



# Joint Regional Strategy

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**MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

**FOR PUBLIC RELEASE**

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## 1. Executive Statement and Mission Statement

### **Mission Statement**

The United States has significant national security interests in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and the Department of State and USAID are committed to a more sustainable set of long-term relationships with our partners in the region that focus on solving shared problems and building shared prosperity while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.

### **Executive Statement**

The greatest challenges facing governments and people in the MENA region are well-known: fragile governments contending with legitimacy challenges, corruption, and human rights abuses; stagnant economies further exacerbated by COVID-19; rampant and complex conflict perpetuating insecurity; ingrained social and legal gender discrimination; a large youth population and lack of employment opportunities; shrinking space for civil society; and the climate crisis, bringing increasing drought and instability. These challenges have implications across all sectors and disproportionately impact vulnerable populations. The rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia, both as global strategic competitors and regional influencers, and the continued influence of Iran, are the core challenges for U.S. foreign policy in the coming decade, and therefore addressed as a cross-cutting priority under this strategy. Our diplomatic, economic, and development tools and investments will help us meet these challenges by building stronger ties with partners in the region.

This strategy embodies these commitments and outlines the goals and objectives necessary to create space for people throughout the MENA region to realize their aspirations, and to demonstrate to Americans that partnerships in the region contribute to our lasting national security. The strategy addresses five inter-connected goals that focus on (1) addressing regional security; (2) advancing peace in the Middle East; (3) strengthening inclusive economic growth; (4) advancing accountable, responsive governance, and human rights; and (5) accelerating cross-sectoral actions to address the climate crisis.

The common thread tying these goals together is the President's priority to not dwell on the challenges of the past, but to focus on finding solutions for the future that contribute to the prosperity of all people, both from the MENA region and the United States. For instance, the Abraham Accords and normalization agreements mark a shift in regional alliances in the Middle East and open a new chapter in the effort to integrate Israel into the region and build a lasting peace. Likewise, the countries that will be best equipped to meet the security challenges of our changing world will be those with resilient, inclusive governments that treat civil society as a partner rather than a threat, and that recognize the fundamental rights of their people, including freedom from oppression, freedom of expression and association, and freedom of the press. We will continue pressing governments to reduce corruption to increase their legitimacy and win the trust of the people they serve.

The strategy also addresses the urgent opportunity to meaningfully engage and economically empower women, youth, and marginalized populations to participate fully in confronting the challenges facing countries in the region, particularly in the response and recovery from COVID-19 and combating the climate crisis. We know that communities and countries that have meaningful participation and leadership from women have better outcomes on virtually every development indicator, including, perhaps most importantly, peace and security. The data conclusively demonstrate that when women thrive, entire countries thrive — it is a strategic imperative. Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace, and Security provides ample data about the role women play in peace and security. In their Women, Peace, and Security Index, released on October 19, 2021, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and the Palestinian Authority ranked among the ten worst countries in the world for women's inclusion, justice, and security. By contrast, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where conflict and instability pale in comparison to elsewhere in the region, ranked 24th, just two behind the United States. Through innovative diplomacy, it is time we engage the region in new ways with evidence-based approaches that put women and girls at the forefront of peace and security decision-making, as well as meaningful economic and political participation and leadership.

These priorities continue as the United States and the MENA region strive to overcome and recover from COVID-19. The pandemic is reshuffling the global economy, shutting down some sectors and spurring growth in others. In the MENA region, these changes are exacerbating pre-existing economic, political, and social vulnerabilities, and are threatening to further deepen challenges pertaining to female labor force participation and, in some countries, reversing vital progress in women's employment. As economies navigate the post-COVID terrain, the region's public and private sectors must work together to protect women's employment and support their re-entry to the workforce.

Cutting across the full strategy is the priority of confronting the global climate crisis. The Middle East is poised to be one of the regions hardest hit by rising temperatures, desertification, drought, and extreme water scarcity. Countries in the Gulf are already experiencing temperatures so high that they threaten to make outdoor life unlivable, while the countries of the Fertile Crescent have endured historic levels of drought that have decimated food crops. Nearly 60 percent of the region's population is exposed to high water stress, and approximately 52 million people in the region are chronically undernourished. Increased water scarcity further drives food insecurity and with it, migration, instability, and conflict. These challenges are particularly serious in countries like Syria, where 9.3 million people, more than half the population, are food insecure, or in Yemen, where 16 million people require food aid.

The region is also home to many of the world's leading fossil fuel producers, which rely on hydrocarbon exports to fuel their economies. Navigating this hardship depends on a sound policy framework that creates incentives for net-zero, climate-resilient local and regional actions and investments. It requires innovative and community-led efforts supported by the international community, including those designed and led by women and youth, combined

with scalable solutions grounded in principles of equity and respect for human rights. Given that Egypt will host the 2022 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 27), followed by the UAE in 2023 (COP 28), there is greater interest in climate action across the region, presenting us with a window of opportunity to empower the region to become more climate aware and embrace meaningful action.

Equally important to our outward strategy is our inward facing commitment to diversity in our workforce. Concrete actions to further diversify our ranks will help us more effectively represent America abroad while building the human resources that ensure our diplomacy remains relevant and robust into the next century. Both the Department of State and USAID are committed to advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) through operationalizing Executive Order (E.O.) 13985 to advance racial equity and support for underserved communities; E.O. 14035 to advance DEIA in the federal workforce; and E.O. 14020 mandating the first-ever government-wide strategy to advance gender equity and equality, released on October 21, 2021. To effectively implement U.S. foreign policy, the people responsible for advancing our diplomatic and foreign assistance priorities must reflect the full diversity of the United States, and this strategy will take concerted effort to create lasting and sustainable change across both agencies.

Over the next four years, we will reorient diplomacy and foreign policy resources to address opportunities as we look to the future, while learning from the challenges of the past. Through relentless and brave diplomacy, this strategy lays out an ambitious, affirmative, and inclusive agenda that leverages data and collective action — given the urgency that both the climate crisis and global pandemic warrant — to engage the region in new ways.

## 2. Bureau Strategic Framework

**Bureau Goal 1:** Modernize and revitalize U.S. alliances, partnerships, and multilateral cooperation to prevent, deter, and resolve conflicts; counter terrorism; and address regional security and stabilization challenges.

- **Bureau Objective 1.1:** Strengthen regional partnerships, including women leaders, diverse populations, and marginalized communities, to address modern-day security and stabilization challenges.
- **Bureau Objective 1.2:** Strengthen locally led solutions to resolve conflict, promote reconciliation, and advance inclusive, democratic governance and human rights.
- **Bureau Objective 1.3:** Strengthen partnerships to address global competition from the PRC and Russia, and influence from Iran.

**Bureau Goal 2:** Advance freedom, security, and prosperity for Israelis, Palestinians, and their neighbors.

- **Bureau Objective 2.1:** Enhance prospects for a viable two-state solution.
- **Bureau Objective 2.2:** Increase political and economic normalization with Israel by Arab and Muslim-majority countries.
- **Bureau Objective 2.3:** Reduce disparities in freedom, security, inclusion, and economic growth for Israelis and Palestinians.
- **Bureau Objective 2.4:** Address the dire humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip.

**Bureau Goal 3:** Strengthen inclusive economic growth that achieves stable and prosperous societies while creating new markets for U.S. exports.

- **Bureau Objective 3.1:** Improve business enabling environment in support of open markets.
- **Bureau Objective 3.2:** Drive economic prosperity through inclusion of women and marginalized communities in a more equitable, healthy, skilled, and educated populace.
- **Bureau Objective 3.3:** Strengthen economic resilience to better withstand shocks.

**Bureau Goal 4:** Advance accountable and responsive governance through strengthening democratic principles and fundamental freedoms.

- **Bureau Objective 4.1:** Enable more transparent, accountable, inclusive, and equitable governance systems, including rule of law.
- **Bureau Objective 4.2:** Enable independent civil society to adapt, freely operate, represent diverse communities, and hold governments accountable.
- **Bureau Objective 4.3:** Strengthen independent, safe, diverse, and free media.

- **Bureau Objective 4.4:** Advance respect for human rights and promote access to justice, including for marginalized populations, women, and youth.

**Bureau Goal 5:** Accelerate equitable and ambitious cross-sectoral actions to address the climate crisis in line with 2050 net-zero emissions targets.

- **Bureau Objective 5.1:** Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and work toward a phase-out of oil and gas emissions in the region, complemented by renewable energy deployment and economic diversification, in consultation with other major producers.
- **Bureau Objective 5.2:** Strengthen innovative, community-led, and nature-based solutions and technical cooperation across the region to promote climate adaptation and sustainable management of natural resources, including water.
- **Bureau Objective 5.3:** Advance regional partnerships and multilateralism to engage diverse stakeholders, particularly women and youth, to catalyze transformative shifts to net-zero economies and sustainable solutions as societies transition to greener models.

**Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 1:** Strengthen the Department of State and USAID's ability to recruit, hire, develop, promote, and retain diverse talent and remove barriers to equal opportunity for historically underserved communities.

**Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 2:** Ensure that the Department of State can support management services beyond each individual post's platforms through a regional center in Amman.

### 3. Bureau Goals and Objectives

**Bureau Goal 1:** Modernize and revitalize U.S. alliances, partnerships, and multilateral cooperation to prevent, deter, and resolve conflicts; counter terrorism; and address regional security and stabilization challenges.

- **Bureau Goal 1 Description:** Consistent with the President's guidance, the Department of State's Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) Bureau and USAID's Bureau for the Middle East (ME) seek to build sustainable partnerships with regional partners and civil society, as well as with local, regional, and national organizations that advance an affirmative agenda to address shared regional and global challenges. In the MENA region, we want to continue the U.S. Government's leading role in diplomacy and people-to-people development initiatives. Our support of a rules-based international order, girded by our global alliances and participation in the multilateral arena, provide the foundation for regional security. The Department of State is at the forefront of preventing regional and global adversaries — both nation-states and non-state actors — from directly threatening our partners and citizens, while USAID leads in engagement and program implementation with civil society and governance organizations to build a more peaceful, prosperous, and healthy world. National security efforts build on the strong foundation of U.S. cooperative security partnerships in law enforcement and defense institutions that prevent, deter, resolve conflicts, counter terrorism, and address current and future regional security challenges.

The Diplomacy, Development, and Defense approach remains a key element of the JRS. As the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) implements modifications to its global posture and longstanding geographic priorities, NEA and ME remain committed to partnering with DOD to implement and achieve U.S. foreign policy priorities and goals of peace and stability in the MENA region. While we must continuously assess the risks associated with a change in regional posture, change creates new opportunities to move beyond a security-dominated dialogue with regional partners and focus on an affirmative agenda that includes defending human rights, strengthening global health security and recovering from COVID-19, mitigating climate-related conflict, and helping stabilize fragile states.

Multilateral cooperation with, and support of, international organizations remains pivotal to de-escalating regional tensions and managing regional conflicts to help prevent the spread of threats, including terrorism, and to strengthen good governance and more resilient and peaceful societies around the globe, a critical part of ensuring the American people can live in peace and security at home. Key threats to this international order and multilateral approach stem from disinformation, so NEA and ME



will continue to prioritize countering geopolitical influences from the PRC, Russia, and Iran, including those that encourage authoritarianism and a weakening of democratic governance.

A decade after the Arab Spring, most countries in the MENA region still have not met the legitimate aspirations of their citizens for basic rights and social, economic, and political reforms. Civil society and human rights defenders across the region continue to face threats, judicial harassment, arbitrary detention, torture, and other forms of persecution. COVID-19 has again demonstrated the interconnection between health and regional instability, with infection spread both worsening and worsened by conflict and instability. These challenges further strain already tenuous local and national government institutions that foster regional security and stability.

**Bureau Objective 1.1:** Strengthen regional partnerships, including women leaders, diverse populations, and marginalized communities, to address modern-day security and stabilization challenges.

- **Bureau Objective 1.1 Justification and Linkages:** The Global Fragility Act of 2020 and the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability; the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 and the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security; and the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018, all affirm that the United States will work to strengthen fragile states and remains committed to breaking costly cycles of violence and instability and promoting peaceful, resilient partners in the region. Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) Objective 1.4, Peace and Security, states that we must engage meaningfully with our partners to modernize their capabilities to meet and prepare for an ever-changing threat landscape. A modern approach to security and stabilization prioritizes engagement of women leaders and the participation of marginalized communities.
- **Bureau Objective 1.1 Risk Considerations:** There are significant risks to working in a region where fragile political and economic conditions are exacerbated by converging factors such as authoritarian regimes focused on regime security, disruptive geopolitical influences, and major shocks like COVID-19 and the climate crisis. Without effective assistance that targets women and marginalized communities to bolster more engaged, responsive, and inclusive governance and civil society institutions, continued backsliding, instability, and inequality remains a risk. This in turn creates opportunities for foreign adversaries and an environment ripe for violent extremism.

Security risks in these environments, including those stemming from local security services themselves, limit our footprint, efficacy, and oversight. Fragile states rarely travel a politically predictable path, which constrains our ability to introduce enduring partnerships and programs. Supporting security forces with weak accountability mechanisms can introduce risk and political backlash when they operate in ways that conflict with responsive governance or human rights. The rise in authoritarianism, and corruption in the wake of COVID-19, including the disproportionate impact on women, further destabilizes democratic progress and a rules-based society that is foundational to carry out initiatives supporting U.S. national security interests.

**Bureau Objective 1.2:** Strengthen locally led solutions to resolve conflict, promote reconciliation, and advance inclusive, democratic governance and human rights.

- **Bureau Objective 1.2 Justification and Linkages:** This objective supports guidance from the 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (INSSG), the 2020 U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, and the JSP Objective 1.4, Peace and Security. These strategies affirm that the United States will support inclusive political processes to resolve violent conflicts, emphasizing meaningful participation of youth, women, and members of racial, religious and ethnic communities and marginalized groups. These strategies further mandate the meaningful engagement of women and members of marginalized communities to increase their roles — in number and importance — in conflict resolution, formal and informal peace and reconciliation processes, support of democratic principles, and championing human rights.
- **Bureau Objective 1.2 Risk Considerations:** In the absence of locally led and generated solutions, there is significant risk of non-sustainable and ineffectual approaches being brought to bear on these complex challenges, due to an absence of local-level buy-in, support, expertise, and contextual awareness. USAID’s forthcoming Local Capacity Development Policy states that, “developing local capacity is critical to addressing underlying factors of fragility, strengthening local humanitarian response systems, and enhancing resilience to shocks and stresses. And it is vital to ensuring that marginalized and underrepresented groups have the skills and opportunities to lead on their country’s development.”

**Bureau Objective 1.3:** Strengthen partnerships to address global competition from the PRC and Russia, and influence from Iran.

- **Bureau Objective 1.3 Justification and Linkages:** This objective supports JSP Goal 1 to renew leadership and mobilize coalitions to address global challenges that have the greatest impact on American security and well-being. This objective is intended to identify and mitigate the second-order effects of our competitors — the PRC and Russia on the global scale and Iran across the region — in areas of climate change, COVID-19 response and recovery, terrorism, poverty, and religious/ethnic divisions.
- **Bureau Objective 1.3 Risk Considerations:** Efforts intended to thwart or perceived to thwart a competitor can lead to retaliation through proxies with devastating effects on U.S. citizens, our partners, and the most at-risk populations living within our partners' and our competitors' borders. Similarly, efforts to thwart a competitor's proxy can also contribute to escalation of tensions. Disruptive geo-political influence from Russia, the PRC, and Iran heighten instability and conflict vulnerabilities and worsen developmental and humanitarian outcomes in an already complex and fragile region. These disruptive influences are therefore a grave threat to U.S. foreign policy and national security. Regional partners have historically sought to leverage our global concerns with strategic competitors to extract additional concessions and water down terms of assistance.

**Bureau Goal 2:** Advance freedom, security, and prosperity for Israelis, Palestinians, and their neighbors.

- **Bureau Goal 2 Description:** The United States seeks to advance equal measures of freedom, security and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians alike, which is important in its own right, but also as a means to advance toward a negotiated two-state solution in which Israel lives in peace and security alongside a viable Palestinian state. This approach remains the best way to ensure Israel's future as a democratic and Jewish state. To advance this goal, the Administration will work closely with Israel, renew our ties with the Palestinian Authority, and engage with the international community to advance measures that result in meaningful progress and change. The Abraham Accords and normalization agreements are critical for regional stability, and the United States will work to expand these efforts and urge other countries to normalize relations with Israel.

**Bureau Objective 2.1:** Enhance prospects for a viable two-state solution.

- **Bureau Objective 2.1 Justification and Linkages:** The Administration seeks to advance equal measures of freedom, security and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians alike and is committed to advancing a negotiated two-state solution in which Israel lives in peace and security alongside a viable Palestinian state. This objective directly links to the INSSG commitment to Israel's security through promotion of a viable two-state solution and supports JSP Goal 2 as a prerequisite for sustainable freedom, security, and prosperity for all involved parties. A viable two-state solution is also dependent on each of the other four goals in this regional strategy.
- **Bureau Objective 2.1 Risk Considerations:** A fragile Israeli government coalition, the Palestinian Authority's dire fiscal situation, the absence of legislative and presidential elections, the enduring presence of armed terrorist groups in Gaza, and extreme social and economic inequality between the Israeli and Palestinian people put significant limitations on potential for sweeping agreements on a two-state solution. Not meeting this objective risks further delaying resolution on a two-state solution and risks further Israeli-Palestinian and/or regional armed conflict.

**Bureau Objective 2.2:** Increase political and economic normalization with Israel by Arab and Muslim-majority countries.

- **Bureau Objective 2.2 Justification and Linkages:** The United States' supports the Abraham Accords and other normalization agreements between Israel and countries in the Arab and Muslim world. The United States will continue to explore and advance opportunities for normalization with Israel to expand diplomatic and economic cooperation among countries in the region. This objective builds on the progress made through the Abraham Accords and, in turn, supports Israel's regional integration and promotion of a holistic, regional approach to safety, security, and prosperity for all involved parties. This objective supports broader U.S. national security priorities as outlined in the INSSG to further integrate Israel with its neighbors through expanded diplomatic and economic normalization efforts/agreements. Its success is also linked to each of the other four goals in this regional strategy.
- **Bureau Objective 2.2 Risk Considerations:** Support for normalization efforts risks the perception that these efforts come at the expense of supporting Palestinian self-determination and statehood. It should be clear that U.S. support for normalization between Israel and other countries is not a substitute for Israeli-Palestinian peace. The United States will seek to harness existing and future agreements to make improvements in the lives of the Palestinian people.

**Bureau Objective 2.3:** Reduce disparities in freedom, security, inclusion, and economic growth for Israelis and Palestinians.

- **Bureau Objective 2.3 Justification and Linkages:** The United States will seek to reduce socio-economic and gender divides in local decision-making, safety, education, commerce, and participation in civic life for Israelis and Palestinians. We will support efforts to reduce poverty, corruption, and unemployment faced by the Palestinian people. We will seek job creation for the next generation of Palestinians to bring economic stability and prosperity to the West Bank and Gaza. Advancement in these areas will stabilize conditions that create vulnerabilities affecting the safety and security of daily life for Israelis and Palestinians and their neighbors. This objective reflects the Administration's commitment to Israel's security as outlined in the INSSG, as well as E.O. 13985 and JSP Goal 3.2 to advance equity and support marginalized populations through resumption of U.S. foreign assistance resources to the Palestinian people.
- **Bureau Objective 2.3 Risk Considerations:** Advancement in these areas may threaten entrenched power holders who benefit from the status quo. Corruption on local and national levels, the freedom, economic and security divide between Israeli and Palestinian populations, unauthorized settlement activity and increased tensions in settlement areas, and the degradation of legitimacy of local authorities and rule of law in the West Bank and Gaza all present risks to achieve this objective.

**Bureau Objective 2.4:** Address the dire humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip.

- **Bureau Objective 2.4 Justification and Linkages:** The Gaza Strip continues to face a protracted man-made humanitarian crisis stemming from years of political and administrative mismanagement, import and export restrictions, and unresolved post-conflict recoveries. The United States is committed to providing foreign assistance to the Palestinian people to alleviate dire humanitarian pressures and improve the quality of life, primarily in Gaza. We encourage Israel to promote and enable the operations of international relief organizations and facilitate the movement of goods — including medical supplies and civilian construction materials — into Gaza in a manner consistent with Israeli security interests. Similarly, we encourage engagement with countries in the region to constructively engage with legitimate authorities to improve humanitarian conditions in Gaza. This objective aligns with JSP Goal 1.3 and 2.4 to reinvigorate U.S. humanitarian leadership and strengthen resilience to recover from economic, environmental, and other systemic shocks, including conflict and COVID-19.
- **Bureau Objective 2.4 Risk Considerations:** Delayed improvement to humanitarian conditions risks a continuation of the suffering that has contributed to successive rounds of violence between Israel and Hamas and other terrorist organizations. A continuation of Hamas' mismanagement of Gaza at the expense of economic development and recovery efforts will hinder improvement of Gaza's humanitarian conditions. International relief organizations continue to emphasize increasing access to Gaza for recovery and humanitarian efforts. The limited access of border crossings has further limited the entry of goods, including medical supplies and equipment to Gaza.

**Bureau Goal 3:** Strengthen inclusive economic growth that achieves stable and prosperous societies while creating new markets for U.S. exports.

- **Bureau Goal 3 Description:** Ensuring sustained, inclusive economic growth is key to providing continued opportunity for the region's population, developing new markets for expanded trade and investment, and promoting greater equity across societies in the MENA region. As the region struggles to proactively diversify the economy away from the oil industry, spur growth and enhance equity across the region, we recognize that gender diversity in the public and private sectors will bring a variety of experience and talent that is likely to have positive spillover effects on economics. Economic diversification is essential in order to address the climate crisis while creating opportunities for youth and underprivileged populations in emerging green industries. Inclusive growth is particularly essential to effectively respond and recover from COVID-19 given the disproportionate impact faced by women, including increased caregiving burdens, heightened risks of gender-based violence, and greater job losses. Compared to other regions, the Arab states saw the second highest decline in women's labor force participation during the pandemic (with the exception of Saudi Arabia). That said, women have been leaders on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response, and their leadership should carry into recovery efforts. To support a foundation of financial stability and prosperity, it is critical to promote conditions inclusive of women and youth in particular, and conducive to private sector risk taking, job creation, and open market access.

**Bureau Objective 3.1:** Improve business enabling environment in support of open markets.

- **Bureau Objective 3.1 Justification and Linkages:** Outdated rules and complex regulations stymie foreign investment and stifle the entrepreneurship and private sector risk-taking needed to create jobs and opportunities for the region's growing population. Streamlined procedures, consistent regulations, and transparent laws and processes will facilitate new market access, greater risk taking and investment, and encourage domestic and foreign investment. Inherent within this is the need to address social norms that limit women, youth, and other populations' access to markets. This objective supports JSP Goal 2.1, 2.3, and other key USG strategic priorities to improve economic governance, catalyze private sector investment, boost economic opportunity, and expand markets that benefit local populations and Americans alike.



- **Bureau Objective 3.1 Risk Considerations:** Without streamlined procedures, consistent regulations, and transparent laws to improve the business environment, there may be increased costs (time and resources) that make business and investment in the formal sector untenable or push populations to seek employment in the informal sector. Such informal businesses are limited in their growth potential and ability to attract investment. Governments also do not receive tax revenue from informal businesses, further inhibiting governments' ability to build capacity and invest in the infrastructure that contributes to a stronger, more reliable business enabling environment. In turn, it is more difficult to attract foreign investment into these markets.

**Bureau Objective 3.2:** Drive economic prosperity through inclusion of women and marginalized communities in a more equitable, healthy, skilled, and educated populace.

- **Bureau Objective 3.2 Justification and Linkages:** Strengthening the health and education sectors will build resilience to weather sociopolitical, economic, and health shocks. Diversifying economies to strengthen regional health security better positions MENA to prevent and respond to biothreats like COVID-19. Ensuring that women, youth, and underrepresented populations can meaningfully participate in the formal economy, particularly to recover from the pandemic and combat the climate crisis, will improve economic resilience long term. Ensuring that these marginalized communities are equipped with the necessary skills and education, coupled with the removal of cultural and legal barriers, results in more inclusive economic opportunities and growth. In turn, this creates a more responsive and enabling environment which can then be leveraged to drive further change. Women's economic empowerment benefits all members of society and is a crucial prerequisite to a sustainable and strong economy, while increased participation contributes to slowing and reversing the gender and wage gaps in the workforce. This objective supports key overarching goals including strengthening global health security, especially among vulnerable populations, and reducing the gender gap in access to finance, as outlined in JSP Goal 1.1 and 2.2.

- **Bureau Objective 3.2 Risk Considerations:** If there is not more inclusive economic prosperity for diverse groups in the MENA region, particularly youth and women, there may be increased disillusionment and eventually more political unrest. The Arab Spring was in part a response to limited opportunities among marginalized and disadvantaged groups, particularly youth. Additionally, without opportunities for education and employment, certain marginalized groups may take their skills elsewhere, potentially leading to brain drain or insufficient demographic support from the prime working-age population. Marginalized groups without economic opportunities in formal sectors may also seek employment in informal sectors or by joining new ideological movements, exposing themselves to dangerous or exploitative practices. For women, a lack of economic opportunity in the MENA region can also exacerbate societal gender imbalances and inhibit social progress. Furthermore, inclusive workforces drive economic growth and recovery, which is paramount to respond to second order impacts of COVID-19.

**Bureau Objective 3.3:** Strengthen economic resilience to better withstand shocks.

- **Bureau Objective 3.3 Justification and Linkages:** In an already volatile region, where security and political stressors are common and climate-related stressors further compound these shocks, COVID-19 is the latest example of economic shock impacting the MENA region. Strengthening economic resilience will be critical to recover from second-order impacts of the pandemic as well as mitigate further shock from climate change. We must enable inclusive employment opportunities to ensure economic growth in the health and education sector to better adapt and respond to changing global security threats like COVID-19 and the climate crisis. Existing financial challenges, including high debt burdens and public wages, further necessitate greater economic resilience, as the risk of various external and internal shocks remains. This objective supports strategic policy and assistance priorities including protecting economic gains, increasing capacity to enforce environmental policies, preventing backsliding, and promoting innovative market-based solutions to address challenges like climate change, water security and supply chain shifts, as reflected in JSP strategic objectives 2.4 and 2.2.

- **Bureau Objective 3.3 Risk Considerations:** Without proper preparedness to absorb both internal and external shocks, the negative effects of such shocks will be amplified, increasing burdens on provisions of public goods (such as health services) and supply chains. Further, an inability to strengthen economic resilience to withstand shocks will exacerbate societal and economic inequalities (particularly among marginalized groups) and increase both public and private debt. An inclusive recovery will not be possible without addressing the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on women, nor is it possible to effectively recover — economically or socially — without participation of half the population. The socio-economic consequences exacerbate political unrest, thus perpetuating the cycle of instability inhibiting market growth and job creation.

**Bureau Goal 4:** Advance accountable and responsive governance through strengthening democratic principles and fundamental freedoms.

- **Bureau Goal 4 Description:** Effective, accountable democratic governance, vibrant civil societies, respect for the rule of law, and protection of human rights and human dignity will form the foundation for long-term peace and prosperity in the region. U.S. assistance will address democratic backsliding, combat corruption, and help develop more inclusive and representative political institutions and processes that are transparent, accountable, and responsive. Accountable governance must be responsive to demands for effective change on climate action, and responsive to calls for climate justice, thereby working to make democracy deliver to populations in the region. In partnership with other democratic and democratizing states and communities in the region, we will help facilitate a healthy, equitable operating environment for civil society that enables local actors to engage constructively with governments and represent societal interests, including those representing marginalized groups, such as underserved racial, religious, and ethnic communities; women; youth; persons with disabilities; and LGBTQI+ populations. We will also 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 rights and fundamental freedom issues. These efforts will improve public access to information, mitigate trafficking in persons and other transnational criminal activity, promote respect for human rights, and include and empower women and youth.

**Bureau Objective 4.1:** Enable more transparent, accountable, inclusive, and equitable governance systems, including rule of law.

- **Bureau Objective 4.1 Justification and Linkages:** Addressing the region’s challenges and meeting its population’s demands for ending corruption, improved governance, and having a voice in determining their futures will require sustained reforms. This will require more responsive and accountable governance; political processes that include women, youth, and other underrepresented groups; and inclusive dialogues and partnerships between civil society and governments. Increased transparency, including efforts to curb corruption, directly promotes both inclusive economic growth and improved, equitable service delivery. NEA and ME will support processes that enable the democratic aspirations of all people and empower women to participate fully and safely in civic and economic life so that societies are more prosperous and peaceful. We will actively support countries in conflict and transition; local and national government institutions that more transparently and equitably provide better public goods and services to all citizens; political parties, legislative, and advisory bodies that better represent constituent interests; and credible election processes. Moreover, we will fully invest in expanded opportunities for greater political participation by all citizens — recognizing the particular need to empower and enfranchise women and marginalized populations. This objective aligns with the President’s INSSG and JSP Goals 1.5, 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3. The sub-objectives delineate how we plan to support for the Administration Executive Orders to advance inclusion and inclusive development which include but are not limited to: Freedom of Religion or Belief, Advancement of Gender Equality and Equity, Racial Equity, and Advancing the Rights and Opportunities of LGBTI+ Persons.
- **Bureau Objective 4.1 Risk Considerations:** Democratic backsliding is a real risk, particularly for communities already demanding an end to corruption, political rights, improved services, and economic opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic as well as its secondary impacts further exacerbate these grievances. The pandemic exposed corruption, stretched government services, and enabled governments to circumscribe political space, all of which increased state fragility. Weak institutions with a lack of accountability, responsiveness to citizens, and political will continue to present challenges to the USG effectively meeting this goal and our objectives. We will work closely with civil society, media, labor organizations, the private sector, our partners in the region, and other democratic states to encourage political reforms that address these issues and citizen engagement. We will encourage governments to work with the private sector in the region and transnationally to curtail digital authoritarianism and increase respect for human dignity, especially for women and marginalized populations, in dialogues with our partners.

**Bureau Objective 4.2:** Enable independent civil society to adapt, freely operate, represent diverse communities, and hold governments accountable.

- **Bureau Objective 4.2 Justification and Linkages:** 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 holding governments accountable. We will strengthen the ability of civil society groups to enhance democratic practices and inclusiveness, to conduct government oversight, and to engage with their governments, noting that the operating environment must be open for a diverse civil society to exist and function. This effort will include a focus on enhancing the participation and leadership of diverse groups such as women; youth; and underserved racial, religious, and ethnic communities, among others within civil society. This objective aligns with the INSSG, E.O. 13985 to advance diversity and equity, and JSP Goal 3.1 and 3.2 to promote accountability and good governance that delivers for all citizens, in all their diversity.
- **Bureau Objective 4.2 Risk Considerations:** Risks to civil society playing its legitimate role include a constrained legal and financial environment, activist burnout and disillusionment, discord between civil society actors, personal risk of harassment, hurdles to registration, and lack of capacity to organize locally across sectors to stand up and maintain strong frameworks. Additional risks result from differences between the U.S. Government's strong emphasis on equity and inclusion of marginalized groups, women and girls, and youth, and the region's social and cultural norms, political aims, and economic interests. To mitigate the effects of this risk, we will continually assess opportunities and risks in our programming and work with governments to improve the legal operating environment. We will work through local stakeholders, including community-based organizations and youth-led organizations, to navigate barriers to participation, equity, and inclusion so that civil society not only has space to exist but can also exercise their right to hold governments accountable.

**Bureau Objective 4.3:** Strengthen independent, safe, diverse, and free media.

- **Bureau Objective 4.3 Justification and Linkages:** The media plays a critical role by informing citizens to make decisions reflective of their needs and holding political and other institutions accountable. Journalists and citizens must be able to produce and access media safely. We will work together with civil society and journalists, the private sector and not-for-profit media outlets to improve the operating space and market — both offline and online — and support them in advocating for free and independent media by supporting credible, professional, and objective media working to stop disinformation by governments and other actors. This objective aligns with JSP goal 3.1 and 3.2 to promote democratic values, good governance, and accountability, for which independent and free media is foundational.
- **Bureau Objective 4.3 Risk Considerations:** Increased capacity for digital surveillance, aided by media and social corporations, may hinder progress in this domain. We will work with governments, journalists, and civil society to amend or abolish criminal defamation laws and the establishment of safe zones for journalists and to continue to champion media credibility, professionalism, and objectivity.

**Bureau Objective 4.4:** Advance respect for human rights and promote access to justice, including for marginalized populations, women, and youth.

- **Bureau Objective 4.4 Justification and Linkages:** Governance based on laws, an impartial and accessible judicial system, and respect for fundamental freedoms lay the groundwork for progress across a range of issues, including justice and accountability for human rights violations; more inclusive, representative political systems; development and economic growth; reduced corruption; security and conflict resolution; and the protection and participation of women; youth; underserved racial, religious, and ethnic communities; internally displaced persons; refugees; and marginalized groups. Importantly, they also lead to a more stable and prosperous region over time. Rights-respecting institutions include online and offline domains where violence against women and racial, religious, and ethnic communities and marginalized groups occurs. This objective aligns with the INSSG, E.O. 13985 to advance racial equity and support for underserved communities, E.O. 14020 to advance gender equity, and JSP Goal 3.2 to advance respect for human rights.
- **Bureau Objective 4.4 Risk Considerations:** Societies that perpetuate injustice fuel lasting grievances that can undermine long-term stability. If they do not advance tolerance, inclusion, participation, and equity, countries are in danger of further instability. We will work with government institutions and civil society, including faith-based organizations, and advance political processes to protect and promote human rights, including improving access to justice for populations in the region. We will work to ensure that diverse groups, such as women; youth; underserved racial, religious, and ethnic communities; persons with disabilities; and LGBTQI+ populations can advocate for their rights and to address community grievances.

**Bureau Goal 5:** Accelerate equitable and ambitious cross-sectoral actions to address the climate crisis in line with 2050 net-zero emissions targets.

- **Bureau Goal 5 Description:** The United States and the world face a profound climate crisis, and the global community must act urgently to transform economies and reduce greenhouse gas emissions dramatically by 2030 to avoid the most catastrophic impacts of climate change in this century. Climate change in MENA drives instability, water and food scarcity, conflict over resources, and migration that further exacerbate regional fragility and economic insecurity, all of which are compounded by COVID-19. The Paris Agreement, which the United States played a leading role in negotiating, is the framework for the global response to this crisis. While most countries in the MENA region have signed the Paris Agreement, their Nationally Determined Contributions are not aligned with achieving 2050 net-zero greenhouse gas emissions and keeping 1.5 degree warming in reach. Given that Egypt will host the 2022 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 27), followed by the UAE in 2023 (COP 28), there is greater interest in climate action across the region presenting us with a window of opportunity to increase climate ambition and meaningful action to impact long term climate outcomes in the region.

This strategy sets an ambitious agenda based on science and the interconnected nature of global impacts to drive policy that addresses the climate crisis by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and simultaneously adapting to climate change, including mitigating future biothreats, such as COVID-19, through a One Health approach. Accordingly, NEA and ME will align its assistance with ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans and priorities and focus on supporting countries to achieve their international obligations.

In a region where entire economies and societies are built on extractive industries, the environmental impacts — both locally and globally — are a major driver of the climate crisis. Given the urgency set forth by this Administration and our allies, coupled with a renewed emphasis on multilateralism, the United States is able to engage with the region in a new way. With unprecedented goals to increase U.S. public international climate finance, significant resources will be available to advance climate action. State and USAID will engage closely with SPEC Kerry and leverage his close ties to the region to effect change in meaningful and innovative ways that empower women and youth to adapt, mitigate, and build resilience to respond to climate change. Through education, technical assistance, and brave diplomacy, the U.S. Government can provide the necessary tools to encourage the next generation to work in tandem with the environment, rather than against it, to change the course for the region and lay the groundwork for sustainable peace and security, across all sectors, and for all people.



**Bureau Objective 5.1:** Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and work toward a phase-out of oil and gas emissions in the region, complemented by renewable energy deployment and economic diversification, in consultation with other major producers.

- **Bureau Objective 5.1 Justification and Linkages:** This objective aims to harness our diplomatic, development, and technical expertise, as well as our experience partnering with the private sector to achieve substantial emission reductions now and facilitate a future net-zero emission world, with a particular focus on major emitting economies like the Gulf states. The U.S. Government will incentivize the region through multilateral efforts to transition economies and the oil and gas industry to achieve sustainable and climate responsible economic growth through supporting policies to successfully enhance renewable energy, healthcare, education, and other clean technology advances. With our allies, the U.S. Government will provide technical assistance in the development of national adaptation planning and implementation to accelerate the flow of, and access to, finance, consistent with our commitment in the U.S. International Climate Finance Plan. While ambitious, these objectives align with the INSSG, E.O. 13990 on combating the climate crisis, and Goal 1.2 of the JSP.
- **Bureau Objective 5.1 Risk Considerations:** Dependence on oil imports from OPEC+, led by Saudi Arabia, for stabilizing gasoline prices continues to be a global problem. There will likely be many years before a complete transition away from gasoline-powered vehicles begins, although several auto manufacturers have announced plans to phase out the sale of new combustion engines by 2035, and President Biden has set a goal to achieve 50 percent EV sales by 2030. CO2 emissions from fuel combustion in the Middle East have grown from 1.059 billion tons in 2000 to 2.164 billion tons in 2019. This is underscored by the region's increasing consumption of its own oil and gas products, with oil consumption having grown over the same period, reaching 17.8 million bpd in 2019. Despite decades of warning from the scientific community that greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel combustion are leading to global impacts such as water resource depletion, short-term gains in fossil fuel revenues have continued to drive policy decisions. This will be a very difficult habit to break. Furthermore, near-term action to mitigate methane emissions from oil and gas will be needed to meet the 1.5C Paris target in addition to longer-term decarbonization efforts.

**Bureau Objective 5.2:** Strengthen innovative, community-led, and nature-based solutions and technical cooperation across the region to promote climate adaptation and sustainable management of natural resources, including water.

- **Bureau Objective 5.2 Justification and Linkages:** The MENA region is the most water-scarce region in the world, with 12 of its countries falling within the most water-stressed countries and with 60 percent of its population exposed to high water stress. The impacts of climate change are especially severe in the MENA region, as evidenced by rising temperatures, floods, droughts, and desertification. In turn, these impacts increase water and food insecurity; augment the threat posed by emerging infectious diseases; agricultural pests; and social inequality, all of which contribute to conflict, destabilization, and an increase in migration and internally displaced populations. To address these emerging threats as outlined in Goal 1.2 and 2.4 of the JSP and E.O. 13990, we must support climate-resilient water management practices that focus on sustainable watershed and aquifer management, advance the use of non-conventional water resources, harness the power of science and technology, promote gender equity and equality, and embrace private sector engagement. The adoption of a One Health approach, which recognizes the interconnection between people, animals, and their shared environment, is key to success in this area, and consistent with USG priorities across multiple departments and agencies, including USAID, CDC, USDA, DOI, and NOAA. One Health is also embedded in the National Biodefense Strategy and other key strategies.
- **Bureau Objective 5.2 Risk Considerations:** To avoid increased conflict due to resource scarcity, collaboration between scientists, engineers, and policymakers across geographic borders is needed. In many cases, this will include talks across political borders between groups that have a poor track record of working together. Also, desalination, the likely ultimate source of water for many extremely water-stressed countries in NEA, is energy intensive and may lead to increased energy demand. It is essential for this technology to be developed in tandem with renewable or other low-carbon energy, not increased fossil fuel production, to avoid further exacerbating the problem down the line.

**Bureau Objective 5.3:** Advance regional partnerships and multilateralism to engage diverse stakeholders, particularly women and youth, to catalyze transformative shifts to net-zero economies and sustainable solutions as societies transition to greener models.

- **Bureau Objective 5.3 Justification and Linkages:** Bold action to tackle the climate crisis is needed more urgently than ever. We need to include a broad universe of stakeholders, including a spectrum of leaders to understand opportunities of a net-zero economy, including from business, government, academia, civil society and local communities. This presents the U.S. with a data-driven opportunity to meaningfully engage and economically empower women, youth, and marginalized populations to not only combat the climate crisis, but also recover from and thrive in a post-pandemic world. No country can solve the climate crisis alone, particularly in MENA where climate change is undeniably interconnected to complex conflict, instability, and inequality. Everyone must do their part, and we must harness the potential of all people to tackle this crisis. Evidence increasingly demonstrates that empowering women — politically, economically, and socially — and meaningfully including their needs and perspectives in decision-making leads to more equitable and sustainable policies. The INSSG and JSP both prioritize climate action and gender equity, presenting us with an opportunity to explore the gender-climate nexus in MENA, as seen in every other region across the globe.
- **Bureau Objective 5.3 Risk Considerations:** While the President has made clear that climate and gender equity are top priorities, operationalizing these policies in the MENA region will be challenging. Efforts to engage women, youth, and marginalized communities have been met with harsh resistance from autocratic leaders across the region. Civil society is often viewed as a threat, and inclusive governance is something we aspire toward, but have not made meaningful progress on. Coupled with U.S. demand for oil from the region, this objective will require delicate but bold diplomacy.

## 4. Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objectives

**Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 1:** Strengthen the Department of State and USAID's ability to recruit, hire, develop, promote, and retain diverse talent and remove barriers to equal opportunity for historically underserved communities.

- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 1 Justification and Linkages:** As identified in the SWOT analysis, there is a lack of diversity among the staff working at the Department of State and USAID. To have a workforce that reflects the diversity of the American people, both agencies must strengthen our respective abilities to recruit, hire, develop, promote, and retain diverse talent and remove barriers to equal opportunity. We must also provide resources and opportunities to strengthen and advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility priorities that specifically target historically underserved communities at multiple levels in both organizations (i.e., interns, entry-level, mid-level, and senior management, Civil Servants, Foreign Service Officers, Locally Employed Staff, Employed Eligible Family Members, and Contractors).
- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 1 Risk Considerations:** From an operational perspective, the main risk of not achieving this objective is the lost opportunity of transforming the Department of State and USAID into higher-performing organizations, with a more diverse workforce with differing perspectives towards implementing U.S. foreign policy and engaging with foreign partners. From a societal perspective, the risk of not achieving this objective is perpetuating a system that has inherently favored some people over others, and which has created social tension, inequity, and injustices that have spanned generations. Additionally, the continued marginalization and neglect of DEIA creates serious national security vulnerabilities, limiting the effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy and widening the gap of future policy experts ill prepared and equipped with diverse perspectives on societal fragility and global unrest. We must also acknowledge that racism and discrimination are traumatic and cause real health impacts. Diverse and marginalized groups often live with post-traumatic stress, and in order to mitigate further harm and improve retention, both agencies must adopt a trauma-informed approach across human resources practices and management efforts.

**Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 2:** Ensure that the Department of State can support management services beyond each individual post's platforms through a regional center in Amman.

- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 2 Justification and Linkages:** The Regional Support Unit in Amman exists to streamline management support across NEA, allowing for more cost-effective services.
- **Bureau Cross-Cutting Management Objective 2 Risk Considerations:** This should be relatively low risk, as the Unit already exists and once fully staffed can provide support across the Bureau.