

The 33rd Summit of the Arab League will take place in Manama, Bahrain on May 16. Many Middle East watchers in the United States consider the League be an organization that since its founding in 1945, has struggled to live up to its promise. Today's Arab League, they argue, is like so many other large regional and international organizations: a disparate grouping of members with conflicting agendas and able to reach agreement only on the least common denominator.

Pointing to the Abraham Accords, these critics tout a new paradigm whereby individual states, rather than collective action can transform the region. They see in the decisions by Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco to normalize relations with Israel a new, state- by-state path to peace. A deal among Israel, the United States and Saudi Arabia over normalization as part of a new regional security arrangement, which is reportedly making progress, would add considerable momentum to this approach.

Such an assessment ignores a seminal political reality in the region: the Arab League remains an indispensable player in any comprehensive peace agreement. While there are clearly multiple Arab leaders who have demonstrated the vision to think outside the box and the courage to take risks for peace, there are nevertheless constraints on how far they can go without the collective consensus of other members.

However much critics may discount it, the Arab League matters to the Arab states. The members believe in it and care about its outcomes. For all the talk about differences and divisions among them, the idea (and ideal) of Arab unity remains a powerful force from which citizens and rulers alike draw strength. The League's sanction confers legitimacy, and for this reason, a lasting resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not possible without its endorsement. Bahrain will continue to call for a ceasefire and advocate for a 2-state solution that will meet the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. Doing so will provide a peaceful and prosperous environment for everyone, on all sides.

The good news is that today's Arab League differs quite considerably from its previous incarnations. The organization's agenda is no longer driven by actors whose interests and ideologies are antithetical to the West. Instead, the political and diplomatic balance of power has shifted in favor of a new generation of leaders in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, along with Egypt. They are pragmatic capitalists and clear-eyed realists with eye-popping ambition. They believe that without a settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, war will continue to wrack the region and to prevent the full realization of their visionary futures. And they are prepared to use the full weight of their considerable economic and political power to achieve an agreement that is acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians.

Perhaps most important from the American perspective is the fact that the overwhelming majority of the region's leaders are committed to working hand-in-glove with the United States to achieve this goal. Bahrain is leading the way with the region's first bilateral comprehensive economic and security

agreement. Together with other Abraham Accords signatories, we have achieved an unprecedented level of governmental and private sector cooperation in defense, trade, tourism and investment. Last month, regional allies joined efforts to intercept Iranian missiles and drones breaching their airspace, en route to Israel. Egypt and Qatar have been unstinting in their efforts to secure the release of Israel's hostages.

Gone from multilateral Arab fora are the anti-Western diatribes that were once a regular part of the proceedings. The few outliers that remain, regimes sanctioned by the international community, and the spoiler roles they once played have been coopted or neutralized by the League's more progressive members. We are heavily invested in a peaceful regional future and determined to exorcise the ghosts of the past.

This will only be possible, however, if all of us - the Arabs and the West - work together with common purpose. As a responsible, forward-looking, pro-American partner, Bahrain will certainly do its part. In hosting this year's Arab League Summit, much as we have done throughout our modern history, Bahrain will be a resolute and forceful advocate for dialogue, tolerance and compromise. Bahrain's leader and summit host His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa has been travelling to major Arab capitals in a bid to ensure that this year's gathering produces an outcome of substance that contributes positively to peace-making efforts.

We want to prove the critics wrong and to show the world that the Arab League is on the right side of history. If the past seven months have taught us anything, it is that the old way of doing things will not suffice. We must chart a new path forward, and an Arab League fit for purpose is an essential part of that reality.