

# United Nations Development Program

Enhancing multilateral cooperation in the Middle East conflict



**Forum: United Nations Development Program**

**Issue: Enhancing multilateral cooperation in the Middle East conflict**

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## Introduction

The Middle East has still the centre of international politics, holding the spotlight with the conflicts and geopolitical competition. The region has faced or was met by an array of issues that range from long-standing border conflicts, political instability, economic underdevelopment to ideological differences. The Arab Israeli conflict, the Syrian Civil War, and conflicts in the Persian Gulf are all the best examples of the complexity and volatility of the region. They have resulted in humanitarian crises, displacement, and instability that spilled across regional borders.

Despite these problems, history shows that multilateral collaboration countries and international bodies collaborating and working together has the potential for shown benefits. The actions of the United Nations (UN), the Arab League, and other peacekeeping cooperations have helped facilitate conflict resolution. This report touches on the complex factors of the conflict in the Middle East, the obstacles towards achieving lasting peace, and the role of multilateral bodies in maintaining sustainable and effective solutions.

The role of diplomacy in conflict resolution cannot be overstated and left unseen. All past peace agreements, such as the Camp David Accords and the Oslo Accords, have validated that it is possible through diplomacy to achieve lower tensions and issues. However, maintaining such agreements and ensuring permanent peace is not easy because of political shifts and ongoing conflicts. Finding out the cause in formulating appropriate peace and stability strategies in the region.



## Definition of Key Terms

**Multilateral Cooperation:** When two or more countries or international organizations cooperate with each other to solve global or regional issues as a group.

**Conflict Resolution:** The process of settling disagreements peacefully through diplomatic negotiation, mediation, and intervention.

**Geopolitical Interests:** Political, economic, and security interests that define a country's participation in global affairs.

**Proxy War:** A war where external powers support opposing forces to exert influence without direct military intervention.

**Peacekeeping Missions:** International organization-conducted missions for preventing conflict escalation and civilian protection.

**Humanitarian Relief:** Distribution of relief to crisis-affected people, including food, medical assistance, and shelter.

**Geostrategic Rivalry:** International rivalry between nations for control of strategic points or resources. In the Middle East, rivalry between powers like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey typically prevents cooperation because each is interested in dominance over political, military, and economic issues.

**Regional Hegemony:** Pre-eminence of a single country or set of countries over political, economic, and military issues in a region. In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Iran are the countries that aspire to regional hegemony, making multilateral cooperation more difficult owing to competing aspirations.

**Complex Interdependence:** Countries are tied together by trade, security and common problems. In the Middle East, complex interdependence links countries to one another via energy trade, security concerns and regional cooperation on issues such as terrorism, with multilateralism as a necessity.

**Peacekeeping Operations:** Multinational military involvement to support peace in contentious parts of the world. Interventions will typically be in the form of involvement by international actors such as the UN to establish stability in places like Lebanon or the Golan Heights but are constrained in their success due to domestic political trends.



**Transnational Security Threats:** Security threats that cross borders (Examples: Terrorism; Organized Crime) They say that “each crisis can no longer be solved to the prevalent one state, especially with these threats such as nuclear proliferation and extremist organizations, with the help of both the Arab world and Europe, as multilateral” in Middle East.

**Complex Interdependence:** A situation where countries are interconnected by trade, security, and shared problems. In the Middle East, complex interdependence connects countries with each other through energy trade, security concerns, and regional cooperation on issues like terrorism, and multilateralism is a necessity.

**Peacekeeping Operations:** Multilateral military intervention to assist peace in contested regions. Interventions here will generally involve involvement by international participants like the UN to create stability in such locations as Lebanon or the Golan Heights but are limited in success by domestic political trends.

**Transnational Security Threats:** Security threats that transcend borders, i.e., terrorism or organized crime. In the Middle East, they call for multilateral action, as they cannot be solved by one state, especially with threats like nuclear proliferation and extremist organizations.

**Security Dilemma:** A situation in which actions by a nation to enhance its security make others insecure, thereby heightening tensions. The Saudi Iranian competition and their Middle Eastern arms races are the best example of this dilemma, which hinders regional cooperation.

**Resource Diplomacy:** Using natural resources as an instrument of international relations. Middle Eastern countries, particularly those with oil and gas reserves, use resource diplomacy to form alliances and exert pressure, both promoting and complicating multilateral cooperation.

**Humanitarian Intervention:** Military or diplomatic action to stop or prevent violations of human rights. Humanitarian intervention in such trouble spots as Syria or Yemen must involve multilateral action, yet interventions are never supported because interventions always raise concerns about sovereignty.

**Multilateral Disarmament:** Collective action toward the elimination or reduction of weapons, especially nuclear or chemical weapons. In the Middle East, this is complicated by Iranian and Israeli nuclear initiatives, thereby rendering multilateral action difficult despite global disarmament intentions.



**Conflict Transformation:** An approach that addresses the root causes of conflict and sustains peace by transforming social, economic, and political structures. Conflict transformation within the Middle East is critical for ending long-term conflicts, and this has to be achieved by multilateral processes in addressing issues at their source.

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Set of global goals aimed at fixing issues like poverty, inequality, and climate change. The SDGs promote cooperation among regional organizations on social and environmental issues in the Middle East, although conflict in the region and scarcity complicate their realization.

### **General Overview**

The Middle East, as a place of complicated geopolitics and socio-economic challenges and difficulties, is a region where the creation of multilateral collaboration can make an impactful contribution to peace, prosperity and stability. The need for multilateral collaboration in the Middle East is driven by the same security interests, economic interdependence, and increasing recognition that no country alone can take regional challenges. Encouraging cooperation among a number of states is key for ending wars, combating climate change, enhancing trade relations, and ending humanitarian crises. Through diplomacy initiatives, organizations in regions, and international partnerships, multilateral cooperation can change and the region's future.

The Middle East has traditionally been an area of conflicting national interests, ideological rivalries, and interventions. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and Turkey have traditionally been competing on matters of land and regional influence. The civil wars in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq only make the possibilities of peace more remote. Yet these same issues also demonstrate the teamwork and cooperation between several parties. Great power collaboration, supported by global institutions like the United Nations (UN), can mitigate the impact of such struggles and provide examples of peace and ceasefires. Multilateral forums like the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) provide dialogue and diplomatic engagement. These institutions have the ability to bring countries to negotiate solutions to everything from security concerns to economic integration.

Another principal of multilateral cooperation in the Middle East is economic interdependence. As the region relies heavily on oil exports and increasingly needs to diversify into sectors like agriculture, technology, tourism, regional and cross-border cooperation between countries can help increase trade, investment, and regional development. Infrastructure, energy, and sustainable development can leave lasting effects on growth and prosperity. The establishing of free trade zones and the promotion of regional economic alliances are examples of how multilateral cooperation can foster economic integration. The economic potential of the Middle East can be



unlocked by collective efforts at resource distribution challenges, such as water and energy sustainability, that are common challenges of the majority of countries in the region. Multilateral agreements at addressing these challenges, like joint water agreements, can significantly boost regional stability and cooperation.

Multilateral cooperation is also the answer to addressing the Middle East's humanitarian Problems. Wars, dislocations, poverty, and violation of human rights have established immense human sufferings in countries like Syria, Palestine, and Yemen. The work of international organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is crucial in coordinating relief measures in the form of humanitarian aid. Multilateral arrangements can help in resource mobilization, fair aid distribution, and peace-building efforts to reduce sufferings. Additionally, multilateral diplomacy is also essential in conflict resolution and peace negotiations. Successful establishments, for example, the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) and peace processes in countries like Lebanon, show the potential of multilateral diplomacy in advancing negotiations towards conflict resolution. Concertation among international players, including the United States, Russia, the European Union, and regional powers, remains important in resolving the region's long-standing conflicts.

Encouraging multilateral cooperation in the Middle East is not without challenges. Though opportunities for constructive cooperation exist, the history of rivalries and distrust between its principal actors renders long-term cooperation fleeting. However, with concerted efforts from regional as well as international powers, multilateral cooperation is the key to a more peaceful, prosperous, and stable Middle East, where the region's people's shared interests are met over the disagreements that have long defined the region.

## Major Parties Involved

**Israel and Palestine:** The Israeli Palestinian issue is among the most complex conflicts in the region. Israel demands security and recognition from parties, and Palestinians demand sovereignty, particularly over the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. The conflict has caused several wars, uprisings, and a few failed peace negotiations and is among the greatest destabilizing forces in the Middle East.

**Saudi Arabia and Iran:** These regional heavyweights are engaged in an ancient rivalry that is battled out in proxy wars and political influence throughout the region. Saudi Arabia, a kingdom dominated by Sunnis, and Iran, a country dominated by Shiites, back opposing sides in conflicts within Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Their geopolitical contest and conflict feeds tensions and undermines diplomatic efforts.



**The United States and Russia:** The U.S. has historically supported Israel and Gulf allies like Saudi Arabia, while Russia has been crucial in sustaining regimes like that of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and in him being a close ally of Iran. Their conflicting policies have fuelled proxy wars in the region and limited multilateral cooperation.

**Turkey:** A major regional power, Turkey has been deeply engaged in Syria, getting involved militarily against Kurdish forces while juggling its relationships with Russia and NATO. Other than that, it has also welcomed millions of refugees and been at the centre of regional diplomacy.

**United Nations (UN):** The UN has tried to control conflicts with peacekeeping and diplomatic efforts. However, conflicts in the Security Council, where veto powers have often paralyzed valid resolutions, have limited its effectiveness.

**The Arab League:** A coalition of Arab nations that has tried regional diplomacy. However, internal conflicts and competing national interests have paralyzed collective action regarding the Israeli Palestinian conflict and other regional conflicts.

**Extremist Groups:** Terrorist organizations such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and Hezbollah are all across the Middle East, spreading terrorism, destabilizing governments, and making conflict resolutions more difficult. They are usually the excuse for military interventions by regional and global powers.

## Timeline of Key Events

**1948:** The establishment of Israel leads to the first Arab Israeli War and Palestinian dispossession (Nakba).

**1967:** The Six-Day War results in Israel's conquest of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights, which aggravates regional tensions.

**1979:** The Iranian Revolution brings an anti-Western Islamic regime to power, altering the balance of power in the region.

**1993:** The Oslo Accords attempt to establish a framework for Israeli Palestinian peace but later collapse under the weight of ongoing violence and political disparities.

**2003:** The U.S. invasion of Iraq overthrows Saddam Hussein but triggers long-term instability and sectarian violence.

**2011:** The Arab Spring sparks massive protests, leading to civil wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen.



2014: The rise of ISIS leads to military intervention by the U.S., Russia, and regional powers, further complicating conflicts.

2015-Present: The Saudi-led coalition enters Yemen to combat Iran-backed Houthi rebels, and a long-running humanitarian crisis follows.

2020: The Abraham Accords normalize Israel's relations with several Arab nations, a significant diplomatic breakthrough.

2023-Present: Escalating violence in the Israeli Palestinian conflict raises alarm about a broader regional confrontation.

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

There have been numerous efforts over the decades to resolve the Middle Eastern conflicts and reach multilateral cooperation in the region, but most of them have been unsuccessful by problems and have had little success. Various peace efforts, diplomatic negotiations, and regional agreements have been made to address the complex geopolitical issues of the region, including border conflicts, sectarian strife, economic problems, and security concerns.

The most significant effort toward a solution of the Middle Eastern conflicts was the Camp David Accords of 1978. The Egyptian Israeli peace treaty, with the help of the United States, was a significant step toward Middle Eastern peace. Egypt officially acknowledged Israel as a nation for the first time, and in response, Israel pulled out of the Sinai Peninsula. Even though the accords were considered as a milestone, they had been criticized for the exclusion of other Arab nations, particularly Palestine, and for not addressing the broader regional issues, such as the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Despite the drawbacks, the Camp David Accords were a rare instance of effective multilateral diplomacy in the region and demonstrated that peace can be achieved between competing states if there are third parties involved.

Another major initiative for peace was the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, which attempted to put an end to the Israeli Palestinian conflicts and war. The PLO and the Israeli government negotiated clandestinely in Norway and reached a consensus regarding the establishment of a Palestinian self-rule in parts of the West Bank and Gaza. The Oslo Accords were hailed as a breakthrough towards peace, with both sides committing to mutual recognition and laying down a blueprint for future negotiations. But the failure to apply some of the most important provisions, such as the status of Jerusalem and the right of return of Palestinian refugees, and the violence that followed in the next few years, led to the final collapse of the peace process.



## Possible Solutions

One of these solutions is the strengthening of regional organizations like the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). These organizations already have important roles in regional diplomacy and conflict resolution but have still failed often due to inter-state disagreements among member states. To render them more effective, these organizations can be subjected to institutional reforms that make them more representative and make them include the different interests of the region. Creating definitive frameworks for conflict resolution, economic collaboration, and security cooperation could urge member states to make multilateral solutions a priority over rivalries. By opening options of communication and promoting a sense of regional coherency, these institutions could escalate tensions and create cooperation on matters such as resource management, security, and trade.

The other possible solution is the support and encouragement of economic integration and joint development projects. The Middle East is a region with economic potential, but the regional economic integration is fragmented, and national economies often work in isolation from one another. The establishment of regional free trade zones could promote interdependence and make war less probable. Joint infrastructure ventures, such as cross-border energy pipelines, transportation networks and renewable energy initiatives, could be a reason for shared prosperity. Multilateral economic cooperation would not only be mutually beneficial but also reduce the economic vulnerabilities that are often responsible for political instability. Furthermore, a focus on sustainable development projects would help common challenges like water scarcity, energy dependence, and climate change, which are crucial for the region's future.

In the area of security, a multilateral approach is crucial in combating shared threats such as terrorism, the proliferation of arms, and the destabilizing effects of foreign interventions. Regional security cooperation mechanisms can be strengthened to improve intelligence exchange, border control, and counterterrorism. For example, a regional security community that includes both Gulf countries and their neighbors would tackle security concerns while promoting collaboration. In addition, multilateral diplomacy needs to focus on the prevention of conflict, through early warning systems and joint military exercises and peacekeeping missions to areas of tension. Rather than resorting to unilateral military intervention, regional powers can take collective action to ensure that security issues are managed jointly, thereby reducing the risk of escalating conflicts.

The other main area for multilateral cooperation is humanitarian aid and refugee management. The Middle East is home to some of the largest displacement crises in



the world, as millions of refugees are fleeing from Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. A multilateral refugee management system would encompass not just the host countries but also international bodies like the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and non-governmental organizations. These efforts can be supplemented by shared responsibility in hosting refugees, funding humanitarian assistance, and addressing the underlying causes of displacement, such as war and poverty. Further, through participation in multilateral diplomatic efforts, countries could join hands in finding durable solutions to the refugee issue, including repatriation, resettlement, and reintegration programs.

Diplomatic efforts towards conflict resolution also constitute a fundamental component of multilateral cooperation in the Middle East. Intractable conflicts, such as the Israeli Palestinian conflict, the Syrian civil war, and Yemeni tensions, require ongoing diplomatic engagement. Global powers, such as the United States, the European Union, Russia, and China, must work in concert with regional powers to formulate negotiating frameworks that address main causes of conflict, ensure political representation, and provide economic support for post-conflict rebuilding. These attempts at diplomacy can be underpinned by diplomacy, or the informal dialogue among society groups, retired diplomats, and academics with the goal of building confidence and opening up new lines of communication.

Finally, multilateral cooperation must strive for the creation of a culture of peace and understanding. People-to-people diplomacy, cultural exchange, and education can melt the barriers of suspicion and misunderstanding that are the common causes of regional conflict. Promoting dialogue between different sectarian and ethnic groups, as well as between governments, can allow for the construction of a more cohesive regional identity. Initiatives that promote intercultural tolerance would be particularly valuable in the Middle East, where religious and ethnic distinctions traditionally have been significant causes of conflict. Through dialogue, education, and joint projects, multilateral cooperation can work towards the establishment of peace that transcends political and ideological divisions.



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