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Op-Ed

The Gulf's last best offer to Israel

The Netanyahu government must not miss its golden chance to be part of a regional security dialogue

By [Emily B. Landau](#) and [Shimon Stein](#) / May 20, 2017, 8:04 pm

As one of the most conflict-ridden regions in the world, the Middle East sorely stands out in its lack of any region-wide framework for conducting security dialogue among states in the region. As such, an important route for clarifying states' threat perceptions and security concerns in a regional format, and building confidence that could possibly engender greater regional cooperation, is missing. The only attempt to set up such a framework was during the Madrid peace process of the early 1990s, in the context of the multilateral working group that dealt with Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS).

Since those talks ended in late 1995, there have been efforts to restart the ACRS talks, to discuss a weapons of mass destruction-free-zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East, as well as to encourage discussion of arms control and regional security in unofficial Track II settings, which since 2010 have been heavily weighted toward the WMDFZ idea. But a major constraint to these efforts over the past 20 years has been the lack of a clear mutual interest among the regional states – coupled with lack of interest on the part of the United States – to conduct this kind of dialogue. Certainly there has been no common interest that was strong enough to overcome the well-known hurdles: the stubborn resistance of many Arab states to sit in common frameworks with Israel; the insistence of Egypt, in particular, to focus on Israel and the nuclear realm, and the lack of peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Back in the 1990s, what got the regional players to the table was strong US determination, reinforced through a mix of pressure and inducements offered to the regional states in order to secure their participation.

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