

BUSH AND THE MIDEAST: ADVANTAGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

By
Dr. John Duke Anthony

DECEMBER 13, 2000

Editor's Note:

As the endgame of the 2000 U.S. presidential election is played out after five weeks of uncertainty, many GulfWire readers are beginning to speculate on what new personalities and policies will mean for U.S. interests in the Mideast. GulfWire is pleased to contribute to that dialogue with this essay by GulfWire publisher Dr. John Duke Anthony.

["Bush and the Mideast: Advantages and Opportunities," appeared as the lead editorial in today's issue of the Kuwait-daily, Arab Times.]

BUSH AND THE MIDEAST: ADVANTAGES AND OPPORTUNITIES
By
John Duke Anthony

(December 13 - Kuwait) The next President of the United States is finally known. Not any too soon. Many are keen to know what difference, if any, a Bush Administration might make in terms of Mideast-U.S. relations. What new of anything might there be in the offing that pertains to the Mideast? Following are some of the near-term certainties along with a range of probabilities and possibilities.

Many will recall that, during the campaign, "specialists" made numerous statements about how one could not discern an appreciable difference between then-candidates Bush and Gore when it came to Mideast matters. But few of the specialists spoke the truth. What they said was not true. What was not true then is even less true now. Expect to see transformation on several fronts. For many, this is what the election, in part, was about. Various changes are certain to affect issues of interest and importance to Mideastern countries.

Breaks with The Past

One of the biggest and most visible breaks with the recent past will be on the personality front and in terms of new policymakers. The latter are certain to want to proceed with their predictably quite different ideas of how best to achieve key U.S. foreign policy objectives. Expect no one new who is assigned to the Bush Administration's Mideast watch, at least starting out, to be asleep at the wheel. Such changes will be manifested soon enough in terms of actions, attitudes, and assumptions, as well as positions and policies, pertaining to America's interests.

There will also be continuity. For many, this is what other parts of the election were about. But uncertainty as to which parts of the present will remain the same, and which parts will change, will provide the grist for much speculation. For some, this will be the cause of anxiety. For others it will be a cause for hope.

For the anxious, a measure of solace is assured. It is in the awareness that most of the tightly interconnected civil and Foreign Service specialists who deal with Mideast issues on a day-to-day basis will not be leaving. It is in the guarantee that Washington officialdom's rhetorical commitment to achieving an Arab-Israeli peace will stay the course. It is in the knowledge that the foreign policy establishment's postured concern for weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery will remain in tact. It is in the assurance of the Bush Administration's ongoing support for eventually integrating the entire Mideast into the dynamic of economic globalization.

Cautious Optimism

For the uncertain, there are grounds for cautious optimism. These are based on the certainty that there will be new Mideast policy initiatives. Among the thorniest problems requiring immediate attention are the conflicts with Israel.

Iran and Iraq are two east-of-Israel policy challenges that are unlikely to take a back seat for long. Then, to the south, there is Yemen. And nearer to hand are Lebanon and Syria. Don't rule out that either or both could become renewed crucibles of conflict with Israel, as could Libya, although much more remotely.

Look for changes in leadership style and substance and nuance. For reasons of personal interests, professional experience, and a more factual as opposed to political calculation of American national interests, the executive branch's focus will be slightly different than before. Expect the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf states to be assigned a higher priority than would have been the case under Gore.

GCC Region

Anticipate that the GCC states, collectively as well as individually, will continue to comprise the one region of the Mideast that will remain first among equals. These countries will retain a special policy status. Status here is defined as a geological and geographical area that is indisputably vital to American national needs and concerns.

Little wonder why: the nature and number of U.S. strategic and economic interests in this region exceed those in any and all other Mideast sub-regions. In this regard, expect an accelerated approach to assuring Saudi Arabia's admission into the World Trade Organization. And expect this Administration, like the one before it, possibly even more so, to ask OPEC for favors.

Watch for subtle shifts on the tactical front. To wit: the chance for executive and legislative branch cooperation on major foreign policy issues will be greater than at any time in the recent past. The Republican edge in

all three houses of power, razor thin though it may be, is nonetheless an edge.

Razor-Thin?

Pundits and politicians will no doubt continue to make light of this situation. However, the fact remains that the Republican's legislative and policymaking edges are greater than any since the Eisenhower era. In the forging of policy, the value of having an edge is not an end in itself; it is to use it. In any case, razor thin is probably just the right blade width for dealing with the challenges of tax and social security reform. And something sharper still may be necessary to cut through various Mideast issues that, as history has shown, tend to harden over time.

There is also the matter of political indebtedness. The Bush Administration does not owe its electoral victory to one or more ethnic, religious, or ideological groups for whom U.S. Mideast positions and policies are a life's consuming passion. Had Gore won, the opposite would be true. The distinction may not equate to all the difference in the world, but, for many, it need only equate to a major difference in the Mideast.

Lastly, Republicans have traditionally been more ardent than Democrats in their support of U.S. Mideast business interests. Their chance to demonstrate support is unlike any they have had since the previous century. Expect them not to let it go to waste. With reason: the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf states possess the preponderance of natural resources vital to world economic growth and to the material well being of all of humanity.

* * *

Dr. John Duke Anthony is President and CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations; Secretary, U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee; and publisher of GulfWire. All three are Washington, D.C.-based non-profit and non-governmental organizations devoted to educating Americans about U.S. interests and involvement in Arab countries, the Mideast and the Islamic world.

LAST LINES

Independent commentary provided in 'GulfWire' and materials contained in the linked Internet sites do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations or the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee. News extracts and links contained in GulfWire have been reported in various media. GulfWire and the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations/U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee have not independently verified the accounts referred to and do not vouch for their accuracy or the reliability of Internet links.

Internet links were active the day of publication in GulfWire. Some hyperlinks are longer than one line of text and may not properly 'wrap around' in your email. You may need to cut and paste these links to your Web browser.

The 'GulfWire' is an information service of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee Secretariat. Please feel free to forward this edition of the 'GulfWire' to your friends and colleagues, and suggest additions to our mailing list.
[CLICK HERE](#)

For more information on the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee visit the web sites of the [National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations](#) and the [U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee](#) or call (202)293-0801.

National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations
President and CEO: Dr. John Duke Anthony

PATRICK W. RYAN
Editor-in-Chief, GulfWire
<mailto:gulfwire@ArabiaLink.com>
C. R. TRISDALE
Deputy Editor, GulfWire
<mailto:CRTrisdale@ArabiaLink.com>

The GulfWire e-newsletter and Web site are developed, produced and maintained by [Ryan & Associates](#).



Copyright © 2001, GulfWire
All rights reserved.