**A Framework for Middle East Peace**

**Instead of finding a constructive way forward, the US has fallen back on past failed policies.**

[Dr James J Zogby](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/dr-james-j-zogby)

May 12, 2024

The US reaction to Iran’s retaliatory drone and missile launches against Israel was predictable and unhelpful. More sanctions against Iran and more weapons to Israel, while calling for de-escalation, was at best contradictory. At worst, it could exacerbate existing tensions.

Commentary from the Israeli and Arab press and the US and Western policymakers and “analysts” was even more distressing. Some Arabs celebrated Iran’s display of might as a show of strength and deterrence. Israelis touted the effectiveness of the defense arsenal that neutralized Iran’s well-telegraphed attack. A similarly congratulatory tone from Western hawks, on the right and left, first elevated, then denigrated the Iranian attack, while suggesting that the only effective response was massive retaliation by Israel to “neutralize” Iran. A limited response would only embolden Iran to attack again.

Such notions are shortsighted foolishness and downright dangerous. The reality, despite the desires of some, is that neither Israel nor Iran will be defeated. The costs of such a fool’s errand would devastate the entire region. Their arsenals and allies—globally and regionally—can wreak havoc in countless lives lost and economic devastation in the Levant and Arab Gulf states.

The broader Middle East needs peace and stability, not more conflict. More arms and hostile posturing won’t help. If we’ve learned anything from history, it’s that the region’s antagonists won’t be defeated. Conflict either emboldens them or metastasizes their conflicts’ root causes into new, more virulent forms.

After decades of misguided US and Western policies, the region faces several separate but connected conflicts—rooted in each country’s particular circumstances but stirred up by same set of external actors—Iran and its allies, or the US/Israel axis and its allies.

US persistence on its path of unquestioning support for Israel and refusal to challenge Israel or constructively engage Iran leads to where we are today: genocide in Gaza, Israel and Hezbollah on the brink of war, Syria still reeling from civil war, and Iran involved in multiple conflicts including in Libya and Sudan.

Responding to US policy’s lack of coherence, its weakened stature in global affairs, the rise of China and a China/Russia axis, and persistent regional threats, several Arab governments have been forced to act alone to protect their interests by seeking regional peace and stability. They are developing their own ties with Iran, working with China and Russia, while continuing ties with the US and making overtures to Israel.

Now, with a devastating war in Gaza and the dangers of conflict between Israel and Iran, instead of finding a constructive way forward, the US has fallen back on past failed policies.

Back when the Obama administration was using sanctions and its diplomatic capital to negotiate a nuclear arms deal with Iran, I argued for a different course. Why not address Iran’s regional meddling by working with the same P5+1 members of the UN to convene a regional security framework modeled after the precursor to the OSCE that stabilized Europe, East and West, during the Cold War.

This idea had first been broached by the 2006 Iraq Study Group, calling for the formation of an International Support Group to bring together Iraq’s neighbors with the five permanent Security Council members to address the regional fallout from the Iraq war.

Ignored then, this idea should now be considered to address critical issues affecting regional stability and world peace: ending Israel’s occupation of Palestinian lands and continuing its aggressive regional role; Iran’s meddling; the need for political and economic reforms; a Nuclear Free Zone in the Middle East; security guarantees and a non-aggression pact; and promoting the benefits of regional investment and trade.

Like the Madrid Peace Conference, a Middle East OSCE would bring together Arab countries, Iran, Turkey, and Israel under the sponsorship of Security Council members. Some countries will need pressure to participate, concessions made, and incentives offered. Unlike Madrid, pressure shouldn’t end when the parties convene, but continue until agreements are reached.

US policymakers say such an idea won’t fly, pointing to this or that country that won’t participate. The same was said about Madrid. Such a response is lazy and lacks imagination. It’s also foolish, and dangerous because the alternative is the path to perpetual war.

**Dr. James J. Zogby**
The writer is the President of Arab American Institute.