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Many conceptualizations of security posit a rigid division between national security, which is largely focused on global threats and challenges at the systemic level, and homeland or domestic security, which is largely focuses on internal threats and challenges inside a state's borders. Thus, in the United States, Iran is a national security threat, while human trafficking or natural disasters are homeland security threats and challenges. This distinction between “home” and “away” has dominated both education and practice. At the same time, since 9-11, successive US administrations have adopted variations of the “one-percent” doctrine, a quote from Vice-President Dick Cheney which Ron Suskind used to illustrate a zero-tolerance approach to risk, leading to homeland security policy that prioritized a unilateral and maximalist approach to domestic security threats at the expense of collaboration. Homeland security is understood as a unitary effort along neo-realist lines.

These American conceptualizations have come to dominate much of the academic literature on homeland security as well as homeland security curriculum. As American-style education has become a global export, particularly in the Middle East, American curricula on domestic security have become increasingly prevalent in the region, including the curriculum used to train senior decision-makers. Analysis of courses in domestic and homeland security in diverse countries in the Middle East such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates shows that an American model curriculum is frequently exported. However, this artificial division is not relevant for small states, even aspiring regional powers, because security priorities tend to overlap the domestic and international. Nor is a great power’s confrontational approach to domestic security advisable for a small state.

A case study of the United Arab Emirates demonstrates that its key security priorities are shaped by both domestic and regional global inputs, and require solutions at all levels. Many security priorities defy unitary solutions. In studying and teaching security in non-superpowers, the homeland security concept should be revised to reflect this reality. However, drawing on the author’s own experience teaching senior leaders at the UAE’s National Defense College and a review of other curriculum in the Emirates suggests that in many cases the curriculum fits American rather than Gulf realities. Indeed, there is also reason to believe that this understanding influences the practice of domestic security.

The paper concludes by offering lessons for how the teaching of homeland security might be reformed, again drawing on the author’s own experience in the Gulf and examples of successful
curricular reform in the region. It also advances the concept of cooperative domestic security, which better reflects how successful small and middle powers practice domestic security. By developing a program of teaching domestic security that draws on relevant, cross-national perspectives, and by conceptualizing domestic security as something that is, for a small state, something that is inherently cooperative, Gulf states and other similar countries can better align the instruction and practice of homeland security with the actual environment of practicing domestic security as a non-superpower.