



U.S. Policy in the Arabian Peninsula: An Evaluation

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Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on this timely and important topic. My testimony will consist of four parts: the U.S. policy context, the regional context, obstacles to U.S. objectives, and a way forward for U.S. policy.

U.S. POLICY CONTEXT

The United States is in the midst of a broad strategic shift, away from a focus on the “global war on terrorism” and toward an emphasis on great-power competition, particularly with Russia and China. While the discrete policy choices attending this shift are often contentious, the change in strategic direction is one which has been pursued by successive administration and reflects a deepening bipartisan consensus.

Less clear, however, is precisely what this strategic shift implies for American policy in the Middle East. Some have argued that it requires a rebalancing of resources away from the Middle East and toward Asia and Europe, not only because the latter regions are of increasing importance, but because the past two decades of heavy U.S. engagement in the Middle East have produced few clear successes despite a tremendous investment of resources.¹

Any such effort at a pivot faces two obstacles, however. First, vital American interests remain at stake in the Middle East, and there are no regional or external powers to which we can entrust them. These include countering terrorism, preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, ensuring the free flow of energy and commerce, and ensuring the access of the U.S. military. Second, securing these interests is vital to great-power competition itself. Both China and our allies in East Asia, for example, are highly dependent on energy imports from the Middle East.

The challenge the United States faces in the Middle East is how therefore to secure our interests in the region and prevent rivals from gaining at our expense, while at the same time reallocating resources from Middle East commitments toward other priorities. The most straightforward an-

¹ See for example Mara Karlin and Tamara Cofman Wittes, “America’s Middle East Purgatory: The Case for Doing Less,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2018-12-11/americas-middle-east-purgatory>

swer, and one already being implemented to an extent, is to work as much as possible through regional allies, supplementing their efforts with limited American support. Yet this approach is complicated in practice.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Middle East is in the midst of a prolonged period of flux. Since 2011, the region has undergone what I have termed a “double collapse”—the collapse, first, of states and institutions, and second, of the de facto U.S.-centered regional security architecture.² This double collapse has had a number of consequences.

First, the center of gravity in the Arab world has shifted from where it traditionally resided—Egypt and Syria, first and foremost—to the Arab Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.³ This has had a number of reverberations, including the shift in Arab states’ focus from issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to Iran and Islamism.

Second, the relative disengagement of the United States has, in the absence of any other great power ready to take the baton as America did from Britain in the 1950s, contributed to intensifying regional competition. Three ad hoc blocs have emerged in this contest for preeminence—one comprised of conservative powers like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Jordan, and, tacitly, Israel; a second headed by states that support political Islamism, primarily Turkey and Qatar; and a third, anti-American bloc led by Iran and supported by its non-state proxies and affiliates and Assad’s rump Syria, and sustained externally by the revisionist states, Russia and China. The United States is most closely identified with the first bloc, but in fact has very strong military, economic, and diplomatic ties with the first two but hostile relations with the third. These groupings are necessarily simplified, but the regional fault lines are real.

Third, the collapse of states has created vacuums that non-state actors—including those affiliated with Iran—have been keen to exploit. This has been evident in eastern Syria and western Iraq, where the Islamic State took advantage in the relative absence of any central government authority acceptable to local citizens; in Yemen, where the Houthi movement in 2014 ousted the internationally-recognized transitional government that replaced the Saleh regime; and in Lebanon, where the Iranian proxy Hezbollah has accumulated power due in large part to the weakness and disorganization of the state.

These phenomena have contributed to a burst of interventionism by regional powers. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, supported by the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, intervened in Yemen and Bahrain. The UAE, largely to support its Yemen intervention and compensate for the feared U.S. departure from the region, has become increasingly active in East Africa. The UAE and Qatar intervened in Libya, supporting different factions in that country’s civil war. Turkey has intervened in Syria, Iraq, and Qatar, and opened its largest overseas military base and embassy in Somalia. Iran has intervened in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, and has a vise-grip on Lebanon. At the

² Michael Singh, “The Great Unraveling,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 25, 2016, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-great-unraveling>

³ For a fuller discussion, see Marc Lynch, “The New Arab Order: Power and Violence in Today’s Middle East,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2018-08-13/new-arab-order>

same time, other external powers have made increasing inroads into the region. The clearest case of this today is Russia, but over the longer run China is likely to be more active, and indeed has already stepped up its military engagement in the Middle East.⁴

The overall result of this competition, with limited exceptions, has been to add to regional instability, undermine U.S. interests, create an environment of insecurity for the region's smaller states, and, most ominously, increase the risk of wider regional conflict.

OBSTACLES TO A NEW U.S. STRATEGY

Under different circumstances, the United States might find itself welcoming the increased willingness of our partners to address problems and conflicts within their own region. Pushing our allies to share burdens has been a global theme for the Trump administration, just as it was to a lesser degree for the Obama administration. Harnessing allies' willingness to act to advance U.S. interests, however, faces a number of obstacles.

Limited Military Effectiveness

Despite the tens of billions of dollars that the United States has invested over decades in building up the militaries of our regional partners, those forces' effectiveness remains limited,⁵ as demonstrated by the struggles of the GCC in Yemen and Turkey in Syria. This is not strictly a matter of capabilities (regional militaries have spent enormous sums on the latest military hardware) but rather of transforming those capabilities into battlefield results. Nor is the problem strictly one of operational effectiveness; more important, arguably, are failures of strategic planning—setting realistic objectives and devising a plan to achieve them expeditiously—most evident in Yemen. Others among our partners have capable forces, but limited ability to project power beyond their borders.

Limited Cooperation Among Partners

Despite facing common challenges, our partners in the region have coordinated poorly and even clashed with one another. This is most evident in the intra-GCC dispute that has pitted Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the UAE against Qatar. But even where these partners are ostensibly working together—for example, the GCC intervention in Yemen—they appear to be working more in parallel than in effective combination. This lack of cooperation is not limited to the military sphere, but also extends to the diplomatic and economic arenas. Traditional regional coordination mechanisms like the GCC and Arab League have diminished in importance and effectiveness, and the Middle East remains less economically integrated than virtually any other region of the world.⁶ By all accounts, our partners' advance coordination with Washington on major initiatives affecting our interests also remains poor.

⁴ Richard Fontaine and Michael Singh, "Middle Kingdom Meets Middle East," *American Interest*, April 3, 2017, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/04/03/middle-kingdom-meets-middle-east/>

⁵ Kenneth Pollack, "The U.S. Has Wasted Billions of Dollars on Failed Arab Armies," *Foreign Policy*, January 31, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/31/the-u-s-has-wasted-billions-of-dollars-on-failed-arab-armies/>

⁶ Mustapha Rouis, "Regional Economic Integration in the Middle East and North Africa," MENA Knowledge and Learning Quick Notes Series, World Bank,

Human Rights Deficits

The assassination of Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018 and the detention of women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia that same year have brought increased scrutiny of Riyadh's human rights record. While these incidents are indeed egregious, they are also representative of endemic human rights problems across the region. As the Khashoggi affair demonstrates, our partners' lack of respect for human rights creates a tension between U.S. interests and values, and erodes U.S. public support for these partnerships.

But human rights deficits are also a problem for U.S. interests, period—repression gives sustenance to extremism, as does a lack of non-violent channels for the expression of dissent. It can also erode business confidence in partners in need of foreign direct investment. Furthermore, the marginalization of certain communities, like the Arab Gulf's Shia Muslim populations, creates an opportunity for Iranian interference. In Bahrain, for example, there is evidence that the government's crackdown on the Shia opposition has led to increased, rather than decreased, opportunity for Iran.⁷ The same may be true in eastern Saudi Arabia.⁸ An increase in repression may also be taken as a sign of regime fragility, and should raise questions among U.S. policymakers about the stability of partner governments.

Economic Deficiencies

In addition to poor regional economic integration, our regional partners suffer from a common set of domestic economic challenges that if unaddressed can pose a threat to their success and stability. Among Gulf oil exporters, these are primarily twofold: first, an overdependence on oil revenue, which given the increasing volatility of oil prices can give rise to unanticipated fiscal pressures; and second, a bloated public sector and underdeveloped private sector.^{9,10}

Spoilers

Those parties in the region that oppose our partners—including both Iran and non-state actors like the Islamic State—have sought to exploit and exacerbate the problems noted above. Iran, for example, has reportedly supplied Yemen's Houthi rebels with advanced capabilities such as ballistic missiles and drones, which have fueled and escalated the conflict there. Iran likely does this in furtherance of a security strategy that involves sowing instability within and along foes' borders in order to keep them preoccupied and, presumably, unable to focus their attention on Iran proper.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/20566/780730BR1oQN95onowledgeonoteo-series.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁷ Michael Knights and Matt Levitt, "The Evolution of Shia Insurgency in Bahrain," *CTC Sentinel* (Vol. 11, Issue 1, January 2018), <https://ctc.usma.edu/evolution-shia-insurgency-bahrain/>

⁸ Chris Zambelis, "The Kingdom's Perfect Storm: Sectarian Tension and Terrorism in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province," *CTC Sentinel* (Volume 9, Issue 1, April 2016), <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-kingdoms-perfect-storm-sectarian-tension-and-terrorism-in-saudi-arabias-eastern-province/>

⁹ "Regional Economic Outlook: Middle East and Central Asia," International Monetary Fund, October 2018, <http://data.imf.org/?sk=4CC54C86-F659-4B16-ABF5-FAB77D52D2E6>

¹⁰ Michael Singh, "The Real Middle East Crisis is Economic," *New York Times*, Aug. 19, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/opinion/the-real-middle-east-crisis-is-economic.html>

Per UN Security Council resolution 2231, the international prohibition on the sale of major offensive weapons systems to Iran will cease in 2020. It is not yet clear whether Iran, which to date has stressed self-sufficiency and asymmetry in its military strategy, will choose to purchase conventional arms from abroad, but the possibility will add to the security worries of U.S. partners in the near future.’

The increasing involvement of other external powers in the Middle East also poses a challenge for U.S. strategy. The presence of the forces or systems of other external powers could limit the U.S. military’s freedom of action and, were the United States to return to an “over-the-horizon” posture, even limit our ability to respond quickly to crises. These powers’ involvement also risks increasing the capabilities of hostile actors, not just with respect to conventional arms, but with respect to intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) functions, cyber capacities, space launch, and other areas.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR U.S. POLICY IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

Amid outrage over the Khashoggi assassination and concern over mounting humanitarian problems in Yemen, U.S. partnerships in the Gulf—and particularly the U.S.-Saudi relationship—has faced new scrutiny. Some scholars have suggested that the partnership between Washington and Riyadh no longer serves U.S. interests, any more than it is consistent with U.S. values.¹¹

In my view, it would be a serious mistake to jettison our partnership with Saudi Arabia or with our other Gulf allies, for three reasons. First, there is a defensive element to these alliances—the United States seeks to preserve close ties in Riyadh and elsewhere in order to maintain influence over these states’ choices, and to ensure they remain stable. Second, as noted above, working through allies is the clearest way to secure our interests in the Middle East while shifting resources to other regions. Third, severing our partnerships in the region would force these states to look elsewhere for arms and other support, and increase the incentives for other external powers to deepen their involvement in the region.¹²

This is not to say, however, that the United States should simply be content with the status quo. Just as walking away from our regional partnerships would undermine our interests, so too would uncritically embracing them or resigning ourselves to the present state of affairs. Instead, the United States should concentrate its efforts in a number of areas:

Improve Allied Military Effectiveness

As noted above, much U.S. military aid in the Middle East has proven to be a poor investment—but not all. With willing partners and a long-term U.S. commitment, such aid can pay significant

¹¹ See for example Emma Ashford, “The US-Saudi Alliance Was in Trouble Long Before Jamal Khashoggi’s Death,” *War on the Rocks*, October 22, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/the-u-s-saudi-alliance-was-in-trouble-long-before-jamal-khashoggis-death/>

¹² For a more extensive discussion of the US-Saudi relationship, see Michael Singh, “The United States, Saudi Arabia, and the Middle East in the Post-Khashoggi Era,” *War on the Rocks*, December 10, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/12/the-united-states-saudi-arabia-and-the-middle-east-in-the-post-khashoggi-era/>

dividends, as in the cases of Israel, the Palestinian Authority security forces, and the UAE. To be effective, the United States should not focus solely on training and equipping, or on modeling regional forces after our own. Rather, as Dr. Mara Karlin has argued,¹³ effective military aid must also address questions of doctrine and organization. And as Dr. Kenneth Pollack has argued, U.S. assistance should focus on enhancing positive qualities partner militaries already possess.¹⁴ Congress and the administration should also consider the allocation of military aid within the region; excluding aid to Israel, the lion's share currently goes to support the purchase of major weapons systems by Egypt.

It is important, in my view, that the U.S. exercise care when imposing conditions on military aid or military sales, such as those now being debated with respect to Saudi Arabia. We should avoid, in my view, tying military assistance to unrelated issues, however compelling. The track record of this sort of conditionality is poor, likely because military assistance offers insufficient leverage to address deeper political and social problems in a partner state, and because our partners bristle at any perception that the United States is using assistance to impose our views on other matters. Tying multiple issues together means that progress on all will move at the pace of the most difficult among them; it is better to address our concerns separately and accept that progress will be fast in some areas and slow in others.

It is entirely appropriate, however, to tie assistance and sales to the conduct of partner militaries and the manner in which they wage war, as well as on stringent end-use verification. In addition, both Congress and the administration should bear in mind the systemic risks of steadily increasing arms sales to the region.¹⁵ Arms sales and other military assistance can fuel interventionism, distort civil-military relations in recipient states, and result in proliferation in cases of instability or poor custody. Policymakers also need to continue to bear in mind the need to preserve Israel's qualitative military edge—despite warming relations between Israel and our Arab allies—as well as the possibility of conflict between U.S. allies more generally.

Conditionality need not be explicit or Congressionally-mandated. It should instead be implicit in our security coordination with partners; we should only support military actions that serve our mutual interests, are conducted in accordance with international norms, have clear and realistic objectives and timetables, and have a viable political strategy alongside any military plan. This may produce difficult conversations in which we inform partners that we cannot support a particular operation, but this is likely less damaging to our partnerships than initially offering support to a dubious action only to walk away when it begins to falter.

This raises the specific case of Yemen. As Congress and the administration consider U.S. policy options in Yemen, they should bear in mind several points. First, Yemen is not, as it sometimes is portrayed, primarily a Saudi-Iranian conflict. The conflict has its roots in the disintegration of the

¹³ Mara Karlin, "Why Military Assistance Programs Disappoint," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-military-assistance-programs-disappoint/>

¹⁴ Pollack

¹⁵ See for example Trevor Thrall and Caroline Dorminey, "Risky Business: The Role of Arms Sales in U.S. Foreign Policy," Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 836, <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/risky-business-role-arms-sales-us-foreign-policy>

Saleh regime in 2011—whose authority beyond Sanaa was already questionable—and the political turmoil which followed. The GCC states intervened only after the Houthi movement ousted the internationally-recognized transitional government and violated several power-sharing agreements, for which the Houthis were condemned by UN Security Council resolution 2216. Iran’s involvement has reportedly remained modest, if pernicious. Iran’s exports of arms and fuel to the Houthis have helped to sustain and escalate the fighting. However, it is not clear that Tehran has the necessary influence to shape Houthi decision-making, and in any event, it is unlikely Iran would wish to encourage the Houthis to stand down since its interests are arguably better served if Saudi Arabia and the UAE remain bogged down in the conflict. There is a silver lining to this, as it also implies that the Saudis and Emiratis could influence the Houthis directly, and Iranian influence is not necessarily permanently entrenched in Yemen.

Second, the withdrawal of U.S. support to the GCC coalition, or the suspension of U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia or the UAE, are unlikely to end the conflict or ease humanitarian conditions in Yemen. Despite the Stockholm Agreement, the path to a political agreement between the Houthis and Yemeni government forces remains difficult, as the Director of National Intelligence recently noted¹⁶ and as violations of the ceasefire have so far demonstrated.¹⁷ Nor is this the only of Yemen’s conflicts; the country is also experiencing a renewed north-south split which may jeopardize its unity, which dates back only to 1990.¹⁸

The best course of action for the United States and its partners is to boost our support for UN efforts at mediation between the Houthis and pro-government forces.¹⁹ Even if these falter, the United States should discourage its partners from pressing an attack on the port city of Hodeida, which could have significant humanitarian consequences. Instead, the United States should encourage its partners to remain focused on negotiations and improving humanitarian access, in part by addressing the problems identified in the most recent report of the UN Panel of Experts.²⁰ The coalition’s military aims going forward should be modest and focused on direct threats, including countering Iranian proliferation to Yemen, deterring Houthi missile and rocket attacks on neighboring countries and international shipping lanes, protecting areas liberated from Houthi control, and continuing to degrade al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State.

¹⁶ Daniel Coats, “Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Committee,” Testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 2019, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/2019-ATA-SFR--SSCI.pdf>

¹⁷ Michael Knights, “Protecting Yemen’s Peace Process from Houthi Ceasefire Violations,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch No. 3065, January 8, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/protecting-yemens-peace-process-from-houthi-ceasefire-violations>

¹⁸ For a fuller discussion, see Ariel Ahram, “The Stockholm Agreement and Yemen’s Other Wars,” Lawfare Blog, February 3, 2019, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/stockholm-agreement-and-yemens-other-wars>

¹⁹ For several recommendations on how to do this, see Dana Stroul, “How to Build on the New Yemen Agreement,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 13, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-to-build-on-the-new-yemen-agreement>

²⁰ The report is not yet publicly available. For a summary, see Elana DeLozier, “In Damning Report, UN Panel Details War Economy in Yemen,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PolicyWatch No. 3069, January 25, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/in-damning-report-un-panel-details-war-economy-in-yemen>

While continued offensive military assistance to our allies should be contingent on a shared strategy, we should resist the temptation to walk away from our partners while U.S. interests remain at stake.

Improve Coordination Among Partners

While discussion of an “Arab NATO” remains ambitious, the Trump administration is nevertheless right to press our Gulf partners for more and better multilateral coordination, which is embodied in the Middle East Strategic Alliance, or MESA, initiative. One model for such multilateral engagement is the Bush administration-era Gulf Security Dialogue, or GSD.²¹ The GSD was organized around six pillars: defense capabilities and interoperability, regional security issues and conflicts, counter-proliferation, counter-terrorism and internal security, critical infrastructure protection, and Iraq.

A retooled GSD might have a different membership—states such as Egypt and Jordan could be included, as they are in the MESA concept. In addition, the pillars might be expanded to include regional economic integration, which is not strictly a security matter but is no less important to regional stability and prosperity. Such a construct could offer a structured framework for the United States and others to engage likeminded states on long-term security issues, and provide a mechanism for more veteran regional leaders to influence those who are less experienced, and encourage strategic planning by partners whose own domestic national security apparatuses do not necessarily lend themselves to it.

More multilateralism of this sort is not likely to solve the rift within the GCC, which is deep and longstanding, and has defied efforts at Kuwaiti mediation. The United States should continue to support Kuwaiti efforts and add our own pressure on the parties to resolve a dispute that risks benefiting U.S. adversaries. In the meantime, the United States should continue to press Qatar to improve its performance on matters such as countering terrorist finance and other longstanding U.S. concerns.

Press for Domestic Reform

U.S. officials should elevate the human rights issue in bilateral and regional agendas and ensure that American messages on these issues enjoy clear, high-level diplomatic support. Making clear to partners that these issues will always be a topic of conversation when high-ranking U.S. officials visit, and that visiting officials’ itineraries will include meetings with civil society representatives, can help rein in abuses and create space for civil society in the region, which is vital to our partners’ prosperity and stability. When violations occur, the United States should be prepared to impose targeted costs, such as the sanctioning of seventeen Saudi officials following the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi. These steps, in turn, can contribute to sustaining domestic U.S. support for these relationships. The U.S. should be prepared to take a patient, case-by-case approach, fo-

²¹ For background on the GSD, see “The Gulf Security Dialogue and Related Arms Sales Proposals,” Congressional Research Service, October 8, 2008, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RL34322.pdf>

causing less on headline gains such as elections and more on the incremental work of building and strengthening the institutions that are vital to resilient states.²²

As noted above, the United States should not focus merely or even primarily on political reform, but should also stress economic reform, which arguably is just as important for regional stability and individual dignity—and regarding which our partners are generally more open to U.S. advice. Ideally, this should take the form of supporting plans devised by our partners themselves, such as Saudi Arabia’s “Vision 2030” plan, or recommendations formulated by the IMF and World Bank.

Reinvigorate Regional Diplomacy

At the moment, the United States has multiple regional ambassadorships vacant, and has no confirmed Assistant Secretary of State or Defense for the Middle East region. As for our partners, they increasingly choose to deal with the United States through a small number of interlocutors, regardless of the issue. This dynamic presents significant risks, because such a small circle of people—who are also engaged on other foreign and domestic policy matters—can necessarily only devote so much attention to our regional partnerships. In Saudi Arabia, for example, it would be both to the U.S. and Saudi advantage to broaden our points of contact on security issues, particularly at the working level. The first step to encouraging delegation by our partners, however, is to practice it ourselves, by confirming and empowering a U.S. ambassador who can develop a broad set of relationships in Riyadh. If done in a spirit of friendship, our partners should see this not as a threat but as a step to strengthen our bilateral relationships.

Having personnel in place, however, is insufficient. In addition, the United States should ensure that we have a robust strategic planning process for devising our own regional policies, and should include as part of that process consists of consulting with partners. The United States is viewed as increasingly unpredictable, and our commitment to the region is increasingly called into question. Our partners should not be given a veto over our policy choices, but their views should be taken into consideration, and they should be given whatever advance warning they need to prepare for the consequences of our decisions.

Counter Spoilers

As noted above, where Iran and non-state actors such as the Islamic State have expanded their footprint, they have generally been taking advantage of preexisting conflicts rather than initiating them. While resolving these conflicts—especially in Syria and Yemen—can reduce these actors’ room for maneuver, doing so is inordinately difficult. For this reason, the United States and our partners should also focus on denying them new opportunities to exploit by using diplomacy and deterrence to prevent conflict, pressing partner governments to embrace marginalized minorities, and address grievances and ideologies that can fuel extremism and conflict.

²² This passage drawn from Michael Singh, “The United States, Saudi Arabia, and the Middle East in the Post-Khashoggi Era,” *War on the Rocks*, December 10, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/12/the-united-states-saudi-arabia-and-the-middle-east-in-the-post-khashoggi-era/>

Such steps, however, will only accomplish so much in the face of actors who are determined, well-organized, and well-resourced. For this reason, the United States should continue to play a lead role in organizing regional and international partners to share intelligence on and counter the terrorism, proliferation, and associated financial threats posed by Iran and non-state actors. This is a role that we must continue to play ourselves, in part because our partners lack the international diplomatic and economic influence to do so, because these actors' activities are often global in scope, and because we possess the ability to respond to threats, such as Iran's maritime threat in the Gulf, which our partners do not. In order to do this effectively, the United States should retain a forward-deployed posture in the region; due to the increasing involvement of other external powers and the proliferation of antiaccess/area-denial (A2AD) capabilities, we cannot otherwise be assured of the ability to quickly respond to threats to our interests in the region or surrounding regions.

To be most effective, U.S. efforts must be seen by partners in and outside the region as rooted in evidence, and proportionate to the threat. In the specific case of Iran, this implies a need to reach a modus vivendi with European and Asian allies regarding the JCPOA—even if the United States continues to remain outside the agreement while those allies continue to abide by it—in order to refocus multilateral discussions on shared threats that are a matter of broader agreement, such as Iran's support for terrorism and non-state proxies, its cyber activities, and the advances in its ballistic missile and other advanced weapons programs.²³

²³ For a fuller treatment of this issue, see Michael Singh, "How Trump Can Get a Better Deal on Iran," *Foreign Policy*, October 10, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/10/how-trump-can-get-a-better-deal-on-iran-sanctions-european-union-pompeo-trump-missile-program/>