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Can Europe Choreograph a Saudi-Iranian Détente?

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Executive Summary

Geopolitical rivalries between the two shores of the Gulf are having a detrimental impact on the stability of the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. European interests, such as the security of land and maritime routes, the rescue of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – a.k.a. the Iranian nuclear deal – and, crucially, the stabilisation of several regional crises – notably in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon and the Horn of Africa – are severely affected. For this reason, working towards de-escalation in the Gulf has featured prominently of late in the foreign policy strategies of several European countries, including the European Union. The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, received a specific mandate for mediating a dialogue on Gulf security in 2020. The recent election of Joe Biden as president of the United States (US) provides a momentum to push this forward. Under Biden, the US intends to return to the JCPOA and promote follow-on talks on regional security between the two shores of the Gulf. While nuclear diplomacy should not be directly tied to regional security talks, the only way to make a return to the JCPOA sustainable would be to keep regional players constructively engaged by meaningfully addressing their related threats perceptions. Europeans should not wait for the US to lead on this front. Instead, there should be an acknowledgement that the Biden administration will be pushing ahead with plans for American retrenchment from the MENA region and will be absorbed

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by the JCPOA question as well as by domestic matters. The EU and individual European players should work in coordinated core groups, promoting confidence-building measures among the parties and encouraging them to explore ways to convert the principles of good neighbourliness into concrete geopolitical moves addressing core security issues. To do that, core groups should act under a single European umbrella, making Europe a geopolitical and security player.

Introduction

Over the course of the past decade, it has become increasingly apparent that geopolitical rivalries between the two shores of the Gulf are having a detrimental impact on the stability of the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. As such, these tensions strongly affect European interests, such as the security of land and maritime routes, the salvation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – a.k.a. the Iranian nuclear deal – and, crucially, the stabilisation of several regional crises – notably in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon and the Horn of Africa.

While on the surface such tensions may seem intractable, there is a window of opportunity for diplomacy. The election of Joe Biden as president of the United States (US) portends a return to the JCPOA and support for follow-on regional security talks. The prevailing vision in the US and Europe is that tying nuclear diplomacy to regional security talks would only usher in cross-vetoes and complicate both processes, hindering tangible progress. On the other hand, the sole way to make a return to the JCPOA sustainable – i.e. durable and resilient to the pressures of its many opponents – would be to keep regional players constructively engaged. The prospect of a follow-on regional security dialogue would allay related threat perceptions on all sides, but only if the premises are concrete and appealing.

The six monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have sensed the turn towards a diplomacy-first approach and are adjusting their postures accordingly. The Iran hard-liners within the GCC – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – are also moving ‘from the time of resistance to the time of reckoning’.² Throughout 2019 and 2020 hardliners have also demonstrated that, when the traditional US deterrence

umbrella becomes leaky, they have no interest in a kinetic escalation within their borders. This attitude was evident in 2019, when the US failed to respond to asymmetric attacks against tankers in Emirati territorial waters and oil infrastructures in Saudi Arabia, attributed to Iran. These episodes cemented the perception of a gradual US retrenchment and disengagement from the region, that will only grow stronger under a Biden presidency.³

The GCC countries then are confronted with a clear dilemma: to patch up the deterrence umbrella by inviting other global powers to protect their strategic assets, or to give diplomacy a chance.⁴ Europeans can help tip the balance towards the latter option, if they are proactive, consistent and sensitive to the local strategic calculus.

Europe’s role in Gulf security

Building confidence

After decades of confrontation, confidence among the parties in the Gulf is non-existent. Several European thinkers have argued that the first step to establishing a security dialogue in the Gulf would be to re-build trust.⁵ Focusing on confidence-building measures among conflicting parties is, in fact, one of the strong suits of Europeans, who have, throughout their own history, developed a consolidated experience in these instruments and an unshakable belief in their validity. Taking as an example the experience of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the EU could

2. Interview with a senior Saudi diplomat, phone, 14 January 2021

3. Daniel Benaïm and Jake Sullivan, “America’s Opportunity in the Middle East” 22 May 2020, *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2020-05-22/americas-opportunity-middle-east>

4. For more context on the internationalization of Gulf security, see: Alaa Al-Din Arafat. “Rising Powers and the Persian Gulf Security.” in *Regional and International Powers in the Gulf Security*. (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham), 2020, pp. 55-97.

5. See for example: Neil Quilliam and Sanam Vakil, “A Pyramid of Multilateral Confidence-Building Measures in the Middle East”, *IAI Papers*, November 2020, <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/pyramid-multilateral-confidence-building-measures-middle-east> <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/pyramid-multilateral-confidence-building-measures-middle-east> <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/pyramid-multilateral-confidence-building-measures-middle-east>; Rouzbeh Parsi and Dina Esfandiary, “So Close Yet So Far Apart. Facilitating Dialogue and Cooperation across the Persian Gulf”, *IAI Papers*, October 2020, <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/so-close-yet-so-far-apart-facilitating-dialogue-and-cooperation-across-persian-gulf>



coordinate a forum on soft security issues that represent common challenges and require common solutions for all Gulf players. These issues include: the COVID-19 pandemic, drug and human trafficking, piracy, economic diversification, environmental security, energy transition and societal transformation.

These are domains in which European know-how and technical capacity building is much appreciated by governments in the region. A similar European initiative would be particularly appreciated by countries such as Kuwait and Oman, whose decision-makers have traditionally advocated in favour of establishing similar regional fora. It would be crucial to establish the talks in the form of a structured dialogue, guided by specific principles and formats.⁶ Content-wise, ideas to kick-start these debates could be drawn from existing and new Track 1.5 and Track 2 talks among interlocutors from all the Gulf countries, many of which have been sponsored by European institutions.⁷ In these fora, participants have been offered the chance to engage beyond the toxic prejudices that often feature in the public discourse. Such Track 2 projects could remain a core feature of Europe's parallel diplomacy across the board.

Confidence-building measures have intrinsic value in establishing channels for dialogue among conflicting parties. However, tensions in the Gulf have risen to such levels that, in the recent past, even soft security issues have been securitised and politicised, becoming highly sensitive. One example of recent friction is the COVID-19 pandemic, which offered Gulf countries the opportunity to cooperate and represented a clear case in favour of such cooperation. Instead, the Gulf response to the pandemic became politicised, with reciprocal accusations of failing to contain the spread – including hints of intentionality – and swift decisions to close borders between

countries.⁸ Attempts to work together were missing. This episode has shown, once again, that coordination and dialogue on soft security issues alone will not move the needle. Confidence-building measures are no substitute for the heavy-lifting in geopolitical and security matters, at the core of Gulf tensions. If those core issues remain untackled and unsolved, they will continue to hinder positive outcome. Thus, confidence-building measures should complement, not substitute the hard-core political work.

Principled relations

In debates as well as in writing, Saudi and Iranian thinkers have been advocating for a reset in Saudi-Iranian relations around shared principles.⁹ Among them, Abdulaziz Sager and Hossein Mousavian recently authored a long article outlining suggestions for ways in which Riyadh and Tehran could escape the existing zero-sum struggle.¹⁰ The idea would be to agree on a charter of basic and core values and principles, thus rising above the years-long vicious cycle of asymmetrical conflict and poisonous blame game politics. The suggested principles include: embracing mutual respect; respecting sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and the inviolability of boundaries; adhering to non-interference in internal affairs; rejecting the threat or use of force and committing to peaceful settlement of all disputes; rejecting the policy of employing sectarianism for political objectives and supporting and arming militias in the regional states; respecting the inviolability of diplomatic facilities and strengthening Islamic solidarity while rejecting the pursuit of hegemony.¹¹

These principles are largely inspired by those enshrined in the 1945 Charter of the United Nations. They also

6. Christian Koch and Adnan Tabatabai, "The Quest to Launch Regional Integration Processes in West Asia and the Arabian Peninsula", *IAI Papers*, November 2020, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/quest-launch-regional-integration-processes-west-asia-and-arabian-peninsula>

7. Ideas on this are offered by Tamer Badawi and Luigi Narbone, in "De-escalating Tension in the Gulf: Why Efforts to Facilitate Arab-Iranian Dialogue should be Intensified", op-ed, Middle East Directions Programme's Regional Security Initiative, European University Institute, June 2019, <https://middleeastdirections.eu/de-escalating-tension-in-the-gulf-why-efforts-to-facilitate-arab-iranian-dialogue-should-be-intensified/>

8. Nafisa Eltahir and Lisa Barrington, "Bahrain accuses Iran of 'biological aggression', Gulf states try to curb coronavirus", *Reuters*, 12 March 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-saudi-travel-idUSKBN20Z03K>

9. Eyad al-Refai and Samira Nasirzadeh, *The Conversation*, "Saudi and Iran: how our two countries could make peace and bring stability to the Middle East", 14 June 2019, <https://theconversation.com/saudi-and-iran-how-our-two-countries-could-make-peace-and-bring-stability-to-the-middle-east-118696>

10. Abdulaziz Sager and Hossein Mousavian, "We can escape a zero-sum struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia – if we act now", *The Guardian*, 31 January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/31/iran-saudi-arabia-joe-biden-cooperation>

11. *Ibid.*



echo the so-called Rouhani-Nayef agreement, a non-aggression and non-interference pact signed by Hassan Rouhani – then Iran’s Head of Supreme National Security Council – and Saudi Arabia’s then-interior minister, Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz Saud.¹² Under the terms of the agreement, Iran’s government pledged not to interfere in the domestic affairs of GCC countries, handed over Saudis accused of terrorism, and suspended its support for foreign groups hostile to GCC leaders. This agreement, signed in the mid 1990s and renewed in 2001, led to a significant détente between the two countries, which only started to unravel when Saudi Arabia grew concerned about Iranian expansionism in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein.¹³ This historical precedent demonstrates that a similar agreement over the principles regulating Saudi-Iranian relations can be found again. Both the EU and individual European countries would certainly grant their full political support to such process.

However, as Sager and Mousavian themselves highlight, beyond agreeing on principles, ‘action is needed to build confidence after decades of antagonism and mistrust.’¹⁴ In fact, it is relatively uncontroversial for the parties to agree upon UN principles, and to renew their commitment to those. However, that commitment will only have impact when it is operationalised in specific geopolitical steps. Diplomatic heavy-lifting should work precisely in that direction.

Diplomatic heavy-lifting

A certain diplomatic gravity and the opportunity to play the ‘honest broker’ card will be essential in attempting to disentangle the intricate geopolitical questions at the heart of Gulf tensions. In this context, the Europeans are certainly considered to be a more honest broker than the US, given the enmity between the US and Iran. The Euro-

peans would be better placed than China and Russia, countries still mistrusted by many in the GCC, and profoundly so by the US which is deeply suspicious of their long-term interests in the region. While Russia’s and China’s involvement in regional security talks is often supported by Iran, overlapping the great powers rivalry over the dynamics of the regional rivalries could only create more roadblocks and potentially compromise the whole process. In the end, the Europeans are the only global actors not subject to a veto by either party with respect to prospective discussions on Gulf security.

That doesn’t mean that the Europeans don’t come to the table with some baggage of their own. Due to their efforts to save the JCPOA, the European Union (EU) and some key member states are perceived by various GCC capitals as being biased in favour of Iran.¹⁵ At the same time, the EU lost credibility in Iran due to the failure to oppose the maximum pressure campaign of former US President Donald Trump.¹⁶ Other member states, such as France and the United Kingdom (UK), are instead seen by Iran as being particularly close to the GCC, because of their strong bilateral relations.¹⁷ The Nordic countries are viewed by both sides as neutral but also as lacking the capabilities and political will to go beyond proposing neutral platforms for discussions.¹⁸ Given these complexities, a flexible approach to divide labour, under tight coordination, would combine strengths and alleviate weaknesses. This flexible approach would envision individual European countries and the EU working together in core groups – or coalitions of the willing – and leveraging their preferred bilateral relations and channels in a coordinated and cooperative manner.¹⁹

Jumping straight into multilateral, crowded talks would be the fastest means to ensure the failure of a Gulf security dialogue, as it would simply replicate existing fault lines and opposing agendas. Instead, a European core group should engage in preliminary shuttle diplomacy to

12. Abdulrahman al-Rashed, “Rowhani’s election: Welcoming an old friend”, *Al Arabiya News*, 17 June 2013, <https://english.alarabiya.net/views/2013/06/17/Rowhani-s-election-Welcoming-an-old-friend>

13. Awadh Al-Badi, “Saudi-Iranian Relations: A Troubled Trajectory” in Gawdat Bahgat, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, and Neil Quilliam, *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and its Arab Neighbours* (Cambridge: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp 189 – 209.

14. Abdulaziz Sager and Hossein Mousavian, “We can escape a zero-sum struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia – if we act now”, *The Guardian*, 31 January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/31/iran-saudi-arabia-joe-biden-cooperation>

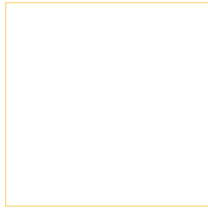
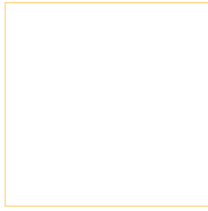
15. Interview with a senior Emirati expert, Zoom, 21 January 2021; Interview with a Kuwaiti diplomat, phone, 17 December 2020

16. Speech by a senior Iranian expert, Zoom, 18 November 2020

17. Ibid.

18. ECFR’s digital roundtable on Gulf security, Zoom, January 2021

19. The concept of “cooperative bilateralism” in the Gulf is unpacked in: Cinzia Bianco, “A Gulf apart: How Europe can gain influence with the Gulf Cooperation Council”, Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, February 2020, https://ecfr.eu/publication/a_gulf_apart_how_europe_can_gain_influence_with_gulf_cooperation_council/



prepare the ground for such talks, to wit, by defining the broad contours of an agenda and endgame acceptable to all parties. To augment their leverage, the European core group should travel as a joint delegation.²⁰ Capitalising on existing bilateral relationships and developing them towards greater inclusivity could, in turn, amplify the influence of all members of a core group.

The aim of these preliminary talks would be to counter the idea that engagement without pre-conditions legitimises the current architecture of power in the Gulf. A non-negotiable security interest for most GCC capitals is indeed to roll back the Iranian encroachment they perceive in the Arabian Peninsula, i.e. Iran's presence via proxies in Yemen and links to Shi'a militant groups within the GCC. Interestingly, Iran has similar priorities which include limiting the Saudi-Emirati encroachment in two bordering countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and rolling back their sectarian links with Sunni separatist groups in Ahvaz.²¹

As a much-needed proof of goodwill, a European core group should try to persuade Iran to enter into confidence-building military-to-military talks regarding the defence architecture on the islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Thunbs, seized by the Shah in 1971 and claimed by the UAE. The moratorium on the arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE - triggered by the Biden administration, and then adopted by Italy, and likely to be followed by other European countries - provides the right conditions for similar discussions. This would remain true even if only some weapons systems - such as ammunitions - remain under embargo. A limited embargo in fact provides an opportunity to shift the conversation regarding defensive mechanisms.

On conflict-resolution, the Yemen file seems particularly ripe for boosted diplomacy, due to general war fatigue in international and regional parties to the conflict. A European core group featuring the E4 (Italy, Germany, France and the UK) plus the EU should use their channels with Iran, ideally in coordination with Oman, to persuade Tehran to stop their weapons delivery to the Houthis in return for the prospect of a reduced Saudi geopolitical reach over the Af-Pak region. The same European core group should be then expanded to include Sweden, which played a major role in the Yemen diplomatic process, and

the current European members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) - Ireland, Norway and Estonia - to discuss as the best means to support the post-conflict phase of the UN-led process. The new engagement by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, started via a recent visit in Tehran, could reinvigorate the process. This phase should directly involve Iran and Saudi Arabia, but also the UAE - which has unmatched influence over the southern players and a desire to be elected at the UNSC for the next term.

At every step, the Europeans can and should count on the support of two GCC countries which consider regional de-escalation a strategic priority: Oman and Kuwait. Both countries possess platforms and networks - including in and on Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the UAE - that they can leverage to advance a de-escalatory process. Europeans should cultivate their relations to both actors, namely by providing the necessary guarantees to bolster their own resilience to the continued strong winds of regional polarisation.²²

A new security balance

The other central question in the Gulf is the future of the regional security architecture and, in particular, the role of international players. The role of external powers in Gulf security has been codified in the strategic thinking of the Gulf thorough history. With few exceptions, external powers played a key part in protecting the GCC ruling regimes from domestic and foreign challengers and, in turn, had a say in their security policies. This was the case for Britain until the 1970s and for the United States thereafter.²³ Today this formula of security assistance for security role is perpetuated, even if to different degrees. The United Kingdom, while fully absorbed by Brexit, has bolstered its security foothold in the Gulf.²⁴ The United States, while retrenching from its role as a security guarantor, has deployed 3000 additional troops and weapons

20. Ibid.

21. Interview with a senior Iranian expert, phone, 25 November 2020

22. Cinzia Bianco, "The deaths of the mediators-in-chief: Oman, Kuwait, and de-escalation in the Gulf" commentary, European Council on Foreign Relations, 9 October 2020, https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_deaths_of_the_mediators_in_chief_oman_kuwait_and_de_escalati/

23. Jonathan Fulton and Li-Chen Sim (eds), *External Powers and the Gulf Monarchies* (London: Routledge, 2018).

24. Joe Devanny and Philip Berry. "'Gulf Security is Our Security': Global Britain and UK Gulf Strategy, 2010-20." *Defence Studies* (2021), pp. 1-21.



systems in Saudi Arabia after the 2019 ARAMCO attacks and retains a large military presence across the GCC.²⁵

For Iran, on the other hand, the presence of external powers in the GCC – in particular, the UK and the US – has been the single most important source of threat perception since 1979.²⁶ For this reason, Iran has consistently argued that the future security architecture in the Gulf should not feature external powers. Especially not the United States. Yet no GCC country would consider a regional architecture without global power as a security guarantor. In fact, Tehran's insistence on this point is one of the reasons most GCC countries fully rejected Iran's Hormuz Peace Endeavour (HOPE).²⁷ The GCC leaders acknowledge an unchangeable power asymmetry between them – total national population circa 25 million – and the 80 million strong and war-tested Iran.²⁸

Though these divergences in security thinking may be the most irreconcilable of all, Europeans should not refrain from tackling them. Europeans are not generally seen as security providers in the region: there are recurrent references to the EU lacking military deployment capabilities and individual European states being unwilling to commit resources. In discussions about a European contribution to regional security in the GCC, the lack of any on-the-ground commitment – however symbolic – often results in questioning Europe's leverage and interest writ large.²⁹ Yet a central role for Europe in a security architecture in the Gulf is feasible and it would help engineer a balance-of-power which would lessen Iranian threat perceptions on the US presence.

An overwhelming majority of European capitals do not relish increasing their military footprint in the Gulf, let alone competing with the UK and the US in this regard, and rightly so. However, Europeans could approach this matter sensibly and through the prism of their interests. They could focus on the domain of maritime security,

a niche where their capabilities are largely appreciated and one that is crucial for Europe's commercial and energy interests. The European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASoH) mission, launched in 2019 and supported by a core group of European states including Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal, goes in that direction. Its objective is to improve freedom of navigation by providing enhanced maritime situation awareness and surveillance and sharing information with all partners operating in the area, including the maritime industry. It provides the opportunity to overcome intra-European competitive bilateralism and to pool assets in joint initiatives, thereby generating leverage. In addition, the EU's newly launched instrument, Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP), provides the right framework to make sure that maritime security initiatives taken by individual member states, like EMASoH, remain under a single European umbrella.³⁰ The mission should be expanded to feature more European participants and assets as well as enhanced capabilities in the field of aerial surveillance, given that drone attacks are increasingly a major concern. In particular, European countries such as Italy, that have military-to-military links to Iran and therefore appear far less threatening to Tehran, should expand their participation.

EMASoH was received positively in the GCC monarchies, especially in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, where the frigates operating as part of the mission are stationed. First and foremost, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh believe the presence of European assets is enough of a deterrent to Iran, which seeks to avoid unintended accidents. Iran has instead reacted to the mission with greater reluctance, perceiving it as another avenue for the presence of Western security forces in the region. However, EMASoH officials stressed repeatedly that the mission is in no way hostile to Iran and, on the contrary, has a specific diplomatic mandate to engage both sides of the Gulf on issues of maritime security.³¹ EMASoH's declared objective, already actively pursued by the diplomats, is to coordinate with all players in the Gulf and to enlist their indirect involvement in

25. "Pentagon to deploy thousands of additional troops to Middle East", *Reuters*, 3 January 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-security-usa-middleeast-idUSKBN1Z21U4>

26. For an in-depth read on Iran's threat perceptions, see: Abdolrasool Divsallar. "The Pillars of Iranian-Russian Security Convergence." *The International Spectator* 54.3 (2019): 107-122;

27. ECFR's digital roundtable on Gulf security, Zoom, January 2021

28. Anthony H. Cordesman and Bryan Gold. *The Gulf Military Balance: The Conventional and Asymmetric Dimensions*. (Rowman & Littlefield), 2014.

29. ECFR's digital roundtable on Gulf security, Zoom, January 2021

30. Josep Borrell, "Why the EU needs to be a global maritime security provider", blog, European External Action Service's website, 27 January 2021, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/jordan/92123/why-eu-needs-be-global-maritime-security-provider_en

31. Comments by EMASoH officials in an ECFR digital roundtable on maritime security in the Gulf, November 2020



shaping the agenda for talks, leading to a collective and shared initiative on maritime security.

In this, the Europeans have clearly drawn a line between EMASoH and the US-led mission, International Maritime Security Construct, instituted by Trump and joined by the UK. Should the Biden administration decide to disband this very *Trumpesque* mission, the Europeans might better focus on the maritime domain to build their credibility as security actors and interlocutors. Projecting Europe's strategic autonomy from the US would indeed strengthen rather than weaken Europe's credentials in facilitating a regional security dialogue in the Gulf. It would challenge the stereotype sometimes applied to Europeans in the Gulf, that they are a fuzzy extension of the US, and point instead, to Europe as a US ally, one that could relieve some of the US burden as a security provider. Last but not least, it would be a small but symbolic step to address Iran's vocal calls for a diminished US military presence in the Gulf.

Conclusions

Working towards de-escalation in the Gulf has featured prominently in the foreign policy strategies of several European countries and of the EU of late. High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, received a specific mandate for his work on this in 2020. As coordinator of the JCPOA Joint Commission, the EU is set to play a pivotal role in the efforts of nuclear diplomacy between the US and Iran.³² The preparatory work on follow-on regional security talks should begin simultaneously: European core groups formed by the E4, the Nordics and the European UNSC members would divide the labour of shuttle diplomacy under EU coordination, to settle the broad contours of an agenda acceptable to all parties. The upcoming March trip of France's President Emmanuel Macron to Saudi Arabia and the UAE could be a first step in this direction, if it is properly coordinated under a European umbrella. If Europe were to present a much-needed action plan on Gulf security, the US could have more political space to focus on the difficult task of reviving the JCPOA. Proactively tackling the question of the post-JCPOA Gulf security balance could prevent the backlash pressures and maverick reactions

that would otherwise come from concerned regional parties. This is something that Washington, anxious to relinquish some geopolitical responsibilities in the MENA region, has been requesting of European allies.³³ Despite baggage and limitations, the Europeans are currently the only global actors not subject to a veto from either party in this endeavour. As such, a geopolitical Europe could make a difference in setting the scene for a new era of diplomacy in the Gulf.

32. Abdolrasool Divsallar, "De-escalating the Iran crisis : is there a role for Europe?," Policy Brief, Middle East Directions Programme's Regional Security Initiative, European University Institute, February 2020, <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/66185>

33. Charles Thepaut, "The US needs Europe to end the 'forever wars' in the Middle East", 30 October 2020, *The Hill*, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/523131-the-us-needs-europe-to-end-the-forever-wars-in-the-middle-east>

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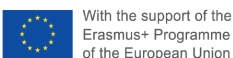
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