



Second Flanking Cooperative Idea

Transferring the Win-Win Approach of the JCPOA to Other Areas of Cooperation in the Middle East/Gulf:

Non-governmental Players as Actors of Change

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Based on his rich experience since 1994 as a strategy consultant for major international companies investing in Iran, the author makes the case for using the achievement-oriented approach of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as a model for tackling all major regional challenges in a cooperative way, especially by non-governmental actors.

Background and Context: The Need for a Win-win Mentality

The Middle East – a turbulent area for most of the last century – is currently the site of several conflicts in which regional and international powers confront one another, but at the moment there seems to be little likelihood of these conflicts being resolved. They have many causes, but one of the cultural factors that has complicated the political processes in the Middle East is the prevalence of a win-lose mentality. What is desperately needed is the promotion of win-win scenarios, in the hope of developing a region-wide win-win mentality.

Many experts believe that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the JCPOA/agreement) between the E3/EU+3 and Iran has been a successful example of a win-win formula, and this agreement could be used as a model for other multilateral frameworks to develop and implement win-win solutions to the region's many problems. In this process we should not wait for the resolution of complex geostrategic and political issues before acting. Yet we should start with pragmatic steps which can build bridges and promote mutual confidence that will in turn pave the way for the adoption of win-win scenarios.

Business(wo)men as Constructive Actors of Change ...

In practice, private sector representatives from all the countries in the region have shown that they can cooperate and develop such win-win approaches. The essential fact is that a greater private sector, trade and investment cooperation will lead to job creation, a key instrument in promoting economic growth and pushing back against extremism in all its forms. At the same time, peace and stability are prerequisites for long-term investments in the region's economies.

... and Regional Cooperation as the Only Answer to the Pressing Challenges

There are many areas where such pragmatic steps can and must be taken. For example, environmental degradation is emerging as a key security challenge that faces all regional countries – but most of the Middle East's current environmental issues do not stop at national borders (see Box No. 1). The mismanagement of water resources, desertification – leading to violent and destructive sandstorms – and environmental degradation are all causes of the current state of affairs, and the only way to address these phenomena is

through multilateral cooperation.

In order to pave the way for the development and implementation of a win-win mind-set, the best approach would be the initiation of what can be termed triangular, multi-stakeholder processes that address environmental challenges and involve the private sector, universities and research centres in partnership with local stakeholders. It goes without saying that the business communities because of their interest-based pragmatism and risk-taking attitude are of particular importance for such an effort. The triangular element refers to the involvement of one international organisation such as the United Nations (UN) or European Union and two or more regional countries, as the need arises.

Examples of such processes include the following:

- UN, Iranian, and Iraqi stakeholders could come together to address how to contain the destructive impact of sandstorms in the region. This could include the drafting and joint implementation of programmes to introduce plantations of context-appropriate flora in target areas and adopt modern approaches to managing water resources, with the objective of improving environmental conditions and reducing the damaging effects of

Box No. 1: A Concrete Cooperative Example at Non-governmental Level

“The repercussions of climate change and environmental challenges pose enormous risks to Iran and Saudi Arabia alike. While there are differences in geography and climate in both countries, they also have many environmental challenges in common. Problems such as sand and dust storms or diminishing water resources are border-crossing phenomena that no country can deal with alone; therefore, cooperation is key. At this point in time, however, willingness to cooperate is utterly lacking in a region marked by geostrategic rivalries, ongoing military conflicts and deep-rooted mutual distrust between regional rivals, and between Saudi Arabia and Iran in particular.

*CARPO and the EastWest Institute initiated a meeting of experts from Saudi Arabia and Iran as part of their ‘Iran-Saudi Track 2 Initiative’. The participants discussed environmental challenges to reach a better understanding of the political context and to identify opportunities and limits for Iranian-Saudi cooperation in the field of regional environmental policy. Participants agreed that climate change and ecological deterioration pose a major challenge to their countries and the region. Fully aware that the current political situation makes cooperation very difficult, participants discussed potential avenues of exchange below the level of national governments and proposed initiatives for cooperation on a regional and international level.” (Source: Jan Hanrath and Wael Adul-Shafi ‘Executive Summary’, in *Environmental Challenges in a Conflictive Environment: Iranian and Saudi Perspectives on the Risks of Climate Change and Ecological Deterioration*, Bonn and Brussels: CARPO and EastWest Institute, Brief No. 8, 11 September 2017.)*

future sandstorms.

- Saudi, Iranian, and European experts could work together to exchange views and develop joint approaches for instance to carbon capture and storage in the region’s oil and gas fields, taking into account geological realities, the two countries’ commitments to contain CO₂ emissions. Such an initiative would improve technical exchanges among the petroleum sector representatives of Iran and Saudi Arabia, which would in turn encourage these two oil- and gas-producing giants to develop their resources in more efficient and environmentally friendly ways.

Conclusions and the Potential of a Spill-over to the Disarmament and Non-proliferation Area

It is easy to be complacent and believe that it is the responsibility of governments (see Box No. 2) to resolve conflicts and address economic, environmental, and social issues, but at a time when governments are either overwhelmed by the extent of the challenges, or incapable of addressing the problems that their countries face, or unwilling to do so, non-governmental players should initiate processes that will help to ease tensions and generate a greater un-

derstanding of win-win solutions to the region’s many problems. Once it is widely appreciated that it is possible to think and work in win-win terms, it should become easier for the governments in the Middle East/Gulf to engage their neighbours in more constructive ways when cross-border challenges arise.

After all, assuming that policy fields are separate in a porous way: why not expecting a transfer of a win-win mentality to the disarmament and non-proliferation area? ■

Box No. 2: A Concrete Cooperative Example at State Level

“In the midst of tremendous domestic uncertainty, [Saudi] tentative feelers were sent out to begin a process of rapprochement with Iran. Foreign Minister Saud al Faisal’s visit to Iran in 1991 signified the beginning of improved relations. Indeed, diplomatic ties were reestablished. Iran was eager to convince Saudi Arabia that the days of funding international extremists were over. The countries also reached an agreement on hajj participation. In 1996, when Saudi Arabia boycotted the U.S.-sponsored MENA Economic Summit in Doha, Iran applauded its stance. As Saudi Arabia began to distance itself from the United States, Iran welcomed the show of strength. Throughout 1997, Abdullah worked to consolidate his position (and invited Rafsanjani to visit); in the same year, Khatami was elected president of Iran.

*A Joint Economic Commission was established, direct flights between the capitals were approved, and a \$15-million joint industrial committee began operations. At the year-end meeting of the Organization of Islam Conference (OIC) in Tehran, Khatami and Abdullah embraced, a photo-op that did not go unnoticed. Even the GCC summit recognized that ‘Iran was turning a new page in GCC relations’.” (Source: Gwenn Okruhlik ‘Saudi Arabian-Iranian Relations: External Rapprochement and Internal Consolidation’, *Middle East Policy* 10[2] 2003: 113-125.)*

Further Reading

- Samir Abdullah Ali et al. “Exploring Economic Cooperation in the Middle East”, *ACADEMIC PEACE ORCHESTRA MIDDLE EAST, POLICY BRIEF* Nos. 26/27. Online available at <http://academicpeaceorchestra.com>.

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