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POLICY OUTLOOK

A New Moment for Arab Multilateralism

Amr Hamzawy and Nathan J. Brown

Since October 7, 2023, key Arab states have made real and successful efforts at collective diplomacy. While Arab efforts have been ad hoc and their achievements limited, they demonstrate that sustained collective diplomacy is now more possible than in the past. The governments of Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates can draw lessons from the past two years to develop a more cohesive, long-term collective regional strategy in the future.

Key Takeaways

- Arab states can **mobilize political and financial capital** and translate public sentiment into policy, if they have international support.
- Arab **collective action is politically powerful**, even when it is limited. Joint diplomatic efforts over the past year gained traction because they presented plausible, fundable, and publicly legitimate proposals.
- **Differences in policy and external rivalries** among Arabs can undercut collective action and leave cracks in diplomatic frameworks if not addressed.
- **Struggling for regional hegemony** among Arab governments is more likely to deteriorate security in the Middle East than improve it.

Policy Recommendations for Arab Capitals

- Take a **coherent, joint position** backed by realistic diplomatic and funding pledges.
- Be willing to **engage with multiple external actors**, without depending on any one particular state.
- **Present an agenda** that not only rejects problematic factors but also develops concrete suggestions for how to move forward.
- **Do not assume** that a bilateral relationship with Washington is the only way to secure national interests.



Read the full article, “Is the Arab World Finally Discovering Collective Security and Multilateral Diplomacy?” by Amr Hamzawy and Nathan J. Brown at <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/12/arab-multilateral-gaza-conflict-diplomacy-middle-east>.

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History of Arab Collective Diplomacy

- In the past, Arab attempts at collective diplomatic have been ad hoc, emerging from specific regional events.
- After the 1979 Egypt-Israel normalization, other Arab states coordinated an isolation campaign toward Egypt and support for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The campaign lasted until the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.
- After the invasion of Kuwait, multiple Arab states signed the Damascus Declaration involving multilateral security coordination, but this effort was abandoned in favor of bilateral agreements with the United States.
- In 1989, several Arab states helped negotiate the Taif Agreement to end the Lebanese Civil War, but the implementation of the agreement hit numerous obstacles within Lebanon.

Collective Diplomacy Since October 7, 2023

- New regional challenges brought on during the Gaza war galvanized Arab states to take collective action.
- Risk of regional expansion of conflicts with Israel
- Accelerated activities from Iranian allies in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen
- Inconsistent and ineffective U.S. policy toward the region after October 7
- As a result, key Arab states came together to develop a coordinated diplomatic posture which led to tangible results.
- January 2025: Gaza ceasefire agreement
- March 2025: Arab reconstruction plan for Gaza
- July 2025: Saudi-French effort leading to the New York Declaration on Palestinian self-determination
- November 2025: UN Security Council Resolution 2803, which tweaked and endorsed U.S. President Donald Trump's twenty-point plan



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