ALSHARQ FORUM

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL POWERS, INSTITUTIONS AND ACTORS IN THE NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE FOR THE MENA

Rapporteur's Note

The following note reflects detailed discussions held during a private roundtable in Istanbul on the Role of Regional Powers, Institutions and Actors in the New Security Architecture for the Middle East and North Africa. These exchanges took place during Al Sharq Forum's conference on 'Towards a New Security Architecture for the MENA region' on March 18–19, 2017.

The participants in this roundtable discussed various dimensions of the regional security security architecture in the Middle East and North Africa. Their discussion is here grouped into several questions corresponding to the questions where (at which level), when, and how. This note presents leads and pointers towards how eminent experts on the region responded to the following questions:
- At which level should regional security architecture building efforts start?
- What should be the guiding principles of such attempts?
- When should we start discussing a new regional security architecture?
- What are the fundamental questions need to be answered to start talking about regional security architecture?

Where do We Start In Discussing Regional Security Architecture ?

Any discussion of a new security architecture for the MENA region must start by identifying the threats and challenges to the existing mechanisms of the security architecture. We must first ask what these new and evolving threats are. We may want to start by seeing that the current structure is too state-centric and that threats defined by global actors often do not reflect local actors' sensitivities and threat perceptions. There usually is a gap between 'threats' as perceived by global actors and those seen by local actors. We may therefore want to distinguish local, regional and global concerns from one another. As the 'Global War on Terror' showed us, global threat perceptions may ignore regional interests and threat perceptions.

This may also imply that new security architecture should be established after first questioning whether it should rest on the state pillar. We should also see that some changes have already taken place on the ground, with these boundaries starting to disappear or become meaningless in some areas. In some places, there is already an administrative structure on the ground, which should not be securitized either. We may want to discuss reallocating the powers of central governments, meaning decentralizing governments, in conflict-ridden places such as Iraq and Syria.

For other countries, however, objectives will first need to be decided upon. We must be aware that for all the discourse about the Iranian-Saudi relationship being at the center of conflict in the region, there is also the Syrian issue. In fact, the war in Syria lies at the core of things, with millions of people displaced. This suggests that the talk about a new security architecture must start with the state but it cannot remain state-centric. And, when there is a meeting arranged to talk about a new architecture, it will have to be decided who will sit at the table, as well as whether the composition will include Sunni-majority states only or Iran and Israel as well. Kurdish issues will have to be settled at the regional level at one point, but this will be carried out at the nation-state level. The idea that there is no avoiding the state level if we want to talk about regional security architecture is also substantiated by the fact that states still retain major spoiling power. This does not mean that national interests will not have to be reconciled at one point; they will have to be overcome because the pursuit of national interests by each regional actor is creating a lose-lose scenario with nobody able to fully realize their national objectives. This is more so valid if by state interests we understand elite interests. If elites ruling in countries of the region realize that they may stand to lose everything if they continue to compete and see the dangers inherent in further escalation, they will have more incentives to cooperate on several fronts.

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However, it is equally true that even if we wanted to start at the state level, we have to take into account that there is no state in Syria, Yemen, Libya or Iraq at the moment. Besides, most of the states in the region are not natural; they remain artificial entities with very heterogeneous populations. Moreover, what if there is an agreement on the new security architecture and cooperation at the state level but the popular base reject it? The base/bottom level should not be ignored. Any attempt at a regional security forum for instance cannot miss the youth level and depart from the idea that unemployment is a major driver of radicalization and extremism in the region. If the formation of the European Union is remembered as a valuable model, we need to notice that the EU integration process was accompanied by social integration projects such as the Erasmus program. Our focus on the political level should not therefore lead us to forget the social and other levels. Parallel-track perspectives remain key.

It is important to focus on social and cultural levels also because it is domestic dynamics that shape states' behavior in the region. Domestic-level considerations shape and determine the foreign policies of Iran, for instance, which brings Russia into the picture to influence the Syrian situation beyond Iran's own strategic limits. A similar two-level game analysis can be made for Saudi Arabia. This brings to the fore the concept of 'cultural security' as well and the idea that state-oriented analysis must be balanced by a human security perspective. The heterogeneous demographics of the region also force us to prioritize democracy and human security rather than the states that are currently killing their own people. If states still occupy a privileged position, anything established in the region will be very fragile.

Therefore, a future 'Regional Security Forum' should approach security from two levels: top-down levels (governmental level)

and, complementary to this, a bottom-up approach (looking at security in a creative way). If we approach security issue from a top-down perspective on its own, it will be insufficient. There needs to be hope for young people (taking into consideration technology, young entrepreneurs with the most creative ideas, and connecting young entrepreneurs to investors). This forum must be inclusive in its approach of whom to invite, and include mainstream Islamists to channel many religiously-driven people's ambitions and hopes into a legitimate channel.

The forces of disintegration are not only political but also economic. The region is going through a severe economic hemorrhage, with weakened engines of economic development. What follows and will continue to follow is the degradation of human life. This means that things can get much worse.

When Can We Start? A Discussion on Principles

Another aspect in our discussions on concerns about regional security architecture relates to what principles should guide this process and when we should start discussing it. The immediate suggestion is that current conflicts should be settled first. However, the settlement of these conflicts does not look imminent. Instead, it is more likely that currently frozen conflicts may turn into hot conflicts. The forces of disintegration in the Middle East and North Africa are currently very powerful. When one surveys developments in Libya, with different forces including the Russians supporting General Haftar, we can see plainly the power and momentum of the forces of disintegration. To make matters worse, the forces of disintegration are not only political but also economic. The region is going through a severe economic hemorrhage, with weakened engines of economic development. What follows and

will continue to follow is the degradation of human life. This means that things can get much worse. From a larger perspective, an international realignment is taking place which will have a significant impact on the region.

This may mean that it is still very early to discuss regional security architecture. It is no surprise that we cannot see one in the making at the moment. Regional architectures emanate from regional order, which is fundamentally lacking today. This also implies that discussing regional security architecture at this conjecture will mark more an ambition than a reality. For this reason, we should start talking about a sub-regional architecture with an eye on regional architecture in the mid- and long-term. Maghreb countries may have such a sub-regional architecture already, but they too have their own issues and conflicts. The Palestinian issue cannot be overlooked either. The problems between major regional players such as Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are well known and complex enough. At this stage, virtually all countries in the region are security-consumers; each country feels deficit of security, which leads them to ask for international support.

In the region today, the current situation exports instability and imports intervention. We may want to harken back to Europe, where over centuries the notion of sovereignty was desacralized. The European example also shows that there can be negotiations even without trust as long as all parties agree that peace is in their interests.

Therefore, unless the current conflicts end, the deep-seated reasons behind these conflicts are discussed and, finally, that enough regional players reach the conclusion that it is in their utmost interest to establish a regional order, the current situation may

continue for the foreseeable future. Here, the European model—where key European countries realized that ongoing conflict was lose–lose and peace and order were in the interests of all—needs to be brought to mind.

Many observers agree that a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a sine qua non for peace in the region, but neither trusts the other. This absence of trust is exacerbated by the belief that Iran has different levels and levers of power: religious power, political power, and military power. If Saudi Arabia starts dialogue with political powers in Iran, other power centers such as the military may undermine the effort.

In the region today, the current situation exports instability and imports intervention. We may want to harken back to Europe, where over centuries the notion of sovereignty was desacralized. Likewise, any new security architecture in the region must provide a basic level of rights to the people and move authority from the state level to the supranational level. The European example also shows that there can be negotiations even without trust as long as all parties agree that peace is in their interests. As long as each party articulates their red lines and lays out their security interests, these can be harmonized to a certain extent. The only pre-condition for all of this is that there must be willingness from both sides.

A Regional Security Forum should not set about creating institutions from the start; it should rather focus on exchanging ideas. Participation in such a forum should be voluntary and open to all. Most importantly, the new architecture should not be enemy-oriented. Previous attempts at regional order were anti-Iran, and hence exclusionary. In this process, it may be also important to know about decision-making in regional countries. The absence of knowledge about

decision-making and who is pulling the strings in Iran and Saudi Arabia complicates our efforts to reach important players and establish links and bridges. Many observers agree that a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a sine qua non for peace in the region, but neither trusts the other. This absence of trust is exacerbated by the belief that Iran has different levels and levers of power: religious power, political power, and military power. If Saudi Arabia starts dialogue with political powers in Iran, other power centers such as the military may undermine the effort.

We need to also consider the need for a new language to underpin our efforts towards regional security. The current sectarian language and discourse of discrimination and hate will poison any chances of regional cooperation. Besides, as a principle, it may be crucial to remember that institutions follow intentions. European history teaches us that Germany found its place in the continent over centuries, while it fought France three times over a relatively short period of time. This means that ideas and attitudes must come before institutions.

Badly-designed regional institutions can escalate existing problems. In approaching the issue of establishing a regional security architecture for the region, a salami-slice approach may be useful. Existing conflicts can be solved piece by piece instead of trying to use a more comprehensive resolution style that is neither easy for consensus nor for implementation. Trust can be built up gradually and functional cooperation may come in handy. It is wiser to scale up security cooperation as we go along, not forgetting that politics and security starts at the local level.

What is also important in this process is to remember that there is no point in pursuing cooperation for cooperation's sake or trying to establish institutions for institution-building's sake. If new high-level meetings take place through regional forums which then turn into 'do-nothing' institutions that ordinary citizens come to loathe, this can create more problems than it solves. Badly-designed regional institutions can escalate existing problems. In approaching the issue of establishing a regional security architecture for the region, a salami-slice approach may be useful. Existing conflicts can be solved piece by piece instead of trying to use a more comprehensive resolution style that is neither easy for consensus nor for implementation. Trust can be built up gradually and functional cooperation may come in handy. It is wiser to scale up security cooperation as we go along, not forgetting that politics and security starts at the local level. In this process, Arabic, Islamic and Mediterranean currents and circles need to be combined to overcome stubborn authoritarianism in the region. It is, however, possible to establish order without a large-scale normative consensus and a commonality of norms and values, just as it is possible to have democracies without democrats. Spoilers within and outside the region are a reality, as in the case of the democratic transition in Tunisia and the role of some regional spoilers.

Some Fundamental Questions

Our discussions on the regional security architecture require us to answer a few further questions. To start with, we need to ask and answer who the constituency of this new order is. In other words, who is going to live in the house we will build? This brings in the issue of legitimacy. For instance, if we think that settlement of current conflicts is a pre-condition for the new security architecture of the region, we need to see how difficult this is by noting that the new talks in Astana are not reaching their targets

because some actors do not accept them as legitimate. We must also take into account 'legitimacy' in the sense of societal acceptance through involving young people and enabling them to overcome unemployment. How do we include the reality of women in the region into our discussions? What is missing from our comparisons between our day and the times of Westphalia is that social media, communications technology, and revolutionary activism was absent back then.

We must see that the frequently-cited Treaty of Westphalia is an incorrect analogy, in that the international community's perspective on the MENA region still holds that dictatorships are better than chaos and anarchy, as evidenced by its attitude to the Assad regime.

In addition, we need to decide where we want our new security architecture. We need to decide who should be involved and what the challenges are. To protect whom/against whom? The answer to the latter question depends on where you stand in the region. Naturally, it looks different from Tehran and entirely different if you are in Riyadh. However, if we are serious about institutionalized regional security cooperation every actor needs to be in the tent; all actors, state and non-state, need to be included because they have the ability to act as spoilers. Even one person represented by another person needs to be at the table. For even small groups may create significant problems. In Libya for instance, some militias even have a veto power; they are powerful local actors, not the obedient proxies of anybody else. They already play a pivotal place among the countries in the region.

We also need to answer "the security of what?" Are we talking about security of the people? The security of states? Or the security of the region? Citizens' rights and national security considerations must be

balanced. Democracy is up to the countries of the region but pluralism as the basis of citizenship is inevitably necessary. Finally, we must produce an answer to the question of what position exactly we want to reach. For true security cooperation as in NATO involves drilling together and implies armed forces reaching the goal of interoperability. A military exercise, however, with three thousand soldiers does not mean drills and security cooperation. Which fields will be included among these areas of cooperation? Intelligence? Police work? At what level?

The Internal-External Dimension
Another entrenched problem in the region is the absence of domestic architects of regional security. The Middle East and North Africa have so long outsourced their needs in this regard. We must produce architects of regional security from within the region. That is to say, it is up to regional actors to come up with the rules of the game and impose it on the international actors this time. In previous experiences with regional security architectures in the region, this was not the case. It flew from the international to the regional. Otherwise, international powers such as Russia and the United States will impose their own interests, such as those in the realm of energy, on the region.

However, other problems in the region may soon multiply as well. Though the current focus is solely on extremism in the context of Daesh in Iraq and Syria, many believe that Daesh may move to Sinai in Egypt as well. It is therefore too early to write off Egypt as a 'stable' country, as there are deep currents that may even release a second wave of the Arab Spring. If Daesh consolidates itself in Sinai, we may be headed for multiple partitions in the region. Some cantons that may come into existence as a result of a possible partition may be more dependent on international powers than ever. When this happens, we must see that the frequently-cited Treaty of

Westphalia is an incorrect analogy, in that the international community's perspective on the MENA region still holds that dictatorships are better than chaos and anarchy, as evidenced by its attitude to the Assad regime.

An inevitable question we need to ask regarding the role of Egypt in future regional security cooperation is which Egypt we are talking about. We must remember that with the coup in 2013 legitimately acquired power was stolen from elected representatives. Today, Egypt under the Sisi government is not helping our case in terms of regional security. While the Sinai problem was only a minor problem during President Morsi's time, due to the oppression and evacuation of land under the Sisi regime it grew into a major issue. It needs to be remembered that President Morsi had founded a quartet with Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt as a new security arrangement. If we turn our gaze to North Africa, we see that Libya stands at the heart of several potential problems in the Mediterranean. Algeria, Libya and Egypt used to be major regional powers in North Africa. With the Libyan economy and politics in tatters, even Boko Haram may find new strength.

If there was such a thing as a regional security architecture in the region in the 20th century, it was based on external pillars such as American and Soviet power. Today, external involvement is at a much lower level than it has been for decades. The weaknesses that we see in every state in the region are domestic; regional states are internally fragile. For example, Saudi Arabia has the 'problem' of Shiite movements because it perceives them all as potential 'fifth columns' and as anti-government in the region. This is because almost all countries in the region have a problem with weak political systems. Unless this problem is solved, we cannot start talking about a regional security architecture.

From yet another perspective, Russian involvement in Syria has totally changed the dynamics in the region. This also has made multilateral diplomacy a prerequisite for a solution to regional problems. However, such multilateral diplomacy should be conducted in the short term, during the transitional period, with contributions from the modern great powers. In the end, however, major regional powers should assume responsibility for moving the process forward. In other words, we must first solve the Daesh problem, then facilitate the transition with multilateral great power diplomacy, and finally, major regional powers must come together to ponder regional security. Such a roadmap is allowed for by the fact that the United States is leaving the region, and though Russia may be back in the region, it is still not too attached to it. This view—that regional powers must come together for solution to regional problems—is supported by the regional nature of problems faced.

The Future of Non-State Armed Actors

First of all, we may want to start by questioning the assumption that armed state actors are good and non-state armed groups are bad. We need to relocate this distinction into one that should be between entities that generate threats or pretend to fight threats and entities that extinguish threats or help fight threats.

No actor can be blamed exclusively for the emergence of non-state armed groups which emerge because states fail to protect their own citizens. When states fail miserably to protect their own citizens, such groups may be "tolerated" by parts of the populations . It is ultimately the fragility of the state and the available opportunity structures for non-state actors that allow them to entrench their positions and consolidate their hold.

Thus, no actor can be blamed exclusively for the emergence of non-state armed groups which emerge because states fail to protect their own citizens. When states fail miserably to protect their own citizens, such groups may be "tolerated" by parts of the populations . It is ultimately the fragility of the state and the available opportunity structures for non-state actors that allow them to entrench their positions and consolidate their hold.

It is important to decide what we call these groups. Do we call them warlords, militias, paramilitaries, tribes? It is important to see though that many non-state armed groups in the region may have significant overlap with society and state. For instance, Hashd-i Shaabi enjoys a political, cultural, and religious nexus with society and are recognized as resistors to the previous Baath regime. They have an overlap with society. The integration of armed non-state actors is also an issue of identity as well as battlefield performance. What is more, which non-state armed group count as militias is also contested. The idea of Hezbollah being a militia to be integrated into the state sounds ridiculous; it is rather the state that is integrated into Hezbollah. It is Hezbollah that runs social services, they are the army, and they are the state. We must rethink and reformulate the relationship between states and respective armed no-state groups because as we speak about non-state actors as against the state, contesting the state, and within the state etc., non-state actors in Libya and Lebanon are the principal actors, not the state. In Iraq and Libya, non-state groups are already parts of the state. A member of parliament in Iraq founded and remains the head of parts of Hashd-i Shaabi. The same goes with Hezbollah. They are already part of the state or even the state itself.

Can we distinguish between bad militias and good militias? The debate about these groups also hinge on how these groups themselves

envisage their role and whether they see their role and function as compatible with the relevant state or not. We also need to remember that the acceptability of the non-state armed group depends on whether they are acceptable in a particular international context. For example, the KRG were dismissed in the past as 'rebel militias' but they now make an easy ally of the West today because they speak the language of democracy and the rule of law. Yet, the danger in legitimizing an armed group is that once you do, others think that they deserve the same legitimacy too. With the recent law passed in Iraq to legalize Hashd-i Shaabi, we may see a similar law in Syria for non-state pro-regime groups who want to legalize themselves.

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On the question of tackling the issue and future of non-state armed groups in the region a few suggestions can be made. We need to remember first that while army units tend to be based on ethnic sects in Syria and Yemen, this is not the case in Egypt and Turkey. We may see more of the former pattern in the future. When it comes to dealing with existing non-state armed groups, three alternative models stand out. The ideal solution is to make them a regular element of the army by making them army reserves. This gives them a legal base but they are disbanded and only called for when there is a need. This also allows for their military oversight. In Syria, non-state armed groups such as the YPG may not only be guerillas based around one ethnicity (the Kurds) but may also set up frameworks with other groups such as the Turkomans etc. They are also very good at reflagging themselves and becoming a force within themselves. Finally, there are those movements in the region such as Hezbollah or other militia groups which will fight to

the death. However, one can also make the case that these groups act according to the local geopolitical climate; they, therefore, act differently in Lebonan than in Syria and they behave differently in Iraq as well. This means that our choices do not have to be limited to integration or elimination. It can be some of both; half and half.

The suggestion of integration creates problems as well because there are many other groups such as the Guards of Nineveh province and the Sahwa groups that cannot be easily integrated. This may also lead to partition in some countries such as Iraq, where Sunni parts have their own army and Kurds have their own Peshmerga. Whether the integration of militias is possible through material incentives is another matter. For some observers, the integration of militias fails because states do not offer them enough material incentives. Or, states do not try to integrate the entire structure of these militias. One lesson, therefore, is that states may want to create material incentives to integrate militias into national armies.

The economic dynamics that emerge as states collapse and non-state actors emerge has its own logic and dimensions. When the formal economy disintegrates, a war economy emerges with self-sustaining elements and criminals.

The Syrian regime also recruits from among Christians and Ismailis, which have already formed their own small militias. They currently fund themselves through the regime but they procure locally as well by raiding the opposition. However, because Syria too is a very weak central state at the moment, these state-sponsored militias will be competing for resources amongst themselves whenever there is no enemy to unite them. It is almost impossible to find

solutions to these problems in the short term; they too require moving forward in a piecemeal fashion.

Decentralization of power and states may emerge as a result of the current chaos, but we must approach this eventuality more cautiously. The economic bases of these militias also matter; in the case of Libya and Iraq, all resources accrue to the state, which is why militias feel that they have to be close to the state. But in Syria, where central government has very little to offer them, militias have a different relationship to the state. The economic dynamics that emerge as states collapse and non-state actors emerge has its own logic and dimensions. When the formal economy disintegrates, a war economy emerges with self-sustaining elements and criminals.

The international experience with armed non-state groups who have bid farewell to arms may also be instructive. In the modern period, half of the armed groups around the world turned into political groups and demobilized. In Latin America for instance, some former members of some armed groups have recently become foreign ministers. Regarding the integration of armed militias into national armies, if the leader of the military unit has tribal or regional loyalties and does not take orders from the minister of national defense, this creates several problems. In such cases, the unit receives orders from their own leader instead of from the commander of the army. The idea that incentives may work for the integration of armed non-state groups into national security structures may work in states such as Libya, where there was in the past an incentive to demobilize. However, similar chances are slim in Egypt where the population is rather very large while resources are scant. In Libya, General Haftar played the role of spoiler. There is also the problem of leadership in situations where armed groups are integrated

into national armies. Charismatic leadership helps such cases a lot. Such groups in the process of laying down their arms ask the question of who they are giving their arms to. The ideologies of armed non-state groups may matter as well for integration and DDR purposes. Such groups may also have an absolutist orientation, which makes it very difficult to talk to them.

It is very much possible that we may not get armed militias to give up their arms and demobilize at the moment. Demobilization and disarmament of militias may not be feasible in the short term. What we can do, however, is to get them to respect human rights at least. We need to keep in mind also that as time passes, militias also learn; they improve their fighting capabilities at the battalion and platoon levels. They gain experience and become better warriors. This may make it hard to disarm and demobilize them in the long term as well.

Current Regional Institutions

When a new regional security architecture is under discussion, we may find it apt to revisit some of the old security cooperation mechanisms in the region. One of the first that would come to mind is the Gulf Cooperation Council, which was founded in 1981 against Iran. The composition of the GCC can be divided into three groups. Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain form one group, while Qatar and Kuwait form another, and Oman forms the third. There is the intention to turn the GCC into a union, but Oman rejects this notion. The GCC intervened in the events in Bahrain at the onset of the Arab Spring and the members are cooperating on Yemen. That being said, the foreign policies of GCC member states are often at odds with each other. For instance, three GCC member states withdrew their ambassadors from Doha because of the role they saw Al Jazeera playing by covering the events in Egypt, Bahrain and Libya in a

particular manner. This means that the GCC is not a monolithic entity.

This can be best seen in recent divergent approaches to Iran within the GCC. While Oman has an excellent relationship with Iran and the Kuwaiti foreign minister recently visited Iran on an official tour, Saudi Arabia rejects the idea of developing good relations with Iran. Besides, Saudi Arabia's approach to the GCC has been changing ever since King Salman took over. Qatar looks favorably on a rapprochement with Iran, but the GCC is deeply divided over the issue. Oman itself is looked on very suspiciously because of its good relations with Iran. There is the theoretical possibility of turning the GCC into GCC+2 (Iran and Iraq) and the Qatari government has suggested a dialogue in that vein but nothing has come to fruition yet.

In terms of the possibility of travelling on the path towards a new regional security architecture, a regional summit bringing together Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey is crucial. Otherwise, the weight of the GCC should not be overestimated, as there are deep disagreements among its member states on crucial issues such as the Arab Spring and the future shape of the region. Regarding the Arab League, it was deeply damaged by the coup in 2013 and ensuing Sisi government in Egypt. What may offer more promise for the region is the formation of sub-regional arrangements, such as those between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkey and Qatar, and Baghdad and Syria. These sub-regional arrangements may then be connected to one another. To recall, what have turned around fraught Turkey-KRG relations since the 1990s are intensive business ties. Therefore, business ties can be play a role here, as in the European project, which is currently under a dark cloud, but will probably live on because of its consolidated and deep trade ties.

The Role of Regional Rivalry

Regarding the obstruction of regional rivalries in future regional security cooperation, other observers are of the opinion that regional players need to make peace, not become fond of each other. We must come to grips with the fact that some countries in the region act based on their ideological and at times sectarian beliefs. The role of ideological and sectarian motivations shape and drive the elites. Therefore, their role should not be underestimated. This implies that Saudi Arabia and Iran will probably not solve their differences. Yet, this does not mean that our debate should remain theological. The European model before us shows that we must move from the theological field to the political in order to solve our differences. As happened in the Holy Roman Empire, although at one point emperors determined the confessional statuses of their people, a century later this system was entirely revised based on graded rather than full toleration. This meant the existence of full-confession free areas, which were given some rights. In short, confessional cohabitation with conditional sovereignty began to go together. Princes could no longer act with full impunity, but rather had to provide minimum rights to their subjects. They could rule for life, but under these and other conditions.

The current foreign policies of regional actors in the region are designed based on emotions instead of objective analysis and cold calculations. In this, some groups/people in the region feel left out/excluded from dominant narratives in the region. The point is that for a regional security architecture to come into existence, the countries of the region should not be aiming to end their differences, but to learn to accommodate them. Before starting to talk about a regional security architecture, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran must come together and have a candid discussion about their geopolitical interests.

That being said, regional rivalries are not productive for the additional reason that threat perceptions disseminated among the peoples of countries in the region are often not real. Correcting this would lead the way to Israel, for instance, becoming normalized and finding some allies in the region. Saudi Arabia's demonization of the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islam is another such example. The same can be said about Iran and its securitizing acts in the region. The politicization of alliances or tactical approaches to bilateral link do not help the cause of increasing trust among regional actors and decreasing feelings of sectarianism. For instance, Iran's support for Hamas was once perceived as positive. People thought that Iran was being non-sectarian. However, they later stopped this support, and people came to notice that Iranian assistance was tactical and political, not sincere. The idea of proxy wars has commonly been used of late to describe the situation in Iraq, Yemen and Syria, but it does not help either. The concept of proxy war is based on a win-lose situation, while the realities on the ground require all actors to reach compromises and adjust their stances.

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EVENT DESCRIPTION

The collapse of regional order has made the security failures of the Sharq region ever more apparent. State failures, violent extremism, the emergence of militia groups as prevalent regional forces, chemical warfare, and the arms race are among the security problems, which call for the development of a new security architecture for the MENA region.

ABOUT ALSHARQ FORUM

The Sharq Forum is an independent international network whose mission is to undertake impartial research and develop long-term strategies to ensure the political development, social justice and economic prosperity of the people of Al-Sharq. The Forum does this through promoting the ideals of democratic participation, an informed citizenry, multi-stakeholder dialogue, social justice, and public-spirited research.

Address: Istanbul Vizyon Park A1 Plaza Floor:6 No:68 Postal Code: 34197 Bahçelievler/ Istanbul / Turkey
Telephone: +902126031815
Fax: +902126031665
Email: info@sharqforum.org

sharqforum.org

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