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THE NEW CONTAINMENT

CHANGING AMERICA'S APPROACH TO MIDDLE EAST SECURITY

Bilal Y. Saab

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FOREWORD

The security paradigm in the Middle East is undergoing dramatic changes. Transnational terrorist and insurgent groups pose threats to the internal and external security of regional states, eroding the foundations of the state system itself, particularly in Iraq and Syria. Failed states like Libya and Yemen threaten their neighbors' borders and are hotbeds of violence and extremism that risk the lives of combatants and civilians alike, posing broad threats to US allies and partners. And while the challenge of a nuclear Iran could be mitigated in the short term through a successful nuclear agreement, Iran's robust asymmetric activities remain a troubling source of instability throughout the region. In this context, the traditional, long-standing regional security concerns, including interstate war and the Arab-Israeli conflict, may be overshadowed by a new set of security challenges that have risen to the fore.

The United States has addressed Middle East security largely at the state level, but the growing threats to the Westphalian system have shown such an approach to be inflexible with respect to nonstate actors. At the same time, the United States has struggled to articulate, let alone execute, an overall Middle East security strategy as it tries to extinguish the fires spreading throughout the region. The lack of clear US objectives and coherent security strategy has led regional partners to question the US commitment to their security and has sparked debate over what the United States' security role in the region should look like going forward.

The United States faces a challenge in defining this role for itself. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have left the American public and the Obama administration understandably wary of military overstretch. The administration wants its partners in the Middle East to shoulder greater responsibility for regional security, but their capacity to assist in external operations is limited.

This report by Bilal Y. Saab, Senior Fellow for Middle East Security at the Atlantic Council's Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security, provides critical insights into the problems confronting US strategy while offering a new, balanced security role for the United States in the region. Saab offers viable recommendations for a new US security approach that seeks to help create a new regional security architecture. The United States can play a critical role in helping to contain existing threats in the Middle East and securing a space for its partners to build their governance capacity. Over time, this will empower regional players to take the lead on regional security and serve the long-standing US goal of stability in the Middle East.

This effort is part of the Scowcroft Center's Middle East Peace and Security Initiative, launched in 2013 by the Atlantic Council. It is a vital contribution to the Scowcroft Center's strong body of work on the US role in the security of the Arab Gulf states and the future of regional security in the broader Middle East.

Barry Pavel
Vice President and Director, Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security
Atlantic Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Securing the Middle East after an Iran nuclear deal is the next big challenge for both the region and the international community. The United States and its allies have engaged in tireless diplomacy with Iran over the past few years to produce an agreement that would limit Tehran's nuclear program for the next decade and a half. However, the hard work does not stop here; in fact, it may have just begun. To protect the deal (assuming one is finalized) and take full advantage of its potential benefits, which include the drastic reduction of the risk of nuclear weapons proliferating in the region, the United States needs a comprehensive strategy for regional security in the Middle East. After all, the ultimate prize and broader objective is and has always been to secure and stabilize the region. A potential nuclear deal with Iran—as strategically significant as it is—is only one piece of the Middle East security puzzle.

In this report, the author makes the case for a more creative and cost-effective US containment approach to regional security in the Middle East that seeks, among other things, to ultimately involve regional stakeholders in a cooperative security system. The author starts with four key assumptions: First, there is no lasting security and stability in the Middle East without real political and economic development. Second, the United States neither can nor should be the agent pushing for change in the region; change should almost always come from within. Third, change cannot happen without first addressing immediate and severe security challenges. And fourth, the United States cannot address those security challenges alone.

The United States has three realistic, strategic options—counterterrorism, hands-on, and cooperative security—to choose from to arrest the collapse of order in the Middle East and improve security conditions. These options may have some commonalities, and some could be pursued in combination, but they are sufficiently distinct to merit a category of their own.

Option One: Counterterrorism

Many of this option's advocates believe that what is currently happening in the region is reminiscent of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) in Europe. Instead of Catholics and Protestants fighting each other, today's antagonists are Sunni and Shiite Muslims, whose competition for power similarly is fueled by ancient hatreds and competing faiths. In this holy war, there is very little the United States can do. In fact, the smartest strategy may be to step back and let radical elements within the Sunni and Shiite communities fight it out until the region is "purified." In this scenario, the United States would continue to prioritize combatting terrorist groups that could target the US homeland. On other issues, however, it would essentially be on the margins, only willing to intervene militarily if Sunni-Shiite violence directly threatens Israel or the stability of global commerce. And even then, the use of force by Washington would be "surgical" and designed to fulfill a specific, short-term goal.

This counterterrorism-focused option is a fair characterization of the Obama administration's foreign policy in the region (with the exception of NATO's military intervention in Libya). However, it is evident that the strategy has not produced desirable outcomes. The Middle East's security problems are hardly limited to terrorism. A minimalist and vastly noninterventionist US security approach risks both undermining US influence in the Middle East and losing traditional US regional partners, whose support is critical to addressing a myriad of other internal and external security threats facing the region—including failed states, civil wars, an intensifying Saudi-Iranian cold war, and Iran's destabilizing influence—that affect US strategic interests, as well as regional and international security.

Option Two: Hands-On

A hands-on approach, which has roots in the George W. Bush administration's philosophy toward the Middle East, merits careful discussion and honest evaluation. However, it is unclear if the failures of President Bush's freedom agenda in the region were purely due to poor policy implementation. Indeed, securing the Middle East through heavy military intervention and promotion of free elections (with little regard for other equally if not more important elements of democracy, including rule of law, good governance, and institution-building) was a risky and flawed strategy. The disastrous US experience in Iraq since 2003 provides enough warning about the consequences of US-led nation-building in the Middle East. Regardless of its intentions, Washington does not have sufficient economic resources, local knowledge, or political commitment to the region to do it right.

But beyond Iraq, Washington's push for free elections in Gaza brought Hamas—a group labeled as terrorist by the US government—to power. In Lebanon, Washington's cluttered support for anti-Syrian Lebanese politicians backfired and consequently increased Hezbollah's influence. Pressuring Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other regional partners to open up politically also was ineffective, partly due to internal resistance to what was understandably perceived as US meddling.

Option Three: Cooperative Security

A robust US containment approach to Middle East security ultimately would seek to help create a reasonably secure political space in the Middle East in which US regional partners can lead this period of transition with the least amount of violence and chaos. Such an approach that effectively:

- prevents Iran's possession of nuclear arms and, more broadly, the spread of nuclear weapons in the region;

- deters large-scale military conflict and, if deterrence fails, intervenes militarily on the side of US partners;

- stops escalation in the event of another war between Israel and Hezbollah and/or Israel and Hamas;

- reduces the scope and severity of civil wars;

- degrades violent, extremist groups; and

- limits the destabilizing influence of Iran in the region

would significantly contribute to the development of a cooperative security system in the region. In such a system, formal or informal, security would be a shared goal, jointly attained through regional bargaining, coordination, cooperation, and even competition, but in ways that effectively prevent escalation and limit violence and conflict. It is hard-nosed, realist arms control, but with broader applications than weapons cuts and limitations.

While cooperative security is a more sustainable and strategically sound security option for the United States and the region than the other two options, there should be no illusions about its inherent challenges. Indeed, it is unfortunate but not coincidental that this better option also happens to be the most complex and difficult to pursue. Nurturing a culture of arms control in the region will be an incredibly hard and lengthy process, especially in today's increasingly volatile environment.

Because of the depth and scope of the political and security problems currently facing the Middle East, one would not be faulted for believing that no multilateral arms control initiative could ever be seriously entertained and practiced in that part of the world.[1] How could arms control succeed in a region that is deeply troubled, dangerously torn apart, and heavily militarized? Indeed, with Middle East order collapsing, the prospect of countries in the region cooperating with each other at a time when they feel most threatened and concerned about their relative security seems presently unthinkable. Thus, the unprecedented move of placing real, verifiable, and mutual limitations on these countries' sovereignty, state secrets, and defense armaments for the collective goal of reducing regional insecurity seems even more far-fetched.

But it is precisely *because* of those reasons that arms control should be seriously pursued in the Middle East. Indeed, the Middle East, more so than at any other time, is in desperate need of a venue where countries in the region can discuss a host of security threats that pose a mutual danger and agree on a code of conduct for human and regional security.[2] For such a forum (and ideally a regime) to have any chance of materializing (the Middle East is the only region in the world not to have such a forum), it must not only be region-wide and inclusive but also conceived by and for the region. Though middle powers including Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have risen over the past few years, the buy-in of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, Turkey, and Egypt—the most pivotal states in the region—is most important.

Emphasis on local design and ownership of a regional security system notwithstanding, the United States and its extra-regional partners and allies can and should help facilitate the creation of such a system by serving as a critical node for cooperation, convening, facilitating, guiding, and providing technical and diplomatic assistance when needed.

This would not be the first time the United States tried to engineer Middle East security talks. It did so in 1991 following the multilateral peace discussions launched by the US-led Madrid Peace Conference. Made up of thirteen Arab states, Israel, a Palestinian delegation, and several other entities, an Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group was created to complement the bilateral tracks between Israel and the Palestinians on the one hand, and Israel and Syria on the other. ACRS focused on confidence-building and security-related issues but produced largely symbolic results. It ultimately collapsed in 1995, primarily due to failed attempts at bridging differences between Egypt and Israel on security priorities. Other important reasons for failure include the exclusion of key, confrontational states that carried a great deal of influence—Iran, Iraq, and Libya—and Syria's and Lebanon's boycotting of the talks. That Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria—all states suspected of having weapons of mass destruction-programs at the time[3]—were not present all but guaranteed the failure of the talks.

There is no question that the regional context has shifted dramatically since ACRS. Syria is ravaged by civil war. Iraq is a torn nation. Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi is gone. Lebanon broke free from Syria (though it is still controlled by pro-Iran Hezbollah). Egypt's regional weight has sharply decreased due to the upheavals of the past four years. Then, of course, there is Iran, whose nuclear program was not a major item

1 Bilal Y. Saab, "The Future of Arms Control in the Middle East," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 67, no. 3 (Summer 2013), pp. 426-436.

2 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Towards a Regional Security Regime for the Middle East: Issues and Options*, Report of the SIPRI Middle East Expert Group with a New Afterword by Peter Jones (Stockholm, October 2011), p. 43, http://books.sipri.org/files/misc/SIPRI2011Jones.pdf.
3 Ibid. Summary of the 1998 report.

of discussion two decades ago, but has now completely reshuffled the deck in terms of regional security and nonproliferation diplomacy. Furthermore, the status-affirmation and assertiveness of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar will force any potential regional security talks to take the views of these states into account; gone are the days when Egypt spoke for all Arabs. These emerging actors add an additional layer of complexity to any potential talks, which makes the task of understanding their interests and concerns even more important.

US leadership was crucial for the launch of ACRS. Secretary of State James A. Baker, in particular, played an instrumental role in pushing Israel and the Arab states to participate in the talks. Baker was highly respected by his Arab counterparts due to his toughness, straightforwardness, and impartiality. A new ACRS would require Washington to assign a veteran Middle East Special Envoy who could bring many of Baker's qualities and diplomatic skills.

But beyond US diplomatic leadership, the United States would have to strengthen its security and political relations with its traditional partners in the region and ideally negotiate defense treaties with those that are most vulnerable and willing—the Arab Gulf states. Among other obvious benefits, a closer and better-functioning security relationship with Washington would provide these partners with a stronger incentive to participate in security talks with their archrival—Iran—without having to worry about bargaining from a position of relative weakness. Indeed, Saudi Arabia and other US partners would never agree (and rightly so) to a regional security architecture that sanctions Iran's perceived dominance and increases their security vulnerabilities vis-à-vis Tehran. But on the other hand, and equally important, a regional security architecture that is specifically designed to weaken or "gang up on" Iran will also fail (Iran clearly would not participate in such a multilateral security arrangement). Therefore, the United States would need to engage in an artful balancing act to reassure its partners, while also being sensitive to Iran's legitimate security interests.

Regardless of the nature of US strategies for Middle East security, regional security will remain lacking, and long-term stability in the Middle East will remain elusive if the Arab world fails to make a serious push for political and economic development. However, the process of historical change in most parts of the Arab world cannot fully materialize or even begin to achieve desirable outcomes without first addressing the immediate and severe security challenges currently plaguing the region.

The hope is that as regional insecurity decreases, the likelihood of reform increases; or, in other words, positive change would actually become possible. This proposition is worth debating, however briefly. The Arab uprisings were supposed to be a wake-up call for governments in the region. "Reform or die" was meant to be the Arab Awakening's clearest message. With the exception of Tunisia, it seems that the lesson most Arab governments have drawn from the past five years is to double down on repression, instead of easing up. Indeed, the securitization of politics continues to be the preferred course of action for most governments in the region.

The United States can always try to come up with a more balanced and effective package of positive and negative incentives to push its partners and adversaries to institute good governance and reform their national economies. But if the history of US efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East is any guide, that approach faces serious limitations. The truth is that sustainable and peaceful change almost always comes from within. But will that type of change ever come? The concern is that, if the United States manages to effectively address many of the sources of internal and external insecurity, the motivation of many governments in the region to reform might actually decrease. A greater sense of internal safety and tranquility might encourage Arab governments to revert to the status quo ante and further delay change. Thus, the sense of urgency might drastically decrease.

It is tempting to argue that the United States should use the pressure generated by regional chaos as a tool or stark reminder to urge its partners to reform, or that it should make its efforts to help address regional insecurities conditional on their willingness to reform. While it sounds like a smart idea at first glance, it is a nonstarter. The United States should do whatever it can to help prevent the total collapse of order in the Middle East, simply because it is in its own interest to do so, regardless of what its partners choose to do internally.

"Whatever the course, however long the process took, and whatever its outcome," President George H. W. Bush said on Soviet reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev, "I wanted to see stable, and above all peaceful, change."[4] The Middle East is currently going through its own revolutionary changes, and it is critically important, as Bush National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft cautioned at a time when the Soviet empire was collapsing, to "mold and guide [these changes] into channels that would produce the right outcome."[5]

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4 Bartholomew Sparrow, *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), p. 430.
5 Ibid.

INTRODUCTION

Securing the Middle East after an Iran nuclear deal is the next big challenge for both the region and the international community. The United States and its allies have engaged in tireless diplomacy with Iran over the past few years to produce an agreement that would limit Tehran's nuclear program for the next decade and a half. But the hard work does not stop here; in fact, it may have just begun. To protect the deal (assuming one is finalized) and take full advantage of its potential benefits—which include the drastic reduction of the risk of nuclear weapons proliferating in the region—the United States needs a comprehensive strategy for regional security in the Middle East. After all, the ultimate prize and broader objective is and has always been to secure and stabilize the region. A potential nuclear deal with Iran, as strategically significant as it is, is only one piece of the Middle East security puzzle.

The Middle East has not witnessed a large-scale, multinational conflict between Arabs and Israelis since 1973. It also has not had to deal with another belligerent power bent on invading and annexing its neighbors since Saddam Hussein's Iraq was ousted from Kuwait by a US-led international coalition in 1991. Yet, despite this decades-long absence of major Arab-Israeli war, high-intensity regional military conflict, and aggressive attempts by any regional state to redraw borders and expand territorially, the Middle East today is more insecure and unstable than it has ever been in its modern history. It is ravaged by widespread violence, death, destruction, and human tragedy. How has it gone so horribly wrong?

The United States has been the principal guarantor of security in the Middle East since Britain's withdrawal from the region in the early 1970s. It has sought to secure the region primarily by deterring interstate war; preventing the rise of a hostile, dominant power; and countering the proliferation of nuclear weapons.[6] Aided by a preponderant US military footprint in the Gulf, Washington has used a hierarchical approach to regional security, effectively assuming the role of hegemonic stabilizer. Through that role, it helped avert another high-intensity military conflagration between Arabs and Israelis, similar to the 1967 and 1973 wars; it contained aggressive states such as Iran and Iraq throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s; it brokered peace between Egypt and Israel in March 1979, and between the latter and Jordan in October 1994; and it successfully convinced Iran, using

positive and negative incentives, to roll back its nuclear program for at least the next decade and a half.

These significant achievements notwithstanding, Washington's top-down approach to regional security has always had important limitations. As the name indicates, the approach is state-centric and is most effective in dealing with macro—but not micro—security issues. Despite a greater US emphasis on countering Middle East terrorism and insurgency since 9/11, Washington has had little success in addressing the domestic sources of regional insecurity, specifically the meteoric rise of militant nonstate actors that have proliferated and gained tremendous influence in the region over the past decade. US policymakers also have failed to appreciate how internal and external security often intersect in an increasingly interconnected region and international system.

> A POTENTIAL NUCLEAR DEAL WITH IRAN, AS STRATEGICALLY SIGNIFICANT AS IT IS, IS ONLY ONE PIECE OF THE MIDDLE EAST SECURITY PUZZLE.

For decades, Washington opted for short-term stability by partnering with authoritarian states that were, and still are, politically fragile yet committed to safeguarding two US strategic interests: not going to war against Israel and ensuring the supply of cheap oil to the global economy. This was Washington's grand bargain in the Middle East. Though inherently unstable, it lasted more than four decades. However, it ultimately collapsed, primarily because it could not keep up with rapidly changing global and regional trends, and specifically with an information revolution around the world and a demographic bulge in the Middle East whose agents had, for a long time, been denied political rights, religious freedom, and economic opportunity.

The past five years in the Middle East have underscored the critical need for a bottom-up approach to regional security—one that complements, or at least does not stand in the way of, a US-led top-down approach. The Arab Awakening is an example, among many others in history, which helps demonstrate that what happens within states implicates the security of others and that of the entire region. Equally important, how these states are set up, how they are perceived

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6 The United States did little to stop Iran and Iraq from fighting for eight years in 1980-88, and even helped prolong the conflict in an effort to weaken and contain both adversaries.

by the global community of nations and by their own publics, and how they perform domestically also significantly affect internal and potentially regional security.

A regional security approach from the ground up requires nothing less than overhauling an Arab state system that has been a major source of insecurity and instability in the region. Having failed since its formation in the first half of the twentieth century to garner popular legitimacy, accommodate religiously and ethnically diverse communities, and generate equitable economic growth, such a system has finally imploded. Of course, several Arab countries, including the Gulf states, survived the recent upheavals, but all of them continue to struggle, in varying degrees, with the state-building enterprise. This overarching failure or weakness of governance has greatly contributed to insecurity in the Middle East for decades, leading to terrorism, insurgency, and domestic conflict.

For this long-term political experiment to succeed, Arabs—not the United States or any other foreign power—should be at the forefront. The disastrous US experience in Iraq since 2003 provides enough warning about the consequences of US-led nation-building in the Middle East. Regardless of its intentions, Washington does not have sufficient economic resources, local knowledge, or political commitment to the region to do it right. Moreover, any heavy US involvement would delegitimize the process and undermine local ownership. Like other civilizations in history who underwent difficult and often violent political transitions before them, Arabs will have to go through a process of trial and error aimed at building a just and viable social contract, a process that is likely to extend throughout much of the twenty-first century. Until the Arab world charts a path forward and starts addressing its rampant political decay, religious hubris, and economic mismanagement, regional security will remain scarce, and challenges such as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), Iran's destabilizing behavior in the region, and the growth of violent extremism—to just name a few—will continue to present themselves and possibly worsen with time.

Yet, as critical as good governance is for long-term regional stability, it will currently neither secure nor halt the unraveling of the Middle East. Indeed, even if a long-term Arab reform process were to start now, it will take years to potentially yield positive results. Therefore, it will not solve immediate security challenges such as rolling back ISIS, countering Iran's asymmetric threat, terminating Syria's civil war, combating terrorism in Egypt, securing Iraq, ending Libya's anarchy, and preventing Yemen's descent into chaos. In fact, if modern European history is any guide, democratization itself (in whatever form it may take in the Middle East) is likely to generate, at least in the short

> UNTIL THE ARAB WORLD CHARTS A PATH FORWARD AND STARTS ADDRESSING ITS RAMPANT POLITICAL DECAY, RELIGIOUS HUBRIS, AND ECONOMIC MISMANAGEMENT, REGIONAL SECURITY WILL REMAIN SCARCE.

term, greater insecurity and political violence, which, given its current cataclysmic conditions, the region simply cannot afford. In an ideal world, Arabs would be able to effectively and simultaneously address both long-term governance and short-term security issues, but it is too tall and unrealistic an order for state structures that already lack capacity, resources, know-how, and political bandwidth.

To be clear, this is not a call to put Arab political development on hold indefinitely or until there is perfect security in the region. There is no such thing as perfect security. But it does strongly suggest adopting a more coherent and robust approach to drastically improving prevalent and extremely challenging security circumstances throughout the region, which effectively are delaying, if not obstructing, this historical process of change in the Middle East. Whether we like it or not, so long as states in the region perceive existential threats and prioritize physical security, reform will take a back seat.

In today's extremely volatile regional environment, security is a basic and necessary public good that should be pursued first, though not as an end in itself but as a necessary condition to enable change. However we have to accept the reality that whether or not change does happen, and the manner in which it happens, is still entirely dependent on the decisions and actions of local agents themselves—as it has always been. The hope is that as security increases, so does the likelihood of reform.

To enhance regional security conditions in the short run, it is important to know why such conditions have massively deteriorated in recent years. Local circumstances throughout the region and their disparate effects on security are of course relevant, but a broader explanation for the worsening of regional security circumstances can be found in the intensifying rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran (and their respective allies), the region's Sunni and Shiite pivotal powers, respectively.

The proxy war between Riyadh and Tehran, which dates back to the early 1980s, is not responsible for the region's dissolution, although it has broadened and deepened regional insecurity, prolonging and exacerbating conflicts through exploitation of ethnic, religious, and sectarian faultlines. ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other terrorist elements have taken advantage of this environment of chaos and gained control of large swaths of land and large amounts of resources in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and other areas, threatening the security of the Middle East and potentially that of Western countries. Therefore, overcoming the Middle East's massive security deficit will require, among other things, a marked de-escalation in the increasingly tumultuous relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

In this ever more complex environment in the Middle East, where the distinction between foreign and domestic seems increasingly blurred, there are real limitations to the United States' ability to shape or influence outcomes. Furthermore, given the amount of blood and treasure the United States has spent in the region thus far, there is a reduced appetite in Washington and among the American public for greater US involvement in the Middle East. However, as attractive as it sounds, a hands-off US approach, which boils down to letting the region burn itself out until a new, more peaceful order emerges, can prove very costly. Terrorism emanating from the Middle East that could target the US homeland in ways similar to the 9/11 attacks and the continued strategic importance of the region's stability and energy resources to international security and the global economy, respectively, are two important reasons why the United States cannot afford to be a bystander and watch the region completely fall apart.

In this report, the author makes the case for a more creative and cost-effective US containment approach for regional security in the Middle East that seeks, among other things, to ultimately involve regional stakeholders in a cooperative security system. The author starts with four key assumptions: First, there is no lasting security and stability in the Middle East without real political and economic development. Second, the United States neither can nor should be the agent pushing for change in the region; change should almost always come from within. Third, change cannot happen without first addressing immediate and severe security challenges. And fourth, the United States cannot address those security challenges alone.

What follows from this set of assumptions is a new guiding principle for US security engagement in the Middle East: the creation through effective deterrence and, depending on the issue, containment of a variety of internal and external security threats of a reasonably secure political space in the Middle East, in which US regional partners can lead this period of transition with the least amount of violence and chaos. The Obama administration has championed this reconceptualization or recalibration of the US role in the Middle East from that of a fixer to facilitator, but unfortunately with little credibility, creativity, consistency, strategic guidance, or commitment to implementation.

A robust US containment approach to Middle East security that effectively:

- prevents Iran's possession of nuclear arms and more broadly the spread of WMDs in the region;

- deters large-scale military conflict and, if deterrence fails, intervenes militarily on the side of US partners;

- stops escalation in the event of another war between Israel and Hezbollah, and Israel and Hamas;

- reduces the scope and severity of civil wars;

- degrades violent, extremist groups; and

- limits Iranian destabilizing influence in the region

would significantly contribute to the development of a cooperative security system in the region. In such a system—formal or informal—security would be a shared goal, preserved jointly through regional bargaining, cooperation, coordination, and even competition, but in ways that effectively prevent escalation and limit violence and conflict.

This report offers practical suggestions for US policymakers to effectively pursue these important security goals as critical stepping stones to ultimately enabling US regional partners to make strides toward sustainable stability—one that is built on good governance, rule of law, and economic development.

Photo 1. A Sea Hawk helicopter takes off from the *USS Truxtun*, which is deployed to support maritime security operations and theater security cooperation efforts in the Gulf.
Photo credit: US Navy/Flickr.

EXTERNAL SECURITY

External insecurity is a familiar excuse used by authoritarian governments to justify to their own populations (and even to the outside world) delaying the implementation of internal reforms. "No voice is louder than the sound of battle" was Egypt's notorious slogan under the leadership of President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The slogan meant to suggest that preparing for another war against Israel after the humiliating defeat of 1967 was a top priority that took precedence over any other public policy issue. It seemed understandable, given Egypt's loss of strategic territory to Israel in the Sinai Peninsula. But Cairo's state of emergency law remained in force for decades after the two countries signed a peace accord in 1979, serving as a tool to inhibit political life and stifle any calls for reform. This tendency to limit freedoms also applies to democratic governments when they perceive external threats, although to varying degrees. Take the United States, for example. Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States issued legislation that permitted, among other things, spying on US citizens in the name of fighting terrorism. Many Americans saw and continue to see the Patriot Act, which President G. W. Bush signed into law fourteen years ago, as a threat to civil liberties.

Yet, it is hard to overstate the level of insecurity in today's Middle East. While autocratic governments used to imagine and even fabricate security threats in the past to justify and legitimize oppressive rule, those threats currently are very real. Addressing them has required placing security on top of the public policy agenda and taking away from precious resources that could have been allocated to domestic development programs. The following describes some of the major sources of external insecurity in the region.

Iran's Nuclear Program and the Risk of Nuclear Proliferation

A potential nuclear deal between Iran and the US-led group of nations known as the P5+1 (the United States, Britain, France, China, Russia, and Germany) that caps the former's nuclear program for the next decade and a half would re-

Photo 2. High-level talks on a comprehensive agreement on the Iranian nuclear program took place in early April, 2015 in Lausanne, Switzerland, between China, France, Germany, the EU, Iran, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. *Photo credit*: European External Action Service/Flickr.

duce the risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. However, the deal would not eliminate this risk, and it is not at all clear that it would make the region any safer, now or after the deal expires.

Iran could violate the agreement by secretly going beyond the provisions of a deal and preparing for the day when it may need full nuclear weapons capability. But the risk is not limited to Iran reneging on its nuclear commitments. After key provisions of the deal expire (the duration of the deal is unclear, but it is generally understood that it would last fifteen years), Iran would be able to use advanced centrifuges that enrich uranium faster and to acquire a nuclear weapon if it so chooses (though how quickly it can do so is unclear and has been hotly debated).

Over the past few years, most Arab Gulf states, along with other important US regional partners—including Egypt, Jordan, and Israel—have raised serious concerns, both publicly and privately, over a nuclear accord with Iran that neither removes its nuclear weapons production capabilities nor arrests its growing destabilizing influence in the Middle East. Anxious about their security and unsure about the future

of their security relationships with the United States, Washington's regional partners would most likely hedge their bets, possibly pursue their own nuclear programs (maybe not all but some of them), intensify their arms buildups (as some already have), and compete much more aggressively with Iran in various strategic domains (signs of that are already emerging in Syria and Yemen). This could create dangerous security dilemmas in the Middle East, increasing the likelihood of regional war.

Iran-Saudi Arabia Cold War

The cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran is not new. The feud between these two nations dates back to 1979, when the Islamic Republic of Iran was born. But since the start of the Arab uprisings, this strategic competition has escalated and spread, tearing apart nations like Syria and Iraq and destabilizing others, including Yemen, Jordan, Bahrain, and Lebanon. Indeed, the domestic conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and recently Yemen would not have endured and caused this much death and destruction had Saudi Arabia and Iran cooperated to end the violence. Instead, each country backed its own proxies in an attempt to increase its relative influ-

ence in the region at the expense of the other. Saudi Arabia, along with other Sunni-majority governments in the region, currently perceive a dangerous imbalance in Sunni-Shiite power relations in the Middle East, and they are doing all they can to rectify it (Riyadh's military campaign in Yemen, and soon possibly in Syria, is in many ways a byproduct of this perception). Iran, on the other hand, believes that Saudi Arabia is at the forefront of a regional campaign to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, destabilize the Iraqi government, and defeat the Houthis in Yemen, using tools like air power and Sunni extremist militancy to achieve its objectives. The most dangerous aspect of this struggle is that both Iran and Saudi Arabia see it as zero-sum, where relative gains by either side in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, or Lebanon are perceived as losses by the other.

Iran's Asymmetric Threat

Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East has been a topic of serious debate since 1979. Some view Iran as a status quo state that seeks to preserve the regional balance of power to ensure its survival. Others argue that Iran is a revisionist state bent on shaping the future of the region in its favor by using offensive tactics. The reality, as always in the Middle East, is more complex and nuanced than these two scenarios. The Islamic Republic's thirty-six-year history suggests that it is a pragmatic power that more often than not calculates the costs and benefits of its actions. Its ideological leanings and perception of civilizational superiority in relation to Arabs notwithstanding, Iran is neither purely offensive nor purely defensive. Depending on the circumstances and the stakes at hand, Iran will calibrate its level of engagement. In short, it is a rational, though not necessarily reasonable, actor.

Yet regardless of how one describes Iran's foreign policy, some facts are indisputable. To pursue its interests in the region, Iran has projected power externally by building an impressive network of militant proxies. These proxies have challenged the authority of central governments, engaged in political violence, and even instigated external wars (Hez-

> THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC'S THIRTY-SIX-YEAR HISTORY SUGGESTS THAT IT IS A PRAGMATIC POWER THAT MORE OFTEN THAN NOT CALCULATES THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF ITS ACTIONS.

bollah triggered a war against Israel in the summer of 2006 by conducting a deadly military operation against Israeli troops along the Israeli-Lebanese border). Hezbollah is undoubtedly the most successful case of Iranian power projection in the region, but it is not the only one. Iran nurtures and supports a range of Shiite politicians, militiamen, and intelligence agents in Iraq and Bahrain as well as the Houthis in Yemen. It also has had a strategic partnership with Syria for three and a half decades, although the relationship is currently at risk due to the civil war in Syria. So long as Iran continues to aggressively interfere in other countries' domestic affairs, regional security will be at risk.

The Next Israel-Hezbollah War

While the likelihood of another multinational Arab-Israeli war has significantly decreased over the years (Iraq is no longer a confrontational state; Syria is in a state of civil war; Egypt and Jordan have peace agreements with Israel; and there is a strengthening anti-Iranian alignment of interests between Israel and several Arab Gulf states), the next war between Hezbollah and Israel may be just around the corner.[7] Should another war happen, there is reason to believe that it will be even larger and bloodier than the 2006 conflict, involving multiple actors and possibly leading to a direct war between Iran and Israel.[8] Such an outcome would be catastrophic for regional security.

Mutual deterrence has so far prevented another war between Hezbollah and Israel, but there is no shortage of flashpoints that could reignite the conflict:

- The fact that Hezbollah is currently present on the Syrian side of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights fighting rebels alongside Assad's forces is a cause for Israeli concern. Should Hezbollah gain a stronger foothold in the area, Israel might react militarily. For example, in January, the Israeli air force killed six Hezbollah fighters and an Iranian general in the Syrian Golan Heights town of Quneitra. The Lebanese *Daily Star* reported that "among Hezbollah's casualties was Jihad Mughniyeh, the son of Hezbollah's senior commander Imad Mughniyeh, who was killed in a 2008 Mossad-led operation in Damascus."[9] Israel is watching Hezbollah and Iran's offensive in southern Syria very closely, because it is concerned that its foes might plan a new front along its northeast border.

7 Bilal Y. Saab and Nicholas Blanford, "Seeing Red along the Blue Line," *Foreign Policy*, July 29, 2011, http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/07/29/seeing-red-along-the-blue-line-2/.

8 Bilal Y. Saab and Nicholas Blanford, "The Next War: How Another Conflict between Hizballah and Israel Could Look and How Both Sides Are Preparing for It," Brookings, Analysis Paper, no. 24, August 2011, http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2011/8/hizballah-israel/08_hizballah_israel.pdf.

9 "Conflicting Reports over Israeli Airstrike on East Lebanon Border Area," *Daily Star,* June 2, 2015 http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Jun-02/300250-israeli-air-raid-targets-east-lebanon-border-area-near-brital-casualties-unknown-security-sources.ashx.

- In the nine years since the end of the 2006 war, Hezbollah has significantly increased its military capabilities, acquiring long-range rockets and surface-to-sea missiles fitted with guidance systems, receiving training on more advanced air defense systems, and making further advances in signals intelligence and communications. Hezbollah's military evolution is itself a strong incentive for Israel to launch a war to degrade, at least temporarily, the Shiite group's capabilities.

- With the recent discovery of two large natural gas fields off Israel's and Lebanon's coasts, the risk of a dispute over maritime border demarcation escalating and leading to war is high, given the deep animosities between Israel and Hezbollah. Hezbollah's leaders have warned Israel not to develop the gas fields and have vowed that the group would restore the sovereignty of Lebanon's waters in the face of what it alleges is Israeli theft.

- The evolution of the Syrian civil war could spark another Hezbollah-Israel war. If the Assad regime believes that it faces imminent collapse, it could ignite a limited conflict with Israel in the Golan Heights as part of a diversionary war. Or it could even launch an all-out assault as a final act before collapse. Either scenario could quickly escalate and broaden to include Hezbollah, even against the party's will.

- With Hezbollah incurring heavy losses in the Syrian conflict, Israel could exploit its adversary's relative weakness and launch an attack intended to neutralize the Shiite group's military threat.

The prevailing peace along the Lebanon-Israel border is a result of both sides absorbing the costs of the 2006 war and the risks inherent in another round of fighting. Yet, although this is the longest period of tranquility along the traditionally volatile frontier since the late 1960s, the calm remains precarious and could be shattered at any time. Neither Hezbollah nor Israel wants another war. However, neither believes that the 2006 conflict will be the last battle waged between them, and both sides have been feverishly preparing for the next war since the last one ended.

The Next Israel-Hamas War

The likelihood of another war between Israel and Hamas is hard to gauge, but the preconditions that led to conflict in the past continue to be prevalent today. It is the precipitants that might change. Hamas continues to lick its wounds following last summer's fifty-day war in Gaza and Operation Protective Edge, which left its medium-range missile stocks depleted and much of its tunnel infrastructure destroyed.[10] The group was forced to rely on indigenously-made missiles in the absence of Iranian monetary and military support,

which was withdrawn due to Hamas' unwillingness to back the Assad regime in Syria.[11] Tensions with Iran, combined with Egypt's crackdown on smuggling in the Sinai and Israel's ongoing blockade, have made for a slow rebuilding process since the end of the war.

However, there are recent indications that Hamas is beginning to accelerate the speed of its recovery. The group conducted outreach to both Hezbollah and Iran in early 2015, seeking renewed cooperation. Hamas' military leadership sent a letter to Hezbollah in January calling for unity against Israel.[12] Relations with Iran also have thawed, and *Wall Street Journal* reports that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps is believed to have transferred tens of millions of dollars to Hamas' al-Qassam brigades.[13]

Renewed working relationships among Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran could see Hezbollah and a strengthened Hamas engage Israel along its northern and southern borders, with Hamas using Iranian funds to rebuild its tunnel network and replenish its missile stocks. Israel would run the risk of a smaller border conflagration escalating into a two-front war, necessitating a division of forces and creating the potential for heavier casualties. Civilians on both sides would almost certainly be heavily affected. Israeli intelligence assesses that Hamas may be seeking to cultivate amphibious capabilities and claims to have shot down drones from Gaza, suggesting new challenges to Israel's security.[14] While Qatar is rumored to be moderating a long-term ceasefire with Israel, prospects are not bright, as Israel refuses to lift its blockade until the Gaza strip is demilitarized.[15] Rapprochement with Iran will neither benefit this process nor contribute to better relations for Hamas with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt.

In the immediate future, Hamas' main goals will be rebuilding its capabilities and neutralizing extremist adversaries in Gaza. Hamas was forced to disavow rockets fired toward

10 "Gaza-Israel Conflict: Is the Fighting Over?," BBC News, August 26, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28252155.

11 Adnan Abu Amer, "With Little Help from Iran, Hamas Fights Israel with Homemade Rockets," *Al-Monitor*, July 16, 2014, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/hamas-war-israel-without-iran-support.html.
12 Nidal Almughrabi, "Hamas Calls on Hezbollah to Unite Fight against Israel," Reuters, January 22, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/22/us-israel-palestinians-hezbollah-idUSKBN0KV10920150122.
13 Con Coughlin, "Iran Rekindles Relations with Hamas," *Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 2015, http://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-rekindles-relations-with-hamas-1429658562.
14 William Booth, "Here's What Really Happened in the Gaza War (according to the Israelis)," *WorldViews* (blog), *Washington Post*, September 3, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/09/03/heres-what-really-happened-in-the-gaza-war-according-to-the-israelis/.
15 Jack Moore, "Qatar Mediating Long-Term Truce between Israel and Hamas," *Newsweek*, March 26, 2015, http://europe.newsweek.com/qatar-mediating-long-term-gaza-ceasefire-between-israel-and-hamas-316663.

Israel by a Salafist group claiming allegiance to ISIS in late May and early June, and similar groups are believed to be behind explosions near Hamas security posts.[16] Hamas will seek to stamp out such actors in order to avoid retribution from Israel and maintain the ten-month ceasefire, buying itself more time to rebuild.

International Intervention

International intervention has been a topic of heated discussion and policy debate since the 1990s. Many on the political left believe that international intervention in developing countries' conflicts on humanitarian grounds is almost always destabilizing, because it upsets internal political dynamics, kills innocent people, amplifies the insecurities and vulnerabilities of domestic societies, and rarely fixes the problem. Advocates of humanitarian interventions, on the other hand, argue that ethnic conflicts cause great human suffering and are a significant threat to domestic and regional peace. And because they are less likely to end on their own, a "solution from above" is often necessary to stop the systematic violence and avert further atrocities.

Many in the Middle East, however, believe that Western and specifically US humanitarian intervention is imperialism in disguise. Even those who maintain that the United States has noble intentions have concerns that Washington's bull-in-a-china-shop approach can make matters worse. Once again, the 2003 Iraq war is a good example. Few people in the region today care about whether Washington intervened in Iraq to eliminate Saddam Hussein's (nonexistent) nuclear materials or to save the Iraqi people from tyranny, or both. What matters is that the war and its aftermath have had disastrous consequences from which Iraq, the United States, and the region as a whole are still suffering.

Having overthrown the dictatorial regime of Libyan President Muammar Qaddafi and prevented a possible genocide, the NATO-led war in Libya in 2011 is perceived in a more positive light than the US invasion of Iraq. Nevertheless, the country is currently experiencing high levels of anarchy and instability, posing a threat to itself and to its neighbors. Libya is awash with arms and illicit drug trafficking. The country is run by militiamen, warlords, and, in some parts, ISIS-linked jihadists. Significantly contributing to the disorder in Libya is a lack of political commitment on the part of Western intervening powers to the pacification and reconstruction of the war-torn nation. If Libya is a model for humanitarian intervention, as several advocates of the war have said, then it is a model for how not to intervene.[17]

Should the next US military intervention in the Middle East not be backed by international law, effective military capabilities, sufficient financial resources, and strong political commitment, it will most likely fail and therefore cause greater insecurity in the region.

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16 Fares Akram, "Hamas Busy Tackling Pro-ISIS Jihadis in Gaza—Middle East," Haaretz.com, June 8, 2015, http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/1.660205.

17 Alan Kuperman, "Lessons from Libya: How Not to Intervene," Policy Brief, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, September 2013, http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/23387/lessons_from_libya.html.

Photo 3. After crossing the Turkish border between August 15 and August 17, 2013, more than fifteen thousand Syrian refugees were transported to camps in Duhok and Kawrgosk, near Erbil. *Photo credit*: Béatrice Dillies/Flickr.

INTERNAL INSECURITY

If Arab governments used war with Israel as an excuse to maintain police states and delay reforms, the fight against terrorism and more generally the preservation of public order is currently one of the biggest reasons for keeping political opening at bay.

Failed states, civil wars, and violent extremist groups are major sources of internal insecurity in the Middle East. Though all of these threats, as previously argued, find roots in the very design of the Arab state system—corrupt, politically closed, despotic, and economically dysfunctional—this does not change the fact that their effects on domestic and regional security in the Middle East are especially significant and taxing on both the people and governments.

Failed States

Institutional deterioration or breakdown often results in the state's inability to provide public goods for the population, the most important of which is protection from internal and external dangers.[18] Failure to effectively consolidate state institutions also allows for the proliferation of nonstate actors who challenge the state's authority and monopoly over the use of force.

Weak and failed states can have similar traits, which is why they are often confused. But a clear and definitive indicator of a state's failure is its lack of practical, central control over much of its territory. According to this definition, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya are failed states due to the rebels' (extremist and moderate alike) control of large amounts of state territory,[19] while almost all other states in the region

18 Francis Fukuyama's work on institutional capacity is particularly relevant. Francis Fukuyama, *State-building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).
19 Lebanon is an interesting case because Hezbollah, a nonstate actor, effectively controls the southern part of the country and the capital's southern suburbs, and is a dominant political player in the Lebanese government. But few observers would call Lebanon a failed state, even though it does meet the definition laid out above.

> **SHOULD THE NEXT US MILITARY INTERVENTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST NOT BE BACKED BY INTERNATIONAL LAW, EFFECTIVE MILITARY CAPABILITIES, SUFFICIENT FINANCIAL RESOURCES, AND STRONG POLITICAL COMMITMENT, IT WILL MOST LIKELY FAIL AND THEREFORE CAUSE GREATER INSECURITY IN THE REGION.**

are weak states due to their inability to effectively control their borders and provide a set of public goods to a wider segment of their populations.

While failed states are often portrayed as breeding grounds for terrorists, it may be that weak or failing states pose a bigger threat to domestic, regional, and possibly international security. This is because the latter group of states offers more practical benefits to terrorists (including infrastructure, public order, communications, housing, hospitals, and a public financial system) than environments in which order has completely broken down and basic goods and services are nonexistent. However, the nature and aspirations of the terrorist group matter a great deal. An entity such as ISIS, for example, is more interested in completely overhauling the existing order and establishing a system of governance in accordance with its own beliefs and ideology. Therefore, standing state capacity matters little to ISIS (in fact, the less the better for ISIS). By contrast, for a purely terrorist organization such as al-Qaeda, or a criminalist network, a more favorable environment from which it could operate, plan, coordinate, and communicate is a weak state rather than a failed one.

Beyond the rise of terrorist and insurgent groups, the total failure of the Syrian and Iraqi states (or what is left of the former) has been a source of domestic and regional insecurity due to the massive migration flows and internal displacements that they have caused. For example, the tiny nation of Lebanon, with a total population of around four-and-a-half million, today hosts more than one million Syrian refugees.[20] Until the bullets stop flying in Syria, these refu-

gees will continue to cause major economic burdens, social strains, and security concerns for an already shaky Lebanon.

The breakdown of the Libyan and Yemeni states has created an environment in which weapons flow inside the country and across the borders, various forms of illicit trafficking take place, and illegal commercial networks flourish. Indeed, "Libya is now home to the world's largest loose arms cache, and its porous borders are routinely transited by a host of armed nonstate actors . . . The United Nations also has documented the flow of arms from Libya into Egypt, Gaza, Niger, Somalia, and Syria."[21]

The Libyan government's inability to prevent ISIS from taking control of strategic Libyan territory is a major cause for concern for European, and specifically Italian, authorities (given Italy's physical proximity to Libya). Even though ISIS recently suffered some setbacks in Libya as a result of airstrikes by the recently-formed Libyan government and of fighting with al-Qaeda-linked militants, the group still has a considerable presence in cities like Sirte and Derna to the east.

US Secretary of State John Kerry probably engaged in wishful thinking when he said on May 2, 2015, that Yemen was "not yet a failed state."[22] But the truth is that Yemen is effectively one, having lost control of much territory to Houthi rebels, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and a host of other militant factions. Saudi Arabia, leading a military campaign against the Houthis and other rebels in Yemen, is not only concerned by the growing risk of terrorism from Yemen but also by the spillover effects of the Shiite rebellion in northern Yemen and the growing influence—real or perceived—of Iran in the country and across the region.

Civil Wars

Civil wars cause failed states and failed states cause civil wars. However, failed states are a latent threat—they can but do not necessarily bring about systematic violence. Civil wars, on the other hand, are actual threats, which by definition produce a tremendous amount of death (at least one thousand per year), destruction, and human suffering. Civil wars may even cause interstate conflict. The Middle East has had its fair share of civil wars, with at least six nations experiencing such wars over the past few decades.

Until Syria, the most notorious civil war the region had ever witnessed was the 1975-90 Lebanese civil war. It was long, deadly, and it had regional ramifications. An estimated

20 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile—Lebanon," http://www.unhcr.org/

pages/49e486676.html.
21 Giorgio Cafiero and Daniel Wagner, "Four Years after Gaddafi, Libya Is a Failed State—Analysis," *Eurasia Review*, April 6, 2015, http://www.eurasiareview.com/06042015-four-years-after-gaddafi-libya-is-a-failed-state-analysis/.
22 "John Kerry: Yemen Not Yet a Failed State, May 'Hold Itself Together' with Peace Talks," Associated Press, May 2, 2015.

Photo 4. Iraqi soldiers and paratroopers fire at paper targets at the opening of the Anbar Operation Center's new range in Ramadi on September 10, 2011. *Photo credit*: The US Army/Flickr.

150,000 people died as a result of the war and more than 1 million (a quarter of the population) were displaced. The property damage alone was estimated at $25 to $30 billion, which constituted close to thirteen times the national income of the country at the end of the war.[23] Though it was a domestic struggle for power fought among Lebanese, various foreign nations intervened on the side of their allies, prolonging and intensifying the conflict. The war ended in 1990 with the signing of a Syria-imposed peace settlement—the Taif Agreement—that brought about a new Lebanese power-sharing arrangement that effectively was under Damascus's control until 2005.

In its fifth year, the Syrian civil war has already had more disastrous effects than the fifteen-year Lebanese civil war. It has led to the country's disintegration, killing thus far more than 220,000 people, internally displacing 7.6 million and relocating 3.9 million others to neighboring countries,[24] and

costing billions of dollars in property damage (not to mention the enormous psychological damage to those who managed to survive and the extremely difficult humanitarian circumstances under which the next generation of Syrians will have to live). The picture from Iraq is not that dissimilar. While the death toll from Iraq since the 2003 US invasion is harder to measure given the conflict's various phases, one study found that "nearly half a million people have died from war-related causes in the country since 2003."[25] The numbers from Libya and Yemen's ongoing civil wars are less alarming, but there seems to be no end in sight to the violence in either country, with things getting even worse.

Because they have a tendency to spill over, civil wars also pose threats to the stability of neighbors and possibly the region. It is not entirely clear how internal conflict in one state specifically leads to its onset in another,[26] but three

23 Dana Kraiche, "Lebanese Civil War Memories Die Hard," *Daily Star*, April 13, 2012 http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Apr-13/170177-lebanese-civil-war-memories-die-hard.ashx.
24 USAID, "Syria Complex Emergency," March 31, 2015, http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/syria_ce_fs05_03-31-2015.pdf.

25 Kerry Sheridan, "Iraq Death Toll Reaches 500,000 Since Start Of U.S.-Led Invasion, New Study Says," Agence France Presse, January 23, 2014. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/15/iraq-death-toll_n_4102855.html.
26 Nathan Black, "When Have Violent Civil Conflicts Spread? Introducing a Dataset of Substate Conflict Contagion," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 50, no. 6, 2013, pp. 757-8.

factors play primary roles in encouraging spillover[27]: Population movements and refugees; the support or intervention of external actors; and the fragility of neighboring states.

First, civil wars frequently result in massive refugee flows and movements of populations over borders. These movements can significantly harm the receiving nation, which is often forced to "divert resources away from state capacity building and core infrastructure planning"[28] to support migrants. In addition to the logistical challenge they present, refugees also pose security risks for receiving countries by, among other things, waging war from their new locations.[29]

Second, intervention by a neighboring state or external actor increases the chances that a civil war will not only spread but also endure.[30] History is replete with examples of this, including the civil wars in Uganda, Bosnia, Nicaragua, Nagorno-Karabakh, Sudan, Afghanistan, Libya, and Lebanon.[31]

Third, the fragility of neighboring states also plays a role in heightening the risk of spillover. Such fragility may take the form of a porous border that is easily crossed.[32] State capacity, which includes "stability, control, protection from predation, the extraction of resources, and the ability to adapt and respond to crises," is crucial to estimating a state's ability to avoid spillover.[33] In particular, neighboring states' capacity to secure borders and manage the influx of refugees, weapons, and violence, as well as their ability to manage domestic sentiment and dissuade local populations from emulating rebel movements in other states, are important determinants of civil war spillover.[34] Finally, the ability of neighboring states to manage and resource refugee populations is another indication of neighboring states' fragility.[35]

27 William Young, et al., *Spillover from the Conflict in Syria: An Assessment of the Factors that Aid and Impede the Spread of Violence* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR600/RR609/RAND_RR609.pdf.
28 Ibid, p. 9.
29 Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2014), p. 5.
30 Tony Addison and S. Mansoob Murshed, *Transnational Terrorism as a Spillover of Domestic Disputes in Other Countries*, World Institute for Development Economics, December 2002, p. 13; Patrick Regan, "Third-Party Interventions and the Duration of Intrastate Conflicts," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 46, 2002, pp. 55-6.
31 Kyle Beardsley, "Peacekeeping and the Contagion of Armed Conflict," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 73, no. 4, 2011, p. 1052. Referenced in William Young et al, *Spillover from the Conflict in Syria*, p. 7.
32 Boaz Atzili, "When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors: Fixed Borders, Sate Weaknesses, and International Conflict," *International Security,* vol. 31, no. 3, 2006/7, pp. 51-2. Referenced in William Young, et al., *Spillover from the Conflict in Syria,* op. cit., p. 9.
33 Alex Braithwaite, "Resisting Infection: How State Capacity Conditions Conflict Contagion," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2010, p. 313.
34 Ibid., p. 314.
35 William Young, et al., *Spillover from the Conflict in Syria,* op. cit., p. 10.

Violent, Extremist Groups

With regional chaos spreading, there is currently no shortage of violent, extremist groups in the Middle East that constantly challenge state authority and domestic peace. But among those actors, jihadist fighters loyal to ISIS and al-Qaeda pose the gravest threats to the region because they:

• are endowed with a larger amount of human and material resources;

• kill more people and cause more damage to infrastructure and property than any other nonstate actor;

• operate in multiple countries, from which they also plan operations against others;

• are the most heavily armed;

• control vast swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria;

• have a transnational ideology that continues to attract disenfranchised people not only from the region but from around the world;

• are strategically oriented, disciplined, and determined;

• are technically and technologically proficient; and

• cannot be reasoned or negotiated with.

If failed states cause civil wars, so can terrorist and insurgent groups (they also can prolong and intensify civil wars). By launching spectacular suicide bombings against Iraqi Shiites in 2004-06, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the late leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), succeeded in igniting a fierce civil war between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq, whose effects are still felt to this day. His successor, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, changed the name of AQI to the Islamic State (or ISIS, or ISIL) but continued the pursuit of Zarqawi's dream of an extremist Sunni enclave across the region, thus far making considerable progress.

Jihadists belonging to ISIS and al-Qaeda's franchises in the region are currently in control of half of Syria and major parts of northern and western Iraq. They also are strengthening their presence in Libya, Yemen, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Lebanon, terrorizing and radicalizing local populations. There is no shortage of opportunities for jihadists in today's Middle East. In fact, they are so plentiful that ISIS and al-Qaeda's franchises are locked in a violent competition for power, territory, money, and followers (that they disagree on strategy and priorities does not change that fact).

Photo 5. A view from above the 9/11 World Trade Center wreckage. *Photo credit*: wcm1111/Flickr.

US STRATEGY OPTIONS

The United States has three realistic, strategic options to choose from to arrest the collapse of order in the Middle East and improve security conditions. These options may have some commonalities and some could be pursued in combination, but they are sufficiently distinct to merit a category of their own.

Option One: Counterterrorism

Many of the advocates for this option believe that what is currently happening in the region is reminiscent of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) in Europe. Instead of Catholics and Protestants fighting each other, today's antagonists are Sunni and Shiite Muslims, whose competition for power is similarly fueled by ancient hatreds and competing faiths. In this holy war, there is very little the United States can do. In fact, the smartest strategy may be to let radical elements within the Sunni and Shiite communities fight it out until the region is "purified." In this scenario, the United States would continue to prioritize combatting terrorist groups that could target the US homeland, but on other issues it would

essentially be on the margins, only willing to intervene militarily if Sunni-Shiite violence directly threatens Israel or the stability of global commerce. And even then, the use of force by Washington would be "surgical" and designed to fulfill a specific, short-term goal.

This counterterrorism-focused option is a fair characterization of the Obama administration's foreign policy in the region (with the exception of NATO's military intervention in Libya). However, it is evident that this approach has not produced desirable outcomes. As previously analyzed, the Middle East's security problems are hardly limited to terrorism. A minimalist and vastly noninterventionist US security approach risks both undermining US influence in the Middle East and losing traditional US regional partners whose support is critical to addressing a myriad of other internal and external security threats facing the region that affect US strategic interests as well as regional and international security.

Option Two: Hands-On

This option, which has roots in the G.W. Bush administration's philosophy toward the Middle East, merits careful discussion and honest evaluation. However, it is unclear if the failures of President Bush's freedom agenda in the region were purely due to poor policy implementation. Indeed, securing the Middle East through heavy military intervention and promotion of free elections (with little regard for other equally if not more important elements of democracy, including rule of law, good governance, and institution-building) was a risky and flawed strategy.

But beyond the US strategic fiasco in Iraq, Washington's push for free elections in Gaza brought Hamas—a group labeled as terrorist by the US government—to power. In Lebanon, Washington's cluttered support for anti-Syrian Lebanese politicians backfired and as a result increased Hezbollah's influence. Pressuring Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other regional partners to open up politically also was ineffective, partly due to internal resistance to what was understandably perceived as US meddling. Regardless of its intentions, Washington does not have sufficient economic resources, local knowledge, or political commitment to the region to pursue a more political interventionist and hands-on security approach.

Option Three: Cooperative Security

Many of the proponents for this option judge that the Saudi-Iranian dispute is a classic, realpolitik struggle for power that uses religious symbols and exploits sectarian animosities. In this traditional and non-zero-sum rivalry, there is hope for regional security, but regional states themselves must take the lead in preserving it. As argued below, the United States would still have major security priorities in the region, but it also would seek to create the right set of conditions that are necessary for the development of a new, regional security architecture, in which regional stakeholders can talk, bargain, share concerns, cooperate, and even compete, but in ways that effectively limit violence and conflict. It is hard-nosed, realist arms control, but with broader applications than weapons cuts and limitations.

Cooperative security is a more cost-effective, sustainable, and strategically sound security option for the United States and the region than the previous two options. However, there should be no illusions about its inherent challenges. Indeed, it is unfortunate but not coincidental that this better option also happens to be the most complex and difficult to pursue. Nurturing a culture of arms control in the region will be an incredibly hard and lengthy process, especially in today's increasingly volatile environment. And even if it were to take shape, formally or informally, a regional security and arms control initiative cannot be expected to effectively deal with all sources of internal and external insecurity in the region. A range of US security and diplomatic efforts would have to complement it.

A New Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group

At a time when the United States' ability to even degrade ISIS is suspect, any suggestions of grand regional security orchestrating by Washington might lack seriousness and credibility. Also, any attempt at transferring foreign (be it European or Asian) concepts and practices of regional security and cooperation into the Middle East is more likely to fail given the unique traits and challenges of the region. Finally, even the most useful regional cooperation system in the Middle East cannot effectively address in and of itself all regional security challenges, or provide long-term regional stability if there is no progress by regional governments on good governance and economic reform.

Because of the depth and scope of the political and security problems currently facing the Middle East, one would not be faulted for believing that no multilateral arms control initiative could ever be seriously entertained and practiced in that part of the world. How could arms control succeed in a region that is deeply troubled, dangerously torn apart, and heavily militarized? Indeed, with Middle East order collapsing, the prospect of countries in the region cooperating with each other at a time when they feel most threatened and concerned about their relative security seems presently unthinkable. Thus, the unprecedented move of placing real, verifiable, and mutual limitations on these countries' sovereignty, state secrets, and defense armaments for the collective goal of reducing regional insecurity seems even more far-fetched.

But it is precisely *because* of those reasons that arms control should be seriously pursued in the Middle East. Indeed, the Middle East, more than ever before, is in desperate need of a venue where countries in the region can discuss a host of security threats that pose a mutual danger and agree on a code of conduct for human and regional security. For such a platform (and ideally a regime) to have any chance of materializing (the Middle East is the only region in the world not to have such a forum), it must not only be region-wide and inclusive, but also conceived by and for the region. Though middle powers, including Qatar and the UAE, have risen over the past few years, the buy-in of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, Turkey, and Egypt—the most pivotal states in the region—is most important.

The US Role

Emphasis on local design and ownership of a regional security system notwithstanding, the United States and its extra-regional partners and allies can and should help facilitate

the creation of such a system by serving as a critical node for cooperation, convening, facilitating, guiding, and providing technical and diplomatic assistance when needed.

This would not be the first time the United States tried to engineer Middle East security talks. It did so in 1991, following the multilateral peace discussions launched by the US-led Madrid Peace Conference. Made up of thirteen Arab states, Israel, a Palestinian delegation, and several other entities, an Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group was created to complement the bilateral tracks between Israel and the Palestinians on the one hand, and Israel and Syria on the other. ACRS focused on confidence-building and security-related issues but produced largely symbolic results. It ultimately collapsed in 1995, primarily due to failed attempts at bridging differences between Egypt and Israel on security priorities. Other important reasons for failure include the exclusion of key confrontational states that carried a great deal of influence—Iran, Iraq, and Libya—and the boycotting of Syria and Lebanon of the talks. That Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria—all states suspected of having weapons of mass destruction-programs at the time—were not present all but guaranteed the failure of the talks.

There is no question that the regional context has shifted dramatically since ACRS. Syria is ravaged by civil war. Iraq is a torn nation. Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi is gone. Lebanon broke free from Syria (though it is still controlled by pro-Iran Hezbollah). Egypt's regional weight has dramatically decreased due to the upheavals of the past four years. Then, of course, there is Iran, whose nuclear program was not a major item of discussion two decades ago, but has now completely reshuffled the deck in terms of regional security and nonproliferation diplomacy. Furthermore, the status-affirmation and assertiveness of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar will force any potential regional security talks to take the views of these states into account. Gone are the days when Egypt spoke for all Arabs. These emerging actors add an additional layer of complexity to any potential talks, which makes the task of understanding their interests and concerns even more important.

US leadership was crucial for the launch of ACRS. US Secretary of State James A. Baker in particular played an instrumental role in pushing Israel and the Arab states to participate in the talks. Baker was highly respected by his Arab counterparts due to his toughness, straightforwardness, and impartiality. A new ACRS would require Washington's assignment of a veteran Middle East Special Envoy, who could bring many of Baker's qualities and diplomatic skills.

But beyond US diplomatic leadership, the United States would have to strengthen its security and political relations

> A NEW ACRS WOULD REQUIRE WASHINGTON'S ASSIGNMENT OF A VETERAN MIDDLE EAST SPECIAL ENVOY, WHO COULD BRING MANY OF BAKER'S QUALITIES AND DIPLOMATIC SKILLS.

with its traditional partners in the region, and ideally negotiate defense treaties with those most vulnerable and willing—Arab Gulf states.[36] Among other obvious benefits, a closer and better-functioning security relationship with Washington would provide these partners with a stronger incentive to participate in security talks with their archrival—Iran—without having to worry about bargaining from a position of relative weakness. Indeed, Saudi Arabia and other US partners would never agree (and rightly so) to a regional security architecture that sanctions Iran's perceived dominance and increases their security vulnerabilities vis-à-vis Tehran. But on the other hand, and equally important, a regional security architecture that is specifically designed to weaken or "gang up on" Iran also will fail (Iran clearly would not participate in such a multilateral security arrangement). Therefore, the United States would need to engage in an artful balancing act to reassure its partners, while also being sensitive to Iran's legitimate security interests.

US Regional Security Priorities

Independent of the potential emergence of a regional security architecture, the United States still would have to pursue a set of critical security priorities in the region, including preventing Iran's possession of nuclear arms and more broadly the spread of nuclear weapons in the region; deterring large-scale military conflict and if deterrence fails, intervening militarily on the side of US partners; stopping escalation in the event of another war between Israel and Hezbollah, and Israel and Hamas; containing civil wars; degrading violent, extremist groups; and limiting Iranian destabilizing influence in the region.

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36 Bilal Y. Saab and Barry Pavel, *Beyond Camp David: A Gradualist Strategy to Upgrade the US-Gulf Security Partnership* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, May 2015), http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Camp_David_0508.pdf; Saab and Pavel, *Artful Balance: The Future of US Defense Strategy and Force Posture in the Gulf* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, March 2015), http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/artful-balance-the-future-of-us-defense-strategy-and-force-posture-in-the-gulf.

However, it also is true that the effective pursuit of these objectives would in many ways lessen some of the challenges of developing a regional security architecture, and vice versa. For example, the chances for cooperative security in the region would dramatically decline should the United States fail to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. At the same time, multilateral arms control that effectively addresses regional states' various security concerns can reduce these states'—and specifically Iran's—urge to further militarize and expand their WMD programs. Another example is Iran's asymmetric threat in the region. If Washington does little to stop Iran from deepening and widening its interference in US partners' domestic politics, states such as Saudi Arabia will have little incentive to enter into regional security talks with a country—Iran—that is actively trying to destabilize it. The following US regional security priorities are necessary and important in their own right, but can be seen as complementary to the potential building of a regional security architecture.

Prevent Iran's possession of nuclear arms and more broadly the spread of nuclear weapons in the region

Making sure that Iran does not acquire a nuclear weapon is by far the most important security priority of the United States in the Middle East. No other regional security challenge compares to a nuclear-armed Iran. In fact, a nuclear-armed Iran would worsen the severity of various other regional security problems and make them more difficult to solve. Because of serious questions over nuclear safety, technical capacity, and political stability in the Middle East, "more is not better" when it comes to nuclear weapons.[37]

Since the Vietnam War, no US foreign policy issue has been more fiercely debated than the crisis over Iran's nuclear program and what the United States ought to do about it. Through painstaking diplomacy, economic sanctions, and the threat of war, the United States recently succeeded in negotiating an agreement with Iran that limits the latter's nuclear capabilities in return for the gradual lifting of sanctions on the Iranian economy. Should the deal be confirmed, it would contribute to strategic stability in the Middle East by drastically reducing the risk of nuclear proliferation in the region.

But as strategically significant as it is, there are some concerns over the deal. Some were raised by the respected, bipartisan group of authors of the Iran Project's "Statement on the Announcement of a Framework for a Comprehensive

Nuclear Agreement with Iran,"[38] including:[39]

1. *The fate of existing stockpiles:* What is the future of Iran's excess enriched uranium and existing stockpiles of 20 percent-enriched uranium? How will the P5+1 limit Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium to three hundred kilograms of low-enriched uranium for the duration of the deal?[40] Two recent developments complicate the international community's ability to limit Iran's nuclear stockpiles. First, the 2013 interim deal, also known as the Joint Plan of Action (JPA), allowed Iran to continue enriching uranium, but required it to "convert the enriched uranium into an oxide form that cannot be easily turned into weaponizable material."[41] Iran has failed to comply with this provision; as of June 2, 2015, only 5 percent of its uranium hoard has been converted.[42] Though Iran attributes this failure to technical problems and sabotage, some analysts say that a likelier explanation is that Iran never intended to comply with the JPA.[43] Iran's nuclear stockpile has grown over the last eighteen months of negotiations, contradicting statements by the Obama administration that the program has been "frozen" in the interim period.[44]

   Second, Iran's willingness to ship a large portion of its stockpile of uranium to another country (possibly Russia) is still unclear.[45] Western officials argue that there are other ways of dealing with the material—including blending it into a more diluted form, but this complicates inspections.[46] If Iran chooses to follow in the footsteps of North Korea and kick the inspectors out of the country, there would be no assurances about the status of the fuel.[47]

37 Kenneth N. Waltz, "More May Be Better," in Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002).

38 The Iran Project Statement on the Announcement of a Framework for a Comprehensive Nuclear Agreement with Iran, http://www.scribd.com/doc/261031719/The-Iran-Project-Statement-on-the-Announcement-of-a-Framework-for-a-Comprehensive-Nuclear-Agreement-with-Iran.
39 Michael Singh, "What's Still Missing from the Iran Nuclear Framework," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2, 2015, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/whats-still-missing-from-the-iran-nuclear-framework.
40 The Iran Project Statement.
41 "Iran's Uranium Hoard: Whoops, Tehran forgot to shrink its enriched uranium stockpile," *Wall Street Journal*, http://www.wsj.com/articles/irans-uranium-hoard-1433374267?cb=logged0.9357787288820254.
42 David Albright and Serena Kelleher-Vergantini, "Iran's Stock of Less than Five Percent Low Enriched Uranium," Institute for Science and International Security, June 2, 2015, http://www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/Irans_35_stocks_of_LEU_June_2015_Final.pdf, p. 1.
43 Ibid., p. 1-2.
44 David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "Iran's Nuclear Stockpile Grows, Complicating Negotiations," *New York Times*, June 1, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/02/world/middleeast/irans-nuclear-stockpile-grows-complicating-negotiations.html.
45 David E. Sanger and Michael R. Gordon, "Iran Backs Away From Key Detail in Nuclear Deal," *New York Times*, March 29, 2015.
46 Ibid., p. 1.
47 Sanger and Gordon, "Iran Backs Away From Key Detail in Nuclear

2. *Enrichment after ten years*: "What scale of uranium enrichment will be possible for Iran after ten years?"[48] According to the US government fact sheet, the current iteration of the agreement restricts Iran's domestic enrichment capacity and its enrichment research and development for ten years—a provision crucial for ensuring that Iran is at least one year away from amassing enough nuclear fuel for weaponization—but it is unclear what will happen beyond that period. Iranian officials chafe at the notion of any restrictions after ten years, while US officials would prefer a "soft landing," in which Iran gradually increases its uranium enrichment capacities. [49]

3. *Disclosure to inspectors*: What level of disclosure is required for Iran to address questions about its nuclear research program? Since it signed the November 2013 Framework for Cooperation (FC), Iran has disclosed many aspects of its program to the IAEA.[50] However, Iran's alleged military nuclear research in the past (and possibly at present) remains a serious issue. "Such research could include the testing of nuclear-weapons components such as detonators, the development of a nuclear payload for missiles, and modelling weapon [behavior]. On this, the preliminary deal is vague, stating only that: 'Iran will implement an agreed set of measures to address the IAEA's concerns regarding the Possible Military Dimensions (PMD) of its program.'"[51] Without such disclosure, it is difficult for the international community to determine how far along Iran is in the path to a nuclear weapon, and if it has truly ceased its nuclear weapons-related activities.[52]

4. *Duration and scope of the verification regime*: What level of access will inspectors have to suspicious nuclear facilities, and how long will they have this access? The United States is counting on the effectiveness of inspections to enforce the deal.[53] It is assumed that Iranian efforts to cheat or deceive the international community

will be "discovered and exposed in a timely manner."[54] However, the history of international inspection regimes and the record of US intelligence agencies suggest that the efficacy of inspections is not guaranteed. Furthermore, the methods and technology for concealing facilities evolve as quickly as the ones for discovering them. Iran can build another production facility for highly enriched uranium somewhere in the country, or carry on illicit nuclear activities at military facilities that it currently bars inspectors from, such as the one in Parchin.[55] Access to these sites is crucial for preventing "sneak out"—the prospect of Iran constructing a uranium enrichment plant in secret to develop a bomb—and for determining Iran's true "break out" period; the one-year estimate is based solely on known facilities and nuclear material inventories.[56]

5. *Performance and sanctions relief*: Will the lifting of sanctions be contingent on Iran's full compliance?[57] If Iran violates the agreement, how will the P5+1 evaluate the severity of such violations and what would they specifically do about it?[58] Rapid sanctions re-imposition is critical because it helps deter Iranian cheating and it serves as a less costly and risky alternative than the potential use of force by the United States.[59] Part of the deal's implementation package is a dispute-resolution panel including Iran and the P5+1 whose purpose would be to address potential breaches by Iran.[60] But this might allow members of the P5+1 who are less enthusiastic about sanctions, such as Russia and China, to "delay or even veto snap-back,"[61] making punishments non-automatic.

The United States should pursue the following measures to address some of the most relevant ambiguities and potential weaknesses of the nuclear deal:

1. *Lift sanctions gradually*: Sanctions relief must be done in stages, and remain highly responsive to serious sig-

Deal," *New York Times*.

48 The Iran Project Statement.

49 Laurence Norman, "Nuclear Deal Allows Iran Significantly to Boost Centrifuges after 10 Years," *Wall Street Journal*, April 4, 2015, http://www.wsj.com/articles/tehran-and-west-agree-on-parameters-of-deal-for-irans-nuclear-program-1428006137.

50 Blaise Misztal, "Update on Iran's Nuclear Program," Bipartisan Policy Center, February 23, 2015, http://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/update-on-irans-nuclear-program-2/.

51 Declan Butler, "Iran Nuclear Deal Poses Scientific Challenges," *Nature*, April 9, 2015. http://www.nature.com/news/iran-nuclear-deal-poses-scientific-challenges-1.17296.

52 Olli Heinonen, "Verifying Iran for the Longer Term," Iran Task Force, March 2015, http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/Heinonen_Verifying%20Iran%20for%20the%20Longer%20Term.pdf, p. 5.

53 Dore Gold, "Inspections: The Weak Link in a Nuclear Agreement with Iran," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, June 11, 2014, p. 3, http://jcpa.org/pdf/Inspections_The_Weak_Link_in_a_Nuclear_Agreement_with_Iran.pdf.

54 Zalmay Khalilzad, "The 4 Fatal Flaws of the Iran Deal," *National Interest*, April 4, 2015.

55 Ibid. See also Shreeya Sinha and Susan C. Beachy, "Timeline on Iran's Nuclear Program," *New York Times*, April 2, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/11/20/world/middleeast/Iran-nuclear-timeline.html#/#time243_10809.

56 Heinonen, "Verifying Iran for the Longer Term," p. 5.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Armin Rosen, "The Key to Obama's Iran Deal Might Not Actually Work," *Business Insider*, June 4, 2015 http://www.businessinsider.com/the-key-to-obamas-iran-deal-might-not-actually-work-2015-6#ixzz3eIS01zXB.

60 Kambiz Foroohar and Sangwon Yoon, "A $500 Billion Maybe: Why Big Iran Moment May Be Years Away," *Bloomberg*, June 25, 2015 http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-06-25/a-500-billion-maybe-why-iran-s-big-moment-could-be-years-away.

61 Armin Rosen, "The Key to Obama's Iran Deal Might Not Actually Work," *Business Insider*, June 4, 2015, http://www.businessinsider.com/the-key-to-obamas-iran-deal-might-not-actually-work-2015-6.

nals by Iran about its intent to ship or dilute its nuclear material. The suspension of sanctions should be predicated on Iran's disclosure of its past and possibly ongoing nuclear weapons work, including the PMDs of its program, as well as the broader conclusion by the IAEA that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful in nature.[62]

2. *Cap Iranian production capacity*: "The more efficient Iran's centrifuges become, the greater the danger that Iran can develop a 'sneak out' capacity."[63] This can be addressed by capping the country's production of centrifuges and implementing enhanced verification requirements that continue beyond the "sunset clause" in the current agreement.[64]

3. *Provide unlimited access for inspectors*: IAEA inspectors should have access to all key facilities, personnel, documentation, and other information being sought, including suspicious military sites.

4. *Remove arbitrary time limits to verification*: International verification efforts should continue after the "sunset" of the comprehensive agreement—in fact, verification activities cannot be constrained to an arbitrary timeline in an agreement. Instead, it should end when IAEA inspectors have concluded that all nuclear material and activities in Iran are in peaceful use, and there are no undeclared activities that the international community should be concerned about.

Deter large-scale military conflict, and if deterrence fails, intervene militarily on the side of US partners

It is always hard to measure deterrence success, because the absence of war does not necessarily prove that deterrence worked (a host of other factors could have led to the preservation of peace). However, it is assumed that the United States' preponderant military presence in the Gulf, its ability to effectively project military power and quickly transfer military assets from other regions, and its willingness to use force help deter the occurrence of large-scale interstate war in the Middle East. Such forward-deployed US military presence in the region will continue to serve as a key factor contributing to deterring major war in that part of the world.

Since the risk of major Arab-Israeli war is much reduced in today's regional environment, the more likely scenario of interstate war in the Middle East is currently one in which Iran and its allies go to arms with its adversaries—be it Egypt, Israel, or some Arab Gulf states. Many have argued

that Obama damaged US credibility when he decided not to take military action against Syrian leader Bashar Assad, despite drawing a "red line" against the use of chemical weapons. Credibility is essential to deterrence effectiveness, and US deterrence did take a hit following the Syrian episode, but one should not exaggerate its significance or conclude that it caused Iran to feel that it now has license to attack its neighbors.

A rational actor more often than not, Iran understands the language of deterrence and knows better than to provoke the United States—the most powerful military on earth. In short, aside from more effective diplomacy, there is little the United States can add to its conventional military deterrent posture in the Middle East to make it more robust. But as argued below, there is more it should do, along with its regional partners, to enhance its unconventional capabilities in the region to deter Iran from indirectly destabilizing other countries.

> SUCH FORWARD-DEPLOYED US MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE REGION WILL CONTINUE TO SERVE AS A KEY FACTOR CONTRIBUTING TO DETERRING MAJOR WAR IN THAT PART OF THE WORLD.

Stop escalation in the event of another war between Israel and Hezbollah, and Israel and Hamas

Since 1991, all high-intensity military conflicts in the Middle East have involved a state and a nonstate actor—a trend that is likely to continue into the future, given the increasing influence of militant nonstate actors. Israel's successive wars over the past few years with Hamas (i.e., the 2008–09 Operation "Cast Lead," the 2012 Operation "Returning Echo," the 2012 Operation "Pillar of Defense," and the 2014 Operation "Protective Edge") and with Hezbollah (i.e., the 1993 "Operation Accountability," the 1996 "Operation Grapes of Wrath," and the 2006 "Second Lebanon War") have caused a tremendous amount of death and destruction, and as previously argued, could flare up again due to lingering tensions and unresolved issues.

The United States has always urged all parties to preserve the peace, but the reality is that it cannot deter potential conflagrations and specifically stop any side from initially resorting to violence. Israel will use force whenever it feels threatened or sees an opportunity to weaken its adversaries, and Hamas or Hezbollah will do the same. What

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62 David Albright, Andrea Stricker, Serena Kelleher-Vergantini, and Houston Wood, "P5+1 Framework: Needs Strengthening," Institute for Science and International Security, April 11, 2015, p. 10, http://www.isisnucleariran.org/assets/pdf/Assessment_of_Iran_Nuclear_Framework_April_11_2015-final.pdf.
63 Heinonen, p. 3.
64 Ibid.

> HEZBOLLAH AND HAMAS, DESPITE THEIR AGGRESSIVE RHETORIC, ARE NOWHERE NEAR CAPABLE, BY ANY OBJECTIVE STANDARD, OF CHALLENGING THE EXISTENCE OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL.

the United States can do, once bullets start flying, is actively prevent escalation by taking concrete diplomatic action to stop Israel from using excessive force against Lebanon and the Palestinian people.

Tactical successes notwithstanding, none of Israel's military operations against Hezbollah and Hamas achieved strategic objectives or enhanced Israel's security.[65] On the contrary, Hezbollah, and perhaps less so Hamas, rebounded and became stronger after each Israeli military campaign. While Israel has the right under international law to defend itself against unprovoked aggression, it has employed a liberal interpretation of self-defense, as evidenced by its frequent use of excessive force against irregular forces that are no match to its military and do not pose existential security threats. This does not imply that Israel should ignore or dismiss the military threat posed by Hezbollah or Hamas. However, it does suggest that effective policies of containment against Hezbollah, in consultation with the United States, would work better than military policies that lead to escalation.

Israel's decision to escalate is driven largely by the belief that a military solution to the perceived Hezbollah and Hamas threat is possible. Many senior Israeli officials continue to believe that strategic bombardments of Lebanese and Palestinian civilian infrastructure can crush Hezbollah and Hamas or at least cause a rift between the groups and Lebanese and Palestinian society.

Yet Israel's military campaigns against Lebanon and the Palestinians have achieved the opposite of what Israel had hoped for. Furthermore, Israel's operations killed large numbers of innocent people, destabilized the Lebanese government and the Palestinian Authority, and as a result harmed US interests (for instance, Israel's 2006 Second Lebanon War significantly undermined the pro-US government

of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and drastically weakened its ability to pressure Hezbollah to disarm).

Therefore, the United States should apply diplomatic pressure on Israel at the onset of or during military conflict to prevent it from responding with excessive force to potential provocations from Hezbollah and Hamas. Hezbollah and Hamas, despite their aggressive rhetoric, are nowhere near capable, by any objective standard, of challenging the existence of the state of Israel.

Reduce the scope and severity of civil wars

The United States' military interventions in Vietnam, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Iraq strongly weaken the case that Washington can successfully resolve civil wars. Although not impossible, it is highly unlikely. That Washington has vowed not to intervene in Syria's ongoing civil war, therefore, should come as no surprise. A US strategy of civil war containment may lack morality or political resoluteness, but in most cases it provides a less costly and more effective option for the United States, local antagonists, and the region. Containing civil wars essentially requires reducing their severity, preventing them from spilling over to neighboring states, and helping to create the necessary conditions for a political settlement.

Containing the Iraqi and Syrian civil wars is currently much harder and costlier than it was a few years ago, though it is not unthinkable. In Syria's case, many have argued that before scores of jihadists entered the conflict, the international community and specifically the United States had an opportunity to end the civil war by intervening militarily by air to help the moderate rebels topple the Assad regime. But Washington refused to pursue that option, saying that it preferred for the Syrian government and the rebels to negotiate a solution. As time went on, the fighting escalated, jihadists proliferated, and huge atrocities took place, but Washington continued to resist the use of force. It argued that US military intervention would lead to further chaos and sectarian killing in Syria, given the absence of a viable alternative to Assad. Very few can currently argue against these US claims given the catastrophic conditions in Syria, but many can convincingly say that Washington did very little to prevent those conditions from reaching such terrible levels. If its goal was a political settlement among Syrians, Washington did almost nothing to pursue it.

In its Syria calculus, Washington missed the notion that the road to a negotiated settlement goes through a successful US containment strategy whose pillars include training and equipping a secular military opposition; working with allies and neighboring states to stem the flow of foreign fighters across borders; and setting up safe zones and protected, safe-passage corridors in northwest Syria and along the

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65 Bilal Y. Saab, *Levantine Reset: Toward a More Viable US Strategy for Lebanon*, Analysis Paper, no. 21, July 2010, Brookings, p. 25. http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2010/7/lebanon-saab/07_lebanon_saab.pdf.

Photo 6. An Emirati Mirage 2000, and a Pakistani F-7, left to right, fly in formation during a multinational exercise with aircrews from France, Jordan, Pakistan, the UAE, the United Kingdom, and the United States in the Air Forces Central area of responsibility. *Photo credit*: US Air Force.

Turkish border, so refugees can return and humanitarian aid can be provided.

The story of US travails in Iraq is not that dissimilar. While the United States has invested much more in building an Iraqi army that can protect the country from internal and external dangers, there is still a long way to go, as evidenced by the Iraqi security forces' (ISF) embarrassing military performances against ISIS and their failure to halt ISIS's control of a sizeable chunk of Iraqi territory. The Iraqis' suspect willingness to fight is not Washington's fault, but Washington has done almost nothing to limit Iran's influence in Iraq—an influence that has produced a Shiite-dominated Iraqi security apparatus and a government in Baghdad that has grossly alienated the Sunnis, disempowered them, and by default thrown many of them into the arms of ISIS. Obama is about to send four hundred and fifty more troops to Iraq to speed up the training of the Iraqi army, whose weaknesses have left Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi vulnerable to challenges from Shiite hard-liners more closely aligned with Iran. A bolstered Iraqi army can help retake the city of Ramadi and the Iraqi leader's efforts to reach out to disaffected

Sunnis. But these additional US troops will neither fight ISIS nor serve as forward air controllers. Obama is right not to commit the same mistakes of the past and get in the middle of an Iraqi civil war whose conclusion must come at the hands of Iraqis. However, his conciliatory approach toward Iran has made the Iraqis' task more difficult to achieve.

Degrade violent, extremist groups

It is a truism that achieving a decisive victory against a terrorist organization such as al-Qaeda or an extremist insurgency such as ISIS requires far more than the use of force. Another evident truth is that, because it cannot do it alone, the United States would have to work with its regional partners to ultimately defeat al-Qaeda and ISIS. To help those partners address the underlying conditions that have led to al-Qaeda and ISIS's rise, the United States should help significantly degrade both groups' capabilities.

By arresting and/or killing many of its leaders, including its founder Osama bin Laden; by foiling many terrorist plots; and by cutting off many of its sources of funding, Washington has effectively degraded al-Qaeda's terrorist capabili-

ties and as a result reduced its threat to the US homeland. Al-Qaeda's ideology endures, and its franchises in the region survive, but there is little doubt that its ability to once again strike the homeland in a spectacular fashion has weakened.

ISIS is not believed to pose an immediate threat to the US homeland, but if allowed to expand and operate freely, it will get stronger, and might change its priorities and strategies to focus more on the "far enemy"—the United States. Degrading ISIS will require the pursuit of a set of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic measures. These include:

1. Intensifying air strikes and drone attacks against high-value targets would help limit ISIS's ability to command and control its troops, to expand and hold territory, and to plan spectacular terrorist operations. Precise aerial bombardments also would help cut off ISIS's "supply of technology, weapons, and ammunition by choking off smuggling routes."[66]

2. Preventing ISIS from maneuvering and dispersing its units where they coalesce in Iraq. Doing so will contribute to ISIS rotting from the inside-out; "over time, the religious, ideological and governance pretensions of ISIS will likely wear thin."[67]

3. Bolstering the military and law-enforcement capabilities of Iraq's and Syria's neighbors who are willing to commit military resources to the fight against ISIS.

4. Disrupting ISIS's funds, which requires cutting off their various revenue streams. Measures include targeted financial sanctions on those who trade in ISIS's stolen oil, including "middlemen,... refiners, transport companies,"[68] and other entities that handle the commodity; preventing ISIS from raising funds through ransoms by encouraging international partners to stop paying them to terrorist groups (a practice that has become more universally adopted in recent years); imposing sanctions on ISIS's external donor networks, with the cooperation of other states; restricting ISIS's ability to access the international financial system by blocking its ability to complete transactions through Iraqi, Syrian, and other banking systems; and placing targeted sanctions on ISIS's leaders and facilitators.[69]

5. Stemming the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria, which would require ramping up intelligence efforts, police work, and border control operations.

6. Maintaining the coalition of anti-ISIS local forces in Iraq and Syria and specifically upping military and intelligence support to the Kurds in northern Iraq and northeastern Syria, given their effectiveness thus far in combating ISIS.

Limit Iranian destabilizing influence in the region

Iran's threat network, malign influence, or asymmetric threat are terms used interchangeably in the Iran policy discourse in Washington. They all describe the indirect, destabilizing role that Tehran is suspected to play in the Middle East—a role that many believe has dramatically increased across various domains (both conventional and unconventional) and theaters (primarily in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon) over the past couple of years as Washington was negotiating a nuclear deal with Tehran.

The most effective antidote to continued Iranian interference in the US regional partners' internal affairs is political and economic development. Indeed, internally strong and politically stable partners help deny Iran opportunities to pry. The severity and longevity of Iran's destabilizing influence in the Gulf will continue to be proportional, among other variables, to the pace and scope of reform and development in the region. That said, the United States can play a role in helping its partners mitigate the effects of Iran's unconventional threat.

The good news is that an increasing number of current and former senior US officials recognize this widening and deepening threat. Senators Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and John McCain (R-AZ) recently stipulated that "success in the mission of [degrading and defeating ISIS] will not be achieved by capitulating to Iran's ambitions for regional hegemony." Former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Gen. David Petraeus said that the "foremost threat to Iraq's long-term stability and the broader regional equilibrium is not [ISIS]; rather, it is Shiite militias, many backed by—and some guided by—Iran." Gen. Lloyd Austin and Gen. James Mattis, the current and former Commanders of the US Central Command, respectively, along with James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, all issued similar warnings in separate official statements. Even President Obama's top military adviser, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, recently told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he has "concerns about the sectarian nature of Iran's activities in Iraq."

The bad news is that, despite this growing chorus in the US government and the inescapable trend of Iranian expansion in the region, the Obama administration has not changed much in its non-nuclear approach toward Tehran. Even if a nuclear deal is reached, the White House must pursue nec-

66 Audrey Kurth Cronin, "ISIS Is Not a Terrorist Group: Why Counterterrorism Won't Stop the Latest Jihadist Threat," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2015 Issue https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2015-02-16/isis-not-terrorist-group?cid=nlc-foreign-affairs_this_week-021915-isis_is_not_a_terrorist_group_5-021915&sp_mid=48064185&sp_rid=dGhheWVyZEBsYXcuYnl1LmVdkQS2.
67 James Fromson and Steven Simon, "ISIS: The Dubious Paradise of Apocalypse Now," *Survival*, vol. 57, no. 3, May 19, 2015, p. 45, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00396338.2015.1046222#.VZGcWd-jbKM8.
68 David S. Cohen, "Attacking ISIL's Financial Foundation," US Department of the Treasury, October 23, 2014, http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2672.aspx.
69 Ibid.

essary follow-on actions that would seek to counter Iran's aggressive attempt at expanding its negative influence in the region. Obama (and his predecessors) should have done that a long time ago. Although Iran is currently way ahead in this competition for power and influence in the region, it is better late than never.

With regard to Iran, Washington's priority has been to deter it from overtly attacking its neighbors, and, since 2003, from acquiring nuclear weapons. It is not that Tehran's long reach in the region is not a US concern, it is simply that Washington has done very little to stop it. Things might change following the recently held Camp David summit between Obama and his Gulf counterparts, where the former emphasized countering Iran's expansionist regional designs collectively. However, that remains to be seen. It is hard to imagine such a scenario fully materializing given the current alignment of interests between Tehran and Washington in the fight against ISIS.

The stationing of powerful US military assets in the Gulf helps deter Iran from attacking or coercing its Gulf neighbors. It also provides some security assurances to US regional partners and contributes to fighting terrorists in and from the region. But very few of those assets are well-suited to deal with Tehran's ability, which it has honed for decades, to create and work through local, nonstate proxies. Indeed, supersonic and multirole fighter jets, aircraft carriers, missile defenses, and other forward-deployed weapons systems and units are strong deterrents against Iran's conventional military capabilities, including its expanding missile arsenal, but these tools do not affect or guard against this powerful network of nonstate surrogates that Iran has been developing since the early 1980s.

There has always been a heavy emphasis on external defense in US force posture in the Gulf, but it is about time for the Pentagon to seriously incorporate tools into its posture that boost internal security within the Arab Gulf states. Instead of aimlessly increasing its troop levels in or deploying more hardware to the Gulf following a potential Iran nuclear deal, the United States should focus instead on cooperating more closely on intelligence and threat assessments with its Gulf partners, and specifically help build their capacities to train and equip their law enforcement agencies and directorates of analysis so they can better assess, detect, and counter Iranian interference. Border security is a vulnerability for the Arab Gulf states. Therefore, greater investment in persistent, long-range, and high-altitude intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities is a must for ensuring customs border protection, and the United States can help both train local forces and, if necessary, deploy jointly. Partner-capacity-building priorities also should include cyber security—a domain in which Iran has considerably enhanced its capabilities over the years.

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Photo 7. Demonstrators pray before assembled riot police outside Tahir Square, Cairo.
Photo credit: Ramy Raoof/Flickr.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the nature of US strategies for Middle East security, regional security will remain lacking, and long-term stability in the Middle East will continue to be elusive if the Arab world fails to make a serious push for political and economic development. However, the process of historical change in most parts of the Arab world, as this author has maintained, cannot fully materialize or even begin to achieve desirable outcomes without first addressing the immediate and severe security challenges that are currently plaguing the region. If a house is on fire, saving the lives of residents should be the first and most immediate priority. Only after that is accomplished does the building of a new and stronger foundation for the house become possible.

The hope is that as regional insecurity decreases, the like-

lihood of reform increases. In other words, positive change would actually become possible. This proposition is worth debating, however briefly. The Arab uprisings were supposed to be a wake-up call for governments in the region. "Reform or die" was supposed to be the Arab Awakening's clearest message. But with the exception of Tunisia, it seems that the lesson most Arab governments have drawn from the past five years is to double down on repression, instead of easing up. Indeed, the securitization of politics continues to be the preferred course of action of most governments in the region.

The United States can always try to come up with a more balanced and effective package of positive and negative incentives to push its partners—and adversaries—to in-

stitute good governance and reform their national economies. But if the history of democracy promotion by the United States in the Middle East is any guide, that approach faces serious limitations. The truth is that sustainable and peaceful change almost always comes from within. But will that type of change ever come? The concern is that, if the United States manages to effectively address many of the sources of internal and external insecurity, the motivation of many governments in the region to reform might actually decrease. A greater sense of internal safety and tranquility might encourage Arab governments to revert to the status quo ante and further delay change. The sense of urgency might be drastically reduced.

It is tempting to argue that the United States should use the pressure that is generated by regional chaos as a tool or stark reminder to urge its partners to reform, or that it should make its efforts to help address regional insecurities conditional on their willingness to reform. While this sounds like a smart idea at first glance, it is a nonstarter. The United States should do whatever it can to help prevent the total collapse of order in the Middle East simply because it is in its own interest to do so, regardless of what its partners choose to do internally.

"Whatever the course, however long the process took, and whatever its outcome," President George H. W. Bush said on Soviet reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev, "I wanted to see

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stable, and above all peaceful, change."[70] The Middle East is currently going through its own revolutionary changes, and it is critically important, as Bush National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft cautioned at a time when the Soviet empire was collapsing, to "mold and guide [these changes] into channels that would produce the right outcome."[71]

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70 Bartholomew Sparrow, *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), p. 430.
71 Ibid.

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