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## SODELOVANJE OBOROŽENIH SIL V ZUNANJI POLITIKI: PRIMER BLIŽNJEGA VZHODA

## PARTICIPATION OF ARMED FORCES IN FOREIGN POLICY: THE CASE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

**Abstract** In addition to their traditional role in national defence and security, in the modern world the armed forces have an increasing number of tasks related to the implementation of the foreign policy of states, particularly in the field of defence diplomacy. This is also the case in the Middle East, which is usually associated with instability, conflict and war. However, the study has revealed the fact that many armies in the region are involved in efforts to build peace and stability. The results of the study showed their involvement in peace support operations, humanitarian operations, combat operations outside national territory and participation in various forms of national defence cooperation, including the formation of alliances and coalitions. This has enabled conclusions to be drawn on the positive or negative impact that armed forces have on the stability and security of the region.

**Key words** *Armed forces, Middle East, regional security, foreign policy.*

**Povzetek** Poleg tradicionalne vloge v obrambi države in pri zagotavljanju njene varnosti imajo oborožene sile v sodobnem svetu vse več nalog, ki so povezane z uresničevanjem zunanje politike držav, še posebej na področju obrambne diplomacije. Tako je tudi na Bližnjem vzhodu, ki ga po navadi povezujemo z nestabilnostjo, konflikti in vojnami. Toda študija je odkrila dejstvo, da je veliko vojsk v regiji vključenih v prizadevanja za vzpostavitev miru in stabilnosti. Rezultati raziskave so pokazali njihovo udeležbo v operacijah v podporo miru, humanitarnih operacijah in bojnih operacijah zunaj nacionalnega ozemlja ter sodelovanje v različnih oblikah obrambnega sodelovanja držav, vključno z oblikovanjem zavezništev in koalicij. Tako so omogočili sklepanje o pozitivnem ali negativnem vplivu, ki ga imajo oborožene sile na stabilnost in varnost regije.

**Ključne besede** *Oborožene sile, Bližnji vzhod, regionalna varnost, zunanjia politika.*

## Introduction

The security dynamics of the Middle East and North Africa have changed radically over the last decade, and it is evident it shall continue to change for the foreseeable future. What appeared to be a relatively stable pattern of security developments has become the scene of four major wars in Libya, Syria, Yemen and Occupied Palestinian Territories. Major changes have also taken place in the military and internal security forces of most countries in the region, with »a shift away from modernizing and expanding conventional military forces and their major weapons to a focus on counterextremism, counterterrorism, and internal security« (Cordesman, 2020). During the last decade, a lot has been said about the political and security situation of the Middle East as this part of the world has again become the topic that everyone is talking about. However, we have found that there is a lack of papers that have included all Middle East countries in the context of regional security. There are many researchers who have written about different events in the region but more in a way of describing what had happened and how did the armed forces behave. Our research focused on one of most important factors for prosperity of a country but not within a context of domestic but foreign (international) security, the armed forces, and their changing role. Today, it is quite common that they are involved, besides their main function of protection of the country's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, into international peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions, internal security tasks, disaster relief operations and in nation-building (Born, 2003, p 50). Among others, they contribute to the foreign policy implementation i.e. protection or support of national security interest outside national borders, which was the main research area.

The research included the armed forces of 16 Middle Eastern countries: Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkiye, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. We consider these countries to be a part of the Middle East region (World Atlas, 2022), even though some authors will stretch it and say that the Middle East consist of more countries when adding some African countries like Djibouti and Mauritania, even, Afghanistan, the Comoros, Pakistan, Sudan, and Somalia (*ibid.*). In general, we consider the armed forces of the Middle East countries as one of the crucial factors that may have impact on the security and stability of the region. This is because armed forces are by the definition and purpose one of the key elements for providing the security of nations. However, the history is full of examples how the military, under different circumstances, also became the threat to the security, both within the country and also beyond its borders.

The focus and purpose of our research follow the observation of some scholars. For example, Grizold noted that the military provides the national security, but this function is not just a defence of the country from different threats, but also performing the function, which is closely related with the national security, an implementation of the national foreign policy (1992, p 66). Troxel talks about two tasks, to reassure and dissuade the foreign governments (2012, p 219). Žabkar describes the military role in peace and crisis pointing out tasks like military support to foreign governments

or armed forces in critical situations, separation of armies in conflicts, and creation of conditions for elections in unstable countries (2003, p 125–129). Born points out, among other military tasks, multinational missions, peace establishment, prevention of conflicts, protection of civilians, and nation building (2003, 53–56). Bruneau and Matei consider military tasks in six groups including preparations for fighting foreign wars, humanitarian operations, fight against global terrorism and peace support operations (2008, p 917). Therefore, »non-traditional« or tasks which are related to foreign military activities in the context of international (regional) security, set the area of interest of our research.

The main purpose of this article is to improve an understanding of one of many factors that impact the security of the region. We started from assumption that there is a common interest to monitor, research and understand who or what impacts security in the region. The timeframe of our research was the period from 2011 until 2023. This period was characterized as one of the most delicate and historically one of toughest periods of the modern history of the Middle East with instability, lack of security, protests, failed democratic changes, rise of new terrorist organizations, establishment of terrorist state, change of regimes, internal conflicts, wars among states, etc. We were researching the use of military power as one of elements of national power of the Middle East countries, which makes armed forces the main research subject. The main research question was: What is the role of the armed forces in national foreign policy?

We pursued two main objectives: (1) to establish a theoretical framework which establishes relations between armed forces, national foreign policy and regional security, and (2) to find out what is the practical role of armed forces in foreign politics of respective Middle East countries. We used the deductive approach with a combination of variety supporting methods as is the historical method, analysis of primary and secondary sources, comparative analysis, and description. For answering research question, we explored and analysed the following parameters: legal foundations for military participation in national foreign policy, cooperation among armed forces in the region, involvement in humanitarian and peace support operations, involvement in combat operations outside national borders, and participation in military coalitions and/or alliances.

## 1 ARMED FORCES, FOREIGN POLICY, AND REGIONAL SECURITY

Countries normally depend on armed forces to defend them and keep them safe without being involved in internal politics. Armed forces are foundation of country's defence, being institution that main responsibility is to take care of safety of their nation and land. According to one of definitions, consist of all organized armed formations, groups, and units placed under a command that is responsible for the conduct of its subordinates which are represented by a government or a legal authority and are a subject to an internal disciplinary system that, among other obligations, enforces compliance with the law of armed conflict (Medecins Sans

Frontieres, 2022). They are safeguarding the country from internal and external threats, assisting government in promoting peace and stability, assist in combating international terrorism, and help citizens during natural disasters. NATO foresees the following missions and roles for the Armed Forces: (1) defend the own country, (2) provide humanitarian aid, (3) perform search and rescue missions, (4) provide assistance in disasters and (5) in accident, and (6) participate in maintaining public order, by providing administrative assistance, performing protective functions or assisting the police in emergencies (NATO, 2008).

Whatever role armed forces have they all need to respect the law and the legal framework they are bound with, which is different in every country. As they are responsible for protecting or supporting national interests, they must make the effort to create environment that is safe, and this includes not only dealing with internal but also external environment. Therefore, there is a close relation between their role and the foreign policy of the State. One can observe how smart foreign policy protects national interests, and if it implements objectives effectively, it promotes both internal and foreign stability and security.

Foreign policy, in general, can be seen as a set of decisions and actions that make up the policy of a government to protect the well-being of its citizens and promote their national interests before other countries and subjects of international law, and preserve international peace by (1) strengthening the security of the State vis-à-vis other countries, (2) promoting cooperation between different nations, economically, commercially, and culturally, (3) protecting the culture and values of society, (4) developing and consolidating the rule of law, ensuring the economic and social well-being of citizens, (5) applying justice ensuring compliance with international legal standards, and (6) respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms of people (Universidad Europea, 2022). »A State's foreign policy reflects its values and goals and helps drive its political and economic aims in the global arena« (University of York, 2022). Its purpose is to strengthen or protect national interests within the international environment. The care for common, international security is an integral part of those interests. Therefore, the armed forces carry a part of this responsibility performing different tasks for the protection or establishment of international security« (Grizold, 1992, p 66). Discrete uses of the armed forces are often an effective way of achieving foreign policy objectives (Blechman and Kaplan, 1978). In essence, foreign policy represents a nations approach in implementing strategies to secure a favourable position in its interactions with other countries.

One can understand the role of national armed forces in implementing foreign policy as a »set of principles and decisions, a plan of action and a thought-out course of action adopted and used by a nation for conducting relations with other nations and all international actors with a view to secure the preferred and defined goals of her national interest.« (YourArticlelibrary, 2020). Armed forces can have a valuable impact on diplomacy as they can promote peace and stability. They can try to ensure safe and secure geopolitical environment and promote regional stability with its

partners. Showing the military power forces can be seen not only by enrolling in conflicts but also in opposite, peacekeeping operations, peace support missions, international responses to transnational security threats (terrorism, arms proliferation, organized crimes) etc. (Bivainis, 2019).

The foreign policy may be implemented through the co-called defence diplomacy in which the armed forces share an important if not a major role. They perform different tasks like (1) promoting bilateral or multilateral cooperation in the field of military relations, security and defence, (2) preparation of contracts and agreements in the field of defence, (3) supporting partners in reforming the security sector and developing their capacity to participate in military operations, (4) conducting training and education in schools and military academies, (5) supplying military equipment and materials, (6) military counselling for international needs, (7) planning and organising multilateral military exercises, (8) logistic assistance in crisis and humanitarian operations caused by natural phenomena and catastrophes, (9) supporting efforts to build the military infrastructure necessary for the organisation of cooperation and mutual defence, (10) promoting democratic civilian control over the armed forces, (11) supporting the compliance with agreements in the field of arms control and disarmament, confidence building measures and control of special facilities, etc. (Drab, 2018). Defence diplomacy involves the peacetime cooperative use of armed forces and related infrastructure as a tool of foreign and security policy (Cottee and Foster, 2004).

Promotion of national (security) interests can develop through two modes of foreign policy implementation: partnerships and alliances. The later enables not only foundation for effective defence of the county and its allies, but also provides the tool for promoting international stability in security, what we can understand through the purposes of collective defence and collective security. Generally speaking, the collective defence is an official arrangement among nations (allies) to provide defence support to other members nations if they are attacked, while the collective security is more global concept of preventing conflicts or wars, providing mutual assistance, and also improving stability and security around the world. Collective security was one of premises for establishing the UN. Both, collective security and collective defence are expressions of foreign policy where the armed forces took a significant part.

Looking through the historic context, it is obvious that the armed forces of the Middle East had served as the extended hand of European powers as most were created by the European powers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some Arab armies who were created to help the imperial forces defend the colony against an external threat, most turned their attention toward internal threats to the regime (Pollack, 2019). There is no doubt that the armed forces of the region have played significant role in shaping the region. According to Riyadh Defence Forum (2022), they share a common view on main threats to regional security: (1) conflicts and instability, (2) terrorism and extremism, (3) attacks on territorial integrity, and (4)

nuclear proliferation. Protection of territorial integrity is of particular concern for states with border or territorial disputes. Throughout the history, and especially in the last decade, we had witnessed similar roles and performance of armed forces in the region, both positive and negative. There were armed forces that had performed effectively in supporting their government in foreign policy decisions, other did not, some were successful in defending their countries and standing by their government, other have turned their back to the government.

The armed forces have an important role as initiators of many different situations and the ones who have a large impact on regional stability and security. Countries in the region are very intertwined, so even though national security is important, the regional security is of significant value for the peace and stability. Regional security has shown to be of crucial importance for the region that has many historical problems, but these historical problems have an effect on present time and make today security situation more complicated as the interactions among countries of this region are full of mistrust, dysfunction, and absence of agreement (Ragab, 2020). Buzan and Weaver are talking in Regional Security Complex Theory about the importance of regional security. Their theory is intended for providing a conceptual framework to explain the emerging new order of international security after the Cold War. It assumes that the regional level is the basis for security analyses (2003, p 15). »One of the purposes of inventing the concept of regional security complexes was to advocate the regional level as the appropriate one for a large swath of practical security analysis, where the region refers to the level where states link together sufficiently closely that their securities cannot be considered separate from each other. The regional level is where the extremes of national and global security interplay, and where most of the action occurs« (ibid., p 44). In the following chapter we present the results of our study which shows the practical example of involvement of respective armed forces into nation's foreign policy, and thus influencing the regional security.

## **2 MILITARY ROLE IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

### **2.1 Legal foundation**

The Middle East has a specific regional dynamic. Countries have their own diplomatic strategies, including defence diplomacy, and they are all trying to balance between power and sensibility in pursuing their security interests. In this chapter we focused on legislative framework with whom the use of national armed forces in foreign policy is implemented. We found out that there are countries which have incorporated the military role in foreign policy, and specifically a military contribution to regional security, into their legislation. For example, Bahrain authorized by National Action Charter armed forces to support and ensure security and stability in the Gulf region and Arab World, and to support all international efforts for peaceful settlement of regional disputes (Kingdom of Bahrain, 2013). Israel's National Security Doctrine foresees military operations in enemy territory, and military-security cooperation at

the regional and international levels as a component of the response to the nation's security challenges (Meridor and Eldadi, 2019). Jordan defined the role of armed forces by Armed Forces Law (2007) which requires their participation in UN and other international forces, assistance of the forces of another country, and help to war or disaster victims in other countries. Saudi Arabia points out the position that aggressive actors must be confronted by a military capability that can persuade and, if necessary, compel them to refrain from expansionist tendencies (Al-Saud, 2002). United Arab Emirates (UAE) explains the military role in regional security through information provided by Foreign Ministry which, among others, stresses military involvement in Middle east peace process, transition in Yemen, security mission in Libya, and fight against terrorists and extremists in the region (Embassy of the UAE, 2022). Turkiye states in the Constitution that the military tasks include, among others, operations other than war, crises management, and small scale or limited force deployments (NATO, 2022).

For some countries the military participation in foreign policy was not directly stated but can be derived indirectly. For example, Egypt prohibits in the Constitution (2014) the President of the Republic in his capacity of the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, to send the armed forces outside the national borders, except after consultation with the National defence Council and obtaining the approval of the House of Representatives). Iranian armed forces are tasked to secure Iran's position as a regional power (DIA, 2019), which anticipates deploying military forces outside national territory, what one can observe in practice. Kuwait defined within the National Law a possibility that military officers may be loaned to foreign or international governments (Kuwait Constitution, national Legislative Bodies). Finally, there were countries where it was not possible to find any information regarding relationship between armed forces and foreign policy, (Cyprus, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman Quatar, and Yemen), or it was clear from the legal documents that the military engagement outside national territory is not envisioned (Syria). However, we have found out that some of those countries have been involved in military coalitions (e.g. Cyprus, Iraq, Oman, Lebanon, Quatar, Yemen), or performed stability operations (e.g. Cyprus, Quatar, Oman), or participated some form of military cooperation (e.g. Cyprus, Oman, Quatar, Iraq). Therefore, there must be a legal foundation for such endeavours. However, this conclusion can not be applied for Lebanon. Although we can observe Lebanon taking part in military coalition and conducting multinational military exercises, there is no evidence for deployment of Lebanese armed forces outside national territory and therefore we don't consider them participating actively in national foreign policy.

## 2.2. Military cooperation in the region

Military cooperation is one of tasks armed forces perform in the context of defence policy. Its purpose is to promote regional stability, address security challenges, and improve relationships between countries, especially among armed forces. It was crucial that countries recognize mutual interdependence in dealing with common security issues. The military cooperation was thus fostered by many security demands, e.g. counter terrorism, securing strategic lines of communications, containing

spill-over effect from regions affected by war, or coping with Iranian ambitions to become a regional power. The study showed rather intensive cooperation between armed forces in the region, and number of associated defence or military agreements.

For example, Cyprus cooperates with Egypt and Greece with focus on maintaining the security in immediate region, the Middle East and the Gulf, and implement the joint training programs intended for coordination and capabilities integration to enhance regional peace, security and stability (Unipath, 2022a). Egypt is actively engaged in military partnerships in different forms like hosting military delegations, participating in military conferences, participating combined training exercises, etc. Iran maintains defence and security ties with Shia groups and Shia-led governments, mainly to establish a regional network to counter Israeli and Western influence (DIA 2019, p.15). Iraq strengthens military cooperation with Egypt to enhance security in the region (Ahramonline, 2023). Israel develops partnership with Cyprus which includes exercises, exchanges, trainings, research, innovation, and technology (Israel Hayom, 2016). Jordan has signed the cooperation agreement with Quatar focusing on combating terrorism, crime, illegal migration, illegal trafficking of weapons and ammunition, human trafficking and illegal migration, etc. (Unipath, 2022b). Kuwait developed an intensive cooperation with Turkish Armed Forces with emphasis on military training and exercises (Unipath, 2022c). Saudi Arabia is member of Combined Maritime Forces which is a forum of multinational maritime partnership intended for maintaining security and stability in the international waters with the focus on counter-narcotics, counter-smuggling, suppressing piracy, and encouraging regional cooperation (Combined Maritime Forces, 2024).

Some countries are taking part in NATO-sponsored modes of cooperations, e.g. The Mediterranean Dialogue which is the forum that aims to contribute to security and stability in the wider Mediterranean region, with the participation of Egypt, Israel and Jordan (NATO, 2024b), and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative which aims for contributing to long term regional security where Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Quatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE are taking part (NATO, 2024a).

### **2.3 Combined (multinational) military training and exercises**

Military training, including exercises, is probably most used activity for promoting the defence diplomacy and the tool which promotes not only regional cooperation but also contributes to enhancing the capabilities and readiness of participating armed forces for defence of their countries and contributing to multinational security efforts in the region. Military exercises, across the region, serve a purpose in promoting teamwork, collaboration and stability. They may also serve as a tool of deterrence, or for extending influence and shape security environment in the region. For example, Cyprus and Israel conducted the exercise Onesilos-Gedeon, intended for training the personnel, increasing the combat capability and gaining experiences (Brief, 2019). Egypt and Cyprus executed multiple times military exercises which confirmed their strong military partnership. One example is exercise Ptolemy (Unipath, 2022a). Iran and Oman participated in combined

ground and maritime exercise (Tehran Times, 2024). Jordan and Qatar regularly address security challenges through exercises (Unipath, 2022b). Turkiye was a host of exercise Anatolian Eagle with the participation of UAE and Qatar, and observers from Iraq, Oman and Jordan (NATO, 2023).

Among foreign partners, the USA has a lead in organizing series of military exercises promoting mutual trust, understanding and common security goals, enhancing also military capabilities of some countries making them possible contributors to different multinational military mission. Those are, for example exercises Eager Lion with participation of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, UAE, Cyprus, Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Egypt (US CENTCOM, 2022), or Bright Star where armed forces from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE, and Cyprus took part (DVIDS, 2023). Sometimes is just a bilateral event like in case of Lebanon and the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command conducting the exercise Resolute Union with main focus on maritime awareness, operations, command and control, with force protection and infrastructure defence (US CENTCOM, 2023). It can be concluded that multinational military exercises play a crucial role in relationship between countries of the region and are regular type of cooperation (see Table 1).

Table 1:  
Military  
exercises in the  
region  
Source:  
authors, based  
on Unipath,  
2022, DVIDS  
2023, and US  
CENTCOM,  
2023.

MULTINATIONAL MILITARY EXERCISE	PARTICIPATING COUNTRY FROM THE MIDDLE EAST
Anatolian Eagle Lead by Turkiye	Turkiye, UAE and Qatar Iraq, Oman, Jordan as an observer
Eager Lion Led by USA	Saudi Arabia, Jordan, UAE, Cyprus, Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Egypt
Eagle Resolve Led by USA	Bahrain, Kuwait, Quatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE
Exercise Bright Star Led by USA	Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE, Cyprus
Gulf Shield Led by Saudi Arabia	Bahrain, Kuwait, Quatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE
Iron Union Led by USA	UAE
North Thunder Led by Saudi Arabia	Turkiye, UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Yemen
Medusa 10 Led by USA	Egypt, Cyprus, UAE
Tolemy 2021 Led by Egypt and Cyprus	Egypt and Cyprus
Invincible Sentry Led by USA	Different partner every year Oman (2021), Jordan (2022), Qatar (2023)

## 2.4 Combat operations outside national territory

Combat operations outside national are one of most visible demonstrations of military role in foreign policy. They show also an ability of nations for power projection in promoting their security interests. Power projection shows the ability to act, apply force, or just show presence in areas beyond its own country borders. Combat operations directly impact security in the region on both ways, positive and negative. Some nations may consider military interventions as a tool for promoting stability in the region, or to show the power and influence, shaping security environment which meets their security interests, or for show of force which support deterrent defence posture. This kind of operations demonstrate that the armed forces play important role shaping country's foreign policy decisions and goals. This becomes visible during major wars where one can observe involvement of foreign armed forces as part of military coalitions or conducting combat operations independently (see Table 2).

**Table 2:**  
Major regional wars in the last decade  
**Source:** authors, based on SIPRI, 2018, and Congressional Research Service, 2021.

WAR	ARMED FORCES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST INVOLVED
Syrian Civil War	Iran, Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, Israel
Yemeni Civil War	Saudi Arabia, Iran, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait
War against ISIS	Bahrain, Jordan, Egypt, UAE, Lebanon, Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Turkiye, Qatar, Iraq

The study showed quite an extensive use of combat operations in pursuing national and common security interests in the region. For example, Bahrain was involved in Yemeni civil war supporting legal armed forces. Among others, it performed air combat operations and joined the execution of blockade at sea (Cafeiero, 2024). Egypt has not been very enthusiastic to take part in conflicts across the region but has joined the coalition against Houthis in Yemen. Iran frequently uses military power for displaying intent to be a regional leader and trying to expand security influence. There is a long list of Iranian combat operations in different countries in the region including, among others, attacks on shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman, attacks on oil pipelines in Saudi Arabia, and missile attacks in Israel. Israel is regularly deploying armed forces for conducting combat operations in immediate proximity (e.g. Lebanon, Syria) or in more remote areas (e.g. Iran, Yemen) demonstrating strong will to diminish any serious threat to its security. It is not avoiding also deterioration of relationship with potential partners like in case of commando raid on the Gaza-bound Turkish ship (CSIS, 2010). Jordan was engaged in the fight against so-called Islamic State in Syria and joined the coalition against Houthi rebels in Yemen deploying fighter jets (Reuters, 2015). Turkiye performed

an armed intervention in the Republic of Cyprus in 1974, displaying the national interest and putting it before anything else, and it took part in Syrian conflict where it conducted several military operations, mainly due to its long-standing disputes with Kurds, extending military efforts to Kurdish region in Syria (Kurdish Peace Institute, 2023). UAE had been participating in the Saudi-led effort to counter Iran, was, among others, involved in Yemen war, supported USA against Al Qaeda's affiliate groups, participated fight against Islamic State in Syria, and took part in an intervention to help Bahrain suppress a major uprising by its Shiite majority (Congressional Research Service, 2021). Qatar supported the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen deploying armoured infantry and combat helicopters (Al Jazeera, 2015). Saudi Arabia took a lead in military coalition fighting the rebels in Yemen, and, on one hand, supporting the Yemeni government, and on the other, reducing Iranian influence in the region (SIPRI, 2018).

Among countries that had not demonstrated will to use combat power outside national borders for implementing the foreign policy, some of them not even having capabilities to do so, are Iraq, Cyprus, Oman, Kuwait, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon. They joined the military coalition against Islamic State in Syria (Lebanon, Oman, Kuwait, Yemen) but they didn't conduct combat operations in those countries. Finally, there are only three countries with significant deployable military capabilities that can project power in pursuing their security and/or defence interests, including influence the behaviour of adversaries and produce major impact on regional stability, mostly negative than positive. Those are Iran, Israel and Turkiye. Some other have ambitions to project military power, but limited military capabilities to do it on the same scale (e.g. Saudi Arabia and UAE).

## 2.5. Humanitarian and peace support operations

Humanitarian and peace support operations directly support stability and security in the region and are mainly performed without using force. Those operations are often considered an integral part of so-called stability operations or stability efforts which international community or individual nations are using for contributing to peace and security. Sometimes are understood also as part of crisis response operations or measures. Besides, enhance bonds between potential multinational partners, increase understanding within the region, help ensure access when required, strengthen future multinational operations, prevent crises, and shape the operational environment in peacetime (US Joint Doctrine 3-07, Stability).

### 2.5.1 Humanitarian operations

Humanitarian operations where armed forces are involved were one of the parameters we were using for determining which countries are making region safer (have positive impact on regional security). For that purpose, we understand humanitarian operations as goods and services provided by military actors (including, but not limited to, organization, transportation, security, medical assistance, engineering, communications, supplies, and equipment), funding, commercial contracting, materiel, and technical support provided by military actors (OCHA, 2018), and

disaster relief operations, support to refugees and internally displaced persons, technical assistance and support, chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear consequence management and in public security (NATO, 2015).

There are many Middle East armies that take part in efforts to mitigate humanitarian crisis. For example, Jordanian armed forces have provided humanitarian assistance at the regional and international levels, building and restoring places of worship, providing humanitarian assistance to the local population by distributing meals, clothing and school supplies to students, treating patients, protecting children and women from assault or sexual harassment, and relief for those affected by war or natural disasters e.g. in Pakistan, Iran, Turkiye, and Armenia (Jordan Armed Forces, 2023). Cyprus was among the countries that shipped large quantities of humanitarian aid with the help of officials and their landing crafts and large floating platforms during the last war between Israel and Hamas (Reuters, 2024). Turkiye armed forces provided humanitarian assistance in Syria pursuing an »enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy« (Republic of Turkiye, 2022). Saudi Arabian contributions have enabled a continued humanitarian response in the Middle East and other regions, particularly to those affected by the Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan crises, which included immediate relief such as food distribution, medical aid, and the construction of refugee camps (UNHCR, 2024). UAE was involved in many humanitarian operations, e.g. providing support to Iraq (reconstruction of hospitals, humanitarian supplies) (Embassy of the UAE, 2022). Qatar has had a large role in bringing humanitarian aid to Gaza strip (The Peninsula, 2025). It also sent rescue and relief missions to Turkish areas affected by earthquake (Atalayar, 2023). Kuwait armed forces transported tons of humanitarian aid to Poland for distribution among Ukrainian refugees (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2022). Iran has also helped Gaza Strip with humanitarian aid while informing everyone that Iranian armed forces are ready to offer medical assistance to people in Gaza (MEMO, 2023). Iraq was coordinating with Egyptian authorities to send the aid and donations to the Gaza Strip, too (Egypt Today, 2023). Israel conducted military operation called Good Neighbour to provide humanitarian aid to Syrians (The Times of Israel, 2017). Israeli Defence Forces helped also Turkiye after the earthquake. Oman armed forces have provided humanitarian aid to Sudan which included air-bridge for transport of food and medical supplies (Muscat Daily, 2023). Egypt has sent tons of humanitarian aid after the explosion in Beirut (Cahn and Yavorsky, 2023). Bahrain Defence Forces are also among others which have transported humanitarian aid to Turkiye after the earthquake (Bahrain News Agency, 2023).

### 2.5.2 Peace support operations and missions

Nations in the region are keen to use humanitarian operations in foreign policy for building mutual trust and cooperation, and thus promoting peace and stability. They are using also other tools like peace support operations and missions for which some consider a diplomatic tool that has a goal to be utilized to bring stability and peace. Peace support operations contribute to regional security (UN prefers using term peacekeeping) and are proven to be one of the most effective tools available to

assist host countries navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace (UN, 2022). However, this tool is being used only by few countries in the region, and there are just three that dedicate significant efforts to this kind of military operations: Egypt, Jordan and Turkiye (see Table 3). Among others only Yemen and Iran have supported UN Peacekeeping operations in the past (UN, 2023).

**Table 3:**  
Troops contributing to UN Peacekeeping from the Middle East in 2023

**Source:**  
authors, based on UN, 2023.

COUNTRY	TOTAL
Egypt	1739
Jordan	357
Turkiye	154
Cyprus	2
Qatar	1

Egypt is the largest contributor of personnel in UN Peacekeeping missions from Middle East countries. The reluctance of others to put more emphasis on peace support operations and thus contributing to security in the region could be understood from the assumptions that are preoccupied with domestic security issues, or are involved in armed conflicts, or are avoiding engagement within the area. The latter can be seen from modest participation in UN peacekeeping operation in mission in the region where only Turkiye and Jordan take part (see Table 4).

**Table 4:**  
Peace support operations and missions in the region  
**Source:**  
authors, based on UN, 2024.

OPERATION OR MISSION	LOCATION	LEAD	PARTICIPATING COUNTRY FROM THE MIDDLE EAST
UN Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP)	Cyprus	UN	Jordan
United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)	Israel	UN	Non
United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)	Lebanon	UN	Non
United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)	Lebanon	UN	Non
NATO Mission Iraq (NMI)	Iraq	NATO	Turkiye, Jordan
EU Mission for the Support of Palestinian Police and Rule of Law (EUPOL COPPS)	Occupied Palestinian Territory	EU	Turkiye

The reasons for not taking part in peace support operations and missions in the region may come from the combination of predispositions and specific policy decisions to national security concerns, to keeping their focus on other parts of the world, to working with alternative international organizations of ad hoc coalitions, etc. (Bellamy and Williams, 2012, p 6–8). We found that the countries that are participating in the peacekeeping operations in the region are also countries who are participating this type of stability operations in other parts of the world too, which directly shows their foreign policy orientation dedicated not only to security and stability in the home region but also to other troubled regions around the world. For example, in United Nations Interim Administration mission in Kosovo, Turkiye and Jordan were among top ten military contributors. In the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, Egypt was one of the top ten military contributors and holds place in UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and in UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Jordan was contributing to UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali operations and UN Interim Security Force for Abyei.

## 2.6 Alliances and coalitions

Coalitions and alliances are powerful tools for promoting security interests. They enhance the defence of its members, and ability for influencing regional stability and security. They are often shaped by the regional competition but also international intervention.

### 2.6.1 Alliances

Alliance in international relations is an agreement between two or more countries for mutual support in case of war (Britannica, 2022a). These countries, with formal agreements, promise each other that they shall offer support (US DOD, 2019). We have identified two types of agreements we consider as alliances in the region (see Table 5).

Table 5: Defence and security alliances in the region  
Source: authors, based on Britannica, 2022a and 2022b.

ALLIANCE	COUNTRIES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST INVOLVED	FOCUS
Arab League	Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, UAE	Coordination of military defence measures
Organization of Islamic Cooperation	Egypt, Syria, Iraq, UAE, Bahrain, Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Oman, Kuwait, Lebanon, Iran	Peace and security

Main defence and security arrangement in the region is evolving around the Arab League, an organization that is promoting cooperation on security issues and coordinating responses to conflicts in the region. It is a loose confederation of 22 Arab nations whose broad aims are »to strengthen and coordinate the political, cultural,

economic, and social programs of its members and to mediate disputes among them or between them and third parties» (Britannica 2022b). In case of aggression or threat of aggression by one state against a member-state, the state which has been attacked or threatened with aggression may demand the immediate convocation of the Council (Charter of the Arab League). The other organization that we consider alliance is the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, »aims at promoting Islamic solidarity by coordinating social, economic, scientific, and cultural activities. Under the banner of strengthening the struggle of Muslims, the conference pledges to eliminate racial segregation and discrimination, especially in regard to the Palestinians» (Britannica, 2022d). It has 57 members, including 13 from the Middle East. The organization with the main emphasise on peace and security has been very vocal, among others, on condemning the Israeli attacks on Gaza strip and West bank throughout the years.

Getting involved into alliances, for most of the countries of the region, is anything but simple and involves complex political decision-making position. There is no better example for this than Israel, where it has been developing below-the-radar bilateral security relationships with Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE for some time, hoping to establish an explicitly anti-Iran defence alliance. Because of this, Israel and Gulf countries are growing their cooperation normalising their relations (Foucher and Jacobs, 2022). In addition, there have been many talks about Middle East Air Defence Alliance purposed for better protection of countries in the region against attacks from Iran (Ahronheim, 2022). The USA is leading potential alliance called Middle East Strategic Alliance for contributing to peace and security in the region and the world, including Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE), Egypt, and Jordan (Farouk, 2019), but it has not made any progress so far. Another new idea of alliance is the one with Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan. Egypt and Jordan want to reduce their dependence on Saudi Arabia while Iraq wants to move away from Iran (Ryan, 2020). The alliance is »aiming for cooperation on security, diplomacy, and economic relations« (ibid.). All mentioned to-be-coalitions are in developing phase.

## 2.6.2 Coalitions

Building coalitions is another way of improving, sometimes deteriorating, the defense and/or security situation in the region. While the alliances are pursuing more long-term security goals, coalitions are mostly short-term endeavors addressing arising or ongoing security issues including armed conflicts, terrorism, wars, etc. Alliance usually suggests partnership of at least medium-term duration, coalitions tend to be temporary, finishing after a goal has been achieved (Britannica, 2022c). »Coalition forces refer to military units from different nations cooperating to enhance operational effectiveness in various scenarios, including peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, or combat missions» (Total Military Insight, 2024). We have found out that in general there are two large (non-formal) opposing coalitions in the Middle East that define a rivalry which threatens to tear the region apart. Confrontation between Iran and his allies and on the other side Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel. The history of recent conflicts and wars shows that coalition building is widely accepted

tool for implementing foreign policy of respective countries which are promoting regional security and stability (see Table 6). As we could see, coalitions and alliances are an expression of common diplomatic strategies among countries that share the same security interests. They have the same goal, collectively building secure environment, whatever that might mean for them. We emphasize this because one can witness two opposite coalitions in the region, and both would say that their main goal is safety and stability. We can conclude that most of countries in the region have been involved in coalitions and/or alliance.

Table 6.  
Military  
coalitions in the  
region  
Source:  
authors, based  
on ACLED,  
2024, Global  
Coalition, 2020,  
Egypt today,  
2017, Tehran  
Times, 2021,  
and US DOD,  
2023.

COALITION	COUNTRIES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST INVOLVED	FOCUS
Saudi led coalition in Yemen	Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan	Countering the Houthi rebels and helping Yemeni government
Coalition to defeat Daesh	Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Turkiye, Yemen	Fighting terrorism (to defeat so-called Islamic State)
The Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition	UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman	Coordinate military and relief support to member countries to enable them to defeat armed terrorist groups and alleviate the suffering of local communities
Russia-Syria-Iran-Iraq coalition	Russia, Syria, Iran, Iraq (+Hezbollah)	Counterintelligence sharing and fight against IS
Western-led Operation Prosperity Guardian	Bahrain	Freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and bolstering regional security and prosperity

### 3 DISCUSSION

Significant transformations have been visible in the Middle East over the past decade. This has been seen in improving the relations among countries which has positive influence on the security situation in the region. On the other hand, there are ongoing conflicts that have been occurring periodically and that have the direct negative impact on regional stability and security. The focus of our research was on one of the most important institutions in making both, peace and security, chaos and instability - armed forces. We analysed how armed forces influence the regional security while implementing the foreign policy of their nations. We have observed armed forces responsible for securing national security interests, their roles ranging from performing common training and exercises, participating multinational (coalition) operations, providing humanitarian aid, to conducting peace support operations. Researching the armed forces of the Middle East helped

us understanding the military dynamics between countries in relation to regional security. It is worth mentioning that only national armed forces were taken into consideration, and not the irregular or terrorist forces that operate in some of the countries of our research.

In achieving security objectives, the Middle East countries are using strategies and tools of foreign policy. They are putting a lot of emphasis on defence diplomacy trying to resolve regional conflicts and improve their cooperation to be able to make the region safer. Joint initiatives create more peaceful environment which all the actors then can benefit from. Throughout the research, we have analysed different parameters which helped us develop conclusion on military support to foreign policy goals (see Table 7).

The main observation is that except Lebanon and Syria, there are no armed forces in the Middle East that are not participating in implementation of foreign policy, or from different perspective, there is no country that would not recognize a value of military force in pursuing national security or defence goals outside the national territory. For that purpose, the countries have established legal framework which provides foundation for military involvement in foreign policy. It is worth mentioning, that legal provisions enable armies participating the implementation of foreign policy and not in creation of it. The evidence that armed forces have impact on creation of national foreign policy was not found. Among countries that don't envision employment of armed forces abroad are already mentioned Lebanon and Syria which we assume that they are preoccupied with domestic issues. Although their countries took part in coalitions and alliances there was no intent to use them outside national territories.

Stability operations, including peace and humanitarian operations, are powerful tool for promoting security interest and improving stability in the region. Almost all armed forces in the region are helping other countries with humanitarian aid and/or assistance. Among those that are not, Syria and Yemen are preoccupied with internal security and own humanitarian crises and cannot dedicate resources for helping others. While humanitarian operations are broadly accepted and performed, peace support operations are less represented among the Middle east armed forces. Only five countries are persistent in this type of operations supporting peace and stability among them. Iran and Yemen had been involved in the past too, but no they are in the group of others who don't dedicate their military capabilities for this kind of operations.

Multinational military exercises promote regional stability with sharing knowledge, collaboration, and communication and, not least important, promoting trust among countries. The Middle East has many security issues and exercises are one of tools available for mitigating the consequences or enabling adequate response in the future. Military exercises are likely to improve dialogue between countries and contribute to improving defence diplomacy efforts. There are no armed forces in the region that is not involved in any form of multinational training or exercises. The only exception is Syria for the obvious reasons (domestic issues).

Alliances and coalitions are two modes of foreign policy used for defending or promoting security interest of member nations. Based on their use in practice it can be concluded that alliances remain mostly forum for political (security) discussion while coalitions are concrete tool for impacting the security in the region. It can be concluded that all Islamic nations are involved in some kind of alliance or coalition which gather mostly Arabic world around main security issues. For that reason, Cyprus and Israel are excluded although they have supported coalition (e.g. Cyprus), but without direct military involvement. Israel is pursuing its own foreign policy without participating coalitions but one can observe military operations of Israeli defence Forces that supported coalition's goals (e.g. coalition against Daesh).

Table 7:  
Implementation of foreign policy  
Remark:  
\*based on observation of military activities we assume there is a legal foundation to do so.  
Source:  
authors.

IMPLEMENTATION OF FOREIGN POLICY							
Armed forces	Legally defined military role in foreign policy	Stability operations		Military cooperation	Defence or security alliance	Military coalition	Combat operations abroad
		Peace support operations	Humanitarian operations	Training & exercises			
Bahrain	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cyprus	✓*	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Egypt	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iran	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iraq	✓*		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Israel	✓		✓	✓			✓
Jordan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kuwait	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lebanon				✓	✓	✓	
Oman	✓*		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Qatar	✓*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
S. Arabia	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Syria					✓	✓	
Turkiye	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
UAE	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yemen	✓*			✓	✓	✓	

Combat operations outside national territory are most visible and harmful way of promoting foreign policy. There are more than half Middle East countries that use this tool, mostly through coalitions since they do not have significant military power to use it individually. Only Turkey, Israel and Iran have capabilities for power

projection to impact the security in the region on higher scale which in practice means that their implementation of foreign policy mostly deteriorates the security situation in the region. Smaller armies that have capabilities to conduct combat operations outside national territory contribute to common goals of coalitions striving for conflict termination or containment and improving the regional security.

## Conclusion

The research of the role of armed forces in the Middle East in the foreign policies had a main purpose to improve understanding, in general, of the region itself, and specifically their influence on regional stability. After completing the research, we have obtained a better picture in terms of deterioration or improvement of the regional stability and security. The role of the armed forces has traditionally been linked to the defence of the country and ensuring its security. However, the military power available to states is not only directed at their own security, but also at strengthening or protecting defence and security interests beyond their borders. It is therefore not surprising that the armed forces from the Middle East have several tasks related to the implementation of the foreign policy of states, especially in the field of defence diplomacy.

The Middle East is usually perceived as a region of instability, unrest, conflict and war. However, our study has revealed the fact that large number of armies are involved in peacebuilding and stability building efforts. By examining the participation of the armed forces in stabilisation operations (e.g. peace support operations, humanitarian operations and combat operations for peacebuilding or conflict containment), and their participation in various forms of defence cooperation among states, including alliances and coalitions, we can identify their important role in supporting the national foreign policy and the common security or defence interests of the countries in the region. Despite the rather intensive use of armed forces in combat operations outside national territory, one can observe that the use of military force is often aimed, paradoxically, at ensuring a more stable and secure region.

Among the activities that promote cooperation, trust and understanding, humanitarian operations and military exercises stand out, while participation in peace support operations is less widespread than expected. Middle Eastern countries avoid participating in peacekeeping operations and missions in the region, but the presence of their forces in other peace support operations around the world is also not widespread. Although the use of the military is often linked to countries' ambitions to expand their influence in the region and to traditional tensions within the Muslim community, led by Saudi Arabia on the one hand and Iran on the other, we can detect a motivation among most countries to promote cooperation in ensuring stability in the region. Therefore, the impact of the armed forces on regional security is not only negative but also positive, as can be seen in the army that is probably most associated with instability and war - the Israeli Defence Forces.

At the end we must point out that a certain limitation of our research comes from issues obtaining data since the countries we were researching are very sensitive in publishing information's about their armed forces. This has had an impact on

our research as in some cases, we were not able to find the information's to have a complete picture. However, despite these challenges, the research offers a valuable contribution for understanding the evolving role of armed forces in the Middle East foreign policy, establishing a foundation for all the future research on this and similar topics.

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