

The United States' Policy toward the Middle East in the Post-cold War Era: Hegemony or Leadership?

Radosław Fiedler

*Adam Mickiewicz University
Poznan, Poland*

Abstract: *This paper examines the United States' Policy toward the Middle East in the Post-cold War Era. The study gives a historical perspective of the American involvement in Middle East affairs and presents a critical evaluation of this involvement till today. Besides, it tries to answer the question of whether the US policy could be considered as one based on hegemony or leadership.*

Keywords: *The United States, the Middle East, international realitions, terrorism*

Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde Orta Doğuya Dönük Amerikan Politikası: Hegemonya mı, Liderlik mi?

Özet: *Bu çalışma soğuk savaş sonrası dönemde Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin Orta Doğu politikasını irdelemektedir. Çalışma, Orta Doğu'da Amerikan varlığının tarihsel olarak gelişimini sunmaktadır ve Amerikanın Orta Doğu politikalarını sorgulamaktadır. Bunun yanında çalışma Amerikan politikalarının daha çok liderlik niteliği mi taşıdığı yoksa hegomanik özellik mi gösterdiği sorusuna yanıt aramaktadır.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Orta doğu, uluslararası ilişkiler, terörizm*

Introduction

More intensive American involvement in Middle East affairs began during its bipolar rivalry with Soviet Russia. Before the Second World War the United States was perceived positively as a non-colonial power by the inhabitants of that region. Especially after the Suez crisis in 1956 those positive feelings began changing into more critical attitudes toward the United States (Kuniholm, 1980: 20-45).

Apart from containing the Soviet Union and its proxies in the Middle East, Washington's interests have been clearly defined since 1945 related to access by the Western bloc to Arab oil. Since 1948 the United States has had to perform a balancing act between Israel and the Arab states which has been a hard task, especially during the oil embargo imposed by the Arab oil

monarchies and Iran on the US and its allies following the October War in 1973. It was difficult to trade against the background of Arab-Israeli conflicts. The US's main achievement was its effective mediation during peace negotiations between Egypt and Israel and the agreement at Camp David. A main source of the Arab-Israeli wars was resolved by Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy which focused on the Egypt and Israel peace process. However, there was also a serious setback to American interests which occurred in Iran, caused by the Islamic revolution led by the charismatic leader Ruhollah Khomeini. After the revolution, anti-Americanism was the most important basis for the Iranian Islamic Republic's identity. The US was severely humiliated by the 444 day hostage crisis. It caused the final breaking off of its relations with Iran and thwarted Carter's reelection (Farber, 2004).

America's Middle East policy was particularly aimed at containing the Soviet Union's influence on the region. Its main aim was creating effective alliances for a stable US policy in the region. It was a difficult task because there were at least five destabilizing factors which could at any moment turn into a full scale conflict with outside actors: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Lebanese civil war, Iranian revolution, Iraqi-Iranian war and Soviet Russia's invasion of Afghanistan. These crises were important challenges for the US position in the greater Middle East region and demonstrated that the US's influence on the region was important in stabilizing it (Miglietta, 2002).

The United States is active player in that region and has the ability to influence it. The reasons for American involvement in the Middle East are:

- Important location between Asia, Africa and Europe,
- Energy factor – the largest proven oil reserves in the world,
- Iraq – the problem of stabilization after 2003,
- Counter-terrorism collaboration and activity,
- Preventing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD),
- Mediating in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The United States possesses instruments for influencing the Middle East, such as:

- Military bases, especially in the Persian Gulf,
- Important economic position as: lender, investor, seller and oil consumer,
- Regional allies such as Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

In the post cold war era the US has faced several barriers and threats in acting in the Middle East as a superpower, such as:

- Anti- American sentiments and terrorism,
- Breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process,
- Destabilization of Iraq and Shia - Sunni conflict,
- Iran and its nuclear ambitions,
- Criticism of United States' policy from key regional players such as: Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

The Middle East was called a shatter-belt by Saul Cohen, meaning it was a volatile region with an enormous potential for destabilization and conflicts in a regional and international context (Cohen 1963: 83-87). The Middle East shatter-belt comprises two types of conflicts: internal and external. The sources of conflict on an internal regional level are characterized below:

- Rivalry for regional leadership / hegemony. The diversity of the Middle East creates difficulty in establishing a single, stable regional power. There are several challengers, such as: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Egypt or Iraq. None of these states, though, possesses the ability to act as a sole hegemonic power. For example, Iran, which is Shia in character and with a population more than half Persian, is a difficult neighbor for the Arab states, and unacceptable as a regional hegemonic power. Iran is a Shi'ite theocracy but also with nuclear ambitions. Iran's nuclear arsenal would challenge security and could initiate a nuclear race in the Middle East. In the past Egypt made a real attempt to act as a hegemonic power in the Arab world. During the Nasser era, Cairo was very close to assuming real leadership. Despite his enormous popularity, Gamal Abdel Nasser could not impose Egyptian hegemony over the other Arab states. The Arab world was divided into conservatives and progressives. Of course, the divisions were much greater. Turkey is capable of regional leadership but not of establishing a hegemony. Turkey is valued regional and resolute player. For example, Turkey in 2003, by refusing the Americans use of its territory for the invasion of Iraq showed it could act as an independent regional player.
- Potential border conflicts. In the Middle East border disputes can be a potential source for conflicts. In the past, border disputes provoked wars between Iraq and Iran, or Iraq and Kuwait. A lot of these potential border conflicts are still unresolved. Most of the Middle East

borders were established by colonial powers and their shape was to guarantee their interests rather than those specific to the region. For example, Iraq's borders were established by Great Britain. For London it was more important to control a strategic area with oil resources than any potential conflict arising from mixing Kurds with Arabs and Shi'ites with Sunnis in a single Iraqi state.

- Such factors as ethnic and religious minorities reveal a threat to the integrity of the Middle East's states. Divisions and conflicts between different ethnic and religious groups are a serious challenge for Iraq and Iran. Any scenario involving Iran's or Iraq's disintegration would surely influence tensions in neighboring states.
- Another challenge is Islamic fundamentalism. The Iranian revolution in 1979 gained momentum from political ideologies motivated by religion. Khomeini used the Shi'ite tradition together with anti-shah and anti-American sentiments as important ingredients for his revolution. At the end of the '70s it seemed Islamic fundamentalism would challenge the secular regimes in Egypt, Iraq or Syria. This led to more visible activity by religious fundamentalists but was still too weak to take power. The Iranian theocratic regime is an example of injustice and failure to build a vibrant economy which can ensure employment and well-being for its society. Khomeinism and other fundamentalist ideologies are no longer an attractive alternative for the secular regimes in the Middle East. Khomeinism in practice has meant a new form of totalitarian system which controls its society but is incapable of building a thriving economy and attractive professional development for its youth.
- However, politicized religious fundamentalism does not pose a real threat to the Middle East as much as terrorism from the Al-Qaeda network. In their ideological agenda Usama ibn Ladin and Ayman al Zawahiri focused on the struggle against the American presence in the Middle East. Al-Qaeda's targets are the American military bases, embassies, tourists and Arab monarchies in the Middle East allied with the United States. Between 1998 and 2005 Al-Qaeda's network attacked US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, the warship USS Cole in Aden, the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon, a rail station in Madrid, and public transport- the underground and buses in London. In the years 2003-2007 Iraqi Al-Qaeda pursued a civil war in Iraq. In 2006 it nearly achieved its aim. However, due to Iraqi Al-Qaeda activity Iraqi civilians paid a heavy toll and eventually the group lost the support essential for spreading its terrorist cells. Summing up, Al-Qaeda does not possess an attractive ideology which can influence a wider audience. Its extremist activity and toll in human lives, especially among civilians in Saudi Arabia and Iraq, have demonstrated its destructive character. Nevertheless the organization, with its network structure, has the capacity to disturb

the political and economic situation in the Middle East. The organization has infiltrated Arab societies in the Middle East and to a certain extent has some affection inside Arab and other Muslim communities in Western Europe and the United States. Al-Qaeda's activity with its loose cell-structure is not easy to track. Small cells can survive undetected and can be reactivated just before a terrorist attack. The organization resembles the internet in its communication Afghanistan, and recently Yemen, are hotbeds for Al-Qaeda terrorist activity not only in the Middle East but in other regions as well. The most challenging problem is Al-Qaeda's attempts to obtain weapons of mass destruction (WMD), with the destructive character and terror activity it is a grave security challenge.

- Unresolved Israeli – Palestinian conflict. In 1991 in Madrid a peace process started. In 2000 it collapsed and the Al-Aqsa intifada erupted. In the 2006 elections to the Palestinian Autonomy parliament Hamas gained a majority to establish its government. One year later the Palestinian Autonomy split into Gaza, ruled by Hamas, and the West Bank, under Fatah control. The conflict is difficult to resolve due to the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem with the Old City under Jewish control since 1967, Palestinian refugees, control of water, the Israeli "security fence" and the Israeli military presence in the West Bank. The conflict is rooted in history, land and in different perceptions of security as well as huge emotions which lead to difficulties in renewing the peace process. At present, the right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu is unable to formulate new peace proposals, but also divisions between the Palestinians are undermining the restarting of the peace process. The complicated structure of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affects regional stability. It generates international Palestinian terrorism. Since the '90s Hamas and Islamic Jihad have been using suicide bombers against Israeli military and civilian targets, and also the conflict has strongly affected Jewish fundamentalism and terrorism.
- Water scarcity is a potential source of conflict. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) 6.3% of the world's population lives, but with access to only 1.4% of the world's renewable water resources. The processes of urbanization and a demographic explosion have brought about a problem with water shortages. In 1960 in the MENA region lived a population of 100 million, in 2006 it reached 311 million, and according to prognoses in 2025 it will rise to 430 million (Fiedler, 2010: 96).

These possible sources of instability can, of course, be added to. It reveals the Middle East as a shatter-belt region resembling Europe before the first world war. Such comparisons can be considered superficial and invaluable due to the differences between Europe and the Middle East in religion, culture, traditions and political processes. However, such an analogy in my opinion should be taken into account, because of two visible similarities:

- The ongoing power rivalry (Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia) in the Middle East and Europe (France, Tsarist Russia, Germany, Austro-Hungary and Great Britain) before 1914;
- Iranian nuclear ambitions and its regional ambitions can be compared to Imperial Germany's plans of dominating Europe.

The Middle East is of crucial significance for the world's energy security. At present its oil export accounts for 40% of global demand and is critical for the world's transportation systems (contributing 96% of its energy demands). The MENA region provides around 34% of the world's oil production. The Middle East, especially in the Persian Gulf sub-region has the largest proven oil reserves, according to different sources they amount to around 60% of the world's proven oil reserves. In the next two decades oil production worldwide will decrease except in the Middle East. Since 1945 cheap Arab oil was an important factor in the development of Western economies. Since 1973, during the oil crisis, it has had a tremendous influence on the world's energy security. In the near future the Arab oil-monarchies and Iran will remain the largest oil producers.

Since 1945 the energy factor has been the main reason for American involvement in the Middle East. When, in 1990, the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein decided to invade Kuwait he endangered the fragile balance in the Persian Gulf. At that time the United States was the sole guarantor of the status quo for Arab leaders. After incorporating Kuwait, Iraq threatened Saudi Arabia. Saddam Hussein's aggressive policy endangered world energy security. Saudi Arabia's royal family asked the United States for military assistance due to the Iraqi threat. The George H. Bush administration agreed to provide its ally with military help in an operation called 'Desert Shield'. The United States was interested only in combating the Iraqi army occupying Kuwait. However, the United States did not want to become a hegemonic power, but rather a leader acting in accordance with international law. The American government sought support in the United Nations. The military operation against Iraq was executed under a UN mandate with broad regional support, even from the Syrian government. Acting within the framework of UN Security Council resolutions 687, 688 and many others, it displayed restraint (Fiedler, 2010:161-169). The American leadership aimed only at liberating Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. The Bush Sr. administration did not

plan to occupy the Iraqi state. By the end of the 'Desert Storm' military operation, two insurrections erupted in Iraq, one by Iraqi Shi'ites and another by Iraqi Kurds. Both uprisings counted on allied military assistance which never materialized. The Iraqi Shi'ites in particular were brutally repressed by Saddam Hussein's army. The American administration was afraid successful insurrections would create a new situation in the Persian Gulf – a difficult and unpredictable one, even with a possible scenario of the Iraqi state disintegrating after the end of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship with a strong influence from Iran on the Iraqi Shi'ites.

Nevertheless, the successful military operation guided by the United States within the UN's framework created broad opportunities for intensive American involvement in the Middle East. Practically, the United States has had two different options: to act as a leader (American leadership) or as a hegemonic power. The first option was taken during the military operation 'Desert Storm'. As it turned out, the United States demonstrated a competence, patience and multilateral strategy in managing the Iraqi crisis. Such activity enabled the United States to be a credible sponsor of the peace process, initiated during the Madrid conference. By the end of 1991 it seemed that under the sustained American mediating the peace process would finally resolve the conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians and Israel with Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. At the beginning of the '90s American leadership was taken as one reasonable option for stability in the Middle East. Since September 11th, 2001 the American government has aimed rather for a hegemonic strategy in its policy on the Middle East, thus breaking with the leadership formula. It is worth asking the question – why didn't the American leadership in the Middle East bring about the expected outcomes?

Leadership is a broad formula and difficult task for the leader state and the other states involved. For David P. Rapkin, the sources of global leadership are the following: intensive ties among states, common interests and acceptance for the leading state to assume this role (Rapkin, 1990: 129). For Jolanta Bryla the conditions for effective leadership are varied, and include: 1. the will of a country's political elite to act as a leader state 2. having the resources and political system to act as a global leader (Bryla, 2002: 53). The idea of global leadership is very often treated as a manifestation of a hegemonic power. It is important to differentiate leadership from a hegemonic attitude, though. For Andrzej Galganek: "opposite to hegemonic power is having a legitimate leadership, the latter derives from accepted procedures introduced by the global leader" (Galganek, 1991: 12). Conceptualizing the formula for leadership it is worth emphasizing its important features (Fiedler, 2010: 41):

- Ability and effectiveness in promoting universal ideas;
- Effectiveness in organizing and leading broad coalitions, solving different problems and combating threats;

- Ability and effectiveness in developing international collaboration everywhere from science to the economy, and promoting international regimes and regulations within the framework of the international system;
- Acceptance of opinions and policies other than, and even at odds with, those of the leading state;
- Readiness to pay the costs related to leadership;
- Credibility between declared ideas and political practice;
- Broad and effective support for the leading state from other states in the international system.

Naturally, the leadership formula can be extended into other important areas of activity. Acting as a leading state in the international system is not only a difficult but challenging task. A leading state should patiently work with the international community through such means as negotiations and a multilateral arena of collaboration. Legitimacy is also an important condition for sustaining effective leadership. There is a thin borderline between hegemony and leadership. A mixture of leadership and hegemony is also possible, different tools and methods assumed depending on the ends of foreign policy. The leadership formula needs a long time to achieve many ends, sometimes a hegemonic strategy is a tempting option for a powerful state wishing to impose its own rules on the international community.

How can hegemony be perceived? The term hegemony was introduced by the ancient Greeks. Thucydides perceived hegemony as a polis legitimately authorized to lead others and to maintain control. In George Modelski's long-cycle theory hegemonic power derives from hegemonic war. According to his theory four phases for each long cycle can be distinguished (Modelski, 1983: 220-225):

- A global hegemonic war as a result of which the undefeated power becomes a hegemonic world power;
- Apogee of the world power;
- Delegitimacy of the world power and a challenge from an opponent or opponents;
- Deconcentration – loss of the status of a world power due to the hostile activity of rival states.

Teresa Los-Nowak analyzed hegemony through two models (Los-Nowak, 2006: 187): the sub-system of indirect hegemony and the sub-system of direct hegemony. In the first model hegemony derives from the complicated nature of international relations with interdependencies and has a more horizontal structure. In the second model hegemony derives from the

hierarchical structure of international relations and is imposed by the most powerful state-actor.

In another theoretical approach, the theory of hegemonic stability, a basic assumption of that concept is that economic and political collaboration is dependent on one dominant state-actor. The hegemonic state is a guarantor of a stable global economy. A decline in hegemonic power means a serious destabilization for the global economy (Galganek, 1991: 12). Robert Cox proposed extending the traditional concept of hegemony in the critical theory of hegemony. In his approach a predominance in economic, political or military power is not sufficient to become a hegemonic power. A decisive prerequisite is a broad consensus on the ideas, power resources and institutions inside the state, which later are extended onto the global stage (Galganek, 1991: 20).

Reconsidering the United States' global role in the post-cold war environment, it is useless to treat it in simple terms such as global hegemony, because:

- The United States does not possess sufficient resources in managing all the crises existing in the global arena,
- The United States cannot impose its ends on all states and organizations, therefore it is more useful to analyze the United States' different strategies as those of hegemony and leadership in more regional frameworks,
- The Middle East is an ideal framework for this – because the United States has the most visible instruments (economic and military) influencing this region in the post-cold war era.

The United States accounts for around 45% of the world's military spending. During a single decade, 1998-2008, US military spending rose nearly 80%, reaching USD 700 billion in 2008. The US possesses more than 800 bases and military installations around the world. There are more than 400,000 American military personnel in overseas missions. There are economic problems as the US has enormous budget and trade deficits. In 2009 the budget deficit reached USD 1.4 trillion (Fiedler, 2010: 25-39). American military dominance is the most visible feature of their superiority but a stagnant economy heavily in debt, with trade and budget deficits, is an annoying factor which can undermine the US's global role. Military superiority does not imply effectiveness in combating terrorism and asymmetrical threats. The contemporary international environment is complicated and multi-dimensional: states, organizations, terrorists and crime groups and, finally, the globalization process which leads to a more intensive flow of goods, finances, people, information and ideas. Interdependence among different actors is the most visible feature of globalization. It is misleading to

describe the US's role as that of a hegemonic power in such a complicated structure of international relations. It is more useful to analyze the United States' roles as leader or hegemonic power in the Middle East context.

To repeat the above-mentioned question: why didn't the American leadership in the Middle East bring about the expected outcomes? To answer that question it is necessary to analyze the United States' policy in the Middle East during the decade from 1991-2001, through the examples of the Bush and Clinton administrations' policies towards this volatile region.

1. Ineffective strategy of dual-containment policy towards Iran and Iraq. At American insistence the heaviest sanctions in history of the United Nations were imposed on the Iraqi state. The worsening living conditions of Iraqi civilians forced the international community to introduce a 'food for oil' program. The Iraqi dictator retained his power. The Bill Clinton administration, pursuing the removal of Saddam Hussein, wanted further extension of the UN sanctions. Impatience and disappointment at the UN framework led the Clinton administration to abandon the leadership and multilateral strategy for a hegemonic strategy with limited ends, an example of which was the punitive bombardment of Iraq (the 'Desert Fox' operation) without UN authorization. The United States was unable to retain an effective, broad anti-Iraq coalition. In the UN Security Council the Clinton administration's proposal for more punitive actions against Saddam Hussein was accepted only by Great Britain. Lacking a clear strategy, the United States did not try to redefine their leadership formula. The United States, opting for more hegemonic actions, was not credible because the Clinton administration did not want to go further than a simple demonstration of power. In effect, the problem with Iraq remained unresolved, and at the same time the United States failed to reestablish relations with Iran.
2. In 1991 the Madrid peace process was established and two years later the Palestinian Autonomy was established. The United States was perceived as a powerful mediator in the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. In 1993 many believed that a new era of peace had begun following the Madrid conference. Unfortunately, as it turned out, these expectations were too optimistic. In 2000 an American mediator invited Yassir Arafat and Ehud Barak to Camp David to complete the peace talks. The conference was broken off by Arafat, whose demands were not met by Barak. Arafat's negotiations agenda included Palestinian control over East Jerusalem and the West Bank, Jewish settlements removed from Palestinian territory to Israel, and accepting the return of more than 3.5 million Palestinian refugees to Israel. Several months after the unsuccessful Camp David meeting the Al-Aqsa intifada started and the peace process fell apart.

3. In the '90s the threat from the Al-Qaeda terrorism network emerged. The United States became the prime target for terrorist attacks. For Usama ibn Ladin the United States were occupying holy Muslim land (the American military bases in Saudi Arabia) and thus threatened Islam. Ibn Ladin's organization wanted to expel Americans from the Middle East by attacking them, not only in that region but in other places as well. Beneath are the examples of Al-Qaeda terrorist activity that followed:
 - February 1993 – New York, the first attack against the World Trade Center. In that terrorist attack 8 Americans perished;
 - October 1993 – Mogadishu, during a battle 18 American soldiers were killed. The Somali attackers were instructed and trained by Al-Qaeda;
 - August 1998 – Kenya and Nairobi, 242 people were killed in bomb blasts at United States embassies, including 12 American citizens;
 - October 2000 – Aden, 17 American sailors perished in the attack on the USS Cole.

The above-mentioned terrorist attacks revealed Al-Qaeda's ability to harm American interests. The terrorists were encouraged by an ineffective American response. For Al-Qaeda's terrorists the United States seemed the best target because it not only brought the attention of the global media and no serious counterterrorism activity. In the 1990s the Al-Qaeda network developed on a global scale. That threat was neglected by the Clinton administration. As it proved later – Al Qaeda would be effective on September 11th, 2001, with the dreadful and most successful terrorist attacks in history in which nearly 3,000 people perished.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks were the most significant impulse in redefining the American strategy in the Middle East. The Bush Jr. administration, under a neoconservative influence, formulated a new doctrine in which the United States could use preemptive military actions against "rogue states" and terrorists. In the neoconservative agenda Iraq was the greatest threat. They accused Saddam Hussein of possessing WMD and of having links to Al-Qaeda (as it turned out later – all these accusations were unjustified). The Bush Jr. administration was convinced that by militarily overthrowing Saddam Hussein they would start a great wave of democracy in the Middle East. The Bush doctrine and its military operations against Iraq in 2003 ('Iraqi Freedom') without United Nations authorization was evident manifestation of a hegemonic policy towards the Middle East. The neo-cons believed that a firmer policy including military means would be the best remedy for terrorism and the lack of democracy in the Middle East. Such ignorant assumptions brought about serious problems in Iraq and an outbreak of anti-American feeling. The effects of American military operations

in Iraq are not only the internal destabilization of that state but also a reinforced Iran.

In 2003-2009 the Bush Jr. administration was focused only on Iraq and Afghanistan. Other problems, such as the broken Israeli – Palestinian peace process, were not a top policy agenda. Finally, Iraq was partly stabilized due to the 'surge' operation, but all the problems with the Sunnis, Shi'ites and Kurds can still erupt and even lead to the destabilization of the state. As a result, Bush Jr.'s hegemonic strategy led to the weakening of the United States' position in the Middle East.

However, while the US is the strongest external player in the Middle East, the activity of other actors such as the European Union, China and the Russian Federation is also visible. The European Union is complementary to the United States. Russia is more involved in the South Caucasus and Caspian basin, and is important to the Middle East as a weapons provider, especially to Iran and Syria. China has more potential than Russia to act as a real competitor to the United States, not only in the Middle East but on a global scale, as well. China is addicted to oil. China's daily fuel consumption is 7.4 million barrels. Around 3 million barrels are imported from Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. China's oil diplomacy is directed at long-term contracts with oil producing states and arms sales to Iran, Syria and other Middle East states. In the medium-term perspective, say 10-15 years, China will become a more important external player in the Middle East, not only as a trade partner and fuel consumer, but also more visible in military terms (establishing Chinese bases) and in the political dimension as a negotiator with a nuclear Iran, or mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For China, the United States' military involvement in the Middle East is a challenge to its energy security. For the Chinese political elite it is an uncomfortable situation in which American navy and military bases are spread throughout the whole Middle East area. Oil scarcity in the future could provoke a conflict between the United States and China. Both states are heavily dependent on imported oil from the Middle East. Without an attractive alternative to that oil, such a future energy conflict is unfortunately a probable scenario.

Bush Jr.'s hegemonic policy alienated the United States both on the Middle East and global scene. American credibility was devastated by the false accusations against Saddam Hussein's regime (those of links to the Al-Qaeda and of possessing WMD). Also a serious blow to their credibility was the democratization strategy towards the Middle East based on American military might. Hard power was more important than soft power, such as cultural and political attractiveness. Within the regional framework this hegemonic policy met with serious criticism from Turkey (the Turkish parliament did not agree to the invasion of Iraq from Turkey), complaints were also made by Egypt, Jordan and even Saudi Arabia. The United States could only count on unconditional Israeli support.

The problem of the American-Israel special relationship has been examined by two leading American political scientists: John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt. In 2007 they were the authors of a controversial book entitled *The Israel Lobby and U. S. Foreign Policy*. The main thesis of the book was that the pro-Israeli lobby in the United States heavily influences its foreign policy towards the Middle East and that fact damages American interests in the region. To support the above thesis the authors analyzed the following topics (Mearsheimer, Walt, 2007):

- Only Israel has such intense economic, financial, political, technological and military ties with the United States;
- The close relations between the United States and Israel are seen in the sums which successive American administrations have contributed to Israel. In the years 1948-2003 the United States has provided Israel with the total sum of 140 billion dollars (in dollars from 2003);
- In the American political scene pro-Israel lobbies are very active. A lot of lobby groups and individuals serve Israel's security interests. Their activity is also visible in Congress.

Mearsheimer and Walt's book opened a debate on American foreign policy in the Middle East. The book explored the sensitive issue of the excessive influence of the pro-Israeli lobbies on decision-making in the American political system. This critical analysis allowed a better understanding not only of the United States' role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process but of American policies towards Iran and Iraq.

Bush Jr.'s presidency and its bad effects on foreign policy, but also the deteriorating situation due to the financial crisis, brought Barack Obama to presidential victory. Earlier Obama had not voted for invasion of Iraq. He had opposed this war from the outset and had mistrusted the military solution (Obama: 2007). In 2009, President Obama tried to change the policy and turn it into a leadership strategy towards the Middle East. A successful change in Washington's strategy would be important in reformulating the US's role in that region. A more precisely defined leadership strategy towards the Middle East would contribute to a more effective US policy in that region.

A symbolic change of style in Middle East policy was President Obama's visit to Turkey in April 2009. In his speech in the Turkish parliament President Obama put the emphasis on developing collaboration in different areas, and not only on counterterrorism as President Bush Jr. had done. On 4th June 2009 President Obama gave a speech addressed to the Muslim world in Cairo's Al-Azhar university. Although the speech was not precise on a proposed program, it initiated a better atmosphere in the relations of the United States with its Muslim allies. Nevertheless, this new approach

necessitates a change in Washington's policy towards the Middle East. There is only one visible example – the decrease in the number of US military personnel in Iraq. By the end of 2011 the entire American military personnel are to be withdrawn from Iraq. Unfortunately, there is no visible success in finding a satisfactory solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, President Obama has declared he will conduct direct negotiations with Iran, but that promise has yet to be fulfilled.

In 2012, in the United States the next presidential race will start. Unfortunately, there is less and less time for transforming the American strategy from hegemony to the leadership formula. The United States needs vital partners and allies such as Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and closer collaboration with the European Union in dealing with the Middle East's sources of instability. It will be harmful for the United States' interests if President Obama does not transform the policy into a leadership strategy. However, such a transformation is very difficult and challenging to bring about, but surely in the future would bring more effective multilateral collaboration in the Middle East and enable the United States to act as a constructive leader of greater importance. A hegemonic policy is a temptation due to the United States' means – especially its military capabilities (bases, naval presence in the Mediterranean, India Ocean, Gulfs of Persia and Oman), but going in that direction would paradoxically weaken America's position in the Middle East, due to anti-Americanism and new regional alliances aimed at decreasing the United States' role in the Middle East. Repeating President Bush Jr.'s hegemonic track would be the worst scenario. However, the leadership formula needs a redefined American strategy – apart from declarations and more soft power in rhetoric, no such action in reformulating the US policies on the Middle East has been undertaken.

Conclusions

1. In the post-cold war era the United States could behave towards the Middle East either as a hegemonic power, or as a leader who opts for a more multilateral framework in regional collaboration.
2. The Middle East is a volatile region due to the following sources of instability: rivalry for regional leadership, disputed borders, religious fundamentalism, water scarcity, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, internal state problems with minorities and religious communities, and Iranian nuclear ambitions. These challenges require a cautious, multilateral strategy.
3. In 1991 it seemed that the United States could act as a credible leader: the liberation of Kuwait under the UN mandate and the establishing of the Middle East peace process were emblematic of American leadership. However, both the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations did not seek an effective leadership formula.

Especially during Clinton's two terms there was an inclination towards a hegemonic policy.

4. Since 2001, the Bush Jr. administration implemented a more decisive hegemonic strategy. In Bush's 'axis of evil' the first target was Iraq. The military operation against Iraq undermined the United States' position in the Middle East. A more hegemonic strategy focused only on Iraq led to an unprecedented rise in anti-American attitudes and rendered President Bush's democratization strategy in the Arab world futile.
5. Since 2009, President Barack Obama has declared a new approach to Middle East issues – within a leadership framework. The current president should remember that without the necessary redefinition of the United States' role in the Middle East the effective management of different problems and threats which can arrive in this volatile region will be difficult.

References

- Bryla, J., 2002, *Strefy wpływów w stosunkach międzynarodowych. Aspekty teoretyczne i praktyczne na przykładzie supermocarstw*, Poznań.
- Cleveland, W. L., 2000, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Oxford.
- Cohen, S. B., 1963, *Geography and Politics in a Divided World*, New York.
- Farber, D., 2004, *Taken Hostage. The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam*, Princeton.
- Fiedler, R., 2010, *Od przywództwa do hegemonii. Stany Zjednoczone wobec bliskowschodniego obszaru niestabilności w latach 1991-2009*, Poznań.
- Galganek, A., 1991, "Hegemonia Stanów Zjednoczonych a teorie zmian", *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, no. 7-8.
- Kuniholm, B. R., 1980, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece*, Princeton, New York.
- Los-Nowak, T., 2006, *Stosunki Międzynarodowe. Teorie-systemy-uczestnicy*, Wrocław.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. & Walt, S. M., 2007, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York.
- Miglietta, J. P., 2002, *American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945 – 1992. Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia*, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford.
- Modelski, G., 1987, *Long Cycles in World Politics*, London.
- Mohamedou, M., 2007, *Understanding Al Qaeda: The Transformation of War*, London.
- Moussalli, A. S., 2008, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Islamist Politics*, Gainesville.
- Obama, B., 2007, "Renewing American Leadership", *Foreign Affairs* July/August.
- Pollack, K. M., 2005, *The Persian Puzzle. The Conflict Between Iran and America*, New York.
- Rapkin, D. P., 1987, *World Leadership*, in *Exploring Long Cycles*, ed. G. Modelski, Boulder.

