

Opinion **Iran**

## Iran can set a post-Isis security policy for the region

Two initiatives to ensure we can build on the co-operation that succeeded in that fight

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Mohammad Javad Zarif: to move from turmoil to stability, we must turn to dialogue and other confidence-building measures, such as the promotion of tourism and transparency in armaments © AFP

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The defeat of [Isis](#) has not just heralded the return of stability to large swaths of territory. It is also fanning fresh conflict and tension — including a concerted effort to revive the hysteria which has long obscured the reality of [Iran's](#) foreign policy.

Isis displayed the darkest depths of human evil. Yet it also provided an opportunity to come together to battle an existential threat. The co-operative relationships forged in this fight can usher in a new era. We need new approaches and new terminology to make sense of a world which is transitioning to a post-western global order. Here are two concepts to shape the emerging paradigm in west Asia: the idea of a strong region, and security networking, whereby small and large countries — even those with historical rivalries — contribute to stability.

The objective of a strong region — as opposed to a quest for hegemony and the exclusion of other actors — is rooted in recognising the need to respect the interest of all stakeholders. Any domineering effort by one country is not only inappropriate but

essentially impossible: those who insist on following that path create instability. The arms race in our region is an instance of this kind of destructive rivalry: siphoning vital resources into the coffers of arms manufacturers has contributed nothing to achieving peace and security. Militarism has only served to fuel disastrous adventurism.

Most of the usual modes of forming alliances have also become obsolete. Given our interconnected world, the idea of collective security is now defunct, especially in the Persian Gulf, for one basic reason: it assumes commonality of interests. Security networking is Iran's innovation to address issues that range from divergence of interests to power and size disparities. Its parameters are simple but effective: rather than trying to ignore conflicts of interests, it accepts differences. Equally, being premised on inclusivity, it acts as a firewall against the emergence of an oligarchy among big states and allows smaller states to participate. The rules of this new order are straightforward: common standards, most significantly the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, such as sovereign equality of states; refraining from the threat or use of force; peaceful resolution of conflicts; respect for the territorial integrity of states; non-intervention in the domestic affairs of states; and respect for self-determination within states.

Security networking is not utopian. It is the only realistic way out of the vicious cycle of relying on extra-regional powers, exclusionary alliances and the illusion that security can be bought with petrodollars or flattery. One would expect other countries — especially our European [neighbours](#) — to see it in their own interests to urge allies in our region to adopt this policy.

To move from turmoil to stability, we must first and foremost turn to dialogue and other confidence-building measures. At all levels we are facing a dialogue deficit in west Asia. Aspects of this are visible between the ruling and the ruled, between governments and between peoples. Dialogue should aim to make clear that we all have similar concerns, fears, aspirations and hopes. Such dialogue can and must replace rhetoric and propaganda. Dialogue must be coupled with confidence-building measures: promoting tourism; joint task forces on issues ranging from nuclear safety to pollution to disaster management; joint military visits; pre-notification of military exercises; transparency measures in armament; reducing military expenditures; and all leading eventually to a non-aggression pact.

As a first step, the Islamic Republic proposes establishing a Regional Dialogue Forum in the Persian Gulf. Our longstanding invitation to dialogue remains open, and we look forward to the day our neighbours will accept it, and their allies — in Europe and elsewhere in the west — will encourage it.

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