



COLLECTION

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Deconstructing the Changing Middle East Security Architecture

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Words From the Editor

In recent years, the Middle East has undergone transformative changes with unprecedented geostrategic developments shaping a new regional security order amid heightened great power competition. From the U.S.-backed Abraham Accords and the Chinese-brokered Iran-Saudi deal to the impact of climate change and the Russian invasion of Ukraine on energy, water and food security, Middle Eastern countries are rethinking their alliances to adapt to a changing geopolitical environment on both the regional and international levels.

At this critical juncture, it is more important than ever to engage with various key stakeholders and exchange ideas around an inclusive Middle East order in which countries can co-exist in peace while strengthening their national resilience in the face of shared regional challenges. Thus, it is increasingly crucial for Western countries including Canada to take leadership in facilitating regional engagements and conversations, not only to gain first-hand knowledge of ongoing strategic debates but also to craft a more effective Middle East strategy that contributes to building a more peaceful, stable, and prosperous Middle East.

At the Institute for Peace and Diplomacy (IPD), we take immense pride in taking the initiative and establishing a platform, the Middle East Strategy Forum (MESF), that convenes dialogue and constructive engagement focused on the Middle East region. In this vein, we acknowledge the invaluable support of sponsors and donors, specifically the Canadian Department of National Defence (MINDS Program), which has made it possible for IPD to sustain and expand this Canadian platform, turning it into an internationally recognized forum for strategic discussion on the Middle East.

This policy-oriented compendium is also a product of the 2nd Annual Middle East Strategy Forum (MESF) we hosted in Ottawa last year. As the title precisely suggests, it aims to deconstruct the changing Middle East security architecture by featuring in-depth analyses from a diverse group of prominent experts on a broad range of topics. Particularly, this compendium will serve as a valuable knowledge resource for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners who are keen to gain nuanced perspectives on the role of great powers in the Middle East, Iran's nuclear program and the regional perception of it, water security and climate diplomacy, the Abraham Accords and the state of regional deterrence, the future of Afghanistan under the Taliban rule, and the new terrorism threat environment and counterterrorism strategies in the Middle East.

I hope this compendium inspires experts, scholars, policy analysts, and decision-makers – invested in peace and security in the Middle East – to seek further engagement with their counterparts, despite differences of views, to learn from one another and update their approaches in line with the fast-changing geopolitical environment in the region and beyond.

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Primer

ROXANE FARMANFARMAIAN



Primer

The strategic security landscape of the Middle East is undergoing rapid change, particularly in the Gulf. Local and regional forces are driving this new momentum. But it is the recalibration of great power influence that is the context in which the rebalancing of the region's security architecture is best understood. The diplomatic dynamism in the region contrasts with a low level of Western strategic engagement; it is instead China and Russia that are the global players currently active in the Middle East.

The recent announcement by Beijing that it had negotiated a deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran to restore relations and exchange ambassadors, was the most visible expression yet of the international and regional shifts that are resetting the security agenda in the Middle East. The United States, the traditional guarantor of security in the Gulf – via its vast bases in Bahrain and Qatar, and its significant arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – was left on the sidelines, unable to engage with Iran, a major key regional power, and thus to broker the rapprochement with the region's other powerhouse, Saudi Arabia.

Both local hegemonies have deep relationships and strategic commitments to states across the region. On the one hand, Iran supports proxy militias and alliances in what is often called the Shia Crescent, which stretches from Yemen through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, in adopting a more muscular foreign posture under the leadership of the young Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), has strengthened ties and is investing substantially in regional states such as Egypt, Lebanon, Libya and Morocco. Bringing these adversarial behemoths to the bargaining table has contributed first and foremost to a reduction in tensions in the Gulf, stabilizing smaller Gulf

states' concerns over their regime security. At the same time, it has rapidly galvanized talks between Tehran and Riyadh's closest neighbours, Manama and Abu Dhabi, spawning a new web of relationships that aims to reduce the negative impact of the two states' rivalry elsewhere including the war in Yemen, the political meltdown in Lebanon, and perhaps over time, the internal conflicts that persist in Syria and Iraq.

The recent announcement by Beijing that it had negotiated a deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran to restore relations and exchange ambassadors, was the most visible expression yet of the international and regional shifts that are resetting the security agenda in the Middle East.

The China-brokered deal inducted Beijing into the Great Power club of global peace-making, setting it apart from the Abraham Accords, facilitated by the US, which sought to recalibrate the Middle East's security architecture by forming an anti-Iran Arab-Israeli coalition in the region. This, however, was accompanied by a growing perception, particularly in the Gulf, of a drawdown of US commitments to regional security needs, prompting Washington's strongest Gulf allies to adopt hedging policies to diversify their risk containment strategies. The outbreak of the Ukraine War starkly highlighted the implications of this new ambivalence, with both the UAE and Saudi Arabia rejecting Washington's pleas for cheaper oil, and adopting a neutral stance toward Russia,



rather than aligning with the West in condemning the Russian invasion. Further policy parity with Russia, particularly through OPEC+, has followed.

Although the re-engagement of Iran and Saudi Arabia still needs testing, their revived diplomatic dialogue anticipates the possibility of addressing one of the Middle East's greatest dilemmas – the lack of an inclusive, cooperative regional security framework.

The Abraham Accords' inclusion of Israel into closer economic and technological engagement with its Arab neighbours was a critical step forward – and was followed by successful negotiations between Israel and Lebanon over a maritime border that will bring both states access to gas in the Mediterranean. Yet, the Accords' exclusion of Iran created an unbalanced regional security structure that not only failed to bring stability to the Gulf and the broader Middle East but also further intensified tensions between Iran and Israel with maritime security implications from the Gulf to the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. The Arab signatories in fact have increasingly made it clear that normalization of relations with Israel cannot be a zero-sum game as they do not want to be seen as conspiring in any overt aggression against Iran. For its part, Saudi Arabia has avoided joining the largely UAE-led Accords, deeming the moment too delicate, particularly in light of Israel's ongoing domestic turmoil. With China's entrance into the regional political matrix, Israel's position has now become more complicated, as any pre-emptive strike against Iran, previously

understood by Jerusalem as broadly in line with American policy goals, will now have to take account China's interests, as well as Saudi Arabia's.

Although the re-engagement of Iran and Saudi Arabia still needs testing, their revived diplomatic dialogue anticipates the possibility of addressing one of the Middle East's greatest dilemmas – the lack of an inclusive, cooperative regional security framework. Indeed, the Middle East is the only region in the world without a multilateral forum to host a discussion of transnational risks, including around arms proliferation, maritime security or threats posed by climate change. Various options have been floated in the past, including in 2019, when former Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif unveiled a Gulf-focused security proposal called the Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE), which set out an 'Action Plan' for confidence-building. It served as an alternative to the American-led security alliance, dubbed the Arab NATO plan, which itself countered the 2019 Russian proposal for an OSCE-like collective security programme aimed at including all regional states as well as the US, China, Russia and Europe.

It is important to note that the Straits of Hormuz, a crucial energy security chokepoint, is only 35 miles (55 km) wide between Saudi Arabia and Iran at its narrowest part. Most countries along its shores believe that an inclusive security framework in the Gulf is essential for ensuring future stability in the region. The US ambition to turn the Abraham Accords into a regional security framework that includes bilateral alliance agreements speaks to its recognition that a new security architecture is necessary, even if such a combination has yet to prove successful elsewhere and may be overly aspirational.

The revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which currently appears unlikely, could also potentially serve as a mechanism for developing a more comprehensive regional security



framework in the future. In 2015, when the JCPOA was first signed, the other Gulf states rejected it as threatening to their security. Yet, the lived experience of a sharp rise in regional tensions, which followed Washington's withdrawal from the deal in 2018, transformed their strategic positions vis-a-vis the nuclear deal with Iran. Whether it is the prospect of Iran's nuclear weaponization, or the entrenchment of the adversarial standoff between Israel, the region's only nuclear power, and Iran, an asymmetric power with extensive reach throughout the region, the Middle East very well understands that alternative scenarios, in the absence of a renewed nuclear deal, appear increasingly threatening to their security at both national and regional levels.

The restoration of Saudi-Iran relations has already alleviated some of the pressure resulting from Iran's growing isolation from the West as a result of its internal turmoil and tilt toward Russia in the wake of the Ukraine war. As tensions rise between Iran and Israel, with the US providing little brake on Jerusalem and no obvious off-ramp, regional dialogue with Iran is being recognized as crucial to Gulf security not only by Saudi Arabia but also by an increasingly engaged China.

Although the exact path forward is still uncertain, two key insights have emerged. First, the prevailing regional belief is that an inclusive security framework is the sole viable option for lasting peace and stability in the region. Second, there exists an opportunity for Canada and other Western countries to engage more proactively with the Middle East to foster both bilateral and multilateral dialogue in the region as a means to help develop a more cooperative security architecture.

A photograph of Donald Trump and three other men in suits, smiling and holding large, signed documents. The man on the far left is partially visible, wearing glasses and a red tie. The man next to him has white hair and a blue tie. Donald Trump is in the center, with his characteristic blonde hair, wearing a dark suit and a red and blue striped tie. The man on the far right has dark hair and a mustache, wearing a red patterned tie. They are all holding large, framed documents with signatures. The background is blurred green foliage.

The Abraham Accords: Iceberg Surfacing for Peace and Security in the Middle East

ASSAF ORION



Abstract

The Abraham Accords were a formal manifestation of the true underlying reality in the Middle East, which until their signature was poorly represented by explicit diplomacy and declaration. Their main importance is recognizing Israel's natural and self-evident role in the region, expanding the economic relations with it, and shedding light on the non-public security relations already in place, augmented by Israel's move to US CENTCOM. Expectations that the Accords will translate into solid and formal security alliances are exaggerated and surely premature, yet much has been achieved on bilateral levels and with low profile, and much more can be attained. The keys to tapping the new potentials in the Middle East are a long-term Western commitment to regional partnerships, between regional and international partners and among themselves, adaptation of ways and means to current global challenges, including climate change and great power competition and supporting the growth of partners' capabilities in accordance with their unique position and nature.

Background

On 13 August 2020, US President Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and UAE Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Zaid issued a joint declaration about the Abraham Accords, normalizing relations between Israel and several regional countries.¹ In the following months, four Arab states established formal relations with the State of Israel, the first widening of the regional peace architecture since Egypt and Jordan signed their treaties of peace in 1979 and 1994, respectively.

The signatories of the Abraham Accords, the US, Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan thus

showed that the agreements better serve their national interests than adhering to the historical dogma, maintaining that normalizing relations with Israel should only follow the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Accords were achieved after several historic and strategic trends had converged in the changing Middle East: a decade of regional turmoil ("Arab Spring") sharpened domestic challenges and gave rise to Islamist threats and upheaval, as well as Jihadi terror, such as ISIS; Iran evidently became a main source of national and regional security threats to most Middle Eastern countries; the US was perceived as "leaving" the region, fatigued by long conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq and amid its growing rivalry with China and later farther distracted by Russia's war on Ukraine; Palestinian intransigence has eroded support for the Palestinian cause among Arab leaders, no longer willing to put the latter first at the expense of their own national interests; Israel is increasingly being recognized as a potential partner rather than an enemy, with its various resources answering regional needs; and finally, the Trump administration was willing both to suggest a new alternative strategic approach to the old paradigm ("Palestinians first, normalization later") and to propose US benefits as part of the deal, such as F-35s for the UAE, recognition of Western Sahara as part of Morocco, and delisting Sudan as a supporter of terrorism. President Biden's mid-July visit to Israel and to Saudi Arabia continued this strategic vector, emphasizing Washington's effort to advance closer integration of the regional network, including Israel, seeking both to address regional challenges and to offset other powers' influence, especially China and Russia, in the region.²

¹ U.S. Department of State. "The Abraham Accords." August 13, 2020. <https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/>

² Biden, Joe. "Joe Biden: Why I'm going to Saudi Arabia." *The Washington Post*. July 9, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opin->



A view across the Gulf shows various approaches to relations with Israel on civilian issues: from the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco exchanging embassies with Israel, to Qatar's activity with Israel short of diplomatic relations and Saudi Arabia opening its airspace to Israeli flights yet holding fuller relations till better conditions unfold.³ This variety in approaches is relevant to both civilian affairs and security relations, where low and high-profile activities take place according to the partners' sensitivities and policy preferences.

While most of the new relations are about the economy, tourism, people-to-people relations and diplomacy, much has been written and said about the security and defence aspects of the Accords, from describing them as a "bloc" against Iran, through discussion of a Middle East Air Defense (MEAD) Alliance and Middle East Security Alliance (MESA) and even a "Middle East NATO". Israel's move from EUCOM to CENTCOM under the updated Unified Command Plan (UCP) of the United States was another step towards stronger defence cooperation among America's partners and allies in the region.⁴

The Abraham Accords: Assessing the Security Dimension

Against the multiple expectations for improved security and defence arrangements following the Abraham Accords, a reality check is needed, answering some of the following questions: how realistic are the expectations? How far can these cooperation vectors go, and under which

[ions/2022/07/09/joe-biden-saudi-arabia-israel-visit/](https://www.inss.org.il/2022/07/09/joe-biden-saudi-arabia-israel-visit/)

3 Ben-Shabbat, Meir and Aaronson, David. "The Abraham Accords, Two Years On: Impressive Progress, Multiple Challenges, and Promising Potential." *INSS*. August 15, 2022.

4 Orion, Assaf and Dekel, Udi. "Winds of Change: Israel Joins the US Central Command Area." *INSS*. January 20, 2021.

frameworks? What are the supporting factors and what are the obstacles and impediments to their advancement? What does this mean for regional security, for the Western role in it and for the strategic competition among the great powers, regionally and globally?

It may be important to begin by acknowledging that security cooperation between Israel and regional countries has long preceded the formal Accords.

It may be important to begin by acknowledging that security cooperation between Israel and regional countries has long preceded the formal Accords. Intelligence relations have historically served as low-profile but high-benefit channel for cooperation, away from the public limelight, followed by defence and military contacts and sales. The main drivers for security relations, among the geo-strategic aspects described above, were shared concerns about Iran's multiple threats, growing demand for defence capabilities that Israel masters, and sufficient trust built by years of quiet exchanges.

Yet these complementing elements fall short of the various "alliances" envisioned since the Accords, due to several strategic factors.⁵ Politically, the Gulf States vary on interests, agendas and priorities in general, and tensions between them run deep, as could be seen in the yearslong crisis between KSA, UAE, Bahrain and Qatar. Strategically, their perception of Iran's threat differs – among

5 Abu-Ghazleh, Muhammad. "A Middle Eastern NATO Appears Necessary, but Not Yet Possible." *The Washington Institute*. July 18, 2022.



themselves and compared to Israel, as do their appetite for risk and their national capabilities and strategic cultures.

Politically, the Gulf States vary on interests, agendas and priorities in general, and tensions between them run deep.

The willingness of these parties to fight for each other is doubtful or limited. The war in Yemen exposed the limits of cooperation even among Arab coalition members, as the UAE gradually left the fighting, leaving its Saudi partners alone against the Houthis and their Iranian backers. The F-35 deal, which may have been cancelled by the UAE, reflected the Gulf States' position between the great powers, and their reluctance to ditch their economic relations (alongside 5G communications and arms acquisition) with China to allow advanced US defence systems security.

The Current State of Play

Reportedly, since the Abraham Accords and Israel's move to CENTCOM, several naval exercises were held in the Red Sea⁶, and an Israeli Navy officer is positioned in Manama, Bahrain, as a liaison to NAVCENT but probably also to the Bahraini hosts. In 2021 Iranian drones were shot down on their way to Israel – two in neighbouring countries by IAF F-35s⁷ and in 2022 two over Iraq by USAF

6 NAVCENT Public Affairs. "U.S., Israel Begin Maritime Exercise in Red Sea ." *U.S. Central Command*. August 1, 2022. <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/News-Article-View/Article/3113137/us-israel-begin-maritime-exercise-in>

7 Fabian, Emanuel. "The Times of Israel." *IDF says its F-35 jets intercepted 2 Iranian drones ferrying arms to Gaza last year*. March 6, 2022. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-says-f-35-jets-intercepted-iranian-drones-destined-for-gaza-last-year/>

jets⁸, reflecting already active and effective regional security arrangements. Following the Houthi drone attack on the UAE, Emirati cargo planes were reported in Israel, probably as part of relevant air defence systems transfers.⁹ The Israel Defense Forces' Chief of the General Staff had been hosted by Chairman Dunford in a chiefs of defence meeting before the Accords, but now these meetings are easier for the Arab partners to attend. A regional Chiefs of Defense meeting was held in June in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt¹⁰ and another took place in Israel in mid-September.

Architecture also matters. Experience shows that the wider the participation, the shallower the cooperation and slower the progress, as parties hesitate to be exposed before their neighbours, managing the risk through need-to-know partnership and deniability. Bilateral ties are the most conducive to intimate exchanges and cooperation, and the addition of even a close third partner is not always for the best. On the other hand, multilateral fora sometimes allow actors to mitigate public exposure by joining a larger group, enjoying the legitimacy of larger numbers.

The Path Forward: Policy Recommendations

Strategically, while the US focus remains on China and Russia as the main challenges, the Middle East

8 Kubovich, Yaniv. "Iranian Drones Downed Over Iraq Were en Route to Strike Israeli Targets, Officials Believe." *Haaretz*. March 21, 2022. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-03-21/ty-article/.premium/officials-iranian-drones-downed-over-iraq-were-headed-to-strike-israeli-targets/00000180-5bc7-dee0-afd6-7bdfb130000>

9 Ahronheim, Anna. "Eight heavy transport aircraft belonging to UAE landed in Israel in past two weeks." *The Jerusalem Post*. April 30, 2022. <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-705478>

10 Gordon, Michael R. and Cloud, David S. "U.S. Held Secret Meeting With Israeli, Arab Military Chiefs to Counter Iran Air Threat." *The Wall Street Journal*. June 26, 2022. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-held-secret-meeting-with-israeli-arab-military-chiefs-to-counter-iran-air-threat-11656235802>



is still a vital region for global security and a theatre for competition between great powers. The US would do well to re-posture its military presence in the region, allowing it to pursue its interests in it through a different force footprint, lowering cost and risk. Western allies' contributions can be adapted to the new US posture, although they, too, are constrained by great power challenges in Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

To be able to shift some assets elsewhere, building partner capability and capacity is a key factor in potential load-sharing. Not all partners are equal, but many of them enjoy unique advantages. Israel can play a larger role in intelligence support, logistics and even some offensive operations, as in building partner capacity in the region and beyond. In fact, Israel has already been striking ISIS targets in the region, helping its neighbours and saving anti-ISIS coalition efforts. Other partners may be less eager to engage in offensive operations, but their assets can supplement or complement Western in-theatre assets. Western partners can play a larger role in promoting regional partners' national capabilities and cooperation between them.

Iran's ballistic missiles, drones and cruise missiles are an evident threat to many regional actors. Regional air defence as an integrated system is a tall order, due to the technical, security and geographic dimensions of such integration. Yet lower steps of synergy, as mentioned, are already in the works. Intelligence can provide indications for threats and forward and long-range radars can give earlier warning and deeper awareness, with US CENTCOM as the integrating agent in a regional architecture. On air defences, one may envision a gradual growth of regional capabilities and interconnectivity. US and Israeli systems already protect some partners' skies, as can be inferred from reported THAAD and Spider systems in the Emirates and more can be provided

down the road. Deeper into the future, Israel's advances on laser-based air defence systems may be boosted by Gulf funding and US production, augmenting the multi-tier defence architecture already in place. Gulf resources may also fund common ammunition reserves under CENTCOM stewardship, to include precision arms, such as JDAMs and missile interceptors for use in case of emergency.

To be able to shift some assets elsewhere, building partner capability and capacity is a key factor in potential load-sharing. Not all partners are equal.

Security improvements along the Abraham Accords may seek to widen the regional perspective to include an Indian Ocean element, as can be seen in the political-economic I2U2 Quad between India, Israel, the US and UAE. They can also seek to strengthen the peace architecture in the region, including by integrating the Accords' signatories in peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts. As Israel recently concurred to Saudi control of the Tiran and Sanafir Islets', handed over by Egypt and covered by the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty, Gulf countries may contribute to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in Sinai, bolstering one of the most successful peacekeeping missions in the world.¹¹ Additional contributions may seek partners' and signatories' support to further build Palestinian security forces' capability in advancing counter-terrorism, self-governance and improved conditions for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian

11 Assaf. "UAVs and the Abraham Accords: New Horizons for Sinai Peacekeeping." *The Washington Institute*. January 13, 2021. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/uavs-and-abraham-accords-new-horizons-sinai-peacekeeping>



conflict in the future.

Structurally, with the abovementioned supporting factors and obstacles in mind, it is wiser and more practical to make the main advances on bilateral (Israel-Arab, US-Arab) channels, expanding to trilateral when useful, and progressing to multilateral when possible.

Conclusion

The Abraham Accords were a formal manifestation of the true underlying reality in the Middle East, which until then was poorly represented by explicit diplomacy and declaration. Their main importance is by recognizing Israel's self-evident role in the region, expanding economic relations with it, and shedding light on the non-public security relations already in place. Expectations that the Accords will translate into solid and formal security alliances are exaggerated and surely premature, yet much has been achieved on bilateral levels and on low profile, and much more can be done. The key to tapping the new potentials in the Middle East is a long-term Western commitment to regional partnerships, adaptation of ways and means to current global challenges and supporting the growth partners' capabilities in accordance with each of their unique position and nature. Expanding multiple bilateral partnerships to trilateral, quad-lateral and multilateral frameworks has the potential to improve regional capabilities to protect against common threats and relieve US forces to face more pressing strategic challenges elsewhere.

The Benefits of Counterterrorism Restraint in a Diminished Terrorism Threat Environment

MAX ABRAHMS





Abstract

When should the United States and other Western allies like Canada use kinetic operations to counter-terrorism threats? No foreign policy question has been more important since the September 11, 2001, attacks, particularly when it comes to formulating Middle East policy. In such rare historical cases, the urgency of the threat answers this question. But today's international terrorism threat is not "blinking red," making our counterterrorism response less clear. Based on all indicators, international terrorism remains a problem but does not seem quite as urgent. So, what should America and its Western partners do about it in our seemingly diminished terrorism threat environment today where the decision to employ military power beyond drone strikes is cloudy? This brief policy paper develops four empirical and theoretical reasons from the political science literature as to why an over-active counterterrorism response in a diminished threat environment is problematic.

Background

When should the United States and Western allies like Canada use kinetic operations to counter-terrorism threats? No foreign policy question has been more important since the September 11, 2001 attacks, particularly when it comes to formulating Middle East policy. In rare cases, the urgency of the threat answers this question. The decision to go after Al Qaeda in Afghanistan in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 was a no-brainer. Replace George W. Bush with any other American president and the response would have been essentially the same. Although the twenty-year occupation of Afghanistan would not have happened under different American leadership, the decision to target Al Qaeda's leaders after the worst terrorist attack in history was automatic, inevitable, and

wise. The same is true of the decision to target the Islamic State (ISIS) once it became clear that the group was attracting thousands of foreign fighters from around the world and was intent on striking globally outside of the region. But today's international terrorism threat is not "blinking red," making our counterterrorism response less clear. Based on all indicators, international terrorism remains a problem but does not seem quite as urgent. So, what should America and its Western partners do about it?

Al Qaeda and ISIS are now shadows of their former selves. Al Qaeda never fully recovered from the loss of Osama bin Laden just like ISIS never recovered from the loss of its Caliphate. Sure, the typical caveats are in order: Even a lone wolf or small cell can cause substantial terror; jihadist ideologies are still alive; and important pockets of fighters remain from the Levant to the Horn of Africa to Afghanistan. The point is that we are seemingly in a diminished terrorism threat environment today where the decision to employ military power beyond drone strikes is cloudy.

This is true for four main reasons for which there is growing empirical and theoretical support within the political science literature.

Four Problems with Counterterrorism Overreaction

First, the paradox of counterterrorism is it often spurs more terrorism. This intuition has been made plenty of times before, but I find statistical evidence for it. My studies on the policy of "leadership decapitation" demonstrate that militant leaders frequently restrain the rank-and-file, so taking them out can make their groups even more extreme in their targeting choices. Without the leader communicating which targets to avoid, punishing transgressors and vetting out



rogue operatives, they're freer to act on their own initiative to attack civilians.¹

In my book, *Rules for Rebels: The Science of Victory in Militant History*, I detail how numerous militant groups became less restrained upon losing their leaders.² In 1954, the British launched "Operation Anvil" to stamp out the Mau-Mau uprising. Capturing their leaders around Nairobi initiated a period of uncoordinated, rudderless violence. The Provisional Irish Republican Army also became more violent after the leaders got arrested in the early 1970s. When Filipino police assassinated its founder Abdurajak Janjalani in 1998, the Abu Sayyaf group devolved into a movement of bandits that increasingly preyed on private citizens. When the Israel Defense Forces killed al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade leaders during the Second Intifada, the Palestinian terrorist group increased its attacks against Israeli civilians. When Nigerian police summarily executed its founder Mohammed Yusuf in 2009, Boko Haram also became more ruthless towards civilians. The Salafist rebel group Ahrar al-Sham also became more extreme after a 2014 attack on its headquarters in the northwestern province of Idlib, Syria took out the leadership.

Of course, some militant leaders like Osama bin Laden and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi were so extreme that their successors could not be worse. In such cases, the logic of decapitation strikes is strong. And I find statistical evidence that indeed militant groups are no more likely to use terrorism in the immediate aftermath of an operationally successful targeted killing of a maximally extreme leader. The risk is when the leader is bad, but more moderate than subordinates.³ The key is for national militaries to understand the relationship of the leadership to potential successors before electing to take it out.

The risk is when the leader is bad, but more moderate than subordinates. The key is for national militaries to understand the relationship of the leadership to potential successors before electing to take it out.

Second, terrorists often want to provoke government overreaction. As David Rapoport notes decades ago, terrorists have historically used the "politics of atrocity" to "produce counter-atrocities rebounding to the advantage of the original assailant."⁴ Russian anarchists and the Algerian National Liberation Front tried to elicit heavy-handed counterterrorism measures in order to erode the target government's popular support and attract more terrorists. The main constraint of terrorists is their structural weakness compared to the government. Overreaction strengthens terrorists relative to the government for two reasons. The overreaction convinces those on the sidelines that the government is as extreme as the terrorists allege, growing their supporters and ultimately membership rosters.⁵ And the harming of innocents can convince them that the government will target them regardless of whether they commit terrorism, strengthening the strategic logic of engaging in this violent behaviour.⁶ Terrorist leaders may not have a sophisticated understanding of those two causal mechanisms, but realize that eliciting an overreaction can help them out organizationally at the expense of the government.

Third, whereas government excesses help terrorists, terrorist excesses help the government.

1 Abrahms and Potter, 2015; Abrahms and Mierau, 2017.

2 Abrahms, 2018.

3 Abrahms, 2018.

4 Rapoport, 1992, p. 1192.

5 Lake, 2002.

6 Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007.



Although a vast theoretical literature in political science purports to show the strategic utility of terrorism,⁷ empirical work demonstrates that the non-state attacks on civilians tend to backfire by strengthening the resolve of the target country,⁸ lowering the odds of government concessions,⁹ eroding popular support,¹⁰ and expediting organizational demise.¹¹ Terrorism is self-regulating behaviour with inherent limits that can reduce the need for a kinetic counterterrorism response. The biggest counterterrorism successes – from the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria to the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya to the Islamic State – are often due to the excesses of the terrorists themselves.

The biggest counterterrorism successes – from the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria to the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya to the Islamic State – are often due to the excesses of the terrorists themselves.

Fourth, even substantial counterterrorism investments generally yield disappointing returns. Afghanistan is currently on the brink of mass starvation, the Taliban has returned to power, and women are again imprisoned under Sharia law. Iraq is on the verge of another civil war. In Somalia, the Sahel, Mozambique and other areas of Africa, militant group behaviour is actually

on the rise.¹² Of course, there is a selection issue where America is liable to fight in countries with the kinds of endemic problems that produce protracted violence. But this does not change the reality about the limits of American military power.

The Path Forward: Policy Recommendations

These conflicts, though disastrous locally and still dangerous internationally, do not currently require the post-9/11 or ISIS treatment. But will they? Specifically, how much can America afford to ignore them? Unfortunately, the field of political science offers few answers. For all the studies published after 9/11, there is scant research on when transnational terrorist concerns are expected to graduate into full-fledged national security emergencies. Short of mass casualty attacks on the homeland or the surging of sociopathic militant groups with designs on American bloodshed, it is unclear when the U.S. should use its military for counterterrorism purposes. Nonetheless, the aforementioned research suggests four counterterrorism implications for addressing terrorism in the Middle East and beyond in the current threat environment.

First, the U.S. and its allies must be careful not to adopt kinetic operations that exacerbate the terrorism threat by making the mistake of targeting militant leaders whose successors will be even more extreme. To reduce the likelihood, greater research must be conducted on the extremeness of both extant leaders and subordinates to better determine whether targeted killings are liable to result in the production of even more terrorism. This may seem like common sense, but national militaries are not in the habit of making such assessments, perhaps because they are unfamiliar

⁷ Abrahms, 2019.

⁸ Abrahms, 2006; Berrebi and Klor, 2008; Chowanietz, 2011; Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014.

⁹ Abrahms, 2012, 2013; Gaibullov and Sandler, 2009; and Getmansky and Sinmazdemir, 2012.

¹⁰ Reich, 1990.

¹¹ Lahoud et al., 2012.

¹² Mroszczyk and Abrahms, 2021.



with the latest research on the determinants of leadership decapitation success.

Second, the U.S. and allies must avoid not only empowering more radical leadership replacements, but also inadvertently strengthening militant groups. In practice, this means exercising targeting restraint to ensure that counterterrorism operations steer clear of civilians. Harming civilians grows terrorist supporters not only by creating grievances, but also by convincing civilians that the government is as extreme as the terrorists allege and will be treated as such regardless of whether they perpetrate violence.

Third, the U.S. and allied governments should recognize that indiscriminate terrorist violence, while totally unacceptable, tends to erode the support of its perpetrators. Governments along with the private sector must exploit this politically counterproductive behaviour by highlighting its disastrous effects on the population, thereby reducing terrorist support.

Fourth, the U.S. national security establishment must recognize the limits and costs of post-9/11 American military interventions that were sold in the name of counterterrorism security but did not enhance it and even harmed it. In general, greater thought must go into where and how America should respond to terrorism, particularly in today's ostensibly reduced threat environment.

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A man in a brown and green camouflage military uniform, wearing a matching cap and a full beard, is the central figure. He holds a white flag with the Taliban emblem and Arabic calligraphy. A Motorola walkie-talkie is clipped to his vest. In the background, other soldiers in similar uniforms are visible, along with military vehicles and flags, suggesting a public demonstration or military presence.

Afghanistan and the Taliban's Second Coming: The Need for a Concerted International Response

AHMAD FARID TOOKHY



Abstract

A year after the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, the international community is still grappling with formulating a response to the situation in the country. A central issue is how to reconcile counter-terrorism with the urgency to support the people of Afghanistan. This dilemma will persist as long as the Taliban hold exclusive control over the Afghan state. Diplomacy with the Taliban by individual states is unlikely to make the group modify its positions in response to international demands. Only a formalized and unified approach to diplomacy with the group, preferably mediated by the United Nations, stands the chance of yielding political outcomes that are acceptable both to the people of Afghanistan and to major regional and global players.

Background

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 has resulted in a complex situation, leaving the world in a quandary about how to respond simultaneously to the terrorist threats emanating from the country and the humanitarian crisis afflicting its people. Two related dilemmas present themselves: the first is how to deal with the Taliban and the security threats originating from Taliban-ruled Afghanistan without harming the Afghan people; the second is how to support the people of Afghanistan without aiding or legitimizing the Taliban.

The Taliban's assumption of power in Afghanistan has complicated the enforcement of preexisting international sanctions against the group, leading to much controversy about their knock-on effects. With sanctioned individuals and entities in charge of the institutions of the Afghan state, sanctions are effectively transferred to the already vulnerable population of Afghanistan. In

particular, the provision of humanitarian aid has become problematic as no one can guarantee that such aid would not end up benefitting—directly or indirectly—the sanctioned individuals and entities.

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Some ad-hoc measures have been taken to mitigate the humanitarian and economic crises in the country. For instance, through a pipeline established to transfer cash to Afghanistan, the UN has thus far imported over one billion dollars into Afghanistan to support humanitarian operations.¹ The United States has issued several general licenses to facilitate aid delivery.² In September, it also transferred half of the Afghan central bank's frozen assets to a recently-established Swiss-based Afghan Fund.³ But while these measures might somewhat facilitate the provision of aid in

1 "The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security," Quarterly Report (The United Nations, September 14, 2022), https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/220914_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.485.pdf.

2 "Fact Sheet: Provision of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan and Support for the Afghan People" (U.S. Department of the Treasury, April 13, 2022), https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/126/afg_fact-sheet_20220413.pdf.

3 "Joint Statement by U.S. Treasury and State Department: The United States and Partners Announce Establishment of Fund for the People of Afghanistan," U.S. Department of the Treasury, accessed September 26, 2022, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0947>.



the short term, they cannot serve as long-term solutions to Afghanistan's humanitarian and economic needs.

Policy Debate

The question of what kind of response might be needed to deal with the situation in Afghanistan has been the subject of much commentary over the past year. The proffered policy recommendations converge under one of two broad analytical rubrics: opposing the Taliban, or engaging with the group.⁴ The Taliban's actions over the past year and their continued affiliation with international terrorist groups have led to calls for a more oppositional international stance toward the group.

The fact that the Taliban rules over a population of forty million, that Afghanistan is grappling with a deep economic and humanitarian crisis, and that a host of international terrorist groups operate in the country—all these cold hard facts suggest that opposing the Taliban would carry further humanitarian and security risks.

Several factors, however, militate against a policy of outright opposition to the Taliban. The fact that the Taliban rules over a population of forty million, that Afghanistan is grappling with a

deep economic and humanitarian crisis, and that a host of international terrorist groups operate in the country—all these cold hard facts suggest that opposing the Taliban would carry further humanitarian and security risks.

Moreover, there is no appetite or political will for a renewed round of military intervention in Afghanistan. Even if such political will existed, the two-decade-long US-led military campaign in the country demonstrates the disutility of a military response to the situation in Afghanistan. Undermining the Taliban risks plunging the country into yet another cycle of full-fledged civil war—a scenario that could end up boosting terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISIS-K) while aggravating Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis.

Surely, a policy of engagement with the Taliban has its own limitations and downsides. The group's ideology, its violations of human rights,⁵ as well as its social policies—especially restrictions on women and girls—mean that engagement with the group would entail domestic political costs for almost any government that chooses to do so. It is no surprise that more than a year after the Taliban's return to power, not a single country has formally recognized their government.

Engagement has become even more difficult and limited by the sanctions regime in place and the Taliban's continued close affinity with other terrorist groups. The United Nations Security Council has imposed sanctions on 135 senior members of the Taliban.⁶ The United States has

4 James Dobbins, Andrew Radin, and Laurel E. Miller, "Engage, Isolate, or Oppose: American Policy Toward the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" (RAND Corporation, May 26, 2022), See, for example, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1540-1.html>.

5 "Human Rights in Afghanistan: 15 August 2021 to 15 June 2022" (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, July 2022), https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_human_rights_in_afghanistan_report_-_june_2022_english.pdf.

6 "Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities," n.d., <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/>



placed the Taliban and the Haqqani Network on its list of specially designated terrorist groups while designating the latter as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) as well.⁷ Canada has designated the Taliban as a terrorist group.⁸

These designations, however, do not seem to have swayed the Taliban's decision-making calculus. In May, the UN reported⁹ that the Taliban had appointed forty-one of the individuals on the Security Council's sanctions list to the cabinet and other top positions in the government. They included the prime minister, his three deputies, and fourteen ministers. Members of the influential Haqqani Network were also appointed to key positions within security institutions.

Policy Recommendations

Despite the foregoing risks and limitations, engagement with the Taliban remains the only practical way forward for dealing with the worsening crisis in Afghanistan. Deputy UN Special Representative in Afghanistan, Markus Potzel, began his recent briefing to the UN Security Council by stating that "patience is running out by many in the international community regarding a strategy of engagement with Afghanistan's Taliban authorities." He ended his briefing, however, by noting that "continued qualified engagement"

[sanctions/1267](#).

7 "Afghanistan-Related Sanctions," U.S. Department of the Treasury, February 25, 2022, <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/financial-sanctions/faqs/951>.

8 Global Affairs Canada, "Canadian Sanctions Related to Terrorist Entities, Including Al-Qaida and the Taliban," GAC, October 19, 2015, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/sanctions/terrorists-terroristes.aspx?lang=eng.

9 "Thirteenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2611 (2021) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace Stability and Security of Afghanistan" (United Nations Security Council, May 26, 2022), <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2073803/N2233377.pdf>.

stood the most realistic chance of promoting a governing arrangement in Afghanistan that would benefit the country's people while respecting international norms.¹⁰

The crucial point is the character of engagement with the Taliban and its overall objective. Engagement with the Taliban must be done through a UN-mediated formal mechanism aimed at the formation of an inclusive governing arrangement in Afghanistan. Diplomacy with the Taliban by individual states is unlikely to make the group modify its positions in response to international demands. Through such one-to-one diplomacy with the Taliban, individual states seek to secure their short-term interests in Afghanistan. This pattern of one-on-one engagement with the Taliban will likely lead to intensified geopolitical competition in Afghanistan. It will also allow the Taliban to withstand international pressures by entering into distinct quid-pro-quo arrangements with individual countries.

Only a formalized and unified approach to diplomacy with the Taliban stands the chance of yielding political outcomes that are acceptable both to the people of Afghanistan and to major regional and global players. The United Nations should adopt a more proactive approach to the situation in Afghanistan. In this regard, one option is the revival of the old 6+2 forum, involving Afghanistan's neighbors plus the US and Russia. Other interested and influential states from the region and beyond may be invited to this forum as well.

The guiding principle of this formalized, concerted engagement should be the formation of a more moderate, inclusive government in Afghanistan. The establishment of such a government can help

10 "Briefing by Deputy Special Representative Markus Potzel to the Security Council," UNAMA, September 27, 2022, <https://unama.unmissions.org/briefing-deputy-special-representative-markus-potzel-security-council-0>.



realize the twin goals of countering terrorism and mitigating the humanitarian disaster. An inclusive government is also the most effective means of protecting the basic rights of the Afghan people. It can set the stage for the gradual normalization of relations with the Afghan government, which can in turn help reduce the severity of the country's humanitarian and economic crises.

None of these goals are achievable as long as the Taliban hold a monopoly over the Afghan state. The Taliban's ideology, history, links with international terrorist groups, and resistance to softening their positions in the face of domestic and international pressures— all these factors mean that as long as the group holds exclusive control over the Afghan state, the country will remain mired in the current deadlock.

Conclusion

Obviously, there is no silver bullet that can resolve the multiple crises facing Afghanistan at the moment. Almost any course of action, including diplomacy with the Taliban, will carry certain costs and risks. The fact that a host of regional and global powers, with competing interests, can and do influence the course of events in Afghanistan further complicates the search for a viable solution. But, in part for this reason, concerted international action is required to address the current precarious situation in the country effectively.

For decades, Afghanistan has been a site of contestation among external powers. Geopolitical competitions, both regional and global, have played a major role in destroying the country and uprooting its people. But just as international conflicts have wrecked the country, international cooperation is needed to restore some measure of normalcy to Afghanistan. Such cooperation is certainly not assured, as the history of the past few decades shows. Yet, any serious attempt at

responding to the current situation requires close international cooperation and coordination.

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Climate and Water Security: Opportunities for Diplomacy and Cooperation in the Middle East

MOHAMMED MAHMOUD



Abstract

The Middle East and North Africa region experiences water scarcity largely due to a hotter and drier climate that produces low annual rainfall with limited existing surface water and groundwater supplies. The arid climate has inflated water use to meet drinking water needs, cooling requirements, and agricultural food production in the region. Climate change has posed the greatest threat to water security, with current and projected amplifications in drought, extreme heat, extreme weather events, flooding, and sea level rise increasing the risk of constraining water availability further. There is much potential to improve the current water management policies and practices in the region to better meet the scale of the water security challenges caused by climate change. Improving transboundary water relations to mitigate disputes and conflicts, reducing over-reliance on rapidly depleting groundwater supplies, and ramping up regional efforts to adapt to the water-related impacts of climate change are important steps toward enhancing water security for the region. Several detailed actions are recommended to materialize these steps:

1. Incentivizing cooperation in transboundary watersheds to develop climate-resilient water-sharing agreements,
2. Development of more water augmentation and water conservation projects, and
3. Better leveraging of existing funding mechanisms to pursue more water-centric climate adaptation initiatives.

Background

When it comes to water resources, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is naturally water-scarce due to its predominant warm desert

climate. Surface water systems in the region are few with the two prime examples being the Nile River Basin and the Tigris-Euphrates River System. Both of these major surface watersheds rely on precipitation at their headwaters to produce the streamflow that sustains those rivers. In both river systems, the headwaters are in higher elevations (the Ethiopian highlands for the Nile River and the mountains of Eastern Turkey for the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers) – meaning that precipitation in those areas accumulates as snowpack before contributing water to the river as snowmelt.

The average annual rainfall across the region is well below the global average (approximately 1,000 mm per year). According to the most recent annual data (2017) from the World Bank¹, the average annual rainfall for each country in the MENA ranges from as low as 18 mm per year (Egypt) to as high as 661 mm per year (Lebanon). In fact, for that same year of data, the bottom 11 countries in the world, in terms of the lowest annual average rainfall, are from the MENA region.

While low annual precipitation in MENA directly affects the volume of water generated from the headwaters of the region's surface water systems, reduced rainfall also has an impact on groundwater resources. Groundwater aquifers in the region can be considered non-renewable because of the constrained volume of water they hold and their limited capacity to be naturally recharged as a result of the low rates of annual precipitation. In countries with no access to surface water supplies, groundwater is the primary natural water supply source, which can accelerate the potential depletion of that water resource in those nations.

The region's natural aridity also amplifies the water

1 Average precipitation in depth (mm per year), World Bank Data Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/>



demand for supporting human consumption needs. Beyond the basic need for drinking water to sustain human populations, water is also utilized for industrial and agricultural purposes. When considering MENA's hotter climate, water (along with energy) are critical resources used to provide adequate residential and commercial cooling (e.g. through air conditioning) for local populations to be able to inhabit the region.

When it comes to sustaining local populations, food security is intrinsically linked with water security.

When it comes to sustaining local populations, food security is intrinsically linked with water security. It is important to note that, on average globally, 70% of freshwater (including from surface water and groundwater sources) is used for agricultural purposes.² The use of agricultural water in MENA is higher than in other regions (80% of average water use³) as the warmer climate increases irrigation requirements due to greater evapotranspiration rates.

The Amplifying Effect of Climate Change

MENA, like other regions, is presently facing multiple threats, undermining its water and food security as a result of climate change. Following a record-breaking summer in 2021 where multiple countries and major cities in the region hit annual record-breaking temperatures (including Doha,

Khartoum, and Aqaba), 2022's summer season proved to be equally torrid – with excessive heatwaves, afflicting Europe, the Middle East, and the rest of Asia.⁴

In addition to extreme heat, the region has also undergone varying degrees of extreme weather. Severe tropical cyclones continue to make landfall in and around the Arabian Peninsula to devastating effect, as evidenced by the death and destruction brought about by Cyclone Shaheen in Oman in 2021.⁵ While less severe than tropical cyclones, other forms of extreme weather like short-duration and intense thunderstorms may cause flooding and serious damages to infrastructures and human lives.

In recent years, the Nile River Basin has experienced frequent flooding occurrences in Sudan and the monsoon season of 2022 produced heavy rains that have submerged large parts of Pakistan under flood waters⁶. Extreme weather in the region can also manifest due to prolonged and sustained drought. Besides diminishing the region's already stressed water supplies, drought has the added effect of increasing land surface aridity as well. This enhanced dryness in the topmost layer of the soil has been a major contributing factor to the increase in dust storm events across the region. The summer of 2022 clearly displayed this dire reality with the abnormally high number of dust storms that occurred in Iran, the Arabian

² Water in Agriculture, World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water-in-agriculture>

³ Running Dry: the impact of water scarcity on children in the Middle East and North Africa, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/running-dry-impact-water-scarcity-children>

⁴ The implications of this summer's scorching heatwaves, Middle East Institute, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/implications-summers-scorching-heatwaves>

⁵ Cyclone Shaheen: A reminder of the Arabian Peninsula's vulnerability to extreme weather events, Middle East Institute, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/cyclone-shaheen-reminder-arabian-peninsula-vulnerability-extreme-weather-events>

⁶ Pakistan and Afghanistan at the mercy of an extraordinary summer monsoon season, Middle East Institute, <https://www.mei.edu/blog/monday-briefing-how-complex-middle-east-landscape-affects-possible-iran-deal#mahmoud>



Peninsula, Iraq, and Syria.⁷

Climate projections indicate that such environmental conditions will only get worse in the future if countries continue on with their current inadequate actions to address the main driver of climate change – increased global warming attributed to higher rates of carbon emissions into the atmosphere. Extreme temperatures up to 56 degrees Celsius could potentially be the new normal in MENA moving forward. Countries like Algeria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia may experience summer temperatures 8 degrees Celsius warmer than they are today by the end of the century. Moreover, wet and dry weather events are also expected to be more extreme, leading to more severe droughts and floods associated with those events. For example, North African countries along the Mediterranean could witness up to a 20% decrease in rainfall, while the southern Arabian Peninsula could experience up to 50% more rain (under a future projection of 2 degrees Celsius increase in global average temperature).⁸

Last but not least, the rise of sea level is also another consequence of climate change as it encroaches on critical water infrastructure (e.g. desalination and water treatment plants), agricultural lands, and cities. In fact, the coastal parts of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula may go through significant coastal erosion as a result of sea level rise. What is most alarming for the region is that the cumulative effect of greenhouse gas emissions, based on their current accumulation and future projections, indicate that global sea levels will continue to rise for centuries.⁹

7 Dust storm season in the Arabian Peninsula starts early and aggressively in Iraq, Middle East Institute, <https://www.mei.edu/blog/monday-briefing-four-key-dynamics-watch-lebanon-heads-polls#mahmoud>

8 Middle East & North Africa Climate Roadmap (2021-2025), World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena/publication/middle-east-north-africa-climate-roadmap>

9 Sixth Assessment Report on the Physical Science Basis of Climate

Shortcomings of the Current Status Quo

With these various challenges to water security in MENA posed by climate change, current policies and approaches to enhancing the reliability of the region's water supplies seem insufficient. While the conflicts over sharing water resources within transboundary watersheds have long persisted in the region, there has been a recent hike in the number of disputes over water-sharing across the MENA because of the added implications of climate change.

While the conflicts over sharing water resources within transboundary watersheds have long persisted in the region, there has been a recent hike in the number of disputes over water-sharing across the MENA because of the added implications of climate change.

For instance, Ethiopia's construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance dam in the Nile River Basin has raised the ire of downstream Egypt as the scale of that dam's storage threatens the uninterrupted availability of required water supply for Egypt. Furthermore, the frequency and intensity of flooding events have also increased in the Nile River, with Sudan suffering the most damages when they occur. Climate change has had negative impacts on the Tigris-Euphrates River System as well. Severe drought in that river system has raised the level of disagreements amongst riparians with

Change, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>



accusations of Turkey storing more river water in its reservoirs than it should, much to the chagrin of downstream nations like Iraq and Syria.

A commonality between these two surface water systems is a key issue that has exacerbated all other water management challenges. The real gap is that both of these river systems do not have intra-basin agreements that strongly bind the riparian nations into a cooperative and conjunctive management mechanism for sharing the waters of those rivers. For the Nile River Basin, the original agreements were drafted during a period of colonialism, excluding all other riparian nations with the exception of Egypt and Sudan.

The lack of cooperative water sharing deteriorates transboundary water collaboration into a competitive zero-sum game between upstream and downstream water users.

In the case of the Tigris-Euphrates River System, decades of disagreements have only led to recent political agreements that ultimately were not adhered to due to a lack of sufficient technical nuance associated with them that is needed for their implementation. Furthermore, in times of extreme drought when there is insufficient supply to satisfy all the water needs of the riparian countries, as is the case currently, the lack of cooperative water sharing deteriorates transboundary water collaboration into a competitive zero-sum game between upstream and downstream water users. In effect, a situation where upstream nations at the river's headwaters

will likely hoard more water at the expense of downstream nations.

In addition, groundwater supplies are at high risk of depletion due to an overreliance on them, particularly in areas absent any other water resources (e.g. from surface water systems or coastal desalination). The potential depletion of groundwater supplies is further expedited as there is a lack of sufficient natural (from rainfall) or artificial recharge to those groundwater aquifers – creating a state of overdraft, where groundwater pumping greatly exceeds groundwater recharge. On top of that, increased water demands in the region (for cooling, human consumptions, and agricultural production) have stressed all sources of water, but none more so than non-renewable groundwater supplies.

Overall, the region has been ill-prepared to handle the intensified impact of climate change on the reliability of local water supplies. While a number of initiatives have recently been developed to directly deal with climate change in the region through climate mitigation (reduction of carbon emissions) or climate adaptation (adapting to the effects of climate change), they are not aggressive or expansive enough to manage the current scope of the climate crisis. In fact, because the response to these extreme climate implications has been delayed, many initiatives to deal with the climate crisis are still very much in conceptual stages – requiring a longer time and more investment to bring them into operation. These types of initiatives are fundamentally necessary to protect the region's water supplies from further depletion and decline. Examples of these types of initiatives that are still in their early stages include Jordan and Israel's solar energy for water exchange deal¹⁰

10 Exploring the feasibility of the Jordan-Israel energy and water deal, Middle East Institute, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/exploring-feasibility-jordan-israel-energy-and-water-deal>



and the Middle East Green Initiative¹¹.

Opportunities for Improved Water Security

Given the current status quo of how MENA is handling its water scarcity along with the compounding effect of climate change on the region's water resources, there are plenty of opportunities to improve water security through cooperative actions, amongst the countries of the region and between the region and the Global North.

The international community can certainly play a supporting role in helping resolve some of the active transboundary water disputes across the region. Improving intra-basin water management begins by building better collaborative relationships between upstream and downstream riparian nations. One step towards that goal is for the international community to support and incentivize riparian nations in both the Nile River Basin and the Tigris-Euphrates System to build new cooperation and water-sharing agreements. This can help recognize the current status quo (e.g. the presence of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in the Nile River Basin and how drought has diminished annual river flow in the Tigris and Euphrates) while also ensuring fair and equitable water rights for each riparian nation.

Another approach for boosting regional water security is to expand investments in water resources projects that help increase the reliability of existing water supplies, particularly in consideration of the implications that climate change imposes on local water supply. These water development schemes can include water augmentation projects that incorporate new water supplies to supplement surface and groundwater

sources, such as additional desalination capacity for coastal nations in MENA or expanded rainfall enhancement through cloud seeding programs¹².

Other water development projects can target water conservation applications, of which the opportunities are numerous. Water efficiency projects can reduce water loss in a number of areas: reducing seeping by upgrading older water conveyance infrastructure like water pipe networks and water canals, using less water-intensive approaches in the agricultural sector (e.g. drip irrigation instead of flood irrigation), and expanding water reuse and recycling by treating wastewater not just to non-potable water standards, but to safe drinking water standards – thus maximizing utilization for residential water demand. Water augmentation and conservation can also be used in tandem to protect groundwater supplies from overdraft. Water generated from augmentation projects (such as desalination and cloud seeding) can be used to recharge groundwater aquifers to achieve safe yield.

Funding for water resources development projects in the region is an area where more developed nations outside MENA can provide support for.

Funding for water resources development projects in the region is an area where more developed nations outside MENA can provide support for. Since water augmentation and conservation projects can be considered climate adaptation initiatives, one potential funding source for these

11 The Middle East Green Initiative, Saudi Green Initiative, <https://www.saudigreeninitiative.org/about-middle-east-green-initiative/>

12 The UAE has a robust cloud seeding program operated by the UAE Research Program for Rain Enhancement Science: <https://www.uaerep.ae/>



types of projects is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's Green Climate Fund (GCF).¹³ The GCF was established to assist developing nations in implementing climate adaptation and mitigation strategies and is primarily funded by more developed nations. Many countries in MENA are currently benefiting from the GCF to implement climate mitigation and adaptation projects. The fund can continue to be leveraged to support water security projects in the region as a form of climate adaptation with the continued influx of financial resources into the GCF from countries in the Global North.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the opportunities discussed for cooperation and collaboration regarding enhanced water security in MENA, several policy actions can be recommended:

- Incentivize nations in the region that share transboundary surface water systems to collaborate on developing equitable water-sharing agreements that consider the effects of climate change (incentives for cooperation can come from international pressure for diplomacy and/or financing for development projects).
- Pursue water development projects in the region to implement more water augmentation and water conservation initiatives in order to maximize the usage of available local water supplies, despite the implications of climate change on those water resources.
- Expand funding mechanisms and sources from more developed nations to support developing nations in the MENA region for the implementation of climate adaptation projects that enhance regional water security.

Conclusion

Even though the MENA region is naturally prone to water scarcity, recent effects of climate change have made managing and relying on the region's water supplies even more difficult. Just within the last few years, the region has suffered the worst of these impacts globally – torrid heatwaves broke temperature records in multiple countries, drought conditions have declined the flow of surface river systems to new lows; prompting renewed conflict and disputes between riparian nations, and extreme weather events have yielded damaging cyclones and flooding. However, even with the current status quo of numerous and continuous climate challenges coupled with the inadequate means for climate response and adaptation, there are still opportunities for countries within the region (and beyond) to utilize cooperative solutions to strengthen regional climate resilience and water security. Improving transboundary riparian relations in surface water systems through diplomacy and cooperation can be the first and critical step towards better and equitable water-sharing agreements that consider the current status quo of river conditions and climate change. International funding mechanisms like the GCF can provide the financial support needed to implement climate adaptation projects that address water security in the region, such as water augmentation and water conservation applications. The outlook of maintaining regional water security in the future seems challenging, especially if the projected impacts of climate change proceed unimpeded. But there are still pathways to adaptive action that can limit such impacts, if those actions are taken in the near-term, without delay.

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The image shows three Iranian flags flying against a clear blue sky. The flags are positioned diagonally from the top left towards the bottom right. The top flag is the most prominent, showing the green, white, and red horizontal stripes and the national emblem. Below it, another flag is visible, and at the bottom, a third flag is partially seen. The flags are waving in the wind.

The Iranian Regional Deterrence Strategy in the New Middle East

HASSAN AHMADIAN



Abstract

The changing strategic trends in the Middle East have brought up new opportunities for regional cooperation as well as many challenges to be reckoned with across the region and around the globe more broadly. Iran, a regional heavyweight in the Middle East and an outcast in the US-led regional order since 1979, has long struggled to overcome the limits of the US containment policy and its direct military threats against the country. In fact, Iran's counter-containment and deterrence strategies are crafted to defuse such threat perceptions, driving Iran to favour a more indigenous regional order against the priorities of the great powers including the US in particular. The recent developments ranging from the ongoing Vienna talks on the Iran Nuclear Deal and the changing regional views regarding its revival to the emergence of the Abraham Accord and Israeli attempts to shift the regional balance of power to its favour – at the time of US retrenchment and aging rivalries between regional powers – have altogether created new dynamics that are rapidly shaping a new regional security architecture in the Middle East. This paper aims to shed light on those repercussions with a particular focus on Iranian foreign policy and regional deterrence strategy amid this emerging security environment.

Iranian Regional Deterrence

Establishing functional deterrence has arguably been at the center of Iran's regional strategy doctrine in the past few decades. Soon after, the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran was isolated by the West, responding in its initial strategic reflections vis-à-vis the US policy of containment in a counter-containment campaign—a multidimensional effort to fend off threats posed by the US containment strategy in different domains of military, security, economy and

beyond. However, despite Iran's elevating sense of security as well as its effectiveness in keeping the US at bay and defusing its regime-change agenda, Iran's counter-containment proved too costly and less effective than what seems to be Tehran's initial calculation.

Deterrence as a macro-strategy gradually evolved as the Islamic Republic was rectifying the shortcomings of its counter-containment strategy.

Deterrence as a macro-strategy gradually evolved as the Islamic Republic was rectifying the shortcomings of its counter-containment strategy. Iran's deterrence strategy started taking shape vis-à-vis the US—and Israel as its main ally in the Middle East—in the 1980s and 1990s and was rapidly adopted after the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq—two neighbors with the longest shared borders with Iran. As Iran found itself encircled by a hostile and mighty army committed to regime change, the need for an effective deterrence strategy gained unprecedented traction within Iran's strategic community. Over time, this strategy became regionalized, leading to the emergence of the “Axis of Resistance”—a coalition of like-minded states and movements across the Middle East region with the shared objective of deterring American and Israeli threats. (Mohseni and Calout 2017)

Two salient features of Iranian deterrence are found in its asymmetric and conventional natures. The asymmetry was necessitated by the mere fact of the wide gap between US military capabilities and those of Iran. Previously, Iranians



tried to contain the US through engagement—as in the case of their cooperation against the Taliban in 2001. That effort, however, backfired as Iran was listed as part of the “axis of evil” by then-President George W. Bush, which came as shock to Iranian decision-makers, including General Qassem Sulaimani who was waiting for Iran-US cooperation to expand and bear fruit in Afghanistan. (Ostovar 2016, 159-165)

With a failed engagement attempt and the unfeasibility of shifting the traditional balance of power against the US, asymmetric deterrence—building a grassroots-based regional capacity that can bog the US down and make its military presence in Iran’s surrounding costly—remained to be the only pragmatic option. Over time, this strategy took a regional shape and was adopted by Iran’s regional allies, entrenching the Axis of Resistance throughout the Middle East.

With a failed engagement attempt and the unfeasibility of shifting the traditional balance of power against the US, asymmetric deterrence—building a grassroots-based regional capacity that can bog the US down and make its military presence in Iran’s surrounding costly—remained to be the only pragmatic option.

Capacity-building was centred at the heart of Iran’s regional deterrence. As its foes and rivals enjoyed the ultimate deterrence—nuclear warheads—Iran had to find a way to deter them, which was

operationalized in an asymmetric fashion by developing conventional capacity within and through the Axis of Resistance across the region. This was dubbed from the “Iranian corridor” to the Mediterranean to a “Shiite Crescent” in more sectarian terms. Nevertheless, as understood in the strategic rationale underpinning it, the conventional capacity built throughout the upper Middle East was in line with Iran’s broader geostrategic and security concerns. Those framing Iran’s deterrence strategy as hegemonic or sectarian-oriented either ignore or downplay Iran’s security concerns. (See Ahmadian, 2021)

The Great Power Competition in the Middle East

For decades, the regional dynamics have been affected by international influence as well as rivalries within the region. An oil-for-security tradeoff shaped the logic of international engagement in the Middle East after the Second World War. The US was and still is the main foreign power engaged in the Middle East as other international actors are yet to challenge Washington’s stronghold in the region. After the Cold War and the end of the USSR’s involvement in the Middle East, the US regional position was strengthened further as it remained the main international actor calling the shots in the region—as evident in the Iraq war in 1991 as well as in the occupation of both Afghanistan and Iraq during the 2000s. With the changing international order, however, the US is shifting away from the Middle East—and other regions—to focus more on macro strategic threats posed by China and Russia against the “American Leadership” on the global stage. The strategy, known as “pivot to Asia,” (Lieberthal 2011) was adopted and prioritized by presidents from across the political spectrum in Washington.

The pivot to Asia has impacted the Middle East in various ways and in a fashion rarely seen in



previous US strategies. As a decades-long security guarantor, US retrenchment from the Middle East is most worrisome to its allies, as they will have to deal with their own security needs or team up with new partners to that end. It is also affecting the region by creating a vacuum to be contested by US rivals and, as in the case of Russian involvement in Syria, change the international dimension of regional developments.

With the US retrenchment, whether a perceived notion or reality, coupled with no great power to fill the vacuum, regional countries are testing diplomatic options to deal with one another.

Meanwhile, regional rivalries seem to have peaked during and after the Arab Spring in which Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other regional powers engaged in unprecedented regional confrontations. From the Saudi-led war in Yemen and its blockade against Qatar to the Iranian and Turkish direct military involvement in Syria and Iraq, the Middle East has witnessed an overly militarized approach by major powers in the region. Nevertheless, after years of heightened tensions, Iran and Turkey came to terms within the Astana process along with Russia, using the platform and other direct channels to defuse regional sources of tension in their bilateral ties. Iran and Saudi Arabia also engaged in direct negotiations in Baghdad after long years of confrontations that saw the severing of their bilateral ties. While the process is yet to bear fruit, the mere fact of moving from the ground to the negotiating table is quite an important development.

With regional rivalries and confrontations

peaking out, new dynamics are emerging. Though there are many factors causing such a shift, one should not ignore the correlation between the two abovementioned developments—US retrenchment and the cooling down of regional rivalries. Banking on international actors to overhaul the regional balance of power was part of the rationale behind regional rivalries. With the US retrenchment, whether a perceived notion or reality, coupled with no great power to fill the vacuum, regional countries are testing diplomatic options to deal with one another.

The Nuclear Factor

When Iran signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) known as the Iran Nuclear Deal, back in 2015, its Arab neighbours were concerned about its outcome in the region—suggesting that Iran will have access to a windfall of money to spend on its regional policy and allies. Quite to the contrary, the period stretching from 2015 to 2018 (before the US withdrawal from the JCPOA) was one of the most peaceful periods between Iran, the US, and Arab neighbours in recent decades. In fact, it was the US violation of the JCPOA that started to strain the relations, leading the region to undergo a new round of risky incidents, which could have translated into a whole-scale confrontation. It is important to note that the possibility of such risky scenarios repeating again in the region still remains likely.

In fact, this explains the open willingness of Iran's neighbours to revive the JCPOA with three particular Arab states trying to expedite the process—Oman, Qatar and Iraq. Others, including Iran's rivals such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, haven't been adamantly opposed to restoring the deal like they were back in 2015. Yet, this does not mean that the 2015-negative calculus on the JCPOA is no longer existent, but instead, it indicates that Iran's Arab neighbours do not want



to experience the negative implications that the demise of the JCPOA may bring to the region again, as witnessed in 2019 and 2020. In this vein, these new rounds of Iran-Arab dialogue must be viewed as a way to prevent that costly scenario in the region and also prepare for stronger engagement between Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the aftermath of the JCPOA revival.

This leaves the only opposing party—Israel—out. The Israelis have been involved in two tracks to squeeze the Iranians on the nuclear file and beyond. Firstly, they have been politically active in opposing the JCPOA in Washington and other Western capitals—suggesting that reviving the nuclear deal will be catastrophic for regional peace and stability. On the other hand, they have been trying to forge a regional coalition against Iran—and thereby normalizing relations with their Arab foes. Nevertheless, With the lack of a practical alternative to the JCPOA, the Israeli opposition seems political in nature—used for domestic consumption and as leverage to extract more concessions from the US as it is trying to revive the JCPOA. Though the Israeli leadership remains divided on this matter, some figures such as former military intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Tamir Heyman has argued publicly that a return to the agreement with Iran is Israel's least bad option. (Caspi, 2022)

What is troubling about Israel, however, is what emanates from its regional bid against Iran. As discussed earlier, Iran's regional conventional deterrence was built to balance off against the unconventional nuclear capabilities in the possession of Israel. The equation based on that balance lasted for decades. Regardless, the Israelis are moving beyond that with an attempt to inch closer to Iranian borders—viewed in Tehran as an attempt to encircle the country with the new normalization process as well as the build-up of military-security infrastructure around the

Iranian borders.

Quite expectedly, any move to tap the existing balance of power by one party would set in motion a chain of reactions by the other to render that move in vain. With the Israeli move toward Iranian borders, Iran's uneasiness with Israel grew even further, leading to a series of retaliatory reactions. First, Iran reacted diplomatically aiming at its Arab neighbours to lower their appetite for normalizing—specifically military and security ties—with Israel. Second, it resorted to its hard power track aiming at newly Israeli-enacted military and security infrastructure in countries neighbouring Iran. Tehran's reported attack on two Mossad intelligence bases in Erbil is an example of such a new reality in the Middle East. (IRNA, 2022) It is noteworthy to mention that this risky trend of actions and reactions is not immune to spiralling into something more dangerous like broader conflicts.

Policy Recommendations

What can be offered as policy recommendations with regard to the topic at hand include the following:

- Support and encourage regional rivals in their diplomatic engagements. Those engagements have proved to be effective in lowering the level of tension in the region and will likely continue to do so, moving forward.
- Focus on the JCPOA revival as a pillar of regional security and stability. As the post-2015 period suggests, JCPOA has the potential to manage regional rivalries and provide a more welcoming space for regional dialogue that can lay the foundations of a peaceful security architecture in the Middle East. More importantly, it can also prevent the unfolding of more dramatic and dangerous “Plan Bs” in the region.



- Support and enhance regional ownership/priorities through regional dialogue forums as opposed to international – often confrontational – priorities in the region.
- Support putting a cap on Israeli provocations. As the only party opposing the JCPOA with a track record of sabotage operations against Iran and its allies, Israel is capable of putting the future of the JCPOA and the regional move towards détente at risk. As such, there needs to be a US/Western cap on the Israeli provocations as was during the conclusion of the JCPOA.

Conclusion

In parallel with the changing global order, the Middle East is witnessing new trends and developments that can take the region in different directions. Much of those developments have yet to do with Iran and its relations with the US along with its regional allies states. Moving from counter-containment to deterrence vis-à-vis the US over the past decades, Iran signed the 2015 nuclear deal only to find itself under a US maximum pressure campaign in 2018. Nevertheless, that campaign was not effective in bringing Iran to the negotiating table of US design. As such, new rounds of indirect talks began between Tehran and Washington right after Biden's inauguration with the objective of reviving the nuclear deal. Meanwhile, the region is more receptive to the JCPOA revival and is worried about the consequences of its possible collapse. Yet, Israel remains the only party opposing the JCPOA revival that needs to be kept in check by the US due to the potentiality of its damaging moves against Iran and the nuclear deal. The efforts aimed at the JCPOA revival and parallel diplomatic tracks in the region can lay the foundations for a more peaceful and less volatile regional security architecture in the Middle East. To that end and to broaden the prospect for such

an outcome, spoilers need to be kept in check and enablers need to be strengthened, further.

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Nuclear Diplomacy with Iran and Regional Perceptions

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Abstract

Over the course of the negotiations for the conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal – as well as efforts to revive the agreement following the US unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 and subsequent decreases in Iranian compliance – Iran’s regional neighbours have consistently voiced their concerns about the structure and content of the negotiation process. In particular, Israel and – to varying degrees – the six Gulf Cooperation Council states (GCC)¹ have criticized the parties to the agreement for excluding them from the Iran nuclear talks and for what they have perceived as a prioritization of the resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue at the expense of what they consider to be more pressing threats to regional security – including Iran’s missile programme and its support for destabilizing non-state actors across the region. This article, based on a longer report published by the authors in July 2022 for the Royal United Services Institute,² summarizes how the GCC states perceive the interaction between the Iranian nuclear file and broader regional security dynamics. It argues that – if the ultimate objective is a stable and secure Middle East – the US, Europe and other like-minded governments need to reassure partners in the Gulf of their commitment to supporting the resolution of other regional concerns, independent of the outcomes of nuclear diplomacy with Iran.

1 The GCC is comprised of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain.

2 Tobias Borck and Darya Dolzikova with Jack Senogles, *Chain Reactions: The Iranian Nuclear Programme and Gulf Security Dynamics* (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2022). Accessible at: <<https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/occasional-papers/chain-reactions-iranian-nuclear-programme-and-gulf-security-dynamics>>.

Background

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), concluded in 2015 between Iran and the so-called P5+1 (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and China), was lauded at the time – by many experts and officials alike – as a landmark diplomatic and nuclear non-proliferation achievement.³ The agreement placed restrictions and imposed extensive monitoring and verification measures on the Iranian nuclear programme, following more than a decade of mounting concerns over the nature of Iranian nuclear activities. In exchange, Iran saw the lifting of the nuclear-related sanctions, imposed by US, EU and UN, on its economy, offering Tehran a much-needed respite from years of international economic pressure.⁴

Despite these achievements, from the start, the agreement faced significant criticism in Washington and – critically – in Iran’s own neighbourhood; namely, from Israel and – to varying degrees – the six Gulf Cooperation Council states (GCC).⁵ In negotiating the JCPOA, the P5+1 excluded regional states and issues of regional security from direct negotiations and the contents of the agreement, choosing instead to focus strictly on the nuclear issue. Yet, governments in Israel, Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf questioned the feasibility of such compartmentalization. Regional actors felt that the agreement did not

3 For some of the expert and official voices that lent their support to the agreement, see: Obama White House, ‘The Historic Deal That Will Prevent Iran from Acquiring a Nuclear Weapon’, last updated 16 January 2016, <<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/foreignpolicy/iran-deal>>, accessed 18 October 2022.

4 For more information, see, for example, Kali Robinson, ‘What Is the Iran Nuclear Deal?’, Council on Foreign Relations, last updated 20 July 2022, <<https://www.cfr.org/background/what-iran-nuclear-deal>>, accessed 18 October 2022.

5 The GCC is comprised of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain.



address what they perceived to be much more direct threats to their regional – and respective national – security than the Iranian nuclear programme. Namely, they cited concerns over Tehran’s rapidly advancing missile programme and Iran’s support for destabilizing non-state actors across the Middle East. Furthermore, they feared that sanctions relief and reduced political pressure resulting from the conclusion of the nuclear agreement would embolden Iran, making it less likely to come to the table on these other issues.⁶

While Iran’s Gulf neighbours have generally been supportive of P5+1 efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the Iran nuclear issue – and certainly prefer it to military escalation over the programme – they worry that the West may be willing to compromise on other regional security issues in order to secure a nuclear agreement.

As of November 2022, the future of the JCPOA is uncertain. The efforts to secure a mutual return to the deal, following the US withdrawal from the agreement in May 2018 and Iran’s subsequent roll-back of its compliance with the agreement’s provisions, have not officially collapsed but have been stalled for months.⁷ As with the negotiations

leading up to the 2015 agreement, regional actors have once again voiced concerns over the process and content of the negotiations for a return to the agreement. While Iran’s Gulf neighbours have generally been supportive of P5+1 efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the Iran nuclear issue – and certainly prefer it to military escalation over the programme – they worry that the U.S. and Europe may be willing to compromise on other regional security issues in order to secure a nuclear agreement.⁸

Gulf capitals view the state of the Iranian nuclear programme and related diplomacy as one factor of many in a more complex regional security picture. The ability or failure of Western allies to recognize and address the various regional security concerns of the GCC States – often differing significantly among themselves – plays a much greater role in how regional actors assess regional security dynamics than the specifics of the Iranian nuclear programme.⁹ Integrating discussions on the Iranian nuclear issue into broader policy considerations towards the region should therefore be front of

changed between Iran and the US and European parties to the agreement, the US and Iran have been unable to agree on a draft, and negotiations have since stalled with a number of matters remaining unresolved. Massive public protests in Iran, US and European accusations of Iranian violations of the JCPOA over the Iranian supply of drones to Russia and approaching US midterm elections have all posed challenges to continuing nuclear diplomacy with Iran. (See: Henry Foy, Felicia Schwartz and Najmeh Bozorgmehr, ‘Iran nuclear deal in ‘danger’, says EU chief negotiator’, *Financial Times*, 5 September 2022, <<https://www.ft.com/content/004f0d5a-0eca-4ea0-a423-0184481d033c>>, accessed 19 October 2022; Simon Lewis, Arshad Mohammed, ed. David Gregorio, ‘U.S. says Iran nuclear deal is ‘not our focus right now’’, *Reuters*, 12 October 2022, <<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-says-iran-nuclear-deal-is-not-our-focus-right-now-2022-10-12/>>, accessed 19 October 2022.)

6 See, for example, Sanam Vakil and Neil Quilliam, *Steps to Enable a Middle East Regional Security Process: Reviving the JCPOA, De-Escalating Conflicts and Building Trust* (London: Chatham House, 2021). Accessible at: <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/04/steps-enable-middle-east-regional-security-process>>.

7 While drafts of a ‘roadmap’ for a return to the JCPOA were ex-

8 Tobias Borck and Darya Dolzikova with Jack Senogles, *Chain Reactions: The Iranian Nuclear Programme and Gulf Security Dynamics* (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2022). Accessible at: <<https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/occasional-papers/chain-reactions-iranian-nuclear-programme-and-gulf-security-dynamics>>.

9 *Ibid.*



mind for Western policymakers interested in promoting a sustainable security framework in the Gulf, independent of the outcomes of nuclear diplomacy with Tehran.

This article briefly examines the interaction between the Iran nuclear issue and regional security dynamics in the Gulf. It argues that efforts by the US and Europe to address concerns over the Iranian nuclear programme should be contextualized within the broader regional security dynamics. If the ultimate objective is to ensure a secure and stable Middle East, regional allies will need to be reassured that Iran's other destabilizing activities will not go unaddressed. The article is based on a longer report, completed by the authors for the *Royal United Services Institute* in July 2022.¹⁰ The report's analysis – some of which is presented in this article – was based on a qualitative research methodology centred on extensive engagement with officials and experts from the six GCC states. Here, the authors summarise some of the report's findings and adapt their policy recommendations – initially aimed at a UK audience – to the broader European and North American contexts.

The Iranian Nuclear Programme in the Broader Regional Security Context

Over the last two decades, the Iranian nuclear programme has been a central driver of the West's dealings with Iran, and – to a significant extent – U.S. and European engagement with wider regional security dynamics. To be sure, concerns over Iran's human rights record (including the detention of dual nationals and domestic repression), Tehran's missile programme, and Iranian support for non-state actors across the region have also informed North American

Yet, despite the fact that the ongoing protests inside Iran and Russo-Iranian weapons transfers have made conducting nuclear diplomacy with Iran undoubtedly challenging, it is difficult to believe that the US and Europe would turn down a serious Iranian commitment to resolving outstanding issues in the nuclear negotiations and returning to the JCPOA – a prospect that, admittedly, appears increasingly unlikely.

and European governments' policies towards Tehran. This has been clearly demonstrated in the outpouring of public and official support around the world for the protests in Iran following the detention and death in Tehran of Mahsa Amini, and statements by senior members of the Biden administration suggesting that the current situation inside Iran has shifted focus away from the nuclear negotiations.¹¹ Iranian provision of unmanned aerial vehicles to Russia for use in Moscow's war on Ukraine has also refocused US and European attention towards non-nuclear security threats posed by Iran.¹² However, it would be difficult to argue that – on the whole – the same resources and diplomatic effort have historically

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ 'US Reiterates Support for Protests in Iran, Says JCPOA Not 'On Agenda'', *Iran International*, 18 October 2022, <<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202210189905>>, accessed 19 October 2022.

¹² Patrick Wintour and Jennifer Rankin, 'Iran breaching nuclear deal by providing Russia with armed drones, says UK', *The Guardian*, 17 October 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/17/iran-breaching-nuclear-deal-by-providing-russia-with-armed-drones-says-uk>, accessed 10 November 2022.



been committed by Western capitals to these issues as to the prevention of a nuclear-armed Iran. Yet, despite the fact that the ongoing protests inside Iran and Russo-Iranian weapons transfers have made conducting nuclear diplomacy with Iran undoubtedly challenging, it is difficult to believe that the US and Europe would turn down a serious Iranian commitment to resolving outstanding issues in the nuclear negotiations and returning to the JCPOA – a prospect that, admittedly, appears increasingly unlikely.

In the threat perceptions and policies of the six GCC states vis-à-vis Iran, however, the nuclear issue is much less central. While they each have their own unique relationship with Iran, driven by distinct historical, economic, political, and social contexts, the GCC states nevertheless share the understanding that Iran's nuclear activities are not driven by – nor targeted at – them.¹³ Further, the Gulf Arab states assess that Iran's missile capabilities and Tehran's extensive network of regional armed non-state allies provide the Islamic Republic with sufficient means to deter and respond to any threats it perceives from its immediate region. It is these aspects of Iran's regional policies and activities they consider to be of greatest concern.¹⁴

To varying degrees, the Gulf kingdoms fear Iranian ambitions to undermine the established regional order of independent states and their own respective territorial integrity, regime stability and – in the case of Saudi Arabia – claims to regional leadership.¹⁵ They assess Iranian deterrence strategy, not through any developments on its nuclear programme, but through the leveraging of non-state Shia and separatist groups across the region, as well as advances in its missile and drone

capabilities.¹⁶ The degree to which each of the six Gulf kingdoms perceives Iran as a direct threat – and which Iranian activity is of greatest concern – varies. In general, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain see Iran as the greatest threat to their security; Oman and Qatar are least concerned about direct Iranian

The common perception across the Gulf, and much of the regional and international expert community, is that Iran's nuclear programme, and – by extension – Tehran's engagement in nuclear diplomacy, are driven first and foremost by the Islamic Republic's relationship with the US and – to a lesser degree – Israel.

encroachment on their interests; with Kuwait and the UAE perceptions falling somewhere in between.¹⁷ However, the common thread across the Gulf is the perception of Iran as a destabilizing actor in the region, independently of any developments in the Islamic Republic's nuclear programme.

Instead, the common perception across the Gulf, and much of the regional and international expert community, is that Iran's nuclear programme, and – by extension – Tehran's engagement in nuclear diplomacy, are driven first and foremost by the Islamic Republic's relationship with the US and – to a lesser degree – Israel.¹⁸ GCC experts

13 Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, pp. 13-14.

14 Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, pp. 8-9.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, pp. 13-14.

17 Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, pp. 9-10.

18 Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, p. 14.



tend to believe that Iranian policy on its nuclear programme serves largely to generate leverage in Iran's relationship with the US on other issues.¹⁹ They also note that the nuclear programme – particularly, an advanced nuclear capability – may be generated by Iran as a deterrent against US

Regional states have understandably been concerned over the extent to which more immediate regional security matters, in other words, their core interests, may be treated as trading chips in Iran's nuclear negotiations with the West.

or Israeli military attacks on Iranian territory or assets in the region. Thus, while the programme is not seen by the GCC states as a direct threat, the potential deterrent value does raise concerns among regional capitals when it comes to implications for their respective national and regional security.²⁰

The extent to which any of these factors practically shape Iranian policy on its nuclear programme and related diplomacy is difficult to ascertain due to the opacity of Iran's policymaking, particularly on nuclear matters. The existing literature on the subject suggests that the programme is likely driven by a combination of economic, political, security and normative factors.²¹ However, experts

studying Iranian foreign and security policy tend to agree that the Islamic Republic's decision-making on its nuclear programme is likely not primarily driven by regional security dynamics and is instead determined first and foremost by Tehran's relationship with Washington and the West in general.²² The latter certainly has implications for the threats that Iran perceives from the region – including in relation to its neighbours in the Gulf; yet, in this sense, regional dynamics most likely influence Iranian nuclear policy only in so much as they are driven by – or impact on – the US and, to a lesser degree, Israeli posture in the region.

As a result – and considering the importance that the US and Europe have placed on the resolution of the nuclear issue – regional states have understandably been concerned over the extent to which more immediate regional security matters, in other words, their core interests, may be treated as trading chips in the course of nuclear diplomacy.²³ They also continue to fear that the renewal of the JCPOA – or the conclusion of an alternative nuclear agreement – might further embolden Iran. Gulf Arab capitals are concerned that the economic benefits that they expect Iran to gain from a renewed agreement, combined with the political cover that would come from de facto acceptance by the international community of destabilizing Iranian and Iranian-backed

nuclear activity. See Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, pp. 14–15.

22 For more on the history of the Iranian nuclear programme and possible drivers of Iranian thinking on its nuclear activity, see, for example, Darya Dolzikova and Ariane M Tabatabai, 'Case Study: The Iran Nuclear Deal', in James E Doyle (ed.), *Nuclear Safeguards, Security, and Nonproliferation: Achieving Security with Technology and Policy*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, MA: Elsevier Inc., 2019); Bowen, Moran and Esfandiary, *Living on the Edge*; Wyn Bowen and Matthew Moran, 'Living with Nuclear Hedging: The Implications of Iran's Nuclear Strategy', *International Affairs* (Vol. 91, No. 4, 2015), pp. 687–707; Ariane M Tabatabai, *No Conquest, No Defeat: Iran's National Security Strategy* (London: Hurst & Company, 2020), pp. 126–27.

23 Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, p. 15.

19 Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, p. 15.

20 *Ibid.*

21 One expert interviewed as part of the authors' research suggested that the nuclear programme may factor into Iran's economic and domestic energy considerations. Experts have also often pointed to the perceived prestige that may come with the domestic development of an advanced nuclear programme as a potential driver for Iranian



activity in the region, could make Iran less – not more – likely to constructively engage in regional diplomacy.²⁴ Feeling limited in their own ability to build up leverage to bring Iran to the table, and unsettled by what they perceive to be a wavering US commitment to upholding the regional order in the Middle East, the Gulf monarchies fear that they might be left to deal with a politically- and economically-emboldened Tehran on their own.

At the same time, the two scenarios the GCC states fear more than a diplomatically- and economically-emboldened Iran under a nuclear agreement, are a regional arms race set off by a nuclear-armed Iran,²⁵ and – most of all – a regional war triggered by the US or Israeli attempts to militarily prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.²⁶ Whereas they may not be the target of an Iranian nuclear weapons capability, the Gulf Arab states are conscious of the grave consequences that a conventional military conflict or arms race in the region would impose on their physical security and internationalized economies, even if they themselves are not a direct party to the conflict. To be clear, both a nuclear-armed Iran and the outbreak of full-scale war over the Iranian nuclear programme remain unlikely and largely hypothetical scenarios. As such, preventing the outbreak of conventional war in the region should not be interpreted as ambivalence on the part of the GCC states towards efforts to limit Iranian nuclear activity.²⁷ Instead, GCC concerns over a military escalation – and a much less hypothetical scenario of a conventional arms race in the region

– should serve as a reminder of the importance that regional actors place on an international – especially Western – approach to the Iran nuclear issue that takes into account the full range of regional security dynamics.

Policy Recommendations and Conclusion

Efforts by the US, Europe and allies to address concerns over the Iranian nuclear programme – whatever format these efforts may take moving forward – will need to consider how their policies on the Iran nuclear file fit within their broader objectives vis-à-vis Iran and the region. If the ultimate goal is a safer and more stable Gulf and broader Middle East region, concerns over the nuclear agreement and negotiations voiced by Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and other regional actors should factor into Western calculations. Ensuring that nuclear diplomacy with Iran – and whatever outcome it yields – has the support of regional actors – which was largely not the case in 2015 – will also help make any future agreement more sustainable and more likely to contribute to broader trust-building dynamics in the region.

At the same time, negotiating parties and their allies need to remain realistic about the level of regional engagement that can be expected at the current stage of negotiations. It may not be practical to directly bring in regional actors or issues of regional concern to the nuclear negotiation table, considering the advanced, albeit faltering and increasingly uncertain, state of the negotiations between Iran and the remaining parties to the JCPOA. Furthermore, while Iran's nuclear programme may not be the primary concern for regional actors, it poses a significant threat to global security and non-proliferation. The key, therefore, is not to disregard the benefits of a nuclear agreement despite its inability to address other regional security concerns, but to

24 Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, pp. 15-16.

25 Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, p. 17. For differing views on the threat of regional nuclear proliferation, see Gawdat Bahgat, 'A Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East: Myth or Reality?', *Mediterranean Quarterly* (Vol. 22, No. 1, 2011), pp. 27-40; Richard L Russell, 'Off and Running: The Middle East Nuclear Arms Race', *JFQ: Joint Force Quarterly* (Vol. 58, 2010), pp. 94-99.

26 Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, p. 17.

27 *Ibid.*



reassure regional allies that the support of the US, Europe and other partners for resolving broader regional security issues will persist regardless of the outcome of negotiations. Such reassurances may include further defence and maritime security contributions, the articulation of policy white papers on regional objectives and ministerial-level statements of support for regional partners.

States not directly involved in the nuclear negotiations but eager to support regional security in the Middle East – such as Canada and some European states – can play a dual role in this process. On the one hand, they can remind their partners in Washington, London, Paris and Berlin of the importance of holding Iran accountable for its destabilizing regional policies and domestic human rights record. This can assure regional countries that their concerns are taken seriously and not forgotten and delegate responsibilities across Western partners in ensuring both the nuclear issue and other regional concerns are addressed. On the other hand, they can also help facilitate the painstaking multi-level confidence-building process amongst regional states, convening and nurturing dialogue initiatives, and promoting multilateral (i.e. including Iran, GCC states and others) cooperation on areas of mutual concern – from climate change to food security and economic integration. Countries like Canada might have less leverage over regional powers than the US or others in the P5+1, but this can also mean that their involvement in such activities is less politically sensitive and less likely to directly impact nuclear negotiations.

Ultimately, extra-regional actors cannot force the GCC states and Iran to resolve their differences, nor can they dictate the contours of a future regional order; however, they can help provide a framework for regional diplomacy. This includes providing reassurances to Gulf partners, thus allowing them to focus on confidence-building

and eventual conflict resolution with each other and with Iran, rather than on hedging against the various possible outcomes of the JCPOA negotiation process or whatever nuclear diplomacy efforts may replace it. In doing so, Western states will need to remain cognisant of both the similarities and divergences in the threat perceptions and interests of individual GCC states and other regional actors vis-à-vis Iran and – just as importantly – each other. Preferences for how to structure regional security discussions, the role that Iran should play in the region and the ways in which extra-regional actors can best address their security concerns vary – sometimes significantly – among the GCC states.²⁸ Here, too, embracing complexity and nuance will yield opportunities for effective engagement and support and will help to avoid misunderstandings.

28 Borck and Dolzikova, *Chain Reactions*, 2022, p. 32.



Charting a New Path for Canadian Engagement with the Middle East

JEREMY WILDEMAN



The Middle East plays a critical part in international politics and the global economy. This makes it naturally important for Canada and millions of Canadians who have ties to the region. Yet, Canada is criticized today for not having a coherent Middle East policy that adequately reflects the realities of the region or defines a long-term strategy to protect and advance its interests in this part of the world. This article offers recommendations on how to address such a deficit by first reviewing Canada's historical engagement with the Middle East, particularly its effective role in influencing regional events during the Cold War and in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. The article then examines a precipitous decline that takes place in Canada's regional influence and standing in the mid-2000s during the US-led war on terror. Ultimately, it argues that, in light of the current geopolitical environment in the Middle East, Canada needs to review and renew its Middle East engagement strategy. To this end, the article concludes by offering a list of policy recommendations that could upgrade Canada's regional standing and its ability to pursue its interests in the Middle East. It contends that part of doing this will come from reviewing and learning from Canada's past practices and approaching the region as a fair-minded actor with an aim of contributing to its peace, security and prosperity.

Introduction

The Middle East is a region of great cultural, religious, and geostrategic importance. It is an axis of global transit and trade, accounting for nearly half of the world's oil and gas reserves.¹ This has turned the region into an important theatre for Great Power rivalry both historically

and in current times.² It is also a rich and dynamic region that Canada has significant and growing demographic ties to, through large communities of first and second-generation Canadians of Middle Eastern descent, who maintain a strong connection to the region. Yet, Canada has long missed the opportunity to utilize this unique national characteristic in advancing the country's interest and engagement with the region. It is important to note that this missed opportunity stems from an ill-defined Middle East policy that itself is a product of a lack of overarching foreign policy strategy, vision, and sober understanding of what Canadian priorities are in this strategic region. At best, Canadian Middle East engagement can be seen as an extension of the United States' regional strategy, haphazardly working around its edges with a series of discordant policies, actions, and programming. Yet, Canada has at times had an important impact on the region, and some of these actions have even contributed to the development of Canada's national identity and influence on the international stage. The Middle East has, in turn, had an ongoing impact on Canadian politics and society as well.

Canada and the Middle East in the Cold War

Canadians played a key diplomatic role in the 1947 United Nations decision to partition Palestine and create the State of Israel.³ This came at the end of

1 'Statistical Review of World Energy 2021 – Middle East', Middle East's energy market in 2020, BP's Statistical Review of World Energy and the Energy Outlook (BP, 2021).

2 Aziz El Yaakoubi and Eduardo Baptista, 'China's Xi Arrives in Saudi on "epoch-Making" Visit to Deepen Economic and Strategic Ties', *Reuters* (2022).

3 Richard Newport, 'The Outsider: Elizabeth P. MacCallum, the Canadian Department of External Affairs, and the Palestine Mandate to 1947' (Thesis, Carleton University, 2014); Eliezer Tauber, *Personal Policy Making: Canada's Role in the Adoption of the Palestine Partition Resolution* (Greenwood Press, 2002); Hassan Hussein, 'A "Middle Power" in Action: Canada and the Partition of Palestine', *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (2008): 41–55.



British Imperial rule during the onset of the Cold War, while global decolonization got underway. The establishment of Israel fundamentally changed the composure of the Middle East and was met with hostility by most countries in the region, who considered the UN decision unjust.⁴ For the European states that still dominated global politics, Canada's role contributed to the perception that it was an effective middle power actor,⁵ stepping further out of Britain's shadow on the world stage. The establishment of Israel also led Canada to have its only close regional friend since.

In 1956, Canada helped de-escalate the Suez Canal Crisis caused by Britain and France's invasion of Egypt. Only recently independent from British colonial rule, the invasion threatened to reverse Egypt's hard-fought freedom. The invasion was deeply unpopular in a world where decolonization had taken hold, with even the Soviet Union and the United States threatening retaliation if the aggressors did not withdraw. This caused a real crisis for Canada, which considered the Transatlantic UK-US alliance a linchpin in its foreign policy. Consequently, Canada stepped in and, with the UN, devised a plan to create and send peacekeepers to the Middle East. This helped Britain and France save face and retreat while Egypt would remain independent. This Canadian-led diplomatic initiative later became a national milestone in Canadian foreign policy with Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs Lester B Pearson winning a Nobel Peace Prize for his diplomatic efforts in peacefully resolving the Suez Canal Crisis. This also secured global recognition for Canada as an independent peacemaker in the post-colonial era.

⁴ Newport, 134; Hussein, 46.

⁵ John W. Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943-1957*, vol. II (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 63.

This marked the Golden Age of Canadian foreign policy, an era which would have a lasting impact on how Canadians perceive themselves on the world stage as a progressive, liberal internationalist, peacemaker nation. Canada's actions in the Suez Crisis were indeed oriented in pursuit of its national interest, by supporting its oldest (UK) and newest (US) benefactors by helping extricate them from conflict. However, Canadian leadership was also cognisant of profound changes taking place in the world. They realized Europeans would no longer dominate the power politics like before and recognized the threat decolonization represented to Western interests in their struggle with Communism, if not accepted and respected.⁶

Canada thus adopted a strategic function in the Western Camp, engaging in sophisticated diplomacy on behalf of itself and its allies, reaching out and fostering good relations in the Global South.

Canada thus adopted a strategic function in the Western Camp, engaging in sophisticated diplomacy on behalf of itself and its allies, reaching out and fostering good relations in the Global South. Canada's significant contributions to UN peacekeeping missions coupled with a general aversion to armed intervention only enhanced its image, contributing to a façade of benign

⁶ Asa McKercher, 'The Centre Cannot Hold: Canada, Colonialism and the "Afro-Asian Bloc" at the United Nations, 1960-62', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 2 (2014): 329-49. The Communist bloc was typically ready to support former and existing colonies in their resistance to Europe's dying colonial Empires and to encourage rejection of the West.



neutrality that contrasted with the historical imperialism of other Western powers. This provided Canada with soft power prestige that well exceeded its hard power capacities. Canada's position only benefitted further when, in the 1970s, the country started to depart from its own colonial past, by embracing multiculturalism and welcoming immigration from all over the world.

Canada and the Middle East Peace Process

Canada had its missteps. In 1979, a newly elected minority Progressive Conservative (PC) government, led by Joe Clark, was engulfed in crisis the moment it came to power, over a campaign pledge to relocate Canada's Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.⁷ Canada's generally good international image had already suffered in the Arab world over its perceived closeness to Israel.⁸ The PC pledge took place twelve years after Israel seized and occupied the remaining regions of Palestinian land, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), in the 1967 Six Day War; and just six years after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war led to a 1973 Arab-led OPEC oil embargo of countries, like Canada, for their perceived support of Israel. The embargo caused significant economic turmoil in the West while the Arab States in the Gulf region emerged as global influencers, forcing the US to pay closer heed to Arab views. By contrast, Clark's PCs made a campaign promise completely oblivious to the aspirations of the Arab world, and the diplomatic response was swift with Arab states threatening Canadian national interests, economic well-being, and Canada's hard-earned

diplomatic standing.⁹

The embassy affair raised early doubts about the Clark government's competence.¹⁰ Though losing power after just nine months, the Clark government commissioned an important report that would propose a new Canadian Middle East policy.¹¹ Clark in 1979 tapped former PC leader Robert L Stanfield as a Special Representative to travel to the Middle East to ascertain how Canada could improve its image in the region. Stanfield's immediate interim recommendation was for Canada to put on hold any plans to move its embassy. Broadly, he found consensus across the region against Israeli occupation of the OPT and concerns for the plight of the Palestinians. Stanfield's 1980 final report included recommendations that Canada take a more fair-minded approach respecting all the peoples of the Middle East, and that Canada should foster peace and development in a region where scarce resources had been wastefully diverted toward military expenditures.¹² Writing in 1985, Tareq Ismael described the document as unique because, "for the first time, the Canadian public had a direct input into Canada's Middle East policy, Canadian foreign policy-makers were forced to address the real issues in the area and to frame Canadian

7 Charles Flicker, 'Next Year in Jerusalem: Joe Clark and the Jerusalem Embassy Affair', *International Journal* 58, no. 1 (2002): 115–38.

8 Maurice Jr Labelle, 'Jameel's Journal: Jim Peters, Anti-Orientalism, and Arab Decolonization in 1960s Canada', in *Undiplomatic History: The New Study of Canada and the World*, ed. Asa McKercher and Philip Van Huizen (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 163–83.

9 News Footage from 1979 as Prime Minister Joe Clark Plans to Move Canadian Embassy to Jerusalem, YouTube, The National (CBC News, 1979), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSWwmXcoZfo&feature=youtu.be>; Elizabeth Thompson, 'Secret 1979 Documents Shed New Light on Why Joe Clark Broke Jerusalem Embassy Promise', *CBC*, 7 December 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/jerusalem-embassy-tel-aviv-clark-1.4436795>; Tareq Y. Ismael, ed., 'Canadian Foreign Policy in the Arab World: An Overview', in *Canada and the Arab World* (University of Alberta, 1985), 7–25.

10 John Hilliker, *Canada's Department of External Affairs, Volume 3: Innovation and Adaptation, 1968–1984*, IPAC Series in Public Management and Governance (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 310.

11 Robert L Stanfield, 'Final Report of the Special Representative of the Government of Canada Respecting the Middle East and North Africa' (Global Affairs Canada Digital Library, 1980).

12 Ibid, 2–3.



policy in terms of national interest.”¹³

Stanfield’s recommendations were shelved when Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the Liberal Party returned to power in 1980. Yet, the spirit of the report lived on and by the early 1990s crept into Canada’s Middle East policy. This happened at the same time that public opinion was changing, such that Canadians were exhibiting concern not only for Israel but also for the Palestinians.¹⁴ This also happened after a 1985 Senate Report suggested Canada take a more nuanced and less partisan approach to Middle East politics,¹⁵ and the US became focused on building an enduring peace in the Middle East.¹⁶ By taking a more fair-minded diplomatic approach, even voting at the UN on resolutions considered sympathetic to Palestinian self-determination,¹⁷ Canada was able to improve its diplomatic standing to a point where it could take a leadership role on the most sensitive issues of the US-led Middle East Peace Process between Israelis and Palestinians. This bolstered Canada’s diplomatic standing among its Western allies and the international community.¹⁸ Broadly, Canada was well appreciated in the region for its efforts.¹⁹

13 Ismael, ‘Canadian Foreign Policy in the Arab World: An Overview’, 17–18.

14 Arab Studies Quarterly, ‘Attitudes of Canadians toward the Middle East Conflict: Highlights of a National Survey, January 1983’, *Arab Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (1983): 292–96; Gallup Canada, ‘Canadian Gallup Poll, February 1988, #530_1’ (Scholars Portal Dataverse, 11 October 2019).

15 ‘Report on Canada’s Relations with the Countries of the Middle East and North Africa’, Government of Canada (Canadian Parliamentary Historical Resources, June 1985), 33-1 F6 A12, http://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.com_SOC_3301_5_2/1?r=0&s=1.

16 David Taras and David Goldberg, *Domestic Battleground: Canada and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (McGill-Queen’s Press, 1989), 159–61.

17 Andrew N. Robinson, ‘Talking with the PLO: Overcoming Political Challenges’, ed. Jeremy Wildeman and Emma Swan, *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 27, no. 1 (2021): 21–30.

18 Andrew Robinson, ‘Canada’s Credibility as an Actor in the Middle East Peace Process: The Refugee Working Group, 1992–2000’, *International Journal* 66, no. 3 (2011): 695, 702.

19 Marie-Joëlle Zahar, ‘Talking One Talk, Walking Another: Norm

This marked the height of Canada’s ability to engage as a global actor in the Middle East.

Canada’s Middle East Foreign Policy Today

Canada’s approach to the Middle East changed after the 9/11 terror attacks, and especially from 2004 onward, becoming progressively more securitized and more divisive through successive Liberal and Conservative governments. This included new diplomatic rows with Gulf Arab powers like the UAE in 2010 over landing rights at Canadian airports,²⁰ and Saudi Arabia in 2018 over mild tweets in support of Saudi civil rights activists.²¹ Along the way, Canada dropped the façade of neutrality and any semblance of fair-mindedness. It now regularly votes with a handful of countries against resolutions sympathetic to Palestinians at the UN,²² staking out pro-Israel positions deemed unpopular in the region. It has adopted some of the more hawkish policy positions toward countries considered unfriendly to Western interests, like Syria and Iran,²³ castigating and

Entrepreneurship and Canada’s Foreign Policy in the Middle East’, in *Canada and the Middle East in Theory and Practice*, ed. Paul Heinbecker and Bessma Momani (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 45–72.

20 Steven Chase, Jane Taber, and Brent Jang, ‘UAE Rift Exposes Division in Harper Caucus’, *The Globe and Mail*, 13 October 2010, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/uae-rift-exposes-division-in-harper-caucus/article4389989/>.

21 Jacques Marcoux and Caroline Barghout, ‘How Events Unfolded after Foreign Affairs Minister Sent Tweet Rebuking Saudi Arabia’, *CBC*, 7 December 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/how-events-unfolded-after-foreign-affairs-minister-sent-tweet-rebuking-saudi-arabia-1.4935735>.

22 Phil Leech-Ngo and Emma Swan, ‘A “Determined Peace-Build-er”? Analysing Canada’s Role in the Israel-Palestine Conflict’, in *2016/2018 Canadian Yearbook of Human Rights*, vol. II (Ottawa, Canada: HRREC, University of Ottawa, 2019), 21–38.

23 Michelle Carbert, ‘Liberals Back Tory Motion to End Diplomatic Talks with Iran’, *The Globe and Mail*, 13 June 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-liberals-back-tory-motion-to-abandon-diplomatic-talks-with-iran-until/>; Vahid Tolooei, ‘Choosing Between Bad and Worse: An Iranian-Canadian Conun-



sanctioning them over their human rights records while clearly overlooking violations by friendly powers such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Far from a peacemaker, Canada has become more invested in furthering its political and economic interests, even if that means selling military equipment to countries like Saudi Arabia that have reportedly used such equipment to crush protesters in their war in Yemen.²⁴

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Canada is also an active member of the Global Coalition Against Daesh that helped reverse the growth of the Islamic State. Canada was involved in the disastrous 2011 Libya intervention, which led to the collapse of the state and harmed African regional stability. Meanwhile, it is noteworthy to mention that Canada has in recent years been an active donor providing billions of dollars of regional humanitarian and development aid to key partners like Jordan and Iraq for various projects related to security and stabilization enhancement, refugee protection and gender-based violence, among others.²⁵

drum', *New Canadian Media* (2019).

24 Steven Chase, 'Saudis Use Armoured Vehicles to Suppress Internal Dissent, Videos Show', *The Globe and Mail*, 11 May 2016, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/saudis-use-armoured-vehicles-to-suppress-internal-dissent-videos-show/article29970955/>.

25 Global Affairs Canada, 'Canada's Middle East Engagement Strategy', GAC, <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international-relations-relations-internationales/mena-moan/strategy-strategie.aspx?lang=eng>.

At home, the securitization of Arabs and Muslims has contributed to harmful Islamophobia across the nation with high-profile racist attacks and the mass killings of Muslims in Canada.²⁶ Meanwhile, Canada's diplomatic standing has declined to the point where it seems unable to secure a seat it was once a lock to win on the UN Security Council.²⁷ While being far from fair-minded, it has simultaneously pontificated about its foreign policy being values-driven, engendering ill will over its perceived double standards in the process. This approach even motivated some Canadian civil society organizations to campaign against Canada's 2020 UN Security Council bid.²⁸

A Path Forward

The absence of a strategic vision toward the Middle East is harmful to Canadian interests at home and abroad. It renders Canada ineffective as a mid-sized power active in the world from within the Western alliance system, contributing in the process to the decline of Canada's once out-sized ability to influence world affairs and pursue its national interests. While a wholesale rethinking of Canada's overall foreign policy is long overdue, there are some immediate changes Canada can pursue to improve its standing and engagement in the Middle East.

1. Canada undermines its diplomatic standing when it appears to have blatant double standards in its policy positions such as the

[al_relations-relations_internationales/mena-moan/strategy-strategie.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international-relations-relations-internationales/mena-moan/strategy-strategie.aspx?lang=eng).

26 Randy Richmond, 'The Painful Recent History of Targeted Attacks on Muslims in Canada', *The London Free Press*, (2021); Reda Zarrug, 'Canada's Islamophobia Problem Is Made Even Worse by Its Foreign Policy', *IAffairs* (2021).

27 Stephen Kimber and John Kirk, 'Opinion: Compassionate, Constructive Canada Not Really "back" as Government Bids for UN Security Council Seat', *CBC*, (2020).

28 Marc-André Blanchard, 'To All Member States and Observer States' (Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations, 2020).



support for human rights. One option is to back away from its rights-based language and values projection. However, we know that Canadians expect their governments to promote human rights abroad. Therefore, a better solution for Canada is to be consistent in its support for human rights and applications of its values, regardless if a perpetrator is a friend or foe.²⁹

2. If Canada expects states to respect a rules-based order governed by international law, it needs to be consistent in its application. That is, no rules-based order that Canada purports to support can survive long-term unless that order and its supporters are considered fair in its application and international law neutral by nature.
3. Canada needs skilled personnel with diverse and alternative viewpoints that challenge prevailing orthodoxies about the Middle East. This will allow Ottawa to craft contextually accurate and responsive foreign policy positions while avoiding the pitfalls of groupthink among the policymakers in the government.
4. Canada is an incredibly diverse country with millions of citizens who have personal ties to the Middle East.³⁰ The government needs to find ways to navigate a plethora of diverse community groups' views on the Middle East, in a way that is coherent and consistent and

serves Canadians' broader interests. Adopting support for just some groups' interests at the expense of others sows division and harms Canada's interests.

5. Stanfield's 1980 advice stands today that Canada's ultimate goal should be to encourage moderation and conciliation, with the objective goal of justice and reconciliation in the Middle East.³¹
6. Canada can look to its past for inspiration for more nuanced positions that allowed it to better pursue its interests, while still supporting its Western allies and regional friends.

Conclusion

Canada and Canadians' interests lie in a secure and stable Middle East guaranteed by regional peace and prosperity. Canada needs a structured and contextually appropriate Middle East strategy that speaks to a broader foreign policy vision. In the meantime, there are steps it can take to improve its standing and influence in the region while commensurate with its limitations as a mid-sized actor. That includes drawing lessons from its past when it enjoyed influence in the Middle East. This will become increasingly essential in a multipolar world where even the seemingly closest Western partners in the region are building closer ties to competing powers like Russia and China.³²

²⁹ Such principled guidance has precedent. For instance, in 1980 Robert L. Stanfield advised that to foster peace between Arabs and Israelis, Canada should be prepared to express its disapproval when actions are taken by one or other of the parties that are counterproductive to the peace process. That is, if Canada is to have respect, it must avoid total identification with one party when there is also a case on the other side of the question. Stanfield, 'Stanfield Report', 15.

³⁰ Statistics Canada, 'Canada in 2041: A Larger, More Diverse Population with Greater Differences between Regions', Government of Canada, The Daily (2022), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220908/dq220908a-eng.htm>.

³¹ Stanfield, 'Stanfield Report', 15.

³² Martin Chulov and Martin Chulov Middle East correspondent, 'Putin and the Prince: Fears in West as Russia and Saudi Arabia Deepen Ties', The Guardian, 5 October 2022, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/05/putin-mohammed-bin-salman-russia-saudi-arabia-deepen-ties>; Aziz El Yaakoubi and Eduardo Baptista, 'China's Xi Arrives in Saudi on "epoch-Making" Visit to Deepen Economic and Strategic Ties', Reuters, 7 December 2022, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/world/chinas-xi-starts-epoch-making-saudi-visit-deepen-economic-strategic-ties-2022-12-07/>.

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