

A Middle East and North Africa Regional Co-operation and Security Process:  
Report of the Consortium of Research Institutes

Executive Summary

Introduction

This Report is the product of a year-long process, led by a Consortium of respected institutes from across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with the funding and participation of the Canadian and Danish Governments.<sup>1</sup> The objective of this process was to gather a group of regional thinkers, from both government and civil society to consider the creation of a Regional Co-operation and Security Process for the region.

Findings

After three meetings and intensive dialogue between the sessions, the Consortium members are of the view that such a Process should be created. They further believe that:

1. The objective of a Regional Co-operation and Security Process in the Middle East and North Africa is to provide a framework of rules and procedures for sustained and focused dialogue, transparency and co-operation on the range of security, socio-economic and environmental challenges facing the governments and peoples of the region. The Process will function simultaneously on multiple levels (eg: Governmental, Track Two and broader civil society), with each level contributing to the overall achievement of agreed goals according to its unique ability. An expanded version of the current Consortium process may serve as the basis of the Track Two level.
2. The success of the Process will be defined as a reduction over time, and eventual elimination of violent conflict among and within the countries of the region; by improved standards of political freedom and human security for all peoples of the region; and by a sustained increase in trade and capital flows, contributing to job creation and economic growth for all.
3. It is proposed that the Process should be broadly inclusive as to membership, defining the region as including the states of the Arab League, Iran and Israel, and with some form of close association for Turkey and a role for selected external partners. It is envisaged that the countries of the region should play the leading role in developing and managing the Process.
4. It is understood that not all regional Governments are likely to join the Process at the official level in the first instance. This is why a multi-layered approach is favoured, which would permit those who are not willing to join the official talks to be active in a

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<sup>1</sup> The member Institutes of the Consortium are: The Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (Cairo), the Gulf Research Center (Dubai) the Institut Diplomatique et des Relations Internationales (Algiers), the Centre Tarik Ibn Ziad (Rabat); and the Regional Centre on Conflict Prevention at the Jordanian Institute of Diplomacy (Amman).

structured Track Two process. This Track Two process would also sustain intensive, focused, regionally-led and results oriented dialogues on issues that are not yet ripe for the official track. The envisaged Process is thus meant to be dynamic and capable of evolution as the regional states decide their circumstances permit.

5. As an initial set of tasks to be tackled in the first five years, the Process should concentrate on a set of issues in the following broadly thematic areas: “Hard Security;” “Soft Security;” and Economic Co-operation (a more detailed list of possible topics is outlined in Annex 3 of the Report). It is recognised that “success” does not necessarily mean the achievement of a “solution” to all of these issues, but that intensive dialogue to better manage their effects and develop possible longer term solutions can be an important element in setting the stage of their eventual resolution.

6. The Consortium recognises that other dialogues and processes are underway in the region, and particularly within its sub-regions. The Consortium encourages these to continue and develop; it does not take the view that there must be either a region-wide or a sub-regional Process. The Consortium takes the view that there can, and should be both, and they should be developed in ways that are mutually complimentary.

7. The question of whether this Process can begin right away, or must wait until other pressing issues have been resolved was discussed intensively. It was the view of the majority of the participants that the initial (and necessarily modest) steps to create a Regional Co-operation and Security Process should go forward, even as these other issues are still being resolved. The majority were of the view that waiting until all issues had been fully resolved would mean that the Process would never get going. They also took the view that a Process to encourage regional peace and development would assist those grappling to find solutions to the other problems of the MENA region.

### Conclusion

This Report outlines a bold idea for the future of the MENA region. As with all bold ideas, it is much easier to find reasons why it will not happen than to imagine its success. But the report outlines a step-by-step approach which can unfold over time, beginning modestly and growing as regional circumstances permit. The members of the Consortium commend this Report to the attention of the Governments of the MENA region. They note that Middle East leaders have themselves proposed bold and imaginative visions which have considered many of these same issues, from the Mubarak Initiative for disarmament to the Saudi proposal to the Beirut Arab League Summit.

It is in this spirit that the Consortium members submit this Report. It is their hope that this Report will stimulate further dialogue and consideration of these ideas throughout the Middle East and North Africa and beyond.