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Shaping Effective Strategic Partnerships in the MENA Region

By Anthony H. Cordesman

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Please provide comments to acordesman@gmail.com

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**Anthony H. Cordesman,
Burke Chair in Strategy, CSIS**

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We are here today to find practical ways in which we can strengthen our strategic partnerships. Let me stress that word: *practical*. I have attended far too many meetings over the years that tried to set impossible goals for regional cooperation, that ignored the real world limits to strategic partnerships, that did not address the different needs of different nations, and that failed to develop practical options for action.

Defining the MENA Region and Shaping Strategic Partnerships

We need to recognize that there are many different definitions of the Middle East and North Africa – or MENA region. Even a narrow definition of the region indicates, however, that its core consists of at least 18 nations. The United States Census Bureau estimates that this core region will have some 424 million people in mid-2019 – and this is a population divided by nation, language, sect, ethnicity, and tribe. It also covers a vast area. The MENA region is over 6,000 kilometers from Casablanca in Morocco to Mashad in Iran, and over 3,000 kilometers from Aleppo in Northern Syria to Aden in Southern Yemen.

Each nation has its own history, character, and national security needs. The fact that all generally refer to themselves as "Arab" does not mean that most do not have serious internal tensions, and that there are no divisions between them and their neighbors that impose serious limits on strategic partnerships between particular countries.

The USCENTCOM web page does an excellent job of laying out the resulting challenges this mixture of diversity and distance pose in creating strategic partnerships:

- *The region is among the least secure and stable places of the world.* Adversarial relationships among neighboring states, widespread ethnic and sectarian struggles, malign influence and destabilizing activities, cyber-based threats, and growing arsenals of sophisticated conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction all combine to imperil enduring U.S. vital national interests, as well as those of our trusted partners and allies.
- *Multiple ethnic groups, speaking different languages with hundreds of dialects and confessing multiple religions which transect national borders.* Demographics that create opportunities for tension and rivalry.
- *Geography consists of the intersection of three continents and globally vital commercial sea lanes, flight corridors, pipelines and overland routes.* Nations which stretch from North Africa across the Middle East have forms of governance ranging across the political spectrum, including emerging democracies, hereditary monarchies, autocracies, and Islamist theocratic regimes.

Our task at this conference is not to develop plans for partnerships that ignore these realities. It is rather to find – *and begin to implement* – the best set of practical strategic partnerships within the region that we can. To do so, we must recognize both what we have in common and our

differences. We will need to communicate frankly and honestly, and to respect each other's different perspectives and national sovereignty.

Focusing on What Can Really Be Done

We have already seen too many past efforts that declare over-ambitious goals. The most recent example is the Riyadh Declaration of May 2017. This Declaration calls for a Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA), and it sets goals that go well beyond those set for NATO by seeking to link improved military security to improved political and economic security.

The Declaration calls for an MESA alliance that would help build “peace and security in the region and the world.” It seeks to include every GCC state—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—and Egypt, Jordan, and the United States. And, it sets five major goals:

- *Create a close partnership between the leaders of Arab and Islamic countries and the US leader to confront extremism, terrorism, achieving peace, stability and development, on regional as well as international stages*
- *Promote coexistence and constructive tolerance between different countries, religions and cultures*
- *Confront the sectarian agendas and interference in other countries affairs*
- *Countering piracy and protecting navigation*
- *Create follow-up mechanisms*

These are broad goals that every state attending this conference does share to some degree. At the same time, these goals are so broad that they fail to acknowledge that each nation has its own needs, perspectives, and resources. They do not focus on the impact of the political upheavals that have occurred since 2011, the need to deal with the aftermath of the defeat of the ISIS caliphate, and the impact of the civil conflicts in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

They do not focus on problems like the flow of refugees outside of Syria, the challenges Egypt faces in Gaza, migration across North Africa, or the tensions between Morocco and Algeria. They talk about a "close partnership between the leaders of Arab and Islamic countries," but they do not address the problems and issues that exist within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), or between *and within* Islamic nations outside the MENA region.

They do not set tangible *military* goals or priorities for cooperation and partnership. They do not address the radical differences in the military forces of the states within the MENA region or between them and the forces of the United States. They do not set any goals for force development. They do not explicitly address the need to fight extremism and terrorism.

They also do not address the new hybrid political and military warfare threats posed by nations like Iran, and by non-state actors and popular militias. Moreover, they do not highlight goals and priorities for dealing with the ongoing major changes in the character of modern military forces, and the ways in which they can be used for political and asymmetric warfare.

These are the national security challenges that every nation here has to address both today and indefinitely into the future. They are all challenges that already require each nation to adapt both its national military and security structures, its intelligence structures and operational mission needs, and its goals for strategic partnerships.

Making Alliances and Strategic Partnerships Real

If we are to addressing these real world challenges, we need to recognize that the rhetoric of regional security cooperation has always been easier to create than the reality. Historically, the more ambitious the goal has been in creating alliances, the wider the gaps have been between that rhetoric and the reality – particularly when there has not been a clear unifying threat or warfighting need that binds potential allies together.

This has been true of far too many past efforts in the MENA region – almost regardless of whether they were attempts at binding Arab states together, or broader partnerships that involved outside powers as well. The Baghdad Pact is an early example of such "over reach," but so are a long series of efforts to unite the Arab world by the Arab League and to unite the various members of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

We must honestly address the fact that the divisions between countries in the MENA region have grown in recent years. Its divisions have been reinforced by the upheavals that began in 2011, and the major civil conflicts in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen that have followed. So have the other tensions that have divided both individual states and the Arab World. For example, the deep fault lines in the Gulf Coordination Council (GCC) became all too clear when the boycott of Qatar began in June 2017 – less than a month after the Riyadh Declaration.

Focusing on the Core Needs that Create Effective Alliances and Partnerships

Historically, strategic partnerships work best when there is a common perception of a common threat – and/or when the threat or reality of having to meet an actual threat or conflict unites a diverse group of nations. Alliances and strategic partnerships work when they show they can actually make a real difference in enhancing internal and regional security, in preventing or limiting crises, deterring or limiting war, and in winning or terminating actual conflicts.

NATO is often cited as the leading example of such a strategic partnership, and it remains a major success in adapting to both the breakup of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, and in reacting to the rise of new Russian challenges. NATO too, however, has always had its limits, and they are ones that provide important lessons for shaping functional strategic partnership in the MENA region.

As someone who spent four years in the NATO International Staff during the most challenging years of the Cold War – and who lived with the gaps between what NATO Ministers said and NATO military planners could actually accomplish – I find the nostalgia that some now show for NATO's past to be curiously decoupled from the reality that actually existed.

NATO had its greatest successes when the alliance had the strongest level of common interests, and 16 nations faced an overtly hostile Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact between 1949 and 1990. Even then, however, NATO made limited progress in developing common tactics and interoperability, and faced major problems in standardization and force planning.

NATO only achieved limited success in trying to create an integrated air defense ground environment, and setting common priorities for nuclear and conventional forces. Somewhat ironically from intelligence viewpoint, an alliance formed in 1949 only made its first real attempt to directly compare NATO and Warsaw Pact forces in the mid-1960s. It did not attempt to comparatively model NATO and Warsaw Pact computer wargames until the late 1960s.

Building on Proven Arab and U.S. Experience

Here, the successes that the U.S. and its Arab partners have had in actual combat provide both an interesting comparison with NATO – and a reassuring indication that strategic partnerships can work even when they face similar limitations and divisions.

The strategic partnership that liberated Kuwait – and won the first Gulf War – is an example of a functional alliance that achieved major gains in actual warfare. Kuwait was liberated under joint Arab and American leadership – and where the United States and a wide range of Arab states fought together as partners. At the same time, it is important to note that this alliance succeeded even though some elements of the Arab world had divided taking sides in both the Iran-Iraq War, and in reacting to Saddam's invasion of Kuwait.

It is equally important to note, that much of the unity that existed in 1990-1991 weakened over time because of the divisions within the Arab world. Moreover, the United States went on to make serious mistakes like ignoring the warnings it received from many of its Arab partners about the problems it would face in the aftermath of its invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Yet, the fight against Daesh – and its attempt to form a state or – has again shown that Arab and U.S. strategic partnerships can work. No one achieved some ideal form of unity in this fight, but a wide range of security partners played a constructive role in ending Daesh's false claims to have established a "caliphate."

The broader common threat posed by extremism and terrorism throughout the entire MENA region has done much to unite us, even though we still have different national approaches to internal security, the rule of law, and the definition of terrorist. There is still much to be done, but we have come a long way since the early 2000s. It is also clear that there is still much we can do together that serves each of our individual national interests.

Moreover, ever since 1980, the U.S. and a number of its European partners have cooperated with a range of Arab partners in building up forces and conducting exercises that act as a major deterrent to Iran, and done so even though some countries had tense or fractured relations with each other. The U.S. could only fight its "tanker war" against Iran in 1987-1988 because of the support from its Arab Gulf security partners. It has since worked closely with Arab states, and relied on naval and air bases in the Arab Gulf, to deter potential threats from Iran, as well as to fight extremist and terrorist movements.

Looking at CENTCOM goals

So, how should we proceed to build on our successes and avoid past failures? Here, it is worth noting that the USCENTCOM command narrative sets priorities for strategic partnerships that do not disagree with those in the Riyadh Declaration, but are better defined and more realistic in military and security terms.

Moreover, they are priorities that not only suit the new National Security Strategy the U.S. issued in early 2018, but that every Arab security partner here can broadly agree with. They set clear goals for improving our military and intelligence efforts:

We envision a more stable and prosperous region with increasingly effective governance, improved security, and trans-regional cooperation to counter state and non-state actors posing a threat to U.S. interests. To this end - our USCENTCOM mission is to direct and enable military operations and activities with allies and partners to increase regional security and stability in support of enduring U.S. interests.

...Our strategic approach is focused on protecting our national interests and those of our partners. It is designed to reflect our values, align our behaviors, and support the National Military Strategy. It is proactive in nature and endeavors to set in motion tangible actions in a purposeful, consistent and continuous manner. Each aspect of our approach - Prepare - Pursue - Prevail - enables the next and collectively contributes to the successful achievement of our goals, objectives and our overall mission.

- Prepare the Environment: *Readiness in Advance of Crisis*
- Pursue Opportunities: *Seize the Initiative*
- Prevail in Conflict: *Win the Current Fight and Plan to Win the Next One*
- *Ensure an Effective Posture*
- Strengthen Allies and Partnerships

...A coalition approach - at home and abroad - expands our ability to operate on multiple fronts. Strong relationships based upon shared values serve to create greater cohesion and enhance the effectiveness of available resources and capabilities. Integration with partners, within the region and beyond, enhances the benefit of our presence, mitigates resource constraints, and expands the reach of the force. By building the capacity of regional partner nations, we enable them to assume a larger share of the responsibility for securing their sovereign spaces.

- Deter and Counter State Aggressors
- Disrupt and Counter Violent Extremist Organizations and their Networks.

Setting Four Tangible and Achievable Goals for Strategic Partnerships

If one focuses on these more modest steps, on the resulting military and national security priorities, and on the ways in which the U.S. can strengthen strategic partnerships that meet national needs as well as MENA-wide needs, there are four key areas where further progress is possible and necessary. They include

- *Creating an effective and ongoing Partnership dialogue.*
- *Finding better ways to meeting the extremist and terrorist threat.*
- *Dealing with Changing Military Threats, and*
- *Cooperating in dealing with Changing Military Requirements*

Goal One: Creating an Effective and Ongoing Partnership Dialogue.

First, dialogue is the key to forging and maintaining effective security partnerships. One critical step in our improving our strategic partnerships – *and one that we can begin to take at this meeting* – is for our Arab strategic partners to be as frank as possible in stating their needs, and pointing out the gaps in our efforts and our mistakes. It is also to recognize that every partner should be listened to and deserves the same degree of respect.

The U.S. may be a superpower, but this scarcely frees it of the need to listen to its strategic partners and listen to them as equals who know their own region better than we can. More than a century ago, Lawrence of Arabia made this point in the very different context of World War I and the collapse of the Turkish empire. He told his British colleagues: "Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is."

It is more than a century since Lawrence wrote these words in a somewhat patronizing form. The Colonial era has vanished in the winds of time. America's Arab strategic partners consist of mature

and sovereign states. Each Arab nation now brings its own experts and ideas to the effort to forge better strategic partnerships. Moreover, each Arab Nation has officers and experts who know their own nation and region better than Americans can ever do.

We in the U.S. have shown that we can bring help in critical areas of expertise, training, and technology, and can use our deployed and rapid deployment forces to make our own major military contributions to our collective security. There are very real advantages to being bigger, to having more money, and having fought more wars.

At the same time, recent history has made it all too clear that we in the U.S. have needed to listen to you in the MENA region ever since we reemerged as a world power in World War II. We did listen in fighting the First Gulf War, and it is now clear that we should have listened far more closely in 2003 and in dealing with the turmoil that began in 2011. It is equally clear that we need to listen when you tell us that the need for partnership and U.S. support will continue long after the break-up of the Daesh pseudo-state in Iraq and Syria.

We need to hear frank criticism and advice, and we need your help and guidance if we are to adapt to meet your individual national as well as to regional needs. In some cases, it will be as important for other Arab countries to listen to you as it will be for Americans. *But, in every case, we need to hear your views, your criticisms, and your suggestions.*

Goal Two: Finding Better Ways to Meet the Extremist and Terrorist Threat

Second, there is still a need for partnership in every aspect of deterrence and defense. We do face changing potential conventional threats from both regional states and outside powers, and the need to deter and defend against them. *But*, the most immediate threats we face consist of extremist and terrorist threats from both within and outside the MENA region, military and paramilitary threats from armed groups and non-state actors – many of which have outside support from hostile states or other non-state actors.

We all need to face the reality the extremism, terrorism, civil conflict, and insurgency will be enduring threats. Dealing with these threats is not simply a matter of defeating existing extremist groups like Daesh and Al Qaida, or dealing with today's non-state actors and militias. These threats are shaped by all of the major causes of civil instability that can lead to the rise of violent groups that threaten effective civil governance, the normal rule of law, and permit the limited use of internal security forces. It means having to react to the creation of new forms of such threats for at least another decade and probably two.

Military and internal security forces can only be part of the solution. Each MENA country must find its own political and civil solutions to its own internal divisions and civil challenges. Each must do so in a region where the UN Arab Development Reports, the IMF, and World Bank all warn that economic development will be a major challenge.

As was touched upon earlier, the *total population of the MENA Region already is five times larger than it was in 1950*, and will be seven times larger by 2050. Every nation faces a critical challenge in terms of creating jobs and careers for a native population where well over 30% to 40% of this population is under the age of 24 years of age. It is a region where UN and Arab development reports indicate that youth unemployment is some 50% higher than in other regions of the world, and already is often at the crisis level.

It is a region which not only faces major factional divisions by sect and ethnicity, but where World Bank, UN, IMF and other studies show there are major problems in governance and sometimes in

corruption. It is a region with many traditional values, but one that has moved – or is moving – from dispersed rural societies in the 1950s to highly concentrated levels of hyperurbanization. It is a region which the most recent Arab Development Report – as well as ongoing work by the UN, IMF, and World Bank – shows will face by far the greatest challenges in meeting the needs and expectations of its youth over at least the next quarter century.

Military and security forces cannot deal with the underlying secular causes of extremism and terrorism any more than they can deal with the religious and ideological ones. *But*, military forces can and must be able to protect civil society from organized violence, the rise of violent and insurgent groups like ISIS, and outside supplies of arms, "advisors," and "volunteers."

This means that our security partnerships must continue to look beyond conventional military threats. They must find better ways to create the best intelligence to prevent or cope with the rise of new extremist and violent groups, and their constant adoption of new forms of attack – methods of attack that can range from new uses of the Internet and efforts to manipulate the media to the use of biological and chemical weapons.

We must constantly adapt our partnerships, and learn from each other. We must find new ways to support internal security and police forces, to create more effective counterterrorism and counterinsurgency forces. In the process, we must find steadily better ways to ensure that military forces can target threats that ruthlessly use human shields, and the attack or sacrifice the innocent. But, we must also do so in ways that pose a minimum level of risk, damage, or constraint upon to the populations that it is our mission to protect.

We have already made major progress in many these areas, but the challenges of 2001, the uprisings that began in 2011, and break-up of Daesh attempt to create of a state – and a false "caliphate" – are all too likely to be warnings of what is still to come. There are no reliable or broadly accepted statistics on the levels and of terrorism, but the START data base that the U.S. state Department uses in its annual Country of Reports on Terrorism is widely accepted as a key source.

The START data base helps put both the role of terrorism in the MENA region, and the impact of Daesh in perspective. If one ignores state terrorism – like that of Iran and the Assad regime in Syria – and the violence cause by direct combat in counterinsurgency fights – the START database estimates that there were 68,391 terrorist incidents in the entire world between 2013 and 2017 – the peak years of Daesh influence and activity. It lists 27,430 acts on the MENA region, or 40.1% of the total. This is a high percentage but also a warning that the extremist and terrorist threat is global, and is not confined to any culture, religion, or region.

Even when Daesh was at its strongest, it was only directly responsible for 5,624 incidents. This was only 20.5% of the total in the entire MENA region, and 8.2% of the incidents in the world. It shows that Daesh was an all too important threat. *But*, it also shows that even if breaking up the Daesh attempt at creating a state did not leave major affiliate groups and disperse groups of fighters, it scarcely meant the broad defeat of extremism and terrorism.

Moreover, no defeat of part of Daesh addresses any of the causes of extremism and terrorism. Even if one ignores the ideological and religious challenges involved, the urgency of the need to create effective civil-military stability efforts is all too clear from what has happened in Algeria, Libya, Egypt and the Sinai, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, and Yemen. So is the fact that virtually every region-wide statistic on the potential *civil* causes of extremism and terrorism in the entire region

has grown worse since the first Arab Development Report in 2002, and far worse since the political upheavals that began in 2011.

Experts in the IMF, World Bank, and a variety of think tanks have already warned that it may well take a decade for Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen to both recover from their fighting and the loss of years of potential economic growth. These are cases where the destructive conflicts that have risen out of what has become an "Arab winter" must not be repeated in the future.

Finding the best possible form of intelligence warning about the rise of new threats – and changes in the ways they attack and operate – are keys to achieving this goal. Doing so as early as possible, and countering them before they gather momentum and grow in size will be critical

Finding and sharing ways to react quickly and decisively in dealing with emerging and adapting threats – *and doing so with minimum impact on innocent civilians and civil governance* – will be equally critical. Military intelligence – and intelligence cooperation – must constantly evolve into *civil-military* intelligence in ways that counter what is certain to be a continuing and adaptive mix of threats.

Cooperation in Dealing with Changing Military Threats

Third, no one at this conference can afford to ignore the major changes taking place in every aspect of military operations. These emerging changes in the more conventional forms of military threat differ sharply across the MENA region. They are clearest in the Gulf region where the threat of extremism and terrorism is matched by a major arms race with Iran.

This Iranian threat has four major elements, each of which can affect a wide range of different levels of hybrid political warfare and each of which can lead to many possible levels of actual combat:

- The uncertainties surrounding Iran's nuclear weapons programs, chemical warfare programs, and potential biological warfare programs.
- The ongoing changes in Iran's major ballistic and cruise missile programs – and intelligence and targeting assets like UAVs – that will give it a major precision strike capability using conventional high explosive warheads. These changes can replace weapons of mass destruction with strikes on key military and civil targets in ways that make them weapons of mass effectiveness. They are coupled to Iran's acquisition of the Russian S-300 missile system – its first major modern land-based air defense system since the fall of the Shah – and a serious potential shift in the regional air balance.
- The steady expansion of an asymmetric mix of naval-missile-air forces that can challenge or attack petroleum exports, shipping traffic, and naval forces throughout the Gulf, in and outside the Strait of Hormuz, and increasingly in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea. They include steadily more advanced anti-ship missiles, submarines, submersibles, missile attack craft, "suicide" boats, and smart mines
- Iran's success in exploiting the divisions, fracture lines, and self-inflicted political wounds in the Arab world through the support, arming, and training of forces like the Hezbollah, Houthi, pro-Assad forces, some of the popular militias in Iraq, and Shi'ite extremist factions in Bahrain.

These evolving Iranian threats are all illustrations of why we need new forms of military cooperation, not divisions within the Arab world or uncertainties in the level of U.S. effort, but they are only part of the story. Elsewhere in the MENA region, nations like Egypt and Jordan face military uncertainties because of the lack of progress in reaching an Israeli-Palestinian peace. Migration across the Sahara, and divisions between Morocco and Algeria still affect the stability of North Africa. The war in Yemen presents serious challenges. And, the flow of millions of refugees from the fighting in Syria affects civil stability.

There is no clear way to predict how tensions may escalate into actual combat, but ways in which CENTCOM now defines the military goals and objectives of U.S. and Arab strategic partnerships – the need for the intelligence activities necessary to support them – will need to expand and adapt in the following ways:

The current USCENTCOM goals, which remain valid, include the following four steps:

- Prepare the Environment: *Readiness in Advance of Crisis*
- Deter and Counter State Aggressors
- Prevail in Conflict:
- Disrupt and Counter Violent Extremist Organizations and their Networks

The new goals that need to be added include:

- *Cooperate with – and assist – strategic partners and other members of the CENTCOM coalition*
- *Conduct advanced and more flexible forms of joint and coalition warfare.*
- *Deter or win all levels and types of conventional and hybrid warfare and politico-military asymmetric challenges from hostile states and non-state actors.*
- *Counter outside financial, political, arms transfers, and military assistance support of hostile regional states and non-state actors*
- *Manage and dominate the process of escalation and conflict termination.*
- *Protect the population, minimize civil casualties and collateral damage, and carry out civil-military operations.*
- *Provide ongoing and emergency support to maintain civil stability, and aid to civil governance, law enforcement, and paramilitary forces.*
- *Adapting to new forms of technological warfare like cyber warfare, advances in electronic warfare, and new forms of civil and military vulnerability to precision strikes.*
- *Provide emergency support and aid for civil crises, disasters.*
- *Meeting the challenge of ideological, sectarian, and ethnic polarization, violence and warfare, and the use of new tools like the Internet, social networking, and efforts to manipulate public opinion and the media.*
- *Successfully anticipate – and react to – technological, tactical, and hybrid warfare changes*

Cooperation in Dealing with Changing Military Requirements

Fourth, all of the preceding steps must deal with the fact that the tactical and technological nature of warfare – and every related area of military intelligence – is changing on a global and local level. Moreover, some of these changes avoid combat in the conventional sense. Some allow states and non-state actors to conduct hybrid warfare at a political level and achieving major strategic results without firing a shot.

Virtually every military expert and planner would describe these changes differently, or have a different list – but even a brief list of a few key changes makes the point that our strategic partnerships must attempt to anticipate, and then both exploit and counter such changes:

- *Increased use of air mobility*
- *Precision/Deep strike – integrated air-missile forces*
- *Artificial intelligence*

- *Cyber operations-warfare; Electronics warfare*
- *Advances in ballistic and cruise missiles and air/missile defense*
- *Counter/poer threat to space-based systems*
- *Ideological/information operations/Internet, and strategic communication warfare*
- *Use, support of, non-state actors, arms transfer, train and assist.*
- *Political, asymmetric, hybrid operations/warfare*
- *Sectarian, ethnic, tribal, "factional" and "fault line" conflict.*
- *Increasing limits on civilian casualties and collateral damage; unilateral restraint versus use of civilians as shields/hostages.*
- *Increased role of civil-military operations.*
- *Support and protection of governance, rule of law, and internal security operations.*
- *Integration and speed of IS&R, C4I, and Battle Management*
- *Redefining "jointness" in terms of time, scale, options, and operations.*

Once again, such changes mean that strategic partnerships and intelligence cooperation cannot simply focus on current military priorities and needs. Partnerships must anticipate the new needs that changes in technology and in the character of war are going to impose in the future, and focus as much on deterring and limiting conflict as winning actual wars. They also must recognize that interoperability is the only practical answer. It would take at least a decade to standardize on major combat systems in virtually all partnerships, and there is no present chance of winning political support for such an effort.

Interoperability, however, is changing. These changes include the need to shift – with little or no advance notice – from secure national battle management, secure communications, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (IS&R) systems to integrated partnership systems for managing missile/air operations, missile and air defense, naval surveillance and operations, targeting and damage assessment, and other forms of complex joint warfare for both deterrence and defense. Warning times, reaction times, system complexity, operational time windows, and economy of force all dictate the need for full real time integration, and for joint operational exercises and testing, before a crisis or combat need arises.

Using Military Resources Wisely and Effectively

Ambitious as the previous lists may appear, the U.S. and many of its Arab strategic partners have already begun such many efforts. The key to success, however, is not simply to find ways to improve our strategic partnerships, but to find ways to use that partnership minimize the cost of military forces, free to resources to support other missions, and/or reduce the burden of military spending.

Here, the United States needs to careful review its policies towards burden sharing, and several Arab partners need to find ways to reduce their present burden. Virtually all of the nations in the MENA region face major problems in financing their civil development, and dealing with the other problems in ensuring national stability.

The International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) reports that most MENA countries spent over 4% of their GDP on military forces in 2018, even if one allows for the under reporting of such expenditures by many states. Algeria spent 5.3%, Iraq spent 7.5%, Jordan spent 3.9%, Kuwait

spent 4.3%, Oman spent 11.0%, and Saudi Arabia spent 10.8%. The UAE did not report a number, but almost certainly spent 9% or more. To put these levels of effort in perspective, the goal for NATO countries is to spend 2% of their GDP by 2024. Moreover, the U.S. defense budget for FY2020 indicates that the US Department of Defense will only spend 3.1% of America's GDP.

These figures show the potential importance of taking every possible step in strengthening U.S. and Arab strategic partnerships that can reduce the burden of military spending. Past history shows that efforts at standardizing equipment buys can be impractical because of national politics, and that trying to standardize readiness and investment rates often fails to meet differing national needs.

On the other hand, experience also shows that strategic partnerships do offer ways of reducing costs and improving military efficiency. Options that already have been tested at a limited level, worked in other strategic partnerships or are in development, include

- *Common/standardized training*
- *Interoperability and common munitions and support.*
- *Centralized or common maintenance, repair, and modernization.*
- *Coordinated force and modernization plans.*
- *Integrated battle management; air, control, and warning; air defense; blue/red force tracking, maritime surveillance facilities*
- *Integrated and centralized intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (IS&R) facilities.*
- *Cooperation in both using and countering strategic communications and information warfare*
- *Standardized secure communications and data formats/transfers.*
- *Specialization and contingency plans to use different levels and types of national weapons mixes and capabilities in complementary ways.*
- *Creation of key rapid deployment contingency facilities and prepositioning.*
- *Integrated biometrics, human factor, facial recognition, and surveillance/intelligence systems.*
- *Common cyber defense and cyberwarfare systems and efforts.*
- *Turnkey systems that are normally securely national but that can integrate on contingency basis.*
- *Advanced/centralized common training and simulation facilities, ranges and exercise grounds.*

Once again, every expert has their own list of such options. These also are efforts where national sensitivities – and differences in threat characterization, security systems, procurement sources, and dependence on local allies – present problems. There often will be causes where some strategic partners find it easier to depend on allies than others.

At the same time, there often are "work arounds" that can overcome such sensitivities and the only way to know what options can really be implemented to examine them in detail. The key point is that far too much military planning focuses on getting "more" at higher cost.

Strategic partnerships can offer "better" at lower cost, and be critical in substituting partnership for more national forces. This is particularly true when partners can cooperate in terms of full operational interoperability by mission, rather than simply at a technological level. Put simply, human interoperability is often more important than equipment interoperability. This can only be achieved, however, by preparing in peacetime, by actually working together, and by conducting

the kind of exercises and training that develop the ability to operate before a crisis or conflict occurs.

Moving Forward

I would hope that by the end of this meeting, we will have heard enough ideas to be able to make some important beginnings – particularly beginnings that reflect your needs and your advice. I also hope, however, that our dialogue will create basis for future meetings, ongoing working groups, create some kind of "blogs" or forums to advance our dialogues. One possible tool would also be to expand the role of our attaches to be centers of such efforts.

I would also stress that with so many different regional needs, we will not limit improvements in partnership to area of formal consensus or attempt some kind of master plan. We need to focus at least as much on improving partnership at a bilateral, subregional, or multilateral level. My own experience in NATO – and in working strategic partnerships over the years – has taught me that some of the most important progress in strategic partnership can be local and informal. To put it simply, it is better to build working friendships – and real relationships at the bilateral, multilateral, and subregional level – than seek unachievably broad goals and impossible levels of consensus. No one more rhetoric about alliances and partnership. We need the reality.

** This is the full written text of the speech and some portions have been updated and expanded to reflect the comments of those attending the meeting. Some PowerPoint slides used during the speech have been incorporated in the text. Others have been modified and expanded in the following figures to suit Word format.*

Other Burke Chair Studies of Strategic Partnership options in the MENA region include:

- ***The Arab Gulf States and Iran: Military Spending, Modernization, and the Shifting Military Balance***, December 12, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/arab-gulf-states-and-iran-military-spending-modernization-and-shifting-military-balance>.
- ***Gulf Security: Looking Beyond the Gulf Cooperation Council***; December 12, 2017; <https://www.csis.org/analysis/gulf-security-looking-beyond-gulf-cooperation-council>, and https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/171213_GCC.pdf?hm10rj5lnKMJtrpQ_yY_GJr8lmubYoxk.
- ***The Real Challenges of Security Cooperation with Our Arab Partners for the Next Administration***, November 16, 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/real-challenges-security-cooperation-our-arab-partners-next-administration>.
- ***Iran, Evolving Threats, and Strategic Partnerships in the Gulf***, December 22, 2014, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/iran-evolving-threats-and-strategic-partnerships-gulf>.

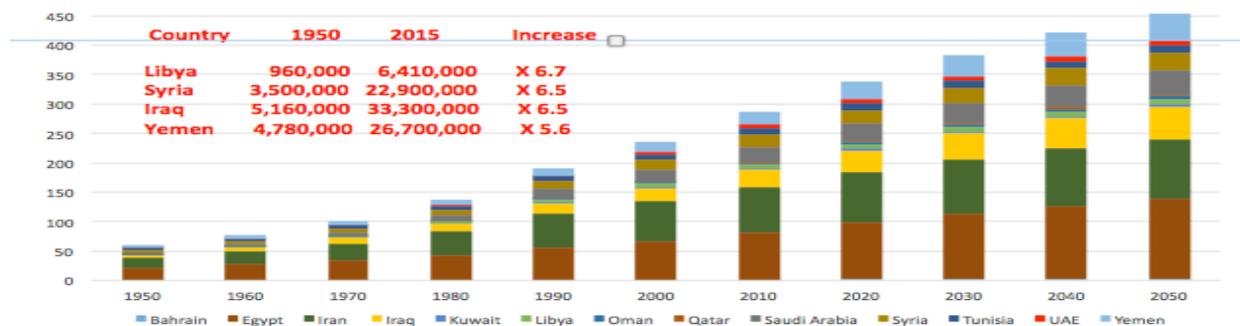
The Population and Demographic Dynamics of the MENA Region

Region Wide Trends

- Grew 5.1 times Between 1950 and 2019
- 43% additional growth by 2050
- Will grow 7.9 times between 1950 and 2050

Demographic Indicators	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019	2025	2030	2040	2050
Population															
Midyear population (in thousands)	77,085	98,823	128,481	172,205	234,965	259,563	285,712	314,361	351,771	394,355	423,963	464,681	496,715	555,384	607,411
Growth rate (percent)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	1.1	1.5	1.9	1.9	2.1	2.0	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.0	0.8
Fertility															
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	4.9	3.8	3.2	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.7	2.5	2.4	2.2	2.1
Crude birth rate (per 1,000 population)	(NA)	(NA)	1	0	20	21	25	24	24	24	22	19	17	16	15
Births (in thousands)	(NA)	(NA)	83	85	4,610	5,421	7,113	7,619	8,611	9,399	9,215	8,731	8,541	8,892	8,815
Mortality															
Life expectancy at birth (years)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	66	67	69	71	72	74	74	76	77	78	80
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 births)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	63	51	42	35	27	23	21	18	15	11	8
Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 births)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	89	69	54	43	33	28	25	21	18	13	10
Crude death rate (per 1,000 population)	(NA)	(NA)	0	0	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	6	7
Deaths (in thousands)	(NA)	(NA)	18	18	973	1,214	1,545	1,620	1,676	1,802	1,906	2,121	2,388	3,149	4,102
Migration															
Net migration rate (per 1,000 population)	(NA)	(NA)	0	-0	-5	-1	-1	-0	1	1	-1	0	-0	-0	-0
Net number of migrants (in thousands)	(NA)	(NA)	0	-14	-1,067	-287	-173	-127	493	469	-400	98	-14	-99	-132

Illustrative Dynamics by Country



	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
Bahrain	0.12	0.16	0.22	0.35	0.51	0.66	1.18	1.51	1.64	1.76	1.85
Egypt	21.2	26.85	33.57	42.63	54.91	65.16	80.47	96.26	111.06	125.24	137.87
Iran	16.36	21.6	28.99	39.71	58.1	68.63	76.92	86.54	93.46	97.69	100.05
Iraq	5.16	6.82	9.41	13.23	18.14	22.68	29.67	36.89	43.83	50.46	56.32
Kuwait	0.15	0.29	0.75	1.37	2.13	1.97	2.64	2.99	3.33	3.62	3.86
Libya	0.96	1.34	1.99	3.06	4.1	5.03	6.11	6.94	7.77	8.47	8.97
Oman	0.49	0.6	0.78	1.19	1.79	2.43	2.97	3.64	4.31	4.88	5.4
Qatar	0.03	0.05	0.11	0.23	0.43	0.64	1.72	2.44	2.6	2.55	2.56
Saudi Arabia	3.86	4.72	6.11	10.02	16.06	21.31	25.73	29.82	33.83	37.25	40.25
Syria	3.5	4.53	6.25	8.74	12.53	16.51	21.77	22.35	26.09	28.94	31.23
Tunisia	3.52	4.15	5.1	6.44	8.21	9.51	10.53	11.49	12.09	12.28	12.18
UAE	0.07	0.1	0.25	1	1.83	3.22	4.98	6.5	7.48	7.95	8.02
Yemen	4.78	5.87	7.1	9.13	12.42	17.24	23.21	29.88	35.66	41.14	46.08

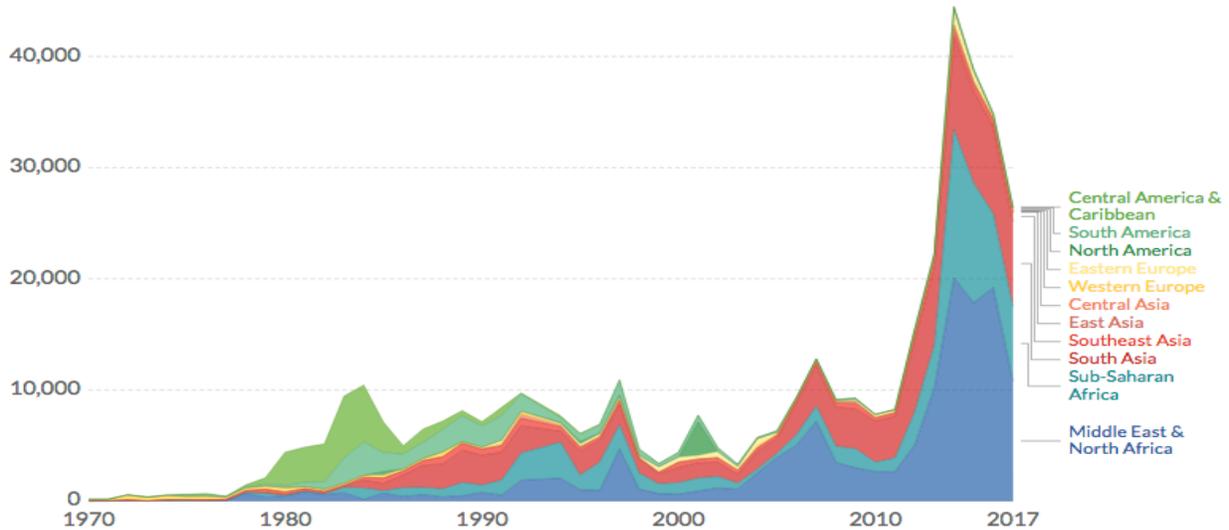
Source: United States Census Bureau, International Data Base, Accessed October 2015. <http://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/informationGateway.php>

US Census Bureau IDB, <https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/idb/region.php?N=%20Results%20&T=13&A=both&RT=0&Y=1950,1960,1970,1980,1990,2000,2010,2019,2030,2041,2050&R=-1&C=AF,BA,EG,IR,IZ,JO,KZ,KU,KG,LE,MU,PK,QA,SA,SY,TI,TX,AE,YM/>, 7.3.19

Looking Beyond Daesh and ISIS: The Scope of Extremism and Terrorism in the MENA Region

Number of terrorism fatalities by region

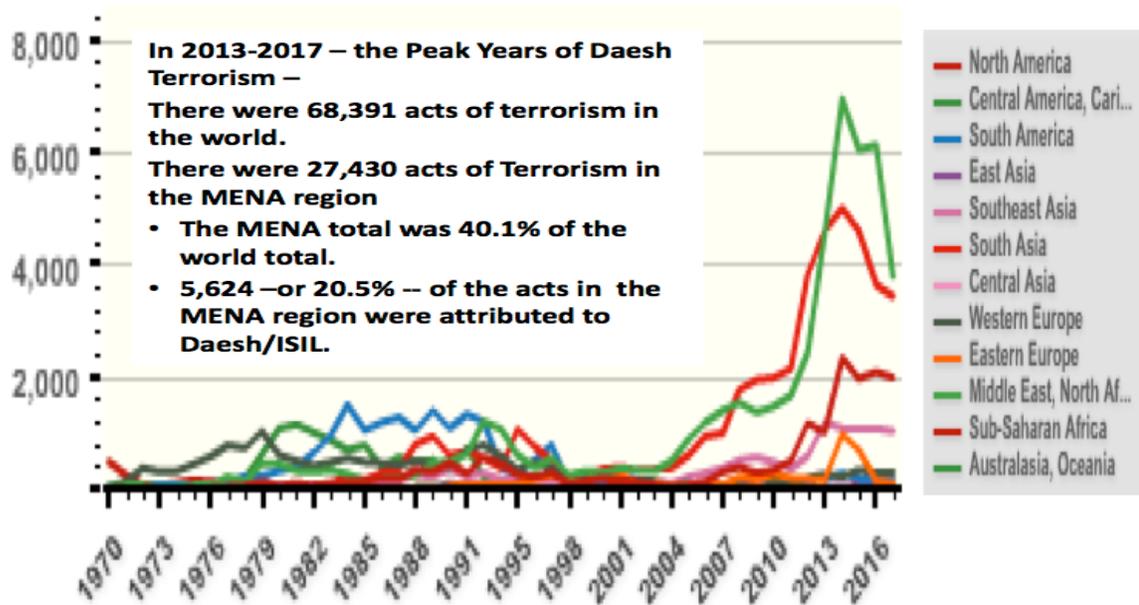
Total number of fatalities from terrorism-related attacks by region. This represents the number of total confirmed fatalities, and includes all victims and attackers who died as a direct result of the incident.



Source: Global Terrorism Database (2018)

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Maximum Number of Terrorist Incidents by Region (Less Insurgencies and State Terrorism): 1970 - 2017



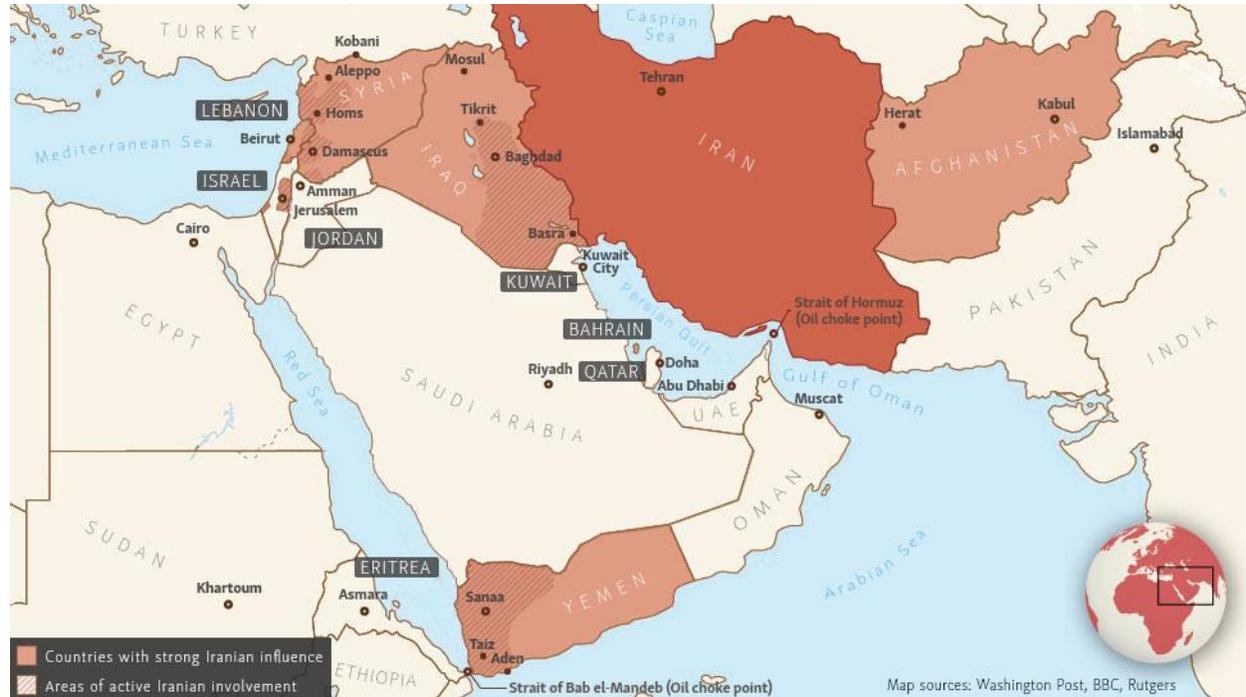
Adapted from **Terrorism**, by [Max Roser, Mohamed Nagdy and Hannah Ritchie](#), First published in July 2013; last revised in January 2018.

<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/terrorist-incidents?time=1970..2017>; and START Global Terrorism Data Base, https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?chart=regions&casualties_type=b&casualties_max=&start_yearonly=1970&end_yearonly=2017&dtp2=all®ion=12,2,7,4,9,10,1,3,6,5,11,8; March 31,2018

Key Changes in the Iranian Threat

- Uncertainties surrounding Iran's **nuclear weapons programs**, chemical warfare programs, and potential biological warfare programs.
- **Ongoing changes in Iran's major ballistic and cruise missile programs** – and intelligence and targeting assets – that will give it a **major precision strike capability using conventional high explosive warheads**. **Replace weapons of mass destruction with strikes on key military and civil targets in ways** that make them weapons of mass effectiveness. Coupled to Iran's acquisition of the Russian S-300 missile system – its first major modern land-based air defense system since the fall of the Shah – and a serious potential shift in the regional air balance.
- **Steady expansion of an asymmetric mix of naval-missile-air forces** that can challenge or attack petroleum exports, shipping traffic, and naval forces throughout the Gulf, in and outside the Strait of Hormuz, and increasingly in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea. They include steadily more advanced anti-ship missiles, submarines, submersibles, missile attack craft, "suicide" boats, and smart mines
- **Iran's success in exploiting the divisions, fracture lines, and self-inflicted political wounds in the Arab world** though the support, arming, and training of forces like the Hezbollah, Houthi, pro-Assad forces, some of the popular militias in Iraq, and Shi'ite extremist factions in Bahrain.

Iran's Key Areas of Strategic Influence



Source: RadioFreeEurope, <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-influence-yemen-iraq/26924135.html>

MENA Military Forces in 2018

Country	Defense Budget (US\$B)	Budget as % of GDP	Active Military Personnel*	Main Battle Tanks	Major Combat Ships**	Combat Aircraft ***
1. Algeria	9.93	5.3%	130,000	1,467	9	135
2. Bahrain	1.48	10%	8,200	180	1	38
3. Egypt	2.90	1.2%	438,500	2,480	15	578
4. Iran	19.6	4.6%	523,000	1,513+	10	336
5. Iraq	17.3	7.5%	64,000	393	0	65
6. Israel	66.3	5.1%	169,500	490	8	352
7. Jordan	1.63	3.9%	100,500	282	0	59
8. Kuwait	6.18	4.3%	17,500	293	0	66
9. Lebanon	2.12	3.7%	56,600	334	0	9
10. Libya	?	?	?	?	0	5+
11. Morocco	3.63	3.1%	195,800	602	8	90
12. Oman	8.95	11.0%	42,600	117	5	63
13. Qatar	8.8****	4.7%	16,500	62	0	18
14. Saudi Arabia	82.9	10.8%	227,000	900	11	407
15. Syria	4.5****	?	139,000	?	2	236
16. Tunisia	0.915	2.2%	35,800	84	0	23
17. UAE	11.00****	9.0%	63,000	385	7	156
18. Yemen	?	?	40,000	?	0	0

* Regular military forces, royal guards, and IRGC; Does not include paramilitary or reserves

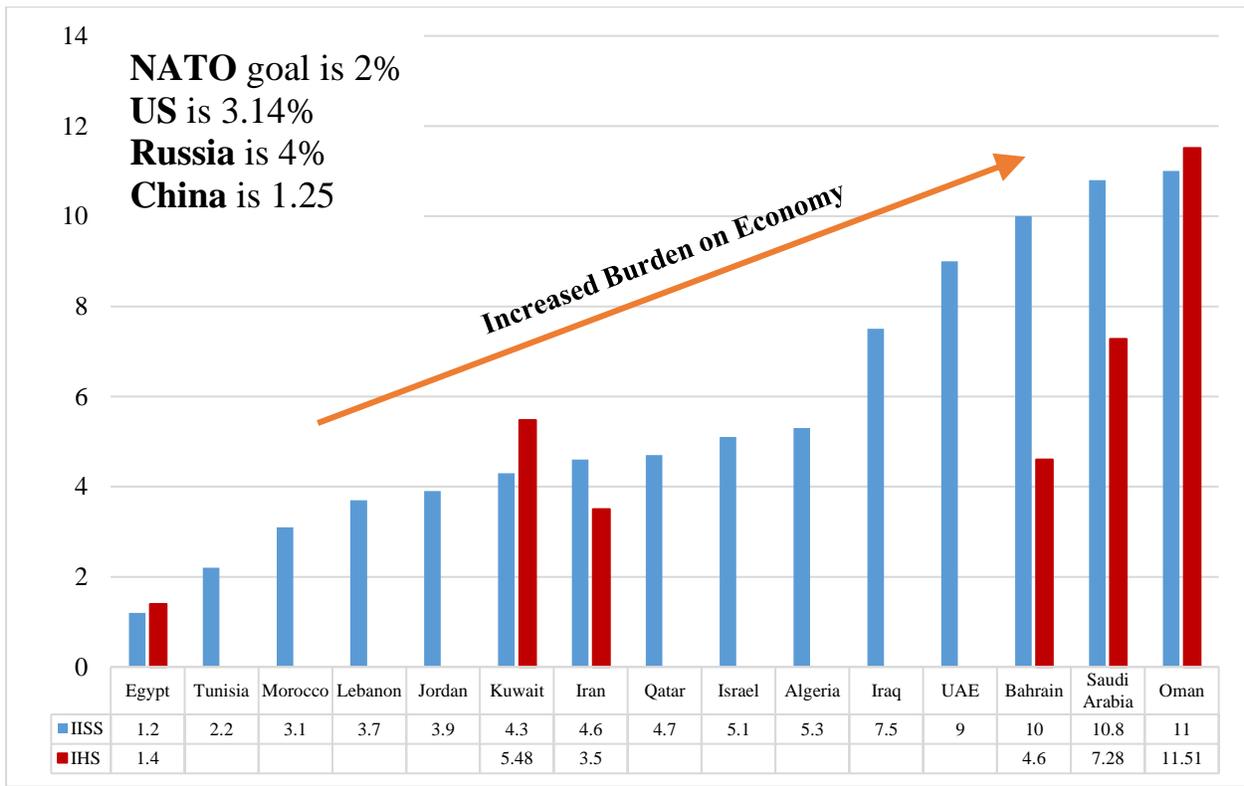
** Major surface and submarines using IISS definition, with some larger corvettes added.

*** Air Force only, using IISS definition

**** Author's estimate, No IISS estimate.

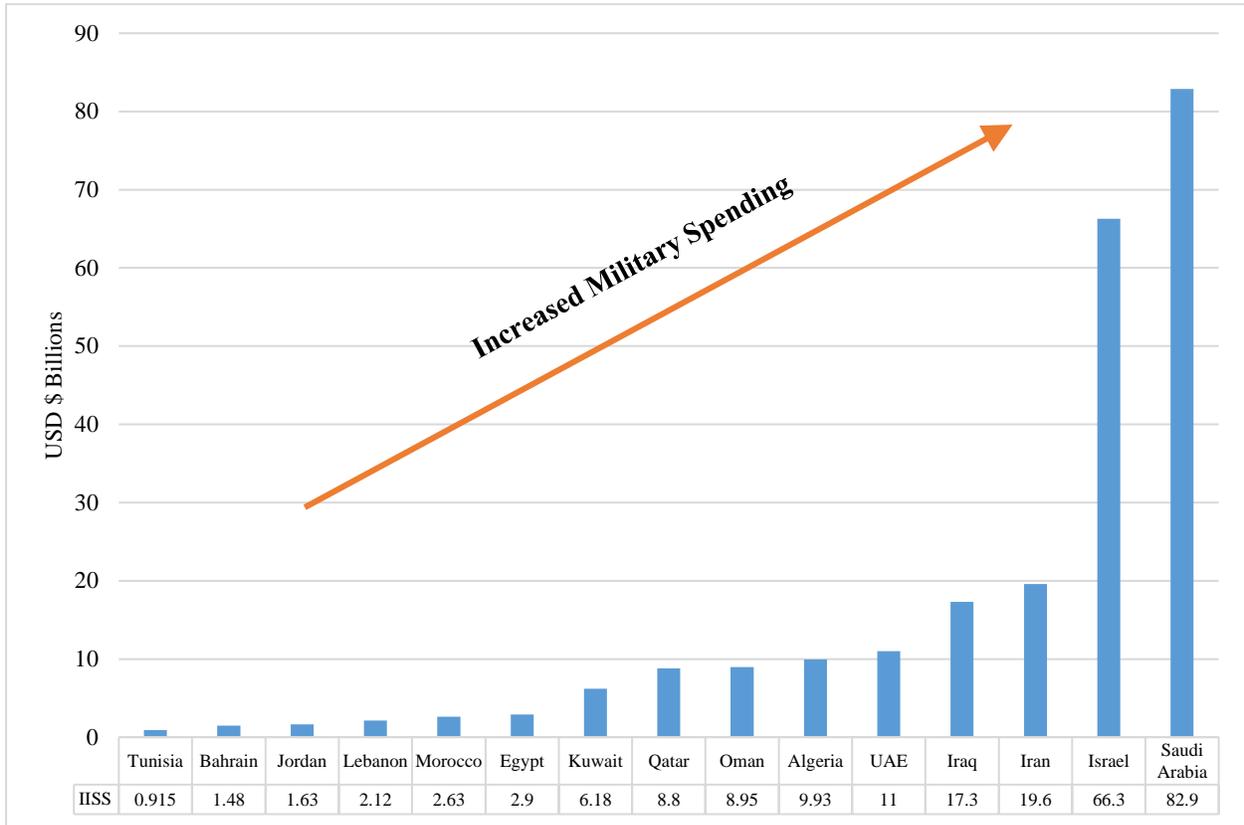
Adapted from the **IISS Military Balance, 2019**

Comparative Estimates of Military Spending as Percentage of GDP, 2018*



Adapted from the **IISS Military Balance 2019** and **Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment**. Author’s estimates for Qatar and UAE.

Comparative Estimates of Military Spending, Total Defense Budget, (USD\$ Billions) 2018



Adapted from the **IISS Military Balance 2019**. Author's estimates for Qatar and UAE.