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MURCIR Analiz

Towards a new era in the Middle East? The early regional implications of the US-Israel war on Iran

“The “Hexagon Axis” proposed by Israel reflects both a new strategy of containment in this emerging geopolitical landscape and the country’s broadening of normalization efforts across the Middle East.”

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With the onset of the US-Israel war on Iran, we enter yet another cycle of rapid changes in the Middle East security landscape in the post-7 October era. The “pre-emptive” US-Israel strikes on Iran, launched on 28 February 2026 and referred to as ‘Epic Fury’ by the US administration and as ‘Roar of the Lion’ by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, are raising discussions of the emergence of a new and critical threshold for the already shifting and fluctuating balance of power in the Middle East. It is also solidifying Israel’s quest for regional actorness and power. At this moment, it is imperative to make holistic assessments that consider both regional and international perspectives and levels of analysis. These inevitable in-depth analyses that embrace both regional and global complexities do not make scenarios of regime change or regime’s behavior change in Iran obsolete; rather, they will lead us to approach speculations about the situation of the Iranian regime within a ‘new order’ not only within the region, but on a global scale. In other words, what is unfolding in the region is part of a broader framework that extends far beyond the issue regarding the Iranian regime.

From embracing normalization to elevating escalation: what are the US-Israel motivations/objectives amid the post-October 7 geopolitical flux?

Geopolitics and alignment patterns have undergone drastic changes since the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October, which is broadly viewed as marking the end of an era that began with the 2011 Arab Uprisings. The key themes that reverberated within the regional order in the post-2011 era were the result of two main camps being formed, one comprising a group of countries in support of the Arab Uprisings, while the other included countries opposed to those popular upheavals. Türkiye and Qatar were vocal in their support, but a Gulf-led coalition, and particularly Saudi Arabia, did not support the uprisings.

Over time, the US aimed to either withdraw from the region or retrench, and with its brokering of the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020 between Israel and several Arab states, a move towards elevating the role of Gulf states – and particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE – became apparent. Similarly, Qatar also increasingly engaged broadly with regional politics while embracing international tactics that reflected the interplay of the country’s desire for regime stability and the need to diversify economic and security schemes. Thus, in the face of changing geopolitical dynamics, the presence of US military bases in Gulf states was no longer sufficient to ultimately guarantee full security for them, particularly in the event of any imminent threat from Iran. The Chinese-brokered Saudi Arabia-Iran normalization that began prior to 7 October should also be seen within the context of this changing security environment in the Middle East. However, the onset of the 7 October attacks and their aftermath drastically altered the course of this period of normalization, causing Israeli escalation not only in Gaza but across the region, spreading to Lebanon and Syria. With these actions, Israel aimed to join the ranks of regional powers attempting to dominate the region as a whole through the instrument of ‘normalization’ prior to and ‘escalation’ after the post-7 October era. Israel, viewed by some scholars as a ‘cusp state’, has historically sought to attain status as a regional power, but cannot fully achieve that goal by military capabilities and other related resources alone. Acceptance by other states in the region is also necessary. Despite the fact that it mainly pursued it through military power capabilities, the events of 7 October provided Israel with an opportunity to expand its sphere of influence across the region. The conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and the fall of the Asad regime in Syria supported the grand strategy of weakening the Iran-led ‘Axis of Resistance.’ Meanwhile, the US has long perceived its alliance with Israel as distinct, especially within the regional context. In American policy discourse, Israel is frequently described as a ‘major,’ ‘closest,’ ‘true,’ or even ‘model’ ally. Within the current changing global and regional environment, Israel is framed as a strategic partner – serving as a “force multiplier, not a free rider” that advances and safeguards US strategic interests in the Middle East.

Within these emerging conditions of flux, Saudi Arabia, as a key factor in the region that had experienced costs arising from its possible normalization with Israel, has aimed to ensure its own status as a regional power amid the war in Gaza and the evolution of a ‘new’ Syria. In this vein, Saudi Arabia poises itself as a regional power with the capability to lead the region in the face of Israeli efforts to achieve escalation and destabilization from Gaza to Syria. In this respect, the Saudi Arabia-Pakistan defence pact rose to prominence slightly before the events of 28 February, raising questions of the possibility of Turkiye’s adherence. This new move by Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, turned Turkiye, Jordan, and Egypt – albeit with various divergent nuances – toward a coherent policy for both reconstruction in Gaza and supplying the necessary tools to consolidate the new rule in Syria under Ahmed Al-Sharaa. These moves, however, conflict with Israel’s actions in the region, which include jeopardizing the conditions for the founding of a Palestinian state and endangering Syria’s sovereignty via military incursions while advocating a decentralized model. Given that, it is hardly a coincidence that only one week prior to the strike against Iran, a new ‘Hexagon of Alliances’ approach was announced by Netanyahu, which includes India within a proposed alliance of countries that will ‘stand together against the radical axes’, i.e. a radical Shia axis and an alleged emerging radical Sunni axis.

What are the early implications of the US-Israel war on Iran and new waves of fluctuations?

Gulf countries, primarily the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries hosting US bases in the region, have been targeted in the aftermath of the beginning of the US-Israel war on Iran. Iran's attacks against these Gulf states have targeted not only US bases, but also oil and gas facilities in Saudi Arabia and Qatar on 2 March, leading to the emergence of a regional coalition (albeit not neatly), including Jordan, **condemning the 'reckless' Iranian attacks across the region.**

It is still too early to predict whether this will engender drastic changes in these countries' approaches towards both Israel and the changing regional political security dynamics that Israel has created. For the time being, however, what is central for the Gulf states is the call for de-escalation while remaining removed from the ongoing battle. Official statements are clearly underlain with the unspoken message that 'this is not our [Gulf] war' and these countries are preferring a defensive course of action rather than an offensive one in response to Iran. For example, Qatari Foreign Minister Spokesperson Majed Ansari stated that **'Qatar has not been part of the campaign targeting Iran. We are exercising our right in self defense and deterring Iranian attacks against our country.'** Nevertheless, Qatar and Kuwait halting Gas and oil production, as others might follow suit, reflects the complex global spillover effects of the war.

What lies ahead?

In the post-October 7 era, calls for Palestinian statehood gained momentum across the globe, culminating in the recognition of a Palestinian state by European countries, including the UK. However, the dominance of the Israeli role in regional reconfigurations has surpassed the emphasis given to Palestinian statehood. Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank are inherently putting the national security of the Gulf countries and Jordan at risk, reflecting high levels of sensitivity to or a reluctance for possible normalization. Israel, on the other hand, is working to cultivate grounds for either a security dilemma or 'de-escalation through normalization.' This would be occurring with the deepening multipolarity of the regional order, reconfiguring the strategic environment, extending its geopolitical scope toward the Horn of Africa while simultaneously drawing in actors from across the Mediterranean and further east.

In this regard, can we predict that Israel will accomplish its long-aspired goal of becoming the dominant regional power in the Middle East? As has been widely discussed in the academic literature, characterizations of Israel as a 'cusp state' (see Robins, 2014; Thies, 2020) began to diminish with the signing of the Abraham Accords in

2020. However, attaining status as an unrivalled regional power also necessitates Israel's 'acceptance' by other regional actors. Such regional acceptance cannot be gained through military means alone; it requires a claim to political leadership and soft power capacity. In the current perilous security environment, the way in which such a quest for regional power may be achieved remains contingent upon the trajectory of the US-Israel war undertaken against Iran.

Furthermore, the endurance of the presence of the US as an extra regional power still has salience in the (re)making or (re)ordering of the Middle East security scheme and in the ability of Israel to evolve as a regional power. Finally, the "Hexagon Axis" proposed by Israel reflects both a new strategy of containment in this emerging geopolitical landscape and the country's broadening of normalization efforts across the Middle East.

Yazarlar Hakkında



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