CHALLENGES FOR AMERICA IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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CHAPTER

1

Sources of American Foreign Policy

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. president Barack Obama discuss the Palestinian peace process

Reuters/Kevin Lamarque

The Middle East often seems like a "special case" to students of foreign policy in the United States: especially troubled, especially hard to understand, especially enmeshed in a set of seemingly unique and intractable political, social, and economic issues. While that is in some ways true, it is also possible—and we think quite useful—to approach policy toward the region and the issues it faces the same way we would begin to understand policy toward any other region or set of issues. Such an approach allows us to view challenges in the region as normal problems of foreign policy. Even the most intractable problems have potential solutions, and our ability to manage these challenges is limited by the same factors that constrain U.S. foreign policy in other regions and issues. Our first chapter lays out a framework that articulates the key influences on U.S. foreign-policy formulation and implementation, regardless of issue area. Specific sources of foreign policy relevant to key challenges in the Middle East are discussed

in the opening chapter of each of the book's four parts—the Arab Spring (chapter 3), radical Islam (chapter 6), Israel and Palestine (chapter 9), and the Shia Crescent (chapter 12). Readers will see these sources at work in the successive chapters that explain the historical development of the challenge and present-day dynamics and U.S. foreign-policy efforts. As we examine the key factors influencing how the United States formulates and implements its foreign policy toward the region, you will discover that these factors are the same ones that influence America's policy toward other regions. We begin by discussing how the foreign and domestic arenas have become intermingled in a globalized world and then examine the several sources of foreign policy.

THE LINKAGE OF DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES

Recent decades have witnessed growing links between domestic and foreign policies. Indeed, President Barack Obama came to office in 2008 promising a foreign policy based on domestic values. However, globalization has been a long process, and the mixing of the two arenas is not entirely new. America's domestic policies were profoundly affected by wars in Korea and Vietnam, and more recently in Afghanistan and Iraq. International organizations such as the World Trade Organization and the North American Free Trade Association have a direct impact on America's domestic economy. Conversely, domestic policies on trade, taxation, economic investment, and even civil rights have had a significant impact overseas. Indeed, it is frequently the case that issues that arise in a domestic context have consequences overseas. Thus, the appearance of a fourteen-minute film trailer posted in July 2012 on YouTube, featuring a blasphemous treatment of the Prophet Muhammad, produced rage throughout the Islamic world after it appeared on Egyptian television.

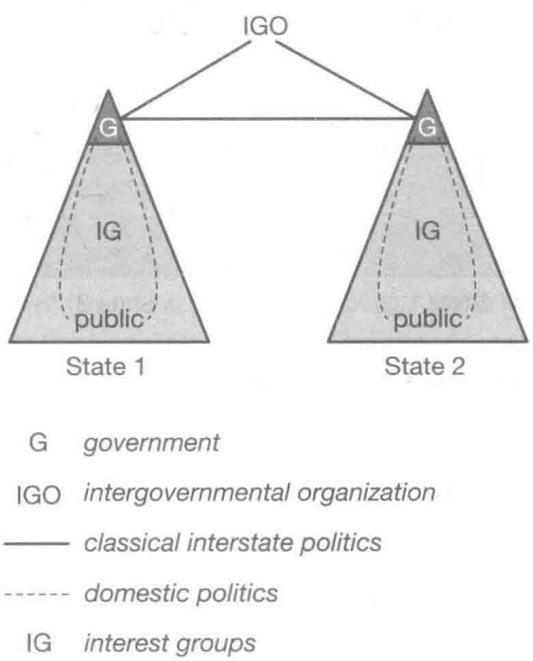
More recently, the Republican-controlled Congress tried to force President Obama to declare additional sanctions against Iran even while negotiations with that country regarding its nuclear aspirations were continuing, and John Boehner, then the Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, invited Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address Congress about the dangers posed by Iran and Islamic terrorists, issues that Republicans believed the president did not take sufficiently seriously. The president, who did not get on well with Netanyahu, with whom he disagreed strongly on several issues—including Iran—was not consulted, and he declared he would not see the Israeli leader when he came to Washington. Netanyahu then authorized expansion of West Bank settlements, which Obama opposed. Obama regarded Boehner as exceeding his role as House Speaker and intruding on the president's leading role in foreign affairs. He also viewed Netanyahu's acceptance and the actions of Israeli ambassador Ron Dermer as gratuitous interference in America's domestic affairs. And after the March 2015 framework agreement with Iran, the Senate, led by Bob Corker (R-TN), chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, sought to force the president to obtain its approval for any final agreement. Obama agreed to allow Congress to reject an agreement, but its vote could be vetoed by the president.

All states are subject to external influences, and their external environment is in turn affected by domestic events, as the cases above involving countries in the Middle East and the United States illustrate. Foreign policy is the point at which influences arising in the global system cross into the domestic arena and domestic politics is transformed into external behavior. The traditional view was that America like other states is sovereign and, as such, controls its boundaries and territory, is subject

to no higher external authority, and is the legal equal of other states. This perspective assumes that sovereign states have a clear and unitary national interest and that their governments interact directly with one another and with international organizations. It also assumes that publics and domestic interest groups in different societies do not interact directly with those in other societies. Instead, they present their views to their own governments, which then represent them in relations with other governments. Figure 1.1 illustrates this traditional perspective in which interstate politics remains distinct from domestic politics.

The traditional model is inadequate to describe the full range of factors shaping foreign policy, and events in the Middle East—especially in recent years—have sharpened our awareness of its limits. We have seen the emergence of powerful nonstate actors that pose transnational threats and also those that challenge the sovereignty and security of existing states in the region, like Israel or Syria. In the Arab Spring, we have observed popular movements overturn regimes that we once thought were so deeply entrenched that they were resistant to revolution, and we have seen many of those same populations rise up in protest against U.S. policies in the region. Indeed, in this region, the domestic and foreign arenas have become so blended that they are impossible to disentangle. In the words of former secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton,

FIGURE 1.1 Model of State-Centric World



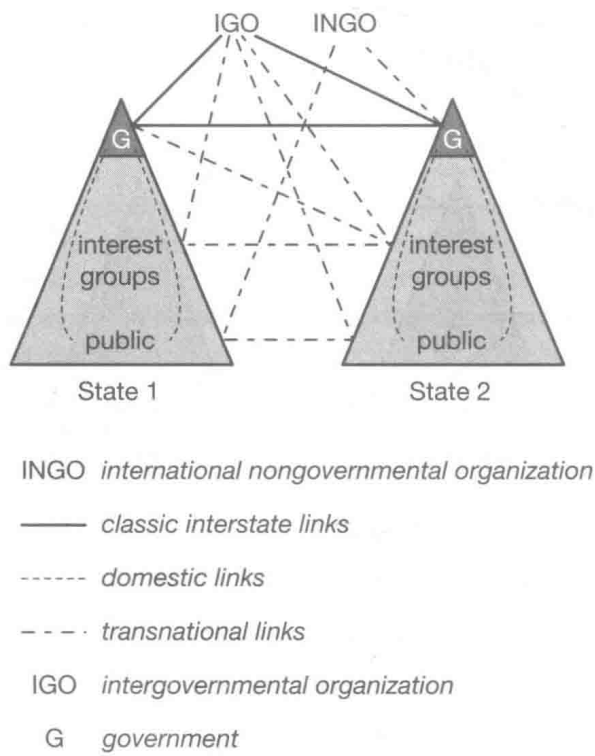
Source: Adapted from Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Transnational Relations and World Politics: An Introduction," *International Organization* (Summer 1971), 332–334.

> [I]ncreasing global interconnectedness now necessitates reaching beyond governments to citizens directly and broadening the U.S. foreign-policy portfolio to include issues once confined to the domestic sphere, such as economic and environmental regulation, drugs and disease, organized crime, and world hunger. As those issues spill across borders, the domestic agencies addressing them must now do more of their work overseas, operating out of embassies and consulates.[1]

Figure 1.2 presents a picture of a world in which external and domestic factors interact directly. The domestic pyramid of policy formation is penetrated at several levels, and links among governments and domestic groups are multiplied to reflect the complex exchanges that occur. Thus, there is interaction among interest groups at home and abroad and governments, among interest groups in different states, and among interest groups and both international organizations and nongovernmental organizations.

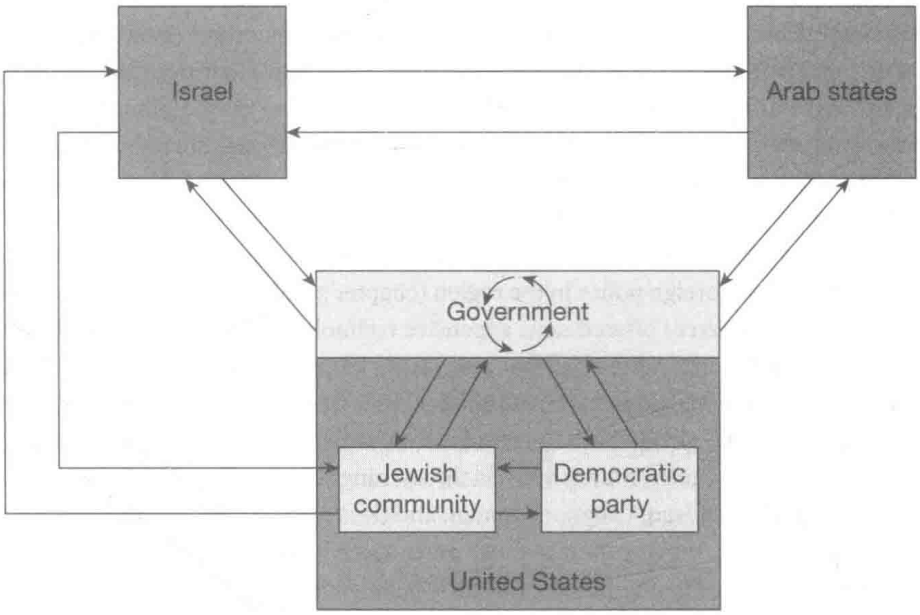
Israel poses an especially complicated problem for America in that every challenge the United States faces in the Middle East is in some fashion made more difficult by American support for that country—for

FIGURE 1.2 Model of Transnational World



Source: Adapted from Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Transnational Relations and World Politics: An Introduction," *International Organization* (Summer 1971), 332–334.

FIGURE 1.3 Communications Model of Israeli Recognition, 1948



Source: Raymond F. Hopkins and Richard W. Mansbach, *Structure and Process in International Politics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 135.

which there is a vocal domestic constituency—and the resentment that support generates within states in the region, including those on which the United States has long relied for oil to fuel its economy. Some of this complexity was reflected by American recognition of the State of Israel. Israel declared its statehood in 1948, a presidential election year in America. Both candidates had to take a position on the question of whether to recognize Israel, but it was especially important that Harry Truman, the incumbent Democrat, adopt a favorable attitude toward the new state because he sought Jewish political and financial support in key states like New York. For President Truman, Israelis constituted a significant constituency because of their links with America's Jewish community. Truman adopted a pro-Israeli policy, despite objections from the Departments of Defense and State, which feared that recognition of Israel would alienate oil-rich Arab states. Figure 1.3 represents schematically the links among groups in 1948 that interacted in relation to the question of recognizing Israel. Arrows represent the flow of communications among key actors. To understand Truman's decision, we would have to describe communications between him and other government officials, between the government and groups like the Jewish community and the Democratic Party, and between the U.S. government and those of other countries.

A similar link between the domestic and external arenas involving the Middle East was evident during the 2012 U.S. presidential election. In a televised debate on October 16, 2012, President Obama and Republican candidate Mitt Romney vigorously disputed the origins of the assault on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that climaxed with the death of America's ambassador. Earlier in the campaign, Governor

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