Deanship of Scientific Research

Toward a New Security Structure in the MENA Region: Challenges and Prospects

Rakan Nawaf AlGhaniem * iD

Prince Al Hussein Bin Abdullah II School of International Studies, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan

* *Corresponding author:*
rakan.almutlaq@gmail.com

Abstract

Objectives: This study aims to examine the numerous security challenges facing the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and propose a comprehensive framework for re-evaluating existing security structures, which exhibit inherent weaknesses. The study emphasizes the urgent need to renew the region's security framework to effectively address current challenges.

Methods: The study employs a qualitative and comprehensive approach, integrating geopolitical assessments and a detailed examination of existing regional cooperation structures. It addresses two main questions: (1) What are the fundamental weaknesses within current regional security frameworks? and (2) How can a new security model address the region's multifaceted security challenges?

Results: The study reveals the complexities of the security landscape in MENA and identifies key vulnerabilities in the current structures. It highlights the importance of establishing a new security framework to enhance stability and foster regional cooperation.

Conclusions: This study contributes to the discourse on regional security by advocating for the creation of a new security structure in MENA. Such a framework aims to strengthen cooperation, address critical vulnerabilities, and promote a safer and more peaceful environment across the region.

Key words: MENA; Middle East; security; conflict resolution; regional stability; diplomacy; peacebuilding.

نحو بنية أمنية جديدة في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا: التحديات والآفاق

راكان نواف حسن الغانم*

كلية الأمير الحسين بن عبدالله الثاني للدراسات الدولية، الجامعة الأردنية، عمّان، الأردن

ملخّص

الأهداف: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة التحديات الأمنية العديدة التي تواجه منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا، واقتراح إطار شامل لإعادة النظر في الهياكل الأمنية القائمة، التي تتسم بنقاط ضعف متأصلة. تركز الدراسة على الحاجة الملحة؛ لتجديد البنية الأمنية في المنطقة لمواجهة التحديات الحالية.

المنهجية: تعتمد الدراسة على منهج نوعي ونهج شامل يشمل التقييمات الجيوسياسية والفحص الدقيق لهياكل التعاون الإقليمي السائدة. وتتناول الدراسة سؤالين رئيسيين: (1) ما نقاط الضعف الأساسية المتأصلة في الهياكل الأمنية الإقليمية الحالية؟ و(2) كيف يمكن لنموذج أمني جديد أن يعالج التحديات الأمنية المتعددة الأوجه؟

النتائج: تكشف الدراسة عن تعقيدات المشهد الأمني في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا، وتحدد نقاط الضعف الرئيسة في الهياكل الحالية. كما تشير إلى أهمية بناء هيكل أمني جديد؛ لتعزيز الاستقرار والتعاون الإقليمي.

الخلاصة: تساهم هذه الدراسة في النقاش حول الأمن الإقليمي من خلال الدعوة لإنشاء هيكل أمني جديد في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا. يهدف هذا الهيكل إلى تعزيز التعاون، ومعالجة نقاط الضعف الحرجة، وتعزيز بيئة أكثر أمانًا وسلامًا في المنطقة.

الكلمات الدالة: منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا، الأمن، حل النزاعات، الاستقرار الإقليمي، الدبلوماسية، بناء السلام.

Introduction.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is witnessing major stability and security challenges and urgently needs new and agreed-upon de-escalation methods. More than ten years after the Arab Spring, the region has seen greater disintegration, conflict, and competition, with several overlapping instability drivers emerging from both inside and outside the Middle East. Weak institutions, fraying social contracts, and rising socioeconomic pressure have collided with resurgent foreign interventionism and a significant deepening of geopolitical divides and militarization, resulting in a volatile mix of state and societal grievances that could erupt into new conflicts or popular mobilizations.

The deterioration of the regional system is most likely represented in the severe weakening of traditional Middle Eastern venues for regional or sub-regional cooperation. For example, internal disputes and limitations affect the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) making them incapable of addressing the rising struggles confronting many Middle Eastern governments and communities. Meanwhile, the global multilateralism crisis has divided international efforts to promote dialogue and de-confliction in the Middle East, complicating the launch of new diplomatic efforts aimed at overcoming the zero-sum logic of competition and moving the region towards a more cooperative and progressive plane. (FEPS and IAI, 2020, p. 7).

Major conflicts occur across the region, such as Libya, Syria, Yemen, Palestine-Israel, and Iran-Saudi Arabia. Regional security is at risk if regional concerns such as the environment, water, health, corruption, economic hardship, inequality, and authoritarianism are left behind. Due to the mistrust and animosity between Iran and most of the Arab Gulf states, longer-term progress toward effective Gulf security will necessitate easing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, drawing on their common interests in opposing violent extremism and terrorism while avoiding direct military confrontation. However, any step toward collective regional security will be based on improving partnerships and confidence among regional states. (Kurtzer, D and Seeley, M, 2020).

Given this unstable background, the need to rethink the region's security structure has never been more important. This study seeks to investigate into and suggest a new security structure in the Middle East that goes beyond the restrictions of existing regional cooperation frameworks. The primary goal is to evaluate the feasibility and strategic importance of developing a comprehensive and inclusive security system that handles multiple security concerns, enhances conflict resolution, and supports long-term collaboration among important regional players.

This study seeks to highlight the fundamental complexities that shape the regional security landscape by critically assessing the weaknesses of present regional cooperation structures and their incapacity to effectively moderate growing tensions and conflicts. Moreover, the study argues for restructuring a potential security framework that deals with the complicated nature of regional dynamics and strives to create a more stable and collaborative regional security environment by outlining the need for a new security paradigm.

The core of this study proposes that the founding of a new security structure consisting of varied regional players is critical for resolving disputes, developing cooperation, and tackling the Middle East's multiple security challenges.

Based on the above, this study has sought to answer the following questions:
- What are the major weaknesses in the current regional security structures in the MENA region?
- How can establishing a redefined security paradigm address the security challenges in the MENA region?

Challenges in the Middle East.

Very briefly, The Middle East after 2011 is "more combustible than ever," as several overlapping crises across geopolitical, socioeconomic, and security sectors, putting further strain on social contracts and already broken regional cooperation forums. The Intra-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) tensions, rising Saudi and Emirati rivalry with Turkey and Iran, and the emergence of energy and geopolitically driven alliances in the Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, competition over conflicts in Syria, Libya, Palestine, and Yemen, as well as the weak states in Iraq and Lebanon, are all examples of the Middle East region's current conflictual multipolarity. Moreover, besides these developments, the protest movements in Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, and Sudan have once again demonstrated the weakening of social contracts in many

states in the region, reminding observers that many of the underlying criticalities that contributed to the outbreak of the Arab uprisings in late 2010 remain unaddressed and have worsened significantly over the ensuing decade. (Dessì, 2018).

The Middle East is confronting several security concerns that go beyond military and traditional threats as a result of the rise of unconventional security threats caused by an effective combination of factors. These include climate change, food insecurity, water scarcity, unsustainable energy, cyber threats, illegal migration, accelerated population growth, deterioration in living standards, poverty, slow pace of economic growth, and sustainable development. Moreover, the changes in the balance of power accompanied by changes in the international system have increased global rivalry in the region, which threatens regional peace and stability. These security challenges caused international concerned about its effects on global security. Therefore, the Middle East is seen as a vital region for the international economy as a whole. In this context, the region has become a staging ground for the formation of several, frequently overlapping security issues. (Kamrava, 2018).

Previous Attempts of Security Structures in the Region.

Since the Arab League's founding in 1945, several security cooperation initiatives have been suggested in the Middle East, but few have had an extended impact on the region's security situation. Divisions between monarchical regimes and other states, weaker states' fears of future regional hegemony, broad differences in threat perspectives, competing visions of security, and divergent aims and strategies of engagement with powers outside the region have all been significant barriers to successful security cooperation. (Kurtzer, D and Seeley, M, 2020, p. 18).

Attempts to establish collective security structures in the Middle East have traditionally been blocked by continuous distrust between states, worries of an assault on sovereignty, disparities in assessments of the nature and breadth of threats, and a lack of common interests and values. Attempts to create a regional security system have failed in the past, such as the post-Gulf War initiative involving the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) plus Egypt and Syria (the GCC+2). Even as regional security challenges have increased, some types of collaboration have harmed regional security, such as the Saudi-backed operation in Yemen. (Katulis, 2018). As the impact of violence and instability in the Yemeni conflict has spread throughout the region and expanded the conflict between regional players, affecting neighboring states, raising extremist groups, and increasing the risk of migrants and refugees. (Coppi, 2018).

Following their military defeat by Israel in 1948, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen signed the Treaty of Joint Defense and Economic Cooperation, which found a system of collective defense to deal with "armed aggression" against any of the signatories. This treaty resulted in the formation of the Arab League's Joint Defense Council. (Katulis, 2018). The treaty is still in force, while internal policies and disagreements between monarchies (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and initially Yemen) and nationalist republics (Egypt, Syria, and Iraq) hampered effective collaboration throughout the Cold War. (Kurtzer, D and Seeley, M, 2020, p. 19).

By 2013, with U.S. engagement with Iran and the ongoing threat of regional "Arab Spring" movements, Saudi Arabia promoted establishing a force of 100,000 troops. (Riedel, 2013). In 2018, the Saudi concept expanded into a fully operational GCC Unified Military Command with 100,000 troops, half of which are Saudi, and led by a Saudi commander. (Farouk, 2019). A combined Saudi-Qatari-Emirati military campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and a Saudi-Emirati campaign against Yemen's Houthis have also occurred in the GCC, with coordination and a unified command structure evolving in the context of urgent common threats. (Martini, J., et al., 2016).

Recently, there has been a growing interest in promoting collaboration among Gulf States and the international community, but with differing purposes and concepts of security. In recent years, three main suggestions for Gulf security cooperation have surfaced. The U.S. Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) proposal, also known as the Arab NATO initiative, was first advanced in 2017. Since then, it has tried to secure the cooperation of Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait to establish a unified military force, and it has yet to overcome divisions and differences in security views within the GCC. These states also differ in their assessment of the risk associated with tight military connections to the UAE and Saudi Arabia following the tragic operations in Yemen. (Farouk, 2019).

Despite some efforts by Gulf States to expand their strategic alliances, no state has sufficient power to establish agreements among the Gulf States. Russia's 2019 plan for an international conference to establish a regional security structure has not received support other than from Iran, Syria, and China. GCC states have been wary of Russia's neutrality as a facilitator, owing to their historic security ties with the U.S. (O'Connor, 2019). The following factors have a significant influence in determining the GCC states' concerns about Russia's perceived neutrality:

First: historic security ties with the U.S.; the GCC states have extensive security partnerships and alliances with the United States, which has traditionally supplied them with security assurances, defense agreements, and military support. These partnerships have influenced their security policies as well as their views of foreign actors.

Second: alignment of Geopolitical Interests; the geopolitical interests of the GCC members frequently align with those of the United States, notably in terms of regional security dynamics, tackling Iranian influence, and preserving Gulf area stability. This alignment encourages trust and reliance on the United States for security guarantees.

Third: concerns Over Influence and Intentions; GCC states may be concerned about Russia's intentions and possible influence in the region. Russia's engagement, especially given its support for regimes like Syria and Iran, might be considered contrary to the GCC states' goals and the broader regional stability they seek to maintain.

In conclusion, the GCC states' concern about Russia's neutrality as a facilitator in establishing alternative structures for Gulf security cooperation is deeply rooted in their historical security ties and strategic alignment with the United States, reflecting concerns about influence, intentions, and a preference for existing security alliances. Moreover, Iran's Hormuz Peace Endeavour (HOPE) initiative for 2019 has received no backing from GCC states as an alternative to U.S. security assurances. Without Saudi Arabia's readiness to engage Iran directly, there is little chance of a coordinated and fruitful GCC discussion with Iran. (Haghirian, M. and Zaccara, L., 2019).

Assessment of Current Regional Cooperation Mechanisms.

Although transnational challenges such as arms proliferation, terrorism, climate change, food security, maritime security, migration, and public health, pose severe dangers to the region's stability and people's well-being, the Middle East is one of the few regions in the world that lacks a broad-based multinational regional structure to debate cross-national challenges. (Chatham House, 2022). As a result, regional security - or lack thereof - has been a frequent challenge for the region. The MENA region has seen security relationships, alliances, and institutions - specific to geographical sub-region(s), international intervention, and ethno-sectarianism - without any reference to the shared characteristics of all states in the MENA region, in contrast to other regions such as Europe, Asia, and Africa, which are the European Union (EU), OSCE and ASEAN because it is a security structures that provides conflict resolution strategies and human rights principles capable of overcoming fragmentation and interstate rivalry. (Kingsley-Anderson, 2023).

In the MENA region, there are two examples of collaboration structures that tried to unify the efforts of the region's states to confront common challenges, but they did not do their responsibilities in the required manner and were unable to solve the challenges. Evidence of this is the increasing escalation of these challenges. The study will examine here the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of existing structures such as the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in addition to the role of the international players in MENA security dynamics.

The League of Arab States (LAS):

The League of Arab States (or Arab League) is a loose confederation of 22 Arab states founded in March 1945 with a broader goal of improving cooperation among its members on areas of mutual interest. The league was formed in response to involvement over postwar colonial territorial divides and strong resistance to the establishment of a Jewish state on Palestinian territory, but it has long been criticized for division and ineffective leadership. (Masters, J and Sergie, M, 2023).

The Arab League's major weakness resulted from its charter, stipulating that only states who approve its resolutions are obligated by them. The League's ineffectiveness has been attributed to many reasons, such as a lack of conditionality on commitment to collective acts. Following the Arab states' defeat in their 1948 war with Israel, LAS members ratified two accords for collective military and economic cooperation. These are the Treaty of Joint Defence and Economic Co-operation

of the League of Arab States (commonly, the Joint Defence and Economic Co-operation Treaty) created two of the principal institutions of the Arab League: The Joint Defence Council and the Economic Council. However, plans were never adequately executed, resulting in weakened United Arab action over time. (Al-Qassab, 2020).

Strengths and Weaknesses:

Strengths

The manifestations of strength and success of the Arab League were apparent in some of the Arab League's limited decisions and its limited management of Arab crises and conflicts in the Palestinian issue, the Libyan crisis and the Syrian conflict. Regarding the Palestinian issue, the LAS ratified the Arab Peace Initiative (API) at the 2002 Arab League Summit in Beirut, which was proposed by Saudi King Abdullah as a comprehensive work plan to end the Israeli-Arab conflict. It stipulated the following: Complete Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967, including the Golan Heights, based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) 242 and 338; a just settlement of the Palestinian refugee question based on UNSCR 194; and Recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent Palestinian state. (Feierstein, G and Guzansky, Y, 2022).

The Arab League's suspension of Syria's membership imposed political and economic sanctions on the Syrian regime in November 2011, and the LAS's decision to establish a no-fly zone over Libya in March 2011. All this highlighted Arabian unity, solidarity, and support for Middle East security, stability, and reform. Along with the no-fly zone over Libya, key measures of LAS have defended the human security of Arab residents in the MENA against the misuse of state machinery during periods of state-led threats in Syria and Libya. (ACW, 2020).

Weaknesses

The weaknesses of the Arab League have been more than its strengths. The League has been severely criticized by both Arabs and non-Arabs for its lack of cohesiveness and major weaknesses. One of the Arab League's weaknesses is that it must decide by consensus. In a consensus-based organization, a single dissenting vote from one of the members is enough to prevent consensus. According to Article VII of the Arab League Charter, "unanimous Council decisions shall be binding upon all member states of the League; majority decisions shall be binding only upon those states which have accepted them." As a result, any resolution is quite easy to fail. This has restricted the organization's ability to approve a consensus and address the many urgent challenges facing the Arab world. (Rodriguez, 2011).

The LAS has declined as an organization, from one that represents and advocates for collective, purposeful, and effective Arab action to a mere veneer of an ineffective institution that reflects the Arab world's widespread division. As the organizational representative of the 22 Arab states, the LAS presently presides over an ongoing series of problems among and between its members; nonetheless, it looks completely incapable of dealing with these problems. Actually, the Arab League has only sometimes succeeded in conflict resolution. It is now incapable of dealing with active conflicts, such as those in Yemen, Syria, or Libya, or simmering tensions, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council crisis in 2017. It cannot be relied on to stand for the aspirations of millions of Arabs in their states' essential and significant political and economic reforms. (ACW, 2020).

In the following paragraphs, briefly the study discussing some of the weaknesses that have been identified in the LASs handling of the Palestinian issue and the Syrian conflict.

The Arab League and Palestine;

The 2020 Arab League summit was a clear blow to the Palestinians. The LAS voted against a draft resolution condemning the UAE-Israel agreement to normalize relations between the two states. The Arab League had earlier rejected the Palestinian Authority's (PA) call for an urgent meeting to address the dangerous impacts of normalization, shortly following the news of the UAE's decision to normalize relations. However, the Arab governments and the (PA) decided to add wording in the final declaration that highlights the Arab Peace Initiative, the two-state solution, and the land-for-peace principle. However, the failure to issue a firm condemnation of the normalization agreement represents a significant shift

in Arab policy toward Palestine and in the Arab governments' geopolitical interests. The decision runs in direct contradiction to the Arab Peace Initiative, which the Arab League adopted at 2002 Beirut Summit, and re-endorsed at 2007 Riyadh Summit, and at 2017 Jordan Summit. (Kharroub, 2020).

The Arab Peace Initiative is focused on the goal of establishing peace in the Middle East through a negotiated settlement, with the following major elements: First: Two-State Solution; The Initiative calls for the formation of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the 1967 borders. Second: Normalization for Peace; It proposes normalizing ties between Israel and Arab states in exchange for a total withdrawal from occupied territories and a just solution for Palestinian refugees. In summary, the decision not to strongly condemn the UAE-Israel normalization accord at the 2020 summit signals a departure from the Arab Peace Initiative's unified Arab stance, highlighting a potential shift in geopolitical interests and priorities among some Arab states regarding the Palestinian issue and the achievement of a comprehensive peace settlement in the region.

The Arab League and the Syrian Conflict;

Under pressure from the Gulf States, the LAS suspended Syria's membership and imposed political and economic sanctions on the Syrian regime in November 2011, due to their concerns about the escalating violence and humanitarian crisis caused by the Syrian regime's ruthless attack on protestors during the Arab Spring. The GCC states attempted to promote regional stability, minimize the regional consequences of the Syrian conflict, and support opposing parties against the Assad regime. All while keeping their geopolitical interests in building a more favorable political context in the region. Arab states were ordered to recall their ambassadors from Damascus. Lebanon and Yemen voted against the decision while Iraq abstained.

The Arab League then appointed former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as a mediator in Syria, in collaboration with the United Nations. His mission was just six months long. Lakhdar Brahimi, who was only named a UN envoy since the Syrian government refused to recognize him as an Arab League envoy due to concerns regarding evident biases or decisions taken by the Arab League regarding the Syrian conflict, replaced him. His mission lasted less than two years and was as futile as Annan's. It is possible to conclude that the Arab League has been mostly absent from Syria since 2012, following the collapse of Annan's mission, due to Russia's prominent involvement in Syria and the near absence of the United States.

In addition to internal League disagreements, unsuccessful mediation efforts, regional geopolitical dynamics, concerns about security threats, and escalating violence within Syria all contributed to the League's limited involvement in the conflict. Undoubtedly, the Arab League's involvement in the Syrian crisis has been largely ineffective. This has been increased due to the discord in the GCC since 2017. (Ziadeh, 2020).

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established on May 25, 1981, during a conference in Abu Dhabi, bringing together the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait to demonstrate that "coordination, cooperation, and integration between them serve the sublime objectives of the Arab Nation." The GCC creation primarily reflected rising concern for the region's stability and security in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and as an economic coalition. Over the four decades since it was founded, the GCC members have not always agreed – for example, in 2014, a division emerged between the GCC and Qatar, which other members accused of failing to maintain mutual security accords. (AluwaIsheg, 2020).

Strengths and Weaknesses:

Strengths

The Gulf Cooperation Council has differentiated itself as a "globalization success story." Despite rivalries, the GCC has managed to balance connections with both the "East" and the "West." Economic cooperation has been critical as a result of efficient OPEC handling and recent diversification initiatives by numerous GCC states. Trade liberalization has

successfully grown intra-regional trade in the sub-region. GCC cooperation via globalization has additionally contributed to GCC states' assertiveness in international interactions. The UAE's role in the Horn of Africa, particularly Djibouti, Oman as a mediator between Washington and Tehran, and Qatar's role in Israel-Palestine, Afghanistan, and Libya are all indicators of the GCC states' growing self-reliance as a result of successful economic policies since the GCC's founded. (Al-Yousif, 2004).

Along with trade liberalization, GCC states built up deepened ties by establishing a 5%-10% customs union in January 2003. Overall, initiatives to liberalize regional trade, cooperate through GCC dialogue as a lead-up to OPEC, and maintain interregional trade with the 'East' and 'West' through diversity efforts have secured the continued existence of Petro-oriented economies by reopening trade to different regions while deepening ties within the Gulf. (GCC, 2003).

The main challenge for GCC states now is preserving the "parallel partnerships" approach that they were able to effectively follow until the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The GCC's position may be described as follows; security with the United States and economy with the Chinese, Indians, and, to a lesser extent, the Russians. However, the rearrangement of Western-Eastern balances in the medium to long term might impact the direction of the Gulf's security sectors, which have been built and upgraded via collaboration with the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States. Such as defense purchases, education, training, joint exercises, and involvement in Peace Support Operations (PSO). The GCC's security sectors are currently experiencing a shift toward increased capacities and self-determination, which will result in a modest but substantial role for China, Russia, and Asian states. This has already taken shape in the form of national defense industry collaboration and patterns of security aid overseas. (Ardemagni, 2022).

Weaknesses

Because of its immense economic and political dominance in the Gulf area, Saudi Arabia has long been viewed as influencing or dominating the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The concept led to debate about the GCC potentially serving as a sphere of influence or domain for Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, as the GCC's largest and most powerful member, has had a significant influence on the organization's policies. It frequently takes the lead on numerous regional problems and has great influence over the council's functioning. Saudi Arabia's economic wealth, political power, and religious significance as the custodian of Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, all contribute to its leadership position.

Furthermore, religious ideology and political affiliations, such as the existence and impact of the Muslim Brotherhood, have affected the dynamics inside the GCC at times. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have taken opposing positions on a variety of political parties, notably the Muslim Brotherhood, resulting in internal tensions and divisions within the council. (Grabowski, 2016). The manifestations of GCC weakness are apparent due to regional differences between members, there have been divisions among states. These include Iran's hostility, geopolitics, history, security preferences, and ideological support for Islamic groups post-Arab Spring, all of which have created divisions between GCC states on two sides: Bahrain, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia versus Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman, (Cafiero, 2022).

Furthermore, cooperative security partnerships over collective security partnerships, which are favored by Bahrain, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, have historically been resistant to collaboration with Tehran in contrast to Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman. Close connections between Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman with Tehran have weakened GCC unity in securing collective security guarantees and sustaining Iran's adherence to the JCPOA. As a result, the GCC has been divided by different national security approaches, with Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman preferring cooperative agreements with Tehran over a collective security agreement under the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA), which was recognized by Riyadh and supported by the Trump administration. (Farouk, 2019).

The rejection of MESA over the Qatar blockade is an example of how history, geography, and societal change in GCC states have created a divide between cooperative and collective approaches to regional security. (Vakil, 2022). As a result, the challenge(s) to a new regional security architecture involves not only the inclusion of Iran or Israel but also the capacity to rebuild confidence among GCC members to recover lost social capital.

The Role of International Players in the MENA Security Dynamics.

The study examines the U.S. security role, as the United States is a key player in shaping security policies in the region.

U.S. Security Role in the Region:

Security in the Middle East has long been a priority on the U.S. foreign policy agenda, since the U.S. is a strategic partner for the region's states, with economic, commercial, and political interests entwined. The United States has been providing security protection to the region for more than seven decades. Since the Truman Doctrine in the 1940s, to help the Middle Eastern States against the Soviet communist tide, and through the Carter Doctrine in 1980, according to which any aggression or attack on the Gulf states was considered as if it were an attack on the United States, it would be confronted decisively by all necessary means including the use of military force. (AlBarasneh, 2021).

The U.S. security role in the Gulf in recent decades has kept security costs low for GCC countries and has diminished the urgency of security cooperation, defined as "mutual collaboration of a group of states to mitigate threats caused by a common set of identified concerns". (Nasser, N. and Auda, J., 2018, pp. 46-47). On the other hand, perceptions of decreasing U.S. interest in defending Gulf regimes from Iranian (or Iranian-backed) threats appear to have pushed Saudi and Emirati leaders to take more accommodative stances toward Iran. The United States' security role in the Gulf has changed, influencing Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states' perspectives. While Obama's JCPOA with Iran raised fears among Gulf states about a potential U.S. shift toward talks with Iran, Trump's isolationism and withdrawal from the JCPOA increased uncertainty. Biden's administration, seeking re-engagement, is a change from Trump's approach, prompting Gulf states to seek alternate partnerships in the context of changing U.S. policy and explore new kinds of collaboration with Russia and China. (Soubrier, 2020).

Therefore, even though U.S. security guarantees have historically restricted incentives of GCC states to build greater collective security arrangements, current questions about the sustainability of U.S. security guarantees have pushed modest efforts toward collaboration among regional adversaries. For example, Saudi Arabia's recent shift toward discussions with its regional adversaries Houthi and Iranians followed what the Saudis perceived as a limited U.S. reaction to the September 2019 Houthis' assault on Saudi oil infrastructure. Hence, the Gulf States see the U.S. as being less than inclined to respond forcefully to perceived threats. (Kurtzer, D and Seeley, M, 2020, p. 25). Moreover, during two delegation visits in 2019, UAE officials directly discussed marine security and other concerns with Iranian authorities. (Cafiero, 2019). Simultaneously, while preserving strategic ties with the United States, Saudi Arabia has also pursued economic collaboration with China, utilizing economic opportunities without undermining its security partnerships with the United States, indicating a dual-track strategy balancing security and economic interests. (Chivvis, C., et al., 2023).

Despite this, there is no avoiding the truth that the region's states and Iran have a competing vision for the region's security, which requests a continuous American presence to preserve the region's security. In other words, the United States plays a critical role in ensuring the region's security. Therefore, it must be mentioned that the region's security was and still depends on the United States, which plays an important role in protecting the security of the region's states. Any proposed security formulas do not meet security needs and do not constitute an alternative to the American role in the near future, and any proposed security formula that depends entirely on the region states themselves, apart from the American role, is ineffective in achieving a cooperative security environment in the foreseeable future. (AlBarasneh, 2021).

To make the balance between reducing the U.S. role in the region and providing security guarantees to the region's states and dispel its concerns, the United States should depend less on military operations and more on diplomacy, economic growth, and technical support. A redesigned U.S. policy that both keeps the Middle East as a priority and rebalances military and civilian instruments can help redirect that region away from costs to the U.S. and toward advantages for the United States as well as the MENA states. (Culbertson, S., et al., 2022).

A New Security Structure Proposed.

The absence of any conflict-resolution mechanism(s) - between any MENA state - in the region means that conflict(s) can become extended and involve many different parties because there is little 'check-and-balance', through dialogue, to

prevent expanding military conflicts. The Arab protests of 2010-2011 worked as a trigger for MENA states to engage in lengthy proxy conflict, as Libya, Syria, and Yemen showed. Military intervention, arms purchases, and alliance creation have the potential to create security dilemmas for other governments that may regard a state's decision to pursue any of these military actions as a "threat." Dialogue among all regional players is required, yet a lack of trust across states is an impediment that can be overcome only via increased integration in a mutually advantageous structure and scope.

Based on the above mentioned, the importance of thinking about the establishment of a strategic, geopolitical collective security structure is highlighted to manage security in the region. Perhaps this structure begins its nucleus by bringing together the Gulf states, Jordan, and Iraq, which are states with common interests and concerns in the region's security and could be extended to include the United States and other powers with an interest in ensuring the region's stability.

Jordan, Iraq, and the Gulf States share geographical, geopolitical, and security interests, each of which is affected by the other. The security status in Iraq is reflected in Jordan and the Gulf States, as Jordan and the Gulf states share geographical borders with Iraq. Jordan has suffered from major security threats, the most important of which is the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other extremist and terrorist groups. In addition to the smuggling of drugs and weapons by Iranian proxies across the Syrian and Iraqi borders, the influx of refugees following the outbreak of civil wars and humanitarian crises led to pressures on the Jordanian economy. This, made it necessary for the Gulf States to bear part of the international responsibility towards Jordan as a result of these challenges, due to Jordan is considered a strategic depth for GCC states and a region that isolates them from the threats coming from Iranian proxies in Syria and Lebanon. The same applies to Jordan and Iraq, which are interested in regional developments, the effects of which have reflected upon them. This includes the Iranian-Saudi competition and the Yemen war.

Moreover, Jordan is distinguished with technical capacity, training experiences, and human expertise in the security sector. Jordan and Iraq share lessons learned and experiences through confronting security challenges such as protests and counter-terrorist groups like ISIS and AlQa'eda, which provides a security investment sector for the Gulf States that already spends in the security and military sectors. Perhaps what will distinguish the security structure that will bring together these six states is that it will be an investment in a specialized regional security structure.

As for Israel and Iran, the responsibilities and connections of Iran and Israel are crucial in the context of developing a specialized regional security framework incorporating the Gulf States. Iran's geopolitical influence, along with its complex ties with many Gulf States, most notably Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, creates a complicated dynamic within the region's security structures. Iran's participation in regional crises, funding for proxy groups, and nuclear programs have heightened tensions, adding to Gulf States' security concerns. (Kozhanov, 2020). On the other hand, Israel's strategic perspective and historic hostility against Iran, owing primarily to regional power struggles and diverging geopolitical interests, affect the security situation. Israel's developments in defense technology, intelligence capacities, and its own security requirements add to the Middle East's complex security calculation, influencing conversations about any potential regional security framework in the region. (Eiran, 2020).

Principles and Objectives:

This study suggests and emphasizes an important set of guiding principles and objectives for a new security structure in the MENA region as the following:

The Principles:

1- Mutual Sovereignty Respect: stressing the significance of each member state's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

2- Non-interference in Internal affairs: establishment of a concept prohibiting outsider involvement in participating states' internal affairs.

3- Commitment to Peaceful Conflict Resolution: the dedication to resolving disagreements and problems via diplomatic measures and peaceful talks is emphasized.

4- Inclusivity, Equality, and Building Consensus: all participating governments must work together to promote inclusion, equal participation, and consensus-building.

The Objectives:

1- Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution: prioritizing actions targeted at conflict prevention and crisis management in the region.

2- Counter Terrorism: Work on joint efforts to fight terrorism, extremism, and radicalization.

3- Socioeconomic Growth: emphasizing the significance of promoting socioeconomic growth and stability as a basis for regional peace.

4- Promoting Regional Dialogue and Building Trust: promoting initiatives, conversation, collaboration, and trust-building between members are being prioritized.

5- Compliance with International Standards: assuring agreement with international norms and values to strengthen the proposed security structure's credibility and respect for international law.

Proposed Mechanisms and Strategies for Integration in A New Security Structure.
Bilateral Measures:

Diplomatic communication has proven highly successful. Relations between the United States and Iran have wavered, however backchannels established during the Obama administration have shown effective in preventing additional escalation in times of crisis. Recent bilateral interaction between Iran and Saudi Arabia which facilitated by Beijing, have been fruitful, with backchannel conversations resulting in the restoration of relations since 2016. While such openings might not settle fundamental differences, the use of bilateral interactions through backchannels is critical in order to maintain ties, which can aid in avoiding potential acts of escalation that may undermine the potential for cooperation among MENA states in any security structure. Bilateral measures, however ad hoc, are vital in times of crisis to prevent the possibility of further escalation. (Cammack, P. and Dunne, D., 2018).

Multilateral Measures:

These measures could include member states' involvement and cooperation in several sectors to strengthen their security efforts that are impacted by development in several sectors such as tourism, economics, education, the environment, cybersecurity, ICT, migration, refugees, and youth empowerment. Membership in regional security agencies cannot account for regional stability if it is based on ethnic background, language, or geopolitics. Membership must focus on participation rather than rejection of all MENA states.

CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS.

The complex nature of the Middle East's security landscape, characterized by ongoing conflicts, geopolitical rivalries, and social grievances, demands immediate and comprehensive regional stability and cooperation measures. This study has emphasized the crucial importance of establishing a new security structure, including major players and developing a framework for long-term peace and prosperity in the region through answers to the main questions: What are the major weaknesses in the current regional security structures in the MENA region? How can establishing a redefined security paradigm address the security challenges in the MENA region?

This study answered the questions through the key findings as the following:

Highlight major weaknesses in existing MENA regional security structures, which are compounded by geopolitical tensions, historical rivalries, and changing global dynamics. The prospects for a redefined security structure are impacted by complex geopolitical conflicts, most notably the Saudi-Iranian conflict, which has an impact on the region's security dynamics.

Highlights the critical importance of a balanced strategy for regional security collaboration. While past alliances and rivalries influence the region's security landscape, the Gulf States and the region's states are expanding their policies, interacting with regional enemies, and seeking alternative relationships to balance economic interests and security requirements. The path to developing a specialized regional security structure requires diplomatic skill, flexibility, and a

strong knowledge of changing geopolitical realities.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Jordan, and Iraq may be a start of the new security structure due to their geopolitical power, resources, and potential contributions to regional stability. Their participation provides a strong foundation for a collaborative security structure, with the possibility of other countries joining.

The proposed security structure is based on the guiding principles of sovereignty, non-interference, and peaceful conflict settlement. Conflict prevention, crisis management, counterterrorism operations, and socioeconomic development are all goals that align with international norms and principles.

Prospects and Challenges: Implementation provides opportunities for increased regional stability, economic growth, and collaboration. However, considerable political, institutional, and external hurdles exist. Geopolitical rivalry, opposition to change, and foreign meddling all pose severe obstacles to effective establishment.

In conclusion, the establishment of a new security structure in the MENA region has great potential for conflict resolution, collaboration, and regional stability. A broad strategy involving diplomatic initiatives, incremental development, and international mediation is required to overcome difficulties. To turn ambitions for a peaceful Middle East into a realistic reality, the route ahead demands concerted efforts, a commitment to discourse, and a willingness to compromise.

This study emphasizes the need to put historical rivalries and entrenched interests aside in favor of a shared vision for a peaceful and prosperous Middle East. The effective implementation of a new security paradigm necessitates steadfast commitment, comprehensive conversation, and long-term collaboration from all stakeholders, guided by the values of mutual respect and collective security.

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