



## The Simple Regional Picture moved to a Complex Regional Sculpture

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Between 2002 and 2022, the geostrategic picture of the Middle East region was relatively clear. There were clear colors of “camps” and “parties”: Iran as the enemy of almost all; American presence in Iraq (based on regional interests); the Arab Peace Initiative as a game changer of Israeli-Arab diplomacy, the Arab Spring and the Abraham Accords – all created a two-dimensional picture of potential alliances, with shared interests and logical drivers for cooperation.

In just less than two years, this picture is now a 3-D sculpture made of bits and pieces – where there are no “camps” or clear sets of alliances. In a brilliant article, my friend Mohammed Baharoon rightfully described these phenomena and state of affairs as “Quantum Diplomacy”. He mentioned three principles of the new Middle-East, and the last one was “Cooperation as Security”.

I would like to view this cooperation as the glue or joints that connect the bits and pieces of the regional sculpture. Yet key questions remain – cooperation towards what? And guided by which “values and/or interests”? And during what timeframe? And how much of it is sustainable beyond just a short-term “opportunity”?

It is time to address the need for cooperation and create regional security by looking at fundamental risks that threaten the stability of the region. If we look at MENA in 2050, for example, there is a clearer picture of true existential threats that go beyond borders and thus cannot be addressed just by one state or a few. Clearly, Climate Change impact is key, yet together with regional economic failure, regional despair, lack of hope and fundamentalism, intractable regional conflicts, and a playground for superpowers fighting for global hegemony – all might bring the region to an irrecoverable and chronic crisis mode.



This is why we need to adopt and invent three new paradigms of cooperation. The first is “vision-driven”, the second is “cross-border driven”, and the third is “citizens-driven”.

Starting from the third notion, I believe that there is not enough energy, capacity, or interest among current regional state leaders to go beyond narrow national interests and think like architects of a regional framework. It is left for visionary citizens from the business, academia, and civil society organizations in the region. They should take the time and collectively design a “vision-driven” approach – and build a shared vision that addresses the challenges of 2050; then they should derive strategies for execution and a mechanism to prioritize short, medium, and long-term plans – and advocate awareness and responsibility from their respective leaders. It will require cross-border cooperation, and will force state leaders to find ways to overcome conflicts, disputes, ideological differences – so “Cooperation as Security” will be finally understood, internalized, and executed.

It is time to address 2050 with a sense of urgency, so that actions tomorrow will drive the region to a solid and more secure, stable, and inspiring sculpture that transcends the old bleak pictures of our region.