

National Security Strategy

of the United States of America

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D. The Middle East: Shift Burdens, Build Peace

For half a century at least, American foreign policy has prioritized the Middle East above all other regions. The reasons are obvious: the Middle East was for decades the world's most important supplier of energy, was a prime theater of superpower competition, and was rife with conflict that threatened to spill into the wider world and even to our own shores.

Today, at least two of those dynamics no longer hold. Energy supplies have diversified greatly, with the United States once again a net energy exporter. Superpower competition has given way to great power jockeying, in which the United States retains the most enviable position, reinforced by President Trump's

successful revitalization of our alliances in the Gulf, with other Arab partners, and with Israel.

Conflict remains the Middle East's most troublesome dynamic, but there is today less to this problem than headlines might lead one to believe. Iran—the region's chief destabilizing force—has been greatly weakened by Israeli actions since October 7, 2023, and President Trump's June 2025 Operation Midnight Hammer, which significantly degraded Iran's nuclear program. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains thorny, but thanks to the ceasefire and release of hostages President Trump negotiated, progress toward a more permanent peace has been made. Hamas's chief backers have been weakened or stepped away. Syria remains a potential problem, but with American, Arab, Israeli, and Turkish support may stabilize and reassume its rightful place as an integral, positive player in the region.

As this administration rescinds or eases restrictive energy policies and American energy production ramps up, America's historic reason for focusing on the Middle East will recede. Instead, the region will increasingly become a source and destination of international investment, and in industries well beyond oil and gas—including nuclear energy, AI, and defense technologies. We can also work with Middle East partners to advance other economic interests, from securing supply chains to bolstering opportunities to develop friendly and open markets in other parts of the world such as Africa.

Middle East partners are demonstrating their commitment to combatting radicalism, a trendline American policy should continue to encourage. But doing so will require dropping America's misguided experiment with hectoring these nations—especially the Gulf monarchies—into abandoning their traditions and historic forms of government. We should encourage and applaud reform when and where it emerges organically, without trying to impose it from without. The key to successful relations with the Middle East is accepting the region, its leaders, and its nations as they are while working together on areas of common interest.

America will always have core interests in ensuring that Gulf energy supplies do not fall into the hands of an outright enemy, that the Strait of Hormuz remain open, that the Red Sea remain navigable, that the region not be an incubator or exporter of terror against American interests or the American homeland, and that Israel remain secure. We can and must address this threat ideologically and militarily

without decades of fruitless “nation-building” wars. We also have a clear interest in expanding the Abraham Accords to more nations in the region and to other countries in the Muslim world.

But the days in which the Middle East dominated American foreign policy in both long-term planning and day-to-day execution are thankfully over—not because the Middle East no longer matters, but because it is no longer the constant irritant, and potential source of imminent catastrophe, that it once was. It is rather emerging as a place of partnership, friendship, and investment—a trend that should be welcomed and encouraged. In fact, President Trump’s ability to unite the Arab world at Sharm el-Sheikh in pursuit of peace and normalization will allow the United States to finally prioritize American interests.