

Ana Luisa Fajer Flores, *The Middle East, a Window of Opportunity for Mexico*

The Middle East indubitably represents a window of opportunity for Mexico in its efforts to bolster the economic component of its foreign policy as an effective means of promoting the country's development. In her essay, Ana Luisa Fajer refers to accepted definitions of the term Middle East for purposes of Mexico's foreign policy before going on to discuss the factors that make this a strategically important region for Mexico, whose diplomatic relations with the major countries in this geographical area reflect bilateral ties of varying degrees in political, economic, commercial and cultural spheres. According to the author, the Middle East offers enormous opportunities for Mexican companies with the potential to invest there, plus the chance to foster exports and attract investment, particularly from Persian Gulf countries, in addition to promoting Mexico's tourism and cultural attractions. However, achieving this will depend on whether or not agreements can be reached at multilateral forums on issues relevant to Mexico and the extent to which we are able to avail ourselves of our existing network of diplomatic representation to promote Mexican exports and attract foreign investment, among other measures. Ana Luisa Fajer concludes by underlining some of the challenges the Middle East poses for Mexico in this respect, placing emphasis on the strategies that have been drawn up to address these.

María de Lourdes Sierra Kobeh, *The Lebanon at a Crossroads: Repercussions of the Israel-Hezbollah War on the Lebanese Political Scene*

The war between Israel and Hezbollah, and the repercussions it has had on Lebanon's political scene, is the topic of this article by María de Lourdes Sierra Kobeh. This recent confrontation is but part of a complex web of conflicts that have been several years in the making within the region and that have since spread beyond its borders, played out against the backdrop of the so-called "war on terrorism" instigated by the Bush administration in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks. More than a year and a half has passed since the clash between Israel and Hezbollah, marking the onset of a new political crisis for Lebanon since November 2006, as a result of the power struggle between the Lebanese government, headed by Fouad Siniora, and opposition forces spearheaded by Hezbollah, a Lebanese-based Shi'a Islamic organization. In a worst-case scenario, if not resolved, this conflict could lead to the outbreak of another civil war. So as to give us an idea of what exactly is at stake here, Sierra Kobeh analyzes the roots of the crisis, contributing factors and the agendas of the two blocs involved. The author then follows this up with an analysis of the recent war between Israel and Hezbollah in the context of the historical development of Lebanon —on whose soil the battle was waged—, underscoring the consequences the war has had on the country's home front.

Luis Mesa Delmonte, *Israel's Deterrence Capacity and the Lebanese War of 2006*

Israel's highly trained and bellicose military apparatus, armed with advanced intelligence and state-of-the-art technology,

both American-and Israeli-made, has traditionally served as an effective war deterrent in the region, particularly in light of its numerous military victories over the decades. Nonetheless, the author of this article believes Israel's military potential and its power to deter symmetrical armed conflicts has been called into question in recent years. This is especially true in the case of asymmetric warfare, which has forced Israel to rethink not only its combat strategies and methods, but its thought processes and policies in general. Mesa Delmonte mentions some of these new asymmetrical threats, such as the Palestinian uprisings, suicide "martyrological" bombings and the firing of primitive Qassam missiles, as a prelude to a more in-depth analysis of the war with Lebanon that broke out in the summer of 2006. Some of the factors that explain the highly developed asymmetric warfare capacity demonstrated by Hezbollah in this confrontation are discussed, along with the strategy employed by the Israeli Defense Forces and the errors that thwarted Israel's attempt to decapitate and destroy this Lebanon-based Shi'a Islamic political and paramilitary group. The author picks up on the threads of Israel's internal debate vis-à-vis the need to reinstate its dissuasive power, and discusses its attacks on Gaza and Syria. In Mesa Delmonte's view, beyond these new asymmetrical threats and Israel's pressing need to revert its "accumulated dissuasive deficit", emphasis must be placed on a negotiated solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, overturning traditional views that only force and a military balance can bring about peace in the region.

Luis Ortiz Monasterio C., *Deciphering Persia. Reflections on Today's Iran*

In this essay, Ortiz Monasterio reflects on contemporary Iran, a culturally and politically diverse country whose essence can

only be deciphered if we make a concerted effort to seek out better analytical tools and avoid the pitfall of accepting, without question, the simplistic views sold to us by the machinery of the mass media. According to the author, a more critical analysis such as this would reveal how the “soft power” approach to international relations Persians have been practicing since time immemorial is the cornerstone of Iran’s growing influence in regions where this brand of diplomacy is effective. The use of inappropriate analytical instruments poses the greatest obstacle to deciphering modern-day Iran, compounded by Western prejudices concerning Islam in general and Shi’a Islam in particular, clichés that are often taken to be indisputable truths. Deciphering Iran is essential to comprehending today’s complex geopolitical reality, but for countries like Mexico, it also has something to tell us about the underlying nature of power and culture in complex societies. As Ortiz Monasterio so rightly points out, Mexican culture is rich in syncretic expressions, which is why he believes the concept of Dialogue Among Civilizations could serve as a model for cultural exchange between nations with millenary traditions like Mexico and Iran, and a paradigm of understanding between every other country in the world.

Rodrigo Azaola, *Afghanistan: Seven Years Down the Road to Reconstruction*

The political reconstruction and pacification of Afghanistan have dragged on for seven years and while tangible improvements can be seen in some areas, a gradual deterioration is evident in others. Rodrigo Azaola points out that, in this context, the military approach to the reconstruction of the country has been erratic, and that the prestige and effectiveness

of the US-NATO coalition is losing ground, while Taliban rebels are recovering political and social terrain. According to the author, Afghanistan faces three main challenges in the medium term: the consolidation of a national army, the reorientation and coordination of the military tasks of foreign forces, and the drawing up of a strategy to prevent drug trafficking from eroding the country's institutions and society in general. However, these challenges can only be addressed by entering into dialogue with less radical wings of the Taliban and cooperating more closely with regional actors. Although the rebels pose no real military threat, they have proven capable of keeping their cause alive and remain active, recruiting combatants from other latitudes and, in global terms, constitute an ideological focal point for armed Islamic militancy. Azaola concludes that the battle for Afghanistan, a country whose viability has been shaken to its foundations by almost 30 years of continuous war, has repercussions that transcend its borders and the region itself, putting the operational capacity of international military alliances to the test and calling their political and diplomatic credibility into question.

Juan Manuel Portilla Gómez, *Islam, Terrorism and Human Rights*

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 spawned a spiral of violence, with terrorists and anti-terrorists turning the world into a merciless battlefield. In this essay, Juan Manuel Portilla Gómez looks at how the inappropriately dubbed “war” on Islamic terrorism has affected humanitarian law and human rights. A veritable crusade has been launched against thousands of foreign nationals, both in and beyond zones of conflict, giving rise to unsavory rumors about prisons like Guantánamo, Bagram

and Abu Gharib; reports of unjustified arrests, with most of the detainees accused of being involved in terrorist activities later being released; the handing over of suspects—in flagrant violation of their human rights—to governments in their countries of origin, where they will most likely be subjected to uncensored torture and other inhumane forms of treatment; and talk of “ghost and itinerant prisoners” and secret detention centers. Portilla Gómez believes that the Military Commissions set up by the United States deny alleged terrorists their right to a fair trial, lacking as they do autonomy and impartiality. Crimes of terrorism should not be brought to justice in this discriminatory manner, he says, but, by virtue of their very nature, should be sanctioned via the existing mechanisms of international humanitarian and criminal law, whether committed in times of war or peace.

Federico Perazza, *Uruguay and the Middle East Conflict*

In the 60 years since the United Nations was created, no other issue has demanded so much of the organization’s time and commitment as the Middle East conflict. Endless talks and negotiations have been held, and a great deal of effort has been channeled into follow-up activities. Since Israel was declared an independent state in 1948, it has been involved in no less than six wars with neighboring Arab states, with the ensuing loss of life (Israeli, Palestinian and Arab soldiers and civilians), not to mention the human desolation of the refugee camps that go hand-in-hand with the material destruction of war. In its ongoing search for a solution, the UN has been forced to implement concrete, effective measures to deal with the political, economic and humanitarian toll of these Arab-Israeli wars. Federico Perazza looks at the stance the UN has taken in the

face of such a complex and long-lasting conflict of inextricable political, economic, military, religious, territorial and strategic dimensions. To manage the conflict, the UN has resorted to peace-keeping operations, instruments not originally provided for in its Charter, but that have emerged as an ad hoc solution to the hostilities and wars unleashed since 1948. In this context, the author underlines the contribution of Uruguay—which played a prominent role in the partition of Palestine in 1947 and the subsequent creation of the State of Israel—to a peaceful solution to the conflict in the Middle East. Uruguayan troops have participated in peace-keeping missions in the zone, while the country has maintained a pacifistic vocation, as evidenced by the peace missions in SINAB and those established as a result of the conflicts between Iraq and Iran and Iraq and Kuwait.