

A Word from the Chairman

It has been said that the deserts of the Middle East are where hopes and dreams go to wither and die. It is a warning worth recalling. Enough skeletons of fallen empires and forgotten cities lie buried in the sands to confirm the wisdom of that caution. In our own day we have seen hopes and dreams languish there, which demonstrates anew that the warning has not lost its gravity.

Just six years ago this region was the most dangerous place on earth. It was here that the United States faced the greatest odds of going to war with the Soviet Union. A clash of interests and a chronically unstable political culture made the chance of miscalculation frightening. As well, the conflicts that have erupted during every decade since Israel's founding—including one occasion that took us to the brink of nuclear confrontation—seemed destined to continue far into the future.

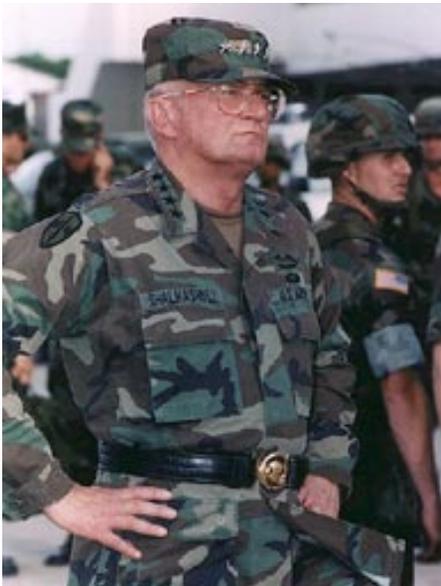
All that has changed. The end of the Cold War was one reason for the difference, although that event was not the cause of regional problems. Far from it. But neither did it heal any rifts. Instead, bipolar competition worked its way between the cracks of shifting hatreds, alliances, and ambitions that grew from a tempestuous past. It was mortar between the

bricks, one volatile canvas painted over another. Then, suddenly, the background on one of the canvasses was washed away.

This permitted two historic brushstrokes that have been applied since then. One was the Persian Gulf War. For the first time in forty-five years the West fought alongside Arab states against a common enemy. More amazing, that very enemy was an Arab nation. At once two great taboos were lifted. Moderate Arabs learned that America is a trustworthy and valuable ally and vice versa. And our European partners, wary of venturing into this region as U.S. allies ever since the Suez crisis of 1956, finally set the past aside.

The second brushstroke was applied when Yitzak Rabin and Yassar Arafat stood with their hands clasped on the White House lawn. For the region's future, their handshake that day carried an impact comparable to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Indeed, the Arab-Israeli confrontation tortured and mangled the region in ways that the Iron Curtain had never inflicted on Europe.

It would be tempting to suggest that all is now well. But, of course, it is not. Twice since the Persian Gulf War our forces have returned to deter Saddam Hussein from again lashing out at



DOD (Helene Stikkel)

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 1)

his neighbors. For nearly four years we have patrolled northern Iraq to prevent the slaughter of the Kurds. Tehran's mosques still resonate with sermons by angry mullahs who spew hatred against America and exhort their followers to export a revolution of dubious benefit that has impoverished and isolated Iran. It was adherents of this faith who planted a bomb in the World Trade Center. With regard to the Middle East peace process, while it has come far there is still a

long road ahead and, absent American power, it is unlikely that it will remain on the right path.

Yet compared to a few years ago, hopes and dreams now have a better chance of surviving in the greater Middle East. We have a vital stake in those hopes and dreams. We depend on the oil that lies beneath the sands. Without it, America as well as the international economy would suffer. We also have strong and invaluable regional allies, from freedom loving and courageous Israelis to wise and noble Egyptians without whom peace would still be an empty dream. Indeed, one great benefit of the last few years has been the growth of American-Arab friendship made possible by vast changes in the region's strategic environment.

The articles on the greater Middle East which appear in this issue of *JFQ* explore some of the challenges that remain. With the end of the Cold War, American power has become interlaced with the future of the region as never before. U.S. leadership, vision, and strength are important to meeting larger challenges and obstacles. As we survey the opportunities before us, we should remember that only a short time ago the threat of Armageddon loomed in this area. We now have a chance to make sure that this threat never arises again.

JOHN M. SHALIKASHVILI
Chairman
of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

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