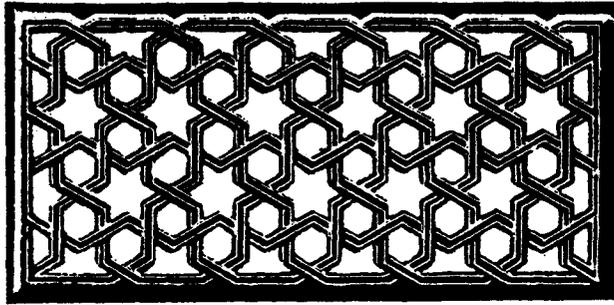


POLICY FOCUS

**ISRAEL AND THE GULF:
NEW SECURITY FRAMEWORKS
FOR THE MIDDLE EAST**

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The Author

Dr. Dore Gold is foreign policy advisor to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, on leave from his position as director of the Project on U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy at Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies. Under the Shamir government, he served as an advisor to the Israeli delegation to the Madrid peace conference. Among his published works is a previous Washington Institute Policy Focus, *Toward Middle East Peace Negotiations: Israeli Post-War Political-Military Options in an Era of Accelerated Change* (1991).

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Executive Summary

The 1991 Gulf War and the post-war Arab-Israeli peace process fundamentally altered the relationship between the Levant and the Persian Gulf and prompted widespread regional and international interest in new security frameworks for the Middle East. Various existing proposals reveal divergent national positions on the future shape and boundaries of such a security system.

Israel has been one of the most active promoters of a security system, primarily as a means of supporting the peace process. Following the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the Peres government proposed to the United States a bilateral working group to investigate the possibility of creating regional security alliances in parallel with a peace agreement with Syria. In January 1996 the two countries agreed to establish such a working group. Peres also sought to explore the idea of a formal U.S.-Israel alliance as the basis for a larger multilateral security system.

Jordan, a relatively small state surrounded by powerful neighbors, has consistently supported the idea of a regional security system modeled on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), through which Amman could create bilateral relationships with different states and blocs. Jordan's geostrategic location is pivotal to regional stability, serving as a buffer between Israel and Iraq, and between Saudi Arabia and Syria. Jordan supports immediate efforts to create an inclusive regional security system that is not tied to completion of the peace process.

Egypt's interest in remaining the Arab world's dominant military and political power has led it to insist on an *Arab*-based security system rather than a broader, *Middle East*-based version that Cairo views as an instrument of Israeli (and possibly Turkish) regional hegemony. Egypt's attitude toward regional security arrangements reflects its perception of Israel's qualitative edge in conventional weapons and general preponderance of military power (due to Israel's purported nuclear capability). Cairo seeks a regional security system that would create a new balance of power with Israel through the revival of Arab defense arrangements and the elimination of any Israeli non-conventional capability. Thus, it has generally opposed (or sought to delay) the idea of an exclusive regional security system for the Middle East.

Instead of the NATO paradigm, in which mutual threats serve as a basis for a regional security system, a more suitable approach for the Middle East would be to focus on common challenges that—while taking into account the interests of concerned parties—must be addressed collectively rather than on the basis of the narrow national interests. Three such challenges stand out:

The eventual re-integration of Iraq. Iraq directly affects the national security interests of both the Levant and the Persian Gulf. Baghdad has repeatedly challenged its neighbors in order to achieve regional hegemony, sent forces to take part in three Arab-Israeli wars, and fired missiles at Israel during the Gulf War. UN sanctions and the U.S. policy of "dual containment" have hampered the revival of Iraqi military power and prompted Baghdad's efforts to initiate a dialogue with Israel as a means of improving its standing in the West; Saddam may believe that joining the peace process would undermine international support for sanctions. Some Israeli analysts have argued that Israel must prepare for the eventual end of the sanctions, even if this conflicts with U.S. policy. Moreover, a unilateral Israeli initiative toward Baghdad might force Syria to accelerate the peace process and make concessions, and could bolster the Israel-Jordan peace treaty. Any such move would come at the expense of the Gulf states, by accelerating Iraq's acceptance in the international system before it has fulfilled certain prior conditions.

Conversely, a decision by several Gulf states to restore ties with Iraq—due to an enhanced Iranian threat or the revival of border disputes between Saudi Arabia and the smaller GCC states—could bring about new alignments that would undermine dual containment at the expense of Israel. If Baghdad agreed to withdraw its heavy armored units from southern Iraq and concentrate them instead in the "panhandle" near the Jordanian border, the advantage in Gulf security would have a profound impact on the security of Israel. Regional stability will require an

approach that takes into account the security of both Israel and the Gulf states. Only in the context of a comprehensive design for regional security can new arrangements be advanced that do not come at the expense of either side of the Middle East.

Jordan's role as a buffer state between Middle East subregions. The challenges facing Jordan as a buffer state did not end with the Israel-Jordan peace treaty in 1994. Although Amman has disengaged from its Gulf War alliance with Iraq and become one of Saddam Hussein's most vocal critics, it has not experienced a corresponding improvement in its relations with other neighbors. Egypt and Syria remain suspicious of Jordanian aspirations in Iraq, and enduring dynastic rivalries still overshadow the Saudi-Jordanian relationship. At the same time, its policy of peace toward Israel appears to lack broad domestic support and will be difficult to sustain if popular economic expectations are not met. Moreover, Jordan's new connection with Israel remains vulnerable to the uncertainties regarding the future of Israeli-Palestinian "final status" talks, and Jordanians and Palestinians retain considerable mutual suspicion.

Jordan's most immediate problem is the uncertainties of the Oslo process. Amman would perceive movement toward the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank as an immediate national security threat; a complete breakdown of Oslo, however, could also expose Jordan to new instability, with the Palestinians pressuring Amman to abrogate its peace treaty with Israel and Arafat improving ties with Jordan's main regional rival, Syria. Theoretically, these problems could be offset by re-enforcing Jordan from the east. Close ties to a post-Saddam Iraq would buttress Amman politically and revive a trade relationship that was vital to Jordan's economy for much of the 1980s. In the absence of such a breakthrough, Jordan must complete the restoration of its ties with the GCC states and seek new forms of cooperation. (Jordan was not party to the 1991 Damascus Declaration, which tied Egypt and Syria to the defense of the smaller Gulf states.) New regional security arrangements, anchored in a cooperative relationship with Amman, would serve the long-term interests of Israel and the Gulf states alike.

A "safety net" for the peace process. The peace process could become far more fragile in the future unless special steps are taken. The Oslo agreement deliberately postponed negotiations on difficult issues such as borders, settlements, security arrangements, refugees, water, and above all, Jerusalem, until talks on final status. As these remaining issues become more daunting and the pace of diplomacy slows accordingly, the peace process will likely face the kinds of crises (and even temporary breakdowns) that usually accompany difficult negotiations. In addition, regional and international factors could also weaken the process at this critical time. The new relationship between Israel and the Gulf states is among the most obvious accomplishments of the peace process that could be threatened by this. Neither Israel nor the United States can afford to allow their relations with the GCC states to be completely contingent on the successful implementation of the peace process. A regional security regime that institutionalized contacts between Israel and the Gulf states could make their bilateral ties less vulnerable to transient events.

Although the idea of the Gulf states benefiting directly from security ties to Israel may be premature, the smaller GCC states have an interest in a broader regional security system that could reduce their dependence on Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia lack Israel's ability to deter a militant Iran or resurgent Iraq from using its arsenal of non-conventional weapons to exert influence on its neighbors. Thus, a regional security structure linking Israel and the Gulf states would not only serve as a hedge against problems in the peace process, but could enhance Gulf security by acknowledging their shared threat perceptions.

Israel and Jordan alone are not sufficient to make such an arrangement work, however, any regional security system will also have to include key Middle Eastern states to provide critical mass. This may prove difficult. Without significant external inducements, Syria is unlikely to participate before achieving a full peace settlement with Israel. Egypt is reluctant to support multilateral security concepts that are not based on Arab states alone, and Saudi Arabia tends to follow the Egyptian-Syrian line. Thus, considerable diplomatic effort will be required to convince Egypt that even a minimal regional framework is in its interest.

Introduction

The 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent Middle East peace process have fundamentally altered the relationship between the Levant and the Persian Gulf. Previously, policymakers treated the two subregions as separate from each other. Wars could rage in the Gulf without having any direct military impact on the Arab-Israeli sector. Similarly, though Arab-Israeli wars may have required political-economic coordination between the so-called Arab "front line" states and the Gulf countries, the battlefield never extended from the Arab-Israeli zone to the Gulf itself.

Strategic considerations were not the only factor dividing the Middle East into two distinct sectors. For much of the Cold War, U.S. policy treated the two areas separately. Historically, the United States entered the Middle East in stages, as it assumed gradual responsibility for the region from Britain; the Gulf was the last area from which the British withdrew, in 1972. From 1973 to 1991, American policymakers tended to use completely different terms of reference when speaking about the two subregions: when discussing the Levant, they spoke about the needs of the peace process; in regard to the Arabian peninsula, they stressed the requirements of Gulf security.

From the American perspective, there were sound reasons to separate the two zones, because the requirements of Gulf security and the peace process frequently conflicted with one another. Massive arms sales to Saudi Arabia, for example, could be seen as undermining America's commitment to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge as it took risks for peace. Conversely, U.S. support for Israeli positions in the peace process risked damaging Washington's ties with the Gulf states. This situation led some analysts to conclude in the early 1980s that the United States could not secure its strategic position in the Gulf if it continued to support Israel's territorial aspirations.

The Gulf War and the peace process altered these strategic and political calculations. When Iraqi missiles struck Tel Aviv, it became clear that the Arab-Israeli sector could no longer be isolated from a war in the Persian Gulf, as had been the case during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War. And when Israeli delegations participated in multilateral peace negotiations held in Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar in 1994, it became equally clear that Israel could no longer be characterized as limiting U.S. relations with the Gulf states. The two Middle East subregions appeared to have converged.

The Clinton administration was the first to recognize that developments in one sector of the Middle East could have a profound impact on the other, and that consequently policies could no longer be geographically compartmentalized without taking into consideration their impact on other areas. Its adoption of a policy of "dual containment" was a testament to the growing realization of the interdependence of the two sectors: the impact of a strong Gulf security structure on the Arab-Israeli sector, and the utility of the peace process in enhancing American capabilities in the containment of Iran and Iraq.

The question of how to define and perhaps divide the Middle East geographically for policymaking purposes has acquired a new urgency due to the growing interest in Israel and the Arab states in designing a new regional security system for the area. The idea of merging different sectors of the Middle East into a unified zone is no longer merely academic, but has immediate policy relevance. Hence, Prime Minister Shimon Peres proposed that Israel and the United States examine options for new regional security arrangements that would accompany a Syrian-Israeli peace treaty.¹ And despite the general difference of views on foreign policy that

¹ "Israel Will Propose to the U.S. to Begin Discussions on a Treaty of Alliance and a Regional Security System," *Ha'aretz*, January 5, 1996.

have existed between Labor and Likud, Binyamin Netanyahu has called for a Middle East "security process" based on a regional security system.² Indeed, the Israel-Jordan peace treaty (which was strongly endorsed by the Likud) makes explicit reference to the eventual establishment of a Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Middle East (CSCME). At the same time, Egyptian scholars have been examining whether a new security system ought to replace the previous Arab collective security system based on the Arab League.

This discourse over the structure and purpose of a regional security system revolves around the central issue of the system's possible architecture—its boundaries, member states, and the content of their interaction. The same types of issues have been part of the European debate on regional security since the end of the Cold War: whether the European security architecture should include only the states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, be reduced to the members of the Western European Union (thereby excluding the North American component), or expanded to encompass the former Warsaw Pact states through the "Partnership for Peace" and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

In any case, once regional security systems are put on the diplomatic agenda, the immediate issue that arises is the shape of the system being proposed. In the Middle East, it is possible to define such a system narrowly—that is, including only Israel and the Arab states that immediately encircle it and are involved in the bilateral peace process (thereby keeping the Persian Gulf as a separate zone); or to imagine a purely Arab security system, such as the Damascus Declaration countries, that would connect Syria and Egypt to the Gulf Cooperation Council states and clearly exclude Israel; or to employ broader terms of reference, such as the Casablanca and Amman economic summits, that cover virtually all of the Arab states and Israel.

Any proposed security system for the Middle East should combine the Arab-Israeli and Gulf sectors of the region. The utility of a unified approach can be illustrated by examining three issues that are likely to be on the diplomatic agenda of both the United States and Israel in the coming period:

- Iraq's re-integration into the regional politics in the Middle East.
- Jordan's role as a buffer state between the subregions.
- The importance of a comprehensive regional security system as a safety net for preserving new Arab-Israeli ties in the context of future challenges to the peace process.

Though there may be a temptation to deal with each of these issues through the narrow prism of the needs of the Arab-Israeli sector or the Gulf sector alone, treating these as subregional issues could be extremely destabilizing for the other zone. This problem could be partly ameliorated by having the United States explain to the various parties the implications of their actions on others. But it can be avoided entirely if the states of the Middle East begin factoring broader regional considerations into their national policies. A comprehensive security system that unified both zones would promote this kind of interregional thinking.

² *Ha'aretz*, April 22, 1996. [Editor's note: After his election, Netanyahu added, "I don't delude myself that we can at once incorporate all the countries of the Middle East into a regional framework, but it's something I would like to advance with other Arab countries, with the countries of the Middle East." See *Middle East Insight* (May/August 1996), p. 32.]

The Quest for a New Middle East Security System

There is growing interest among Middle Eastern policy analysts in the idea of a regional security system. Since 1991, for example, Egyptian scholars have been preoccupied with the failure of the Arab collective security system to prevent the Iraqi attack on Kuwait and have been evaluating the merits of a new, expanded Middle East security system that would include non-Arab actors such as Turkey, Iran, and even Israel. The post-Gulf War Arab-Israeli peace process provided an additional impetus to the quest for a new regional security system. Shimon Peres made explicit reference to such an arrangement in his book, *The New Middle East*. On the Arab side, Crown Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan has been one of the most consistent advocates of the idea of adopting the 1975 Helsinki process, which created the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), and applying it to the Middle East. Thus, the Israel-Jordan peace treaty specifically calls for a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Middle East (CSCME).

There is also growing global interest in new regional institutions for the Middle East. The current peace process, which emerged from the 1991 Madrid peace conference sponsored by the United States and Soviet Union, created an embryonic form of such an institution in the multilateral Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) negotiations. In a January 1995 address at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, Secretary of State Warren Christopher stated that "[i]t is essential that we adapt and build institutions that will promote economic and security cooperation." Christopher subsequently explained that the scope of such an endeavor need not be only global, adding that "[w]e must adapt and revitalize the institutions of global and regional cooperation."³

Christopher may have had in mind the revitalization of regional frameworks such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the Western European Union (WEU), but the belief that institutionalization contributes to world order has relevance in all sectors of the globe. The European Union, for example, has experimented with the institutionalization of new security structures through its Euro-Mediterranean Initiative, which it inaugurated in Barcelona in November 1995. In short, there is widespread interest at both the regional and global levels in new security frameworks for the Middle East.

THE ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE

The various existing initiatives reveal diverging national positions on the future shape and boundaries of a Middle East security system. Israel has been one of the most active parties in the promotion of such a system. As foreign minister, Peres dedicated considerable attention to the idea as a means of buttressing the Arab-Israeli peace process:

The Middle East regional security system will be structured around two types of mutual obligation: nation-to-nation [bilateral and multilateral] and nation-to-region. . . . The duties charged by the regional security system will help enforce the peace, because only a regional framework will allow a dismantling of power structures, work toward disarmament, and control trigger-happy fingers.⁴

Following the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, Peres put regional security systems high on Israel's policy agenda. The Israeli government proposed to the United States the creation of a

³ Warren Christopher, "America's Leadership, America's Opportunity," *Foreign Policy*, no. 98 (spring 1995), p. 13 (emphasis added).

⁴ Shimon Peres, *The New Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), p. 67.

joint working group to investigate the possibility of creating regional security alliances in parallel with a peace agreement with Syria. The two countries agreed to establish such a working group during Secretary of Defense William Perry's visit to Israel in January 1996.⁵ In subsequent months, Peres also sought to explore the idea of a formal U.S.-Israel alliance. In both cases, he saw an American-Israeli bilateral treaty as the basis for a larger multilateral security system.⁶

Under Peres, Israel's concept of a regional security system was not intended to replicate NATO in the Middle East. Though the United States would undoubtedly play a central role in orchestrating any new system, both sides spoke about a limited forum that would focus on confidence-building measures, much as did the original CSCE. Peres envisioned the geographic extent of a regional security system as including "all those forces that support peace and security in the Middle East"—in other words, a structure that would support the peace process.⁷ The American concept, as advanced by Perry, was not that different from Peres' proposal:

I'm not imagining that anything like NATO would come out of this . . . regional security [system]. I think that's far overreaching what could be achieved. But we're definitely looking at a program which would involve the whole region, or as many nations of the region that were willing to participate. And that's the germ of Prime Minister Peres' idea—to extend this into a region-wide security arrangement.⁸

Another variation on Peres' broad regional security system was a more limited grouping that would include only Israel, Jordan, Turkey, and a post-Saddam Iraq.⁹ Notably, this arrangement excludes Egypt, perhaps due to Israel's assessment that Cairo would not join such a regional security grouping unless Israel made concessions in the area of weapons of mass destruction;¹⁰ Egyptian-Israeli differences over the nuclear question have already stymied the work of the ACRS multilaterals.

THE JORDANIAN PERSPECTIVE

Jordan has been one of the most consistent supporters of a CSCE-type regional security system. As a relatively small state surrounded by powerful neighbors (i.e., Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Israel), Jordan must carefully address its security interests by creating simultaneous and counterbalancing relationships with different states and blocs. Moreover, as one Jordanian analyst observed, "Jordan's geostrategic location is pivotal to regional stability."¹¹ Jordan provides Israel with strategic depth *vis-à-vis* Iraq, and Saudi Arabia with similar depth *vis-à-vis* Syria.

⁵ "William Perry and Peres Agreed on the Establishment of a Working Group on Security Cooperation," *Ha'aretz*, January 9, 1996.

⁶ "Treaty of Alliance or Control of the Golan," *Ha'aretz*, April 23, 1996. According to writer Aluf Ben, "Peres wants to establish a defensive alliance with the U.S. in parallel with a comprehensive peace with neighboring countries. The alliance will provide Israel with guarantees against conventional or nuclear attacks, expand its defense umbrella, and serve as the basis for other states to join in the future. The first signs of a new regional security system are already springing up with the military agreements signed with Turkey and the tightening of security ties with Jordan—all with the enthusiastic backing of America."

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ "Perry Outlines Policy on China, Bosnia, Middle East," remarks by Secretary of Defense William Perry at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, in *Wireless File*, United States Information Service, February 6, 1996.

⁹ "Initiative for Strategic Cooperation Between Israel, Jordan, Turkey, and the 'New Iraq'," *Ha'aretz*, December 15, 1995.

¹⁰ Though not commenting on this limited grouping, Ze'ev Schiff concluded that "[i]t's difficult to imagine that these countries [the Arab states], and above all Egypt, won't demand a heavy price for entering this kind of partnership with Israel. Egypt will not take such a large step towards normalization without forcefully demanding Israel's joining the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty." See "A Nice Vision, but Disturbing," *Ha'aretz*, January 9, 1996.

¹¹ Brigadier General Aharon Levrant and Major General Mohammad K. Shiyyab, *A Joint Paper on Jordanian-Israeli Issues of Security and Political Settlement*, Initiative Paper no. 4 (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 1994), p. 11.

For Jordan, multilateral institutions are instruments for establishing sensitive bilateral ties. In the late 1980s, for example, Amman sought to open negotiations with Israel under the umbrella of an international conference. Thus, Jordan has no interest in a regional security system that excludes any of its previous partners. Prior to the Gulf War, Jordan was an active participant (along with Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen) in the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC). The ACC, which strongly supported Baghdad, excluded Syria only because it was Iran's major Arab ally.

"If the Middle East is to enjoy a stable future," Crown Prince Hassan Bin Talal has stated, "it must find a neutral idiom in which to discuss common challenges and a credible framework for collective action. . . . To this end, Jordan has long called for a CSCME."¹² By referring to a "neutral idiom," the prince is broadening regional participation to include a variety of Arab and non-Arab actors; on another occasion, he stressed that "Iraq, Iran, and Turkey are essential components of this region and should not be kept out of our strategic plans."¹³

The general Jordanian requirement for diversity creates an interest in an inclusive regional security system. Thus, Crown Prince Hassan has emphasized that "[u]nless we devise a system that can involve all regional parties without exclusion in addressing all issues without exception, we will not succeed in guaranteeing security in the Middle East."¹⁴ Unlike the Egyptians, who stress the need to restore the Arab collective security system before establishing a broader regional mechanism, the Jordanians call for immediate action. Moreover, they do not condition the creation of a CSCME upon the completion of the bilateral peace process.¹⁵

THE EGYPTIAN PERSPECTIVE

In the old Arab League system, Egypt stood out as the most militarily powerful and politically influential member, and Cairo sees a traditional Arab collective defense system as the best framework for preserving an option for Egyptian regional hegemony.¹⁶ As one Egyptian analyst stated, "[f]rom the Egyptian point of view, there is no option but to rebuild the regional system on the basis of Arab identity."¹⁷ In this regard, Egypt's situation resembles the U.S. position in NATO during the Cold War: Washington was wary that the CSCE or other European security frameworks might evolve into an alternative to the Atlantic alliance and thereby weaken American security ties to Europe. Thus, Egypt's ideological commitment to "Arabism" is tied to its interest in remaining the Arab world's dominant power; Cairo views the alternative—the broader concept of "Middle Easternism"—as an instrument of Israeli regional hegemony:

Plans for Middle Eastern cooperation aim at fundamentally changing the nature of the existing regional interaction order and establishing a new regional order in which the Arab identity would be eclipsed, Israel would be a major player, and economic interaction would be the dominant factor, at least theoretically.¹⁸

¹² Remarks by Crown Prince al-Hassan bin Talal of Jordan to the Oxford Union Society, November 20, 1994.

¹³ *Building on Peace: Toward Regional Security and Economic Development in the Middle East* (proceedings of a conference sponsored by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy in Amman, Jordan, September 9, 1995).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Abdullah Toukan, "A Jordanian Perspective on Arms Control," in *Arms Control and Security in the Middle East*, ed. Richard Eisendorf (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 1995), pp. 89-99.

¹⁶ "Needless to say that the leading country, Egypt, acknowledges that its international role depends on its Arab backyard as a solid basis for its activities. The new spheres of Egyptian policies and actions are just additional circles to the traditional and deep-rooted ones, not replacing them or marginalizing them by any means." See Mohamed Noman Galal, *The League of Arab States and Its Prospective Challenges* (Cairo: Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1994), pp. 25-26.

¹⁷ Mohamed El Sayed Said, "The Search for a Regional System: From Vacuum to Balance to Confusion," in *The Arab Strategic Report-1993* (Cairo: Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1993), p. 41.

¹⁸ Hassan Abu-Taleb, "Mediterranean Cooperation Versus Middle Easternism," *al-Ahram*, cited in *Mideast Mirror*, May 12, 1995.

Indeed, Israel's push for regional cooperation arrangements at the October 1994 Casablanca economic summit may have demonstrated to worried Egyptian officials that Israel saw itself as a new contender for Middle Eastern leadership. Israel's direct contacts in the Gulf, for example, such as the negotiations over the supply of natural gas from Qatar, could turn Israel into a new supply route from the Gulf to Europe, thereby circumventing the Suez Canal. Similarly, Egypt has little interest in an inclusive security system that could give Turkey a more robust regional role, because it might also offer a competing center of power in the east that could attract Arab states such as Jordan or Iraq into its orbit of influence.¹⁹

Cairo's concerns about proposals for a new Middle Eastern security order have highlighted its attraction to architectures based on cooperation within the Mediterranean region. These would include key Egyptian partners in the Mashreq (Arab areas of Southwest Asia) such as Syria, and as a primarily European initiative, would be less likely to serve exclusively American or Israeli interests. At the same time, any possible division of the Middle East into sub-groupings that separate the Mashreq from the Maghreb (North Africa) conflicts with Egypt's long-term strategic vision. As *al-Ahram* Assistant Editor Salaheddin Hafez has noted,

The old imperialist division of the Mashreq and the Maghreb has been refurbished. The new model would attach the Mashreq to the new Middle Easternism and the Maghreb to Europe, while Sudan and Somalia are pushed into their African *milieu*. . . . Israel is given a free hand to control all of these countries on the behalf of the American master.²⁰

Indeed, Israel remains a central factor in Egyptian calculations. Despite the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, Egyptian analysts still perceive Israel as a primary threat, possessing a qualitative edge in conventional weapons as well as a general preponderance of military power due to its purported nuclear capability.²¹ For this reason, Egyptian attitudes toward regional security arrangements express primarily their desire to reach a new balance of power with Israel, through both the revival of Arab defense arrangements and new arms control initiatives to seek the elimination of any possible Israeli non-conventional capability.²²

Thus, Cairo has generally opposed (or at least sought to delay) not only the idea of a CSCME, but also less ambitious proposals for regional security centers, such as those generated in the official ACRS multilateral talks. Chief Egyptian ACRS negotiator Nabil Fahmy has said that Egypt will not support full activation of these crisis prevention centers "unless arms control and peace are also realized."²³ In other words, Egypt will admit Israel into a new Middle Eastern security

¹⁹ According to Egyptian General Taha al-Magdub, "[t]he continued Arab national decline will lead to a greater regional role by non-Arab countries. We must not forget to note in this regard the active Turkish role that seeks to enlarge Turkish interests and to enhance Turkey's regional weight in the region." See "Arab Security's National Dilemma: Israel's and Iran's Role in Entrenching Arab Fragmentation," *al-Ahram*, July 3, in Joint Publications Research Service-Near East and South Asia (JPRS-NEA) *Daily Report*, August 9, 1994.

²⁰ "From Rice to Couscous," *al-Ahram*, in *Mideast Mirror*, November 24, 1994.

²¹ According to Egyptian General Magdub, "If we start with Israel, it is because it represents the major challenge to the Arab nation and the most serious threat to [Egypt's] security for numerous objective reasons." See "Arab Security's National Dilemma: Israel's and Iran's Roles in Entrenching Arab Fragmentation," *al-Ahram*, July 3, 1994, in JPRS-NEA *Daily Report*, August 9, 1994. See also Major General Ahmed Abdel Halim, "Egypt's Security Concerns," (paper presented to a joint conference of the National Center for Middle East Studies and the National Defense University in Washington, DC, January 17-18, 1995). According to Abdel Halim, "A key factor in Egypt's military planning is the extraordinary imbalance caused by Israel's military programs in the nuclear and space fields."

²² According to Abdel Monem Said Ali, "If the Israeli arm[s] rac[e] continues to jeopardize the stability created by the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty on the Egyptian northeastern front, multilateral negotiations on regional security and arms control in the Middle East are expected—even if they extend over a continued period of time—to reduce the Egyptian fears of military imbalance with Israel." See Abdel Monem Said Ali, "Egyptian National Security Perceptions," in *National Threat Perceptions in the Middle East*, eds. James Leonard et al. (New York: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 1995), p. 23.

²³ Doaa el-Bey, "Exchanging Confidences," *al-Ahram*, November 17-23, 1994.

system only if the sources of Israel's perceived military advantage are first eliminated from the equation. At the same time, however, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa has recognized that Cairo needs to generate some parallel efforts. As he observed at the Casablanca summit,

We don't replace Arab cooperation with a regional one, because none can replace the other. We aim to activate different parallel trends and inter-related spheres or tracks. We work on the Arab track to enhance Arab ties, on a regional track that consists of Mediterranean countries expanding to reach Europe, and also on other tracks that reach the Pacific and the Atlantic.²⁴

Given this approach, it would be a mistake to rule out entirely Egypt's willingness to consider a Middle East regional security system if several caveats are kept in mind. First, the system must be minimalistic, as long as the territorial elements of the Arab-Israeli peace process remain unresolved. Egypt will not view Israel as a regional ally until the peace process is completed. Second, even a minimal Middle Eastern system must not challenge or replace the Arab collective security system which Egypt seeks to lead. The Europeans have been able to develop security architectures such as NATO and the CSCE with the United States without compromising Europe-based institutions such as the EC or WEU. Third, Egypt will be far more likely to promote such ideas if they were not proposed solely by other states in the region rather than by Cairo itself. Certainly, a system that confirmed Egypt's regional position would have the best chance of winning its support.

²⁴ Galal, p. 26.

The Implications of Middle East Political Issues on Regional Security Frameworks

The shape of security frameworks is affected primarily by the issues that give rise to their creation. Thus, the threat posed by the massive concentration of Soviet armor in Central Europe, as well as by Soviet military power on the northern and southern flanks of the continent, dictated the shape of NATO. In addition, the identities of the coalition partners that were ready to join to meet this commonly perceived threat also affected the shape of the alliance.

NATO was a security system created as a military alliance; other security systems have been developed to assure the implementation of arms control regimes. Thus, the CSCE provided a framework for confidence-building measures between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and therefore comprised a broad set of countries extending from the United States and Canada to the Soviet Union itself. Such inclusive systems, which combine past and potential adversaries, have also been instituted in the Far East in the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

In the Middle East, security systems can be tailored to address the narrow national interests of the parties concerned: Israel's need to shore up its peace agreements, Jordan's unique position as a buffer state sandwiched between powerful neighbors, and Egypt's need to preserve its special regional status. For such a security system to arise, however, it must also address common challenges that all of the participants are likely to face in the period ahead.

If, at the height of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, Iranian forces had broken through Iraq's defenses at the southern port city of Basra and begun to dismember Iraq, an Arab-Israeli security community might have coalesced to face this mutual threat, in the same way that Europe responded to the Soviet challenge. Currently, however, there is no mutual threat that can serve as a basis for common action. In addressing the domestic threat of militant Islam, for example, an association with Israel might actually prove more a burden than an asset for Arab regimes.

Instead of adopting the NATO paradigm of mutual threats as the basis for a regional security system, a more productive approach for the Middle East would be to focus on common challenges that must take into account the interests of the parties concerned. There are three such challenges that a large number of Middle Eastern states will face: the eventual re-integration of Iraq into the Middle East political order, Jordan's role as a buffer state between subregions, and the need for a regional "safety net" to support the peace process during future challenges. Common recognition that these challenges must be addressed collectively, and not merely on the basis of narrow national interests, can serve as the most practical foundation of a future security system for the Middle East.

THE EVENTUAL RE-INTEGRATION OF IRAQ

Iraq is the best example of a state that directly affects the national security interests of both the Arab-Israeli and Persian Gulf subregions of the Middle East. Under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, Iraq has repeatedly attempted to achieve regional hegemony in the Gulf by challenging its neighbors. It launched the 1980 invasion of Iran, which turned into the eight-year Iran-Iraq War; made territorial claims on Kuwait before finally invading it in 1990; and has repeatedly threatened the territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia. On the other side of the Middle East, Iraq has sent expeditionary forces to take part in the 1948, 1967, and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars (projecting fully one-third of its inventory of ground force weapons against Israel in so doing) and has attacked Israel with its air and missile forces as well. Clearly, Baghdad is a central factor in the national security planning of both Israel and the Gulf states.

Since 1992, the U.S. policy of "dual containment" has helped to neutralize the revival of Iraqi military power to the benefit of both the peace process and Gulf security. But there are a growing number of holes in the enforcement of dual containment, and all parties in the region anticipate the eventual removal of current UN sanctions on Iraq. This naturally leads many to consider reconciliatory moves toward Iraq, because once sanctions are removed and Iraq has re-emerged as an independent regional power, many current options may no longer be practicable.

This is particularly applicable to Israel. As long as UN sanctions are in place, Saddam may have an interest in conducting a dialogue with Israel as a means of improving his image in the West. He may make the calculation that, by agreeing to join the peace process, Baghdad could undermine international support for the sanctions regime. In recent years, there were several indications that Israel considered initiating new contacts with Iraq. The clearest came in May 1995, in the form of a warning to the Israeli government from U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk:

Whatever signals may have been sent by the Iraqi regime in Israel's direction should be seen precisely for what they are: a cynical, even desperate, attempt to enlist Israel's support in lifting sanctions on Iraq. These are overtures clearly unworthy of Israeli ears. And people should be cognizant of the ramifications of responding to them. The United States is currently engaged in a vigorous and so far very successful effort to maintain an international consensus in favor of retaining UN sanctions against Iraq. Nothing could be better calculated to undermine that resolve than the hint or rumor that Israel and Iraq might be engaged in a *rapprochement*. . . . For, if Israel of all countries is ready to have relations with Iraq, why shouldn't *they*—especially if lucrative contracts are offered with the deal? In this way, the smallest action by an Israeli individual can have much larger consequences.²⁵

Prior to Indyk's remarks, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had called upon Saddam Hussein to join the Arab-Israeli peace process by engaging in the multilateral negotiations. In an interview with *Al-Watan al-Arabi*, Rabin declared that "[t]he peace process and the multilateral talks are open to all the countries of the region, including Iraq. Let [Saddam] prove his true intentions by joining this step and benefiting from its fruits."²⁶ Later that year, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres confirmed that Iraq had attempted to contact the Israeli government but had been rebuffed.²⁷

The idea of direct contacts between the Iraqi regime and the government of Israel is not new. During the Iran-Iraq War, high-level Iraqi officials such as Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz sought meetings with various Israeli representatives, including Major General (res.) Avraham Tamir, who had once served as director-general of the prime minister's office under Shimon Peres.²⁸ At that time, Iraq saw Israel as a diplomatic instrument for promoting ties with the United States while the Iranian army was still deep in Iraqi territory. Initiatives were also taken in 1989 for a meeting between then-Minister of Defense Rabin and Saddam Hussein, which never occurred. Commenting on these events, Rabin noted that

The period [in question] was at the end of the Iran-Iraq War. Iraq was injured coming out of the war. My assumption was that it was possible to reach peace [with Baghdad] only if a situation were to arise in which there would be an interest on the other side due to weakness. . . . I assumed that Saddam was weak, and that there was a chance for a change.²⁹

²⁵ Martin Indyk, speech delivered at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, transcribed in *Wireless File*, United States Information Service, May 16, 1995 (emphasis added).

²⁶ "The Prime Minister: Saddam Hussein Invited to Join the Peace Process," *Ha'aretz*, January 17, 1995.

²⁷ "Peres: 'Iraqi Elements Tried to Contact Israel, but Were Answered Completely Negatively on Our Part,'" *Ha'aretz*, May 3, 1995.

²⁸ "Rabin-Saddam: The Meeting That Was Almost Held," *Yediot Ahronot*, December 8, 1995.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

More recent calls for a new Israel-Iraq connection came from former Rabin political advisor Jacques Neriah:

Iraq is an enemy that is signaling a readiness for conciliation. Adopting a policy dictated in Washington is not necessarily the correct solution serving Israeli interests. We are not talking about by-passing the economic embargo, but about getting Israel ready in good time for a normal relationship with Iraq, if and when it is decided to lift the sanctions being applied against it.³⁰

Neriah was not calling for embracing Saddam Hussein, but rather for a more nuanced position: Israel must take preparatory steps to position itself for the time when the economic embargo is lifted, even if this conflicts with U.S. policy.

Open meetings between Israeli leaders and prominent members of the Iraqi regime certainly would have increased the burden on the United States in fending off French and Russian efforts in the UN Security Council to ease the sanctions regime. There are, however, several possible Israeli interests in accelerating the end of dual containment. Foremost among these is the affect an Israel-Iraq dialogue could have on the Syria-Israel negotiating track. Given the hostile relationship between Hafez al-Assad and Saddam Hussein, some Israeli analysts believe that an Israeli move toward Baghdad could force Assad to accelerate the peace process and even make concessions on territory or security arrangements. Of course, it could also have the opposite affect, pushing Assad into a more conservative and confrontational position.

A second consideration relates to Jordan. Before it concluded a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, the latter had signed only the Oslo agreement and the first phase of its implementation in Gaza-Jericho; an agreement with Syria seemed remote. The Israel-Jordan treaty thus left Amman relatively isolated amidst considerable questions about the future of Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Syrian relations. In light of the poor state of Egyptian-Jordanian relations and Egypt's confrontation with Israel over nuclear arms control, Israeli planners may have seen an Iraqi connection as the best means available to bolster the Israel-Jordan peace treaty.

No matter how an Iraq option might have served Israeli interests, a unilateral Israeli initiative toward Baghdad that weakened political support for continued sanctions would clearly have come at the expense of the Gulf states. When Washington finally decides to end its policy of containment of Iraq, it will probably link its decision to Baghdad's compliance with a series of demands intended to reduce the Iraqi military threat to the Gulf region. A premature Israel-Iraq dialogue, however, could preempt such measures by accelerating the acceptance of Iraq in the international system without these prior conditions being fulfilled.

By the same token, the opposite scenario—a restoration of ties between Iraq and several Gulf states achieved at the expense of Israel—is also possible. After all, not all Gulf states have a hostile attitude toward Iraq; Qatar, for example, still hosts an Iraqi ambassador. And the willingness of the Gulf states to come to Kuwait's defense during Iraq's menacing military maneuvers in October 1994 was at best partial: among the GCC states, only Bahrain and the UAE sent forces to Kuwait to counter the Iraqi military concentrations; even Saudi Arabia did not dispatch any units. Ultimately, it was the United States that once again assured Kuwait's security.

Gradual shifts in the balance of power in the Gulf could bring about new regional alignments that would undermine dual containment. An enhancement of the Iranian threat, for example, or the revival of border disputes between Saudi Arabia and the smaller GCC states (particularly Qatar or Oman) might lead some states to adopt an approach toward Baghdad resembling that of Qatar in order to offset Iranian or Saudi hegemony. The Saudis themselves have already implemented important (albeit subtle) changes in their Iraqi policy. During King Hussein's meeting with Crown Prince Abdullah in February 1996, the two sides agreed that "Baghdad has

³⁰ Jacques Neriah, "Normalization of Ties with Baghdad is a Vital Interest for Israel," *Yediot Ahronot*, cited in *Mideast Mirror*, December 14, 1994.

fulfilled all the requirements of the United Nations [sanctions and] it is now necessary to remove the embargo to bring to an end the suffering of the Iraqi people."³¹

Similarly, new security arrangements between Iraq and the Gulf states regarding the deployment of forces within Iraq itself could have a profound impact on Israeli security. If Baghdad agreed to remove its heavy armored units from southern Iraq and concentrated them instead in new military camps in the Iraqi "panhandle" near the Jordanian border, the advantage gained by the Gulf states would be a clear loss for the security of Jordan and Israel.

There is little question that both sectors of the Middle East have benefited from dual containment and the UN arms control regime—which, though imperfect, have nonetheless impeded the restoration of Iraqi military power. The challenge that Israel and the Gulf states will face in the future comes from the gradual erosion of Iraq's political isolation, and with it the ability of the UN to maintain economic sanctions. Under such circumstances, Western policymakers may be forced to modify the conditions of Iraq's isolation—maintaining the UN arms control regime, for example, but accepting new political and economic arrangements. Without the leverage provided by sanctions, however, this could prove a virtually impossible task. Should it nonetheless transpire, it will require an approach that takes into account the security of both Israel and the Gulf states. Only in the context of comprehensive regional security can new arrangements be advanced that do not come at the expense of either side of the Middle East.

JORDAN'S ROLE AS A BUFFER STATE BETWEEN MIDDLE EAST SUBREGIONS

The challenges facing Jordan as a key buffer state in the Middle East did not end with the signing of the peace treaty with Israel in 1994. To a large extent, the treaty posed a whole new set of problems for Amman that will be high on the Arab-Israeli policy agenda in the years ahead. Jordan's policy of peace toward Israel appears to lack broad domestic support, and that will be difficult to change as long as the economic expectations of the Jordanian public remain unfulfilled. Although its new relationship with Israel stands out as the brightest spot in Jordanian foreign policy in the last two years, Jordanians and Palestinians retain considerable mutual suspicion. Palestinian analyst Ali Jarbawi has noted Jordan's deep reservations about the interim agreements:

The newly born Palestinian entity, in spite of its present limitations and dependence on Israel, could gradually grow, blessed by Israel and most Arab nations, to transcend the limitations of self-rule as specified for the transitional period. Were this to happen, and were this new Palestinian entity to find itself unable to grow westward because of Israel, would not its expansion then be eastward [toward Jordan]?³²

Amman's most immediate problems emanate from the Oslo process and specifically the uncertain outcome of Israel-PLO negotiations on "final status" issues, which could undermine Jordanian stability no matter how Oslo develops. According to Jarbawi, Amman would perceive any movement toward the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank "as an immediate national security threat. Since the majority of East Bank Jordanians are in fact of Palestinian origin, Jordan fears that the establishment of a Palestinian state will arouse Palestinian national feelings within its own Palestinian majority."³³ According to this scenario, a Palestinian state under Yasser Arafat's Fatah-based leadership could lead to the overthrow of Hashemite rule by exploiting these demographic vulnerabilities.

³¹ "Hussein and Saudi Crown Prince: We Will Support the Removal of the Embargo on Iraq," *Ha'aretz*, February 13, 1996.

³² Ali Jarbawi, "The Triangle of Conflict," *Foreign Policy*, no. 100 (fall 1995), pp. 102-103.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Jordanian analysts have underlined this point as well:

The relationship between Jordan and the PNA [Palestinian National Authority] is very complex. The PNA's inherent weakness *vis-à-vis* Israel and its ambiguous relationship toward Jordan is a source of constant fear for the Jordanians. If the Palestinian Liberation Organization's track record with Jordan is taken as a precedent for the PNA, then Jordanian leaders and public alike should feel very concerned.³⁴

On the other hand, a complete breakdown of Oslo could also expose Jordan to new instability. The Palestinians might pressure Amman to abrogate its peace treaty with Israel, and Arafat might seek to increase his coordination with Jordan's main regional rival, Syria, as a means of increasing his own diplomatic leverage *vis-à-vis* Amman. Thus, Jordan has reason to be concerned regardless of the course Oslo takes: "Most Jordanians are convinced that, whatever the final product of the stalemated Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, Jordan's security, welfare, and internal stability will be negatively affected."³⁵

The regional vagaries the Jordanians confront as a result of the Oslo process could be offset by re-enforcing Jordan from the east. Clearly, close ties with a post-Saddam Iraq would buttress Amman politically and revive trade with Baghdad that was central to the Jordanian economy for much of the 1980s. Although Jordan disengaged from its (popular) wartime alliance with Iraq and became instead one of the most vocal critics of the regime of Saddam Hussein, it has not experienced a corresponding improvement in relations with its other neighbors. Egypt and Syria have both expressed suspicion about Jordanian aspirations in Iraq, particularly after King Hussein granted political asylum to Iraqi defector Hussein Kamel. At the same time, enduring dynastic rivalries continue to overshadow the Saudi-Jordanian relationship, despite such tangible developments as King Hussein's February 1996 visit to Saudi Arabia.

But perhaps Jordan's most immediate problem is the loss of attention it suffered after the treaty signing ceremonies were over. The best example of what could happen to Jordan in the future is its position *prior* to the peace initiatives with Israel that began in May 1994. In late 1993, the focus of the Arab-Israeli peace process was divided between the implementation of the Oslo accords and the Syrian track. To a large extent, both the United States and Israel regarded Jordan as they did Lebanon—a minor partner who would be brought in once peace is secured with the major political players. This was expressed particularly in U.S. policy toward Jordan, which only began to shift significantly after Jordanian initiatives in the peace process.

Jordan's lack of a defined role in Gulf security also deprived it of considerable political support. Amman was not included in the post-Gulf War system created by the 1991 Damascus Declaration, which tied non-GCC Arab states such as Egypt and Syria to the defense of their smaller Gulf allies. Moreover, the Gulf states' relations with Jordan remained cool as a result of Amman's wartime alignment with Baghdad. Because it was neither moving forward in the peace process nor assuming a definite role in Gulf security, Jordan did not fit into the two main U.S. policy rubrics that would have put it high on Washington's Middle East agenda.

As Amman's peace process policy changed during 1994-95, however, so did the amount of attention it received. From the Washington Declaration to the signing of the peace treaty with Israel to the Amman economic summit, the Israel-Jordan track produced a series of diplomatic milestones that merited intense American attention and engagement, manifested by frequent visits by senior U.S. officials, a public vote of confidence in the Jordanian leadership from the Clinton administration, and an increase in tangible resources—from debt relief to an American commitment to help Jordan modernize its military (with, among other things, U.S.-made F-16 aircraft). Amman also subsequently shifted its policy toward Iraq, and by 1996 was actively

³⁴ Center for Strategic Studies (University of Jordan), "Threat Perceptions from a Jordanian Point of View," in *National Threat Perceptions in the Middle East*, eds. James Leonard et al. (New York: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 1995), p. 52.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

planning for a post-Saddam regime in coordination with Washington. By converting itself into an asset in U.S. dual containment policy, Jordan effectively became an important factor in Gulf security.

Though Amman demonstrated considerable diplomatic skill in breaking out of the isolation it faced in 1993, it nonetheless remains in constant danger of being marginalized again in Middle Eastern affairs. As Israel and Jordan implement the final elements of their treaty, the focus of the peace process will naturally gravitate toward the next phase of the evolving Israeli-Palestinian relationship and the pursuit of peace with Syria. If Amman's efforts in Iraqi affairs do not produce tangible results, its failure to enunciate a new role for itself in the larger policy context of Gulf security could result in Jordan's re-isolation. In the absence of a breakthrough with Iraq, Jordan needs to complete the restoration of its ties with the states of the Arabian peninsula and seek new forms of cooperation with them.

The design of a regional security system can either promote or detract from this trend. If the United States decides, for example, that Gulf security necessitates encouraging better coordination among only the GCC states themselves (and that therefore regional security arrangements for the Gulf be kept separate from those of the Arab-Israeli sector), Jordan would be precluded from a more robust role in Gulf security. This kind of narrow sectoral approach to regional security would ignore Jordan's substantial potential contribution to Gulf security, however. Since the 1970s, Jordanian officers had been involved in training the officer corps of Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman. In 1983, the United States proposed a Jordanian rapid deployment force for internal crises in the Arab Gulf states.³⁶

In fact, Jordan may have already carved out a new role for itself in Gulf security. In April 1996 a U.S. Air Expeditionary Force of thirty combat aircraft (sixteen F-16s and fourteen F-15s) and refueling planes were deployed to a Jordanian airbase to patrol the "no fly" zone in southern Iraq during a two-month gap in the U.S. aircraft carrier presence in the Gulf. Though only a temporary deployment, it indicated that the United States was seeking a role for Jordan in Gulf security, which could involve a direct Jordanian security presence in the future. And because security ties are often followed by improved economic ties (including opportunities for Jordanian workers in the Gulf), better Jordan-GCC ties could bring tangible economic benefits to the kingdom as it faces difficult political strains in the period ahead.

As a buffer state, Jordan not only separates Israel from Iraq, but also protects Saudi Arabia from Syria and the radicalism of the Fertile Crescent. Thus, any future Jordanian-Palestinian struggle has implications for Gulf security. Saudis who view the Hashemite kingdom through the prism of tribal and dynastic conflict may not be concerned with this process of "Palestinization," but it could result in *two* potentially radicalized states along Saudi Arabia's northern border: a Palestinianized Jordan to the northwest and Saddam's Iraq to the northeast. From the standpoint of geopolitics, such a development would undoubtedly undermine the long-term security of the Gulf. Conversely, regional security arrangements anchored in a cooperative relationship with Amman would better serve the long-term security interests of the Levant and Gulf states alike.

A SAFETY NET FOR THE PEACE PROCESS DURING FUTURE CHALLENGES

The third major challenge likely to be on the Middle East policy agenda in the years ahead arises from the very structure of peace process itself. The concept of an Israel-Palestinian interim

³⁶ Dore Gold, *America, the Gulf, and Israel: CENTCOM and Emerging U.S. Regional Security Policies in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), p. 76. The United States has also been supportive of an Egyptian role in Gulf security, initially backing the 1991 Damascus Declaration and more recently bringing units from the UAE to join in the bi-annual "Bright Star" exercises in Egypt in November 1995; see "Biggest 'Bright Star' Ever," *al-Ahram*, November 9-15, 1995.

agreement derived originally from the Camp David accords and is based on the idea of doing what is possible now and postponing negotiations on the difficult issues until subsequent final status talks. Oslo I and II both adopted this procedure, and only specified the issues that Israel and the Palestinians will have to resolve in later negotiations: borders, settlements, security arrangements, refugees, water, and, above all, Jerusalem.

As these remaining issues become more daunting and the pace of diplomacy slows accordingly, the Oslo process will likely face the kinds of crises (and even temporary breakdowns) that usually accompany very difficult negotiations. In addition, regional and international factors may also weaken the process at this critical time. The immediate question is whether this unstable period will disrupt much of what has already been accomplished in the region since the Madrid peace conference and the signing of Oslo I. In this context, an American analyst noted that

As the fate of the 1983 peace accord between Israel and Lebanon shows, the peace process is neither irreversible nor irrevocable. The post-Gulf War successes of Madrid, Oslo, Wadi al 'Arabah, *et al*, were made possible by a historic confluence of American dominance, Soviet irrelevance, Israeli strength, Palestinian disillusionment, and a general sense of realism and pragmatism that took hold in the Arab world. As those ingredients shift, the process changes, and the ability of those achievements to survive future tests, such as succession crises, will change, too.³⁷

Among the most important peace process accomplishments that could be threatened is the cordial and cooperative new relationship between Israel and the Gulf states.

This was hardly the case before Madrid. Since the end of World War II, the United States has repeatedly defined the security of both Israel and the Gulf states (including access to Persian Gulf oil) as focal points of its national interest. But American policymakers faced a virtual "zero-sum" dilemma between the two: support for Israeli positions in the peace process seemed to undermine Washington's strategic position in the Persian Gulf,³⁸ and support for Gulf security by means of massive arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states tended to conflict with the U.S. commitment to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge.

This dilemma was somewhat (though not completely) resolved in the late 1980s. American military penetration of the Arabian Peninsula accelerated substantially in response to the Iran-Iraq War, and even the outbreak of the *intifada* did not interrupt growing U.S. security relations with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Thus, the events of the late 1980s seemed to have de-coupled the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Gulf security, and the 1991 Gulf War reinforced this trend. It is clearly of paramount interest to both the United States and Israel to not revert to a situation in which their relations with the Gulf states are conditioned on what happens in the peace process. Otherwise, if Israel-Palestinian talks on Jerusalem deadlock as expected, Oman and Qatar might feel compelled to freeze their emerging relations with Israel in response.

A regional security regime might help prevent this. An ongoing forum could institutionalize contacts between Israel and the Gulf states and make their bilateral ties less vulnerable to transient interruptions. It was, after all, through the multilateral peace process that Israelis first openly arrived in the Gulf states in an official capacity. Moreover, the smaller GCC states would have an additional interest in such a regional security system, in that it could reduce their dependence on Saudi Arabia. (At the same time, a broader security system could also serve Saudi interests by institutionalizing new Saudi connections with a number of major powers which could neutralize Riyadh's principal regional adversaries, Iran and Iraq.) It is not surprising that the two Gulf states that have demonstrated the greatest interest in improving ties with Israel—Oman and

³⁷ Robert Satloff, "The Path to Peace," *Foreign Policy*, no. 100 (fall 1995), p. 110.

³⁸ In 1981, Anthony Cordesman contended that "[t]he most immediate source of division within the West and between the West and the Gulf is Israel." He concluded that there could be no strategic consensus between the United States and the Gulf states without resolving the Palestinian issue. See Anthony Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), pp. 61, 944, and 981.

Qatar—have also had serious territorial disputes with Saudi Arabia. Oman has not ruled out the idea of expanding the Arab-based regional security system into a broader, Middle Eastern grouping. Indeed, Oman's policy toward Iran and willingness to host an Israeli delegation to the April 1996 multilateral talks on water stimulated some criticism in Arab circles about the sultanate's Arab identity.

In an April 1994 interview, an *al-Hayat* correspondent asked Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Yusuf Bin-'Alawi whether Oman sought the "abolition of the Arab regional system and institutions of the Arab League" in favor of "a Middle Eastern system—including non-Arab states such as Iran, Israel, and Turkey" based on what he said was Bin-'Alawi's stated "vision of the region's future" in which "the Arabic language, Arabism, and the Arab system were finished and the geographical reality which should be addressed was now the Middle East."

Bin-'Alawi's reply did not rule out such an orientation. "The Middle East concept does not negate the Arab concept," he said. "On the contrary; the Arabs own the Middle East, but we should not appear to be racist, and Arab nationalism or Arabism should not appear to be a racist phenomenon." The Arab League "is still the right institution for the Arabs," Bin-'Alawi continued, but since its creation "over forty years ago, we have been unable to create common interests for the Arab League." Given that it was originally formed "for the liberation of Palestine," he argued, it "should not remain in the confines of the past."³⁹

There has even been some Saudi commentary related to a role for non-Arab powers in regional security arrangements. Thus, General Khaled Bin Sultan, the Saudi commander of coalition forces during the Gulf War, described the relationships between the Gulf states and various regional actors as a series of concentric circles:

The 'third circle' is, to my mind, composed of friendly states within the wider boundaries of the Middle East and South Asia. I am thinking, for example, of Egypt and Syria . . . as well as Turkey and Pakistan, friendly Muslim powers on the immediate frontiers of the region. I believe that if these four countries and the GCC planned their defenses together, and carried out joint training, they could make a very considerable new contribution to the security of the area.⁴⁰

Indeed, given the lack of diplomatic relations between Israel and the Gulf states, the idea of the latter benefiting directly from security ties to the former appears somewhat premature. It would be a mistake to rule out such possibilities in the future, however. Sami M.K. Al-Faraj, a Kuwaiti analyst of GCC security policies, observed that "Gulf policymakers always emphasize that their 'state of war' with Israel is one they acquired by association [with their Arab brethren], not by direct confrontation. Accordingly, once their associates agree on peace with Israel, future Gulf-Israeli relations become a matter of course."⁴¹ Al-Faraj, an international lawyer who served as an advisor on security affairs to Kuwait's Supreme Planning Committee, notes that

the inadequacies of regional security arrangements brought to light by the second Gulf War are difficult to address by non-nuclear powers. . . . This calamitous potential, in which either Iran or a revamped Iraq may use their arsenal of non-conventional weapons to exert influence upon their smaller neighbors, forces the latter to explore every possibility in order to prevent such an eventuality. Since neither Egypt, Syria, nor Saudi Arabia can address this inadequacy, *the Gulf's attention must be shifted toward Israel.*⁴²

³⁹ *Al-Hayat*, April 27, cited in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, May 3, 1994.

⁴⁰ HRH General Khaled Bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), pp. 473-74.

⁴¹ Sami M.K. Al-Faraj, "The Changing Security Landscape of the Gulf (1995-2000): A Kuwaiti's Perspective," (an unpublished paper presented to the meeting of the Security Group of the Initiative for Peace and Cooperation in the Middle East, Larnaca, Cyprus, June 18-20, 1995). Al-Faraj expanded on his thinking about an Israeli security role in an interview with an Israeli newspaper; see "An Israeli Umbrella Over the Gulf," *Ha'aretz*, January 31, 1996.

⁴² *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

He does not see an Israeli role in the Gulf serving as a substitute for a superpower role, however:

An Israeli role in the security of the Gulf neither contradicts nor limits Western and in particular American involvement in the Gulf. On the contrary, the United States may consider such a role as complementary to the Western position: A new division of labor, where the Israelis are the advanced garrison providing a local rapid deployment force, [or] even a non-conventional deterrent, if and when the need arises, in anticipation of the arrival of large Western forces in the Gulf in time of major crisis.⁴⁸

Although this suggests an Israeli role in Gulf security comparable to that of Egypt or other Arab states and thus far beyond that envisioned by Israeli defense thinkers, Israel is now undeniably a part of the military calculation of Gulf security. Thus, regional security structures that include Israel and the Gulf states would not only serve as a hedge against problems in the peace process, but also serve the interests of Gulf security by acknowledging the shared threat perceptions of Israel and the smaller GCC member states.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Conclusions

There has long been a debate among theorists over whether international institutions really matter; the failure of European regional institutions in dealing with the crisis in the former Yugoslavia certainly did not help the cause of multilateralism. This study, however, does not focus on the merits of regional security systems. Rather, it assumes that the states of the Middle East are actively interested in multilateralism and proposes that a regional architecture that includes both Israel and the Gulf States would best serve U.S. and Israeli interests in confronting the likely challenges in the area.

The proposition that such systems can be useful for maintaining relations among the parties to the peace process during periods of diplomatic deadlock is not intended to suggest that such minimalist institutions can protect Arab-Israeli relations in any scenario, such as the outbreak of "mini-wars" like the early 1996 confrontation between Israel and the Hezbollah in Lebanon. Nor are the proposed regional security systems robust security coalitions on the model of NATO during the Cold War. Regional security institutions are useful but subtle diplomatic instruments for protecting regional order, not a panacea for the national security of each state.

The central thesis of this study is that the quest for a regional security system has opened up the issue of the shape or definition of the Middle East. This question is at the center of the political discourse in each of the countries in the region, albeit for very different reasons. In defining the structure of a new security system for the Middle East, each potential participant seeks to fulfill its own narrow national interests. And, as in the politics of regional security in Europe or East Asia, the interests of hegemonic states in the purpose and membership of a regional political framework are very different from those of smaller states.

Thus, to construct even the most minimal regional security apparatus, any diplomatic initiative will have to take into account the very different interests in the region. Israel and Jordan clearly have the greatest interest in creating a regional security system; Egypt remains opposed to a robust non-Arab framework at this time. Although the position of the states of the Arabian Peninsula is more ambiguous, it is nonetheless possible to discern greater interest in such projects on the part of the smaller Gulf states than Saudi Arabia.

A viable regional security system linking Israel and the Gulf states will have to include central Middle Eastern states to provide critical mass; Israel and Jordan alone are insufficient to make such an arrangement work. It is unlikely that Syria will participate in any such arrangements before reaching a full settlement with Israel, unless significant external inducements are created. (Indeed, the promise of European financial aid brought Syria to the 1995 Barcelona conference despite Israel's presence.) Egypt is reluctant to back multilateral security concepts that are not based on Arab states alone, and Saudi Arabia tends to follow the Egyptian-Syrian line.

Thus, considerable diplomatic effort will be required to get Egypt more involved in regional institution building. The 1996 Summit of the Peacemakers at Sharm al-Sheikh did this successfully, but it was an emergency conference convened in response to a spate of terrorist bombings in Israel and did not fully evolve into a permanent regional security forum. Egypt and Saudi Arabia might be willing to play a more central role if they understood that such conferences can actually serve their interests and not merely those of their regional competitors. Such a development would help create the conditions for protecting the nascent ties between Israel and the Gulf states from many of the challenges that no doubt lie ahead in the Arab-Israeli peace process.

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