



Joint Regional Strategy

Middle East and North Africa

FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

Table of Contents

1. Mission and Executive Statement..... 3

2. Bureau Strategic Framework 5

3. Goals and Objectives..... 7

4. Cross-cutting Management Objectives..... 16

1. Mission and Executive Statement

Mission Statement

Working in close collaboration, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) and USAID's Middle East Bureau (ME) will lead U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa region through carefully administered diplomacy, advocacy, and assistance that advances the interests, safety, and economic prosperity of the American people. We will promote democratic values and advance a free, peaceful, and prosperous Middle East and North Africa. We will provide advice and analysis to the Secretary of State and the President, allowing them to make the most informed decisions possible on matters relevant to the region.

Executive Statement

NEA and ME, and our personnel serving domestically and in 18 overseas missions, will advance the President's foreign policy agenda for the region by implementing this Joint Regional Strategy. In line with the President's National Security Strategy, the NEA-ME Joint Regional Strategy aims to protect the American people, our way of life, and our interests and values.

U.S. diplomatic leadership and assistance programs remain indispensable to delivering sustainable regional security and mitigating threats to the homeland, reducing conflict and crises, promoting regional prosperity and growth while creating opportunities for U.S. commerce, and for improving regional governance institutions and processes. U.S. regional interests in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are consistent and enduring, despite the complex operating environment. The United States will continue to ensure that all MENA countries meet their international commitments on nonproliferation and that terrorist groups no longer threaten the homeland or our allies. We will advance relationships with our partners that advance security through stability and counter extremist ideologies. We will promote inclusive prosperity and socio-economic development while advocating for the prominent role of U.S. businesses. We will continue to secure the lines of communication and commerce that convey natural resources to our economy and the global market. We will champion American values such as protection of human rights, democratic governance, and respect for the rule of law.

As we pursue these goals, we will continue supporting our oldest and strongest partners. NEA and ME will deepen bilateral partnerships, coordinating across U.S. agencies, and using the full range of our diplomatic and assistance capabilities.

There are a number of risks to the achievement of our objectives. The region remains unstable and uncertain. Civil conflicts are exacerbated by terrorists, malign internal and external actors, and a lack of regional consensus about the path towards stability. Our engagement and programming are restricted in critical areas of the region which are troubled by conflict and instability. Our relationships with our partners remain strong, but a number of critical partner governments lack the political will and capacity to fully implement commitments. In many countries, U.S. foreign policy is unpopular, creating incentives for opportunistic leaders to

criticize U.S. policies and actions – even when these U.S. actions would benefit their own countries' security and stability. Some friendly governments perceive our work with civil society as a threat to their domestic control and authority. Deep rivalries among governments in the region interfere with our ability to achieve our objectives – even when a shared interest presents an opportunity for cooperation. Iran threatens global and regional security through its aggressive and destabilizing activities in the region, such as support for militant proxies and terrorist organizations (e.g., Lebanese Hizballah and Hamas); its development and proliferation of ballistic missiles; its nuclear program; and its egregious human rights abuses against its own citizens. Iran props up a brutal dictator in Syria and undermines Iraqi sovereignty; by providing ballistic missiles and other lethal weapons to the Houthis in Yemen, it prolongs and exacerbates the conflict in Yemen and threatens the security of our allies.

Yet the region's many conflicts also present us with opportunities. The compelling worldwide desire to address the region's persistent security problems has allowed us to mobilize our partners and harness their contributions for a common purpose. We have persuaded key partners to shoulder more of the regional stabilization burden, effectively multiplying our own contributions. We have expanded our leadership in countering terrorism through our security partnerships, such as the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Through our comprehensive Iran strategy, we are countering Iran's malign regional influence and enhancing regional security by building new partnerships and deepening longstanding alliances. Finally, our partners now understand the twin dangers of economic stagnation and weak governance, which exacerbate civil conflict. They are willing to embrace long-resisted reforms that can create jobs and broaden the range of economic opportunities and social participation available to their citizens, including women, youth, and marginalized communities.

2. Bureau Strategic Framework

Goal 1 – Enhance Security, Stabilization, Counterterrorism, and Conflict Resolution

- Objective 1.1 – Enhance and encourage international and regional cooperation through diplomatic and assistance efforts to prevent, mitigate, and respond to current and future conflicts, crises, and mass atrocities in the MENA region.
- Objective 1.2 – Encourage and enable national conflict resolution efforts and advance post-conflict stability initiatives, prevent the resurgence of violence, assist persecuted ethnic and religious minorities, and reaffirm or establish locally legitimate authorities and systems committed to promoting inclusive governance, protecting state unity, respecting internationally-recognized standards of human rights, and partnering with the international community on common interests.
- Objective 1.3 – Develop and strengthen bilateral and multilateral security partnerships, regional security frameworks, and the institutional and political components necessary to promote long-term stability.
- Objective 1.4 – Enhance partners’ commitment and capability to counter Iran and other state sponsors of terrorism, counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and illicit conventional weapons, and capability to defeat ISIS, al-Qa’ida, and other terrorist organizations.

Goal 2 – Advance Comprehensive and Lasting Arab-Israeli Peace

- Objective 2.1 – Advance an enduring and comprehensive peace between Israel and the Palestinians through focused diplomatic engagement and efforts to create a conducive atmosphere for successful negotiations.
- Objective 2.2 – Engage Israeli and Palestinian stakeholders to enact reforms that increase competitiveness, provide for Palestinian private sector-led economic growth, create sustainable opportunities for market-oriented growth, and reduce barriers to market access.
- Objective 2.3 – Improve accountability and transparency in governance in the West Bank and Gaza through sustained outreach with regional and international partners and, where appropriate, programmatic support.
- Objective 2.4 – Build international and regional cooperation towards the normalization of political and economic relations between Israel and regional Arab

neighbors by facilitating broad engagement between governments and citizens.

Objective 2.5 – Relieve suffering and improve the quality of life of vulnerable Palestinians, particularly in Gaza.

Management Objective 2.6 – Reinforce our recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by moving the U.S. Embassy to Israel to Jerusalem, first in an interim and then in a permanent facility.

Goal 3 – Promote inclusive economic growth, socio-economic development, open markets, and increased U.S. exports

Objective 3.1 – Promote increased employment, economic growth, and U.S. economic and commercial engagement by supporting a stronger private sector and business-friendly environment.

Objective 3.2 – Encourage policies that engender a healthy and educated population able to promote social stability and meet the private sector’s employment needs.

Objective 3.3 – Improve the management of energy, land, and water resources through the incorporation of global environmental standards, enhancing regional economic security and promoting sustainable development.

Goal 4 – Improve Governance, Strengthen Democratic Institutions and Processes, and Support an Engaged Civil Society

Objective 4.1 – Engage with government institutions and political processes to increase transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness to the population.

Objective 4.2 – Support civil society to increase its operating space and empower citizens to represent their interests through constructive policy engagement with government.

Objective 4.3 – Emphasize that respect for human rights and the advancement of the rule of law by governments and non-state actors will lead to a more stable region.

3. Goals and Objectives

Bureau Goal 1: Enhance Security, Stabilization, Counterterrorism, and Conflict Resolution

Description and Linkages

The United States seeks a Middle East and North Africa that is neither a safe haven nor breeding ground for terrorists, nor a region that is dominated by any power hostile to our interests. We will strengthen partnerships and form new ones to stabilize and secure the region; resolve and prevent conflicts, radicalization, and the spread of violent extremism; eliminate terrorist safe havens; and mitigate threats posed by hostile nations and terrorist groups that threaten the United States and our allies. Iran takes advantage of instability in the region to expand its influence through partners and proxies, weapons proliferation, and funding, while the world's most dangerous terrorist organizations – ISIS and al-Qa'ida – reside in the region. The United States and our partners supported military operations to liberate territory from ISIS control in Iraq and Syria. U.S. forces remain in Iraq at the government's invitation to train, advise, and assist Iraqi forces and to help prevent an ISIS resurgence. In Syria we are working toward a political process to end Syria's civil war. We will work toward an end state where citizens, particularly in vulnerable communities, are equipped to resist the false promise of violent extremism, return home, and rebuild their lives in safety. We will help partner governments stem the flow of foreign fighters and the spread of terrorist organizations and ideologies. We will create conditions where legitimate local authorities and systems can provide basic public order and justice, manage conflict, and prevent a resurgence of violence, particularly for ethnic and religious minorities. We will work with regional partners and messaging centers to help counter the threat of violent extremism in cyberspace.

Building and enhancing lasting security partnerships is critical to promoting stability, collectively deterring aggression, and reducing threats to U.S. and partner interests in the region. We will promote effective burden sharing with our key regional partners, articulating a clear division of labor to leverage each partner's strengths in security cooperation and civilian security reform initiatives.

Iran's ongoing assistance to proxy militias in the region, support for terrorist organizations, and development and proliferation of ballistic missiles destabilize the region and threaten our partners. The United States will constrain Iran from continuing its role as a leading state sponsor of terrorism. We remain committed to ensuring Iran does not acquire a nuclear weapon and to neutralizing Iranian malign influence. Under our comprehensive Iran strategy, the U.S. government is increasing cooperation with our allies and partners to counter the full range of Iranian threats and to ensure Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon.

We will support multilateral efforts to bring stability, security, and effective governance to post-conflict areas. Libya, Yemen, and Syria are key areas for NEA and ME collaboration as

we seek to end the fighting, improve humanitarian access, and eventually promote stability, good governance, and economic development.

Risks: Given the evolving security and stabilization environment in MENA, NEA and ME will frequently review and adapt our strategies and techniques to achieve our objectives. We will work closely with our partners and international and multilateral organizations to remain agile and responsive to continued and emerging threats within the region.

This goal will directly contribute to NSS Pillar 1 and will advance the objective of JSP Goal 1 to protect America's security at home and abroad.

Bureau Objective 1.1: Enhance and encourage international and regional cooperation through diplomatic and assistance efforts to prevent, mitigate, and respond to current and future conflicts, crises, and mass atrocities in the MENA region.

Justification

We will work with our partners to end ongoing conflicts in the region and prevent these conflicts from further destabilizing the region. International initiatives to support post-conflict stability, address the negative human impact of conflict, and support the necessary institutional, economic, and political components to promote long-term regional stability are vital. We envision international partners and regional organizations active in the region, who increasingly support our goals and work to expand their role in these efforts and cooperatively build the foundation for regional security and stability.

Bureau Objective 1.2: Encourage and enable national conflict resolution efforts and advance post-conflict stability initiatives, prevent the resurgence of violence, assist persecuted ethnic and religious minorities, and reaffirm or establish locally legitimate authorities and systems committed to promoting inclusive governance, protecting state unity, respecting internationally-recognized standards of human rights, and partnering with the international community on common interests.

Justification

We will work to ensure women, youth, and other marginalized groups are represented in bilateral and multilateral conflict resolution efforts, as part of agreements, and in post-agreement stability mechanisms. In post-conflict countries, the United States and international partners will layer and sequence stabilization and economic recovery programs with an iterative approach that supports the political goals for stabilization while planning for transition to self-reliance. Such programs will also emphasize inclusivity and fairness by improving living standards, reducing inequalities, and increasing the affordability of basic goods.

Bureau Objective 1.3: Develop and strengthen bilateral and multilateral security partnerships, regional security frameworks, and the institutional and political components necessary to

promote long-term stability.

Justification

Such partnerships should be supplemented by the establishment and maintenance of relationships with local security actors who can reinforce existing pockets of citizen security. We envision partners that have developed and implemented military and security strategies aligned with U.S. interests and policy goals and are willing to work with the United States to develop the capacity to implement these strategies.

Bureau Objective 1.4: Enhance partners' commitment and capability to counter Iran and other state sponsors of terrorism, counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and illicit conventional weapons, and capability to defeat ISIS, al-Qaida, and other terrorist organizations.

Justification

We envision partner governments who possess sufficient political will and means to counter Iran's malign influence throughout the region; collaborate and support international and multilateral counterterrorism efforts; counter illicit activities that enable terrorist operations; prevent and respond to a terrorist attacks; and prevent and counter recruitment and radicalization efforts. Counterterrorism laws and resources are not diverted to prosecuting non-violent civic activism.

Bureau Goal 2: Advance Comprehensive and Lasting Arab-Israeli Peace

Description and Linkages

Achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians is a long-standing U.S. national security goal that, if achieved, would improve political and economic conditions and increase stability and security in the region. The normalization of political and economic relations between Israel and the Arab League states is a crucial step towards peace and prosperity in the Middle East. Partnerships between Israel and its neighbors will reduce Israel's international isolation and improve security.

We will work with Israel, regional partners, and the Palestinian people in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to improve social, economic, governance, and security conditions for Palestinians while addressing critical humanitarian needs.

We will augment long-term stability by encouraging the return of legitimate governance in the form of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. We will promote development of accountable institutions in both the West Bank and Gaza that are capable of providing essential services, furthering economic growth, and maintaining rule of law. We will assist in building a strong civil society that will promote greater accountability of governmental institutions and personnel.

Risks: Severe poverty, crippling unemployment, and chronic underdevelopment in Gaza feed instability and frustration that could create the conditions for renewed conflict and

humanitarian crisis. We will continue to engage with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and regional states to improve the economic and humanitarian conditions in Gaza and foster peace and prosperity.

Goal 2, with its focus on advancing Arab-Israeli peace, is tied to critical U.S. national security interests, including NSS Pillars 3 and 4, and JSP Goals 1 and 3, which are focused on advancing peace, security, and American influence.

Bureau Objective 2.1: Advance an enduring and comprehensive peace between Israel and the Palestinians through focused diplomatic engagement and efforts to create a conducive atmosphere for successful negotiations.

Justification

We envision affirmative steps will be taken to create the base from which progress toward comprehensive peace can be made.

Bureau Objective 2.2: Engage Israeli and Palestinian stakeholders to enact reforms that increase competitiveness, provide for Palestinian private sector-led economic growth, create sustainable opportunities for market-oriented growth, and reduce barriers to market access.

Justification

A stagnant Palestinian economy and significant unemployment weaken Palestinian governance and create an environment that extremist groups could exploit. We envision improved economic growth and employment in the Palestinian territories leading to improved governance and security.

Bureau Objective 2.3: Improve accountability and transparency in governance in the West Bank and Gaza through sustained outreach with regional and international partners and, where appropriate, programmatic support.

Justification

Long-term stability requires institutions capable of providing essential services, fostering economic growth and maintaining rule of law. We envision the advancement of good governance and the rule of law through engagement on political, economic, and security reforms through a strong civil society, which promotes greater accountability of government institutions and personnel.

Bureau Objective 2.4: Build international and regional cooperation toward the normalization of political and economic relations between Israel and regional Arab neighbors by facilitating broad engagement between governments and citizens.

Justification

Normalization of political and economic relations between Israel and the Arab League states has been an objective of Middle East peace since the State of Israel was founded.

Increased opportunities for diplomatic engagement, trade, and other people-to-people contacts between Israel and its neighbors will help to bolster the likelihood of peace. Israel's international isolation will be reduced and its security increased as it develops new partnerships with its Arab neighbors.

Bureau Objective 2.5: Relieve suffering and improve the quality of life of vulnerable Palestinians, particularly in Gaza.

Justification

Severe poverty, crippling unemployment, and chronic underdevelopment in Gaza increase the likelihood of renewed conflict and humanitarian catastrophe. It is vital we continue to work with Israel and regional and international partners to improve the social, economic, and security conditions of the Palestinian people and respond to critical humanitarian needs.

Management Objective 2.6: Reinforce our recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, first in an interim and then in a permanent facility.

Justification

The U.S. recognizes the political and practical fact that Jerusalem is Israel's seat of government. As stated in the proclamation recognizing this fact, the Department of State is establishing a new U.S. Embassy to Israel in Jerusalem. The specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem are subject to final status negotiations between the parties.

Bureau Goal 3: Promote Inclusive Economic Growth, Socio-economic Development, Open Markets, and Increased U.S. Exports.

Description and Linkages

Private sector growth and increased foreign investment are crucial to MENA's stability. Outdated, complicated, and inconsistent laws and regulations often stymie economic growth and dissuade the private sector risk-taking needed to create jobs that sustain the region's population. In particular, these measures make it difficult to provide opportunities for youth in the region, a high percentage of whom are unemployed. Seven years after the Arab Spring, unemployment for youth in MENA averages 25-30 percent per country compared to 10-12 percent for the general population. It is even higher for young women. In several MENA countries/territories (Libya, Egypt, West Bank/Gaza, and Iraq), youth unemployment is close to 40 percent or greater. This reality represents not only a drag to the future economic stability of the region, but also increases the threat of social unrest and violent extremism.

Turning to government employment options is not a viable or sustainable long-term solution given fluctuating oil prices and the lack of economic diversification in most

countries in the region. The private sector must create new jobs and meaningful opportunities for youth and spearhead inclusive growth that improves the livelihood of the poor and disadvantaged.

At the same time, investments in the education and health sectors yield sustainable dividends. The return on investment in health is estimated to be 9-to-1, and around one-quarter of growth over the past decade in low-income and middle-income countries has resulted from improvements to health. Supporting the health sector in MENA, including addressing non-communicable diseases, emerging pandemic threats, and family planning will yield positive economic and security results by reducing pressure on critical social services and resources due to longer term care needs, unanticipated outbreaks, and rapid population growth. Research has demonstrated that investment in education leads to economic growth, reduces poverty, increases earning power, increases the probability of democracy and its persistence, and has a ripple effect on overall health improvements. Supporting the education sector in MENA includes advancing learning outcomes in basic literacy and numeracy; ensuring equitable access to basic education, particularly in crisis or conflict contexts; and improving education system delivery to be more effective and cost-efficient.

Risks: Countries confront a wide range of challenges including conflicts and protracted crises; rapidly increasing demands on a limited, highly contested supply of water; consequences of climate change-caused rising temperatures and droughts; surging demands for energy; and a growing gap between consumption and domestic production of food. These factors impede efforts these countries make to meet basic human needs for water, food, and energy while sustainably managing their natural resources. Promoting water and food security in MENA is a key element to improving stability and socio-economic development in the MENA region.

Goal 3, with its focus on economic prosperity, socio-economic development, and creating opportunities for U.S. businesses abroad, will contribute to NSS Pillars 3 and 4 and JSP Goals 2 and 3.

Bureau Objective 3.1: Promote increased employment, economic growth, and U.S. economic and commercial engagement by supporting a stronger private sector and business-friendly environment. These measures will create U.S. exports and jobs while increasing intraregional trade and investment.

Justification

Our sustained economic engagement in the MENA region will continue to foster private sector growth and enhance infrastructure and commercial adjudicative institutions, creating a business environment that welcomes more U.S. economic and commercial engagement in the region. We envision a business-enabling environment that is transparent and fair and whose procedures and regulations are in line with international standards. This environment is key to encouraging greater opportunity for the region's

private sector and for foreign investors. We will continue our aggressive advocacy of U.S. goods and services exports that generate U.S. jobs. Inclusive private sector growth will create new jobs and meaningful opportunities for youth and improve the livelihoods of the poor and disadvantaged.

Bureau Objective 3.2: Encourage policies that engender a healthy and educated population able to promote social stability and meet the private sector's employment needs.

Justification

A more educated, healthy labor force is more mobile and adaptable, can learn new tasks and skills more easily, can use a wider range of technologies and sophisticated equipment, and is more productive. The benefits of having a more educated, healthy populace and workforce accrue collectively, and contribute positively to economic growth.

Bureau Objective 3.3: Improve the management of energy, land, and water resources through incorporation of global environmental standards, enhancing regional economic security and promoting sustainable development.

Justification

Based on current trends, many countries in the region will likely face absolute water scarcity, with less than 500 cubic meters of water per capita, by the year 2030. Extreme economic water shortages already exist in places like Yemen. Moreover, population growth rates, averaging over 2.2 percent per year across the region, and migration driven by conflict, are increasing pressure and competition for scarce water and agricultural resources that can exacerbate tensions in this region. To mitigate, if not avert, conflict and support sustainable economic development, MENA countries must pursue a different path to water, food, and energy conservation, management, and use.

Bureau Goal 4: Improve Governance, Strengthen Democratic Institutions and Processes, and Support an Engaged Civil Society.

Description and Linkages

Effective and democratic governance, vibrant civil societies, respect for the rule of law, and protection of human rights will form the foundation for long-term peace, stability, and prosperity in the region and will advance U.S. national security interests. U.S. assistance and engagement will support the development of government institutions and political processes, including more inclusive and representative political systems that are more transparent, accountable, and responsive to all citizens. We will facilitate a healthy operating environment for civil society that will allow it to represent societal interests through constructive engagement with governments. We also will strengthen the rule of law by promoting effective, impartial, and accessible judicial systems. We will use a variety of platforms to explain U.S. policy and advance bilateral and regional dialogue on key issues. These efforts will improve public access to information, mitigate trafficking in persons and

other transnational criminal activity, promote respect for human rights, and empower women and youth.

Risks: Weak institutions with a lack of accountability, responsiveness to citizens, and political will continue to present challenges to NEA and ME effectively meeting this goal and our objectives. We will continue to work closely with civil society, media, labor organizations, the private sector, and our partners in the region to communicate that investments in economic and political reforms that address these issues and citizen engagement can lead to more prosperous economies and countries. We will encourage gradual reforms and increased respect for the dignity of individuals, especially minorities, in our dialogues with our partners.

Goal 4, with its focus on governance, institutions, and civil society, promotes NSS Pillar 4 and JSP Goal 3.

Bureau Objective 4.1: Engage with government institutions and political processes to increase transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness to the population.

Justification

Addressing the region’s challenges and meeting citizen demands for a voice in determining their futures will require sustained reforms, more responsive and accountable governance, and political processes that are more open, credible, and inclusive. Increased transparency, including through efforts to curb corruption, directly promotes both economic growth and improved, equitable service delivery. NEA and ME will support those that seek to bolster the rights and democratic aspirations of their people and assist them along their journey to self-reliance, while recognizing that societies that empower women to participate fully in civic and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful. We will actively support countries in transition; local and national government institutions that more transparently and equitably provide better public goods and services to all citizens; legislative and advisory bodies that are more representative and better reflect constituent interests; expanded opportunities for greater political participation by all citizens to the fullest extent possible – recognizing the particular need to empower and enfranchise women and minority groups; and the development of more responsive political parties where they exist.

Bureau Objective 4.2: Support civil society to increase its operating space and empower citizens to represent their interests through constructive policy engagement with government.

Justification

Civil society plays a critical role in promoting civic awareness and participation, advocating for citizens’ needs and interests, supporting inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation, and engaging with and providing oversight of governments. NEA and ME will work to preserve or improve the operating space, both offline and online, for civil

society and the media. Where opportunities exist, we will strengthen the ability of civil society groups to enhance democratic practices and inclusiveness and to engage with their governments. This effort will include a focus on enhancing the participation and leadership of women, youth, and ethnic and religious minorities within civil society.

Bureau Objective 4.3: Emphasize that respect for human rights and the advancement of the rule of law by governments and non-state actors will lead to a more stable region.

Justification

Governance based on laws, an impartial and accessible judicial system, and respect for fundamental rights serve as a foundation and support progress across a range of issues: more inclusive, representative political systems; economic growth and development; reduced corruption; security and conflict resolution; and the protection and participation of women, minorities, internally displaced persons, refugees, and other marginalized groups. Importantly, they also lead to a more stable region over time.

4. Cross-cutting Management Objectives

Management Objective: Foster efficient and stable management platforms

Justification

NEA and ME are committed to maintaining flexible and efficient management platforms to respond quickly to the goals and priorities established by the administration. Effective diplomacy requires the efficient use of taxpayer dollars to support our diplomatic corps, facilities, and communications and information technology infrastructure to engage with our strategic partners and local populations.