



**Beirut Security
Debates**

GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS AND GLOBAL CRISES: WHAT IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST?

26-27 January 2023



CONFERENCE REPORT

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut, in collaboration with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Regional Peace and Security Project, held the first edition of the Beirut Security Debates (BSD) on January 26-27, 2023, at IFI. Titled “Geopolitical Shifts and Global Crises: What Implications for the Middle East?” the closed experts’ meeting gathered local, regional, and international scholars as well as specialists and policymakers to discuss issues on regional security, geopolitics, economics, energy security, as well as so-called soft security and humanitarian issues central to current global affairs and their impact on the Middle East.

The conference’s panel discussions covered six workshops and accompanying discussions, namely: “Middle East Crises amidst Global Shifts and Rise of New Regional Powers”, “Lebanon, How Deep is the Abyss?”, “The Iranian Unknown post-JCPOA: Domestic and Geopolitical Implications of the Current Protest Movement”, “Regional Issues of Soft Security”, “MENA Economies and Global Geo-economics”, and finally, “Europe and the MENA Region; Is There a Security Architecture in Sight?”

The following report will reflect the main ideas and arguments discussed during the workshops. The main objective of these workshops was to understand the global system and its developments for this reason, it was highlighted that a fundamental understanding of security does not only mean understanding military issues, but also soft and human security, which includes climate change, food security, refugees, and economic infrastructures. Hence, to understand the impact of global developments such as the war in Ukraine over the Middle East, we must analyze geopolitics as a “category of analysis” and widen the term of security.

WORKSHOP 1

MIDDLE EAST CRISES AMIDST GLOBAL SHIFTS AND RISE OF NEW REGIONAL POWERS.

The global order is reshaping and in transition, and amid the rise of new powers, the Middle East is left alone to reshape its regional order. What we are witnessing now is a new attempt to revise the unipolar world system which was established by the US after the end of the Cold War. Russia's war in Ukraine is benefiting China which is becoming a rising power. Hence, instead of multipolarity, a bipolar international system is emerging between two economically strong countries as Moscow, irrespectively of the outcome of its invasion of Ukraine, will emerge weaker.

The three main influences in the region are the US, Russia, and China. Even though the US downsized its military presence in the region, neither Russia nor China could replace its role as the main arbitrator in the region. Over the last few decades, the Americans tried to disengage with the region and have made it clear to their regional allies that they will provide them with security and military aid and that if they face an existential threat, they will provide aid. However, they are alone if they engage in big intra-regional fights, creating some disappointment in the Gulf states and pushing them to look for additional security guarantees that could pave the way for establishing ties with, or consolidating security relations with Russia, China, and even Israel (which has materialized with normalization agreements, for instance).

Russia prioritizes the Middle East for its "North-South" trade. A certain level of stability is crucial for trade and the flow of investments.¹ Hence, Moscow cannot afford new military adventures in Syria as the country is still fragmented. To secure its position in the future world order, Russia is going to stay in the region but not expand further, given its limited resources, also due to the need to focus those it has on Ukraine currently. Russia's main objective towards the region is to push forward with the "North-South" transportation corridor project which will connect the Indian Ocean to northern Russia through Iran and the Gulf States. For this reason, Russia is approaching the Gulf states and we are witnessing an increase in Russian reliance on Iran in Syria, even accommodating Turkey's power ambitions in the Middle East.

As the war in Ukraine continues, China will be replacing Russia, but relative to the US it is not yet a superpower. This factor is shaping China's attitude towards the region. Hence, Beijing is engaging in a balanced and cautious foreign policy towards the Middle East and North Africa,

¹ Evgeny Y. Vinokurov, Arman Ahunbaev, Alexander I. Zaboev, "International North-South Transport Corridor: Boosting Russia's "pivot to the South" and Trans-Eurasian connectivity", *Russian Journal of Economics*, July 29, 2022, <https://rujec.org/article/86617/>, last accessed 15/3/2023.

somehow like its ambitions and presence in African countries. It is investing in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. It is unclear if it is engaging in a balancing act or trying to pose itself as a responsible rising power to mediate regional conflicts. Unlike the US, China is engaging with countries with conflicting interests, and this would consolidate its status in the region. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that China is a relatively new player in the region, and its engagement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, does not mean it will replace the US as the main security guarantor for the GCC countries as Washington remains the main arbitrator for the last resort.

Iran is one of the major regional players in the Middle East. The recent protest movements in Iran have created certain challenges for the ruling elite that pose the potential to reflect on the regional system, meaning that any changes in its state system would have a direct impact on the wider regional organization.



From the Iranian government's perspective, the protest movements are linked to the sanctions imposed by the West. Therefore, the Iranian ruling elites engage in "maximum resistance" against the so-called "maximum pressure". Analyzing from this angle, we can understand the motives behind Iran's support to Russia in its war in Ukraine, and its suppression of protest movements in the country. It seems probable that Iran believes that by resisting both, international and domestic pressure, it may eventually emerge stronger.

To strengthen its position vis-a-vis rival actors, Tehran feels the need to remain engaged in the region while staying focused inside its territory. Iran continues to push its regional agenda through its allies and proxies in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen. Unlike other regional and international actors, Iran maintains a certain advantage as it does not need to spend a lot of human and financial resources for this purpose, partially due to ideological affiliation. Its "intervention" in Ukraine by selling drones to Russia is a sort of "trade-off" with the Americans over the nuclear negotiations. Hence, Iran views local and regional developments from the same prism. As the rising elites are facing diverse pressure, both from the region and within the country (in addition to Israeli attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities and military bases outside the country), this could shape the government's response to the local protest movement. The current political situation domestically is unstable, any reform or change relies on the pressure coming from the Iranian society from inside the country. Within the context of "maximum resistance", we may witness more violence inside the country.

Regionally, the war in Ukraine gave more autonomy to regional powers in the Middle East. For this reason, the Middle East is now looking for its place in the global chess game. Countries have new communication channels and are engaging in partial regional normalizations whereas Turkey is engaging with the UAE and Egypt and Israel with some Arab countries with the aim to create a regional security architecture in counterbalancing Iran. The question remains whether these countries have a vision of any security alliance or a regional form of NATO.

Of course, these partial regional arrangements do not mean wars will end and peace will be established. A ceasefire between KSA and the Houthis in Yemen may provide the ground for additional dialogue between the Saudi Monarch and Iran, but this will not guarantee peace in Yemen as the country is fragmented and Houthis are not the only actor in the country. Hence, when it comes to dialogue, in addition to state actors non-state actors must also have a role. A key example is the Israeli rapprochement with some Arab countries which cannot be considered a deconflicting factor since this is creating additional antagonism in Arab societies and de-facto legitimizing the annexation of the West Bank.

Finally, when analyzing regional security, domestic components such as the state of democratization must be taken into consideration. The current alignments and regional arrangements are not ideological ones but are aiming to legitimize authoritarianism by suppressing local democratic movements and aiming to counterbalance other regional countries.

WORKSHOP 2

LEBANON, HOW DEEP IS THE ABYSS?

IS LEBANON FALLING INTO THE ABYSS?

The potential and the curse Lebanon's geography has made it prone to political hijacking by other countries. Conflicts and wars in Lebanon have continuously been fought as proxies while the Lebanese state is organized as a de facto political feudalism.

According to World Bank reports, Lebanon is going through the worst financial and economic crises since the mid-19th century.² However, the financial crisis has not weakened the neoliberal sectarian elite; rather, the parliamentary election results of 2022 have shown that they are still the main actors intervening on the social scenes to provide humanitarian aid and mobilize votes. During the 2019 uprising, the sectarian political parties did not want to change the system.

Lebanon's geographically unique positioning also makes its domestic politics prone to regional developments. The question is what may happen if a regional reset takes place causing a sudden change in the current regional balance of power. For instance, the end of the cold war and the creation of regional order under the US paved the way for Syrian and Saudi cooperation to repeatedly shape Lebanon's domestic politics. After the Syrian military withdrawal in 2005 and the 2006 war with Israel, a new balance of power was forming domestically and regionally which led to the collapse of the Taif order and the failure of US-sponsored "Greater Middle East" initiative³, paving the way for the Doha agreement in 2008.⁴ This system also didn't last for a long time and with the signing of the JCPOA deal with Iran in 2015, there was a certain international and regional momentum that paved the way for the election of Michel Aoun as President of the country in 2016 by pushing the opposing parties in Lebanon to compromise and agree on a joint presidential candidate.

The political crisis in Lebanon is not a new phenomenon. The political and economic issues are interconnected and engaging in reforms is a difficult task due to the lack of a social contract to create a sense of citizenship. Lebanon needs to adopt comprehensive gradual reforms; further, structural reforms are also needed as the consociation democracy is not functioning for the country. State institutions need to be further created and strengthened.

² "Lebanon Sinking into One of the Most Severe Global Crises Episodes, amidst Deliberate Inaction", *World Bank*, June 1, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/05/01/lebanon-sinking-into-one-of-the-most-severe-global-crises-episodes>, last accessed 15/3/2023.

³ Tamara Cofman Wittes, "The New U.S. Proposal for a Greater Middle East Initiative: An Evaluation", *Brookings*, May 10, 2004, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-new-u-s-proposal-for-a-greater-middle-east-initiative-an-evaluation/>, last accessed 15/3/2023.

⁴ Nada Bakri and Alan Cowell, "Lebanese reach agreement to resolve 18-month political crisis", *The New York Times*, May 21, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/21/world/africa/21iht-lebanon.4.13105564.html>, last accessed 15/3/2023.

Many Lebanese have understood that Lebanon is no longer a priority abroad. Consequently, this implies that they must take care of their country themselves. The vacuum in the Presidential Palace may continue for many months to come if the Lebanese elites do not come to an understanding of how to solve its crisis.

In addition to domestic reforms, Lebanon also needs to shift its foreign policy priorities. Expecting Lebanon to become a neutral country like Switzerland is not realistic. Some scholars suggest that it can use positive neutrality to be the mediator of the region such as Oman. Lebanon should try to be in the center and a bridge between other countries. When President Fouad Chehab met Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser on the Lebanese Syrian border in 1958, there was symbolism in this act. Chehab drew a clear line that Lebanon was not going to be used as a spearhead to threaten Egypt's political interests in the region, and in return, Egypt was not going to meddle in Lebanon's domestic affairs. This positive neutrality kept Lebanon safe until the end of Chehab's era.

To achieve such a policy or initiative, a dialogue on a detailed roadmap and timeline is needed. Evidently, reforms are not possible without engaging with one of the main political actors in the country, namely Hezbollah. The Lebanese must engage in a gradual process of political de-sectarianizing. The system clientelism as it is simply cannot be maintained as it remains dysfunctional and discriminatory. If these structural reforms are not adopted, then the downward trajectory is going to continue as there is no regional settlement on the near horizon.

IS GAS THE ONLY SECTOR FOR LEBANON TO RECOVER?

Cyprus has discovered its gas reserves in 2011 and the potential exporting process may begin in 2027. Lebanon's situation is questionable as it is exploring and drilling, however lacking the basic infrastructure for exporting it. Lebanon has yet to build a functioning infrastructure in this regard. Further, Lebanon also needs to engage and compete not just with Turkish and Egyptian regional markets but also with other Asian countries, which eventually requires more advanced technological approaches such as liquifying the gas; this might not be a high priority for targeted international actors.

There is a decline in the interest of international companies because of the small domestic markets and the insufficient gas infrastructure. Over the past decade, there has not been any new investment in infrastructure. The only way to join the international gas market is via Egypt and Israel, the latter built its infrastructure in the 2000s. None of these considerations taken on their own would prevent the exploration and extraction of gas. But all together they add extra layers of difficulty.

Moreover, exploration has lots of uncertainties, especially in deep waters (20% success rate). Discovery is the first step on a long road to production. Exploration takes a longer process in the Eastern Mediterranean because gas resources are found in ultra-deep water.

WORKSHOP 3

THE IRANIAN UNKNOWN POST-JCPOA: DOMESTIC AND GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CURRENT PROTEST MOVEMENT.

THE PROTEST MOVEMENT IN IRAN

The most recent protest movement started with the killing of Mahsa Jina Amini and the question around the hijab in the public sphere. Some reformists are pushing to make it voluntary, while some hardliners that hold key positions in the government are against any reforms. Compromising on the hijab issue is feared to initiate a domino effect, creating a sense of weakness of the government and state amongst the protestors which could follow with more political demands. Therefore, these hardliners have been cracking down on the grassroots protest movement.

During this protest, the situation of minorities also surfaced. The momentum of the protest is continuing and gaining importance which ultimately means that government repercussions and further attempts to contain the protest movements are to be expected. Meanwhile, the socio-economic conditions of the country, mainly due to corruption and US-imposed sanctions, are worsening the financial sector and the industry.

Besides the limiting of space by the Iranian government, the civil society on the ground and in the diaspora is receiving international attention. This attention is crucial to break the isolation of civil society in order to keep the momentum of the protest movement ongoing. The Islamic Republic perceives the Iranian civil society as a national security threat. Therefore, any form of civil society movement is completely oppressed. Worse, the regime is constructing a “foreign agents” narrative around everyone engaging with the protest movement.

There are conversations and debates going on social media platforms about the impact of sanctions on the deterioration of the social and economic situation in the country, placing the blame increasingly on the government’s domestic and foreign policy rather than the sanctions in place as the government tries to frame it. However, sanctions are perceived as having consolidated government censorship and authoritarianism.

The government seeks to prevent the protesters from coordinating and coming together under a unified leadership. Moreover, the government is relying on the *Basij* to enforce domestic order against protestors. With technological support from China and Russia, the government maintains the capability to shut down internet and cellphone services. The Iranian Supreme Leader also has justified the oppression by blaming the US and Israel for stirring this domestic crisis.

Meanwhile, the gap between rich and the poor is intensifying. This is partially due to deeply institutionalized corruption as the government is monopolizing state resources. In addition to currency devaluation and US-imposed sanctions, there are social issues that are marginalizing certain groups in society. Key factors that are pushing people to go to the streets are decades of oppression against Iranian women, the discrimination against them in the labor market, the enforcement of compulsory hijab, and the arrests against civil society activities.

The working class is also heavily involved in this protest. Despite the relative decline in the number of protests in the second half of November, there were a considerable number of strikes.

THE JCPOA AND BEYOND

Ever since President Ebrahim Raisi's administration assumed power in 2021, US-Iran relations have circled around talks to resuscitate the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). If the deal was to be revived sanctions could be lifted which would open the door for Western investments in Iran, thus enabling needed economic growth. But the crack down on the protests by the regime is having an undeniable impact on the prospects of the revival of the JCPOA, making it difficult for the US and European states to engage with the regime...

The revitalization of the JCPOA would come with sanctions relief and would thereby ultimately benefit the **regime**. However, as the protest movement is asking for system change, there are concerns that sanctions relief would present a green light for the use of violence for the government.

As the JCPOA talks had already reached a deadlock, Iran may further move towards the East, leading to more cordial relations between Tehran and Moscow. This becomes crucial in the light of the continuing Russian War on Ukraine. Specifically, as Iran-Russia bilateral cooperation is fundamentally in the military sector, this development could endanger any further potential progress on the nuclear deal. Practically, this military partnership means the usage of Iranian drones in Ukraine. Iran's rapprochement with Russia and China will have an impact on the region, especially in Syria. With the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia will be more dependent on Iran in Syria. Moreover, many in the old guards of the Iranian regime, have pessimistic views regarding



the JCPOA as they are concerned that with an opening to the West will lead to losing monopoly over key resources which will have certain impacts on the region.

WORKSHOP 4

REGIONAL ISSUES OF SOFT SECURITY

Many experts and discourses argue that climate change and (future) pandemics will shape global politics. Several protests across the region were triggered by water scarcity and low quality. Water scarcity and access as well as the emerging environmental degradation due to this is already triggering conflict over resources between countries and bears potential to escalate further into wars on water in the future, both leading to flight and population movements (internal displacement and refugees).

Climate change is a “*serious aggravating factor*”, meaning a risk multiplier. The draughts in Iraq and Northeast Syria in 2021, for instance, triggered protest movements in the affected regions. In Syria, the 2007–2010 drought was one of the reasons for the start of widespread protests that later led to the conflict. It was one of the worst recorded droughts causing widespread crop failure and degradation of livelihoods, leading to mass flight of especially farming families from rural areas to urban centers. This led to tensions between different fractions of society. In conclusion, climate change induced environmental degradation threatens to cause increasing and intensifying forced migration movements, in the future even more than conflicts and war.

This, coupled with other developments across the MENA-region, has been bringing more and more to the surface the socio-economic grievances in the countries as well as in the wider region. With decades-long intensifying authoritarian rule and populations getting younger, the so-called “Arab Spring” started in the end of 2010/early 2011, with demands for social and reform change; in some countries, the leadership did compromise on some demands, in many, conflicts emerged with partially leading to still ongoing violent civil wars. Groups like DAESH/ISIS found breeding grounds in such instability in these vacuums. Forced migration and refuge have brought regional developments into European and so-called Western countries’ consciousness. However, other challenges such as a lack of access to legal documentation, proof of education as well as access to education, work, and healthcare due to citizenship and (in)formality led to exploitation of populations on the move and further marginalization.

The status of refugees differs from one country to the other: while Syrian refugees have better access to social services in Jordan, their situation is very harsh in Lebanon and Turkey. It should be taken into consideration that Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 convention on refugees (Geneva Convention).

One other major discussion was around the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda (WPS Agenda) and how it can be democratized. Throughout the last decades, there have been several attempts

regarding the inclusion of women in decision-making processes. The agenda has initiated paradigm shift from power-sharing to responsibility-sharing. However, decisions often times are still taken by men of a particular social class. In the last years, we have seen a significant shift in women's engagement in the public sphere in most of Arab societies. For the first time in Saudi Arabia women have been appointed as ambassadors or special envoys. There is a growing number of women in decision-making and mediation processes, but it is still a slow systemic change in who has access to these spaces. There are empirical studies that quantify that the absence of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding has affected the recurrence of new civil wars in the past. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that donors listen to the local population when it comes to engaging in conflict resolution and prevention, making an active effort to include 50% of the population in the national dialogue or mediation efforts.

WORKSHOP 5

MENA ECONOMIES AND GLOBAL GEO-ECONOMICS

Over the past years, global developments have affected countries in the region in different ways. Oil producing countries have benefitted from oil price increases. A good economic performance allows to project security in an increasingly divided world, making economic considerations crucial. Security is therefore to be analyzed from an economic-political perspective.

The GCC is an important player in many different aspects. Cultural change has come consequently in the attempts to diversify the economy, most obviously observed in Saudi Arabia. It is yet to be seen if the Saudi Vision 2030 will reduce the kingdom's dependency on oil, thereby diversifying its economy and developing functioning public service sectors (e.g., health, education, infrastructure, recreation, tourism, all in a sustainable manner). One important consideration for the GCC is that rising powers such as India and China, have big investments in the region. One example of such engagement is China's Belt and Road Initiative and its direct investments into maritime routes and ports across the region to connect trade hubs between Europe and Asia.

For 2050, many countries are aiming to have zero carbon emissions. This would lead to decreased quantities of oil production and consumption, thus lower prices, and economic ease. GCC countries are aware of the future impact that climate change will have on them and make them more vulnerable therefore, the diversification deems vital for them in the long run. This, particularly under the current war in Ukraine, could further encourage East-West cooperation on climate and energy policies, thus giving the GCC additional leverage.

Egypt and Tunisia are heading the "Lebanese way". The main difference in Lebanon is a fixed Lira exchange rate that is not sustainable and depletes reserves as it doesn't reflect the actual value of the currency. Egypt is the second biggest borrower from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), after Argentina. It has never been in such a weak structural situation. However, these

kinds of loans are not a sustainable solution, particularly as they are coupled often with corrupt management which then only tends to protract the crisis. Finally, the IMF's conditions may engrave inequalities as certain fiscal policies potentially harm the already disadvantaged parts of society.

The war in Ukraine has intensified food insecurity. Egypt as the most populated country is facing huge challenges to ensure the ability to feed everyone. With increasing political repressions and financial instability on the global and national economies, the situation of the country might escalate unexpectedly. Similarly, Lebanon is highly dependent on grain and wheat reports from Russia and Ukraine; basic needs such as bread have become unattainable for large parts of the society.

GCC countries have already a tradition to invest in Eastern African countries (e.g., Sudan and Ethiopia) to guarantee food security in the food resource-wise poor countries.

WORKSHOP 6

EUROPE AND THE MENA REGION; IS THERE A SECURITY ARCHITECTURE IN SIGHT?

Does Europe have a significant influence over the MENA region? Is Europe able to play a mediator role and what kind of future does it have in the region amid a new security architecture shaping the Middle East and North Africa?

Europe has not been a driver of regional dynamics. Even if it tries to engage, it does not achieve any success. The rapprochement between Israel and certain countries in the MENA region and the demarcation of the maritime border between Lebanon and Israel were brokered by the US. The EU does not represent a strong position in the same sense, probably because of a non-existent military presence; there are intra-European divisions and no unified foreign policy. Often, bureaucracy hinders the decision-making process.

In recent years, we have realized that Europe has given up on any ambition of democratic change in the region, same seems to apply for conflict resolution engagement. "Fortress Europe" isolation has increasingly taken the center of the debates, with right-wing populism gaining stronger grounds and discourses around terrorism threats and migration as a security challenge being the main domestic and foreign policy focus, instead of working on the root causes for everything mentioned in the previous workshops and sections.

However, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the regional and international arenas changed, and Europe has had to adjust to that and review its interests. Hence, new alliances started to emerge on the international scene and a new interest to increase the military budget (such as in Germany) materialized. NATO and military cooperation gained new momentum and NATO's dependency on Turkey increased amid the Swedish and Finnish NATO's accession bid.

Ideally, the new security structure should not be built on fronts created between different interest basis. The Middle East could consider its version of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe). The OSCE is the world's largest regional security-oriented intergovernmental organization, and its mandate includes issues such as arms control, promotion of human rights, freedom of the press, and free and fair elections. It has its origins in the mid-1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) held in Helsinki, Finland. A new approach for the MENA could orient on:

1. A new Westphalian system: states will not intervene in each other's domestic affairs and will respect the state system of their neighboring countries.
2. Establishing rules of contact and de-escalation: State leaders must act in a rational way and not be over-reacting to new or sudden developments. Their main objective should be to defuse tensions and prevent the emergence of new ones.
3. Preventing non-state actors from being the key actors on behalf of state actors: In Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon we see non-state actors becoming transnational actors that clash with the governments. Such acts create instability in the region and states become vulnerable to foreign interventions.
4. No ideological warfare: States should refrain from "exporting" their ideologies to neighboring countries. Hence, they should not seek to engage in regime changes or ousting governments.
5. The concept of "*géometrie variable*" should be respected: Let each state follow its own pace and path. There is no right or wrong when it comes to nation/state building and development.
6. Creating fields of cooperation: States must find ways to cooperate with each other in economic, scientific, and cultural spheres irrespective of political rivalry.

Both the Madrid (1991) and Barcelona (1995) processes called for Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. This was a very ambitious initiative which laid the foundations of a new regional relationship, and which has represented a turning point in Euro-Mediterranean relations leading to the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean. The initiative called for a common area of peace and stability through the reinforcement of political and security dialogue. It aimed to construct a zone of shared prosperity through an economic and financial partnership and the gradual establishment of a free-trade area. Ultimately, it called for rapprochement between peoples through a social, cultural, and human partnership aimed at encouraging understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies.

The liberal order is not the "*end of History*" as Fukuyama argued, and it cannot work in all societies. The trajectory of the evolution of nation-states in the Arab world is different from that in Europe. We must understand that every state has the right to evolve at its own pace based on its culture and history. State building is not an easy task.

ARE WE HEADING FOR AN “ARAB NATO”?

There are rumors of a new Middle Eastern military alliance, on the lines of an “Arab NATO”. This is significant as some argue that it could include Israel, signaling steps toward better ties between Israel and some Arab countries. This, in turn, will create a new regional security order with the aim of containing Iran.

With the signing of the Abraham Accords, a series of joint normalization statements initially between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, mediated by the United States, began to facilitate the Arab Israeli security network. An institutionalized alliance or a bloc are not yet on the horizon, but we can see some steps taken toward this direction. There are different ideas on Iran’s role in the region (e.g., in the agenda in Yemen vs. their own).

On the other hand, new regionalism is rising in the Middle East. States are making deals the Chinese way (flexibility), based on the idea of national interest. The UAE is opening to Syria, Saudi Arabia is no more engaging in Wahabi activities abroad, and the new young elites in the Gulf are shaping a non-ideological foreign policy and this may hinder any ideology-based alliances in the long run.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Russian war in Ukraine continuous to shape not only the global but also the regional order. The international system with its current status cannot be defined. We live in a chaotic world and the Middle East is in disorder. For the first time in modern history, the region has been left alone to shape its regional order and architecture. This could present a challenge but also a chance to emerge to a more independent region.

The developments in Iran and the momentum of the protest movement will have an impact on the country's foreign policy, but this is dependent on whether the country will have a certain transitional period, or the government will oppress the movement and engage in harsh foreign policy with the West and the neighboring countries.

The unexpected war in Ukraine and the threat to food security as well as the increase in energy prices also halted the projects of the "post-oil" countries. Meanwhile, issues that scholars and policymakers traditionally used to consider as soft security topics are becoming the heart of security: refugees, pandemics, and climate change: all and further issues that impact and shape domestic and foreign policy decision-making of the countries in the region and beyond.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) – Foundation for social democracy!

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is the oldest political foundation in Germany with a rich tradition in social democracy dating back to its foundation in 1925. The foundation owes its formation and its mission to the political legacy of its namesake Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected German President.

The work of our political foundation focuses on the core ideas and values of social democracy – freedom, justice and solidarity. This connects us to social democracy and free trade unions. As a non-profit institution, we organise our work autonomously and independently.

The Regional Peace and Security Project in the MENA is based in Beirut and works with partners across Western Asia and North Africa towards a viable regional security architecture for more stability and inclusive and democratic societies.

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs

Inaugurated in 2006, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. It aims to initiate and develop policy-relevant research in and about the Arab world. The Institute aims at bridging the gap between academia and policymaking by conducting high quality research on the complex issues and challenges faced by Lebanese and Arab societies within shifting international and global contexts, by generating evidence-based policy recommendations and solutions for Lebanon and the Arab world, and by creating an intellectual space for an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, scholars, civil society actors, media, and policymakers.



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