

ISSUES

- The Middle East is home to deep underlying issues that directly threaten U.S. security interests: poor governance, disenfranchisement, humanitarian strife, endemic corruption, toxic sectarian narratives, and now, the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prolific terrorist organizations are present and continue to harbor designs to attack Americans. Weapons of mass destruction (actual and desired) provide the opportunity for further proliferation.
- Freedom of navigation and commerce (30-40% of daily global trade; 50% of proven oil and gas reserves) is threatened by the Iranian regime and their proxies and surrogates. Critical land routes through the region are used to facilitate movement of weapons and fighters that threaten Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.
- U.S. influence in the region is challenged by the increasing Russian and Chinese military, diplomatic, and economic presence. China uses the "One Belt, One Road" initiative to secure basing, increase military presence, and create economic leverage on partners in the region. Russia is focused on securing access and supplanting U.S. influence. Both countries are filling the void created by decreased and delayed U.S. equipment sales. NATO partner Turkey is increasingly at odds with U.S. Middle East policy, as well as their traditional European partners, and is moving away from constructive cooperation to pursue unilateral objectives aimed at creating regional dominance and influence.
- Recent tensions with Iran as a result of the "maximum pressure" campaign and our strike on Qassem Soleimani and their subsequent response have highlighted the need for a reliable diplomatic channel that will allow for de-escalation and discussion of the pertinent issues. It has also brought a realization by Gulf Arab countries of the impact of a war with Iran and the devastating effects it would have on the region.

US INTERESTS

- Prevent the region from being a platform for terrorist attacks on our country and our allies.
- Counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- Prevent instability in this region from affecting our interests in other areas.
- Maintain freedom of navigation and commerce.

- Maintain a balance of power in the region that is favorable to U.S. interests and objectives.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maintain U.S. partnership, influence, support, cooperation, and sales with militaries across the region, but insist on accountability, competence, and self-reliance. Local partners should do their fair share.
- Maintain a sustainable counter-terrorism capability in the region to work with capable partners and keep long-term pressure on terrorist groups.
- Establish diplomatic and military communication channels with Iran to reduce chances of miscalculation and increased tensions.
- Successful prosecution of the new U.S. global priority of competing with China and Russia requires the reallocation of U.S. military resources from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific region and elsewhere. This in turn will place a higher premium on U.S. security cooperation and partnership with allies and partners in the Middle East.