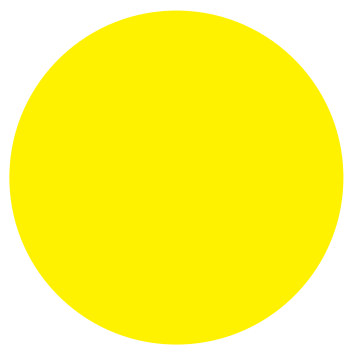


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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (2nd R) presents a certificate of appreciation to an entrepreneur during a ceremony marking the National Export Day in Tehran, Iran on October 21, 2025.
president.ir

Security in the Middle East: For whom and according to which approach?



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O P I N I O N

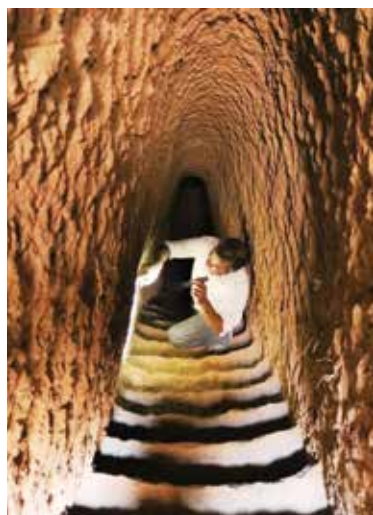
The discourse on security in the Middle East has long occupied a central place in both regional and international analyses and policymaking. Yet, a fundamental question persists: for whom is security defined, and to whom does regional security truly belong? Conventional responses have predominantly reflected the perspectives of powerful international and state actors—particularly Western powers such as the United States and its allies—who frame security within the paradigm of safeguarding their own interests and maintaining political and military stability in the region.

This Western-centric, state-focused lens on security, which has dominated analyses and policies for decades, has frequently led to the marginalization or outright neglect of the concerns and security conceptions articulated by local, societal, and non-state actors. Such disregard for the diverse—and often conflicting—regional perspectives has contributed significantly to the fragility and instability of numerous security agreements and orders, despite their apparent ambitions. More specifically, security as defined by major powers tends to center on controlling military threats, combating terrorism, and protecting geopolitical interests. Within this framework, security is closely tied to preserving the political and economic status quo of dominant actors, often at the expense of the human dimension, social justice, political freedoms, and the authentic concerns of local populations. As a result, enhanced security for these powers frequently engenders insecurity and instability for other groups and communities within the region.

The recent twelve-day war between Iran and Israel starkly illustrates the shortcomings of this approach. In this brief but consequential conflict, non-state and regional actors—such as proxy groups and local coalitions—played a pivotal role in shaping both the dynamics of security and the nature of threats. This evolution underscores that regional security can no longer be defined and managed exclusively by great powers. Rather, it necessitates a multidimensional and polycentric security order that embraces the plurality of perspectives and interests held by regional and local stakeholders.

As long as security remains narrowly construed through the prism of great powers' interests and approaches, agreements in the Middle East will remain inherently fragile. Such a restricted definition of security cannot adequately capture the region's complex realities nor guarantee sustainable security for all actors involved. In contrast, security that is defined and pursued inclusively, through a multi-centered and dialogic process—incorporating states, social groups, popular movements, and non-state actors alike—can lay the groundwork for more durable agreements and a more stable regional order.

Ultimately, it is clear that the production of security knowledge must transcend Western and state-centric confines, integrate local perspectives and live experiences to offer a more nuanced and realistic understanding of Middle Eastern security. Only through such an inclusive and pluralistic approach can there be genuine hope for lasting and meaningful security arrangements in the region.



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