iran could pass the buck to the USA to contain the ISIL for two main reasons: (1) the ISIL was not a direct threat to US sovereignty and (2) the rapid advancement of the ISIL did not give Iran and Syria enough time to rely on buck-passing.

Despite this opportunity to pass the burden, the USA publicly declared that it would not cooperate with Syria against the ISIL; however, it remained mute about a possible cooperation with Iran. Indeed, when presenting US strategy against the ISIL, President Obama also proposed

Congress to authorize funds to support opposition forces in Syria, the most important of which were ISIL affiliates (The White House 2014). There may be two main reasons why President Obama avoided cooperation with Syria. First, the President was still angry at Syria for violating his *red line warning* on not to use chemical weapons against the civilian population. Second, President Obama probably feared that by engaging both states against the ISIL, it could lead to further empowerment of Iran, which could become a threat to US geostrategic interests.

Besides pursuing the buck-passing strategy, the USA has also used direct balancing by providing economic and military assistance to regional allies, engaging in airstrikes against ISIL targets, and creating a defense alliance (Drennan 2014). In April 2015, during a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, President Obama announced a humanitarian aid of $200 million for Iraq (Baker and Gordon 2015). Also, military assistance in the form of light weapons is provided to Kurdish forces by ally states (Drennan 2014). In addition, as of April 9, 2015, the total cost of airstrike operations against the ISIL since its start on August 8, 2014 is $2.11 billion (US Department of Defense 2015).

However, these military strategies have failed as the USA and its allies have failed to "degrade and ultimately destroy" the ISIL. Why is that the case? The answer to this question can be found in the notion of *land power primacy*. The land power is the dominant form of military power, and wars are won by army battalions, not by squadrons in the air or fleets on the sea (Mearsheimer 2001, 83–84). Air and sea powers are instrumental to land power. It means that land power is the decisive force in the war against the ISIL, and air power should be used as an instrument in support of ground troops. Despite its absolute air power, continuing airstrikes, the USA has not been able to destroy or even degrade the ISIL because the Iraqi and Kurdish armies have been smaller in number, less qualified, and less organized than the army of the ISIL, even though the former has been well-quipped thanks to US military assistance.

Following the threat level for each state, the USA is in level five threat, and as such, it can pass the burden to Iraq, Syria, the Kurdish forces, Iran, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and European states. The latter are in a level four threat, and as a result, they can pass the burden of containing the ISIL to regional states in the Middle East. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel have a level three threat, and as such, they can *pass the buck* to Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the Kurdish forces. Iran has level two threat and can pass the burden of containing the ISIL only to Iraq, Syria, or the Kurdish forces. Lastly, Iraq, Syria, and the Kurdish forces have level one threat and have

no other state to pass the buck. For them, the fight against the ISIL is a matter of life or death.

Understanding the level of threat that the ISIL represents to the USA and the regional states is also important to understand the balance of power or poker power politics in the Middle East. For example, while Iran has an interest in protecting Iraq and Syria and containing the ISIL, it will not do so without exhausting first the Iraqi, Syrian, and Kurdish forces. Iran does not want a Pyrrhic victory, winning the battle with the ISIL but losing the war with other regional states, including Iraq. The same is true for Turkey, whose fight against the ISIL would empower the Kurds and create the conditions for the latter to create the Kurdish state at the expense of Turkey. On the other side, Turkey would profit more by relatively strengthening the ISIL and using it to degrade Iraq, Syria, and the Kurds, creating the conditions for Turkey to expand in the region. Also, Saudi Arabia has no interests in containing the ISIL because it would empower its chief rival in the region—Iran. Like Turkey, Saudi Arabia would profit more by supporting the ISIL. By doing that, Saudi Arabia would significantly decrease the influence of Iran and its allies in the region. At the same time, the USA has no interest in containing the ISIL by itself because, regardless of the outcomes of the war, most likely it would empower regional states at the expense of US power. Knowing the cards on the table, the USA is left with only one option: preventing the emergence of a dominant power in the region.

Like in the cases of US foreign policy toward Iran and Turkey, and as explained in this chapter, the elements of the Obama Doctrine can be found also in US foreign policy toward the ISIL. First, the USA is prepared to use of elements of power, including military force, in order to prevent the emergence of a dominant power in the region that would disturb the balance of power. Second, the USA has confronted external aggression against it allies and partners by implementing its own military force. The case of Iraq is an example of this element. Also, on May 14, 2015, President Obama pledged *ironclad* protection from external threats to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states (Davis and Sanger 2015). Providing *ironclad protection* from external threats to GCC member states is also in the service of the third element of the Obama Doctrine—ensuring the free flow of oil from the region to the world—because GCC encompasses some major producers of oil in the Middle East.

The forth element of the Obama Doctrine—dismantling terrorist networks—is present in almost every step of US foreign policy toward the ISIL. In almost every statement related to the ISIL, President Obama empha-

sized the need to dismantle terrorist organizations that threaten the USA and its allies and partners. Also, the President's decision to launch military attacks against the ISIL in Iraq and Syria without the UN approval is in line with the principle of the Obama Doctrine, which postulates that the USA will take direct/unilateral actions to defend itself against terrorist attacks. In addition, the element of preventing the development or use of weapons of mass destruction is not applicable to US foreign policy toward the ISIL because the latter is not developing or trying to use any sort of weapons of mass destruction. Lastly, the element of maintaining US military supremacy is at the heart of US foreign policy as a regional hegemon who aims at preventing the emergence of another hegemon in the Middle East.

Conclusion

President Obama came into office with the promise of transforming US foreign policy. He promised peace instead of war, cooperation instead of conflict, prosperity instead of poverty, equality instead of disparity, and hope instead of pessimism. Well, unfortunately, that is not the world we live in. As soon as the promises met the reality, President Obama realized that there is an ocean between saying and doing. As such, his foreign policy doctrine—*the Obama Doctrine*, like those of his predecessors, succumbed to the very same constraints of the reality and world politics that dictated its objectives and behavioral patterns. The anarchic status of the international system, the possession by other states of military capabilities that could harm or destroy US strategic interests, the fear from and suspicion of the USA that other states may use their military powers against the USA, the rationality of dealing with a perceived or real threat, and the instinct of state survival forced the USA to be fearful of other states and rely on self-help by increasing its relative power vis-à-vis other states.

In addition, the status of the USA as the only hegemonic power dictated its primary foreign policy interest, which is preventing the emergence of another regional hegemon that could harm US geostrategic interests around the world. As the cases of the Nazi Germany and the Imperial Japan showed during the Cold War, the primary objective of any emerging hegemon would be encircling the Western Hemisphere by controlling what Spykman called *the outposts* and strangulating the USA until its unconditional capitulation. Throughout the Cold War, the primary objective of the USA was containing the spread of Soviet influence across the world that could lead to the encirclement of the Western Hemisphere and

the strangulation of the USA. After the Cold War and during the Obama administration, while it has not faced a similar threat to that posed by the Soviet Union, the USA has consistently acted to squelch any attempt by great powers to become regional hegemons.

In order to avoid this threat, the USA has acted preemptively by dealing with the threat before it could emerge. As such, acting preemptively was not a tactic that President Bush invented during his presidency, nor is it a tactic abandoned by President Obama. Preemptive actions include building alliances, launching direct diplomatic threats, and allocating military forces and resources to deal with the threat(s). These actions have been used during the Obama administration to prevent Russia from becoming a Soviet Union-like threat, to deal with Iran, the rise of the ISIL, and China, and to maintain geostrategic relations with important states like Turkey.

Its geographic location in the Western Hemisphere has dictated that the USA relies on the grand strategy of *offshore balancing* to prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon. It is rational to believe that the best way to prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon is to maintain a balance of power that would provide each state or a group of states sufficient power to check and balance other states. From an offensive realist perspective, this is considered to be the *buck-passing strategy*, passing the burden of containing the threat to regional states. However, the buck-passing strategy may not function when there is no state or group of states willing and able to contain the threat. In these case, the USA relies on direct balancing by sending diplomatic threats, creating coalitions, and utilizing resources of its own. Very often, the USA has followed a mixture of buck-passing and direct balancing with a very strong emphasis on the former.

Unless there is change in the relative military capabilities of the USA vis-à-vis other states (consequently a change of its status in the international system) and its geographic location, it is unlikely that US foreign policy will experience major changes in its strategic interests and strategies to achieve them. It is for this reason that what President Obama really did was not different from what President Teddy Roosevelt proposed more than a century ago: *speak softly and carry a big stick: you will go far*.

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CHAPTER 6

Breaking the Taboo About the US-Iran Relationship

This chapter extends the explanation of US foreign policy to incorporate an analysis of the US-Iran relationship. Following the aforementioned arguments from the previous chapters, this chapter will test the claim that the US-Iran relationship on issues involving their strategic interests has remained the same despite the regime change in Iran in 1979. The strategic interests of the USA and Iran are dictated by their position in the international system and their geographic location. Because these two factors have not changed in the last seven decades, it is logical to argue that their relationship has not changed as well. The assumption is that the relationship is about the strategic interests of the two states, not about a coup staged somehow in 1953 or a hostage crisis occurred sometime during the 1979–1981 period. Foreign policy of the two states is not about love or hatred caused by previous occurrences; it is about their strategic interests that decide their future.

A quick look at several important geostrategic issues will reveal that both states share mutual strategic interests. As a result, it would be logical to claim that the US-Iran relationship is characterized by continuous cooperation on issues involving their mutual strategic interests. Of course, factors, such as ideology and history may have an impact on foreign policy; however, their impact is almost non-existent when conflicting with national security interests. Ideology and history, like other components of a state's culture, are important factors, but states rarely use them at the expense of their national security interests. As the study will show, this is also the case with Iran.

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There are five main reasons for selecting the US-Iran relationship as a case study of this chapter. First, Iran is considered a great power and exercises a significant influence in the Middle Eastern politics that may also impact US geostrategic interests. Second, since the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the US-Iran relationship has been characterized by an unprecedented degree of hostile political rhetoric, while prior to the revolution, for more than four decades, both states had been strategic allies. Third, on July 14, 2015, after two years of secret negotiations, the USA and Iran reached a comprehensive long-term deal (Gordon and Sanger 2015). The deal was a surprise to most foreign policy experts and the general public. Despite the vehement opposition, the deal managed to overcome a Republican attempt in the US Senate to block it, taking effect without a presidential veto (Steinhauer 2015). Fourth, Iran is located in the Middle East, a region that is of high geostrategic interests for the USA (Graeber 2007, 131–134). In an interview given in 2005, the current Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, stated that "…wherever Iran goes, it faces the United States. This includes Iraq, too" (Bozorgmehr 2005). Adding more to this perspective, Hussein Mousavian, an Iranian nuclear negotiator who was arrested in 2007 on espionage charges, argued also that there is another site do it: "…Wherever the U.S. goes, it faces Iran" (Bozorgmehr 2005; as cited in Chubin 2006, 117). Lastly, the analysis of the US-Iran relationship is important due to the controversies sparked by the latest interrelated geostrategic issues, including the US-Iran deal of 2015, the situation in Iraq, and the ISIL expansion in the region.

As mentioned previously, the Middle East has been of high geostrategic interests for the USA since the beginning of the Cold War in 1947. Its importance increased significantly in 1956 when the Great Britain and France were forced to abandon the region that they had ruled for many decades. At the same time, Iran has been a geostrategic ally of the USA since its major involvement in the region. Iran served as a strategic ally during the Cold War by preventing the spread of Soviet influence in the region. During the reign of the Islamic forces, Iran has been serving as a balancer to contain regional aggressor states, such as containing Iraq. In addition, Iran has been playing an important role in diminishing the influence of the Arab states or diverting their interests from challenging US influence in the region to preventing the spread of Iranian influence. An example of this effect is the Arab intervention in Yemen in March 2015 against the pro-Iranian government. Today, Iran security and foreign policy sides with the USA in almost all major national security issues

the latter is facing in the Middle East, despite arguments over the nuclear program (Miller 2014).

The geostrategic interests of both states are dictated to a great extent by their geography, the military capabilities, and the place they resume in the international system (Brzezinski 1986, xiv; 1997, 40). Geography determines the proximity to vital resources, such as oil, that can be used to enhance military capabilities of states. Had Iran been located somewhere in Africa, it would have not had the current relationship with the USA. In addition, geography determines the proximity to aggressor states. Bordering the Persian Gulf to the south, surrounded by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Caspian Sea to the north, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east, Turkey and Iraq to the west, and being close to Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, make Iran vulnerable to attacks from local and global forces. However, at the same time, bordering the same states and areas makes Iran geographically important because it may exercise direct influence in regional politics. It is for this reason that Iran was recognized by the USA as a strategic state throughout the Cold War, as explained previously. Also, had the USA bordered Russia in the North, instead of Canada or the cold waters of the Bering Strait, China in the East, instead of the Atlantic Ocean, and Germany in the West, instead of the Pacific, its history and foreign policy would have been dramatically different.

Moreover, the military capabilities of Iran and the USA dictate their positions in the international system and the way how they act to advance their own strategic interests. Iran possesses considerable military power and has been trying to build nuclear power as well. Were Iran as powerful as the United Arab Emirates, or Kuwait, or Albania, it would have not enjoyed the current "publicity" at the world stage or the American attention, nor would it be able to engage in a nuclear program and challenge the USA and other regional powers. The same is true for the USA and other great powers in the system. The USA is capable of projecting sea, air, and land power across the region unlike any other state in history. Attached to the military capabilities is the place each state resumes in the international system. The USA remains the only regional hegemon that has the capability to dominate the Western Hemisphere and project power all over the world. On the other side, Iran remains a regional great power and an influential actor in the region and abroad. The strategies each state implements to advance its strategic interests depend on the military capabilities, which also dictate the status of the USA as a regional hegemon and of Iran as a regional power, and the geographic location. The

geographic location of the USA makes buck-passing less expensive than direct balancing, while the geographic location of Iran dictates a direct balancing strategy in most cases.

Because the geographic locations and military capabilities of the USA and Iran have remained moderately unaltered for decades, it is reasonable to expect that their geostrategic interests, and as a result their foreign policy, have remained moderately unchanged despite radical changes in their domestic politics. While both states can allow themselves to behave irrationally on issues that do not threaten their strategic interest, they are forced to act rationally when it comes to high politics, issues that directly threaten their strategic interests. This claim runs counter to the conventional view held by most experts who argue that "The Islamic republic is not a normal nation-state seeking to realize its legitimate interests but an ideological entity mired in manufactured conspiracies" (Edelman et al. 2014).

If Iran's foreign policy is guided by the Islamic ideology, how would researchers explain Iran's continuous support for Christian Armenia against Shi'a Azerbaijan, its continuous support for Christian Russia against Muslim Chechnya, its cooperation with Israel and the USA during the Iran-Iraq War and the Iran-Contra affair, and the later cooperation with the USA in Afghanistan against the Taliban regime? All these cases (analyzed later in this chapter) challenge the conventional view of Iran as irrational actor.

Geostrategic interests lead to the second major claim of this chapter. Because the USA and Iran have been strategic allies for about four decades (1941–1979), it would be reasonable to claim that the US-Iran relationship after the departure of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1979 and the coming into power of the Islamic forces have remained unaltered when it comes to issues related to their geostrategic interests. Thus, both states should share mutual geostrategic interests as they did throughout the Cold War. While both states can allow engaging in fierce political rhetoric against each other, they cannot permit any form of irrationality that would interfere with the pursuance of their strategic interests.

Whenever geostrategic interests are at stake, cooperation between the two states is almost inevitable. When asked about a potential American-Turkish cooperation to deal with the ISIL, an official close to the US Secretary of Defense stated that "Turkey, by the fact of its geography, is inevitably a partner" (Stewart 2014). If that is true for Turkey, it should be true, more so, for Iran. This claim runs counter to the argument held

by many scholars that "The United States and Iran stand at opposite ends of the spectrum of Middle East politics" (Edelman et al. 2014). The 2001 Afghanistan War, the 2003 Iraq War, and the emergence of the ISIL provide significant support for the claim that both states share mutual geostrategic interests in several important areas despite the limitations they face in their relationship.

US Foreign Policy: Fearing Iran

As was the case with US foreign policy during the Cold War, under the Bush Doctrine, and the Obama Doctrine, US foreign policy toward Iran, and vice versa, has been influenced by the same factors. First, it is reasonable to claim that the international system is characterized by anarchy, the absence of a supranational government. Second, Iran possesses significant military capabilities that could challenge the US geostrategic interests in the region and abroad. As of July 2014, Iran's population exceeds 80 million people of which more than 45 million are of age 16–49 and available for military duties, while more than 40 million of the same age bracket are fit for military duties (Central Intelligence Agency n.d.). While different sources provide different numbers with regard to Iran's military capabilities, it is certain that it has been enhancing its capabilities by conducting *asymmetric*, *low-intensity wars*, modernizing its weapons systems, developing "indigenous" missile and anti-missile systems, and developing a nuclear program (Milani 2009). In addition, the discovery of Iran's secret nuclear program in 2002, followed by its support for anti-American terrorist groups in Iraq, raised deep suspicion and fear for the USA. The USA viewed Iran's actions with deep suspicion and feared that it aimed at extending its influence throughout the region. The destruction of Iraq and the triumph of pro-Iranian forces helped Iran further to emerge as a regional power (Nasr 2007).

A nuclear Iran would challenge US influence in the Middle East and would profoundly alter the balance of power in the region at the expense of the USA. Fearing this scenario, the USA has taken measures to prevent it. It has been encountering Iran by sending clear diplomatic threats and imposing economic embargo. Besides these measures, the USA has been relying on other regional powers to contain Iran. Saudi Arabia and Israel have shown public willingness to use force in order to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Israel has gone much further to threaten that it would take unilateral actions to destroy Iran's nuclear sites by

implementing surgical strikes similar as the *Operation Babylon* against Iraq in June of 1981. In addition, it is uncertain whether Russia is willing to allow its neighboring Iran to acquire a nuclear arsenal. Normal judgment would argue that Russia has no interest in allowing a nuclear Iran that could become a threat to Russia, too. In a few words, the USA should be aware of the fact that there are several regional powers willing to *carry the buck* and balance Iran.

Given the many adversaries it has in the region, Iran should also be seen as an opportunity that can be used to balance other regional forces. The USA used Iran during the Cold War up to the outburst of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 to contain the Soviet Union and Iraq (Halabi 2009, 82; Shareef 2014, 193). Iran was even recognized as America's policeman in the Middle East (Hamilton and Inouye 1987, 157). This strategy allegedly changed soon after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, and since then, the US-Iran relationship has been characterized by fierce political rhetoric (Takeyh 2002, 23; Limbert 2009, 180–181; Mousavian and Shahidsaless 2014, 43). Nevertheless, cooperation has occurred in several instances.

The Rational Iran

Regardless of the degree of hostility and cooperation, it is important to understand whether Iran is an irrational actor or a rational one. Thus, first, it is important to answer the question: Does foreign policy rhetoric of Iran match its actions in cases that involve its strategic interests? This study has proved already in several cases that US foreign policy is based on rationality. Despite these findings, the analysis in this chapter will reevaluate whether US foreign policy toward Iran is also based on rationality. Answering the aforementioned question about USA and Iran's political rhetoric and interests will provide additional support to the following interrelated questions: Are the geostrategic interests of Iran and the USA mutually inclusive or mutually exclusive? How do these interests influence their relationship? Answering these questions will reveal the real nature and factors that dictate the US-Iran relationship.

Significant attention is being given to political rhetoric, ideology, and sentimentalisms following the Islamic Revolution and the hostage crisis rather than to actions and strategic interests benefiting both countries. Some researchers and scholar also claim that it is the Islamic ideology that put both states "at opposite ends of the spectrum of Middle East politics"

(Edelman et al. 2014). The academic and political discussion is focused on either US consideration of Iran as an enemy state led by crazy, irrational Mullahs who are going to build the atomic bomb to destroy anti-Islamic forces, or Iran being angry at the USA for the 1953 coup d'état and its support for the state of Israel. Nevertheless, it is hard to claim that the US-Iran relationship is impacted by a coup d'état or revolution that happened, respectively, about 50 or 30 years ago and at the same time to ignore that about 60 years ago, almost all great powers were involved in a total war, WWII, against each other. The primacy of strategic interests always forces states to act rationally on issues involving their national security.

Besides focusing on Iran's political rhetoric, it is also important to investigate its geostrategic interests and foreign policy actions. Geostrategic interests are the strongest indicators of foreign policy because states act rationally to maximize their power and ensure survival in an anarchic system. Engaging in political rhetoric does not mean that the state is irrational actor because often political rhetoric is used to conceal the real objectives of a state. Regarding Iran, and the USA as well, some experts have argued that both states should act rationally and focus on their mutual strategic interests when implementing their foreign policy (Brzezinski 1999, 314; Nakhleh 2009, 125).

An analysis of the Iran-Contra affair and the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the Russian-Chechen conflict, and the 2003 Iraq War shows that Iran is a rational actor, and its political rhetoric often does not match its actions. In addition to these major cases, the two-year secret negotiations between Iran and the USA, which concluded with the July 14, 2015, deal, add more support to the argument in favor of a rational Iran. Even though its political rhetoric resembles that of an irrational actor, Iran is a rational actor, and its foreign policy actions aim at advancing its geostrategic interests in the international system. The first case shows how the Islamic Iran was willing to cooperate with Israel and the USA because of the need for weapons to fight the war against Iraq. The other two cases show how Iran sided with two Christian countries, Armenia and Russia, against its Muslim brothers, respectively, Azerbaijan and Chechnya, for pure strategic reasons: to ensure territorial sovereignty and increase its military capabilities. In addition, the case of the Iraq War shows that Iran behaved rationally when it "bled" the USA by supporting anti-American terrorist groups in Iraq. Lastly, the recent US-Iran deal is another strong proof that shows how the Islamic Iran has no problem negotiating for about two

years with *the Great Satan*. We are told that *the saint* never negotiates with *the Satan*, but that is not the case with Iran and the USA.

Iran and the USA in the Iran-Contra Affair

The Iran-Contra affair is a political scandal that engulfed the Reagan administration in 1986. It validates the claim that both Iran and the USA acted rationally to advance their strategic interests, setting aside hostile political rhetoric. The affair was a secret arms deal between the USA, Israel, and Iran that happened at a time when both the USA and Iran were struggling in the international arena. Israel acted as the middleman, providing weapons shipment to Iran and payments to the USA in return. Israel had previously sold ammunitions to Iran totaling a value of around $136 million (Beit-Hallahmi 1988, 13–14). Israeli Defense Minister, Ariel Sharon, had notified the American authorities about the arms deal with Iran in his visit to Washington in 1982 (Beit-Hallahmi 1988, 13). Israel had expressed its concerns about the invasion of Iran soon after the outbreak of the war. In a press conference, the Israeli Foreign Minister, Moshe Dayan, called on the USA to forget the past events (especially the hostage crisis which was ongoing at that time) and to provide assistance to Iran (Parsi 2007, 105).

According to another source, weaponry shipments occurred on several occasions: on 96 TOW missiles were shipped on August 20, 1985, 408 TOWs were shipped on September 14, 1985, Hawks missiles were shipped in November 1985, and 500 TOWs were shipped on February 19, 1986 (Wroe 1991, ii–iii). The arms deal also included the purchase of 250 tires for *Phantom* jet fighters, communication equipment, 106 mm recoilless guns, ammunitions, mortars, 150 M-40 anti-tank guns, 24,000 shells for each gun, spare parts for tanks and aircraft engines, shells for 106 mm recoilless rifles and for 130 mm, 203 mm, and 175 mm guns, and TOW vehicle-mounted launchers and missiles, totaling a cost of $75 million (Bergman 2008, 44–45).

Furthermore, following the claim of another arm dealer working at that time for the Iranian government, approximately 80% of the weapons sold to Iran soon after the beginning of the war came from Israel (Parsi 2007, 106). With assistance from Israel, the USA secretly provided Iran through six shipments with more than 2000 TOW anti-tank missiles, 235 Hawk anti-aircraft missiles, and considerable spare parts, all of which with a cost of about $64 million (Marschall 2003, 183). At the

beginning of November 1986, a Beirut magazine published details of the secret trip to Iran of the National Security Adviser to President Reagan, Robert C. McFarlane, and the weapons deal behind it. Surprisingly, after the discovery of the affair, both Iran and the USA engaged in an even more aggressive political rhetoric against each other.

While the content and number of weapons shipments and their cost vary depending on the source, it is certain that Islamic Iran, Israel, and the USA cooperated together in weapons deals soon after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the hostage crisis. How come Iran and the USA (not to mention Israel) cooperated together at a time their political rhetoric toward each other was much more hostile than it is today, more than 30 years after the Islamic Revolution? How come Iran was willing to cooperate with the "Great Satan" and the USA was willing to cooperate with the irrational Mullahs? The answer is simple: Both states followed their strategic interests, not feelings of hatred or love. Through the arms deal, the USA aimed at releasing US citizens taken hostages by the Lebanese Shi'ite terrorist organization *Hezbollah*, preventing the Soviet expansion in Iran, stabilizing oil prices, and collecting money for the *Contras* in Nicaragua (Tarock 1998, 108; Marschall 2003, 183). As a matter of fact, in a secret meeting, representatives of the USA and Iran agreed on the threat that a potential Soviet intervention would pose to Iran (Hamilton and Inouye 1987, 238). On the other side, Iran needed weapons to fight the war against Iraq. Due to its desperate need for weapons to fight Iraq, Iran was willing to buy weapons from everyone, including *the Great Satan* and *the Small Satan* (Milani 1994, 212). In sum, the Iran-Contra affair revealed that despite their hostile political rhetoric against each other, Iran and the USA were willing to act rationally and cooperate with each to advance their respective strategic interests.

Iran and the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict

The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region is another important case to understand Iran's rational behavior and the difference between its political rhetoric and political actions. This conflict is important because both states involved in it have geographic proximity to Iran, the conflict impacts Iran's territorial sovereignty, and Iran and Azerbaijan share cultural similarities. First, both Armenia and Azerbaijan (Republic of Azerbaijan) are Iran's neighbors and share land borders with one another. The geostrategic location of Azerbaijan, Armenia,

and Iran raises certain geopolitical issues, including pipelines, division of the Caspian Sea, Nagorno-Karabakh region, and the issue of Southern Azerbaijan. The pipeline politics has divided Iran and Azerbaijan. On the one hand, there is the bloc created by Azerbaijan in cooperation with the USA, Turkey, the European Union, and Georgia. On the other hand, there is the block that is comprised of Iran, Russia, and Armenia, who find their interests challenged by the first bloc. When it comes to the division of the Caspian Sea, alliances change but still Iran and Azerbaijan oppose each other. Azerbaijan has joined a coalition with Russia, Turkey, the USA, and Kazakhstan while Iran is left on the other side with Turkmenistan.

The second reason for selecting the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict is because Azerbaijan has historical territorial claims over Iran. During the Russo-Persian Wars, much of the Caucasus was occupied by Russian troops and was formally ceded to Russia under the terms of the *Treaty of Gulistan* (1813) and *Treaty of Turkmenchay* (1828). This event brought about the creation of two *Azerbaijans*—the South Azerbaijan and the North Azerbaijan. While Northern Azerbaijan became independent soon after the official demise of the Soviet Union, Southern Azerbaijan had previously become part of Northern Iran. There is a lack of consensus regarding the actual number of the Azeris population in the northwest of Iran. Some researches indicate that Azeris comprise from one-fifth to one-third of the Iranian population, while the total number varies from 20 to 27 million Azeris (Shaffer 2000, 473).

The third main reason for studying Iran's policy toward Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict is the fact that both Iran and Azerbaijan are known as Shi'a countries, while Armenia is a Christian country. After Iran, Azerbaijan has the second largest Shi'a population in the world. Approximately 95% of Azerbaijan's population is of the Muslim religion, and both countries are members of the *Organization of Islamic Conference*. On the other hand, Armenia does not share many values and tradition with Iran. The majority of Armenians practice an orthodox form of Christianity, and its church is named the *Armenian Apostolic Church*.

Just by looking at the demographics and the religious affiliations of both countries, we would assume that Iran would side with Azerbaijan. Indeed, it was not a choice for Iran. It was mandatory under the Islamic constitution for Iran to help their fellow Muslims in need. *Article 3(16)* of the Constitution states that the government of Islamic Iran has the duty of directing all its resources to, among others, the goal of "framing

the foreign policy of the country on the basis of Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unsparing support to the freedom fighters of the world."

However, Iran's political rhetoric in support of the Islamic cause does not match its actions in the case of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Prior to the demise of the Soviet Union, Iran did not interfere in the conflict and considered it an internal affair of the Soviets. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought a new era of politics in the region. After the declaration of the independence by Azerbaijan, Iran became concerned about the links between its northern Azeri population and the newly independent republic. In January 1993, the Ministry of Interior's General Foreign Citizen and Emigration Affairs Office of Iran announced that "any Iranian citizen intending to marry a citizen from Azerbaijan must get a permit from the Ministry of Interior" (Freij 1996, 72–73).

Throughout the conflict, Iran promoted a foreign policy that aimed at preventing Azerbaijan from being able to make territorial claims over Northern Iran. To make the matter worse, a potential Azeri separatist movement could serve as an incentive for separatist movements from the Arabs in South (3% of the Iranian population), the Kurds in West (7%), the Turkmen (2%) in Northeast, and the Baluchis (2%) in Southeast of Iran (Sadegh-Zadeh 2008, 36). This fear of insecurity and national unrest became a real concern for Iran in 1992 when Abulfez Elchibey, a nationalist and anti-Iranian, became the president of Azerbaijan. Elchibey publicly declared his government's aspiration for unification with *Southern Azerbaijan* (Souleimanov and Ditrych 2007, 104; Gresh 2006, 4).

Iran countered Azerbaijan by aligning itself with Armenia. By the end of 1992, Iran and Armenia signed a bilateral treaty of friendship and economic cooperation (Gresh 2006, 5). Rumors spread that Iran had allowed the transit of weapons from Russia to Armenia during the conflict. It was also reported that Iran trained the Armenian secret army forces, which were directly involved in the conflict (Gresh 2006, 5). Besides the impact of the Azeris separatist movements, Iran also feared a possible involvement of the neighboring states and the USA, which would destabilize and weaken Iran. In sum, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict shows that Iran's political rhetoric as the guardian of the Muslim faith and people does not match its political actions. Instead of being driven by the Islamic ideology, Iran's actions are dictated by its geostrategic interests.

Iran and the Russian-Chechen Conflict

In addition, the *Russian-Chechen* conflict is important because Chechnya is a republic predominantly of Muslim population and Russia is a Christian country and has been historically a threat to Iran's sovereignty. According to the 2002 census, Chechnya had a population of 1.1 million, 93.5% of whom were Sunni Muslims. Seeing that Chechnya's population is predominantly Muslim, and it was fighting for independence against a non-Muslim country, many would think that Iran would side with Chechnya against Russia. The Constitution of Iran clearly demands the government to frame its foreign policy based on "*Islamic criteria*, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unsparing support to the freedom fighters of the world".

However, as strange as it may sound, the Iranian policy toward the Russian-Chechen conflict was completely different from what one would expect. While many other Muslim countries condemned the Russian aggression against Chechnya, it became obvious that Iran had no intention to jeopardize its "fruitful relations" with Russia. It was not a common political relationship. It was a *strategic relationship* (Freedman 2000, 70). It was the time again for Iran to set aside the political rhetoric of a theocracy and act to advance its own interests. In March 1996, months before the end of *the First Chechen War*, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati in a visit to Moscow stated that the Iranian-Russian relations were "at their highest level in contemporary history" (as cited in Freedman 2000, 71). In 1999, then the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi, expressed this political position to his Russian counterpart, Igor Ivanov, by adding that Tehran was ready "to undertake effective collaboration in the struggle against terrorists to destabilize the situation in Russia" (as cited in Samii 2001, 49). In the midst of the *Second Chechen War*, in early January 2000, President Sayyed Mohammed Khatami congratulated Vladimir Putin on assuming the office of the Russian President and emphasized the hopes for further intensification of contacts with Moscow (Malek 2008, 2). In 2003, Hamid Reza Assefi, the Iranian representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, declared that the conflict was an *internal affair* of Russia and that Iran had no intention to interfere with it (Malek 2008, 2).

The Iranian policy toward the Russian-Chechen conflict brings forth two questions. First, why did not Iran support its Muslim brothers in Chechnya? Second, why did Iran side with Russia? Iran's cooperation with

Russia and its neutral position toward the conflict was a result of Iran acting rationally to advance its geostrategic interests. Iran calculated that supporting Chechnya would cause Russia to stop providing military assistance and military related technology that Iran so desperately needed. In addition, in supporting Chechen separatist movement, Iran would inadvertently encourage the Azeri separatist movement in northwestern Iran, or fear that Russia would support the separatist movements in Iran in a retaliatory strategy. Thus, the main strategy leading the security and foreign policy of Islamic Iran toward the Russian-Chechen conflict was to enhance its military capabilities and to prevent the rise of the Azeris separatist movement.

Attempts to expand it military power had started in 1989 when Iran launched an ambitious effort to rebuild its military potential and transform itself into a regional power. Iran's military arsenal at that time included 100–200 combat aircraft, 1000–2000 armored vehicles, several submarines, and as many as a dozen missile boats (Eisenstadt 2001). Parallel with this military strategy, Iran had accelerated its attempt to enhance its missile technology, which culminated on February 3, 2009, with the launching of the first satellite into space (Fathi and Broad 2009). Having a sophisticated missile technology would give Iran significant advantage in fighting against other aggressive states, which cannot be reached by the conventional weapons in Iran's disposition. It also would provide Iran with the capability to deliver warheads to distanced locations.

The first main agreement between Iran and Russia dated back in 1989 when Rafsanjani negotiated with the Soviet Union in Moscow. Russia inherited this agreement and implemented part of it due to its demand for direct payment and the lack of economic power of Iran to buy them all. From this agreement, Iran received 422 T-72 tanks, 413 BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, and self-propelled artillery; SA-5 and SA-6 surface-to-air missiles (SAMs); 12 Su-24 and 24 MiG-29 fighters; and three Kilo-class submarines, along with advanced torpedoes and mines (Eisenstadt 2001; Samii 2001, 55). Under the pressure applied by the USA, the Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, pledged to stop the arms trade with Iran in September 1994. In June of 1995, Russian Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, and US Vice President, Al Gore, signed an agreement in which Russia promised "it would fulfill existing contracts by the end of 1999 and would not sign any new ones" (Eisenstadt 2001).

In January 1995, Iran and Russia had signed an agreement which dealt with the construction by Russians of a nuclear power plant at Bushehr.

In July 2002, notwithstanding the US opposition, Russia declared that it would help Iran build five additional nuclear reactors. Iran's nuclear activity intensified in 1999. Despite the *Gore-Chernomyrdin* agreement, Russian and Iranian officials allegedly met in early 1997 to discuss new arms deals. These supposedly involved the possible sale of eight Su-25 attack aircraft; 25 Mi-17 transport helicopters; hundreds of T-72 tanks; 500–1000 SA-16/18 Igla shoulder-launched SAMs; several battalions of SA-10 and SA-12 SAMs; air-surveillance radars; and several other items (Eisenstadt 2001). In violation of the agreement, Russia transferred to Iran other five Mi-17s starting in January 2000, while in November 2000, an Israeli newspaper reported "the imminent departure of a shipment" of 700 SA-16/18 Igla missiles for Iran (Eisenstadt 2001). Like the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the Russian-Chechen conflict showed that Iran's political rhetoric does not match its foreign policy actions and the rationality of pursuing strategic interests prevails over the Islamist-driven sentimentalism.

Iran and the 2003 Iraq War

The 2003 Iraq War is another important case which proves that Iran pursued rational strategies to advance its own geostrategic interests and expand its influence in Iraq. Iran implemented two main strategies. First, it supported pro-Iranian forces to gain control over Iraq's government. Second, it supported anti-American terrorist groups in an attempt to diminish the US influence in the region, thus increasing its own. As the USA accomplished its mission to overthrow Saddam Hussein, Iran initiated its strategy to join all pro-Iranian factions in Iraq in a cohesive group to gain control of Iraq. For this purpose, Iran managed to assemble all the factions in a Shiite Islamic bloc called United Iraqi Alliance. The bloc encompasses the *Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq* (ISCI), the *Da'wa* (Islamic Call) party, and the faction of the young cleric Moqtada Al Sadr. Iran's goal was to take advantage of Iraq's Shiite majority population and turn it into a source of political power to control the state apparatus. The election results proved that the Iranian strategy had worked: the bloc won 128 of the 275 seats in the December 15, 2005, election for a full-term parliament (Katzman 2007, p. 2). The profile of the political figures coming out of this election showed that they all had direct or indirect ties with Iran. Nuri al-Maliki, who was selected as Prime Minister, was from the *Da'wa Party*, whose leaders were in exile mostly in Syria and Iran. Also, most leaders of ISCI had spent their years of exile in Iran. In 1982,

Ayatollah Mohammad Baqr Al Hakim, leader of ISCI, who was killed in an August 2003 car bomb in Najaf, was anointed by then Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini to head a future "Islamic Republic of Iraq" (Duss and Juul 2009, p. 10).

In addition to expanding its influence within Iraq, Iran put a significant emphasis on its strategy of gaining power at the expense of the USA by using anti-American terrorist and paramilitary groups. Iran aimed at not allowing any US permanent military bases in Iraq by making it *bleed*, causing severe military damages. By promoting this strategy, Iran would "kill three birds with one stone." First, it would keep Iraq out of competition for regional hegemonic influence, would turn it into a servant of Iran's ambitions, and would keep America *bleeding*, which would diminish US regional influence. For this purpose, Iran provided political and military support to ISCI's militia, the "Badr Brigades," which were recruited, trained, and armed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (Katzman 2007, 2).

In addition, Iran sought to establish close relationship with Sadr's faction, a large and dedicated following among lower class Iraqi Shiites, and which built an estimated 60,000 person "Mahdi Army" (Jaysh al-Mahdi, or JAM) militia after the fall of Saddam Hussein (Katzman 2007, 2). JAM became very aggressive toward the US troops and pro-American Iraqi politicians. Realizing that JAM would be the best military group through which to advance the strategic interests, Iran began supplying arms to JAM through the Revolutionary Guard's Qods Force (Katzman 2007, 2). Qods Force officers are not combatant forces. Their main task is to identify Iraqi trainees and create traffic route for weapons shipment into Iraq.

In his report to the members and committees of the US Congress, Kenneth Katzman (2007, 3–4), a specialist in Middle Eastern affairs for the *Congressional Research Service*, outlined specific evidence in support of the claim that Iran had provided economic and military assistance to terrorist organizations fighting against US troops in Iraq. Moreover, in his testimony, General David Petraeus stated that Iran continues to arm, train, and direct "Special Groups"—radical and possibly breakaway elements of the JAM—and to organize those groups into a "Hezbollah-like force to serve Iran's interests and fight a proxy war against the Iraqi state and coalition forces…" (as cited in Katzman 2007, 4). Besides the testimony, in a brief press conference, General Petraeus told journalists that Iran's Ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Kazemi-Qomi, was himself a member of the Qods Force (Yates 2007).

Thus, the use of the terrorist and paramilitary groups to gain power in Iraq and to fight against the US forces shows that Iran's foreign policy was based not only on field operatives but also the leadership of Iranian high-ranking officials who aimed at spreading their influence in the region at the expense of Iraq and the USA. While Iran shared with the USA the mutual interests of overthrowing Saddam Hussein, it considered the establishment of permanent US military bases in Iraq a direct threat to its national interests. For these reasons, Iran implemented political and military strategies to expand its influence in Iraq and diminish US influence in the region. At the same time, in order to increase its influence in the region, Iran had also continued the modernization of the armed forces and the growth of its military arsenal.

The 2015 US-Iran Deal

As mentioned previously, the deal is formally known as the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA) and was signed on July 14, 2015, between the USA, Iran, and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany (also known as *P5+1*).[1] The negotiation process for the deal started in November 2013 with the adoption of the *Joint Plan of Action* agreement between Iran and the *P5+1* states. According to the interim agreement, Iran would temporarily freeze portions of its nuclear program in exchange for reduced economic sanctions from the USA and the European Union. Under the JCPOA, depending on the nuclear facility, among others, Iran has agreed to reduce the number of its centrifuges by two-thirds over the next ten years, reduce and eliminate its current enriched uranium stockpile in the next 15 years, not to build new facilities to enrich uranium for the next 15 years, and put its current nuclear facilities and uranium mines and mills under the surveillance of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). On the other side, as part of the deal, the USA agreed to lift economic sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program. In early August 2016, it was discovered that the USA paid Iran in cash $400 million on the day when the latter released the American soldiers that were imprisoned for allegedly entering Iranian territorial waters (Solomon and Lee 2016). The Obama administration reacted by stating that the cash money was scheduled for delivery in January as part of the JCPOA agreement between the two states (Sciutto and Browne 2016). Despite the allegations, this case is

another proof that shows that both states are dealing with each other either secretly or publicly.

While the recent publication of the two-year secret negotiations between the USA and Iran and the shipment of $400 million to Iran have polarized the political class and public opinion in America, the news itself will forever change our perception of Iran as an irrational actor. It will also change our perception of the 1986 Iran-Contra affair (and other affairs) and increase the belief that the affair was well organized by the leadership of the two states, not by unauthorized subordinates or affiliates. Even those who argue that Iran negotiated with the USA to take advantage of the American *foolishness* to build its nuclear bomb are doing nothing else but proving that Iran is indeed a rational actor. This perception will break the taboo about the US-Iran relationship and make cooperation between the two states an acceptable characteristic of it.

It is important to note that there are four major false assumptions in regard to the nuclear program of Iran and the position of the USA. First, it is assumed that the USA has had control over the Iran's nuclear program, and by signing the deal, it is relinquishing the control over it. This is not true. Had the USA had control over Iran's nuclear program, no deal or no effort to fight Iran would be necessary. Second, it is assumed that Iran has been advancing its nuclear program alone, and the decision to build the nuclear bomb will be its exclusive domain. This is also not true. Initially, the USA provided Iran several nuclear reactors to be used for peaceful purposes as part of the *Atoms for Peace* program and the agreement signed in 1957 (Cordesman and Al-Rodhan 2006, 100). The US-Iran nuclear cooperation continued until the dethroning of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1979 by the Islamic forces. After the Cold War, Iran partnered with Russia to advance its nuclear program. In 1992, Iran and Russia signed a secret deal, which the latter would provide to the former plutonium-reprocessing and uranium-enrichment facilities (Reardon 2012, 13). Since then, Russia has been providing Iran with resources needed to advance the program, including nuclear material and specialists. Thus, Russia's decision about whether to allow Iran to obtain the bomb is also a determining factor. What would Russia benefit from giving Iran the nuclear bomb? Understanding the historic animosity between the two states and their disputes over the resources of the Caspian Sea, it would be reasonable to believe that Russia would never allow a nuclear Iran.

The third assumption is that only the USA has the right and power to prevent Iran from obtaining the nuclear bomb. Even this assumption is not true. Other regional states have the right and power to prevent a nuclear Iran as well. Soon after the agreement was announced, Israeli's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Israel was not bound by the deal (Sharon et al. 2015). It would not be a surprise that if felt threatened, Israel may attack Iran's nuclear sites in the same way as it did in June 1981 against the Iraqi nuclear reactor. The fourth false assumption is that if Iran acquires the nuclear bomb, it will use it to destroy Israel and other non-Islamic or non-Shi'a states. While this may happen hypothetically, it would be a suicidal action for Iran to launch a nuclear attack because Israel and other states who possess the *nuclear triad* will have the second-strike capability to retaliate and completely destroy Iran. It is this mutual-assured-destruction (MAD) that prevents nuclear powers from engaging in nuclear wars.

Iran and the USA: Pursuing Geostrategic Interests

Despite the political rhetoric of the last 35 years, the USA and Iran have engaged in direct conflict over only two strategic issues: (1) the 2003 Iraq War in which the latter supported the anti-American terrorist groups in Iraq and (2) Iran's nuclear program about which the USA has consistently expressed real concerns. However, these two cases are extreme and should not serve as benchmarks to define the US-Iran relationship. The USA would oppose the nuclear militarization of any great power around the world, including Iran, and any great power would oppose absolute US dominance in any region, including the Middle East. President Reagan used to say that "That person who agrees with you 80 percent of the time is a friend and an ally; *not* a 20 percent traitor." The same holds true in international relations because rarely in this world will we be able to find states whose geostrategic interests are all mutually inclusive. Depending on their geostrategic interests and power configuration in the international system, today's ally may be tomorrow's adversary and vice versa. In international relations there are no permanent allies or adversaries; there are simply interests to be pursued in an anarchic, volatile system.

Despite differences, a close look at the US-Iran relationship reveals that both states share mutual geostrategic interests in many areas (Mafinezam and Mehrabi 2008, xii–xiv; Maleki and Reardon 2014, 149–166). From the balance-of-power logic, the USA and Iran need each other in order

to balance other regional aggressors, especially the Arabs. Referring to Iranian-Israeli relationship, Mohamad Reza Shah Pahlavi used to say that "neither Israel, nor Iran wanted to be surrounded and alone in a sea of Arabs" (Helms 1981, 188; Tarock 1998, 103). Regarding the US-Iran relationship, the saying would be: Neither the USA, nor Iran wants to be surrounded and alone in a sea of Arabs. It is also true that the USA needs the Arab states to contain a potential too powerful Iran in the future; nevertheless, the current balance of power and regional threats, arguably, mandate a closer alliance with Iran.

What is even more important, because the USA and Iran share mutual geostrategic interests in several cases, it is likely that a strategic loss or gain for Iran most likely would be respectively a loss or gain for the USA, and vice versa. At the same time, if both states experience a strategic gain or loss in any given foreign policy issue, then we should expect that they share mutual strategic interests. In order to test this claim, I will conduct an analysis of three major cases: the 2001 Afghanistan War, the 2003 Iraq War, and the establishment of the ISIL. Because the establishment of the ISIL is an ongoing case, its analysis will also incorporate counterfactual arguments. Counterfactual analysis is used in congruence method when one or more comparable cases are not available (George and Bennett 2005, 189).

The 2001 Afghanistan War

First, the 2001 Afghanistan War is a foreign policy issue in which geostrategic interests of the USA and Iran converged and a gain for the former was at the same time a gain for the latter. At that time, emphasizing the convergence of interests, Iranian Foreign Minister stated that Iran had "some common points with the USA over Afghanistan" (as cited in Takeyh 2009, 212). On the one side, the USA viewed the Taliban government as being accomplice in the September 11 terrorist attack and for being a safe haven for terrorist organizations, especially Al-Qaeda. Overthrowing the Taliban government meant retaliating for the losses from the terrorist attack, destroying support for state-sponsored terrorism, and increasing US influence in the region by establishing a pro-American government. On the other side, Iran's interest in overthrowing the Taliban government was to expand its influence over the western part of Afghanistan known as being pro-Iranian and to support the Shi'a population in Afghanistan (Gladstone 2001, 13). Iran came close to a war with the Talibans in 1998 when they killed ten Iranian diplomats in the consulate of Mazar-e-Sharif.

Sharing mutual geostrategic interests in overthrowing the Taliban government is as important as the fact that both the USA and Iran were aware of this convergence of interests. The USA was aware that overthrowing the Taliban regime would empower Iran, and the latter was aware that the same action would empower America. This argument goes counter to the traditional view held by prominent experts, who argue that the war had *unintended consequence* that benefitted Iran (Milani 2006, 255–256; Haass 2012, 99). Several meetings between Iranian diplomats and their American counterparts occurred in Geneva and at the US-sponsored Bonn Conference, which dealt with the establishment of a new government in the post-Taliban Afghanistan and the issue of the Afghan refugees.

James Dubbins, US special envoy to Afghanistan at that time, highly cherished the role of the Iranian delegation during Afghanistan discussions and stated that "None was more [helpful] than the Iranians," referring to their input about the new Afghani government (Dubbins 2004). Iran provided support to the USA on several occasions during the war and during the reconstruction era of post-Taliban Afghanistan. The support also included intelligence and military assistance against the Talibans (Gladstone 2001, 13; Takeyh 2009, 212; Haass 2012, 99). In sum, both the USA and Iran were aware of mutual strategic interests they shared in overthrowing the Taliban regime. The presence of these mutual interests led both states to cooperate before, during, and after the war. It is for this reason that the empowerment of Iran after the overthrowing of the Taliban regime cannot be viewed as an *unintended consequence* of the war.

The 2003 Iraq War

Previously, I explained that the 2003 Iraq War was a rational action of the USA to advance its geostrategic interests in the Middle East by destroying an aggressor state and terrorist safe haven or supporter. The war aimed at preventing Iraq from becoming a great power that would threaten US interests and destroying state support for terrorist organizations. Likewise, Iran viewed the Iraq War as an opportunity to eliminate a historical ideological and military enemy and establish a pro-Iranian government led by Shi'a clergy. After the 2001 Afghanistan War, Iran realized that the Iraq War could provide another opportunity to expand its influence even further.

And it was right. Two years later, many realized that even the Iraq War empowered Iran (Maloney 2008; Hursts 2009, 232). As expected,

US invasion of Iraq was followed by the coming into power of Shi'a-dominated government. Nothing has better served the Iranian regional interests and none has profited more from the 2003 Iraq War than the Islamic Republic of Iran. Vali Nasr (2006, 212) argues that "The Shi'a ascendancy in Iraq is supported by and is in turn bolstering another important development in the Middle East: *the emergence of Iran as a regional power.*" Years after the deposition of Saddam Hussein and the coming into power of Shi'a forces, many analysts believe that Iraq has become a satellite of Iran (Fiderer 2006; Al-Sheikh and Sky 2012).

There is no doubt that the 2003 Iraq War empowered Iran; however, the question remains whether the empowerment of Iran was an intended or unintended consequence of the war. The evidence and common sense make one believe that either the USA was aware of the fact that the war would empower Iran and could not do anything to prevent it or the USA intended to empower Iran. Claiming that the empowerment of Iran was an unintended consequence of the war is not plausible and is not supported by credible evidence. During the 2001 Afghanistan War, the USA cooperated with Iran to overthrow the Taliban government, and the war empowered Iran because the Taliban regime was as obstructive and dangerous to US strategic interests as they were to Iran's.

It may be reasonable to claim that the 2001 Afghanistan War had unintended consequences that empowered Iran, but it is naïve and beyond the conventional wisdom to argue that two years after the "unintended consequences" in Afghan, the USA was surprised by another *unintended consequence* in Iraq. Indeed, the attempt to reach a "grand bargain" between Iran and the USA, which was initiated by Iran after the 2001 Afghanistan War, proves the opposite, that the USA was aware of the fact that Iran was interested in overthrowing Saddam Hussein and expand Iran's influence in Iraq (Kristof 2007).

Setting aside the scenario about a possible behind-the-scene cooperation between the USA and Iran, even though it may be possible, one may convincingly argue that the USA was aware of the potential consequences of the Iraq War but could do nothing to prevent it even if it wanted to. The USA could damage Iran's geostrategic interests only if it would damage its own interests and vice versa. The fact that a loss or gain for the USA would be at the same time a loss or gain for Iran, and vice versa, and a strong indicator that both states share mutual strategic interests. The removal of the Sunni government and the destruction of Iraqi power were as strategically expedient for the USA as they were for Iran.

It seems that the balance-of-power game always puts Iran and the US on the same side even though it sets limitations as well. It is very important to emphasize that sharing mutual strategic interests does not mean that the USA and Iran should not fear or take advantage of each other when possible. It also does not mean that they are in a permanent alliance because such an alliance does not exist in international politics. The opposite is true. Both states fear each other and will take advantage of each other whenever an opportunity arises. Despite the shared mutual strategic interests, Iran will never allow or accept a too powerful USA with permanent military bases in Iraq, and the USA will never allow a too powerful (nuclear) Iran that could challenge its interests in the future. However, given the fact that the support for Iran in the region is very limited and that there are many regional states willing to balance Iran once it becomes a serious threat, the USA does not feel threatened by Iran's empowerment. Indeed, an empowered Shia Iran constitutes a powerful tool to control and balance potential anti-American threats coming from Sunni, Arab states.

The USA, Iran, and the ISIL

In the cases of the 2001 Afghanistan War and the 2003 Iraq War, I argued that Iran and the USA shared mutual geostrategic interests and that a loss or gain for Iran would most likely would be a loss or gain for the USA, and vice versa. The case of the ISIL follows the same pattern but produces the opposite outcomes: a strategic loss for Iran in Syria and/or Iraq is at the same time a strategic loss for the USA and vice versa. Iran and the USA will both lose if Syria and Iraq fall under the control of the radical Islamic forces of the ISIL.

The radical Islamic forces proclaimed the establishment of the ISIS on June 29, 2014, and the new caliphate claims territories from Aleppo in northern Syria to Diyala province in Iraq (Withnall 2014). It is reasonable to say that the case of the ISIL, its political nature and geographic spread, directly involves Syria, Iraq, Iran, and the USA. Both Syria and Iraq are considered two strategic allies of Iran in the region, and together they have given birth to what King Abdullah of Jordan coined in 2004 as the *Shi'a Crescent* (Wright and Baker 2004). Besides the Iran-Iraq strategic alliance after the 2003 war, many scholars have emphasized the Iranian-Syrian strategic alliance (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997; Goodarzi 2006; von Maltzahn 2013). In addition, the USA is directly involved in

the recent development because the ISIL aims at spreading its influence across the region, thus, challenging USA influence in the Middle East. There is no doubt that besides the disturbance of the balance of power in the region, the ISIL also represents a direct threat to US geostrategic interests because anti-Americanism is at the core of its *reason d'état*.

The emergence of the ISIL can also be viewed as a result of power competition between the regional states. Each regional state wanted to expand its influence in Syria by either supporting or fighting the current Syrian government. The Syrian crisis started as a domestic struggle for power between different social groups but soon became a proxy war as many regional powers intervened to advance their own strategic interests (Kelley 2013; Rogers 2013; Jones 2014; Sen 2014). Indeed, the overthrowing of the Syrian regime with the assistance of some regional powers has more to do with Iran than with Syria. It is a pure balance-of-power action that aims at decreasing Iranian influence in the Middle East and putting an end to the Shi'a Crescent. It was for this reason that several regional states, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey, allegedly provided financial and military support to Syrian opposition forces. And also it was for this reason that Iran provided its support to the current Syrian regime.

While Iran will definitely be a loser if Syria and Iraq will fall to the ISIL, the USA will be the other loser. Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, recognized this mutual strategic challenge in an interview he gave to *The National Interest* magazine. Zarif went even further to provide a strategic advice in which he argued that the USA should support the government of Iraq and Syria because "You need a strong central authority in order to be able to deal with this terrorist menace" (Zarif 2014). This "advice" was in response to the decision of the USA to provide military assistance to Iraq and Syrian opposition forces against the ISIL. It is important to note that this decision is consistent with US foreign policy as offshore balancer and its need to use regional powers to contain the threat in an attempt to avoid the direct balancing of the aggressor and loses that occur thereby. If regional forces fail to contain and eradicate the ISIL, then the USA will have to intervene by using its own resources, including military capabilities and potential army troops on the ground.

In addition, identifying himself as a realist, Zafir stated that he does not believe that "tensions in [US-Iran] relations are inherent or unavoidable" and that resolving the nuclear issue would significantly reduce tension and lead to cooperation. Mohsen M. Milani, a scholar and an expert of Iranian politics, states that the USA and Iran might me entering a period

of *detente*, and that it is surprising that cooperation is coming not through negotiations over Iran's nuclear program but as a result of the threats coming from the ISIL (Milani 2014). It seems that if Iraqi and Syrian opposition forces fail in their mission, the USA would be more likely to cooperate with Iran and Syria rather than engage in direct balancing by using its military power on the ground.

Because the Syrian crisis and the emergence of the ISIL are ongoing events, it is important to add a counterfactual analysis in order to better support the claim that the success of the ISIL will be a loss for both the USA and Iran. Had the USA attacked Syria, as President Obama argued after the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against its own citizens, the ISIL would have taken the control over Syria. This victory would have made it easy for the ISIL to advance in Iraq because the former would have had significant military power to advance. Having gained control over Syria's military arsenal, including chemical weapons, the ISIL would have become a more dangerous force in the region. Comparing the current advancement of the ISIL in Iraq, it would be reasonable to say that had the ISIL gained control over Syria and its military arsenal, Iraq would have fallen to the terrorist group in a matter of months. Had this occurred, Iran would have been facing an even more dangerous enemy than the Iraq of the 1980s, which would have conditioned its security and foreign policy. Given a probable support by other Arab states, the ISIL would have initiated an attack to invade Iran or at least to destroy its military capabilities.

On the other side, these developments would have challenged US geostrategic interests in the region. A victorious ISIL would have been a real threat to the balance of power in the region to the extent that it would have turned the entire region into chaos. Besides being a threat to Iran, the ISIL would have been a threat to other regional powers, including Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The ISIL's goal to expand its influence in other states would have created a situation of uncertainty for regional states and the USA. In addition, the ISIL would have been a threat to the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to the global markets, leading to global economic destabilization. To make the matter worse, the threat to the flow of oil would have caused other world powers, such as China, to intervene in order to protect and advance their interests. While the ISIL is still a non-state actor, its influence may become significant in the future given the fact that it may perfectly serve as an extended military tentacle of other

regional states that aims at diminishing the influence of the USA and Iran in the Middle East.

Despite their political rhetoric, the USA and Iran seem to be involved in an inextricable relationship since the outbreak of the Cold War. Both states have been sharing mutual geostrategic interests in many areas, and as a result, their foreign policy toward each other on issues involving respective strategic interests has been characterized by continuity. The 1979 Islamic Revolution changed the flavor of the US-Iran relationship, but not its essence. While prior to the outburst of the revolution, Iran played a key role in containing the Soviet Union and maintaining the balance of power in the region, after the deposition of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, under the Mullahs, Iran continued to play a crucial role in containing regional threats, such as Iraq, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

The USA and Iran continued to be as rational as they used to be prior to the Islamic revolution. The cases of the Iran-Contra affair, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the Russian-Chechen conflict, and the 2003 Iraq War show that Iran's political rhetoric as the torchbearer of the Islamic cause does not match its actions. Instead, Iran's actions show that its security and foreign policy is determined by pure rational goals to advance its geostrategic interests, and often at the expense of the Islamic cause. At the same time, the 2001 Afghanistan War and the 2003 Iraq War show that a gain for Iran was a gain for the USA, or vice versa. On the other side, the case of the ISIL shows that a loss for Iran in Syria and/or Iraq will most likely be a loss for the USA. All these geostrategic issues bring the USA and Iran together either secretly, as portrayed in the past 35 years, or publicly, as in the case of the recent negotiations for the JCPOA agreement.

While there has been considerable opposition to the JCPOA, there are some important arguments that have been ignored. First, as explained above, Iran is a rational actor, not an irrational one that is governed by some *crazy* religious fanatics. Iran's closest allies in the region are Armenia and Russia, both Christian states. Also, Iran has cooperated with the USA on several occasions, including the Iran-Contra affair in 1986, the 2001 war in Afghanistan, and the war against the ISIL in 2014. The 2015 JCPOA agreement is the culmination of this clandestine cooperation. Second, stating that Iran is a sponsor of terrorism is misleading. This argument implies that Iran is a sponsor of al-Qaeda and the ISIL, which is not true. Both these terrorist organizations represent strategic threats to Iran's and US national security.

The fourth argument that is ignored in the JCPOA debate is that Iran and Israel share mutual strategic interests and threats in the region. The most important strategic interest that the two states share is dealing with threats to their national security coming from the Arab states. Since its declaration of independence in 1948, Israel has been fighting for its survival against the Arab states systematically. Also, the Arab states, besides destroying Israel, aim at destroying Iran. For this reason, they have been trying to persuade Israel and the USA to attack Iran. However, both states, especially Israel, have been cautious not to fall into this trap. Despite their areas of conflict, Iran and Israel also view each other as a buffer state to contain regional threats. For example, Iran may use Israel as a buffer state to contain the expansion of any Arab state or coalition of states. Without Israel, Iran would have to face the Arab states alone. On the other side, Israel may use Iran as a buffer state to contain Arab expansion at its expense. Without Iran, Israel would have to face the Arabs alone. The spread of ISIL is another mutual strategic threat that both states face in the region. Nevertheless, Iran's support for the terrorist organization, Hezbollah, represents a limitation in the Iran-Israel relationship, but it is a minor issue and does not adversely impact US geostrategic interests.

The fifth argument that is ignored is the context of the US-Iran deal. What may have been the impact of the current situation in the Middle East on the deal? Did the ISIL threat bring the USA and Iran together in this formal agreement? Is controlling the nuclear program of Iran the major objective of the agreement? It would be unthinkable to believe that the USA and Iran conducted almost two years of secret negotiations and did not cover the issue of the ISIL. Sometimes, the most important things are not written down, given the complexity of power configuration and alliances in the region. It would be reasonable to believe that what forced the USA and Iran to negotiate was an imperative and pressing issue related directly to the strategic interests of both states.

The spread of the ISIL in the Middle East is both an imperative and time-sensitive issue for both states. Iran, left with no other choice, is forced to use its army troops against the ISIL. On the other side, the USA, faced with the failure to contain the ISIL in Syria and Iraq, is forced to lift the economic sanctions on Iran, giving the latter economic power to finance a potential ground war against the terrorist organization. Only time will tell whether this unwritten deal was true or whether there were also Israeli-

Iranian negotiations held simultaneously. The probability for these two events to have happened is high.

In conclusion, this study shows that despite the political rhetoric, the US-Iran relationship on issues involving their national security interests has remained unchanged even after the coming into power of the Islamic forces in 1979. Their foreign policy has been dictated, first, by the position each state holds in the regional politics and international system and, second, by their geography. As a regional hegemon, the main objective of the USA has been preventing the emergence of another hegemon or great power in the Middle East that would challenge its hegemonic status. For this reason, Iran has been treated both as an opportunity and as a threat to achieve its objective. As an offshore state, the USA has consistently acted as an offshore balancer by using Iran as a balancer of power in the region while preventing it from becoming too powerful. The minority status of Iran in the region, compared to the majority status of the Arab states and Turkey (viewed as a Sunni state), makes Iran a potential ally of the USA to balance other states. However, based on the regional power configuration, Iran can become a threat to the USA only if it acquires nuclear weapons. A nuclear Iran would dramatically alter the balance of power in the region, diminishing also the regional influence of the USA. For this reason, the nuclear program of Iran represents a limitation in the US-Iran relationship.

On the other side, its position in regional and global politics and its geography have dictated the foreign policy of Iran as a great power that aims at maintaining and spreading its influence in the region. Iran has demonstrated repeatedly that it is a rational actor. The Iran-Contra affair, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the Russian-Chechen conflict, the 2001 Afghanistan War, the war against the ISIL, the secret negotiations with the USA that led to the JCPOA agreement, and the secret delivery of $400 million by the USA to Iran are examples of a rational Iran that is willing to cooperate with Christian states against the Muslim ones to advance its national security interests. In addition, the cases of the 2001 Afghanistan War, the 2003 Iraq War, and the war against ISIL show that the USA and Iran share mutual geostrategic interests, and a strategic win or loss for Iran is also a strategic win or loss for the USA. Understanding these cases will help to break the taboo about the US-Iran relationship. Despite its limitations, as in any relationship, both states will continue to share mutual strategic interests until there will be a change in their geography or position in the regional and international system.

Note

1. For more information on the provisions of the JCPOA, see U.S. Department of State. n.d. *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*. http://www.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/iran/jcpoa/ (September 10, 2015).

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CHAPTER 7

The Future of US Foreign Policy in the Middle East

The aforementioned comparative case study analysis shows that US foreign policy in the Middle East in the last seven decades has been characterized by continuity rather than change. From the containment policy of President Truman to the *speak softly and carry a big stick* policy of President Obama, US foreign policy has been different in rhetoric but the same in substance. The status of the USA as the only regional hegemon has dictated its geostrategic interest to prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon. As the cases of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan have shown, an aspiring hegemon would aim at encircling the Western Hemisphere, strangulating the USA, and destroying it. This fear was proven right also during the Cold War when the Soviet Union repeatedly challenged the US hegemonic status across the world, which culminated with the allocation of Soviet missiles in Cuba. The end of the Cold War decreased the level of threats and allowed the USA to pursue non-strategic interests in addition to its strategic ones. However, the USA has pursued non-strategic interests, such as spreading democracy or providing humanitarian aid, either in service of the geostrategic interests or in harmony with them.

In order to achieve its geostrategic objectives, as an offshore hegemon, the USA has relied on the grand strategy of offshore balancing by implementing separately and in combination the strategies of *buck-passing* and *direct balancing*. During the Cold War, the USA implemented a combination of buck-passing and direct balancing because there was no regional state or group of states that were willing and able to confront the military might of the Soviet Union. While the USA was reluctant to use its

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military capabilities, including ground troops, to contain the threat, on many occasions, it would send diplomatic threats to the Soviet Union, create anti-Soviet coalitions, and provide economic aid and military assistance to regional powers to contain the threat. These measures became the cornerstones of the containment doctrine of President Truman and were followed by all US presidents throughout the Cold War.

The policy to pass the burden of containing Soviet expansion to regional powers in exchange for economic aid and military assistance became the predominant strategy following the military defeat in the Vietnam War. Being aware of the high cost of using own military force, President Nixon emphasized the importance of *passing the buck* to regional powers to contain the threat while providing them economic aid and military assistance. In the Middle East, this policy became known as the Twin Pillars policy, through which the USA relied on Iran and Saudi Arabia to maintain the regional balance of power and contain Soviet expansion. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and its advancement toward the Persian Gulf, President Carter reacted by sending clear diplomatic threats and creating a special military force to deal with regional threats directly. In addition, President Reagan extended the Carter Doctrine to incorporate more aggressive actions to roll back Soviet expansion by supporting pro-American forces.

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union left the USA without any major strategic threat at the world stage. However, in the Middle East, Iraq had emerged as a real challenger to the balance of power in the region. The invasion of Iran in 1980 and that of Kuwait in 1989 provide strong indications that Iraq was pursuing an expansionist policy. To make the matter worse, in implementing its expansionist policy, Iraq continuously challenged US influence in the region. In the case of the Kuwait invasion, Iraq defied the US demand not to invade Kuwait and later the demand to withdraw its troops from the invaded territory. This challenging behavior led to the Gulf War as the USA was forced to use its military forces to fight Iraq out of Kuwait. Later, the USA made the overthrowing of the Iraqi government its official policy through the *Iraq Liberation Act*, which was signed into law by President Clinton.

The conflict between the two states escalated significantly after the September 11 terrorist attack. The Iraq's continuing defiance of the US demands to destroy the alleged weapons of mass destruction and its support for anti-American terrorist organizations forced the USA to consider military actions against Iraq. Because there was no other regional power

able and willing to deal with the threat, the USA decided to use its military force to destroy the threat. While the military attack on Iraq was strategically correct, it was managed poorly and led to significant economic and military losses.

Many have considered the Iraq War a strategic blunder because it has empowered Iran. Indeed, the 2001 Afghanistan War to overthrow the Taliban regime also had the same impact even though many experts have considered the empowerment of Iran as an *unintended consequence*. If one were to use the same rationale in the case of the ISIL, one would argue that even fighting the ISIL would empower Iran indirectly because it will be defending Iraq and Syria, which are the two major allies of Iran in the region today. While the ISIL is not a direct threat to the USA, it can become one if it disturbs the balance of power or destabilizes the entire region in the future. Also, the empowerment of Iran is not a geostrategic threat to the USA because geography has surrounded Iran by states that are willing and able to contain it when necessary. Despite these concerns, the 2001 Afghanistan War, the 2003 Iraq War, and the war on the ISIL reveal the surprising truth that a strategic gain or strategic loss for the USA is also a strategic loss or gain for Iran and vice versa. Stated differently, these cases reveal that both states share mutual geostrategic interests.

But this revelation should not be a surprise given the fact that prior to the Islamic Revolution, Iran and the USA shared mutual geostrategic interests in containing the spread of the Soviet Union in the region. Even after dethroning of the Shah, as the Iran-Contra affair has shown, both states cooperated secretly on issues involving their geostrategic interests while engaging in aggressive political rhetoric against each other. In a few words, the aforementioned cases support the claim that foreign policy interests of Iran and the USA and strategies to pursue those interests are not dictated by the type of government or the ideology of their leaders. Instead, they have been dictated by the position that each state has in the international system and their geographic location. Because these two factors have not changed in the last seven decades, their foreign policy interests and relationship have remained unchanged in substance.

The Prospect of US Foreign Policy

This study explained US foreign policy toward the Middle East in the last seven decades by utilizing an offensive realist theoretical framework and a comparative case study analysis. The claims made in this book were tested

by using the congruence method and the process-tracing tool. It first identified the regional hegemonic status of the USA and its geographic location as the two main independent variables that impact US foreign policy interests and strategies to achieve them. Then, the study compared the outcomes of the comparative case study analysis to the theoretical outcomes of offensive realism. The findings reveal that the outcomes of each case are congruent with the theoretical outcomes of offensive realism. In order to provide more support for the findings, this study also used the process-tracing analysis to show how factors, such as anarchy, military power of adversaries, fear and suspicion, the need to survive, and rationality, led to three main patterns of behavior of the USA, including fear, self-help, and power maximization.

Unlike many other studies that do not utilize a well-established theoretical framework, this study provides not only a systematic explanation of US foreign policy in the Middle East but also valid theoretical predictions about the future of US foreign policy in the Middle East and also in other regions of the world. It is common sense to claim that well-established theories (i.e. offensive realism) are able to use the systematic study of the past to explain the present and make *conditional predictions* about the future given the presence or absence of certain variables/factors (Gaddis 1992–1993, 6). Theories are able to discern and package patterns of state behavior under certain circumstances in such a way that they can be used to predict the future under the same circumstances (Morgenthau 1948, 4–5). Without a theoretical framework, "all attempts at forecasting and prediction would be reduced to random guessing" (Gaddis 1992–1993, 6).

Following the aforementioned findings and assumptions under offensive realism, it is reasonable to state that US foreign policy toward the region will likely remain unaltered as long as there will be no change in its geography and its status as the only regional hegemon in the world. Also, the absence of a supranational government and the presence of powerful states in the international system that want to expand their influence across the world at the expense of the USA will make the latter fearful about its future as a hegemonic power and sovereign state. As a rational actor, the USA will realize that its future depends on its own action and the ability to prevent the emergence of another regional hegemon by maintaining the balance of power in every region. In a few words, if there is no major change in the aforementioned factors, the USA will continue to act as an offshore balancer.

While the USA is the only status quo power in the world, it does not mean that it cannot act offensively. The status quo is a condition of the international system while acting aggressively as an offshore balancer is a grand strategy to preserve that condition. The primary objective of the USA as a regional hegemon will continue to be maintaining the status quo and preventing the emergence of another regional hegemon in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world. Also, while military capabilities determine the place of the USA in the international system as a regional hegemon, its geographic location determines the strategy to achieve those foreign policy objectives. Because none of these two factors is expected to experience significant changes in the future, it is reasonable to believe that foreign policy objectives and strategies of the USA will also remain unaltered throughout that period. The USA will continue to rely on the grand strategy of offshore balancing by utilizing the buck-passing strategy whenever possible and direct balancing strategy whenever inevitable to preserve its strategic interests. The spread of the ISIL, the relationship with Iran, the uncertain positions of Israel and Turkey, and the imminent threats coming from Russia and China will be some major issues/threats that the USA is facing and/or will be facing in the near future as a regional hegemon.

The Prospect of the ISIL

The emergence of the ISIL has contributed to the further balkanization of Middle Eastern politics. At the same time, it reveals the true nature of poker power politics played by the USA and all regional powers. While the ISIL is portrayed as an imminent threat to the USA, a close look at regional power politics and geography reveals the opposite. For the time being, and given the power configuration in the region, the ISIL does not pose a direct threat to the USA even though it may become one in the distant future. The USA may be the last states that the ISIL will have to deal with directly. First, the ISIL poses a direct threat on Iraq and Syria. Second, if Iraq, Syria, and Kurdistan fall to the ISIL, then Iran would become the next target of the ISIL. Third, even if Iran falls to the ISIL, then other regional powers, such as Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, would likely be next to confront the Islamic forces. Forth, if all these states capitulate, then the ISIL will project its power against Europe due to its geographic proximity.

The ISIL will not be able to project power against the USA unless it controls all these areas. Thus, the USA will face the ISIL directly only if the aforementioned powers have capitulated or are in the process of being so. Applying a level threat approach to this potential scenario, it is reasonable to say that the USA would fall in the level five threat, Europe in the level four threat, Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia in the level three threat, Iran in the level two threat, and Iraq, Syria, and Kurdistan, which are all directly exposed to the ISIL, would fall in level one threat.

All states involved in this game are aware of the level of threat the ISIL poses to them. As a result, each state will be approaching the ISIL issue accordingly. For example, Iraq, Syria, and Kurdistan will have no other option but to encounter the ISIL on the battlefield. They will not be able to *pass the buck* to any other state. Also, while Iran has a level two threat, it still is able to pass the burden of containing the ISIL to the states and forces in the level one threat. For Iran, destroying the ISIL is as important as strengthening self, not allowing Iraq and Syria to emerge as too powerful states, or allowing other regional powers to become powerful at the expense of Iran. While Iran has a geostrategic interest in destroying the ISIL, to be destroyed, it does not want this to be done at its expense because that would meant a loss in relative power vis-à-vis other regional powers. It is highly likely that Iran will be forced to contain the ISIL directly only if Iraq, Syria, and/or other states will fail or will be expected to fail in doing so.

In addition, at the level three threat, Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia enjoy the opportunity to pass the burden of containing the ISIL to states in the levels one and two threat. For example, Turkey, may decide to remain passive or even help the ISIL to contain the historical Kurdish threat and the expanding power of Iran. Like Turkey, Saudi Arabia may pass the burden on Iran and even help the ISIL to diminish the influence of its traditional adversary. Depending on the situation and spread of power, Israel may also decide to use the ISIL as a tool to contain Iran. However, if that leads to the emergence of powerful Arab states, then Israel would probably join Iran against the ISIL. The second scenario is more likely to happen than the first one because Iran and Israel are considered minorities, and both have an interest in preserving and using each other as a buffer force to encounter the Arab states. Iran has no interest in destroying Israel because it would be forced to fight the Arab states alone. On the other side, Israel needs Iran as a buffer state to contain potential Arab expansion. Seeing from this perspective, it seems like Iran and Israel

are the two Siamese brothers of the Middle East as, in the long term, one cannot do without the other.

Furthermore, at the level four threat, European states will be passing the burden of containing the ISIL to all regional states, and it will intervene only if regional states will fail or will be expected to fail to contain the threat. Many European states have already expressed concerns about the ISIL expansion and the conflict in Syria following the ISIL-sponsored/affiliated terrorist attacks in France and Belgium and the waves of immigrants storming their borders. Most European states has reacted by strengthening their national security at home, increasing counter-terrorism cooperation, and providing technical and economic assistance to regional states in their fight against the ISIL. This approach has been taken also by the Council of the European Union (2016, 9–11) in its 2016 regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL. Some states have taken a more aggressive position against the ISIL. For example, France launched its first aerial strikes against the ISIL in Iraq in September 2014, following the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack (BBC News 2014). In December 2015, Germany also joined the fight against the ISIL (Connolly 2015). However, both states have refrained themselves from using their army to fight the ISIL on the ground. This approach is likely to change as the nature of the ISIL threat changes in the future (Council of European Union 2016, 9).

In this poker power politics, the USA falls in the level five threat and is in a much more comfortable position than the aforementioned states. Its distant geographic location from the Middle East makes the USA an unreachable target for the ISIL for the time being. The ISIL will become a real threat to the USA only if it emerges as a great or dominant power in the region. But because in international politics the gains of one entity are the losses of another, a power gain for the ISIL would mean a power loss for other regional states, such as Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkey, Israel, and so on. For the time being, the ISIL has increased its power at the expense of Iraq and Syria. In doing so, it has also challenged the Iranian influence in those two states. It is for this reason that most Iranians believe today that the ISIL is an *American invention* that aims to contain the Iranian expansion in the Middle East (Erdbrink 2014). While this is not true, it shows that the fight over power among regional powers is a zero-sum game.

Besides dictating its level of threat, geography will also dictate the grand strategy of offshore balancing that the USA will follow to contain the ISIL. This means that the USA will continue to pass the burden of

containing the ISIL to those regional states that are directly threatened by it. By doing that, the USA will be able to contain not only the ISIL but also the regional states who will be forced to diminish their military capabilities in order to protect their territorial sovereignty from the ISIL threats. Having all states providing some real contribution (losing some power) in the fight against the ISIL is important to prevent the emergence of a victorious state.

It is for this reason that the emergence of the ISIL, while being a threat, will continue to be an opportunity for the USA to balance the distribution of power in the Middle East for years to come. Given the current distribution of power in the region following the 2003 Iraq War and the emergence of the ISIL, it seems almost impossible that an anti-American coalition would emerge in the near future because of the collective action problem that each state faces. Concerned with its own survival, each regional state will be desperately looking at the American hegemony for help and cooperation. Fear from neighboring states will lead each state in the Middle East to believe, rightly so, that it pays more to cooperate with the USA than to cooperate against it. The ego of any regional power will surrender to the will of the regional hegemon in the same way as the ego of an individual surrenders to the will of the government. Other rational option there is not.

The Prospect of the US-Iran Relationship

Iran is no exception. The US-Iran relationship will continue to be dictated by the need of the USA as a regional hegemon to maintain the balance of power in the Middle East through the grand strategy of offshore balancing. The relationship between the two states during the era of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941–1979) has been one of strategic cooperation at all levels. Iran was even "appointed" to serve as "the policeman" of the region under the leadership of the USA. In the last 35 years, during the era of the Islamic regime, the relationship has been one of public quarrels, but secret negotiations and cooperation. As rational actors, the USA and Iran have come to realize the convergence of their geostrategic interests. The 2001 Afghanistan War, the 2003 Iraq War, and the emergence of the ISIL are just the latest three highly important cases that show how the USA and Iran share mutual geostrategic interests in the region.

At the same time, both states have realized that there are limitations in their relationship as well. The Iranian aspiration and struggle to become

a dominant power goes beyond the limits of their relationship. The USA views Iran's nuclear program with deep suspicion and fears that it will be used to produce nuclear weapons that would make Iran a dominant power powerful enough to defy American authority and dictate or impact the flow of oil from the region to the global markets. Also, Iran's involvements in Iraq, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the Syrian crisis, and lately in Yemen are strong indicators of its expansionist foreign policy. A combination of a potential nuclear arsenal with a strong army and expansionist policy would make Iran a very dangerous state in the region. For this reason, the USA is interested in maintaining the status quo and preventing Iran from disturbing the balance of power. Not understanding this limitation may cost Iran profoundly. Challenging the USA is not the way Iran needs to follow, and the case of Iraq is a testament to it.

Given the power configuration in the region, it is possible that this strategic relationship will continue even in the future. The geography and the status that both states resume in regional politics and the international system dictate a continuing strategic cooperation in the future unless there is a change in those two factors. The JCPOA agreement between the USA and Iran on July 14, 2015, which came into force on September 10, 2015, after the US Senate did not approve of a resolution to block the deal, will likely strengthen the US-Iran relationship in the future. The leader of the Islamic Revolution, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was right to engage with the USA secretly in an attempt to win its support for the revolution, promising that both states would continue to be allies (Fattahi 2016). The followers of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini today understand the strategic importance of continuing the cooperation with the *Great Satan*. They understand that it is not a matter of ideology or religion. It is a matter of national security interests that are dictated by geography and the position that each state has in the regional and global politics.

The Prospect of Dealing with Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia

Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia are three other important actors in the Middle East that have a significant impact on the balance of power in the region. Israel is recognized by many researcher as being the most privileged ally of the USA in the Middle East (Mearsheimer and Walt 2008). The status of US-Israeli relations is as unique as the history of its founding in the Middle East. At the end of *the Six-Day War*, Israel showed to the

Arabs that it was there to stay as a sovereign state while America realized that Israel had become a regional force not to be ignored (Graeber 2007, 131). Its history, ongoing conflict with the Arabs over the Palestinian issue, geography, and latent and real military capabilities make Israel a geostrategic ally of the USA. Also, because Israel is limited by its population size to become a regional hegemon, despite its formidable military capabilities, the USA has no fear to provide it with significant economic aid and military assistance. Had Israel been populated by different people (i.e. Hindu or Slavic), had the same military capabilities, and had constituted a minority in the region, its foreign relations with the USA still would have been the same. Israel can act as a balancing force of other regional states, such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Egypt, and at the same time not present any threat to US interests in the region. For this reason, Israel will continue to be an unconditional ally of the USA.

On the other side, the US-Turkey relationship has been more complicated than the US-Israel relationship. The growing power of Turkey in the last two decades has been followed by a growing desire to expand its influence in the Middle East and the Balkans. Sometimes it has done so at the expense of the USA and its strategic ally, Israel. Throughout the Cold War, Turkey played a strategic role in preventing the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East. As a member of the NATO, Turkey continued to be of a geostrategic importance even after the war. Nevertheless, a serious shift in Turkish foreign policy toward the USA occurred in March 2001 when the parliament prohibited US troops from using Turkish territories to launch military attacks against Iraq. While this action did not cause major damages to the US-Turkey relationship, it signaled a new era in Turkish foreign policy. This change was also noticed in the Israeli-Turkish relations when, in several occasions, Turkey repeatedly accused Israel for the plight of Palestine and the entire region (Watson and Fahmy 2011). The pro-Islamic government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been governing Turkey since 2003, seems to be poised for an expansionist foreign policy toward the Balkans and the Middle East. According to the current Prime Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu (2010), Turkey will become a major global power due to its geostrategic location and its historic position as the natural successor of the Ottoman Empire, the last caliphate that once unified the Muslim world.

Despite its attempts to reestablish itself in the Middle East, Turkey does not pose any real threat to US interests in the region. For the moment, it is simply another actor that is added to the chessboard of Middle Eastern

politics. As such, it increases the chances for the USA to balance potential aggressors without relying on direct balancing. For example, Turkey may act as a balancing power to Iran. It also may be a decisive force to contain the ISIL expansion. Even though Turkey will try to distance itself from the USA, the fundamentals of the US-Turkey relationship will remain unaltered until the former makes a direct move to challenge the USA in the Middle East. The ISIL issue and the Turkish reaction to it will be a test for the US-Turkish relationship in the near future. Unless the USA loses its status as a hegemonic power due to a major change in the global distribution of power in the international system, Turkey will not challenge US influence in the region. A precedent has been established already: Iraq tried but failed.

Besides Israel and Turkey, Saudi Arabia has been a close ally of the USA for about seven decades. Unlike Iran, Israel, and Turkey, Saudi Arabia is not a regional great power. However, it has the potential to become one in the near future, given its prestige in the Arab and Muslim world, its geographic location, and its resources that are available to build formidable military capabilities. Throughout the Cold War, despite the Arab-Israeli conflict, Saudi Arabia was considered one of the most important allies of the USA in the region. Until the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, Saudi Arabia and Iran were considered *Twin Pillars* of US foreign policy in the region. The lack of formidable military capabilities, its geographic location, and the abundance in oil resources made Saudi Arabia an important ally to prevent Soviet expansion in the region (Cohen 2009, 387). The US-Saudi Arabia cooperation continued even after the Cold War during the first Gulf War, the 2001 Afghanistan War, and the 2003 Iraq War.

Despite cooperation, the two countries have clashed over several issues, including the continuous US support for Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the alleged sponsorship of anti-American terrorism from Saudi Arabia, disagreements over the Syrian crisis, and the exclusion of Saudi Arabia from the secret US-Iran negotiations. In the last decade, Saudi Arabia has spent billions of dollars to purchase weapons, including long-range radars, air-to-air missiles, tanks, and fighting helicopters (Cordesman 2009, 139–141). The expansion of Iranian influence in the region has raised serious concerns for Saudi Arabia, and the recent US-Iran deal has exacerbated the situation even further. Nevertheless, because Saudi Arabia is heavily dependent on oil exports and American support for its prosperity and security, it will likely avoid challenging US interests in the region in

the near future. Like other regional states, Saudi Arabia understands that cooperation with the USA, not conflict against it, is the best path to maintain state sovereignty and advance its regional interests. This path may change only if there is a radical change in the global balance of power and if the USA loses its hegemonic status.

The Prospect of Dealing with Russia and China

Unlike what many researchers have been arguing, instead of putting an end to American hegemony, the 2003 Iraq War paved the way for a new American century in the Middle East. Actually, there is no single center of power in the region that could challenge US strategic interests, and the emergence of the ISIL seems to have been contributing in further fragmentation of regional power politics. This balance of power has created a regional system in which every state benefits more from cooperating with the USA than from fighting against it. For this reason, the only real threat to the current balance of power and US influence in the region would come from an external force that has the potential to disturb not only the regional balance of power but even the global one.

In this hypothetical scenario, Russia and China are currently the only two great powers that may challenge US influence directly in the region or across the globe. The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the continuous threats that it has made to other regional states have raised the concerns about a new Russian expansionism. Also, the direct military involvement in the Syrian crisis of Russia was a well-calculated gesture to reinstate its role as a decisive power not only in the Middle East but also in global politics. The expansionist behavior of Russia should not be a surprise in an anarchic world, nor should this behavior be attributed to the personal traits of individual leaders. This is more so the case with great powers like Russia whose foreign policy has been about the struggle to survive and whose internal political structure to achieve that objective constraints the behavior of individual leaders.

Those who think that the Soviet Union and then Russia behave peacefully because of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, respectively, and those who think that Russia is behaving aggressively today because of Vladimir Putin are simply wrong. Dos and don'ts in international relations depend on cans and cannots, respectively. In turn, cans and cannots of a state depend on its military power. As a result, dos and don'ts of a state depend on its military power. Thus, as an analogy to the famous 1992 President Clinton's presidential campaign motto, "The economy,

stupid", it is valid to claim that in international relations, it is the military capabilities, stupid.

As in the case of the USA, the behavior of Russia is dictated first and foremost by the military capabilities that it has at its own disposal. As its military capabilities increase, Russia's foreign policy will become more aggressive and expansionist. Its geographic location and the sharing of land borders with many Eastern European countries make Russia even more dangerous, as geographic proximity facilitates power projection against regional states. While this may sound a little exaggerated, there is no guarantee that what happened during the Cold War will not occur again under different circumstances, in different ways, and by using different means and methods. It should not be a surprise also that in the near future Russia may invoke the Brezhnev Doctrine.

In this case, the USA will have no other option but to reinstate the grand strategy of containment that it successfully pursued during the Cold War. This development will lead the USA to rely on the grand strategy of offshore balancing by combining the buck-passing strategy with the direct balancing one as it once did during the Cold War. The NATO meeting of July 8, 2016, in Warsaw, Poland, that led to the decision of the allied states to deploy military troops, including 1000 American troops, adjacent to the Russian borders is a strong indicator of a looming new Cold War and the reinstatement of the grand strategy of containment (Borger 2016; Browne 2016). In the Middle East, the containment strategy will follow the same patterns as regional states like Iran and Turkey will see Russia a bigger threat to their sovereignty than the USA.

However, Russian expansionism is different from Soviet expansionism in that it does not have the support of regional states, nor does it have an army strong enough to defeat those of the regional states and their NATO allies. Like in the Middle East, Eastern European states will realize that it is more beneficial for them to ally with the USA against Russia than the vice versa, as the latter represents a real threat to their territorial sovereignty and national survival. Also, while it possesses considerable nuclear power, Russia lacks formidable land power and a robust economy to help it expand the influence in the region (Rumer 2015). A combination of these factors will make Russian expansionism extremely hard in the future despite its attempts to do so. Nevertheless, a combination of its expansionist objective with the inability to fulfill that objective will increase Russia's *relative deprivation* and make it more aggressive.

Understanding this weakness and also the nuclear potential of Russia, the USA will need to focus on economic attacks that would keep Russian

economy in a state of crisis. Having a weak economy will prevent Russia from building a strong army. It will also make Russia unable to sustain its actual military power the same way as it did at the end of the Cold War when Russia was looking for international help to maintain even its nuclear arsenal. Damaging Russia's economy would create an *economic sustainability deficit*, which means that Russia's military capabilities will far surpass its economic capabilities, and the latter won't be able to sustain the former. As a result, military capabilities would become more of a detriment to Russia rather than a threat to other countries.

Unlike Russia, China is in a better position to challenge US hegemonic status. It has a favorable geographic location, a considerable nuclear arsenal, a population of about 1.5 billion people, and a relatively strong economy. A combination of the last two factors gives China all the opportunities to build a superb army that could challenge that of any state on earth, including the USA. Its geographic location, similar to that of the USA, would also help facilitate power projection across the region and beyond. While the rise of China may be a *false alarm* like Japan became to the US economy during the 1980s (Oatley 2012, 32), it may also create considerable geopolitical troubles for the USA in Asia and around the world. In 1942, John Spykman ([1942] 2007, 468–469) argued that advanced technological developments will *sooner or later* increase the geostrategic importance of the region, as it will translate its power potential into actual military strength. When describing the future of China, Spykman ([1942] 2007, 469) states:

> A modern, vitalized, and militarized China of 400 million people [now of about 1.5 billion people] is going to be a threat not only to Japan, but also to the position of the Western Powers in the Asiatic Mediterranean [The area between Asia and Australia and between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean] … Her geographic position will be similar to that of the United States in regard to the American Mediterranean. When China becomes strong, her present economic penetration in that region will undoubtedly take on political overtones. It is quite possible to envisage the day when this body of water will be controlled not by British, American, or Japanese sea power but by Chinese air power.

While Spykman did not live long to see the outcome of WWII, he also predicted that the USA would have to adopt protective policies toward Japan in order to preserve the balance of power and prevent China from disturbing it ([1942] 2007, 470). He also argued that that balance of power in the Orient would depend, in the first place, on the relative strength of the

state within the area and, in the second place, on the ability of the Western Powers to force maintain the balance of power ([1942] 2007, 137). In a few words, in order to contain China, Spykman prescribed the grand strategy of offshore balancing, first, by relying on regional states to maintain the balance of power and, second, by using its own power and influence to help regional states fulfill this objective.

While Spykman used a *geographic realist* approach, John J. Mearsheimer (2001) utilized an offensive realist theoretical framework to predict the rise of China and the threat that it presents to the USA. Unlike Spykman, who emphasized the role of geography, Mearsheimer paid special attention to the factors that dictate the behavioral patterns of great powers. He argued that the anarchic status of the international system, the possession of significant military capabilities by great powers, fear and suspicion of their intentions, and the need to survive by acting rationally would dictate the behavioral patterns of China. These factors combined would make China fear other great powers, understand the need to rely on self-help, and rely on power maximization as the only way to guarantee its survival. Because power politics in the international system is a zero-sum game, the rise of China would occur at the expense, first, of regional states at the regional level and, second, at the expense of the USA at the global level.

US foreign policy in the last seven decades and the growing influence of and threats from China in Asia prove that Spykman and Mearsheimer were right about their predictions. This means that we can explain the present and make predictions about US foreign policy toward China by using the Spykman's and Mearsheimer's inferences. The first important inference is that China will continue to increase its military strength and will become a growing threat to US geostrategic interest. There exists a consensus among experts that China is the most dangerous threat that the USA faces today. Some other experts even believe that the Chinese control of Asia and the end of US influence in that region is inevitable. However, this is a random guess that is based on feeling and actions of the moment, not a theoretical prediction that is based on a systematic analysis and that considers a range of factors and actors that may prevent China from reaching its objective.

Following the Spykman's and Mearsheimer's inferences, it would be reasonable to predict that the USA will react by relying on the grand strategy of offshore balancing. In doing so, first, the USA will pass the burden of containing China to the regional states. For this reason, the USA has been strengthening its cooperation with its traditional ally, Japan.

In addition, in the last two decades, the USA has been intensifying its military cooperation with India (U.S. Department of Defense 2011) to the extent that some consider it to be a nightmare for China (Knodell 2016). Following the recent increasing tensions in the region, the USA has also reacted by lifting the arms embargo against Vietnam, hoping that its historical foe will help in balancing China (Spetalnick 2016). Another example of the back passing strategy has been the alleged support of the USA for the Philippines to challenge the Chinese claims over the South China Sea. On July 12, 2016, a tribunal of United Nations Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled over the issue of the South China Sea in favor of the Philippines and against China (Hunt 2016). Hours later, China reacted by considering the decision as a result of the US intervention and declaring that it would not surrender its territorial claims over the South China Sea (Hunt and Jiang 2016).

However, like in the case of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, because regional states alone may not be able to contain the enormous power of China, the USA will be forced to engage directly to balance China. The USA will likely do this by sending clear diplomatic threats, creating anti-Chinese regional coalition, and using its own resources. On several occasions, the USA has warned China not to engage in military actions or exercises that aim at threatening regional states. Besides offering unconditional support for Taiwan, the USA has also repeatedly disagreed with the Chinese territorial claims over the South China Sea. In addition, as stated previously, the USA has been trying to create and strengthen bilateral and multilateral coalitions against China, including the bilateral cooperation with Japan, India, and Vietnam and the multilateral cooperation with members of the Association of Southeastern Asian Nations (ASEAN). It would be fair to predict that this cooperation will continue to increase in proportion to the increasing threats coming from China.

Using its own resources, especially its military capabilities, will be the last measure of the USA to contain the threat. While the USA will increase its economic aid and military assistance for regional states, it will be reluctant to engage itself in direct military actions. Because China is a nuclear power and has a strong land-based military force, it will represent a great danger for the USA from the military perspective. While this does not mean that China will be able to defeat the USA, it will be able to at least diminish its military capabilities and strengthen the position of other great powers (i.e. Russia) in the international system.

For this reason, the best option available for the USA is to attack what fuels and maintains Chinese military capabilities—the economy. Thus, instead of using the logic of war in the grammar of military, the USA should use what Edward N. Luttwak (1990, 126) called "the logic of war in the grammar of commerce." Like in the case of Russia, weakening Chinese economy will create an economic sustainability deficit that will make it impossible for the economic infrastructure to sustain the military infrastructure, leading to a collapse of China.

But for this to happen, the USA should inject a strong dose of mercantilism into its liberal economic system and focus more on relative economic gains rather than the absolute ones. Economic liberalism, when left unchecked, is a long-term self-destructive force for the USA at the international level because it focuses on the absolute gains and ignores the gains of other nations that can be a threat to its national survival. At the same time, the very nature of economic liberalism is anti-state, as it seeks to remove state borders in search for economic profit. For this reason, economic liberalism should be used as a means to further US regional hegemony, not as an end in itself.

However, this does not mean that the USA needs to convert its economic power into additional military strength. Instead, especially in the case of China, it would be more productive and efficient to use economic power as a weapon to achieve its geostrategic objectives. By doing this, in short term, the USA will make the Chinese military capabilities irrelevant, while in long term, it will make it a detriment to the bearer. If executed with success, this strategy, as part of the grand strategy of offshore balancing, will prevent the emergence of a *Pax Sinica* era and ensure the continuation of *Pax Americana* (Mearsheimer 2001).

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