



The Baghdad Declaration: Good Neighborhood Principles for the Middle East

Middle East Dialogue

Baghdad, Iraq, 16 December 2017

Over the course of the last three years, the Middle East Institute convened a regional dialogue involving participants acting in their personal capacities from Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Turkey. The dialogue also involved participants from China, Europe, Russia and the United States. The discussions resulted in the following declaration of good neighborhood principles for the Middle East agreed in Baghdad 15-16 December 2017.

.....

Violent conflict, terror, displacement, humanitarian crises, and state fragility currently plague the Middle East. The region needs to find its way out of this maelstrom through cooperation and dialogue based on agreed principles, the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and other accepted international obligations. Regional consultation and cooperation should be the overriding goal, as no country in the region can expect to have full security and prosperity in a conflicted region.

Drawing on the experience of other regions as well as their own proud history and traditions, the participants in the Middle East Dialogue have agreed the following:

1. **Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity:** The states of the region should reaffirm respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each of the others. None seek unilateral border changes. Each state should respect the national security and political independence of all other states and refrain from the threat or use of force and interference in others' affairs. The states of the region should aim to de-escalate and de-militarize inter-state tensions. Disputes, including border disputes, should be settled exclusively by peaceful means.
2. **Inclusive Consultation and Dispute Resolution Mechanism:** Resolving conflicts in the region will require regular consultations and discussions among the region's states, as will eventually freezing them, resolving them, preventing future conflicts and building peace throughout the region.
3. **Good Governance:** Promoting and building regional peace requires the states of the region to promote good governance and respect the dignity of the individual in compliance with the principles of international law, including international humanitarian



law as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

4. **Defeat of Terrorism:** The states of the region agree to fight and defeat terrorists and will consult together on designating them as well as cooperating to block the flow of terrorist fighters, counter terrorist ideology and messaging, dry up terrorist financing, share necessary intelligence, and prevent conditions for their reemergence. The states of the region will not provide any political, military or financial support to terrorist groups.

5. **Strengthening State Security Institutions:** There can be no regional stability without strengthening state security institutions. Armed groups have emerged in times of insecurity, or collapsed or weak states. The states of the region should consolidate their control over the use of force.

6. **Respect for Diversity:** States should protect and nurture the region's enormous cultural, religious and ethnic diversity. Toward this end, religious, sectarian, and ethnic proselytization and discrimination should not be used as tools of foreign or internal policy. Social and cultural relationships and interchange should be encouraged. Each of the region's states should protect all minorities, who should be viewed and treated as equal citizens. None should be subjected to forced demographic change.

7. **Return of Refugees:** The wars in the region have created millions of refugees who impact host countries. All refugees should be free to return to their country and area in which they resided prior to conflict in accordance with international conventions. None can be *forced* to return if they would be subject to any form of persecution or danger.

8. **Security Through Cooperation:** Consultation and cooperation among the states of the region is necessary to achieve sustainable security for the states and citizens of the region.

9. **Regional Economic Integration:** Regional economic integration is necessary to achieve a high level of economic development for the people of the region. The region should aim for the convergence of regional infrastructures, regulations and policies.

10. **Culture and educational interaction:** People of the region need to get to know each other better. Exchanges in the realms of ideas, arts and culture as well as mutual understanding, appreciation and respect are necessary underpinnings for a stable region.

11. **Regional confidence-building measures and pilot initiatives:** Initiatives are necessary to build regional cooperation, to help improve state-to-state and inter-societal relations in the region, and to reduce tensions. These could include security arrangements, economic cooperation, and cultural and educational exchanges. We outline below some of the possibilities.



- a. Security: Initiatives could include cooperating in the fights against terrorism and organized crime, blocking trafficking in arms drugs and people, preventing piracy, and responding to natural disasters.
- b. Economy: Initiatives could include cooperating in facilitating trade and investment, engaging all stakeholders (especially the private sector), lowering trade barriers, building common regional infrastructure, managing water resources, encouraging trade in natural gas and electricity, and coordinating policies on climate change.
- c. Education and culture: Initiatives could include reducing barriers to travel and communication, encouraging academic exchange and language study, and promoting media cooperation. The countries of the region should also cooperate to combat antiquities theft and ensure the return of cultural artefacts to their countries of origin.

12. **Toward an Inclusive Regional Architecture:** Maintaining a stable, peaceful and prosperous region will require a permanent and structured cooperation framework, like those that exist in Europe and Asia but adapted to the Middle East's unique circumstances. Any new framework will not replace or supersede existing regional organizations, nor will it obviate the need for bilateral diplomacy.