



April 2023

2023 MIDDLE EAST PROGRESS REPORT

THE AMERICA-EURASIA CENTER

Authored by Bailey Schiff



The America-Eurasia Center

Founded in 1988, The Eurasia Center, formerly The Center for Soviet-American Relations, is an American non-profit, non-governmental educational organization dedicated to improving American knowledge and understanding of Eurasia (Europe and Asia). On July 4, 2022, The Eurasia Center officially changed its name to The America-Eurasia Center to differentiate itself from the multitude of organizations that have since emulated its name and fail to understand what Eurasia is.

Located in Washington, DC, The America-Eurasia Center partners with numerous officials, organizations, and think tanks worldwide. Its educational programs are unique in that they produce future leaders and research teams that continue to promote positive relations. Building positive relations with other nations and institutions has been the hallmark of The America-Eurasia Center.

The America-Eurasia Center promotes positive relations between America and the nations of Eurasia through its nine thematic programs: Civil Society, International Security/Peace, International Education/The University of Eurasia, The American-Eurasian Art Foundation/The National Museum of American-Eurasian Art & Culture Project, The America-Eurasian Business Coalition, Charitable Program for Eurasia, Environmental Program, US-Eurasia Regional Programs, and The American-Eurasian Women's Program. It has also been instrumental in founding The American-Eurasian Business Coalition as a bridge that promotes positive economic relations between America and the nations of Europe and Asia (Eurasia).

In addition, through its regional programs, The America-Eurasia Center builds positive relations with the Gulf States, Europe, Russia, Central Asia, South Asia, and East Asia. These regional programs serve as a bridge to promote nations' peace, understanding, and prosperity.

© 2023 by The America-Eurasia Center

The America-Eurasia Center
202-494-0773 | <https://www.eurasiacenter.org>

Introduction

In partnership with its Middle East Program, The America-Eurasia Center is proud to present the *Middle East Progress Report*, which covers developments in the MENA region in early 2023. The America-Eurasia Center's research on the Middle East highlighted four significant political developments to watch in 2023: rising tension between Israel and Palestine, the Iran Nuclear Agreement, Lebanon's mounting economic crisis, and the United Arab Emirates' strides toward religious inclusivity. The developments discussed in this report cover Israel, Palestine, Iran, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates. Still, political, social, and economic trends in other MENA countries can be found on our website under Country Reports.

Our findings are that religious tension, upholding democratic norms, nuclear proliferation, and economic recessions due to COVID-19 will be the most significant factors in regional cooperation and stability in the coming year. Ideally, nations can overcome these

challenges by finding areas for collaboration and partnership in their shared struggles. With the upcoming 2030 U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the pressure to address these challenges in the Middle East is only mounting. Issues outlined in this report directly correlate with several SDGs, including "no poverty," "zero hunger," "good health and well-being," "clean water and sanitation," "decent work and economic growth," "reduced inequalities," and "peace, justice, and strong institutions."

At The America-Eurasia Center, we aim to aid the people of countries and form long-lasting relationships between nations. As a result, throughout this report, we will bring these political, social, and economic problems to light to outline feasible and achievable solutions for nations, global non-governmental organizations, and international institutions. All solutions outlined, if implemented, can bring the Middle East closer to fulfilling the SDGs and improve regional stability.



Israeli protestors lift flags outside the Knesset in Jerusalem in protest of judicial reform Gili Yaari, Associated Press

Rising Tension between Israel and Palestine

In 2023, Israel is facing a triad of crises: a wave of Palestinian terror attacks in response to military raids in the West Bank, increased expansion of settlements, and protests as Netanyahu's new government continues to restrict the courts. Each point of tension is contributing to rising international concern that a new Intifada may be in our midst. For those unfamiliar with the term, an intifada is a Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Thus far in history, there have been two. The first occurred from 1987-1993, and the second from 2000-2005.

Terrorism and Military Violence

The first point of tension contributing to this fear within the international community is the rise in Palestinian terrorist attacks and Israeli

military violence against Arab citizens. On January 27, 2023, terrorists attacked a synagogue in Jerusalem, killing seven people and making this one of the deadliest attacks on Israelis in years.¹ This followed an Israeli raid on a refugee camp in Jenin that killed nine Palestinians. After this attack, the Palestinian President accused Israel of a "massacre" and later announced it had ended coordination with Israel on all security matters.²

Unfortunately, this cycle of violence is not an outlier but rather part of a more significant trend. 2022 was the deadliest year in Israel and the West Bank since the second Intifada. Palestinian attacks killed 31 Israelis, and the IDF claims Palestinians fired on Israeli troops almost 300 times, compared to 61 times in 2021 and 31 times in 2020.³ In response, Israel began an "anti-terrorism offensive," killing 151 Palestinians in

¹ Daniel Byman, "The Third Intifada?," *Foreign Affairs*, February 7, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/third-intifada-israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

² Yolande Knell and David Gritten, "Nine Palestinians Killed in Israeli Raid in Jenin," *BBC News*, January 26, 2023, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64410607>.

³ Byman, "The Third Intifada?"

the West Bank and Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem.⁴ In November 2022, the U.N. Middle East envoy told the U.N. Security Council that the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians "is again reaching a boiling point, "emphasizing that violence will only escalate with a halted peace process."⁵

Expansion of Settlements

The second crucial point of tension is Israel's increased expansion of settlements in the West Bank. On February 12, 2023, Israel granted retroactive authorization to nine Jewish settler outposts in the occupied West Bank and announced the mass construction of new homes within established settlements.⁶ Furthermore, on March 24, 2023, Israeli watchdogs reported that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu authorized construction bids for a thousand new homes in Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.⁷ In response, the U.N. Security Council is working on a resolution condemning these settlements, and the U.S. is weighing action. The United Nations Security Council was considering a draft resolution demanding Israel "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied

Palestinian territory."⁸ In addition, the White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre voiced concern stating, "we are deeply dismayed by the Israelis' announcement" and "the United States strongly opposes these unilateral measures which exacerbate tensions, harm trust between the parties and undermine the geographic viability of the two-state solution."⁹ According to Axios Tel Aviv, the Biden administration warned Netanyahu against following through on any government coalition agreement that would give finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich administrative control over the occupied West Bank.¹⁰

Judicial Reform

The final point of tension contributing to this internal and interstate conflict is a law which would limit the Supreme Court's power to exercise judicial review by granting the Knesset the ability to override Supreme Court rulings by a simple majority and give the government power to select judges.¹¹ If passed, the Israeli government will be given unmeasurable power over the country's Basic Laws. A recent poll found only a quarter of Israelis support the plan in its current state, and hundreds of thousands more have taken to the streets in protest.¹²

⁴ Byman.

⁵ UN News, "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Nearing 'Boiling Point', UN Envoy Warns," November 28, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/11/1131112>.

⁶ Dan Williams, "Israel Authorises West Bank Outposts, despite U.S. Admonition," *Reuters*, February 12, 2023, sec. Middle East, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-authorises-west-bank-outposts-despite-us-admonition-2023-02-12/>.

⁷ Isabel Debre, "Watchdog: Israel Promotes Bids for 1,000 Settlement Homes," ABC News, n.d., <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/watchdog-israel-promotes-bids-1000-settlement-homes-98103911>.

⁸ Michelle Nichols, "UN Likely to Vote Monday on Call for Israel to Stop Settlements, Diplomats Say," *Reuters*, February 15, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/un-likely-to-vote-monday-call-israel-stop-settlements-diplomats-2023-02-15/>.

⁹ Middle East Eye, "US 'deeply Dismayed' by Israeli Settlement Announcement," Middle East Eye, February 16, 2023, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/us-deeply-dismayed-israeli-settlement-announcement>.

¹⁰ Barak Ravid, "U.S. Weighs Further Steps against West Bank Settlements after Israeli Announcement," *Axios*, February 15, 2023, <https://www.axios.com/2023/02/15/israel-settlements-expansion-west-bank-biden-admin>.

¹¹ Aaron David Miller, "Netanyahu Faces His Own 'Israeli Spring,'" *Foreign Policy* (blog), February 23, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/23/israel-judicial-reform-protests-netanyahu-government-supreme-court/>.

¹² Ben Sales, "What Are the Dual Crises That Israel Is Facing?," February 15, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-731631>.

A Path Forward

Seeing all three crises, Israeli President Isaac Herzog warns of a looming "societal collapse" like a "powder keg set to explode" as he voiced concern for the "democratic foundations of the country" when giving a landmark speech begging for negotiation and compromise over judicial reforms.¹³ So the question begs to be asked: is a new intifada in our midst? The answer is not necessarily. This looming conflict can be halted if Israeli and Palestinian parties meet and commit to peace agreements.

The February 26, 2023, meetings in Aqaba, Jordan, between Jordanian, Egyptian, American, Israeli, and Palestinian governments represent a step forward towards this goal. Together in the Aqaba Joint Communiqué, Palestine, and Israel "affirmed their commitment to all previous agreements between them, and to work towards a just and lasting peace" and "the necessity of committing to de-escalation on the ground and to prevent further violence."¹⁴ Tor Wennesland, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, reiterated, "if implemented, the steps outlined in Aqaba would be an important start to reversing negative trends on the ground."¹⁵

¹³ "Israel's President Herzog Says Compromise Possible 'Within Days' After Speaking With Coalition and Opposition Parties - Israel News - Haaretz.Com," accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-02-19/ty-article/.premium/president-herzog-says-deal-on-judicial-reform-possible-within-days/00000186-6a6e-dba0-a5c6-7a7edaa30000>.

¹⁴ Department of State, "Aqaba Joint Communiqué," *United States Department of State* (blog), February 26, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/aqaba-joint-communicue/>.

¹⁵ UN SECURITY COUNCIL, "Applauding Recent Diplomatic Talks between Israelis, Palestinians, Speakers in Security Council Urge Parties Commit to Agreements," March 23, 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15238.doc.htm>.



Photo of Iran's Pact with China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK, and the US in 2015: Photo by the European External Action Service

Iranian Nuclear Agreement

The Iran Nuclear Agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was a landmark agreement reached between Iran and several world powers in 2015. Under its terms, Iran agreed to dismantle much of its nuclear program and open its facilities to international inspections. In 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from JCPOA and reinstated devastating banking and oil sanctions, jeopardizing the deal. Trump argued that the agreement failed to address Iran's ballistic missile program and its proxy warfare in the region. From the Iranian perspective, Tehran hesitated to even engage in talks as the United States withdrew from the previous agreement and then increased sanctions.

¹⁶ Jon Gambrell, "Iran Has Enough Enriched Uranium to Build 'several' Nuclear Weapons," PBS NewsHour, January 26, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/iran-could-build-several-nuclear-weapons-un-says>.

Restarting Iran's Nuclear Program

Since the 2018 falling out of the JCPOA, Iran has resumed nuclear activities by beginning to enrich uranium in higher concentrations and develop new centrifuges to accelerate this process. As of January 2023, U.N. top nuclear officials began warning that Iran has enough enriched uranium to build several nuclear weapons, with estimates up to 84 percent.¹⁶ Furthermore, on March 24, 2023, the U.S. Joint Chief of Staff Chairman, Mark Milley, shared that Tehran is only two weeks away from producing enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon. After this stage, it would only take a few months to assemble this weapon.¹⁷ Milley shared this updated U.S. assessment in testimony before the U.S. House Appropriations Committee in a

¹⁷ Laurence Norman and Michael R. Gordon, "Iran Could Produce Nuclear Weapon in Several Months If It Decides to Do So," The Wall Street Journal, March 23, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-could-produce-nuclear-weapon-in-several-months-if-it-decides-to-do-so-mark-milley-says-eed38f07>.

hearing on the Defense Department's annual budget request.

Geopolitical Implications

These recent developments have increased global pressures to reach a deal. However, these negotiations have remained at a standstill since this past August due to Washington's insistence on keeping sanctions placed on the Islamic Republic. Both the Trump and Biden administrations have established these sanctions, most recently in response to Iran's supply of drones to Russia and Mahsa Amini's death.¹⁸

In 2021, upon taking office, President Joe Biden said the U.S. would return to the deal if Iran returned remained compliant with the terms in the initial agreement, but only more tension has ensued. This is further complicated by the U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellin's announcement on March 24th that the United States is considering strengthening its sanctions against Iran but acknowledged the current sanctions have not resulted in any behavioral changes from Tehran.¹⁹

As the United States debates how to approach the restoration of the JCPOA, there is growing concern within the international community regarding nuclear Iran aggression towards Israel. The potential of nuclear warfare is of great concern, given that Iran has repeatedly

stated that they wouldn't hesitate to wipe out Israel if they had nuclear weapons. In response, former U.S. admirals and generals have urged the U.S. to arm Israel to prevent a nuclear Iran.²⁰

The official policy for Israel is that Iran enriching uranium above 60% could prompt an Israeli strike.²¹ During the Munich Security Conference, Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant responded to the report stating "all possible means" were on the table to prevent Tehran from proliferating advanced weapons.²² Responsive measures include the potential to attack Iranian nuclear facilities and preparation for military confrontations. A drone attack on such a facility has already begun on January 29th.²³

In this way, nonproliferation in the Middle East will be a crucial determinant of regional peace and security. Nevertheless, diplomatic efforts at limiting its atomic program seemed unlikely given rising global tensions due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Iran providing weaponry to Russia, China's use of spy balloons, and Iran's election of conservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi as President.

A Revival of the JCPOA

Behind closed doors, however, the 2015 JCPOA is being revived. Senior sources in Tehran have reported that the top Iranian nuclear

¹⁸ David Lawder and Kanishka Singh, "Yellen: Iran's Actions Not Impacted by Sanctions to the Extent US Would Like," March 23, 2023,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/yellen-irans-actions-not-impacted-by-sanctions-extent-us-would-like-2023-03-23/>.

¹⁹ David Lawder and Kanishka Singh.

²⁰ "Former Generals and Admirals Urge US to Arm Israel to Prevent Nuclear Iran - *Algemeiner.Com*," accessed March 25, 2023,

<https://www.algemeiner.com/2023/03/22/former-generals-and-admirals-urge-us-to-arm-israel-to-prevent-nuclear-iran/>.

²¹ Andrea Vacchiano, "Iran Enriching Uranium above 60% Could Prompt Israeli Strike," Fox News, March 22, 2023,

<https://www.foxnews.com/world/iran-enriching-uranium-above-60-prompt-israeli-strike-official>.

²² John Irish, "Israel: 'all Possible Means on the Table' to Prevent Iran Getting Nuclear Weapon," *Reuters*, February 17, 2023, sec. Middle East,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-all-possible-means-table-prevent-iran-getting-nuclear-weapon-2023-02-17/>.

²³ Parisa Hafezi and Phil Stewart, "Israel Appears to Have Been behind Drone Strike on Iran Factory, U.S. Official Says," *Reuters*, January 29, 2023,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/blast-heard-military-plant-irans-central-city-isfahan-state-media-2023-01-28/>.

negotiator, Ali Baqueri Kani, met with political directors from Britain, France, Germany, and foreign ministries.²⁴ Outside of the E3, it has been reported that China has also been pushing for the revival of talks on the JCPOA while demanding the withdrawal of all sanctions on Iran.²⁵

In many ways, the international community is split when approaching this dilemma, but there seems to be a consensus that something needs to be done.

²⁴ Mehr News Agency, “Bagheri Kani Held Talks with JCPOA European Parties in Oslo,” Mehr News Agency (Mehr News Agency, March 22, 2023), <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/198745/Bagheri-Kani-held-talks-with-JCPOA-European-parties-in-Oslo>.

²⁵ Laura Zhou and Liu Zhen, “China to Push for Revival of Talks on Iran Nuclear Deal,” South China Morning Post, February 14, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3210164/iranian-president-china-deal-mission-both-countries-confront-western-pressure>.



Firefighters put out a fire at the burnt BBAC bank after a protest organized by Depositors' Outcry, a group campaigning against restrictions on cash withdrawals and worsening economic conditions in Beirut: REUTERS/Mohamed Azakir

Lifeline for Lebanon's Economic Crisis

Lebanon has been facing a devastating economic disaster for the past three years due to a triad of crises: the 2019 financial crisis, the 2020 Port of Beirut explosion, and the COVID-19 outbreak. In response, nominal GDP plummeted by 29 billion USD from 2019-2021, with the World Bank reclassifying the country as a lower-middle-income country in July 2022.²⁶ Today, unemployment hovers around 30 percent, and inflation is so high citizens are living on less than \$14 per day.²⁷

For months, banks have been imposing strict restrictions on withdrawals and calling off open-ended strikes blocking employees from retrieving salaries.²⁸ On February 14, 2023 this

tension reached a boiling point as several hundred Lebanese protestors, including army retirees and angry depositors, attacked banks and set them on fire in protest in Beirut.²⁹

Simply put, economic decline this severe often results in conflicts or even wars, making it essential that the international community aids and pays attention to its development. The current state of Lebanon is in desperate need of humanitarian relief, but before any assistance can be given, there needs to be structural reforms.

Political Turmoil

Much of this continued economic instability can be attributed to political turmoil within the country, as Lebanon failed to form a

²⁶ World Bank, "The World Bank In Lebanon," World Bank, November 2, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview>.

²⁷ Editorial, "The Guardian View on Lebanon's Crisis: A People Betrayed," *The Guardian*, February 12, 2023, sec. Opinion,

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/12/the-guardian-view-on-lebanons-crisis-a-people-betrayed>.

²⁸ Hanna Davis.

²⁹ Timour Azhari, "Lebanese Depositors Smash up, Burn Beirut Banks," *Reuters*, February 16, 2023, sec. Middle East, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanese-depositors-smash-up-burn-beirut-banks-2023-02-16/>.

government after the May 2022 parliamentary elections. The World Bank has called the crisis "a deliberate depression orchestrated by [an] elite that has long captured the state and lived off its economic rents," all while poor and middle-class people bear the burden of the crisis.³⁰ As a result, the International Monetary Fund and others have demanded structural and financial reforms before providing any cash.³¹ Still, with the country lacking a president and a fully powered Cabinet, no progress can be made on reforms reviving the fractured economy.³²

Israel-Lebanon Maritime Deal

Hope, however, is not lost, and a potential lifeline for Lebanon is the new maritime deal with Israel, which the two countries signed on October 27th, 2022.³³ The agreement, resulting from over twelve years of negotiations, established a permanent maritime boundary in the Mediterranean Sea between the two countries, which had been at war since 1948. Governments worldwide praised the agreement with U.S. President Biden noting that "Energy—particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean—should not be a cause for conflict but a tool for cooperation, stability, security, and prosperity," and French President Emmanuel Macron praising the deal as "an important step towards more peace for Israel, for Lebanon, and all the countries and peoples of the region" and said it would "also contribute to

the prosperity of both countries." ³⁴

These offshore oil and gas reserves could be a salvation for Lebanon, but Beirut must repair its politically fractured environment. If they can overcome these challenges, the government could easily unlock its wealth potential and truly aid its people.

Dollarization of the Economy

Another potential solution for Lebanon would be to adopt the U.S. dollar at a fixed exchange rate, known as full dollarization, or create a new currency covered by dollars, termed a currency board.³⁵ Lebanon is uniquely positioned for dollarization given that the economy has been highly dollarized since the 1980s, meaning the dollar has made up most transactions. Lebanese diplomat Adnan Mansour has reiterated these ideas stating, "after over four decades, we have to admit the Lebanese pound is dead, and we have to replace it with another currency."³⁶ Other countries, including Zimbabwe and Ecuador, have turned to full dollarization to aid in hyperinflation and economic recessions with mixed results.³⁷

Others voice concern about the dollarization of Lebanon's economy, arguing that although it could lessen overall financial woes, it may widen already significant economic inequalities. As Sami Zoughaib, a Beirut economist, explains, "we have a class that has

³⁰ Ashraf Al-Saeed and Zeina El Khalil, "Lebanon's Crisis: Great Denial in the Deliberate Depression," World Bank, n.d., <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/01/24/lebanon-s-crisis-great-denial-in-the-deliberate-depression>.

³¹ Editorial, "The Guardian View on Lebanon's Crisis."

³² Hanna Davis, "The Lebanese Pound Sinks to New Low as Economic Woes Worsen," Axios, March 22, 2023, <https://www.axios.com/2023/03/22/lebanon-economic-crisis-lira-pound-sinks>.

³³ Khaldoun AbouAssi Trent Lamia Moubayed, Deborah Lee, "How Lebanon Can Unlock Its Oil and Gas Wealth,"

Foreign Policy (blog), February 13, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/13/lebanon-israel-maritime-gas-oil-deal-economic-crisis/>.

³⁴ Trent.

³⁵ Hanna Davis, "The Lebanese Pound Sinks to New Low as Economic Woes Worsen."

³⁶ Hanna Davis.

³⁷ Kareem Chehayeb, "Lebanon Leans on U.S. Dollar as Economy Tanks," n.d., <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/lebanon-leans-on-u-s-dollar-as-economy-tanks>.

access to dollars ... (and) you have another portion of the population that earns in Lebanese pounds that have now seen their income completely decimated."³⁸ To spark this transition from Lebanese pounds, which 90% of the country earns income in, businesses and employers would have to pay in dollars which are now more expensive given the economic fallout in the country.³⁹

Still, pairing both the implementation of the Israel-Lebanon Maritime Deal and the dollarization of the economy could lift the country out of the crisis. Alternatively, without any institutional action, this economic crisis in Lebanon does not have an end in sight.

³⁸ Kareem Chehayeb.

³⁹ Kareem Chehayeb.



Artistic Rendering of the Abrahamic Family House: Abu Dhabi Government Media Office

UAE Inauguration of Abrahamic Family House

On March 1st, 2023, the UAE's Abrahamic Family House and the interfaith complex for Abrahamic religions in Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi opened to the public. The creation of the project was inspired by the Document on Fraternity signed by Pope Francis on behalf of the Catholic Church and Ahmed El-Tayed on behalf of the al-Azhar Mosque. This new beacon of light houses the St. Francis Church, Imam Al-Tayeb Mosque, and Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue in separate structures.

Symbolic Structural Design

The design of the Abrahamic Family House is three cubic houses of worship placed upon a secular visitor pavilion. The Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue is oriented towards

Jerusalem. It features a multilayered facade inspired by the Jewish Sukkot Festival, where palm trees are harvested, and communities build tents in their garden.⁴⁰ Furthermore, it features a skylight to provide a view of the stars at night, made to reference the chuppah, a structure without a roof used at Jewish weddings.⁴¹

The Eminence Ahmed El-Tayeb Mosque features seven arches on each side, reflecting the significance of the number 7 in Islam.⁴² Furthermore, the walls are covered with 470 panels of filigree latticework made to represent the mashrabiya, one of the most admired features of Islamic architecture.⁴³ The His Holiness Francis Church faces east so it can rise towards the sun, as light is considered a symbol of divinity.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Gulf News, "A Glimpse of the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi," March 11, 2023, <https://gulfnews.com/friday/a-glimpse-of-the-abrahamic-family-house-in-abu-dhabi-1.1678354934622>.

⁴¹ Gulf News.

⁴² Gulf News.

⁴³ Gulf News.

⁴⁴ Gulf News.

Beyond the places of worship, the Center has the Wall of Intentions, covered by triangular plates with messages of peace and love in different languages. Visitors are invited to write down their wishes and intentions on the Wall.⁴⁵

Bridging the Abrahamic Religions

The designer of the Abrahamic House, David Adjaye highlighted that he wanted to "create a building that starts to dissolve the notion of hierarchical difference – it should represent universality and totality – something higher that enhances the richness of human life."⁴⁶

Upon its inauguration on February 16th, President Sheikh Mohamed said the existence of the multi-faith place of worship was a celebration of diversity.⁴⁷ Its opening follows the UAE's declaration of 2019 as "the Year of Tolerance."

So far, this year has culminated in two events pivotal to establishing the Abrahamic Family House. First was the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Shaykh al-Tayyeb in 2019. Secondly was the signing of the Abraham Peace Agreement at the White House by the UAE and Israel in 2020.

The House aims to serve as a bridge between different faiths, a mechanism for religious dialogue, and a physical manifestation of the Document on Human Fraternity crafted by the United Nations.⁴⁸ The synagogue holds the potential to rise above its use as a place of prayer to "a global center for pluralism, culture, education, and engagement; a center for interfaith education, research, and engagement; a center that can create links between Jewish, Arab, and Christian communities within the UAE, across Arabia, and around the world."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Guendalina Dainelli, "Abrahamic Family House Welcomes UAE Residents, Visitors for Worship," March 25, 2023, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2023-03/abrahamic-family-house-uae-abu-dhabi-interreligious-dialogue.html>.

⁴⁶ Lizzie Crook, "David Adjaye Designs Multifaith Complex Called The Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi," Dezeen, September 26, 2019, <https://www.dezeen.com/2019/09/26/david-adjaye-the-abrahamic-family-house-temples-abu-dhabi-architecture/>.

⁴⁷ The National, "President Sheikh Mohamed Says Abrahamic Family House Is Celebration of Diversity," The National, February 16, 2023,

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/2023/02/16/president-sheikh-mohamed-says-abrahamic-family-house-is-celebration-of-diversity/>.

⁴⁸ United Nations, "International Day of Human Fraternity," United Nations (United Nations, n.d.), <https://www.un.org/en/observances/human-fraternity>.

⁴⁹ Marcy Grossman, "What the Opening of the Abrahamic Family House Synagogue in the UAE Means for the Jewish Community and the Rest of the World," February 27, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/what-the-opening-of-the-abrahamic-family-house-synagogue-in-the-uae-means-for-the-jewish-community-and-the-rest-of-the-world/>.

Conclusion

Overall, religious tension, upholding democratic norms, nuclear proliferation, and economic recession due to COVID-19 will be the most significant factors in MENA regional cooperation and stability in the coming year. As outlined throughout this Report, there are a plethora of opportunities for nations to come together and collaborate to tackle these global issues. Israel's internal conflict could be alleviated if Israeli and Palestinian parties meet, commit to peace agreements, and respect the steps laid out in Aqaba Communique. A global conversation around the JCPOA can reduce concerns about nuclear proliferation. Pairing the implementation of the Israel-Lebanon Maritime Deal and the dollarization of the economy could lift Lebanon out of the crisis. Protecting the Abrahamic Family House and continuing to facilitate inter-religious conversation can alleviate regional tensions.

These steps are within reach if MENA nations prioritize peace, prosperity, and partnership over geographical and religious conflicts.

In addition, it is pivotal that the United States continue to improve relations with its partners in the Middle East. Conflict resolution and diplomacy need to be a priority of the United States while reducing military solutions within the region. Only by revising these policy measures will the U.S. and MENA region begin to repair their storied relationship and move towards collaboration on global challenges such as supply chain issues, emerging diseases, climate change, and food security. It remains crucial that the United States and MENA countries work together to address these problems through joint research, innovative solutions, and data-driven policy. Below are some key policy recommendations needed to improve US-MENA Relations.

Key Policy Recommendations to Improve US-MENA Relations

- I. **Nominate and confirm ambassadors to each of the GCC member states:** The U.S. has vacancies in Kuwait and the UAE.
- II. **Create a framework for summit meetings between the President and Gulf counterparts:** This can be modeled after the recent Jeddah Security and Development Summit. Such international conversations provide unique opportunities for unity and cooperation in the Middle East and hint at a more collaborative future.
- III. **Maintain the stability of global trade routes, including those around the Arabian Peninsula:** The MENA region represents a trade and technology bridge between hemispheres making it crucial for the global economy and a transit point for trade.
- IV. **Share technology development and research surrounding clean energy:** As water becomes scarce and the world needs to reduce dependency on oil, the Middle East's progress in desalination and renewable energy technology will be of the essence to the United States. It is crucial both region's build joint efforts to address and mitigate climate change.



The America-Eurasia Center is a nonpartisan non-profit organization that is dedicated to improving American knowledge and understanding of Eurasia (Europe and Asia).

© 2023 by The America-Eurasia Center