

A Counterintelligence Profile: Are High-Fliers Ready?

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For the geopolitics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), it is a time of great anxiety. With the non-Arab actors engaging in another tense series of regional infighting, coercive diplomacy and modern warfare have halted episodic interventions from the Arab counterparts. The MENA high-fliers have moved from their traditional stances of diplomatic arrangements and prioritized military readiness in the current spiraling crisis. For decades, the dominant challenge for the Arab nations has not been Israel's aggression nor Iran's ambitions, but their inability to sustain collective agreement in coalitions. The MENA region has seen countless alliances fracturing over the years, resulting in a region without one superpower. If the Gulf states continue to rely on the United States' changing focus in the Middle East, it will end up losing more than its economic potency and military confidence. It will lose the ability to arrange the chessboard.

The inability of the Arab world to synchronize with its proximate neighbors has weakened the prospects of creating a counterintelligence structure in regional flare-ups. Is staying mutually vulnerable to modern intelligence operations a mistake worth repeating in traditional alliances?

To mitigate conflict spillovers, the Arab nations have prioritized active defense [investments](#) and air denial [practices](#). Systematic [defense](#) procurements have [streamlined](#) their multi-domain operations to prevent entanglements, but out-spying Iran's asymmetric warfighting or Israel's intelligence warfare remains a political test. Israel's intelligence [directives](#) of movement profiling and persistent surveillance of the Supreme Leader highlight the necessity to advance intelligence methodologies. MENA's defensive architecture requires an additional protective layer over deterrence: counterintelligence. Not [synchronizing](#) against a common enemy caused several problems: domestic fracturing, outdated doctrines, historical distrust, and interoperability gaps. Investing rapidly in modern war equipment has erased the Arab world's warfighting inferiority. Still, the mismatch continues to exist in indigenous productions of air defenses, military intelligence, and technical expertise. Despite inter- and intra-regional strategic [connections](#) existing as a starting point, the underlying factors of alliance fragmentation have increased.

Consistent [strategic](#) differences are fracturing the prospects of political reconciliation and strategic retrospection. Facing multiple power projectors, shared security architecture has [reshaped](#) how the geography collaborates during political flare-ups. MENA's high-fliers see this geography without one dominant actor. This vacuum has yet to be filled, but complete dominance requires incremental layering, which Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the UAE, and Iran seek. The Gulf's current strategy to [combine](#) deterrence with diplomacy has been met with historical, geopolitical tests. From Kuwait (1990) to Bahrain (2011), this geography has had its [fair share](#) of regional adventures. The fear of exposing warfighting weaknesses has halted political adventures in MENA. Aside from weak engagements in Yemen and Syria, and confused performances with Israel and Iran, the geopolitical awareness to arrange the Middle East offers a

complex silver lining. The ongoing crisis demands more than a [cohesive](#) block from the Gulf. Moving in line with other MENA actors invites multidimensional risks, gambles, and prospects in managing the evolving theater.

Israel's [versatile](#) intelligence alters political [entanglements](#) for the Gulf. It introduced a hybrid wave of [targeted](#) psychological operations (PSYOPS). The open [presence](#) of Israel's intelligence in the Middle East has resulted in its neighbors' doctrinal fatigue. This 'eye in the sky' layering impacts the susceptibility, vulnerability, and recoverability of MENA's doctrinal postures. It pushes the Persian Gulf to [enhance](#) battlespace in three settings: Iran's [predictive](#) intelligence, the Gulf's [threat](#) assessment, and [integrated](#) weapons systems. Still, the [absence](#) of collective military intelligence and interoperability is glaring.

To keep a watchful eye on regional aggressors, the Gulf adopted a [threefold](#) approach, by formalizing passive defense, security clusters, and proactive diplomacy. With multiple doctrines, MENA struggles to [succeed](#) in collectively [preserving](#) power, let alone [projecting](#) it. Be it Iran or Israel, a common pattern in the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) strategic behavior was observed. It preferred [personalized](#) military innovations and [investments](#), while securing inter-regional [strategic](#) alliances. From the Levant to North Africa, the GCC to Iran, and Turkey to the broader Middle East, this reality articulated the [disconnected](#) objectives. However, the Gulf's common direction to domestically upgrade remained constant, and it offers three scenarios for a future strategy.

First, to become innovative by forming a layered intelligence coalition with regional military sectors in different geographical quadrants, making [Five Eyes](#) a blueprint to align domains, departments, and systems. Second, to continue [investing](#) in personalized, ad-hoc [security](#) investments before [active](#) defense localization. In the current situation, this strategy [provided](#) the Gulf with ample psychological and operational confidence to fuse other arrangements together. Third, use the [previous](#) geopolitical arrangements of MENA to innovate. The Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) was the rump administration's [idea](#) to bring the Arab states together for a joint cause: unifying against Iran. The Qatar blockade and Egypt's [withdrawal](#) soured the idea MESA became a memory. Therefore, the prospects of coordination by cross-regional powers require a consensus.

[Currently](#) the urgency to upgrade counterintelligence structures is neither lacking incentives nor temptations. The urgency to innovate in multiple spheres of traditional power is a matter of strategic inevitability. MENA has found a cogently balanced geostrategy to maneuver in multidirectional geopolitical dimensions. Natural resources, chokepoints, and trade passages give significant bargaining chips to MENA. It has shaped its strategic profile to constructively depend on geostrategic positioning. Using traditional elements of power with natural commonalities and conditionalities offers alliance politics. In a not-so-friendly neighborhood, finding common ground remains an Achilles' heel. Bringing elements of confidence-building from [inter-regional](#) coalition lessons is one go-to strategy.

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