

“Security amidst Dissolution”
The Challenges of Assuring the Continuity of Security Arrangements
in the Middle East amidst the Reality of the Dissolution of the Regional
Order and the Fragmentation Process it is Witnessing

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First if all I would like to thank President Amin Gemayel and the other organizers for the invitation and all efforts making this event possible.

Much of West Asia today is in a state of chaos and conflict. Large parts of Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan are devastated. The on-going wars in Yemen, Libya and Syria have taken huge humanitarian tolls. Political solutions to the current crises are still uncertain, even though there is no military solution for any conflict. Many terrorist groups are still active throughout the region and pose a major threat to all regional and global powers. Instability in the Middle East continues to decisively impact international peace and security.

The region is in the midst of two interconnected conflicts: one between regional powers, and the other between global powers. The chief outside players are the United States and Russia. Moscow’s intervention in Syria together with Iranian support has changed the balance of power in the conflict. Meanwhile, disputes between regional powers have reached an unprecedented level of hostility, as seen in Saudi, Emirati, and Israeli rhetoric, actions, and alliances against Iran.

The roots of instability and conflict in the Middle East today go back decades. There have been three major sources contributing to regional instability.

The first is the full and unconditional support the United States and other world powers have provided corrupt dictators such as the Shah of Iran or Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, and numerous other dictators in the Arab and Muslim world. These dictators have presided over conditions of poverty, unemployment, bad governance, and political suffocation—which all contribute to extremism and terrorism.

The second root cause is because Washington has given carte blanc support to Israel as it has conquered, occupied, and annexed Arab land in violation of international law.

The third cause of regional instability are the wars that have engulfed the region.

In this regard, the first mistake of the United States, its Arab allies and other major global powers was supporting Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein during the Iraq's invasion of Iran—including the use of chemical weapons that killed tens of thousands of Iranians. Their support of attacking Iran backfired with Saddam's invasion of Kuwait.

The second major mistake of the United States and its allies were the post-September 11th invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which unleashed chaos and violence in large parts of the region. The US invasion of Iraq led to the rise of ISIS and other brutal terrorist groups that the United Nations has said are top threats to global security. In Afghanistan, after 17 years of US occupation, the Taliban remain in control of vast parts of the country.

The third major mistake of the US and its allies was their military attack on Libya. The NATO regime change military operation in Libya has resulted in a failed state in the Arab and Muslim world.

The fourth bad mistake as Former Qatar Prime Minister al-Thani said was about Syria. He said that the US and its regional allies made “mistakes” in supporting extremist groups in Syria.” Former U.S. Vice President Joe Biden also publicly stated that US regional allies were a “problem” in Syria and supported terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda.

In Syria, the CIA for years led efforts by US regional allies to topple the Syrian government. This operation led to the deaths of over 100,000 Syrian troops according to the Washington Post’s David Ignatius.

The Syrian Civil War also marked a new phenomenon in the Middle East’s modern history. Previously, governments in the region had been changed in three ways:

1. popular revolution such as in Iran in 1979 or Egypt in 2011;
2. foreign instigated coup d'etats such as the UK/US coup against Mossadegh in Iran in 1953; and
3. regime change through direct foreign military intervention—such as in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya.

However, in Syria there was a new phenomenon of over 100,000 foreign terrorists from all over the world were organized and exported to the country to bring regime change.

The fifth disastrous mistake is the Saudi-UAE-US war on Yemen. The Saudi war on Yemen has been described by the United Nations as the world’s “worst

humanitarian crisis,” with tens of thousands killed or wounded, millions displaced, and outbreaks of famine and cholera.

In such a devastated region, amongst regional powers, Iran and Turkey are two key players which can play major role on crisis management in the region. Their relations suffered from 2011 on Syrian crisis since Turkey was after regime change by supporting extremist and terrorist groups and Iran supported the central state.

Nevertheless, Turkey has also evolved in recent years from being a loyal U.S. ally in NATO to a more independent regional power. This has recently been the case in Syria, where Turkey has joined Russia and Iran in the “Astana process” peace talks, which have made practical progress in negotiating ceasefires and negotiations between rebel forces and the Syrian government.

The Astana process is separate from the U.S.-back Geneva process talks, which have failed to affect any real change in Syria. The primary reason for the failure of the Geneva process and the success of the Astana process is the Astana process’s serious approach to confronting terrorism. Meanwhile, the US led coalition countries spoke of ending the war in Syria but at the same time continued to support Syrian terrorist groups.

Since it entered the Astana talks, Turkey has taken major steps to stop the movement of arms, people, and money that crossed its borders in support of terrorist groups in Syria.

About Turkish-Iranian relations, it is important to note that in the past four hundred years, since Safavid-Ottoman era, Iran and Turkey have not gone to war and there has been peace and cooperation between them.

The reality is that there cannot be peace in the region unless there is cooperation between all the major regional and global powers. Their relations simply cannot be zero-sum. No side benefits from opposing mutually-beneficial cooperation. And there cannot be peace if major regional or global powers oppose it.

The major regional divides today include divisions between Arab and non-Arab states. Turkey and Iran are the two major non-Arab states. They each have their own set of problems and security concerns in the Arab world, as well as with the West. Turkey has opposed the crack down on groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood by many Arab countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Emirates. Iran feels threatened by export of Wahhabism, an ideology that explicitly views Shia Muslims as heretics and which many terrorist groups follow.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has of course publicly stated that Turkey and Iran are together part of a “triangle of evil,” along with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Turkey and Iran can establish a stabilizing regional equilibrium on balancing the role of global powers in the region in favor of global peace and security.

Another major regional divide is between Arabs themselves. During the last three decades, at least four Arab countries, Kuwait, Libya, Yemen, Syria have been attacked by other Arab states. Even Qatar, as member of GCC, is now sanctioned and threatened by Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain.

Overall, the central issue in the Middle East today is a lack of regional cooperation coupled with foreign intervention. Durable regional peace requires institutionalized

cooperation and dialogue between all the major regional powers—Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq and Iran—as well as the permanent members of UN Security Council.

Three major diplomatic innovations are necessary to alleviate regional crises and foster long-lasting regional cooperation, peace and stability. They all entail institutionalized regional security and cooperation systems between regional powers.

The first is about Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), an organization founded by Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan in 1985. ECO should be expanded to deepened political, security and military cooperation in addition to economic relations. The ECO today includes 10 countries with about 470 million inhabitants in Eurasia. This union can be strengthened and modelled after the EU.

With deeper political-economic-security ties between, its members states would be a formidable bloc that could provide security for its member states, stabilize the region, and project influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

The second would be establishing a regional cooperation & security system in Persian Gulf. The feuds between the Persian Gulf countries, whether Arab-Arab disputes such as between Saudi Arabia and Qatar or Iraq and some of the GCC states, or the tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, can be addressed through a regional security & cooperation system which would include economic, political, regional, security and military cooperation.

These states have two options, cooperation or continuing the status quo of confrontation. If they choose continued confrontation, regional instability will

increase, terrorist groups will be empowered, sectarianism will increase, and there will be a real risk of a disastrous war that will not only engulf regional powers, but possibly global powers—especially the United States and Russia.

The other option is for the Persian Gulf states to pursue avenues of cooperation. To do this—the foreign ministers of six GCC states, Iran, and Iraq—must at first openly and without preconditions enter direct dialogue and put all of their security concerns on the table.

The third would be a forum for Arab & Non-Arab dialogue. Other regional powers, such as Egypt, should play a role. To reduce the threat of sectarianism, Sunni-Shia dialogue forums should be set up that see the participation of Sunni scholars from al-Azhar in Cairo and religious leaders from Saudi Arabia and other Sunni countries, as well as Shia clerics from the Qom and Najaf seminaries.

Any sustainable partnership between regional powers must be based on the principles of respect for sovereignty, non-use of force, respect for borders and territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes and noninterference in the internal affairs of other countries.

A gradual process must begin with representatives from these states—ranging from diplomats to technocrats, civil society leaders, artists, and academics—to meet regularly. Over time, high-level negotiations that allow the countries to understand each other's security grievances can lead to a formal institutionalized cooperative relationship—similar to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other similar systems elsewhere in the world.