



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات  
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Situation Assessment | 19 February 2019

# Warsaw Conference: Objectives and Implications

Policy Analysis Unit

## Warsaw Conference: Objectives and Implications

Series: **Situation Assessment**

19 February 2019

### Policy Analysis Unit

The Policy Analysis Unit is the Center's department dedicated to the study of the region's most pressing current affairs. An integral and vital part of the ACRPS' activities, it offers academically rigorous analysis on issues that are relevant and useful to the public, academics and policy-makers of the Arab region and beyond. The Policy Analysis Unit draws on the collaborative efforts of a number of scholars based within and outside the ACRPS. It produces three of the Center's publication series: Assessment Report, Policy Analysis, and Case Analysis reports.

Copyright © 2019 Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. All Rights Reserved.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is an independent research institute and think tank for the study of history and social sciences, with particular emphasis on the applied social sciences.

The Center's paramount concern is the advancement of Arab societies and states, their cooperation with one another and issues concerning the Arab nation in general. To that end, it seeks to examine and diagnose the situation in the Arab world - states and communities- to analyze social, economic and cultural policies and to provide political analysis, from an Arab perspective.

The Center publishes in both Arabic and English in order to make its work accessible to both Arab and non-Arab researchers.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Al-Tarfa Street, Wadi Al Banat

Al-Dayaen, Qatar

PO Box 10277, Doha

+974 4035 4111

+974 40354114

[www.dohainstitute.org](http://www.dohainstitute.org)

# Table of Contents

- Conference Objectives ..... 1
- Why Warsaw? ..... 2
- Mobilization and Representation ..... 3
- An Arab Israeli Alliance to Confront Iran ..... 3
- Conclusion ..... 4

Over 13 and 14 February 2019, a ministerial conference was held in the Polish capital to “enhance peace and security in the Middle East”. Representatives from some 60 countries attended, about a month after an invitation from US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to address regional and international efforts to counter Iran’s “destabilizing” activities in the Middle East.<sup>(1)</sup> While the conference drew a lukewarm response internationally, most Arab countries sent their foreign ministers, and Israel was represented by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The Vice President Mike Pence represented the United States. Beside the ceremonial gesturing by US officials elated in their ability to bring Arab officials together with the Israeli prime minister, the conference did not yield any important decisions. The main goal seemed to be providing a cover for normalization of relations between some Arab countries and Israel under the pretext of confronting the common Iranian threat.

## Conference Objectives

The Warsaw conference aimed to achieve several objectives, most importantly:

- To reassure Arab allies that the United States is committed to their security, especially in relation to Iran, after US President Donald Trump announced in mid-December 2018 his intention to withdraw his troops from Syria and Afghanistan. The decision to withdraw from left Washington’s allies confused, especially in the Gulf region. It had previously been believed that Washington decided, after the Gulf countries led by Saudi Arabia showed readiness to shoulder part of the costs<sup>(2)</sup>, to maintain its military presence in the north-eastern regions of Syria when the war on ISIL was over. It was expected that the US would stay to maintain its influence in Syria and to counter Iran’s influence in the region. The US and its allies fear the creation of a land corridor that allows Iran to link its areas of influence in Iraq and Syria to Lebanon. But Trump backtracked and decided to withdraw his forces from Syria, after a telephone call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on December 14, 2018, sowing distrust in the US commitment to Washington’s Arab allies.<sup>(3)</sup>
- The conference, which was presented and overseen by the Senior Policy Advisor to the Secretary of State and Special Representative for Iran, Ambassador Brian Hook, an event to bring together Arab and Israeli officials publicly to confront the “Iranian Threat.” Achieving Arab-Israeli rapprochement is a key goal and part of Washington’s efforts to create a regional alliance to confront Iran, or to exploit the Iranian threat in order to implement US-Israeli agendas. This was initiated by the idea of creating a “Middle East Strategic Alliance” or, as the media refers to it,

---

1 “A Force for Good: America Reinvigorated in the Middle East”, US Department of State, 10/1/2019, accessed on 18/2/2019, at: <https://bit.ly/2TF0ICX>

2 Ben Hubbard, “Saudi Arabia Delivers \$100 Million Pledged to U.S. as Pompeo Lands in Riyadh,” *New York Times*, 16/10/2018, accessed on 18/2/2019, at: <https://nyti.ms/2RTB4uf>

3 Karen DeYoung et al. “A Tumultuous Week Began with a Phone Call between Trump and the Turkish President,” *the Washington Post*, 21/12/2018, accessed on 18/2/2019, at: <https://wapo.st/2X9vAy8>



“Arab NATO”. The alliance includes the Arab Gulf countries in addition to Egypt and Jordan, to be accompanied by Arab-Israeli coordination. The Middle East Strategic Alliance was scheduled to be announced at a summit of the eight Arab states and the United States, to be held in Washington in October 2018. That never happened due to the continuing Gulf crisis, the blockade of Qatar, and the unwillingness of the United States to expend real efforts to solve the crisis, as its greatest beneficiary. Thus, the US failure to bring together the Arab allies led them to arrange the Warsaw Conference in order to expand the pool for participants.(4)

- The US aims to create a global alliance to exert pressure on Iran and encourage it to accept Washington’s conditions. Since it decided to withdraw from the nuclear deal with Iran in May 2018, the United States has been pressing for maximum pressure on Tehran to negotiate a new agreement that meets three key conditions: to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear program, to stop Iran’s missile program, and to contain Iranian regional influence. Since withdrawing from the nuclear agreement, the United States has imposed two sets of sanctions against Tehran. The first was implemented in August 2018 and the second, tougher round of sanctions, was imposed in November, targeting the oil sector and Iranian banks.(5)

## Why Warsaw?

The US chose the Polish capital to convene the conference for a number of reasons, notably:

- By choosing Warsaw, Washington draws new lines to divide the European continent between the new allies who conform to its regional and international policies, and its old allies with more independent policies in Western Europe. Since the end of the Cold War, Washington has gained confidence in the Eastern European countries that joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after the collapse of the communist bloc, particularly Poland and the Czech Republic. Washington erected parts of the so-called missile shield, a missile defense base in Poland and a radar in the Czech Republic, to counter what Washington claims is the threat of Iranian missiles on the continent.
- Choosing Warsaw indicates the extent of Poland’s servitude to US foreign policy, after becoming fully dependent on the US to defend it from Russian threats to its security. Warsaw therefore finds itself predisposed towards US policies, even when Washington runs counter to EU policies. This also means that Washington is more dependent on Poland to play roles in both the Middle East and in the European continent. The conference is thus an opportunity for Poland and the United States to strengthen their strategic partnership. The first is the effort to host an

4 Yara Bayoumy, Jonathan Landay & Warren Strobel, “Trump Seeks to Revive ‘Arab NATO’ to Confront Iran,” *Reuters*, 27/7/2018, accessed on 18/2/2019, at: <https://reut.rs/2GLJK2E>

5 “Renewed US Sanctions on Iran: Potential for Escalation or Containment”, Situation Assessment, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 9/8/2019, last accessed 18/2/2018 at: <https://bit.ly/2lUaIB>



American base on Polish soil. It was noteworthy that the two countries signed, on the sidelines of the Warsaw summit, a contract to buy 20 rocket launchers worth 414 million dollars, which the United States will hand over to Poland by 2023.

- Considering the lack of European enthusiasm to hold a conference charged with confronting Iran, Warsaw seemed the ideal choice. The ruling law and justice party, Eurosceptic, right-wing populist and with tendencies towards Atlanticism, is in line with the Trump doctrine. Hosting the conference was an opportunity for the conservative right-wing government in Poland to strengthen ties with Washington as it faces growing isolation within the European Union amid a dispute over government compliance with EU rule of law standards.

## Mobilization and Representation

The US failure to drum up real support, especially among its European allies, for a conference aimed at “Confronting Iran” led them to address a number of additional issues. These included the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the humanitarian crises in Syria and Yemen, cybersecurity, terrorism and extremism, missile development and proliferation, threats to maritime trade and others. However, several European countries decided to reduce their representation at the conference, while the EU’s High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and Security, Federica Mogherini, boycotted the meeting citing her participation in the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa.

The EU is committed to the nuclear agreement with Tehran, especially the members who are party to the deal; France, Britain and Germany, and encourages Iran to continue with the plan. Furthermore, they agreed to establish a special banking scheme (a special purpose vehicle) to circumvent US sanctions on Iran and to continue to trade with it, especially in areas that have a human dimension. Britain justified sending its foreign minister to the conference by claiming that its goal is to focus the spotlight on the war in Yemen, with which Britain sees itself directly concerned.

The US-European dispute over Iran was strikingly obvious throughout the conference. In the keynote speech given by US vice president Pence, he demanded that the EU allies withdraw from the nuclear deal and condemned the British-French initiative to allow European companies to flout the renewed US sanctions and continue activity in Iran. He said that “it is an ill-advised step that will only strengthen Iran, weaken the EU and create still more distance between Europe and the United States.”<sup>(6)</sup>

## An Arab Israeli Alliance to Confront Iran

The conference did not produce any new policies against Iran. It turned into an attempt to ease the embarrassment of the Arab parties seeking normalization with Israel. It also turned into a stepping

6 “Middle East conference: Pence urges EU to quit Iran nuclear deal”, Aljazeera, 14/2/2019, last accessed 18/2/2019 at: <https://bit.ly/2X1U1NY>

stone for the establishment of an Arab-Israeli “alliance” under the guise of confronting Iran. While the US is preparing to leave Syria, it is expected that Israel will lead regional efforts to confront Iran, especially in Syria. According to Washington, this requires Arabs to accept the passage of a peace settlement for Palestine, without the Palestinians themselves, in line with the Israeli vision promoted as the “deal of the century” by Trump’s son in law and Middle East envoy Jared Kushner. This means settling on Israel’s assistance to the Arabs in confronting Iran, in exchange for their compliance in the decimation of the Palestinian cause.

The Trump administration had originally embarked on this vision, with little Arab resistance, to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the occupying power, moving its embassy in May 2018, and cutting funding to pressure UNRWA to redefine the refugee. This would have excluded millions of Palestinians from refugee status, and subsequently negated any right of return.<sup>(7)</sup> Meanwhile Israel continues its settlement activities and the annexation of Palestinian land in the West Bank to impose its own *fait accompli*. The Trump administration expects the Arab states to help pressure Palestinians, who have so far refused to discuss the “deal of the century”, to accept proposals that Kushner is expected to announce after the Israeli legislative elections on 9 April 2019.

## Conclusion

The Warsaw conference, intended principally to confront Iran, produced no significant decisions because of the division between the US and the nuclear deal signatories (Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany) with some refusing to attend the conference. It appeared the main goal was to open the door to public normalization between Israel and the Arab states.

The United States will not succeed in tying the confrontation of Iran to the dissolution of the Palestinian cause by forcing Arab countries press the Palestinians to accept an unfair settlement in exchange for Arab-Israeli cooperation to confront Iran. Not only will Israel not fight Iran on behalf of the Arabs, but because no Palestinian party with any legitimacy will accept this Israeli-US vision. The Warsaw Conference could have been considered any other another festive gathering, but the Gulf States’ pursuit of normalization with Israel must not be underestimated.

---

7 “Why the Trump Administration Suspended UNRWA Funding”, Situation Assessment, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 9/9/2018, last accessed 19/2/2018 at: <https://bit.ly/2lm5vZb>