



## Ending US Entanglements in the Middle East

As the US embarks on a war in Iran that lacks strategic sense and public support, the American public is questioning endless military commitments in the Middle East that cost lives, drain resources, and fail to make the country safer. The failed US approach to the Middle East has made it abundantly clear that it is time for a radically different approach. The US must right-size its role in the Middle East, protecting core interests while ending unnecessary entanglements and avoiding another generation of war. A smarter approach should put the responsibility for regional security on regional actors and bring open-ended US military involvement in the region to a close.

 "If the US pulls back, the Middle East will fall into chaos."

 "If the US pulls back, evidence shows that regional states will step forward and take greater responsibility for their own security."

### What are US interests in the Middle East?

The United States has real but limited interests in the Middle East. These include protecting the US from attack, and facilitating the free flow of global commerce. What is not a core interest is trying to control political outcomes across the region, maintaining indefinite military deployments, or providing security guarantees that put US troops in harm's way for the interests of other countries. Over the past several decades, Americans have grown skeptical of these kinds of commitments. US interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and now Iran have cost trillions of dollars and stretched US forces thin while doing little to deliver lasting stability.


 "The US must stay deeply militarily involved in the Middle East to protect its interests."

 "The US can protect its core interests, including economic stability, without a military presence in the Middle East."

### What about terrorism? Won't reducing our commitments in the region make us less safe?

Terrorism is a concern, but large-scale wars and military occupations have often made the problem worse. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan did not eliminate terrorism. In many cases, they created instability that extremist groups used to grow and recruit, the rise of ISIS being a case in point. Military interventions tend to fuel anti-American sentiment, weaken local governments, and create the conditions that terrorist groups rely on. A more effective approach focuses on targeted counterterrorism. This includes intelligence sharing, limited operations against specific threats, and cooperation with regional partners.

 "If the US reduces its military presence, terrorism will surge."

 "Large-scale wars have often fueled terrorism. More effective strategies for keeping Americans safe include removing the US from regional conflicts and focusing on targeted counterterrorism."

## Now that we are at war with Iran, don't we need to focus on winning the war?

This is the same argument Americans have heard before in Iraq and Afghanistan. Once a war begins, the only option is escalation until we win. Experience shows that this logic leads to longer wars, higher costs, and no clear victory. There is no simple military win in a war with Iran. Even after major strikes, Iran retains the ability to escalate and prolong the conflict. Military pressure has historically strengthened hardline elements and increased instability rather than producing lasting, stable outcomes. The US needs to quickly find off-ramps and negotiate an end to this war.

 "Now that we've started a war with Iran, we need to finish the job."

 "Our problems with Iran need to be solved diplomatically, not through war. Pouring resources into a protracted war would be doubling down on our mistake."


## Isn't Israel our greatest ally? Should we continue to sell weapons to Israel?

Israel has been a close partner of the United States, but this does not mean offering unconditional support, especially when Israeli interests run counter to US interests, as they do in Gaza, Lebanon, Iran, and elsewhere. In recent years, US security assistance has helped sustain devastating operations in Gaza, despite US laws that should have restricted assistance. It has also enabled Israel's escalation with Iran, drawing the US into direct conflict. Military aid is a key source of US leverage with Israel, and this leverage should be put to work now, by restricting arms transfers to limit further harm to civilians and regional escalation. The idea that the US can simply provide "defensive" weapons is misleading, as US military aid can shield Israel from the consequences of its actions and encourage further aggression.

 "Israel's interests are America's interests."

 "Allies have their own interests, and US policy should be guided by what serves the American people."


 "We should send Israel only defensive weapons."

 "Sending weapons to Israel has enabled genocide and has protected Israel from the consequences of their own military escalation. The US should not provide Israel with weapons until this behavior changes."

## What would success look like in the Middle East?

Success means a more stable Middle East where security is upheld by regional states rather than by the United States. Stability cannot be imposed from the outside or through military force, and excluding key actors has often made conflicts worse. A better system would involve building a more inclusive regional security framework that includes all major actors, including rivals, because lasting stability requires everyone to have a stake in avoiding conflict.

 "Success means defeating adversaries and maintaining US dominance."

 "Success means building a system where countries in the region manage their own security without American involvement, and in which all people in the region live in safety and dignity."

## What happens to US troops already in the region?

The United States should bring its troops home. The US has thousands of troops stationed across the Middle East, often in missions that no longer have clear objectives. The current posture creates risks. Military assets, rather than deterring attacks, have become targets. Attacks on these forces can quickly pull the US into wider conflicts, even when those conflicts are not in our interest. Reducing unnecessary bases and deployments lowers the risk of stumbling into another war. A responsible strategy would include a phased and deliberate reduction of the US military presence.

 "We need to keep troops in place indefinitely to maintain stability."

 "Endless deployments put US troops at risk and can drag the US into wars it does not need to fight."