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About JPS

There is often a significant gap between political transformations, both domestic and international, and the knowledge produced by researchers, academics, and specialists regarding social issues and phenomena. Despite the proliferation of many journals in the human and social sciences, there is a shortage of publications that provide deep, research-based knowledge and perspectives, that offer valuable alternatives and recommendations to decision-makers across various policy dimensions.

The Jordanian Politics & Society Magazine (JPS), published periodically by the Politics and Society Institute, aims to fill this gap. JPS serves as a scientific platform dedicated to fostering rigorous intellectual debate on issues related to domestic and foreign policies at regional and international levels, with a particular focus on the Jordanian political landscape. The magazine emphasizes the development of scientific and intellectual concepts to address various real-world variables and promotes the exchange of ideas and interactive efforts among specialists.

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FOREWORD

THE ARAB EAST AND THE WINDS OF CHANGE... BUT IN WHICH DIRECTION?!

The future of the entire region today is contingent upon the repercussions of the war between United States, Israel, and Iran. Nevertheless, it is difficult at this stage to predict the form or image that things will take after the war, as everything is linked to its trajectories and its military and political outcomes. What is clear, however, is that the Middle East stands at a critical crossroads, particularly the Arab states in this region, which still represent, until now, the weakest party in the equation.

While Israel has historically been preoccupied with the concept of security and preserving the territories it occupies in Palestine, today it is different and possesses a major ambition based on regional domination. This agenda has been reinforced with the arrival of the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump. One can easily observe Israeli unilateralism in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, and southern Syria, while there exists no force internationally or regionally, Arab or Western, that is willing or capable of deterring these Israeli tendencies in imposing a new equation in the Middle East region.

Such major transformations impose fundamental questions upon the states of the Arab Mashreq. It is important for them to determine their position regarding the future relationship with Iran, a state that has historically existed in the region, while Israel remains an externally imposed entity. Do we wish to build a different future vision in the relationship with Iran based on cooperation, regional security, and parity, or do we surrender to the concept of an endless existential conflict with the Iranians?! Such a question is more important to answer today than at any previous time, because the current war has demonstrated the resilience of the Iranian regime and the strength of the state there. It has withstood the United States of United States, the world's superpower. Instead of the collapse of the regime there and its surrender, or a popular uprising against it, as Netanyahu had imagined and convinced Trump of, we found that the regime has instead become more resilient and stronger internally. The Trump administration, and even Netanyahu's government, reached the conclusion that focusing on the objective of overthrowing the regime there is futile. This means that we will continue dealing with the Iranian regime during the coming phase, which raises an important question for Arab states, particularly the Gulf countries, regarding the kind of what kind of relationship we want with Iran.

In this context, it is still not clear whether our brothers in the Gulf possess a unified answer to the previous strategic question, or whether there are multiple Gulf conclusions and answers. What is clear, however, is that we are facing a phase that calls for an Arab and Gulf reassessment. If there is a recommendation to be presented to these states, it is the necessity of seeking a framework for a pos-

itive regional relationship with the Iranians, and defining the rules of the game with them internally and regionally in a manner that serves the interests of both sides. We must move beyond framing the relationship within the sectarian and identity trap, for it is the interests of states that drive policies. Our interests today lie in a strategic partnership based on clear rules with Iran, instead of waiting for the deals that others conclude with it.

The Turkish position here appears to represent an important model of political maturity, realism, and rationality in the management of foreign policy, particularly at the regional level. Turkey did not drift into sectarian or historical rhetoric in its position toward the current Iranian war; rather, it linked its position to its economic and strategic interests, and viewed the war from the perspective of the threat to its national security on the one hand, and its political interests on the other. The fall of the Iranian regime could mean three dangerous outcomes for the Turks: first, the possibility of identity wars erupting and extending across the region, creating a state of instability; second, a refugee crisis toward Turkey and its impact on internal stability; and third, the strengthening of Israeli regional power and the undermining of the principle of deterrence and the balance of power in the region. Therefore, Turkey realized that its interest lies in stopping the war and avoiding being drawn into the United Statesn-Israeli agenda and the calamities it could bring upon the region.

These transformations are not limited to the regional level, but are also international in nature. The entire world is changing, and there are international transformations that we can observe even in the relationship between United States and its closest European allies. Did French President Emmanuel Macron not call on Europeans to awaken in the face of these global developments?! Did Trump himself not visit China in order to find a solution to the "Iranian problem"? Does the Strait of Hormuz not affect the entire global economy and, to a large extent, the Arab-Gulf economy?!

Thus, we too-Arabically-are required to awaken and think about the major transformations underway, our place in the world, and our strategic interests. This calls on us to work on redrawing the relationship with United States, China, Europe, Turkey, and other states. This is one of the major questions arising from the war and its current repercussions?!

Saudi Arabia, for example, has strengthened its relations with Pakistan and Turkey, and it is clear that there is a major gap between it and the United Statesn administration's perceptions of the coming phase, as well as a crisis of trust. The arrival of warplanes and thousands of Pakistani soldiers to Saudi Arabia has been announced. Likewise, relations between Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, and Turkey have been strengthened in order to confront these historic developments and challenges. This requires pushing toward a policy of "diversifying Arab strategic options," not limiting oneself to the idea of unilateralism in the relationship with the United Statesns, and breaking free from the theory of United Statesn protection for the Arab Gulf.

In addition to the above, Israeli hostile behavior today is not only directed against the Palestinians, but also against Lebanon and Syria, alongside provocative statements against Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the attempted assassination of Hamas leaders in Qatar, and the exceeding of humanitarian standards in dealing with the Palestinian situation. Perhaps the latest example is what happened to the activists of the Freedom Flotilla and the assault against them.

All of this has created unprecedented reactions in global and United Statesn public opinion, a noticeable change in the positions of European states, and a crisis with countries such as Spain and the governments of Ireland and Norway, as well as with the European Union, the United Nations, and South Africa. It has also produced a shift in United Statesn public opinion and a state of unprecedented division within United Statesn circles toward Israel. All of this calls for the development of an Arab agenda of action to invest in these new international climates in the confrontation with Israel, which, after the war on Gaza, has demonstrated intentions of hegemony and a sense of overwhelming power in the region.

As for Jordan, there are important outcomes and conclusions, foremost among them the necessity of maintaining a significant degree of neutrality in the United Statesn-Iranian war and avoiding being drawn into a regional conflict that does not serve Jordanian interests under any circumstances. If we have had a historical problem with Iranian policies and ideas in the region, today we have a major problem with the policies of Benjamin Netanyahu and Israel, and with what Israeli politicians harbor for the future of the West Bank. Therefore, it is important to maintain a position of not being drawn into any battle or war with Iran, but rather to present a moderate and balanced model similar to the Omani model, and to remain keen on preserving this strategic advantage for us, as it will serve Jordan with all parties in the future.

At the level of the greatest challenge externally, it lies with Israel, and with Netanyahu's government in particular, and with the agenda of this government toward both the West Bank and Jordan alike. For Netanyahu, Jordan is nothing more than a functional state or a reservoir for Palestinian refugees. It is clear that the peace project ended in Israel with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, and what has taken place afterward has no relation to a peaceful settlement or belief in peace. I still remember the meeting that brought me together with Benjamin Netanyahu in the summer of 1996, when he became Prime Minister of Israel. There was a conviction on the part of King Hussein, may he rest in peace, that he represented a threat to peace, and he wanted to send him clear messages regarding the Jordanian position on peace and its parameters. He asked me to receive him at the airport and meet with him. He rode with me in the car and was extremely arrogant. It was clear to me from that very moment that he was a person who did not want peace, who believed only in power and arrogance, and who saw no one before him. The atmosphere between us was tense even while I was driving him from the airport during that visit. From that first meeting onward, my firm conviction, which only grew firmer, was that peace with such a person could not be possible.

In the same context, it is necessary for there to be a "Jordanian program" in the West Bank to confront Israeli policies, and that we do not suffice with meeting and speaking with the Palestinian Authority alone, but rather that there be channels, policies, and various forms of engagement with the different Palestinian forces, because confronting the Israeli project of annexing and devouring the West Bank and displacing the Palestinians is a vital Jordanian national, security, and strategic interest.

This also requires that we develop our relations with neighboring states, with the Gulf, Iraq, and Syria, and that these policies take on an institutional character-not merely a personal one-in a way that serves the interests of the states of the region in general. With Syria, it is true that our interest lies in the unity of Syrian territory and the strength of the state there, but at the same time it is mistaken to imagine that major economic benefits will come from Syria. Rather, Syria may become a major economic competitor to Jordan during the coming phase, especially with regard to the transportation of Iraqi oil to the Mediterranean. As for Iraq, it is clear that there remains a gap between us and the Iraqi street, and we must work on building major bridges of communication, official and popular diplomacy, and developing good reciprocal relations, especially with Shiite forces whose relationship with the Arab states and Jordan is supposed to be positive.

In conclusion, our fate today, as Arabs, is in our own hands, and we must choose whether we want, as states and as a nation in this region, to have a voice in shaping the scenarios of the coming phase. Do we want to sit at the table with the other players and have our own voice? Or do we remain outside history and action, remaining passive observers of decisions made by others?!

Abdel Karim Kabariti

Chairman of Magazine›s Advisory Council

JPS interview

JPS Interview

The Israeli war on Gaza, the multifaceted escalation between Iran and Israel, and the current American-Iranian confrontation can no longer be understood merely as adjacent crises unfolding within a troubled Middle East. What is taking place today reveals a major transitional moment in international politics-a moment in which wars are shifting from limited military confrontations into a reshaping of the future of the international order that took form after the Cold War.

The current war is not solely about Gaza, despite Gaza's central moral, political, and humanitarian significance. Nor is it solely about Iran, despite Tehran's weight within regional deterrence equations. Rather, it represents a concentration of a larger crisis: the decline of confidence in the Western liberal order, the erosion of the legitimacy of international human rights discourse, the dominance of absolute power as the organizing principle of the international order, the rise of geoeconomics, and the transformation of energy, maritime corridors, supply chains, and technology into direct instruments of interstate dominance. From the Strait of Hormuz to the Red Sea, from Gaza to southern Lebanon, and from Washington to Beijing, the region increasingly appears as a testing ground for an international order searching for new rules that have yet to assume a definitive form.

The current Iranian-American confrontation gives this debate even greater depth. It reflects not merely a conflict between Washington and Tehran, but also a broader transition in the Middle East from the management of influence through proxies toward a more direct struggle over who possesses the capacity to disrupt maritime navigation, control energy flows, impose negotiating terms, and redefine deterrence itself. At the center of this confrontation lies a growing recognition that military power, regardless of its scale, is no longer sufficient on its own to produce a stable regional order. Military strikes may alter battlefield balances, yet they do not necessarily generate a viable or sustainable regional arrangement.

This is where the significance of this interview with Omar Razzaz emerges. The discussion does not approach the war as a transient event, nor does it remain confined to immediate political commentary. Instead, it situates the conflict within a broader framework of global and regional transformations: the crisis of liberalism and neoliberalism, the retreat of open globalization, the rise of China, the return of the nation-state, the transformation of the economy into a strategic arena of conflict, and the growing importance of corridors, regional connectivity, and supply chains in shaping new maps of influence.

The interview also derives its significance from a specifically Arab and Jordanian perspective. The region can no longer afford to engage with major transformations through a logic of waiting or reactive adjustment. Major powers are reorganizing their priorities, Gulf states are diversifying their partnerships, China is expanding its regional presence, Israel is attempting to consolidate its position through force and economic integration, and Iran is struggling to defend its sphere of influence under unprecedented military and political pressure. Within such an environment, the central Arab question becomes increasingly urgent: will Arab states remain arenas upon which the projects of others intersect, or can they develop shared interests and a more independent regional vision?

Omar Razzaz is widely regarded as one of the most prominent Jordanian figures to combine economic expertise, governmental experience, and broader public engagement with questions of statehood and development. He served as Prime Minister of Jordan between 2018 and 2020, and previously held the position of Minister of Education, in addition to working within regional and international institutions concerned with development and public policy. His intellectual approach is distinguished by its capacity to connect economics, politics, and society, while interpreting major transformations through their direct implications for the state, citizens, and institutions. For this reason, the interview constitutes less a commentary on an ongoing war than a broader dialogue on the future of the global and regional order itself.

-This interview was conducted by Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman and Dr. Ali Hijazi-.

AXIS ONE: LIBERALISM, NEOLIBERALISM, AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE GLOBAL ORDER

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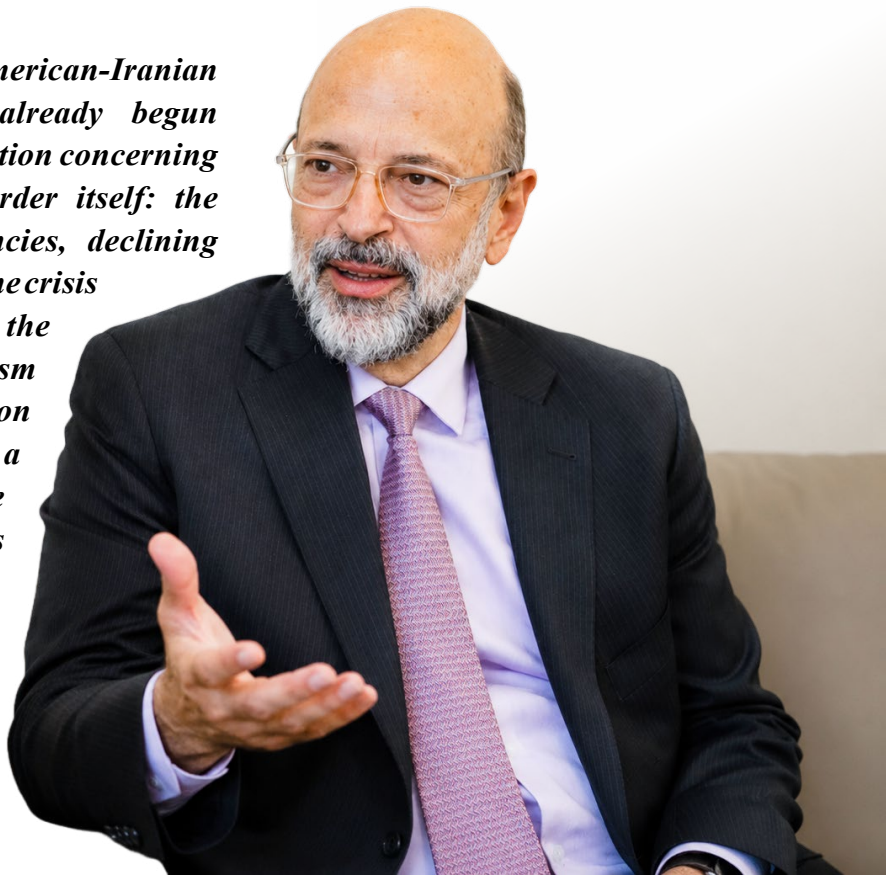
Even before the recent American-Iranian war, global debate had already begun shifting toward a deeper question concerning the future of the liberal order itself: the rise of protectionist tendencies, declining confidence in globalization, the crisis of Western democracies, and the transformation of Trumpism from an electoral phenomenon into an expression of a broader crisis within the Western model. In this context, are we confronting a crisis linked specifically to Trump and his policies, or are we witnessing deeper structural transformations reshaping the international system economically, politically, and culturally?



Dr. Razzaz

We are indeed living through a period marked by profound uncertainty, but this does not mean that what is happening is exceptional or detached from the longer historical trajectory of the international system. When we examine major historical transformations, we find that balances of power have never remained fixed and that international orders have always passed through phases of ascent, decline, and reconfiguration. What is taking place today falls within this broader historical pattern.

The global economy is changing, centers of influence are shifting, and the political balances that governed the post-Cold War era no longer operate in the same way. For this reason, I believe that attributing all these transformations solely to Trump oversimplifies the picture more

than it explains it. Trump matters as a political phenomenon, but he himself emerged as a product of deeper transformations within the West.

The United States remains the world's leading power, yet American influence no longer possesses the same degree of dominance that characterized the international system three or four decades ago. China has risen rapidly in economic, technological, and military terms. Europe has begun speaking more openly about strategic autonomy and the need to reduce complete dependence on Washington, while many states have moved toward repositioning themselves according to calculations of direct national interest rather than traditional alignments.

These transformations have also been reflected within Western societies themselves. Broad sectors of society increasingly feel that the economic and political model that governed previous decades no longer provides a sense of security, justice, or social stability. Within this context, the rise of populism and nationalist right-wing movements becomes easier to understand, as does the transformation of Trumpism from a purely electoral phenomenon into an expression of a deeper crisis within the Western model.

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When discussing the crisis of the liberal order, concepts are often conflated between liberalism as a political project grounded in freedom, representation, and accountability, and neoliberalism as an economic framework that elevated the market to a central position while reducing the social role of the state. How do you distinguish between these two levels? And how does this distinction relate to what you and Dr. Hazem Rahah wrote regarding the collapse of neoliberalism and the search for a new model for the role of the state, the economy, and labor?

Dr. Razzaz

I believe that understanding the current crisis first requires distinguishing between liberalism as a historical political idea and neoliberalism as a specific economic phase. Confusing the two either leads us to defend the entire model without critical revision or to reject its underlying values altogether because of the failures associated with its economic and political applications.

Liberalism, as a historical idea, emerged around the liberation of the individual from absolute authority, whether that authority was exercised by the church, the state, or rigid traditional structures. It was built upon the principles of individual rights, linking the legitimacy of power to ac-

> ***We may be witnessing the return of a new form of mercantilist thinking, albeit in a modern form that differs from the models of previous centuries.***
> ***The world is entering a historic transitional phase in which absolute American hegemony is receding, while new powers such as China are rising and the international system shifts from unipolarity toward multipolarity.***

countability, political representation, and public freedoms. Economically, it was also connected to the idea of open markets and competition rather than the closed imperial economies historically dominated by power and privilege.

Yet the liberal experience carried its contradictions from an early stage. Western states that spoke of freedom and representation within their own societies simultaneously practiced colonialism and domination beyond their borders. This contradiction remained deeply embedded in how many societies perceived Western liberal discourse, not necessarily because of its underlying principles, but because of the inconsistency between those principles and their practical application.

> ***The crisis of the West is not simply linked to Donald Trump as an individual phenomenon, but rather to a deeper crisis within the liberal Western model itself, driven by the erosion of the middle class, the rise of populism, and declining confidence in globalization.***

Neoliberalism, however, belongs to a different historical phase. It emerged clearly during the eras of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher before expanding globally throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Its central premise was to grant the market a far broader role while reducing the social function of the state and opening unprecedented space for capital and the private sector. leading to the formation of monopolistic structures that effectively limit competition.

During that period, the state was increasingly perceived as an institution primarily tasked with protecting private property and deregulating the market more than protecting social balance. The idea of the state as an investor in social protection and public services gradually receded, while a new vision gained prominence-one that assumed the market alone was capable of organizing economic life and producing efficiency and growth.

At first, the model appeared remarkably successful. Profits expanded, investment increased, capital became more mobile, and globalization seemed to usher the world into a new era of interconnectedness and openness. Yet the other side of the picture gradually began to emerge within Western societies themselves.

Modern capitalism relied heavily on the free movement of capital, goods, and labor. Western economies benefited enormously from open markets and global capital mobility, but they were not socially or politically prepared to deal with the consequences associated with labor mobility and deep transformations in the structure of work itself.

Major corporations relocated large portions of their industrial production to lower-cost countries. Profits indeed increased, but industrial middle classes in the United States and Europe gradually lost their sense of security and stability. Workers who for decades had constituted the backbone of Western industry found themselves

confronting a new economic order that no longer granted them the same status or protections they once enjoyed.

The issue was therefore not merely economic. Once people begin to feel that the system within which they lived for decades no longer works in their favor, a crisis of trust inevitably emerges. It was precisely within this context that right-wing populism rose, and that discourses centered on identity, borders, and the restoration of the nation-state began gaining increasing political appeal.

Globalization was long presented as an open project benefiting everyone, yet its actual application was highly selective. Capital and goods moved with remarkable freedom, while people themselves continued to face restrictions, political anxieties, and social fears. Over time, broad segments within Western societies began to feel that globalization had transferred jobs and economic stability elsewhere, leaving local communities confronting uncertainty and insecurity. For this reason, the crisis is no longer merely about a set of economic policies; it has evolved into a broader crisis of confidence in the model that governed the world over recent decades.

Part of the problem also lies in the way neoliberalism increasingly shifted responsibility for success or failure almost entirely onto the individual. If someone became unemployed, the assumption was that the problem lay in their skills. If they failed economically, the explanation was reduced to poor personal choices. This perspective marginalized the structural dimensions of the economy and diminished the significance of social, educational, and class inequalities that were reflected in the erosion of the principle of equal opportunity.

Today, debate over the role of the state is returning in a different form. The issue is not a return to an oversized state that controls every aspect of economic life, but rather the need for a state capable of protecting minimum standards of justice and equal opportunity, particularly in education, healthcare, social protection, and labor markets.

> ***There is a fundamental distinction between liberalism as a political idea grounded in rights and freedoms, and neoliberalism as an economic model that reduced the role of the state and deepened social inequalities.***

These questions become even more urgent in light of the transformations associated with artificial intelligence and automation. The world is approaching profound changes in the nature of work, production, and economic organization. Many traditional occupations are likely to change fundamentally or disappear altogether, while states already suffering from high unemployment or weak educational systems will become even more vulnerable to these transformations.

For this reason, discussions surrounding the "collapse of neoliberalism" are closely linked to the search for a new model capable of adapting to a rapidly changing world. The central question today concerns how to construct an economy that preserves initiative and innovation while simultaneously preventing the erosion of society and the widening of social inequalities in ways that threaten stability itself.

Parallel to these global transformations, the Middle East is experiencing a clear condition of strategic vacuum. The traditional Arab regional order has weakened, Arab-Arab divisions have deepened, and no cohesive Arab project currently exists capable of producing a stable regional balance. In politics, however, vacuums rarely remain empty; whenever one power retreats from a space, other actors move quickly to fill it. This explains why regional powers such as Iran, Turkey, and Israel have become increasingly active in seeking influence, strategic roles, and spheres of presence throughout the region.

The traditional Arab response, by contrast, has remained largely fragmented. Each state attempted to construct its own protective network or secure its position through bilateral alliances, often centered on relations with the United States. Yet even this relationship no longer possesses the same degree of stability that characterized previous decades. Tensions within the Western camp itself have become increasingly visible, whether in the relationship between Washington and Europe or within Europe itself, as national interests once again move ahead of the logic of long-term rigid alliances.

The world today is moving toward a more pragmatic order that is less tied to traditional ideological alignments. States are reorganizing their priorities according to calculations centered on economic security, domestic stability, and the capacity to protect both society and the state within an increasingly volatile international environment.

At the center of these transformations, non-oil-producing states such as Jordan appear particularly vulnerable to the effects of regional and international instability. Jordan is affected by wars, refugee movements, energy prices, global economic slowdown, and shifts in aid flows and

investment patterns. In other words, the repercussions of crises reach the Kingdom even when it is not a direct party to them. This reality makes thinking about the future of politics, economy, and public policy significantly more complex in the coming phase.

The central idea of that article emerged from an attempt to draw attention to the fact that the world is entering a period of profound transformation, and that one of the greatest dangers facing states and elites lies in treating old models as though they were permanent and unquestionable truths. Institutions and systems naturally tend to cling to the formulas with which they are familiar,

especially when those formulas have succeeded for extended periods. Yet history consistently demonstrates that models which lose their ability to adapt gradually enter phases of crisis, even when this is not immediately visible at the outset.

For this reason, the article was intended less as a theoretical declaration about the end of a historical phase and more as an attempt to sound an early warning regarding the transformations ahead. The underlying argument was that many of the assumptions governing the past four or five decades no longer function with the same effectiveness, and that there is a serious need to think about alternative policies and frameworks capable of preparing societies for a world that is more complex and characterized by higher levels of uncertainty.

A central aspect of this transformation concerns the labor market itself. For a long period, the neoliberal model treated success and failure as mat

> ***The states most likely to succeed in the coming years will not merely be those endowed with strategic geographic locations or substantial financial resources, but rather those capable of understanding the dynamics of their own societies, building institutions that continuously learn and adapt through self-correction, and transforming stability from a defensive condition into a platform for productivity, influence, and an active regional role."***

ters of almost entirely individual responsibility. Unemployed individuals were told they simply needed to improve themselves further, while those lacking adequate income were informed that they had failed to acquire the necessary skills. This perspective significantly marginalized the structural dimensions of the economy and underestimated the impact of social, educational, and class inequalities on people's lives and opportunities.

Over time, the role of the state as a guarantor of minimum social balance steadily declined. As a result, current debates increasingly revolve around the need for a state with a stronger capacity to ensure broader access to opportunities, reduce inequality, and invest in education, healthcare, social protection, and labor markets.

The issue here is not the pursuit of absolute equality, which remains practically unattainable in any society, but rather the preservation of a minimum level of fairness in opportunity so that an individual's social or economic background does not become a closed destiny determining their future

from the outset.

These questions become even more urgent when viewed in light of the transformations associated with artificial intelligence, automation, and the restructuring of the global labor market. The world is witnessing rapid changes in the nature of employment, production, and required skills, while many traditional occupations are likely to undergo profound transformation or disappear altogether in the coming years.

States already suffering from high unemployment, weak educational systems, or economic fragility will be especially vulnerable to the consequences of these transformations. Artificial intelligence, despite the enormous opportunities it offers, may also become a factor that deepens economic and social inequality if governments fail to develop public policies capable of addressing its consequences early and effectively.

For this reason, discussions surrounding the "collapse of neoliberalism" are not limited to describing an economic crisis. They also represent an attempt to encourage states and societies to think differently about the future itself. The central question today concerns how to construct a model better able to adapt to a rapidly transforming world in which economy and technology continuously reshape both society and the state.

Within this context, the role of the state is returning to the forefront once again, though in a form distinct from the oversized traditional state of earlier eras. What is required is a state capable of protecting opportunity, managing major transformations, and preserving social balance without suppressing initiative or reproducing the rigid bureaucratic structures associated with previous models.

The war on Gaza exposed a profound moral and political crisis within Western discourse on democracy and human rights because of the evident double standards applied to international issues.

China presents itself not merely as an alternative ideological model, but as evidence that development and modernization are not necessarily tied to the traditional Western model.

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If globalization reduced the capacity of the nation-state to control the economy, borders, and labor markets, can we say that part of the global rise of populism and the political right reflects an attempt to restore the nation-state as a framework for protection and sovereignty?

Dr. Razzaz

A significant part of what we are witnessing today reflects a broad reaction within many societies to a growing perception that the nation-state has lost part of its capacity to provide protection, whether economically, socially, or even culturally. Large segments of society have increasingly come to feel that the state has retreated in the face of the influence of multinational corporations and

transnational markets, while the ordinary citizen has become less capable of influencing decisions that directly affect daily life. Within this context, it becomes easier to understand the rise of nationalist and populist discourse, the renewed emphasis on borders and sovereignty, the relocation of industries back into national economies, the protection of domestic labor markets, and efforts to reduce dependence on external actors in strategic sectors.

The problem, however, is that some of these movements approach the idea of restoring the nation-state through an emotional logic rooted in fear and exclusion, rather than through serious thinking about how to build a modern state capable of protecting society while remaining open to the world and adaptable to international transformations.

The real challenge today lies in finding a new balance. The world needs states genuinely capable of protecting their citizens socially and economically, yet without retreating into isolation or turning into entities hostile to international cooperation.

Complete isolation is not a realistic solution either. The global economy remains deeply interconnected, technology transcends borders, and issues such as energy, water, climate, and supply chains make it nearly impossible for any state to exist entirely apart from others. For this reason, the central issue is not a choice between the nation-state and an open world, but rather how to build a strong and cohesive state capable of protecting its society while simultaneously engaging with the global economy and international relations from a position of greater balance and confidence.

AXIS TWO: THE DECLINE OF GLOBALIZATION AND THE RISE OF GEOECONOMICS

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Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the world entered a phase of expansive economic globalization supported by the Bretton Woods system, international trade agreements, and institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. Throughout this period, the United States led the global discourse surrounding free trade, capital mobility, and economic openness. Yet the paradox today is that the very power that once championed globalization is now imposing trade restrictions, raising tariffs,

> ***The war on Gaza exposed a profound moral and political crisis within Western discourse on democracy and human rights because of the evident double standards applied to international issues.***

and engaging in a broad technological and economic confrontation with China. Are we witnessing the beginning of the fragmentation of the form of economic globalization that prevailed after the Cold War?

Dr. Razzaz

Certainly, this appears to be the broader trajectory, even if the transformation itself has not yet fully matured. Over recent decades, free trade, capital mobility, and open competition were treated as quasi-fixed principles of the global economic order. But over time, Western powers-particularly the United States-began to feel that this system no longer guaranteed them the same level of dominance they enjoyed after the Cold War, especially with the rise of new economic powers that managed to benefit from globalization in highly effective ways.

At a certain stage, globalization appeared to be a project capable of producing benefits for everyone, or at least this was how it was politically and publicly presented. Yet reality demonstrated that the distribution of gains was far from balanced, and that economic openness also contributed to a redistribution of global power in ways that many within the West itself had not fully anticipated.

China represents the clearest example of this transformation. In the span of only four decades, it moved from an economy dependent on low-cost labor to a major industrial and technological power possessing significant influence in sectors that have now become central to the definition of global power itself, including advanced technology, and control over rare minerals, artificial intelligence, and telecommunications, all of which are ultimately translated into highly advanced precision manufacturing in both goods and services.

At this point, American concerns intensified considerably. The issue was no longer confined to trade deficits or traditional industrial competition, but increasingly revolved around the question of who would control technology, knowledge, and supply chains in the future. For this reason, the United States-well before the current administration-began imposing restrictions on the export of advanced technologies, the transfer of technical knowledge, and sectors connected to semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and telecommunications. These sectors are no longer treated merely as economic files, but rather as direct components of national security. This reflects a deeper transformation in the understanding of the economy itself. During the era of open globalization, there was a tendency to separate economics from geopolitics. Today, however, the

The crisis of the West is not simply linked to Donald Trump as an individual phenomenon, but rather to a deeper crisis within the liberal Western model itself, driven by the erosion of the middle class, the rise of populism, and declining confidence in globalization.

relationship between them has become far more direct and explicit.

The economy has once again become an instrument of influence and competition among major powers. Technology, energy, knowledge, and supply chains have all been transformed into strategic assets embedded within calculations of global power.

At the same time, China itself never viewed the unipolar world as a final or stable arrangement. There has long been a clear Chinese understanding that Beijing had become a major power entitled to pursue a more influential position within the international system, and that its economic rise should ultimately be reflected in the structure and rules of the global order itself.

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If open globalization is receding, what is replacing it? Are we moving toward a world of closed economic alliances, trade and technological wars, and competition over rare minerals, semiconductors, maritime

corridors, and supply chains? In other words, is the international system shifting from ideological and political conflict toward a geoeconomic struggle in which technology, energy, strategic routes, and resources become the primary instruments of power?

Dr. Razzaz

We are not witnessing the end of global interconnectedness, but rather its transformation into a form more directly tied to security, politics, and competition among major powers. Globalization will not disappear, yet neither will it continue in the highly open form that prevailed after the Cold War. Trade flows, technology, and supply chains are becoming increasingly linked to calculations of national security and international power balances.

If we look briefly at economic history before the rise of modern capitalism, we find that the world passed through the phase of mercantilism, during which major powers built their strength through control over resources, maritime routes, markets, and strategic seas. In that era, economics functioned as a direct extension of political and military power, and each state sought to protect its industries, secure its trade routes, and expand its geopolitical influence.

Part of the discourse we hear today-particularly in the United States-reflects a gradual return to this logic. When Trump speaks about Greenland, the Panama Canal, or influence in Latin America, he is operating from a worldview that sees control over strategic locations, corridors, and resources as a fundamental component of global power.

This thinking is no longer marginal within international politics. Oil and gas remain important elements in global power balances, but the picture has become far broader. Today, calculations of power also include artificial intelligence, semiconductors, rare earth minerals, energy infrastructure, submarine cables, supply chains, and even the new polar routes emerging as a result of climate change.

Take Greenland as an example. To some, it may appear as a distant or marginal issue, yet in reality it is linked to a long-term struggle over geography, resources, and future maritime corridors. As Arctic ice melts, new shipping routes that were previously inaccessible are beginning to emerge, thereby reshaping part of the world's economic and strategic geography.

For this reason, it can be argued that we are witnessing the return of a new form of mercantilist thinking, albeit in a modernized version distinct from earlier historical models. A powerful state today is not simply one that possesses a large military, but one that controls technology, energy, resources, and strategic corridors, while also possessing the capacity to secure its own supply chains.

Amid this transformation, an important opportunity also emerges for states of the Global South and the developing world. These countries were never the primary beneficiaries of liberalism, neoliberalism, or even previous economic systems, and they may therefore find in this moment a broader space for repositioning themselves and building more diversified and flexible relationships.

What we are witnessing today through new economic corridor projects, the restructuring of supply chains, and evolving relations among India, Europe, the Gulf states, and Asia reflects a world genuinely entering a phase of economic remapping. Influence is no longer measured solely by military power or ideological slogans, but increasingly by the ability to connect ports, energy networks, technology, and resources.

At the same time, these transformations reveal the limitations of current international institutions. The United Nations played an important role in preventing the world from sliding into major global wars during previous decades, yet the international system failed to build a more equitable order, particularly for states of the Global South.

The Security Council remains governed by the balance of power established after the Second World War, while the veto has granted major powers broad capacity to obstruct any meaningful path toward international justice, especially in issues related to the Arab world and Palestine.

For this reason, we may be entering a historical moment that compels the world to reconsider the very structure of the international system itself and the nature of the institutions required to govern an increasingly complex and multipolar world. The coming challenges are no longer local or isolated: climate change, energy, water, migration, and food security are all transnational issues that no state can address alone.

Even climate change itself is no longer merely an environmental issue. The melting of Arctic ice, for example, is directly reshaping geopolitical and economic geography. Areas that were once peripheral or absent from traditional strategic calculations are gradually becoming arenas of global competition because of emerging maritime routes and potential resources.

> ***The greatest danger facing Arab states lies in becoming mere transit spaces for the projects of others rather than active partners capable of shaping those projects and defining their own strategic interests.***

These transformations are likely to have profound consequences for developing states, particularly in the Middle East, because smaller and medium-sized economies will find themselves operating within a world that is more fragmented, more competitive, and less stable than the one that characterized previous decades.

Ultimately, the issue is not the end of globalization itself so much as the transformation of its nature. What was once presented as an open and neutral economic order is increasingly becoming a space of strategic competition governed by power, technology, corridors, and resources.

JPS

In the past, control over oil and maritime routes constituted the foundation of power. Today, however, many argue that data, artificial intelligence, and semiconductors have become part of the very concept of sovereignty itself. Are we witnessing a redefinition of power in the international system?

Dr. Razzaz

Certainly. We are living through a period in which the meaning of power is being profoundly redefined. During the twentieth century, power was primarily associated with armies, energy resources, control over natural resources, and maritime routes. Today, however, knowledge, technology, and data have become essential components of sovereignty and global influence.

If we look at the American-Chinese rivalry, it becomes clear that its core is not limited to trade disputes or tariff policies. The deeper issue concerns control over advanced technology, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, digital infrastructure, and the platforms that shape communication and knowledge. These sectors are no longer merely economic domains, because they are directly tied to national security, influence over media and public opinion, and even the details of everyday social life.

For this reason, the economy has become intertwined with security and politics in unprecedented ways. Data itself has been transformed into a strategic resource, perhaps approaching the significance oil once held in earlier eras. Those who possess the capacity to collect, analyze, and control data ultimately possess a substantial share of the instruments of future power.

States that lack strong technological and knowledge infrastructures will become increasingly vulnerable to dependency and fragility within the emerging international order, even if they possess natural resources or strategic geographic locations. At the same time, this transformation also creates opportunities for medium-sized and smaller states. Some of the new elements of power no longer depend exclusively on military size or natural resources, but rather on investment in education, scientific research, innovation, and the development of human capital.

For this reason, the meaning of sovereignty itself is likely to change significantly in the coming period. The issue will no longer revolve solely around control over territory, oil, or strategic corridors, but also around who controls knowledge, develops technology, and possesses the ability to generate and manage data.

Ultimately, the states most likely to succeed in the future will not simply be those richest in resources, but those capable of transforming knowledge, technology, and human capital into long-term strategic assets.

AXIS THREE: GLOBAL DEMOCRACY AND THE CRISIS OF THE WESTERN MODEL

JPS

If we move to the political dimension, the crisis no longer appears merely economic. Western states that long presented themselves as models of democracy and human rights are today experiencing visible internal turbulence: the rise of Trumpism, the expansion of populist right-wing movements, declining youth confidence in democracy, and a striking double standard in the application of human rights principles, particularly in cases such as Gaza. Even Francis Fukuyama, who once wrote about the "End of History," later returned in Identity to reopen questions related to recognition, collective identity, and the rise of populism. In this context, does democracy remain an idea worth defending in the Arab world? Or has the crisis of the Western model weakened the very appeal of democracy itself?

Dr. Razzaz

There is today a genuine crisis of confidence that extends beyond political systems themselves to the intellectual and philosophical frameworks upon which they were built over recent decades. Many people, particularly among younger generations, increasingly view democracy as an idea that no longer fulfills the promises historically associated with it. Part of this perception is linked to what they observe in practice: democratic systems producing populism or bringing to power political forces that do not appear genuinely committed to freedom of expression, pluralism, or even some of the foundational principles of political liberalism itself.

When young people witness this contradiction between discourse and practice, declining trust becomes a natural consequence. There is a growing feeling that the Western liberal order operates according to double standards, particularly in questions of international politics and human rights. The values defended forcefully within Europe and the United States often appear far less present when the issue concerns other societies, especially within our region.

The war on Gaza deepened this perception considerably. Many felt that global discourse surrounding justice and human rights lost a significant part of its moral coherence, and that definitions of victimhood, the application of international law, and even the limits of humanitarian empathy had all become subject to clear political selectivity.

> ***For Jordan, stability should not be understood merely as a defensive condition, but as a form of strategic capital that must be transformed into economic and institutional strength, with emphasis on internal cohesion, gradual modernization, and the transition from a 'transit corridor' into a genuine hub of production and economic connectivity.***

This produced consequences extending beyond immediate politics. The issue acquired an intellectual and psychological dimension as well, be-

cause once people lose confidence in the fairness of international standards, they begin reassessing the discourse that had long been presented to them as universal and humanitarian.

Yet despite all these crises, the deeper question remains: what is the alternative? Would the world truly become better in the absence of freedom of expression, accountability, or the citizen's right to participation and dissent?

In my view, the crisis is less about the idea of democracy itself and more about the manner in which it was practiced over recent decades, as well as the transformations that made some modern democracies increasingly vulnerable to the influence of money, major corporations, directed media, and technology.

Even within the United States, many of those who voted for Trump were not necessarily convinced by everything he said. Rather, they felt that traditional political institutions no longer represented them, and that economic and media elites had come to dominate the political sphere in ways that left ordinary citizens with diminishing capacity to influence decision-making.

Here we encounter one of the central crises of modern democracy. The issue is not merely the existence of elections, but whether people genuinely feel that their voices have meaningful in-

fluence within the political system. Once citizens begin to believe that the available choices are fundamentally similar and that major decisions are made far from public influence, the gap between society and institutions gradually widens.

For this reason, when it is said today that democracy has failed, I believe the discussion must be far broader than that. Historical experience does not offer examples of authoritarian or totalizing systems that achieved sustainable stability solely through the existence of a "strong leader" or an "enlightened ruler." The deeper issue concerns the construction of institutions capable of listening to society, engaging with its citizens, correcting mistakes, and advancing cumulatively toward a system that preserves human dignity and fosters a genuine sense of inclusion rather than marginalization.

Any political system-regardless of its name or ideological reference point, whether democratic, socialist, Islamist, monarchical, or republican-is ultimately judged according to two central questions: does the citizen's voice reach the decision-maker, and do real mechanisms of accountability, correction, and institutional development exist?

When such mechanisms disappear, the political system gradually becomes isolated from society, even if it appears outwardly strong. Institutions that lose the ability to hear people or to understand social, economic, and political tensions inevitably become more fragile over time.

Democracy is not a ready-made product that can simply be imported and installed overnight. It is a long historical and cultural process built within society itself-in education, administration, political parties, labor unions, municipalities, and in the broader relationship between people and the state. For this reason, European democracy differs from American democracy, and Arab democratic experiences will inevitably differ from Asian ones, because every society reproduces its institutions according to its own history, values, and social structure.

Even those who regard the model of the 'enlightened ruler' as preferable to democracy - Singapore is frequently invoked in this context - eventually come to realize that if such a ruler lacks institutions capable of conveying the realities of society as they truly are, he will, over time, become captive to the narrow circle surrounding him. This is not a problem confined to any single state; it is almost a global phenomenon. In many systems, a layer of individuals forms around decision-makers whose role becomes embellishing reality and conveying what leaders wish to hear rather than what is actually occurring on the ground. Once the genuine connection between state and society begins to erode, institutions gradually deteriorate even if the signs are not immediately visible.

In the end, political systems are not measured by their names, but by their capacity to hear society, correct their mistakes, and build institutions that prevent the separation of power from the people. That is the essential issue, whether the system is called democratic or carries any other designation.

AXIS FOUR: CHINA AND THE MULTIPOLAR INTERNATIONAL ORDER

JPS

Amid the crisis of the Western model, the Chinese model increasingly appears as its most significant challenger: rapid economic and technological rise, a one-party system, a strong state, and a clear capacity for long-term planning. At the same time, Chinese discourse frequently invokes the idea of the "Thucydides Trap" to emphasize the need to avoid confrontation with the United States and to recognize an emerging multipolar world. Based on your visits to China and your engagement with Chinese elites, how do the Chinese perceive their future? And does the Chinese model represent a global alternative to the Western model, or is it a specific experience shaped by China's own historical and political conditions?

Dr. Razzaz

China is presenting itself not merely as a rising economic and technological power, but also as evidence that the world is no longer governed by a single model of development, political legitimacy, or even modernization itself. This is why Beijing's repeated invocation of the "Thucydides Trap" carries multiple messages simultaneously.

The first message is directed toward the United States and the broader international community. Its essence is that China can no longer be treated as a marginal actor or as a power that can easily be contained. Any attempt to halt China's rise through coercion could push the world toward a broad and costly confrontation, perhaps even toward a stage of mutual destruction, particularly given the profound economic and technological interdependence that now exists among major powers.

For this reason, China advocates recognition that the world is moving toward a broader multipolar order and that the phase of unipolar dominance that followed the Cold War can no longer continue in the same form.

At the same time, China seeks to present itself differently from traditional imperial models. Official Chinese discourse consistently emphasizes the idea of "peaceful rise," arguing that Beijing does not seek to reproduce the old Western colonial experience, but rather to build economic and developmental partnerships based on mutual interests, whether in infrastructure, trade, technology, or climate cooperation.

> ***China presents itself not merely as an alternative ideological model, but as evidence that development and modernization are not necessarily tied to the traditional Western model.***

Naturally, this does not mean that China operates from purely moral motivations or that it lacks major strategic interests. All major powers ultimately act according to calculations of influence and national interest. However, China is attempting to expand its global presence through instruments that differ, at least relatively, from the traditional Western pattern that relied for long periods on direct military intervention or the imposition of political models through force.

Within China itself, the picture is more complex than it sometimes appears externally. China is not a completed or permanently stable model; rather, an ongoing process of searching for carefully calibrated balances: between state and market, between the Communist Party and the private sector, and between political control and economic openness.

The economic reforms launched decades ago generated enormous growth for China, but they also produced significant challenges, including rising corruption during the phase of privatizing state assets, widening social inequality, and the emergence of powerful economic centers of influence within both state and society.

For this reason, a major component of current Chinese leadership policies can be understood as an attempt to recalibrate the relationship between the state and capital, while also reasserting stronger oversight over bureaucratic institutions and economic power networks.

There is a clear awareness within China that economic growth alone is insufficient to produce long-term stability, particularly if accompanied by widespread corruption or by an administrative apparatus detached from society. This explains the strong emphasis placed on bureaucratic discipline, monitoring the performance of officials, and linking state legitimacy to the concrete improvement of people's lives.

China does not possess a pluralistic political system in the Western sense, nor does it contain open party competition. The one-party system remains the framework that organizes political life and defines the limits of political movement. Yet within this framework there are ongoing efforts to build mechanisms capable of transmitting people's concerns and demands to decision-making circles, particularly in areas related to public services, education, healthcare, and local development.

In my view, the importance of the Chinese experience does not lie in presenting a ready-made model that can simply be transferred or replicated elsewhere. Rather, its significance lies in the questions it forces the entire world to confront. The central issue concerns the capacity of the state to understand its society and maintain a genuine connection between authority and the public.

This dilemma is not limited to non-democratic systems; it confronts most political systems to varying degrees. Any authority that loses the ability to hear society or to understand the social and economic transformations occurring within it gradually enters a condition of stagnation. Over time, the gap between state and society widens, while corruption and social tension become increasingly likely to accumulate.

For this reason, I do not believe the world is moving toward the complete triumph of any single model. Rather, it is entering a more complex phase in which different systems and experiences coexist simultaneously. Ultimately, the true measure of success will not be ideological slogans, but rather the capacity of the state to build effective institutions, preserve stability, and respond to transformations in economy, technology, and society.

In my opinion, the significance of China lies not in its role as a ready-made model for export, but in the way it compels the world to reconsider a deeper question: what constitutes the real measure of state success? Is it merely the formal structure of the political system, or is it the state's ability to respond effectively, combat corruption, improve people's lives, and prevent the separation of authority from society?

JPS

Much of the post-Cold War international order was built around American hegemony, despite all its contradictions. If the world is now moving toward multipolarity, does this imply a more balanced international order, or are we entering a more chaotic phase in which no single power possesses the capacity to regulate the global system?

Dr. Razzaz

We are indeed living through a transitional phase between two international orders, and such historical periods are usually the most turbulent and uncertain. The order that emerged after the Cold War was built to a considerable extent around American dominance, economically, militarily, and technologically. This reality provided the world with a degree of relative stability in certain areas, yet at the same time produced clear imbalances because the management of the international system was concentrated largely within a single center of power.

Today, this model is entering a phase of gradual decline, but the problem is that the alternative has not yet fully taken shape. China is rising rapidly, India is expanding its economic and political presence, Europe is searching for greater strategic autonomy, Russia is attempting to reassert its international role, while the United States itself faces growing internal divisions alongside mounting economic and political pressures.

The fundamental dilemma is that the world is moving toward multipolarity at a moment when no international institutions possess the capacity to manage this transition effectively. This helps explain the growing levels of volatility, fragmentation, and open conflict, whether in Ukraine, the Middle East, or even within the global economy itself.

In earlier periods, the structure of the international order appeared relatively clearer. Today, however, we face a far more complex world in which technology intersects with security, economics with geopolitics, and energy with supply chains and commercial corridors.

For this reason, current conflicts appear far more interconnected than the conventional wars of earlier eras. Competition no longer revolves solely around military influence, but increasingly

around knowledge, technology, data, energy, and the capacity to control global economic networks.

Despite all these transformations, I do not believe a return to unipolar dominance in the same form that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union remains possible. The world today is too large, interconnected, and complex to be managed by a single power alone.

Perhaps the most important question for the coming decades is how to build a more balanced and stable international order without allowing multipolarity itself to evolve into a condition of fragmentation and open-ended conflict.

That is the central challenge confronting the world today, because transitions from one international order to another rarely occur smoothly. More often, they are accompanied by profound instability and a broad restructuring of power balances, interests, and alliances.

AXIS FIVE: REGIONAL PROJECTS, CORRIDORS, AND SUPPLY CHAINS

JPS

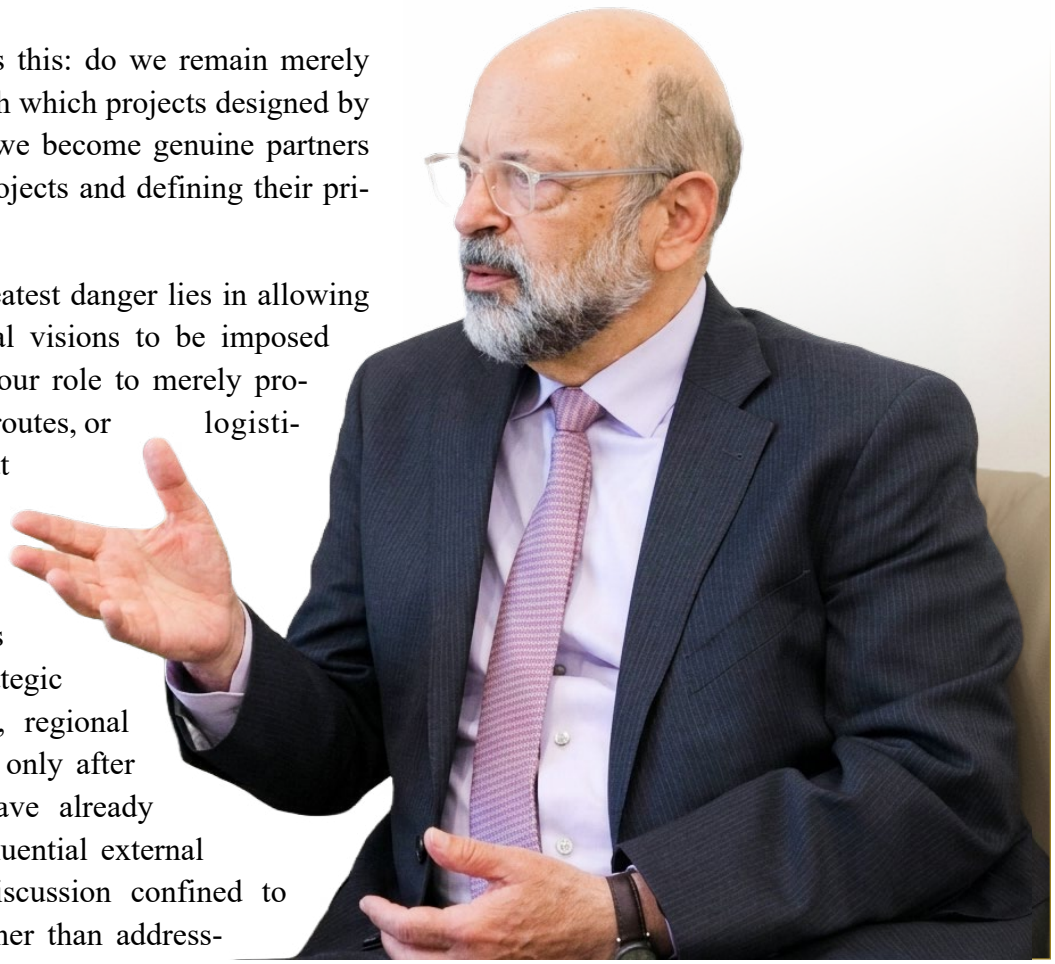
If we shift from the global system to the regional level, we notice that the vocabulary of politics itself has changed: economic corridors, transportation networks, supply chains, submarine cables, energy, and ports. Geography is no longer interpreted solely through the lens of traditional geopolitics, but increasingly through geoeconomics and regional connectivity. How do you interpret these transformations? Are we entering a phase in which the Middle East is being reshaped through corridors and cross-border economic interests?

Dr. Razzaz

I believe we are living through an extremely sensitive moment in the region, one fundamentally defined by the existence of a broad political and strategic vacuum. Any vacuum of this scale, in any part of the world, naturally pushes competing powers to attempt to fill it or reorganize it according to their interests. This becomes even more significant in a region that already lies at the center of global trade, major energy routes, maritime and overland transportation networks, and the strategic intersection linking Asia, Europe, and Africa.

Today, the importance of the region is no longer tied solely to oil and gas in the traditional sense, but also to ports, overland corridors, submarine cables, data infrastructure, information storage, energy systems, and technology. All these elements have become directly interconnected in defining the economic and political power of states. Within these transformations, there is a growing tendency among major powers to secure their own routes, corridors, and resources independently-that is, a gradual return to a new form of mercantilist thinking. Yet the more important question for us in the region concerns how we engage with these transformations from the position of active participants rather than passive recipients.

The central issue is this: do we remain merely a geography through which projects designed by others pass, or do we become genuine partners in shaping these projects and defining their priorities?



In my view, the greatest danger lies in allowing ready-made external visions to be imposed upon us, reducing our role to merely providing land, transit routes, or logistical facilities without possessing a clear conception of what we ourselves want or what serves our long-term strategic interests. At times, regional states join projects only after the major lines have already been drawn by influential external powers, leaving discussion confined to implementation rather than addressing the more fundamental question: what benefits do we seek to achieve, and how do we ensure that these projects do not become instruments of influence operating at the expense of our own interests?

If we genuinely seek to protect our interests, we must first develop a clear internal strategic vision. That means identifying which corridors we actually need, what risks must be avoided, and which opportunities can be transformed into real sources of strength.

For this reason, I believe Arab regional thinking has become a necessity rather than a political luxury and must move beyond. Why, for example, does there not exist a serious vision for connectivity networks extending from the Gulf through Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey toward Europe? Why does the region remain dependent on a single route, a single project, or the influence of a single external actor instead of developing diversified networks of corridors and alternatives? The existence of multiple transportation and connectivity networks is not merely an economic issue; it is also directly related to sovereignty and strategic stability. States possessing multiple options are less vulnerable to pressure and more capable of maneuvering within a volatile regional and international environment.

Achieving this, however, requires two essential conditions. The first concerns the possession of knowledge, strategic vision, and planning capacity so that regional states do not remain merely recipients of externally designed projects. The second relates to the ability of states with overlapping interests to coordinate effectively with one another.

Coordination with Syria is important, as is coordination with Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states, because despite their political differences, these countries are ultimately connected through a shared economic geography and deeply intertwined interests. Without thinking in these terms, regional states will remain in the position of weaker actors receiving the outcomes of projects designed by others rather than becoming genuine partners in shaping and directing them.

The European experience after the Second World War offers an important example: the transition from deep political and nationalist conflicts toward the construction of shared economic interests, beginning with coal and steel and eventually evolving into the European Union. Could the Arab Mashreq or the Levant think in a similar way-that is, begin from practical economic interests rather than waiting for comprehensive political consensus?

Dr. Razzaz

The most dangerous outcome for the region today would be for it to become merely a geography used to facilitate the projects of others, rather than a genuine partner in designing those projects and determining their direction and interests.

This idea is not historically new. The European experience itself provides an important example. Europe lived through centuries of devastating wars and conflicts, yet Europeans eventually reached the conclusion that the continuation of conflict exhausted everyone and that building shared interests might represent the most rational path toward stability.

What matters here is that the starting point was not political in the traditional sense, nor did it begin with grand slogans of unity. Rather, it began with economics and immediate practical interests. The discussion centered on coal, steel, energy, and basic industries-that is, sectors in which cooperation became more beneficial than conflict and where war itself became costly for all parties involved. From this foundation emerged the idea of supranational institutions, which gradually evolved over time into what later became the European Union.

The most important aspect of this experience lies not only in what was eventually achieved, but also in the capacity to imagine a future different from the reality that existed at the time. Major ideas rarely begin at the moment of implementation. They first emerge as intellectual and theoretical discussions that may initially appear distant or unrealistic, until historical circumstances create the conditions that make their realization possible. As Nelson Mandela once said: “It always seems impossible until it’s done.” This applies to our region as well.

Many people today view any discussion of Arab or Levantine integration as overly idealistic or detached from reality, particularly given the scale of current divisions, wars, and crises. Yet the problem is that the alternative to thinking seriously about the future is remaining trapped within the same cycle of crises and exhaustion.

For this reason, I believe that the realistic entry point for any regional project does not begin with grand political slogans, but rather with shared economic interests: trade, energy, transportation, water, supply chains, education, and technology.

These sectors can form an initial foundation upon which broader levels of cooperation may later emerge. Once states begin to feel that they possess genuinely interconnected interests, political coordination becomes easier, and stability gradually transforms into a shared interest rather than remaining merely a fragile balance sustained between recurring crises.

Economic integration does not immediately eliminate political disagreements, nor does it automatically resolve conflicts. What it does create, however, is an environment in which cooperation becomes more beneficial than confrontation, and in which stability evolves into a practical choice that serves all parties rather than remaining merely a political slogan repeated in official rhetoric.

AXIS SIX: THE GULF, ALLIANCES, AND THE FUTURE OF THE REGIONAL ORDER

What you are proposing regarding corridors and integration leads to a deeper question in international relations connected to dependency theory and the limits of autonomy within the global system. Do the United States-or major powers more generally-actually allow regional states to build genuine strategic autonomy? We can observe, for example, that Washington itself appears uncomfortable even with complete European strategic independence, let alone autonomy emerging in the Gulf or the Mashreq. In light of developments over recent years, have Gulf states begun reassessing the logic of exclusive reliance on American protection?

Dr. Razzaz

What is happening in the Gulf cannot be understood as a complete departure from the American security umbrella, because the relationship with the United States still possesses deep military, security, and economic dimensions. At the same time, however, there is a growing awareness that the world no longer offers the kind of absolute guarantees that existed in previous eras. For this reason, a broader reassessment of the nature of strategic relationships and alliances has gradually begun to emerge. These transformations may not appear suddenly or dramatically, but they are clearly reflected in the way states think and in the political and economic movements we are witnessing today.

One important indicator is that many Gulf states no longer rely exclusively on a single international partner in the way they once did. Instead, they have moved toward broadening their network of relations with actors such as China, Turkey, Europe, Pakistan, and several Asian countries, in addition to strengthening intra-Gulf relations themselves. This reflects an increasing recognition that the international system has become more multipolar and that complete dependence on a single actor can become a source of vulnerability in a rapidly changing world.

Within this context, we can understand the gradual transition from the logic of the "single alliance" toward the logic of "diversified partnerships." The principle here resembles, to a large extent, the idea of diversifying sources of income in economics. A state that depends on a single source becomes far more vulnerable to disruption during moments of crisis or sudden change, whereas diversification provides greater flexibility, resilience, and room for maneuver. The same principle applies to international relations. Diversifying partnerships and alliances grants states broader strategic space and reduces the likelihood of becoming entirely dependent on the position, decisions, or policy shifts of any one country.

Ultimately, this transformation is not linked solely to foreign policy, but also to the way states interpret the changing nature of the world itself. The international environment has become more fluid, alliances less fixed, and economic, technological, and security interests increasingly interconnected. As a result, states are attempting to construct more flexible relationships that enable them to preserve their interests within a rapidly transforming global order.

Yet the Gulf itself is not a completely homogeneous bloc. There are differences in priorities, economic models, and the nature of each state's regional and international relationships. At the same time, Gulf states possess large financial surpluses, sovereign wealth funds, and significant economic capabilities that provide them with broad room for maneuver and strategic repositioning. How do you assess the impact of these factors on the future of Gulf relations and regional stability?

Dr. Razzaz

An important part of understanding the transformations occurring in the Gulf is connected to the nature of rentier economies themselves, because states possessing large and relatively stable resources manage their economies-and the relationship between state and society-differently from states that depend more heavily on domestic production and traditional taxation.

In the Gulf context, oil and financial resources provided governments for decades with substantial capacity to invest, build infrastructure, and achieve high standards of living. These resources also granted Gulf states considerable flexibility in managing both their domestic policies and their regional and international alliances. The scale of national wealth and sovereign wealth funds gives Gulf states considerable strategic flexibili-

ty to navigate crises and pursue recovery through expansive investment in infrastructure, development, and citizen welfare.

At the same time, however, current global transformations-whether in economics, energy, technology, or security-are pushing all states to reconsider how to preserve long-term stability and sustainability.

For this reason, we are now witnessing greater attention directed toward economic diversification, investment in technology, renewable energy, and logistics, alongside efforts to diversify international partnerships and construct multiple strategic relationships. The world itself has become more complex and less stable than in previous decades.

In addition, the nature of current regional challenges has made the idea of regional stability increasingly important for all actors. The prolonged state of fragmentation and conflict across the region has demonstrated that state collapse or the continuation of disorder does not affect only one country; its repercussions spread across the entire region economically, politically, and in security terms.

For this reason, I believe the coming phase will increasingly push regional actors toward more flexible forms of cooperation and coordination based on shared interests, stability, and development rather than merely managing traditional rivalries. Ultimately, the ability of any state to adapt to global transformations will depend not only on the scale of the resources it possesses, but also on its capacity to build a long-term strategic vision, diversify its options, and invest simultaneously in both domestic and regional stability.

If we widen the lens to the future of the region, are we moving toward a regional order dominated by a single power through the integration of Israel and the idea of "peace through prosperity"? Or are we heading toward competing regional axes? Or perhaps toward a prolonged phase of fluidity and uncertainty? And what can Arab states do to avoid remaining merely arenas in which the projects of Iran, Turkey, Israel, and major powers intersect?

Dr. Razzaz

No genuine peace can be built upon a logic of domination and control. Any sustainable peace requires a degree of justice, integration, and mutual recognition, as well as the existence of a partner that views the region as a space for cooperation and shared interests rather than merely an arena to be reorganized according to calculations of power. For this reason, I believe that discussions of "peace and prosperity" remain fundamentally limited so long as the dominant approach continues to operate through a security-centered or colonial logic that views the region primarily through the lens of control and balance management.

If a genuine regional project based on justice, respect for the rights of peoples, and

the construction of meaningful economic and developmental integration actually existed, it would undoubtedly benefit everyone, because long-term stability cannot be built upon subjugation or the imposition of realities through force alone. Yet the current reality remains far removed from such a vision, at least in the foreseeable future.

At the same time, there is a fundamental reality that must be approached with realism: the major regional powers that exist today will not disappear from the regional landscape. Iran will remain, Turkey will remain, Israel is also likely to persist as a settler-colonial and racially exclusionary state. These actors will continue to form part of the region's strategic equations in the near and medium term.

> ***The greatest danger facing Arab states lies in becoming mere transit spaces for the projects of others rather than active partners capable of shaping those projects and defining their own strategic interests.***

Ultimately, names and theoretical models are not the central issue. Whether one speaks of Western democracy or alternative developmental models associated with certain Asian experiences, the true criterion concerns the existence of institutions capable of responding to society and preventing the emergence of a wide gap between authority and the public. People are not ultimately searching for slogans as much as they are searching for outcomes: a state capable of delivering services, building the economy, protecting society, and managing crises before they escalate into major breakdowns.

This leads to another important point concerning the role of citizens themselves. Stability and regional integration cannot be purely top-down projects; they also require a popular sense that cooperation serves the real interests and daily lives of ordinary people.

The European experience, despite all its current crises, offers an important example of this dynamic. Over time, broad sectors of society developed the conviction that economic and political integration provided greater stability and opportunity compared to Europe's long history of conflict. Even in Britain, following Brexit, significant segments of younger generations began to feel that leaving the European Union was not necessarily the best option for their economic and political future. Such transformations are not produced solely through top-down political decisions, but rather through the gradual accumulation of experiences, interests,

and broader public perceptions regarding what genuinely serves society's long-term benefit.

For the Arab world today, the most realistic entry point is not waiting for comprehensive political consensus, but rather building shared economic interests, protecting what remains of the nation-state, and preventing fragile states from becoming open arenas for the projects of external powers.

JPS

If we were to summarize this idea in its Arab dimension, could we say that the coming phase requires giving greater priority to building shared Arab economic interests, particularly as the world shifts toward economic and geoeconomic competition? And could this become an entry point for improving Arab political relations as well?

Dr. Razzaz

The short answer is yes, certainly. I believe the region has already begun to exhibit some early indicators of this transformation, even within its most sensitive and complex arenas. The Syrian case offers a clear example. At the outset of the Syrian crisis and the Arab uprisings a decade or fifteen years ago, the region witnessed sharp Arab polarizations, with some states extending support to rival actors as part of broader attempts to weaken competing sides or obstruct their success. The eventual outcome was the collapse and near-total failure of the Syrian state itself.

Part of this behavior still persists among some states, but alongside it there has emerged a growing Arab realization that the continued collapse of states serves no one, and that the vacuum created by state fragmentation opens the door to broader regional and international intervention, whether by Iran, Turkey, Israel, or other external actors. For this reason, we now see a greater-albeit gradual-tendency toward supporting the preservation of at least the minimum structure of the nation-state and its institutions, even amid continuing disagreements over political systems, modes of governance, or the nature of desired settlements.

In my view, this reflects a higher degree of realism and political maturity compared to earlier periods. There is an increasing recognition that comprehensive chaos does not produce sustainable gains for any actor, and that the existence of a weak but potentially stabilizable state is far less costly than total collapse, which opens the way to prolonged conflict and endless intervention.

If we compare what occurred in Syria with what happened earlier in Yemen, or what is happening today in Sudan, we can observe a growing Arab awareness of the dangers associated with state fragmentation and the transformation of countries into open arenas of conflict.

These crises did not remain confined within their national borders. Their consequences spread across the entire region through refugee flows, security threats, economic costs, and expanding external interventions. As a result, a gradual conviction has begun to form that preserving the state-even while recognizing the need for reform and change-has itself become a central requirement for regional stability. The collapse of institutions does not merely produce local vacuums; it reshapes regional balances in ways that are far more dangerous and complex.

For this reason, I believe that focusing on shared economic interests and on projects related to connectivity, integration, energy, trade, and infrastructure may represent the most realistic entry point for broader Arab cooperation in the coming phase. Once economic interests become genuinely interconnected, they gradually create incentives for greater stability and political coordination as well.

AXIS SEVEN: JORDAN AMID GLOBAL AND REGIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS

In light of all these global and regional transformations-from war to economics, technology, artificial intelligence, and the changing position of the state within the international system-what is the first question Jordan should ask itself? Should the priority begin with searching for a regional role, or with strengthening the domestic sphere and building a model of stability capable of adaptation?

Dr. Razzaz

For Jordan, stability is not merely an existing condition that we seek to preserve; it is a form of strategic capital that can be built upon if transformed into more effective institutions, stronger internal trust, and genuine economic opportunities.

Any state lacking a reasonable degree of political, institutional, and social stability will face great difficulty in building an economy capable of growth, attracting investment, or developing a sustainable model for the future. From this perspective, Jordan possesses important strengths that should be treated as foundations for future development rather than as fixed realities to be taken for granted. We possess institutions that have accumulated experience over decades, relatively established political and administrative traditions, and the Hashemite monarchy, which has played a pivotal role in preserving state stability while cultivating traditions of tolerance within a region marked by turbulence and transformation.

There is also an institutional structure encompassing the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Although citizens may

at times express criticism regarding performance, effectiveness, or the level of achievement, the existence and continuity of these institutions has itself become a strategic asset, particularly when compared to what has occurred in several states across the region during recent years.

Yet preserving stability does not mean merely maintaining the status quo. It requires continuously strengthening and developing it, because the coming period appears likely to be filled with economic, political, and technological shocks at both the global and regional levels. This raises the more important question: how do we transform stability from a defensive condition into a source of strength and productive capacity?

In my view, the answer begins with internal cohesion and national unity. Any state experiencing deep internal fragmentation becomes more vulnerable to external pressure, attempts at weakening or fragmentation, and the imposition of external agendas.

For this reason, building internal trust and reinforcing a shared sense of citizenship are not simply political slogans; they are directly connected to national security and long-term stability. When the state possesses this level of internal resilience, it becomes far more capable of building a competitive economic and investment model and presenting itself as a stable and functional environment within a highly unstable regional context.

I recall here an example that struck me personally. I recently heard that one major international institution, facing substantial financial and political pressures globally, decided to relocate an important part of its operations to Jordan. When officials were asked why, the answer was clear: The search was ultimately for a state capable of providing a stable and secure environment - one able to endure, coordinate, and sustain institutional governance amid such profound global instability.

This kind of trust is not built quickly. It emerges through a long accumulation of stability, institutional continuity, and crisis-management capacity. For this reason, I believe that investing in stability and institution-building is no less important than any purely economic or investment-related issue, because economic growth itself requires a stable and predictable environment in order to develop.

Over recent years, Jordan has attempted to move forward through paths of economic, political, and administrative modernization. These trajectories remain necessary and important, even if the results have not reached the level that citizens had hoped for, particularly given the complexity of regional and international circumstances.

The problem emerges, however, when evaluation or criticism transforms into a

condition of complete pessimism or into calls for retreat and closure rather than further development. Sometimes, when results do not appear as quickly as expected, a tendency emerges to conclude that the entire project has failed and that the solution lies in reversing course altogether. In my view, this is a deeply dangerous conclusion, because reform and modernization are inherently cumulative and long-term processes rather than rapid transformations capable of producing their full results within a short period, especially in a region experiencing this level of instability and challenge.

JPS ***Over recent years, Jordan has moved along paths of political, economic, and administrative modernization. Yet there is now a sensitive question: how can the experience be reviewed and its pace and instruments evaluated without allowing such a review to turn into retreat? How do we distinguish between recalibrating the path and returning to the starting point?***

Dr. Razzaz

I always distinguish between the "destination" and the "speed." The destination represents the long-term strategic objective upon which both the state and society ultimately agree: building a modern state that is more institutionalized, more capable of participation, development, and adaptation to future transformations. This destination must remain clear and stable, even when we encounter difficulties or periods of slowdown along the way.

Speed and instruments, however, are matters that can and should be reviewed and adjusted according to circumstances, outcomes, and the challenges that emerge during the process itself. Any serious project of reform or modernization naturally passes through uneven stages, and at times the state may need to proceed gradually, reorder priorities, or modify certain policies in response to domestic, regional, or international conditions.

> ***Globalization in its open form is retreating, while the world moves increasingly toward 'geoeconomics,' where technology, energy, supply chains, and rare minerals have become instruments of competition and influence among major powers.***

The idea resembles, to a large extent, a long journey toward a clearly defined objective. At times, one may need to alter part of the route, navigate around a particular obstacle, or reduce speed because of surrounding risks. But this does not mean changing direction or abandoning the fun-

damental destination. The real problem begins when temporary difficulties become a justification for abandoning the project altogether. There is a major difference between temporary setbacks within a long-term process and entering a continuous cycle that repeatedly returns one to the original starting point.

Any genuine modernization process requires strategic patience and the capacity for cumulative progress. Results do not always emerge quickly, particularly in states operating within unstable regional environments or facing persistent economic and political pressures. For this reason, I believe the crucial issue is not the absence of mistakes or challenges, but rather possessing the ability to learn, adapt, and continue without losing sight of the broader strategic direction. The states that ultimately succeed are not those that avoid crises altogether, but those capable of managing crises without losing their strategic compass.

What we need, therefore, is patience, evaluation, and reconsideration of instruments and pace-not retreat from the destination itself. At times, we may have been overly optimistic in estimating the speed of transformation, such as believing that a mature party-based political life could be built within only a few years, or that large-scale investments could be attracted rapidly within a regional environment characterized by high levels of risk and uncertainty. Yet this does not mean that the overall direction itself is wrong.

JPS

In the context of economic modernization, and with the rise of corridors, supply chains, rail networks, and regional infrastructure projects, what should Jordan's main priority be? How can Jordan transform itself from a transit route into a genuine hub for production, services, and economic connectivity?

Dr. Razzaz

In my view, Jordan's primary priority is ensuring that it does not become merely a "transit corridor" within emerging regional and international projects. There is a fundamental difference between being a country through which energy lines, goods, and logistical corridors simply pass, and becoming a genuine economic, productive, and service-oriented hub within these networks.

If corridors and supply chains are going to pass through Jordan, it is essential that this be reflected directly in the national economy, employment opportunities, local production chains, and the communities connected to these projects. The issue is not simply that routes cross Jordanian geography, but rather how this geographical position can be transformed into real added value for both the state and society.

The countries that genuinely benefit from economic corridors are not those that merely permit transit, but those that build industries, services, logistics centers, investments, and infrastructure around these routes in ways capable of generating sustainable economic activity. For this reason, it becomes critically important to think about how these projects can be connected to the domestic economy, education and vocational training, the labor market, and the industrial and service sectors, so that the benefits do not remain limited to transit fees or short-term financial returns alone.

At the same time, attention must be given to the issue of diversifying networks and corridors and avoiding dependence on a single route or a single partner. A state dependent on one line or one strategic actor becomes far more vulnerable to political, economic, and security transformations. By contrast, when a country possesses multiple options and diversified networks, its capacity for maneuver becomes greater and it becomes less exposed to pressure or disruption during regional or international crises.

For this reason, I believe that what is required in the coming phase is not merely participation in regional corridor projects, but the development of a clear strategic vision for transforming Jordan's geographical position into a long-term source of economic and strategic strength-one that enables Jordan to become an active participant within these networks rather than merely a territory through which the projects of others pass.

In administrative modernization, if we were to identify one key priority for the coming phase, would it be digitalization, institutional restructuring, or building mechanisms that allow citizens' voices to genuinely reach institutions and transform trust into a measurable and accountable relationship?

Dr. Razzaz

For me, the essence of administrative modernization does not lie solely in digitalization, institutional restructuring, or changing administrative titles, despite the importance of all these dimensions. The deeper issue concerns the nature of the relationship between the citizen and the public institution: does the citizen genuinely feel that their voice reaches decision-makers? And do institutions themselves understand that they are accountable to the public?

Any administrative modernization process that fails to build real channels of communication, accountability, and trust will remain limited in impact, because trust between society and the state is not created through slogans or media campaigns. It is built when citizens feel that their complaints are genuinely followed up, and that

institutional performance can be measured and held accountable in a transparent and visible way.

When people see, for example, that one institution received thousands of complaints and managed to address most of them effectively, while another institution failed to do the same, a sense gradually develops that there is a system genuinely functioning and that performance is not left to randomness or personal discretion. This point, in itself, is critically important in rebuilding trust between citizens and the state.

By contrast, when these bridges are absent, even genuine achievements may lose much of their impact because the psychological and cognitive gap between society and institutions can at times become larger than reality itself. People do not judge governments solely by what is accomplished, but also by the extent to which they feel the state is close to them, understands their problems, and responds to their concerns.

For this reason, I believe the essence of administrative reform in the coming phase should focus on building institutions that listen to people, interact with them, and possess clear mechanisms for accountability, transparency, and continuous evaluation.

Ultimately, the state that succeeds in the coming years will not simply be the one possessing an important geographical location or large financial resources. It will be the state capable of understanding its society, building institutions that learn and continuously correct their mistakes, and transforming stability from a defensive condition into a platform for productivity and effective regional influence.

And this, in my view, represents the real challenge facing Jordan: preserving stability while simultaneously transforming that stability into a source of strength capable of generating trust, development, and regional influence, rather than treating it merely as a condition that must be defended and preserved.

These transformations do not appear merely economic or political; they also seem to affect humanity's sense of security, meaning, and stability itself. Do you believe the world is also experiencing a psychological and civilizational crisis, rather than simply a crisis of international order?

Dr. Razzaz

Many political and economic discussions focus on statistics, indicators, alliances, and balances of power, while overlooking the fact that there is a human being living amid all these transformations, attempting to understand his place within a world changing at extraordinary speed.

A substantial part of the contemporary

global crisis is linked to the growing sense of uncertainty. People increasingly feel that the foundations which once provided stability have become far less secure: employment, the middle class, social identity, and even the image of the future itself.

For decades, many societies operated around an implicit promise: if individuals studied, worked hard, and fulfilled their responsibilities, they would attain a stable life and a future better than that of the previous generation. Today, this promise appears significantly weaker in the eyes of large segments of society, whether because of economic transformations, rapid technological change, political crises and wars, or widening social inequalities.

This helps explain the rise of anxiety, anger, and declining trust, alongside the growth of populism and identity-based tensions, particularly among younger generations who sometimes feel that the world is moving faster than their capacity to comprehend or keep pace with it.

Technology itself, despite the enormous benefits it has provided, has at times contributed to deepening this condition. The world has become faster and more pressurized, while people's lives increasingly unfold within an environment of constant comparison, economically, socially, and psychologically. Many traditional social bonds have also weakened or receded, while individuals increasingly experience feelings of marginalization. Citizens often vent their frustrations through social media, yet participate less in public life itself.

For this reason, I believe the world today is experiencing a crisis of meaning as much as it is experiencing a crisis of politics or economics. People are increasingly asking: What does justice mean? What does progress mean? What is the role of the individual within this rapidly changing world? And what can still provide people with a genuine sense of security, belonging, and confidence in the future?

Ultimately, any political or economic system that loses the capacity to provide people with a reasonable degree of dignity, stability, and hope will sooner or later face a profound crisis, even if it appears externally strong or achieves impressive economic indicators.

Real stability is not measured solely by economic growth, military power, or geopolitical influence, but also by a society's ability to preserve its psychological and social cohesion, and by the individual's sense that he possesses a meaningful place, role, and future within the worl

ANALYSIS

Iran and the Accumulation of Losses: The Islamic Republic on the Day After the War

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Iran's regional influence is undergoing a phase of accelerated erosion on multiple levels. This decline did not emerge suddenly, nor can it be explained solely through external pressure. Rather, it reflects the cumulative consequences of strategic choices made by Tehran itself when it opted to position itself as a central actor in the regional order through an approach whose costs ultimately proved greater than its returns. On 8 December 2024, Tehran lost its influence in Syria almost entirely. This was followed by the gradual weakening of Hezbollah's political leverage and the loss of the first tier of its political and military leadership. Meanwhile, the Iraqi militias, together with the Houthi movement (Ansar Allah), are facing a condition of strategic ambiguity and growing uncertainty regarding the future of their regional roles. How, then, did a project that expanded over decades arrive at such a turning point?

This article argues that what Iran confronts in the aftermath of the war extends beyond military setbacks or the weakening of its alliance network. More fundamentally, it marks a transition from an era in which influence could be maintained through relatively low political and symbolic costs to a phase in which regional influence has become far more expensive in security, economic, and domestic terms. For decades, Tehran succeeded in transforming the discourse of resistance and victimhood into substantial regional capital. Today, however, it finds itself facing a profoundly altered equation: a network of influence that demands greater resources, possesses diminished symbolic legitimacy, and operates within a regional environment increasingly willing to challenge and scrutinize the costs of the Iranian role.

From the Blessing of Influence to Its Burden

Before 2011, Iran enjoyed what could be described as the "advantage of the model." It portrayed itself as the force confronting global arrogance and carrying the banner

of the oppressed, while neighboring Arab regimes were increasingly associated with repression rather than resistance. This equation enabled Tehran to maximize political impact at relatively limited cost through instruments of soft power that generated a regional presence far exceeding what could have been achieved through direct military means. Satellite television networks, cultural organizations, and religious outreach through schools and husseiniyas all functioned as low-cost yet highly effective tools of influence. Iran's strength during this period rested less on military deployment than on its ability to produce a political narrative that resonated beyond its borders. As a result, its regional reach appeared disproportionately large compared to the resources invested in sustaining it.

The Arab uprisings of 2011 disrupted this equation from within. Suddenly, new actors emerged across the region employing the very language that Iran had long monopolized: defending the oppressed and confronting tyranny. Yet the Arab protest movements articulated demands for change independently of the Iranian model-in Tunis, Cairo, Benghazi, and Sana'a. Iran thus found itself challenged not by external adversaries, but by constituencies it had long claimed to represent. Tehran's response proved decisive in shaping subsequent perceptions. When it chose to stand alongside the Assad regime against its own population, describing the Syrian uprising as a foreign conspiracy while celebrating other uprisings as an "Islamic awakening," the regional perception increasingly took hold that sectarian considerations had begun to outweigh its once-transnational revolutionary discourse. In doing so, Iran squandered the reservoir of admiration and solidarity it had patiently cultivated within Arab public opinion.

The Arab uprisings did not weaken Iran militarily as much as they eroded its symbolic image among broad segments of Arab society. More importantly, they stripped Tehran of its most valuable asset: its image itself. Once that image was lost, Iran forfeited a source of influence that neither financial resources nor military power could easily replace.

This marked the first major turning point. Iran could no longer reconcile a discourse centered on defending the oppressed with its support for a regime confronting a large-scale popular uprising. As Tehran shifted from investing in symbolism to defending allied regimes, its influence moved from the realm of legitimacy to that of hard power. This transition inaugurated a new era of mounting costs: financial costs in Syria, sectarian costs across the Arab sphere, and political costs reflected in its deteriorating standing within Arab public opinion.

Syria: The Loss of Strategic Depth, Not Merely an Ally

Then came 8 December 2024. The fall of the Assad regime was not simply the loss of an ally; it constituted a rupture at the core of the regional structure Iran had spent four decades constructing. Syria represented the central logistical and strategic link in Iran's regional architecture. Through Syrian territory, weapons were transferred to Lebanon, and through it the so-called "Axis of Resistance" maintained its geographical continuity from Tehran to the

Mediterranean. Estimates suggest that Iran spent more than thirty billion dollars in Syria throughout the years of conflict, in addition to the thousands of fighters who lost their lives on Syrian soil. The loss of this entire investment in a single moment signaled that the regional map had fundamentally changed and that Iranian influence in the Arab Mashreq had become geographically constrained for the first time in decades.

Within the same context, Hezbollah emerged from its confrontations having paid a heavy price in both leadership and organizational capacity. At the same time, Iraqi militias increasingly find themselves trapped in a condition of strategic uncertainty, caught between domestic pressures demanding a redefinition of their role and external pressures that continue to narrow their operational and political options.

Syria's importance did not stem merely from its position as a political ally of Tehran, but from the fact that it served as the geographical infrastructure of the Iranian regional project itself. The loss of Damascus meant that the axis of influence had forfeited its most critical land corridor, that Hezbollah no longer possessed the same strategic depth, and that Iraq had ceased to function as part of a connected sphere of influence, increasingly becoming instead an arena for pressure and compensation. In this sense, Iran lost the geography of influence before it lost its instruments.

When Influence Becomes a Burden: Allies and the Strategy of Endurance

The war has revealed that the network of allies which for decades provided Iran with a capacity for indirect deterrence has, at least partially, evolved into a political and security burden. Hezbollah emerged from the confrontations with a diminished ability to take the initiative and under expanding domestic Lebanese constraints on its movement. Iraqi militias, meanwhile, face dual pressure stemming from their ideological and political ties to Tehran on the one hand, and from the growing costs of turning Iraq into an open arena for American and Israeli retaliation on the other. As for the Houthis, despite retaining a significant capacity to disrupt maritime activity in the Red Sea, their role increasingly places Iran before a more complicated equation: every expansion in the function of the proxy enhances the capacity for disruption, but simultaneously raises the costs of international isolation and external pressure.

This article argues that Iran's post-war challenge extends beyond military losses or the weakening of its network of allies. It represents a deeper transition from an era of politically and symbolically inexpensive influence to one in which influence has become costly in security, economic, and domestic terms.

With the erosion of significant parts of its offensive instruments of influence, Iran gradually shifted toward a defensive logic based on increasing the costs of pressure directed against it. In the successive wars that

unfolded in the aftermath of 7 October 2023-when Israel experienced the largest military attack carried out by a non-state actor since the occupation of Palestine in 1948-Iran endured a series of escalating confrontations. From the "Twelve-Day War" in June 2025 to the "Forty-Day War" in February 2026, nuclear and military capabilities were destroyed, infrastructure was targeted, senior commanders were assassinated, and intelligence networks were exposed. Yet the regime remained intact. This endurance did not reflect invulnerability, but rather mastery of a different equation: making defeat prohibitively costly for all parties involved.

When the Strait of Hormuz was closed, the move was not merely tactical; it represented a strategic message that the cost of Iranian collapse would be borne globally, albeit to varying degrees. Nearly one-fifth of global oil trade passes through the Strait each day, making it deeply intertwined with industrial production, supply chains, and broader political stability. This pattern of "endurance" reflects a deeply rooted strategic doctrine in which Iran does not necessarily seek outright victory as much as it seeks to make the consequences of defeating it unbearably expensive for those attempting to impose such an outcome.

In this sense, Iran no longer presents itself to its adversaries as a triumphant power, but rather as a state that cannot be broken without inflicting widespread damage on the regional order and the global economy. This distinction is essential to understanding Iran's position in the aftermath of the war. Deterrence is no longer grounded in the capacity for expansion, but in the ability to make contraction costly for all parties involved.

Yet Iran's capacity for endurance does not erase the question of the historical costs associated with that endurance, nor does it preclude the emergence of moments in which states are compelled to redefine their relationship with power, sovereignty, and political settlement.

Is Iran Facing a New Turkmenchay?

This question evokes one of the most painful episodes in Iran's collective historical memory. In 1828, the Treaty of Turkmenchay was signed under the weight of defeat before Tsarist Russia. Under its terms, Qajar Iran ceded nearly 80,000 square kilometers of territory in the Caucasus, including Azerbaijan, Armenia, and parts of Georgia, while also paying what historians describe as crippling war reparations estimated at twenty million rubles. Yet despite the magnitude of humiliation, the Qajar state survived for nearly another century-exhausted and deeply wounded in its sense of dignity, but not collapsed. Indeed, some historians argue that the shock of Turkmenchay awakened within Iranian political consciousness a renewed sensitivity toward sovereignty and independence, one that has continued to shape Iranian political discourse up to the present day.

Does the potential abandonment of Iran's nuclear program-or its substantial freezing within the framework of a comprehensive agreement with Washington and its partners-constitute a new form of Turkmenchay? The comparison, however, contains a fundamental distinction that cannot be overlooked. The losses of 1828 were territorial and permanent;

in the context of great-power politics, lost territory is rarely recovered with ease.[1] By contrast, the functional relinquishment or suspension of nuclear capability remains, in principle, reversible. Iran can continue to accumulate scientific expertise and rebuild its capacities whenever strategic circumstances shift. Tehran already demonstrated this after the collapse of the 2015 nuclear agreement, when it rapidly resumed uranium enrichment at levels far exceeding those stipulated under the accord.

What ultimately links the two moments is something deeper than a territorial comparison: it is the equation of survival in the face of wounded pride. The Qajar state accepted the Treaty of Turkmenchay because the alternative was collapse. Today, Iran faces mounting pressure from multiple directions: cumulative economic sanctions that have stripped the Iranian currency of more than 90% of its value over the past decade, the erosion of its alliance network, and growing domestic discontent that revolutionary rhetoric has failed to contain. This internal strain has manifested itself in repeated waves of protest, from the Green Movement[2] in 2009 to the "Mahsa Amini" uprising in 2022.[3]

The central question, therefore, is not whether concessions will eventually emerge, but when, under what conditions, and with how much national dignity preserved. What makes the current moment particularly sensitive is that nuclear negotiations are no longer taking place in a political vacuum. They unfold within a regional and international climate in which the military option has become an active possibility rather than a purely rhetorical threat. As a result, Iran's room for maneuver appears narrower today than at any point since the signing of the 2015 nuclear agreement.

When the Treaty of Turkmenchay brought the Russo-Iranian War to an end, the Qajar state did not immediately confront the challenge of recovering lost territories. Instead, it faced a more urgent and consequential task: rebuilding a state that war had nearly fractured internally before it was defeated externally.

The Qajar attempts at reform became particularly visible during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah and under the leadership of his minister Amir Kabir.[4] These late modernization efforts sought to emulate the European model through the creation of a regular army and a centralized administrative structure. Yet they collided with the entrenched authority of the religious establishment, which possessed a parallel source of legitimacy, as well as with local elites who regarded reform primarily as a threat to their interests. The Qajar state survived, but it failed to transform. It continued to operate with a pre-Turkmenchay political

1 The military defeat of the Iranian Qajar state by the Russian Empire, which culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828. In Iranian historical consciousness, the treaty is regarded as one of the most humiliating moments in modern Iranian history, as it compelled Iran to cede vast territories in the Caucasus and pay substantial financial reparations to Russia.

2 The military defeat of the Iranian Qajar state by the Russian Empire, which culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828. In Iranian historical consciousness, the treaty is regarded as one of the most humiliating moments in modern Iranian history, as it compelled Iran to cede vast territories in the Caucasus and pay substantial financial reparations to Russia.

3 A broad protest movement that erupted in Iran in 2022 following the death of Mahsa Amini after her detention by the morality police. The protests rapidly evolved into a wider political and social uprising that reflected escalating tensions between segments of Iranian society and the ruling establishment.

4 One of the most prominent reformist statesmen of the Qajar era, who served as grand vizier and became known for his efforts to modernize Iran's administration, military, and educational system.

mentality in a rapidly changing world it could not fully comprehend.[5] The Constitutional Revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century emerged as an expression of these accumulated contradictions, before Reza Shah ultimately brought the entire Qajar era to a close.

The lesson lies not simply in the final collapse itself, but in the long interval separating the two moments. Between the signing of the treaty and the eventual collapse of the Qajar order stretched eight decades during which the state remained trapped between the necessity of reform and resistance to change. The question today is whether the Islamic Republic of Iran now stands before a similar historical crossroads.

The answer begins with understanding what Tehran will define as its primary priority on the day after any settlement. All indications suggest that preserving regime cohesion will constitute the first line of any post-war agenda. Iran, having emerged from years of cumulative pressure, understands well that the most serious threat it faces lies not abroad, but within-a domestic sphere marked by widening gaps between a young and increasingly frustrated population and the governing order. This internal tension remains unresolved, and no external agreement alone will resolve it. Yet any easing of economic pressure through sanctions relief and the recovery of Iranian assets frozen abroad-outcomes that could emerge from a future nuclear settlement-may provide the regime with additional time to reorganize the foundations of its domestic legitimacy.

Reconstruction represents the second major battle. Iran enters this phase burdened by an economy weakened by sanctions, entrenched rentier practices, and chronic underinvestment in infrastructure. Tehran and other major Iranian cities now face mounting crises related to water scarcity, energy shortages, and environmental degradation that can no longer be postponed. In the Iranian case, reconstruction does not refer solely to repairing the direct destruction caused by war; it also entails restoring an economy that had already been deteriorating gradually for years before recent events intensified its fragility. The unresolved question remains whether Tehran will open itself to foreign capital and its accompanying conditions, or whether it will reproduce the model of self-sufficiency whose limitations have already become apparent.

The Qajar comparison is particularly revealing here. After Turkmenchay, Iran did not lack reformist intentions; rather, it lacked the ability to choose between two conflicting imperatives: preserving existing structures of

> The Arab Spring did not weaken Iran militarily as much as it eroded its symbolic image among broad segments of Arab public opinion. In doing so, it stripped Iran of its most valuable asset: its image. Once that image was lost, it lost an instrument that neither money nor weapons could replace.

5 The term used in Iranian history to refer to the Constitutional Movement and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911), which called for limiting the authority of the shah and establishing a parliamentary order.

power on the one hand, and undertaking deep structural reform on the other. The Qajars chose the first option. They implemented enough reform to survive, but not enough to recover and transform. The contemporary Iranian system now faces a remarkably similar dilemma, though with one crucial difference: the contemporary international environment is unlikely to grant Tehran the same amount of time that history once granted the Qajars.

Conclusion

The Iranian experience across five centuries-particularly since the sixteenth century-reveals a recurring pattern: the Iranian state may lose wars militarily, yet its collapse unfolds slowly, while its recovery rarely proceeds at a pace commensurate with the scale of the loss. The "Iranian phoenix," as some scholars have described it, is not merely a metaphor, but an expression of a deeply rooted capacity for adaptation forged through centuries of pressure and endurance. Yet the phoenix does not rise without fire, and this time the fire is not exclusively external. The Islamic Republic of Iran now confronts a predicament similar to that faced by the Qajar state after Turkmenchay: a political order that survived while the world surrounding it fundamentally changed.

Following Turkmenchay, the Qajar state spent decades attempting reform without daring to undertake genuine transformation. It continued to operate with the mentality of a defeated state unwilling to fully acknowledge its defeat. Abbas Mirza understood the necessity of building a regular army, yet the political establishment failed to recognize that military reform alone could not rebuild the state itself. By the time the Constitutional era emerged and later Reza Shah rose to power, the Qajar state had exhausted one historical opportunity afteranother.[6]

The Islamic Republic possesses advantages the Qajar state never had: more deeply institutionalized structures, greater technological depth, and a conscious awareness of the historical experience that continues to shape its political education and strategic thinking. Yet it also carries the same structural dilemma that burdened the Qajars: the unresolved tension between the necessity of reform and the imperatives of regime preservation. The only difference is that the pace of history today is immeasurably faster than it was in the nineteenth century.

The central questions therefore remain unresolved. Will the Islamic Republic succeed where the Qajar state failed by combining regime cohesion with meaningful reform at the same time? Can it rebuild its economy without opening pathways that the political system itself perceives as threats to its ideological identity? Ultimately, what will Iran become on the day after the war: a state capable of redefining itself with the confidence of one that has learned from history, or a state content with managing crisis and remaining only marginally above the threshold of collapse? Between these two possibilities lies the difference between an Iran that shapes its future and an Iran that merely postpones its decline.

6 Abbas Mirza: Crown prince of the Qajar state and one of the leading advocates of military modernization in early nineteenth-century Iran following the defeats suffered against Tsarist Russia.

The Gulf States and the Redefinition of Security and Sovereignty
An Introduction to Responsible Interconnected Sovereignty in the Middle East

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The U.S.-Israeli war against Iran, which erupted on February 28, has moved far beyond the boundaries of regional military escalation. It has become a defining moment that has returned the Gulf Arab states to the very center of the regional war equation, transforming them from neighboring observers of the crisis into arenas of direct exposure and vulnerability. The war revealed that the Gulf security architecture—including foreign military bases, critical infrastructure, and energy and maritime corridors—can no longer be understood merely as instruments of protection and stability. Rather, they have become integral components of the conflict arena itself. Consequently, the central Gulf question is no longer confined to how external threats can be deterred, but extends to how protection arrangements and networks of interdependence can be prevented from evolving into sources of sovereign and security vulnerability.

This paper advances a dual argument. First, it contends that the recent war did not merely shake the assumptions underpinning traditional Gulf security; rather, it imposed a fundamental redefinition of the concepts of security and sovereignty in the region, and perhaps even of the Gulf states' relationship with the United States, their principal ally whose security guarantees they rely upon and whose military bases they host. Second, the paper argues that this transformation cannot be adequately understood through the classical vocabulary of Westphalian sovereignty. Instead, it requires the development of a new conceptual framework that may be described as "responsible interconnected sovereignty." The paper combines the theoretical construction of this concept with its analytical application to the Gulf region in the aftermath of February 2026, while capturing the military, economic, political, and legal dimensions of this transformation.

Introduction

Classical sovereignty, since the Peace of Westphalia, has rested on three principal assumptions: the state's monopoly over the use of force, its control over territorial borders, and the exclusion of external interference from its internal affairs. This conception remained dominant in shaping understandings of security and international relations for decades. [1]However, the U.S.–Israeli war on Iran exposed the limitations of this framework in the Gulf context. Gulf states did not lose their formal legal sovereignty; rather, they experienced a form of strategic exposure as military bases, energy corridors, civilian infrastructure, and networks of economic interdependence became spaces where protection and vulnerability intersected simultaneously. Accordingly, sovereignty can no longer be understood solely in terms of border protection, but increasingly through the state's capacity to manage the military, economic, and security entanglements surroundingit.[2]

The Transformation of Security and Sovereignty Assumptions in the Gulf

The strategic impact of the war proved profoundly disruptive, shaking the very assumptions of security and sovereignty that had shaped Gulf strategic thinking for decades. It had long been taken for granted that the security partnership with the United States, reinforced by the extensive presence of American military bases, would be sufficient to deter Iran and prevent the expansion of war into the Gulf region. Yet the opposite occurred entirely: the war and its repercussions were drawn directly into the Gulf states themselves, while attempts were made to pull them into the conflict as active participants.

At the same time, a growing awareness emerged that Gulf sovereignty could no longer be regarded as absolutely protected under the assumption that hosting allied military bases as instruments of security would not simultaneously transform those states into focal points for imported threats and strategic vulnerability [3]. The war revealed

> ***Foreign military bases, critical infrastructure, and energy and maritime corridors are no longer merely instruments of protection and stability; they have become part of the battlefield itself.***

1 Stephen Krasner argues that sovereignty has never been as absolute as classical theory has portrayed it. Instead, it has consistently been subject to violation, negotiation, and reinterpretation - a condition he famously described as "organized hypocrisy" in international relations.Derek Croxton» ,The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 and the Origins of Sovereignty «,The International History Review ,21 no(1999) 3 . andStephen D .Krasner ,Sovereignty :Organized Hypocrisy) Princeton :Princeton University Press42–3 (1999 ,

2 Ali Kursan argues that the Middle East is experiencing a delayed Westphalian moment, in which new regional alliances are emerging primarily out of self-interest amid security vacuums and regional threats, rather than as a consequence of transformations in the broader international system. John Milton, Michael Axworthy, and Brenda Sims offer an important alternative reading of the historical Westphalian settlement. They contend that the Peace of Westphalia did not institutionalize absolute sovereignty in the manner commonly assumed; rather, it established a form of conditional and reciprocal sovereignty grounded in mechanisms of collective guarantees and mutual restraint.Abel Polese and Ruth Hanau Santini ,eds ,.Rethinking Statehood in the Middle East and North Africa: Security ,Sovereignty and New Political Orders) London :Routledge١٨–١ ,(٢٠٢٠ ,. Ali Murat Kursun» ,The Middle East‹s Westphalian Moment ?From Chaos to Realism «,War on the Rocks ,February٢٠٢٦ ,٢ . Patrick Milton, Michael Axworthy, and Brendan Simms, Towards a Westphalia for the Middle East (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1–20, 60–120.
https//:warontherocks.com/2026/02/the-middle-easts-westphalian-moment-from-chaos-to-realism

3 Neil Quilliam and Kristian Alexander» ,Iran and Gaza Conflicts Teach Gulf States a Hard-Power Lesson «The World Today) Chatham House ,(March ,2026 ,16 https//:www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/03-2026/iran-and-gaza-conflicts-teach-gulf-states-hard-power-lesson

that hosting foreign military bases, as instruments of protection and deterrence, may simultaneously render Gulf states themselves part of the arena of targeting. As a result, it is no longer possible to separate Gulf national security from the conflicts unfolding within its immediate neighborhood or across its vital strategic domains, western analyses have already concluded that this round of conflict taught Gulf states an important lesson regarding the necessity of hard power and exposed the limits of relying solely on American security guarantees. It also highlighted the fragility of neutrality once Gulf military bases and critical infrastructure become incorporated into Iran's target bank. (4)

Redefining the Concepts of Security and Sovereignty

In this context, the concept of security in the Gulf may no longer be confined to military protection against an external threat. Instead, it is likely to be reconceptualized as the state's capacity to prevent its territory, waters, and vital infrastructure from being transformed into platforms of targeting or arenas for the exchange of strategic messages among competing regional powers. After this war, security has become less about deterring attacks than about containing their repercussions, ensuring the continuity of the state and its economic and service functions under any circumstances or pressure, and preserving the independence of national decision-making when security commitments intersect with sovereignrisks(5).

For sovereignty, it has undergone an even deeper and more sensitive redefinition. The recent war between the United States and Israel on one side and Iran on the other revealed that Gulf sovereignty is increasingly measured by the state's ability to prevent external actors from transforming its territory into an operational extension of their own conflicts, whether those actors are allies or adversaries. When a state hosts a foreign military base yet does not exercise full control over its operational use or over the consequences arising from that use, sovereignty is not legally abolished, nor is it necessarily diminished so long as such a presence functions as a strategic complement (6).Accordingly, the Iranian attacks on American bases and civilian facilities in the Gulf acquired a significance that extended far beyond their immediate military dimension. From the perspective of Gulf capitals, they appeared as a dual violation: first, an assault on national territory itself, and second, an exposure of the limitations inherent in external protection arrangements. By targeting Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, Iran effectively undermined the assumption that the Gulf states could remain outside the war while simultaneously hosting American security infrastructure. In its fiftieth extraordinary meeting held on March 1, the Ministerial Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council described the Iranian attacks as a blatant violation of sovereignty and a breach of international law and the principles of good neighborliness. (7)The joint statement issued by the foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the European Union on

4 Reuters» ,Iran Missiles Bring War to Gulf Doorstep ;Hardens Support for U.S-.Israel Campaign «February ,2026 ,28 https//:www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-missiles-brings-war-gulf-doorstep-hardens-support-usisrael-campaign/28-02-2026-

5 Mona Yacoubian» ,Iran‹s War Strategy :Don‹t Calibrate—Escalate «,Center for Strategic and International Studies ,March ,2026 ,16 https//:www.csis.org/analysis/irans-war-strategy-dont-calibrate-escalate . Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) ACLED ,(Middle East Special Issue :March 2026 ,4 2026 https//:acleddata.com/update/middle-east-special-issue-march2026-

6 Mariel Ferragamo et al» ,U.S .Forces in the Middle East :Mapping the Military Presence «,Council on Foreign Relations ,last modified June ,2025 ,23 https//:www.cfr.org/articles/us-forces-middle-east-mapping-military-presence

7 Gulf Cooperation Council» ,Statement Issued by the50 th Extraordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the GCC Regarding the Iranian Aggression Against the GCC «,GCC General Secretariat,

March 5, 2026, further emphasized that the security and stability of the Gulf region constitute a fundamental pillar of the global economy. The statement also called for safeguarding freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb.[8]

This concept manifests itself in the Gulf through four practical tests. The first concerns foreign military bases: while they provide a deterrent umbrella, they also impose a persistent question upon the host state regarding the limits of their use and the costs associated with their potential targeting. The second is the Strait of Hormuz, which is not merely a maritime passage, but a strategic node where Gulf national security intersects with global energy security. The third involves civilian and economic infrastructure—from refineries and desalination plants to airports and supply chains—as these facilities have increasingly become integral components of national security rather than merely service-oriented infrastructure. The fourth relates to economic diversification projects, since any large-scale war threatens not only military security, but also investor confidence and the economic visions upon which Gulf stability and legitimacy are increasingly founded.

The Strait of Hormuz was no longer merely a vital corridor for the global economy during the war, nor is it likely to remain so in its aftermath. Rather, it evolved into a central arena for the redefinition of Gulf sovereignty itself. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, approximately 20 million barrels of oil per day flowed through the strait, accounting for more than a quarter of global seaborne oil trade. In addition, nearly one-fifth of the world's liquefied natural gas trade - particularly exports from Qatar - passed through it. By contrast, the available alternative capacity through Saudi and Emirati overland routes amounts to only a few million barrels per day. [9]Iran's effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz following February 28, 2026, led to an estimated 70% decline in tanker traffic. The U.S. Energy Information Administration further estimated that disrupted production reached approximately 9.1 million barrels per day in April 2026. [10]This reality renders the Hormuz situation far more than a mere maritime bottleneck; it has become a sovereign dilemma. Freedom of export, the stability of state revenues, and the ability of Gulf states to preserve their position within the global economy have all become tied to a passage over which they do not exercise full control.

The Dilemma of American Military Bases and the Economics of Defense

The central question produced by the war is no longer whether foreign military bases provide protection, but whether they have themselves become part of the Gulf security dilemma. The United States still maintains a significant military presence in the Middle East, making it a fundamental component of the regional deterrence architecture. Yet the war simultaneously demonstrated that this presence does not function solely as a deterrent umbrella; rather, it can also become a generator of risk when Iran perceives it

March 2026 ,1 https//:www.gcc-sg.org/en/MediaCenter/News/Pages/news2026.2-1-3-aspx

8 Council of the European Union» ,Joint Statement by GCC–EU Ministers ‹Meeting on Recent Developments in the Middle East :Iran‹s Attacks Against GCC States «,Consilium ,March ,2026 ,5 https//:www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/05/03/2026/joint-statement-by-gcc-eu-ministers-meeting-on-recent-developments-in-the-middle-east-iran-s-attacks-against-gcc-states/

9 Candace Dunn and Justine Barden» ,Amid Regional Conflict ,the Strait of Hormuz Remains Critical Oil Chokepoint «,Today in Energy ,U.S .Energy Information Administration, June ,2025 ,16 https//:www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id65504=

10 Center for Preventive Action» ,Confrontation Between the United States and Iran «,Global Conflict Tracker ,Council on Foreign Relations, (accessed May ,2026 ,4 https//:www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/confrontation-between-united-states-and-iran

as an integral part of a hostile war machine.

(11)The Gulf states do not appear likely to move toward a complete security disengagement from the United States in the foreseeable future. More plausibly, they are expected to engage in a quiet renegotiation of the terms of partnership itself: who ultimately decides on the use of military

> ***Sovereignty is no longer defined solely by the protection of borders, but by a state's ability to manage the military, economic, and security interdependencies surrounding it.***

bases, what limits govern operational involvement, and what guarantees are provided to host states if they are the ones expected to bear the costs of that presence. This war is unlikely to end Gulf dependence on the United States, but it may transform that dependence from a relationship grounded in strategic reassurance into one characterized by caution, conditionality, and a stronger desire to maximize national margins of autonomy.

The Middle East Council on Global Affairs has likewise argued that the Gulf states face a difficult strategic dilemma: they are unable to substantially reduce their relational dependence on Washington, while simultaneously unable to sustain an alliance structure that exposes their security to decisions made beyond their own borders. This tension is pushing them toward a new security framework aimed at strengthening indigenous defensive capabilities, renegotiating the terms of the American security umbrella, and cautiously diversifying partnerships with European, Asian, and regional actors (12).It is also important to note that this war exposed a striking economic imbalance within the air defense equation. Iran employed dense swarms of relatively low-cost drones, while the Gulf states and American forces found themselves compelled to expend highly expensive interceptor missiles in response. As a consequence, several Gulf capitals reportedly began examining lower-cost alternatives, including Ukrainian interceptor drones. This reflects a broader transition from the logic of expensive technological superiority toward a model of smart, cost-efficient defensive saturation embedded within an emerging security transformation strategy(13).

The Shift from Protection-Based Security to Control-Oriented Security

The central idea here is that the Gulf is moving away from reliance on an external power tasked with preventing threats, toward the construction of a sovereign posture in which any security partner - regardless of its weight or influence - becomes part of the architecture of stability rath-

11 Khalid Al-Jaber» ,Reframing the Gulf Regional Security Architecture «,Middle East Council on Global Affairs ,March ,2026 ,30 https//:mecouncil.org/blog_posts/reframing-the-gulf-regional-security-architecture

12 Tim Kelly and Maki Shiraki» ,Gulf States Eye Cheap Ukrainian Interceptor Drone as Iranian Attacks Drain Missile Stocks «,Reuters ,April ,2026 ,8 https//:www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/gulf-states-eye-cheap-ukrainian-interceptor-drone-iranian-attacks-drain-missile/08-04-2026-

13 H .A .Hellyer» ,Gulf Security ,Iranian Isolation ,and Regional Paramountcy After the War «,Gulf International Forum ,April ,2026 ,9 https//:gulfif.org/gulf-security-iranian-isolation-and-regional-paramountcy-after-the-war .

er than a potential cause of its collapse. The Gulf states are recalibrating their security relationship with Washington, while simultaneously seeking to redefine its terms in ways that preserve wider margins for national maneuverability. In this context, the Gulf International Forum argues that the Gulf's trajectory of strategic diversification is likely to accelerate through deeper economic, technological, and defense relations with Asian and European partners - not as a substitute for the American relationship, but rather as an additional hedge against fluctuations in U.S. policy and commitment. [14]The war also revealed that the true value of alliances for the Gulf states no longer lies primarily in protection guarantees themselves, but rather in their capacity to provide states with the resources, technology, and training necessary for self-defense.

The Saudi case represented a concentrated model of this emerging security transformation. Riyadh continues to view its security relationship with the United States as structurally deep due to its longstanding dependence on Washington in the fields of armament, military training, and institutional defense cooperation. Yet the Iranian attacks on Saudi civilian infrastructure and energy facilities crossed a line that could no longer be tolerated because they constituted a direct and explicit violation of sovereignty. Here, the new equation emerges in its clearest form: Saudi Arabia shows no desire for an open war, yet it is no longer able to treat the Iranian threat as one that can simply be contained beyond its borders. Consequently, its post-war definition of security is likely moving toward a formula that combines strengthened defenses, deeper internal fortification, and perhaps the preservation of diplomatic settlement channels - but from a position of greater rigidity and diminished trust in the intentions of the adversary.

The United Arab Emirates, in turn, offers a different yet complementary example of this trajectory. Statements made by Anwar Gargash in April 2026 indicated that Abu Dhabi views any settlement addressing Iran's nuclear program, missiles, and drones as essential to preventing the emergence of a more dangerous Middle East, while also insisting that the Strait of Hormuz cannot be held hostage by any party. At the same time, Gargash emphasized that the United States would remain the UAE's principal security partner. The paradox here is striking: the very war that exposed the limitations of American security guarantees may, in some cases, deepen the perceived need for them rather than encourage separation from them.[15]

Responsible Interconnected Sovereignty: A New Regional Logic

Under these complex circumstances, and given the urgent need to devise solutions capable of supporting the Gulf's transition toward a new formula that protects both its security and sovereignty, it becomes necessary to conceptualize "a new sovereign model through which the state exercises its political independence via the conscious management of regional and international networks of interdependence, in a manner that prevents its territory, resources, proxies, or digital space from being transformed into sources of threat to collective stability, while preserving its exclusive right to strategic decision-making concerning war and peace."

This definition rests upon three interconnected levels: a right (independence), a function (man-

14 Alexander Cornwell» ,UAE Says Use of Hormuz Must Be Guaranteed in Any U.S-.Iran Deal «,Reuters, April ,2026 ,6 https//:www.reuters.com/world/europe/uae-says-use-hormuz-must-be-guaranteed-any-us-iran-deal2026-04-06-

15 Kenneth N .Waltz ,Theory of International Politics) Reading ,MA :Addison-Wesley. 97–93 ,(1979 ,

agement), and a constraint (non-harm to regional stability). It draws upon Stephen Krasner's distinction between four dimensions of sovereignty - international legal sovereignty, Westphalian sovereignty, domestic sovereignty, and interdependence sovereignty - while adding a fifth dimension: regional responsibility, meaning the state's obligation to ensure that its external influence does not become a source of instability.(16) The logic of responsible interconnected sovereignty rests upon three interconnected circles: consolidated internal sovereignty, interconnected sovereignty, and responsible cooperative sovereignty. Its central assumption is that the structure of the regional order is shaped not only by material power, but also by the idea of mutually agreed collective stability, and that regional disorder is not an immutable condition within the regional equation.

1. Internal Sovereignty: This form of sovereignty is reflected in the exclusive monopoly over strategic decision-making, the regulation of actors within the state, and the protection of society. It corresponds to what Kenneth Waltz described as functionally differentiated units within the international system.

2. Interconnected Sovereignty: This dimension revolves around managing outward influence from the state, preventing destabilizing forms of expansion, and regulating relations with non-state actors. It is linked to the state's capacity to control the flows of individuals, ideas, information, and capital across borders.

3. Responsible Cooperative Sovereignty: This form of sovereignty expresses active participation in protecting shared domains, commitment to the rules of regional stability, and acceptance of coordination mechanisms without surrendering or compromising political independence.

The central hypothesis is that the more capable a state becomes in managing its regional interconnections - rather than merely controlling its territorial borders - the greater its effective sovereignty becomes, and the lower the probability that it will be transformed into a platform for conflict. Conversely, states that fail to regulate interdependence are transformed from sovereign actors into open arenas of confrontation, even if they continue to retain the formal appearance of sovereign statehood.

If the Gulf Arab states incorporate the capacity to regulate interconnectedness into their definition of sovereignty, this new conception may fundamentally reshape the structure of regional interaction.

Synthesis: Toward a Regional Charter for Responsible Interconnected Sovereignty

The synthesis between the theoretical and applied dimensions of this analysis reveals that what the Gulf states are experiencing today constitutes a practical test of the central premise underlying responsible interconnected sovereignty. When a state fails to regulate regional interconnectedness, it is transformed from a sovereign actor into an open arena of conflict. In this context, foreign military bases, maritime corridors, economic networks, and cross-border proxies are not merely operational details; rather, they constitute the precise points of leakage through which the effective sovereignty of the modern regional state is ultimately determined. Accordingly, any binding regional charter cannot be built solely upon the traditional principle of non-aggression, but must instead rest upon a deeper foundation: the prohibition of using states' territories, military bases, proxies, or strategic corridors as instruments for

16 Krasner ,Sovereignty42–3 ,

destabilizing the shared regional environment. This constitutes the essential core of what may be described as a Charter of Responsible Interconnected Sovereignty.

Within this framework, the message directed toward Iran appears exceptionally clear. If Tehran continues to conceive sovereignty as the capacity for regional expansion through networks and proxies - and through penetration into the sovereignties of neighboring states under various regional justifications - then the Gulf states are increasingly compelled to advance toward an alternative understanding of sovereignty: one that moves beyond influence itself toward preventing countervailing influence and firmly halting any attempt to transform the region into a permanent arena of fire and instability. This understanding depends upon the ability of regional actors, collectively and by majority consensus, to construct a security equation that prevents neutrality from becoming a point of weakness through multilayered fortification - defensive, diplomatic, and economic alike. This is precisely the practical framework proposed by responsible interconnectedsovereignty(17).

The message directed toward partners - foremost among them the United States - is no less clear. Hosting military power does not imply relinquishing the right to define national interest. Future security partnerships must therefore be constructed upon new rules governing consultation, defining the limits of engagement, and providing explicit guarantees to host states when the facilities of a strategic partner become central targets in regional conflict.

It would not be entirely accurate to argue that the war pushed the Gulf states either toward deeper alignment or toward greater neutrality. More precisely, it compelled the Gulf to reconstruct the entire equation. The challenge is no longer a simple choice between two opposing camps, but rather the construction of a new security formula that combines deterrence, internal fortification, defense diversification, preventive diplomacy, and the resilience of the national economy. On this basis, it can be argued that the war of February 28 indeed constituted a decisive turning point in the redefinition of both security and sovereignty in the Gulf. Security had long been understood primarily as a relationship of external protection, while sovereignty was generally conceived as a stable legal condition. After this war, security has become a composite capacity built upon resilience, deterrence, flexibility, and strategic fortification, while sovereignty has evolved into a practical ability to prevent the state from being transformed into an unintended arena for the wars of others.

Conclusion

States that fail to master sovereignty as a delicate and balanced system will ultimately find themselves surrounded by entanglements that consume them rather than being managed by them. In this world, the weakness or strength of states increasingly appears contingent upon their ability to survive without losing the essence of themselves. In the Gulf in particular, the central question is no longer simply: who will protect the state? Rather, it has become: how can the state protect itself from the costs of protection itself when that protection becomes an entry point for the expansion of war? The redefinition of Gulf national security is moving neither toward separation from the American partnership nor toward immersion in a new axis of alignment, but toward the construction of a sovereign doctrine that rec-

17 Khalid Al-Jaber» ,The Limits of Neutrality for Gulf States in the U.S–.Israel–Iran War «,Middle East Council on Global Affairs ,March ,2026 https//:mecouncil.org/publication/limits-gulf-neutrality-us-israel-iran-war/.

ognizes that hosting power does not mean surrendering the right to define national interest.

The sovereign state in today's Middle East is not the state that responds to every strike, but the one capable of preventing the next strike from escalating into a wider war. This is the deepest transformation of all: the Gulf no longer confronts only the question, "Who protects us?" It now faces a far more difficult and realistic question: "How do we build a security order in which the instruments of protection themselves do not become breaches in sovereignty?" At its core, this question constitutes the true title of the post-February 2026 era, and it is precisely what makes responsible interconnected sovereignty an indispensable framework for interpreting the coming phase and formulating responses to it.

Jordan as a Resilience State: Engineering Stability and the Limits of Adaptation in a Turbulent Regional Environment

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The experiences of the past decade-from the outbreak of the Arab uprisings in 2011, through the Syrian war, the rise of jihadist organizations, global economic crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Gaza war, and most recently the war with Iran-demonstrate that Jordan has not existed on the margins of regional shocks, but rather at the center of their political, security, and economic repercussions. Yet despite this succession of crises, the Jordanian state has maintained a remarkable degree of institutional and social cohesion and has avoided the trajectories that drove other states in the region toward collapse, fragmentation, or the loss of control over the public sphere.

Describing Jordan merely as a stable state remains insufficient to explain this experience. Stability implies a relatively fixed condition of equilibrium, whereas the Jordanian state operates within a regional environment that continuously reproduces crises and transmits them internally through borders, refugee flows, energy dependency, markets, the Palestinian issue, and transformations in Syria and Iraq. Jordan therefore appears closer to the model of a "Resilience State,"[1] namely a state that sustains itself through the capacity to absorb shocks, distribute their costs internally, and prevent them from evolving into existential crises.

The distinctiveness of the Jordanian case does not lie in the absence of fragility, but rather in the manner through which fragility is managed. The state has succeeded in developing political, economic, and security mechanisms that enabled it to endure within a constantly shifting regional environment. At the same time, however, Jordan faces a profound paradox: when resilience becomes a permanent mode of crisis management, it risks turning into a substitute for structural transformation and may postpone the resolution of underlying tensions rather than dismantling them. Here

1 A concept referring to the capacity of the state and its institutions to withstand, adapt to, and recover from security crises, economic shocks, or natural disasters while preserving quality of life and maintaining social cohesion. The concept is grounded in effective deterrence capabilities, institutional flexibility, and cohesion between leadership and society. It is increasingly employed as a strategic framework for strengthening state stability and continuity, and has been adopted by several states as a leading governance model.

emerges the central question within the Jordanian experience: does the resilience-state model constitute a sustainable strategy for managing risk, or does it gradually accumulate a form of strategic exhaustion over time?

This paper proceeds from the hypothesis that Jordan has constructed a hybrid model of resilience based on three interconnected pillars: controlled political modernization, an adaptive economy, and a multi-tier security "layered security" capable of managing both external and internal risks. Nevertheless, the sustainability of this model remains contingent upon its ability to transform resilience from a defensive condition into a deeper trajectory of transformation capable of rebuilding trust, expanding participation, and reducing the social costs of reform. Without achieving such a qualitative breakthrough, the model may ultimately generate what can be described as "strategic exhaustion." The central challenge facing Jordan is therefore no longer merely the ability to endure, but rather the ability to prevent resilience itself from evolving into a prolonged condition of attrition.

The Regional Environment as a Structural Condition of Resilience

The Jordanian case cannot be analyzed in isolation from its regional environment, not merely because this environment influences the Kingdom, but because it constitutes one of the principal structural determinants shaping state policy itself. Jordan confronts both internal and external threats while operating within a regional setting that continuously reproduces insecurity and reshapes it through increasingly complex dynamics. The accelerating transformations in the relations among regional and international powers have imposed a permanent condition of strategic uncertainty upon the Kingdom, making it increasingly difficult to rely on fixed patterns of alliances or stable regional balances.

Within this context, the Jordanian state adopted a model of foreign policy management grounded in high flexibility and the avoidance of sharp alignments, while simultaneously maintaining multiple channels of communication that allow it to maneuver within a highly volatile regional environment.

The American-Israeli war against Iran placed Jordan before its most complex regional test since the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011. For the first time, the Kingdom found itself at the center of a direct confrontation affecting its strategic environment from every direction: potential disruption in energy markets, threats to air and commercial corridors, escalating security risks along the borders, and the possibility of conflict spillover into neighboring Arab arenas. The manner in which the Jordanian state managed these developments demonstrated that resilience is no longer merely the capacity to absorb crises, but has evolved into a practical framework for governing a regional environment characterized by an unprecedented degree of uncertainty.

These challenges did not emerge in isolation. Rather, they accumulated through a prolonged trajectory of regional upheavals that fundamentally reshaped the security environment surrounding Jordan, with the Syrian war representing the single most consequential turning point in this transformation.

Since 2011, Jordan's northern border has become one of the most complex fault lines in the region.

The challenges extended far beyond refugee inflows-Jordan has hosted more than 1.3 million Syrians-and expanded to include the rise of narcotics trafficking networks, the infiltration of armed groups, and the erosion of the concept of secure borders as it existed before 2011.

A growing number of analyses have further suggested that southern Syria evolved into a semi-uncontrolled environment, compelling Jordan to move from a traditional border defense strategy toward a model of preemptive cross-border security. Security management thus became part of a daily strategic equation reflecting the recognition that threats are increasingly linked not only to geography itself, but also to transnational networks operating across borders.

True resilience is measured not by the ability to absorb crises, but by the capacity to prevent them from evolving into long-term strategic exhaustion.

To the east, despite the relative improvement in Iraq's security environment, the persistence of institutional fragility and the multiplicity of informal centers of power continue to generate an unpredictable strategic environment, particularly in relation to informal trade networks and threats linked to energy security. The sensitivity of this file intensified further with the American-Israeli war against Iran, as Iraq once again emerged as a potential arena for the exchange of pressure and signaling between Washington and Tehran. In Amman, this possibility is not viewed merely as an internal Iraqi matter, but rather as a factor capable of affecting border security, energy supplies, trade flows, and even the broader level of regional stability.

This environment imposes upon Jordan a condition of constant exposure to spillover effects that manifest in multiple forms. Informal economic interconnections increasingly reshape patterns of cross-border exchange outside formal regulatory frameworks, creating mounting security and monitoring challenges. At the same time, the fragility of the security environment in certain Iraqi regions renders the eastern border an open space for the risks of infiltration or the reconstitution of transnational networks, whether economic or security-oriented in nature.

In addition, instability in Iraqi energy policies, and their occasional linkage to domestic political considerations or broader regional calculations, indirectly affects Jordan, which continues to pursue diversification of its energy sources and the strengthening of its energy security. Consequently, any disruption in this domain is interpreted not only as an economic issue, but also as a factor with implications for overall national stability.More importantly, these threats intersect within a highly complex regional environment, making their management considerably more difficult. Jordan is therefore not confronting a single source of threat that can simply be contained, but rather an interconnected system of overlapping risks that requires a flexible and multidimensional response. Within this context, security extends beyond the narrow notion of border control and evolves into a continuous process of managing cross-border interactions in ways that limit the transmission of re-

gional crises into the domestic sphere.

In the western direction, the Palestinian issue constitutes the most sensitive and complex factor within Jordan's security equation, not only because of its geopolitical dimension, but also due to its deep entanglement with the social and political structure of the state itself. By virtue of its geographic position, demographic composition, and political history, Jordan approaches the Palestinian issue as a structural element that directly affects its internal balances.

Major developments such as the Jerusalem uprising in 2021 and the Gaza war in 2023 demonstrated that any escalation in the Palestinian territories immediately extends into the Jordanian domestic sphere through several interconnected levels.

- The first of these levels is popular pressure, as broad segments of Jordanian society interact with developments in Palestine as an issue carrying national and moral significance rather than merely an external political matter.
- The second level concerns the recurring questioning of political legitimacy, whereby state positions and foreign policies are reassessed in light of developments in the conflict, placing the government under continuous public scrutiny.
- The third level is reflected in the tension that may emerge between the state and society, particularly when the priorities of official policy diverge from prevailing public sentiment.

Developments in Palestine therefore generate not only conventional security threats, but also reshape the domestic political sphere, influence levels of public trust, and reactivate questions of identity and belonging. This makes the Palestinian issue a constant and structurally embedded factor within Jordan's broader stability equation.

This regional environment has placed Jordan before a fundamentally different reality from that which existed in earlier periods. The challenge is no longer confined to protecting borders alone, but increasingly revolves around managing the repercussions of crises that rapidly penetrate the domestic sphere through the economy, energy security, public opinion, and the Palestinian issue itself. With the American-Israeli war against Iran, it became increasingly clear that the state's ability to preserve stability can no longer be understood solely through a traditional security framework, but must also be linked to the management of the domestic political and social sphere under conditions of sustained regional pressure.

Political Modernization: Managing Pluralism Under Pressure

Since 2021, Jordan has witnessed a clear trajectory of political modernization manifested through the establishment of the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System, amendments to the laws governing political parties and elections, and gradual efforts to move toward parliamentary governments. Unlike some states that initiate reform under the pressure of imminent breakdown, Jordan adopted a relatively preemptive approach in which political modernization emerged within the broader context of two interconnected objectives: preventing the repetition of regional instability scenarios and absorbing mounting domestic pressures.

Within this framework, Jordan developed a dis-

tinctive model for managing the domestic political sphere. The model allows a measured degree of political participation and public expression while simultaneously maintaining clear boundaries intended to prevent pluralism from evolving into sharp polarization that could threaten national cohesion.

Political modernization in Jordan therefore operates within a highly delicate equation: expanding participation sufficiently to absorb pressure, while regulating the political arena in ways that prevent it from descending into destabilizing polarization. This explains the significance of the Royal Committee for Political Modernization and the amendments to the electoral and political party laws, which represented an attempt to reorganize participation, introduce new social forces into the public sphere, and prepare the ground for a gradual transition toward parliamentary governance. Yet the trajectory remained governed less by the question of legal texts and more by the question of trust. Laws may open the political space formally, but they do not by themselves guarantee that citizens will engage in politics with a genuine sense of representation and political efficacy.

The central challenge therefore lies in trust rather than institutions alone. Despite the legal reforms, surveys such as those conducted by Arab Barometer continue to indicate low levels of trust in political parties and limited political participation.[2] This reveals a fundamental weakness within the reform process: institutional reform does not necessarily translate into a transformation in the relationship between state and society unless it is accompanied by a deeper reconstruction of that relationship on the basis of trust and meaningful representation.

The limited confidence in political parties further demonstrates that the Jordanian political dilemma is not solely related to the weakness of party organizations themselves, but also to a long history of mutual caution between the state and society. Citizens who do not perceive a direct impact of participation on public policy are likely to remain hesitant to treat political modernization as a substantive transformation. For this reason, the true test of political reform does not lie in the number of parties, parliamentary seats, or newly enacted laws, but rather in the ability of the process to generate a broader public perception that participation can meaningfully influence people's lives.

From the perspective of the state, the issue is not political participation in itself, but rather how participation can be expanded without allowing it to evolve into a form of polarization that becomes difficult to manage within a highly sensitive regional environment.

Economic Modernization: Between the Imperatives of Stability and the Limits of Social Strain

Over the past decade, Jordan has faced accumulating economic pressures that compelled the state to manage the economy through a logic of continuous adaptation rather than one of structural transformation. High levels of public debt coincided with chronic unemployment-particularly among youth-alongside sluggish economic growth, rising costs of public services, and mounting pressures resulting from limited natural resources. These challenges were further

2 Arab Barometer. Jordan Public Opinion Report 2024 (Wave VIII). 2024. https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/ABVIII_Jordan_Report-Public-Opinions-EN-1.pdf

intensified by an unstable regional environment marked by successive political and security crises that directly affected the Jordanian economy through refugee inflows, disruptions in regional trade, and volatility in energy and transportation markets.

Within this context, Jordanian economic policies cannot be understood solely as conventional developmental policies, because a central dimension of these policies has been linked to a political and security function concerned with preserving social stability and reducing the likelihood of internal unrest. Consequently, the state approached the economy not merely as a field of fiscal and administrative reform, but also as an instrument for managing social balances. This was reflected in the continuation of support policies for key sectors, the preservation of social protection networks, the relative expansion of cash assistance programs, and the continued reliance on public-sector employment as a mechanism for absorbing social pressures, particularly in governorates suffering from high unemployment rates.

At different stages, the state also postponed certain economic reforms carrying high social costs or implemented them gradually in order to avoid generating large-scale protest movements within a volatile regional environment. Simultaneously, external assistance played a significant role in enhancing the state's ability to preserve financial and monetary stability, thereby allowing the continuation of essential spending and mitigating the impact of successive economic crises. In this sense, the economy became integrated into the broader system of managing domestic stability rather than remaining a purely technical file detached from political and social considerations.

The most recent regional war revived traditional Jordanian concerns related to energy security and external trade. Disruptions in regional maritime navigation, intermittent closures of the Strait of Hormuz, and fluctuations in oil prices and shipping markets once again exposed the structural sensitivity of the Jordanian economy to external geopolitical shocks. This sensitivity is not confined to the energy sector alone, but extends to transportation, tourism, investment, remittances, and cross-border trade-all sectors that depend, to varying degrees, on regional stability and the uninterrupted movement of economic flows through regional corridors.

The impact of these transformations is amplified by Jordan's geopolitical location at the intersection of highly sensitive regional and commercial routes. Any large-scale regional disruption therefore directly affects the national economy through rising import costs, declining trade flows, disruptions in supply chains, and contractions in tourism and investment activity. For this reason, the war was not interpreted in Amman as a geographically distant military crisis, but rather as a direct test of the state's capacity to preserve economic and social stability within an unstable regional environment.

Despite these pressures, Jordan demonstrated a relative capacity to adapt to successive crises without sliding into comprehensive economic or financial collapse. The state preserved the stability of its monetary institutions, continued fulfilling core financial obligations, and managed the consequences of refugee crises and regional trade disruptions with a degree of institutional flexibility. Yet this adaptive capacity did not reflect deep economic transformation as much as it reflected

a model centered on managing fragility and preventing collapse.

For this reason, the Jordanian economy over the past decade can be described as closer to a "Survival Economy" or "Resilience Economy," a model that does not primarily seek transformative growth, but rather the preservation of a minimum level of monetary, social, and political stability. This model aligns closely with the literature on the management of economic fragility in resource-constrained states, where the priority becomes maintaining institutional continuity and avoiding severe deterioration, even if growth rates and employment opportunities remain below societal expectations.

The strength of this model lies in its ability to absorb shocks and prevent rapid collapse, particularly within a region that has witnessed extensive economic and security disintegration in recent years. Its limitations, however, appear in its weak capacity to address the structural roots of economic and social crises. Persistently high unemployment, declining purchasing power, and expanding living pressures all gradually contribute to the production of social frustration, particularly among younger generations and segments of the middle class.

This reality reveals the complex relationship between the economy and political legitimacy in Jordan. Legitimacy does not rest solely on political representation or the continuity of state institutions, but is also tied to the state's ability to preserve social stability and maintain a minimum degree of distributive justice. Whenever citizens perceive that economic burdens are distributed unevenly, or that the costs of reform are borne more heavily by society than by economic elites, levels of public trust gradually decline, creating a widening gap between institutional stability and societal stability.

> ***When resilience becomes a permanent mode of crisis management, it risks replacing the structural transformation that lasting stability requires.***

Conversely, economic policies that take social considerations into account and balance the requirements of reform with the imperatives of internal stability can strengthen the state's ability to preserve social cohesion, particularly within a regional environment characterized by high levels of uncertainty. The central Jordanian economic dilemma in the current phase therefore concerns how to transition from a model centered on crisis management and survival toward one more capable of generating growth, employment opportunities, and greater economic sustainability without undermining the political and social balances that have preserved state stability over the past decade.

This reality ultimately underscores a central fact: in Jordan, the economy forms an integral component of the equation of political legitimacy itself. The more citizens perceive that the costs of

reform are distributed unequally, the more trust declines and the likelihood of social tension increases. Conversely, policies that preserve a strong social dimension can contribute significantly to reinforcing stability even under highly difficult conditions.

National Security: From Deterrence to the Integrated Management of Risk

In the Jordanian case, security cannot be separated from the surrounding political, economic, and social environment; rather, it is produced through their continuous interaction. Public trust in the state, the capacity of the economy to absorb social and economic pressures, and the degree of societal cohesion all directly influence national stability and determine the state's ability to manage crises and prevent regional tensions from spilling into the domestic sphere.

This dynamic explains Jordan's adoption of a model of "integrated security," which combines instruments of hard security-such as border protection and the containment of direct threats-with instruments of soft security, including social management, the reinforcement of cohesion, and crisis prevention. This model is reflected in policies of containment alongside the use of political, economic, and social tools aimed at preserving stability without allowing conditions to deteriorate into disorder or fragmentation.

Security in Jordan is therefore not based solely on deterrence. It also depends on the ability of state institutions and security agencies to identify early indicators of tension, whether in the form of social protest, economic pressure, escalation in فلسطين, cross-border smuggling, or instability in neighboring states. In this sense, societal trust becomes an integral component of national security, economic performance becomes part of the broader protection framework, and public policy itself evolves into a preventive instrument rather than merely a reactive mechanism for crisis management.

More importantly, the state does not seek to eliminate threats entirely-an unrealistic objective within such a volatile regional environment. Instead, the priority lies in managing threats within controllable limits and preventing them from escalating into conditions of systemic collapse or widespread disorder. This constitutes the defining characteristic of what may be described as a "Resilience State": a state capable of adapting to an unstable regional environment without losing its institutional continuity or governing capacity.

The significance of the war between the United States and Iran for Jordan lies in the way it transformed the concept of national security itself-from the management of traditional border threats into the management of multidimensional regional risks. The Kingdom confronted not merely the possibility of direct military threats, but rather an interconnected system of risks involving energy security, maritime trade routes, airspace management, supply chains, economic pressures, potential refugee flows, and the political and media repercussions of the conflict on domestic public opinion. As a result, Jordanian security management during the crisis increasingly resembled the governance of an interconnected risk environment rather than the containment of a single identifiable threat.

The Resilience State Model: Integration and the Limits of Balance

The strength of this model lies in the interaction among its different components:

- Political modernization contributes to reducing social tension and reinforcing legitimacy,
- While economic performance helps alleviate social pressures, ultimately supporting broader security stability.
- In turn, security stability provides the necessary environment for the continuation of these processes.

Accordingly, the Jordanian case can be described as a hybrid model based on the interaction among three interconnected pillars: controlled political modernization, an adaptive economy, and an integrated security framework. This interaction enables the state to endure, adapt, and avoid collapse without requiring the achievement of an idealized form of stability that remains difficult to attain within the existing regional environment.

The strength of the Jordanian model derives from the way it links politics, economics, and security within a single governing equation. Political modernization alleviates part of the social pressure by providing broader channels for expression and participation. Economic policy supports stability when it incorporates considerations of social justice. Security institutions, meanwhile, provide the overarching framework that allows these interactions to continue without descending into disorder or institutional breakdown. Yet the relationship among these elements does not always operate harmoniously. Every expansion of political participation raises public expectations, every unbalanced economic reform increases social pressure, and every regional escalation renews the test of the state's ability to regulate the domestic sphere.

Here emerges the central paradox of the resilience state. The model is capable of protecting the state from major shocks, yet it may gradually become accustomed to managing crises rather than resolving their structural causes. Over time, the capacity for adaptation itself may evolve into a form of exhaustion if the gap between declared reform and tangible outcomes remains wide. In this sense, resilience does not represent weakness, but neither does it constitute an end in itself.

Conclusion: Resilience as a Phase Rather Than an End State

Despite Jordan's clear success in developing an advanced model of resilience, the true value of this model lies not merely in its ability to prevent collapse, but in its capacity to create a pathway toward transformation. The Jordanian state has succeeded in weathering major regional shocks, preserving relative stability, and maintaining its position as a credible regional actor. Yet these achievements do not mean that the model has reached a stage of completion.

Sustained resilience carries a delicate paradox. It grants the state additional time, mitigates the effects of crises, and preserves institutional cohesion, yet it can gradually evolve into a permanent mechanism for managing postponement if it is not accompanied by deeper political reform grounded in trust, a more equitable economic model, and a conception of national security that incorporates indicators of social tension into its early calculations. At this point, the risk emerges from the success of the model itself, because it may encourage the state to manage crises rather t

han address their structural roots.

Jordan has succeeded in developing a relatively distinctive regional model based on crisis management rather than collapse, and on adaptation rather than rigidity. However, this success should not be understood as a completed condition, but rather as an ongoing trajectory facing continuously evolving challenges.

At the same time, this model is not without limits. Its sustainability remains contingent upon the state's ability to adapt to internal challenges that are no less serious than external threats. Continuous resilience may gradually become a substitute for structural transformation, meaning that the state may succeed in managing crises while postponing the resolution of their underlying causes. Without achieving a qualitative breakthrough, this trajectory may ultimately generate what can be described as "strategic exhaustion," a condition in which resources gradually erode and adaptive capacity declines over time.

Moreover, rising levels of political and economic awareness may widen the gap between what the state provides and what society expects, thereby generating additional pressure on the broader stability framework. In addition, unforeseen regional transformations may place this model before increasingly difficult tests.

For this reason, the sustainability of Jordanian resilience appears dependent upon three interconnected transformations. First, political modernization must evolve from institutional engineering into meaningful participation that citizens perceive as genuinely consequential. Second, economic modernization must be reformulated around principles of social justice and a more balanced distribution of the costs of reform. Third, the concept of national security itself must expand to include public trust, social tension, and youth expectations as early-warning indicators no less important than conventional border threats.

Jordan's strength lies in the fact that it has learned how to endure within a turbulent regional environment. The next challenge is to transform this resilience from a defensive capacity into a project of structural transformation. A state that succeeds in managing crises merely buys time, whereas a state that uses that time to rebuild trust, strengthen the economy, and deepen participation is the only kind of state capable of transforming resilience into sustainable power.

The significance of the American-Israeli war against Iran for Jordan lies in the fact that it provided a practical test of the resilience model developed by the Jordanian state over the past decade. The crisis demonstrated the capacity of Jordanian institutions to absorb the political, economic, and security pressures generated by a large-scale regional conflict, while simultaneously exposing the limitations of the model itself. The more the state relies on the continuous management of successive crises, the greater the need becomes to transform resilience from a defensive mechanism into a deeper and more sustainable political and economic project. The central question posed by the war for Jordan therefore concerns not merely the state's ability to overcome the current crisis, but its ability to prepare for regional crises that may become more frequent and more complex in the years ahead. The fundamental challenge facing Jordan is no longer simply the ability to endure, but rather the ability to prevent resilience itself from evolving into a prolonged condition of attrition.

Iraq and the War on Iran: Transformations of the State and the Regional Sphere

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Introduction: The War on Iran and the Redefinition of Iraq's Regional Position

The war on Iran does not merely represent a military confrontation linked to the nuclear program or to the traditional conflict between Iran, the United States, and Israel. Rather, it reflects a profound moment of regional restructuring in the Middle East, extending beyond the boundaries of direct conflict toward the redefinition of spheres of influence, the functions of states, and the nature of the security environment across the Arab Mashreq. At the center of these transformations stands Iraq as one of the arenas most deeply affected by the war - not only because of geography, but also because of the political and security structure that emerged within the country after 2003, transforming it into a principal intersection point for American and Iranian interests in the region.

The war reveals a qualitative transformation in Iraq's position within the regional equation, as the country has moved beyond its traditional role as an arena for the intersection of American and Iranian influence to become a space through which regional balances themselves are being reconfigured. In this context, the conflict is no longer defined solely by the scale of influence exercised by regional and international powers inside Iraq, but rather by the function Iraq is expected to perform within the emerging structure of the Middle East. The central question is whether Iraq will continue to operate as an extension of Iran's strategic depth, or whether it will move toward integration within the Arab, Gulf, and broader international sphere as a state capable of reordering its own security and economic domains. From this perspective, the war represents a pivotal moment in Iraq's transition from a field for managing external influence into a geopolitical and security nexus through which the balances of the Arab Mashreq are being reorganized.

Over the past two decades, Iraq gradually shifted from being a central state within the Arab regional order into an open geopolitical sphere for regional and international competition. A political-security model emerged inside the country based on balancing American influence and

Iranian influence, making Iraq's stability directly dependent upon the nature of relations between the two sides. Yet the current war has pushed this equation into a far more complex phase, because the conflict is no longer merely about managing influence or containing escalation; rather, it has become an attempt to redesign the regional environment itself. This development places Iraq before a decisive strategic moment concerning the future of the state and its regional function.

Within this context, Iraq is no longer viewed merely as an Iranian "sphere of influence," but increasingly as a central arena for reshaping regional balances in the post-war order. The United States views the reconstruction of the security order in the Arab Mashreq as inseparable from reconfiguring the Iraqi sphere and reducing Iran's capacity to use it as a platform for regional influence. Conversely, Iran regards Iraq as the most important defensive line for its strategic depth, and losing influence there would signify a substantial decline in its ability to shape regional balances.

Accordingly, Iraq's crisis in the post-war period will not simply be a crisis of political order or domestic balances of power, but rather a crisis concerning the very nature of the state itself: can Iraq evolve into a sovereign state capable of making independent decisions and managing its regional relations according to the logic of national interest, or will it remain an open arena for overlapping external influence and regional conflict? This is what makes the war on Iran a moment of comprehensive redefinition for Iraq's position within the emerging regional order, rather than merely a passing security development.

First: Iraq - From a Sphere of Influence to an Arena of Regional Reengineering

The war on Iran has redefined Iraq's position within regional balances in an unprecedented manner. Iraq is no longer merely an Iranian sphere of influence or a traditional arena of American-Iranian confrontation; rather, it has evolved into one of the principal arenas for the reengineering of the regional order in the post-war phase. This transformation is linked not only to the rise or decline of Iranian influence, but also to the nature of the role Iraq is expected to perform within the emerging regional environment.

Over the past two decades, the Iraqi equation was built upon a form of "undeclared balance" between United States and Iran. The United States ensured the survival of the Iraqi state and its formal institutions, while Iran succeeded in constructing an extensive network of influence within Iraq's political, security, and social structures. However, the current war has pushed this equation toward gradual disintegration, as Washington increasingly views Iraq's continued incorporation within the Iranian sphere of influence as a direct threat to its broader project of reshaping regional balances across the Mashreq and the Gulf.

Conversely, Iran recognizes that losing Iraq - or even witnessing a decline in its ability to shape developments there - would signify not merely a reduction in regional influence, but the collapse of one of the most important pillars of its "forward defense" strategy. Consequently, Iraq has become, for both sides, a decisive arena for redefining influence rather than merely managing it.

The danger of the current phase lies in the fact that

Iraq today stands between two contradictory projects: one seeks to reintegrate Iraq into the broader Arab, Gulf, and international environment as a stable and functional state; the other seeks to preserve Iraq within Iran's strategic sphere as an advanced defensive line safeguarding Tehran's regional influence. This contradiction makes Iraq one of the most sensitive and unstable arenas of the post-war regional order.

Second: Transformations in Iraq's Security Sphere and the Crisis of Sovereignty

The war on Iran has exposed the fragility of Iraqi sovereignty in an unprecedented manner, as the Iraqi state no longer faces conventional threats related solely to territorial borders. Instead, it has become part of an interconnected regional security sphere in which military, intelligence, economic, and cyber dimensions overlap and interact simultaneously.

Today, Iraq does not exercise full control over its own security domain due to the multiplicity of armed actors, the overlap of political loyalties, and the connection of certain internal forces to competing regional agendas. As a result, the Iraqi state has frequently proven incapable of monopolizing security decision-making or preventing its territory from being used as an arena for the exchange of regional messages and confrontations.

The current war has also demonstrated that the concept of sovereignty is no longer defined solely by the prevention of external intervention, but rather by the state's ability to control its own strategic decision-making process internally. Iraq may possess formal institutions, an army, and a government, yet it continues to face a fundamental challenge concerning the capacity of these institutions to impose their authority across the entirety of the domestic security sphere.

Within this context, Iraq has moved from a phase of "managing threats" to one of "managing attrition" - that is, coping with prolonged security, political, and economic pressures that gradually erode the state without necessarily producing outright collapse. This pattern of threat constitutes one of the most dangerous transformations generated by the war, because it places Iraq in a permanent condition of structural instability.

> ***The war reveals a qualitative transformation in Iraq's position within the regional equation. It has moved beyond its traditional role as an arena for U.S.–Iranian competition to become a strategic space through which regional balances themselves are being reshaped.***

Third: Armed Factions Between the Iranian Function and the Post-War Dilemma

Armed factions constitute one of the most sensitive and complex issues in the post-war phase following the war on Iran, because they are no longer merely military forces. Rather, they have evolved into an intertwined political, economic, and security structure exercising broad influence within the Iraqi state. Over the past years, these factions represented one of the principal instruments of Iranian influence, providing Iran with the ability to shape Iraqi decision-making without requiring an extensive direct presence.

However, the current war has pushed these factions into a complicated strategic dilemma. On the one hand, they cannot fully detach themselves from the Iranian project due to the depth of their ideological, political, and security ties. On the other hand, maintaining the same role and function after the war may place them under increasing American, regional, and international pressure.

At the same time, the new regional transformations no longer permit the same margin of maneuver that these factions enjoyed during the phase of the "war on terrorism" or the era of "indirect deterrence." The regional environment is increasingly moving toward the reconstruction of the centralized state and the reduction of the role of non-state armed actors. Consequently, the future of these factions has become closely tied to their ability to adapt to a different political and security environment.

The war has also revived the question of the "state monopoly over arms" as an issue connected not merely to Iraq's internal stability, but to its future regional position as well. Iraq's reintegration into the broader Arab and international environment is becoming increasingly dependent upon the state's capacity to regulate the security sphere and reduce the multiplicity of armed centers of power.

Fourth: The United States and the Reconstruction of Iraq's Functional Role

The United States no longer views Iraq solely through the lens of counterterrorism. Rather, it increasingly treats Iraq as a central component in the broader project of reshaping the security architecture of the Arab Mashreq following the war on Iran. Yet the current American approach differs significantly from the post-2003 phase, as it is no longer based on direct occupation or state-building through military force. Instead, it seeks to reproduce a "functional Iraq" capable of integrating into the emerging regional order without becoming a source of instability or a threat to the balances Washington aims to consolidate across the region.

Accordingly, the United States now relies on more sophisticated instruments that include financial and economic pressure, the restructuring of security cooperation, support for formal state institutions, and the gradual integration of Iraq into the Gulf and broader Arab framework, alongside efforts to reduce the capacity of armed factions to shape security and political decision-making. This approach aims to produce an Iraq that is less dependent on Iran and more capable of playing a balancing role within the new regional environment, while avoiding the costs of a comprehensive American military confrontation on Iraqi territory.

However, this strategy faces complex structural challenges because Iranian influence in Iraq is no longer confined to military or security dimensions alone. It has become deeply embedded within economic networks, political structures, and social and religious spheres, making the process of reshaping the Iraqi arena far more complicated than merely containing or weakening armed factions. Consequently, the American-Iranian struggle inside Iraq has gradually evolved from a conventional contest over influence into a struggle concerning the very nature of the Iraqi state itself and the form of its positioning within

the coming regional order.

Within this context, the current American approach toward the government of Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi appears to form part of a broader strategy aimed at recalibrating Iraq's political and security sphere in the post-war period. Washington has provided conditional support to the al-Zaidi government, tied to a number of requirements, foremost among them controlling the weapons of armed factions, reorganizing relations with Iran, and strengthening the centralization of security decision-making under state authority. The American administration recognizes that no project aimed at reintegrating Iraq into the Arab and Gulf environment can succeed without reducing the multiplicity of competing centers of power inside the Iraqi state.

Conversely, failure by the al-Zaidi government to address these conditions may push the administration of President Donald Trump to treat Iraq as part of a broader American vision for reshaping the position of Iran and its regional allies in the aftermath of the war. Such a scenario could open the door to a more intense phase of political, economic, and security pressure on Baghdad, particularly if armed factions continue to exercise a role that extends beyond the boundaries of the state and its formal institutions.

Fifth: Iraq and the New Regional Corridors

The war on Iran has revealed that conflict in the Middle East is no longer managed solely through military power or traditional deterrence balances. Instead, it has become increasingly tied to control over trade corridors, energy routes, supply chains, and strategic infrastructure. Regional and international competition in the current phase no longer revolves merely around political influence, but around which actors possess the capacity to control the movement of trade, energy, and geopolitical connectivity between Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Within this context, Iraq emerges as one of the most important geopolitical nodes capable of linking the Gulf region with the Mashreq, Turkey, and Europe.

Accordingly, the importance of activating alternative oil transportation routes outside the Strait of Hormuz has increased significantly, whether through Syria, Jordan, or Saudi Arabia. Likewise, the "Development Road Project" has gained strategic prominence, representing not merely an economic or logistical initiative, but an attempt to redefine Iraq's geopolitical function within the emerging regional environment. Through this project, Baghdad seeks to transition from the model of a "rentier state" dependent primarily on oil revenues to that of a "nodal state" occupying a central position within regional transportation, energy, and trade networks. Such a transformation offers Iraq an opportunity to rebuild its strategic position not only as an energy producer, but as a vital regional corridor linking the Gulf to Europe through Turkey.

At the same time, however, the war on Iran has once again highlighted the fragility of Iraq's economic position, since any instability in the Gulf or the Strait of Hormuz directly affects Iraqi oil exports, trade flows, investment activity, transportation costs, and insurance expenses. Moreover, the growing significance of overland corridors and geopolitical alternatives to traditional maritime routes may encourage regional and international powers to treat Iraq as an arena of

competition over economic influence, not merely security influence.

Within this framework, the struggle over Iraq no longer concerns only who possesses political or security influence inside the country, but also who determines Iraq's position within the new regional maps of trade and energy. Economic corridors have become an integral component of the reshaping of geopolitical balances in the Middle East, making Iraq's future increasingly dependent upon its ability to transform itself from a "passageway for crises" into a "regional connectivity hub" capable of performing a functional role within the regional and international economy.

Nevertheless, the success of this transformation remains conditional upon Iraq's ability to achieve political and security stability. Any persistently unstable environment will make it difficult to attract investment or develop infrastructure capable of regional competitiveness. Consequently, Iraq's post-war economic future will depend not only on oil prices or the scale of its natural resources, but also on its ability to manage its geographic position as a source of strategic power rather than as an open arena for regional conflict and competition.

Sixth: The Gulf and Iraq - From Security Containment to Conditional Partnership

The war on Iran may lead to a deeper redefinition of the relationship between Iraq and the Gulf states than at any previous stage. This is particularly true following the numerous attacks launched by Iran-aligned armed factions against Gulf countries, especially Kuwait, and the resulting statements of condemnation issued by the Gulf Cooperation Council, which held Iraq responsible for these attacks. Gulf states no longer view Iraq solely through the lens of security threats or Iranian influence; rather, they have increasingly come to recognize that Iraq's stability constitutes an integral component of the stability of the Gulf environment itself.

Accordingly, the Gulf approach toward Iraq may gradually shift from a policy of "defensive containment" to one of "conditional partnership" - namely, political and economic engagement with Baghdad in exchange for strengthening state institutions, reducing the influence of armed factions, and consolidating state control over the domestic security sphere.

At the same time, Iraq understands that its reintegration into the Gulf environment could provide an opportunity to reduce the degree of its economic and political dependence on Iran while opening the door to major regional investments and strategic development projects. However, the success of this transformation will remain closely tied to Baghdad's ability to build a stable state capable of protecting sovereign decision-making and providing a secure environment for economic and investment cooperation.

> ***The war therefore represents a pivotal moment in Iraq's transition from an arena for managing influence to a geopolitical and security nexus through which the balance of power in the Arab Mashreq is being reorganized.***

Seventh: The Future of the Iraqi State in the Emerging Regional Order

The war on Iran reveals that Iraq today stands before a decisive historical moment concerning the redefinition of the state itself, rather than merely the reconfiguration of internal political balances. The central question in the post-war phase no longer revolves around who governs Iraq today or the shape of future governing coalitions, but rather the nature of the Iraqi state that will emerge within the new regional environment: will Iraq become a state capable of monopolizing security and political decision-making and managing its external relations according to the logic of national interest, or will it remain an open arena for overlapping regional and international influence and the multiplication of internal centers of power?

Within this context, the real challenge facing Iraq lies not merely in avoiding the repercussions of the war or containing its security and economic consequences, but in utilizing this moment of regional transformation to rebuild the state and strengthen the concept of sovereignty as the capacity to control strategic decision-making rather than as a mere political slogan. The more Baghdad succeeds in bringing weapons under state authority, strengthening formal institutions, diversifying its regional and international relationships, and reducing its dependence on external conflicts, the greater its ability to move from the position of a "conflict arena" to that of a "regional actor" capable of influencing surrounding balances of power.

Conversely, the continuation of the overlap between the state and armed factions, and between national decision-making and external pressures, may push Iraq toward a more fragile and unstable phase, particularly if the post-war environment evolves into an open arena for the redistribution of influence across the Arab Mashreq and the Gulf region. Iraq today faces a crisis that extends beyond traditional political divisions to the level of a "crisis of the state model" itself - that is, a crisis concerning the ability of the political system established after 2003 to survive within a regional environment increasingly moving toward the redefinition of the concepts of security, sovereignty, and the function of the state.

Accordingly, Iraq's future within the emerging regional order will depend on its capacity to transition from the logic of "managing fragile balances" to that of "building a capable state" - a state that possesses sovereign decision-making authority, manages its foreign relations according to an independent strategic vision, and repositions its geographic location and economic resources within a national project capable of reducing its vulnerability to regional transformations. Otherwise, Iraq may remain one of the Middle East's most exposed arenas for long-term geopolitical exhaustion and competition.

Conclusion

The war on Iran reveals that Iraq stands today before one of its most sensitive and consequential moments since 2003, because the transformations currently unfolding are not limited merely to the redistribution of influence across the region, but extend to the redefinition of the regional order itself and the function of states within it. Within this context, Iraq is no longer simply a country affected by the conflict; rather, it has become one of the principal arenas through which the shape of the new balances in the Arab Mashreq and the

Gulf will ultimately be determined.

The current war has demonstrated that the model of "Iraq as an open arena" is no longer sustainable in the same form that emerged over the past two decades, particularly within a regional environment increasingly moving toward the reconstruction of security and economic spheres on new foundations centered around reducing the role of non-state actors, enhancing the strategic importance of economic and energy corridors, and redefining the relationship between the state, sovereignty, and security.

At the same time, Iraq now stands before a decisive strategic crossroads: either it succeeds in utilizing this moment of regional transformation to rebuild the state, reinforce the centrality of sovereign decision-making, and open itself toward its Arab and regional environment as a balancing state and a strategic connectivity hub; or it remains an open arena for American-Iranian competition and regional conflict, with all the accompanying risks of long-term exhaustion and structural instability.

Accordingly, Iraq's future after the war will not be determined solely by the outcome of military confrontation, diplomatic settlements, or the scale of American and Iranian influence inside the country. Rather, it will depend fundamentally upon the capacity of the Iraqi state itself to redefine its position and function within a regional order moving toward a phase of greater complexity, fluidity, and competition than ever before.

Ultimately, Iraq's post-war future will not be determined solely by the balance of American and Iranian influence, but by its ability to transform from a space through which the conflicts of others are managed into a state capable of redefining its position and function according to the logic of national interest. If Baghdad succeeds in controlling armed actors, consolidating sovereign decision-making, and leveraging its geographical position within emerging networks of energy, trade, and regional corridors, Iraq may shift from being a fragile arena of contestation to becoming an active regional nexus. However, if the dual-state dynamic persists, Iraq will remain one of the Middle East's most vulnerable arenas for prolonged exhaustion and external competition-not because it lacks resources, but because it remains unable to convert its strategic location into effective sovereignty.

The Economic Consequences of the U.S.-Israeli War on Iran: The Open-Ended Calculation and Its Aftermath

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War is not an isolated military event whose consequences end at the boundaries of the battlefield. Rather, it generates ripple effects whose repercussions extend to both productive and service sectors. Major wars throughout modern history have demonstrated that economic losses often exceed military losses in both scale and duration. The Second World War destroyed nearly one-third of Europe's human capital, while the First Gulf War showed that merely threatening oil sources and supply flows was sufficient to shake the global economy even before military operations had begun.

Within the context of the ongoing U.S.-Israeli war on Iran - a conflict that remains an an open-ended conflict - direct and indirect economic consequences have expanded far beyond the immediate parties involved, affecting the global arena as a whole. Many countries that are not directly engaged in the conflict nevertheless continue to endure its negative repercussions.

This article examines several levels through which the economic impacts of the war can be analyzed: the energy crisis; disruptions to supply chains and shortages of goods; the implications for Arab economies, both oil-producing and non-oil-producing alike; and finally, the indirect costs associated with setbacks to economic reform programs and the implementation of future development visions in several countries across the region.

The U.S.–Israeli war on Iran reveals that the economy is no longer merely a domain that absorbs the consequences of conflict, but has itself become part of the architecture of power. Maritime chokepoints, energy markets, supply chains, maritime insurance, food, and fertilizers have all evolved into instruments in the management of strategic pressure. In this sense, the economic repercussions of war cannot be understood as mere side effects, but rather as expressions of geoeconomics, whereby states and other actors leverage

their positions within networks of interdependence to impose political and economic costs simultaneously on adversaries, allies, and global markets alike.

Energy Supply Crisis

Before the outbreak of the war, Brent crude prices hovered around $70 per barrel. However, the American and Israeli attacks on Iran pushed prices within days to between $80 and $82, before surpassing the $120 threshold during certain periods. According to reports and assessments issued by the International Monetary Fund, only a limited number of countries are expected to escape the repercussions of rising energy prices, as recently stated by IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva during the Fund's Spring Meetings in April.

The most visible impact resulted from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly 20% of global oil supplies and massive quantities of liquefied natural gas pass each day. The disruption of this strategic artery effectively threatened energy supplies to countries such as China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Pakistan. Several states subsequently declared emergency measures and adopted consumption austerity policies as part of broader efforts to adapt to the severe market disruptions. At the same time, a number of oil refineries in producing countries were targeted, disrupting production capacities and placing energy infrastructure under the constant threat of attack.

Here, the significance of interdependence as a weapon becomes evident. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz would not target the United States or Israel alone; it would disrupt a vast network of importers, producers, insurance firms, shipping companies, and financial markets. The broader the circle of affected actors becomes, the greater the ability of the party generating the disruption to transform a limited military confrontation into a multidirectional global pressure crisis. In this sense, the danger of Hormuz lies not only in its geographic position, but in its function as a central node within a deeply interconnected global economy.

Disruptions to Supply Chains and International Trade

The first weeks of the confrontation exposed the extreme fragility of global trade arteries passing through the region. The sharp increase in maritime shipping costs along certain routes - in some cases multiplying several times over - alongside the significant rise in air freight prices, demonstrated that the crisis threatens not only the flow of goods, but also the cost of producing and transporting them. Maritime insurance companies increased their premiums by between 300% and 500% for voyages crossing the Strait of Hormuz, forcing shipping companies to reroute vessels around the Cape of Good Hope and thereby adding between two and three weeks to each journey.

The projections issued by the International Monetary Fund reflect a growing recognition that the war is likely to leave a profound mark on global economic growth, as the Fund lowered its growth forecasts while simultaneously raising inflation expectations. The impact intensified further when Gulf airspaces were closed, effectively paralyzing air freight traffic for sensitive goods such as pharmaceuticals and electronics, whose transportation costs rose by between 60 and 80% on some routes.

All of this unfolded within the context of highly interconnected global markets and supply chains characterized by an unprecedented level of complexity compared to previous energy crises. As a

result, the wave of inflation experienced by consumers was not driven solely by higher oil prices; rather, it emerged from a combination of rising energy costs, soaring freight rates, shortages of production inputs, and escalating insurance expenses. Consequently, the compounded costs of the crisis gradually shifted to the final consumer. This perhaps explains part of the growing concern among world leaders regarding the consequences of a war in which they did not choose to participate, yet whose repercussions are likely to affect their political standing and electoral prospects.

The war has also demonstrated that the relationship between energy and food is far more organic and interconnected than is commonly assumed. Natural gas constitutes the primary raw material in the production of nitrogen-based fertilizers, and when Qatari gas supplies were disrupted - following Qatar's suspension of production at the Ras Laffan Industrial City complex after the Iranian strikes - the energy crisis quickly evolved into a fertilizer crisis, with repercussions extending across global agriculture as a whole. Analyses by the International Fertilizer Association estimated that supply shortages would first and most severely affect corn and wheat crops, both of which rely heavily on nitrogen fertilizers. This indicates that the food supply dimension of the crisis may emerge in later stages as a direct extension of the energy shock - precisely what is meant by the cascading effects of this war.

In non-oil-producing Arab countries, where large segments of the population spend between 40% and 60% of their income on food, this second wave of the crisis is likely to be the most painful. Vulnerable households are often unable to absorb a new surge in food prices layered on top of already rising electricity and fuel costs, particularly within economies whose local currencies were already suffering from entrenched inflationary pressures.

One of the most striking characteristics of this logistical crisis has been the emergence of the phenomenon known as "precautionary stockpiling." Governments, corporations, and households simultaneously rushed to increase their reserves of essential commodities, thereby amplifying demand and driving prices upward beyond the actual impact of the supply shortage itself.

The war demonstrated that global supply chains do not function as linear routes, but rather as highly sensitive and interconnected networks. The disruption of a single node—such as the Strait of Hormuz or Gulf airspace—does not merely generate a transportation crisis; it triggers a cascading chain of delays, rising costs, input shortages, and declining productive capacity. In this regard, the fragility of supply chains emerges as one of the war's most significant consequences, revealing that the global economy built its efficiency on speed and low cost, yet incurred a substantial price once these networks were exposed to a major security shock.

The U.S.–Israeli war against Iran reveals that the economy is no longer merely a domain affected by conflict; it has become an integral part of the architecture of power itself. Maritime chokepoints, energy markets, supply chains, maritime insurance, food, and fertilizers have all become instruments of strategic pressure.

Implications for Arab States

Although rising oil prices theoretically imply higher revenues for oil-producing countries, the reality on the ground proved far more complex. Producers do not benefit from elevated prices if they are unable to export their output. This was precisely the consequence of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, as Gulf economies incurred losses estimated in the billions of dollars due to the disruption of export operations, in addition to severe damage affecting energy facilities and electricity infrastructure whose repair costs are likewise expected to amount to billions more. The degree of impact varies according to each country's dependence on exports passing through the Strait of Hormuz, yet what remains constant is that the losses are likely to exceed by far the preliminary estimates currently being circulated.

Elsewhere, Egypt represents a model of a non-oil-producing state bearing the costs of a war in which it did not participate. The Suez Canal - one of the country's most important sources of foreign currency - came under mounting pressure amid escalating maritime risks in the Red Sea and the Gulf region. Simultaneously, the closure of regional airspaces affected aviation and tourism flows alike. In an economy already burdened by inflationary pressures and a balance-of-payments deficit, rising energy, food, and shipping costs have compounded the strain borne by ordinary citizens.

For its part, Jordan is not a direct party to the war, yet it is disproportionate economic costs that exceed its relative economic capacity. The country depends almost entirely on imported energy and is geographically positioned between four simultaneous zones of tension: the occupied Palestinian territories to the west, Iraq to the east, Syria to the north, and a Gulf region experiencing unprecedented instability.

On the energy front, Jordan imports the overwhelming majority of its energy needs, meaning that every increase in oil and gas prices is directly reflected in citizens' electricity bills and in higher production costs for companies, alongside broader inflationary effects across the economy. Under such circumstances, the Jordanian economy is unlikely to achieve the targets outlined in the country's Economic Modernization Vision, which the government has sought to implement.

In terms of trade and shipping, the several-fold increase in maritime and air freight costs along certain routes means that the crisis threatens not only the movement of goods, but also the costs associated with producing and transporting them. As an economy reliant on imported industrial inputs, Jordan bears this doubled burden both when importing production materials and when exporting finished products, thereby reducing its potential competitiveness.

Tourism, one of the country's principal sources of foreign currency, has likewise suffered a severe setback. The sector witnessed a sharp decline in summer bookings from the very first weeks of the war.

At the level of lost economic opportunities, Jordan had entered 2026 relying on two major channels for growth: expanding economic relations with Iraq and the Gulf states and benefiting from the reconstruction of Syria in the post-war phase. The latter represented a significant opportunity to increase Jordanian exports and logistical activity. However, the war disrupted these channels and weakened investor confidence. Regional tensions reshaped Iraq's priorities, while the momentum surrounding Syrian reconstruction - which Jordan had hoped to leverage as an important economic gateway - declined substantially.

Disruptions to Reform Agendas and Delays in Implementing Strategic Visions

The war exposed deep structural vulnerabilities in the trajectory of Arab economic reform efforts. Saudi Vision 2030 - arguably the most ambitious transformation project in the region - was built upon three core pillars: predictable oil revenues, a secure regional environment, and the country's reputation as a stable center for trade and investment. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz placed all three pillars under a serious and unprecedented test.

Saudi Arabia recorded a historic budget deficit during the first quarter of 2026, despite the Kingdom's decision during the war to increase public spending by 20% in an effort to reassure both citizens and investors. Nevertheless, mega-projects such as NEOM, alongside several other initiatives associated with Vision 2030, experienced delays in implementation and a slowdown in the pace of concluding major contracts.

Similarly, the United Arab Emirates - which had advanced further than most regional economies in the path toward economic diversification - faced a difficult test of its own. The closure of the country's airspace disrupted operations at Dubai International Airport, one of the busiest airports in the world, for several days, inflicting major losses on Emirati airlines as well as on the tourism, exhibition, and conference sectors. At the height of the crisis, the UAE also chose to withdraw from Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries - a move carrying significant strategic messages, yet one that may cast a shadow over its future negotiating leverage within the international oil production system.

Meanwhile, Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt have for years pursued reform trajectories governed by agreements with the International Monetary Fund and by national economic modernization programs. These initiatives provided financial support packages tied to reform measures related to subsidies, taxation, and public-sector restructuring. However, the sharp rise in energy and food prices made the implementation of such reforms exceptionally difficult for political and social reasons. Governments facing mounting public anger over rising living costs are unable, at the same time, to remove subsidies on essential goods or introduce further tax reforms without risking heightened instability.

One of the war's most severe consequences for the reform process has been the erosion of business confidence across the region. Foreign direct investment does not flow toward environments dominated by uncertainty and strategic ambiguity. Moreover, several major investment decisions that had already entered advanced negotiation stages were postponed. Even after the announcement of a ceasefire, foreign investors remain hesitant due to the security threats and instability the region has experienced over the past two years.

It is increasingly evident that the repercussions of the war have imposed a double burden on the countries of the region: immediate economic losses on the one hand, and lost developmental opportunities on the other. These consequences are likely to manifest themselves through rising unemployment and poverty rates, alongside delays in implementing economic visions and necessary structural reforms. The central dilemma is that this conflict remains an open-ended file, vulnerable to all possible scenarios.

The only certainty is that a profound transformation has already occurred, and restoring economic momentum will likely require years at best. As for the broader cumulative consequences of the

war, their reverberations will continue to unfold progressively in the periods ahead.

The U.S.–Israeli war on Iran demonstrates that the economy can no longer be understood merely as a sphere that absorbs the consequences of conflict after it occurs; rather, it has become an integral component of the architecture of war itself. Rising energy prices, disruptions to maritime corridors, escalating insurance and shipping costs, and the possibility of a gas crisis spilling over into food markets through the fertilizer sector all indicate that economic security has become a direct pillar of both national and regional security. The central lesson, therefore, lies not only in the scale of the immediate losses, but also in the fragility of Arab development models when confronted with external shocks over which most states possess neither the power to initiate nor to terminate.

Accordingly, there is an urgent need for Arab states to shift from a reactive approach to crises toward a strategy centered on building preemptive economic resilience. This entails developing strategic reserves of food and energy, diversifying import and transportation routes, reducing dependence on single maritime chokepoints, and establishing regional coordination mechanisms in the fields of energy, shipping, insurance, and emergency financing. As this crisis demonstrates, future wars may no longer be measured solely by the number of missiles launched or strikes conducted, but by the capacity of states to keep their markets functioning, their currencies stable, their food supplies accessible, and their development programs sustainable under conditions of prolonged pressure.

The economic consequences of war cannot be viewed as mere side effects; they should instead be understood as expressions of geoeconomics, where states and other actors leverage their position within networks of interdependence to impose political and economic costs simultaneously on rivals, allies, and markets.

Syria between Geopolitical Constraint and Regional Repositioning

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Syria after the Axis

The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 marked a strategic rupture in the role Syrian geography had long played within the Iranian axis. For decades, Syria had served as the logistical and overland link between Tehran and southern Lebanon, sustaining Hezbollah's supply lines while remaining embedded in Israeli strategic thinking as a potential source of threat throughout nearly fifteen years of war. Yet the collapse of that arrangement did not produce durable security. Geography is not remade by domestic political change alone; regional powers are already interpreting the strategic opening created by the regime's fall through their own priorities and wider regional designs.

The new Syrian government therefore faces a particularly difficult equation: before it has consolidated a stable state from which to assert neutrality or non-alignment, it must already preserve a margin of autonomy amid a regional contest over Syria's future role.

The challenge reaches beyond the accumulated burdens of a revolution and war that lasted for a decade and a half. It becomes sharper at the level of regional strategy, where Syrian geography itself has become the object of a struggle over its future alignment and political identity, at a junction where the interests of Washington, Tel Aviv, Ankara, Tehran, and the remnants of an axis weakened by war yet still present all meet. Since the outbreak of the US–Israeli war on Iran in February 2026, the Syrian government's existential test has come into sharp relief: can Damascus keep its territory outside the regional conflict, or will the very location that once gave Syria its historical strategic value draw it back into the centre of the struggle in a new form.

From Function to Dilemma: Syrian Geography after Assad

Under Bashar al-Assad, Iran's role in Syria grew beyond alliance into an integrated regional sys-

tem. The overland corridor linking Tehran to southern Lebanon, Syria's function as Hezbollah's strategic rear, and the deployment of units affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps across Syrian territory gave the Iranian axis a practical coherence that far exceeded political coordination or ideological alignment.

The fall of the regime dismantled this system in its previous form without diminishing the strategic value of Syrian geography. It released Syria from its former Iranian alignment while opening it to a new regional contest over the terms of its repositioning. The central paradox lies here. Damascus is trying to build a national authority guided by an independent Syrian interest, outside both the entanglements of the Iranian period and the expectation, common in some quarters, that Iranian alignment would simply give way to Turkish dependency. It has sought to demonstrate this through an unusually active opening towards the Arab world, the reordering of its regional relationships, and a clear effort to avoid full incorporation into any pre-existing alliance structure.

Israel, however, has met this transformation with neither recognition nor restraint. The persistence of strikes on Syrian territory after the regime's fall suggests that Israeli anxiety is attached less to the identity of Syria's rulers than to what Syria might become if it recovers the capacity to act. A deeper geopolitical constraint shapes this entire predicament. Syria lies at the intersection of the Levant, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Arabian Peninsula, and borders Turkey, Israel, Iraq, and Lebanon — states whose competing interests bear directly on its room for strategic manoeuvre. Neutrality in such a setting cannot rest on declaration alone; it requires either regional acceptance or the power to sustain it. Robert Kaplan's notion of the "revenge of geography" is useful here: geography narrows the field of strategic choice without cancelling political agency altogether[1]. For Syria, therefore, keeping its territory outside the wider regional conflict is a long-term task of state-building and power accumulation.

> ***Geography is not redefined by domestic political change alone. Rather, regional powers reinterpret the strategic vacuum created by the collapse of regimes and seek to reshape it according to their own priorities and regional strategies.***

Israel and Syrian Re covery as a Threat

The most serious obstacle to Damascus's attempt

1 Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012), pp. 13–25.
I use the concept of *geographical constraint* here to describe the way location shapes the range of options available to political actors without reducing policy to a deterministic outcome of geography. This framing is analytically more precise for the argument advanced in this article than the classical geopolitical language of geographical determinism, which has been widely criticised for diminishing the role of political agency and historical contingency. Syrian geography, as the article shows, narrows Damascus's strategic margin without foreclosing it altogether; the Syrian government's relative success thus far in insulating the country from the regional war suggests that structural constraint does not exhaust political action.

to keep Syria outside the regional conflict lies in Israel's treatment of Syrian recovery itself as a threat. This was evident from the first hours after the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024. Israeli policy has been described as "designed to keep Syria broken and unable to harm Israel" [2]. The point reaches beyond Iran's departure from Syria: what Israel seeks to contain is the prospect of a Syrian state able once again to act in the region.

The Israeli strikes of April 2025 on T4 airbase[3], Palmyra, and Hama military airport pointed to a dual strategic logic. They disrupted the early rebuilding of Syria's military capacity and signalled to Ankara that Israel would oppose any durable Turkish military presence on Syrian territory. The aim appears broader than the exclusion of Iran. Israel seeks a Syria too weak to rebuild an effective army, too constrained to become a Turkish strategic depth, and too exposed to impose meaningful costs on Israeli operations inside its territory.

Israeli pressure has also operated through the Lebanese front and through Syria's internal fractures. On the Lebanese front, Washington sought to turn Syria's break with the Iranian axis into an active contribution to the dismantling of what remained of that axis, above all Hezbollah[4]. Damascus was being asked to reverse the function of its own geography: the corridor that had once sustained Hezbollah was now to become an instrument of pressure against it. Accepting such a role would have assigned Syria a new externally defined function at the very moment when the new government was trying to restore the authority of the state itself. By resisting that conversion, Damascus kept its departure from the former axis within the project of rebuilding the state, rather than allowing it to become another stage in the redistribution of Syrian roles among regional powers.

On the domestic front, As Suwayda has become Israel's most dangerous point of leverage inside Syria. The province brings together unresolved local tensions, armed formations beyond the authority of the state, and a distinct Druze social and political setting, giving Israel an opening through which to recast intervention as "minority protection". This policy reached its clearest expression when Israel struck the vicinity of the Ministry of Defence and the presidential palace in Damascus[5] during the escalation in As Suwayda, before the

2 John Haltiwanger, "The Israel-Syria Dilemma," *Foreign Policy*, 17 July 2025, https://bitly.cx/ebhF2.
Haltiwanger quotes Joshua Landis as saying that Netanyahu would prefer to keep Syria "broken" and in a position where it is "incapable of hurting Israel", and that Israel's policy of protecting the Druze and preventing the Syrian military from moving south of Damascus "is designed to keep it that way". In the argument advanced here, such a posture deepens Damascus's reliance on Turkish security support while sharpening Israeli anxieties over Ankara's regional expansion; each party's effort to enhance its own security thereby reduces the security of the others, which is the core mechanism of the security dilemma in realist theory.

3 Campa, Kelly, Alexandra Braverman, Carolyn Moorman, Katherine Wells, Ria Reddy, Johanna Moore, Victoria Penza, Maryam Sadr, and Annika Ganzeveld. "Iran Update, April 1, 2025." *Institute for the Study of War (ISW)*, 1 April 2025. https://bitly.cx/nMESW.

4 Feras Dalatey, Maya Gebeily, and Timour Azhari, "Exclusive: US Encourages Syrian Action against Hezbollah, Damascus Is Hesitant, Sources Say," *Reuters*, March 17, 2026, https://bitly.cx/Eylp5.

5 William Christou, "Israel Strikes Syria's Defence Ministry in Third Day of Attacks," *The Guardian*, 16 July 2025, https://bitly.cx/zu68f.

file was mobilised again during the ongoing war on Iran[6]. The pressure at work here reaches beyond the province itself: it seeks to place Israeli limits on the Syrian state's ability to restore authority within its own territory. More broadly, the danger of this strategy lies in how little force it requires. Israel can keep Syria under pressure through intermittent strikes, the manipulation of local identities, and the steady obstruction of any serious military or security recovery, while stopping short of open war.

> ***In this sense, neutralizing Syria's geography is a long-term project of power, not a political decision that can be accomplished simply by declaring it.***

The Security Dilemma and the Limits of Syrian Neutrality

The Syrian case now displays the logic of a security dilemma. Measures that Damascus sees as necessary for restoring a minimum degree of security and rebuilding state institutions, and that Ankara supports in order to secure its southern border and prevent a security vacuum, are read in Tel Aviv as the early formation of a new threat in place of the receding Iranian one.

Israeli strikes therefore operate as a pre-emptive strategy[7]. They deepen Damascus's need for Turkish support, which in turn sharpens Israeli fears of a larger Turkish role in Syria. Each move thus confirms the anxieties that produced the previous one, locking the parties into a cycle none has yet shown a willingness to break. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan warned that continued Israeli strikes on Syria were "paving the way for future instability in the region", insisting that "Israel's security cannot be achieved by undermining the security of its neighbours"[8]. Thus, these dynamics place Damascus in the predicament of a state weakened by years of war: neutrality requires power, power requires partnerships, and partnerships can narrow the margin of independence they are meant to preserve. The more Israel pressures Syria, the harder it becomes for Damascus to maintain distance from Ankara. A closer relationship with Turkey may help rebuild the army and secure Syria's borders, while also giving Israel further grounds to depict Syria as a Turkish extension and placing Damascus closer to the front line of any prolonged Turkish–Israeli confrontation.

6 Samantha Granville, "Israel Strikes Syria after Druze Clashes," BBC News, 20 March 2026, https://bitly.cx/QXu27.

7Finkel, Meir. "Preventive War: Its Disappearance from Israel's Security Toolbox and the Need for Its Return." *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*, 21 April 2024. https://bitly.cx/BDt8J.

8Mustafa Kirikcioglu, Gizem Nisa Demir, and Merve Berker, "Türkiye Warns Against Military Solutions in Strait of Hormuz Tensions, Calls for Peaceful Approach," *Anadolu Agency*, April 13, 2026, https://bitly.cx/xLqnW.

In this context, "functional neutrality" can be understood as an attempt to reduce the external usability of Syrian geography. The most realistic task before Damascus goes beyond announcing a foreign policy of non-involvement; it lies in preventing Syria from being pulled into pre-defined binaries of alignment, whether with one camp or against another. In practical terms, this means disrupting any return to Syria's former function as the "Iranian corridor", while also avoiding its conversion in the opposite direction into an instrument within the US–Israeli strategy against Hezbollah or against any possible Turkish arrangements in Syria. Syrian neutrality, therefore, should not be measured by the language of distance from regional axes in official statements, but by its practical capacity to disable the military and political functions that regional powers seek to assign to Syrian geography.

Conclusion: Time as a Strategic Wager The latest war on Iran shows that the fall of the Assad regime has altered Syria's place in regional politics without removing it from the regional equation. Damascus has so far achieved a limited tactical success: it has kept its western frontier out of the war on Hezbollah, contained the As Suwayda file provisionally, and managed its relationship with Ankara within the bounds of cooperation rather than dependence. The achievement remains fragile. Israel still possesses the means to strike Syria's military infrastructure, exploit its internal vulnerabilities, and raise the cost of any attempt at state recovery, in the absence of an effective Arab or international constraint. The question of Syrian repositioning therefore goes beyond movement from one axis or camp to another. It becomes a question of whether Damascus can wrest a new meaning for its location and role amid the competing pressures and agendas around it and within it. Syria's departure from its former Iranian alignment does not, by itself, generate an independent sovereign role or a stable capacity for choice. The same geography can be reworked in other directions: Damascus may be pushed into some role in any US–Israeli confrontation with Hezbollah, Syria may become a zone of friction with Turkey, or the fragility of southern Syria may be used as an entry point for the internationalisation of domestic affairs. What Damascus is trying to gain today, amid an unstable regional balance of power, is political and security time: time in which it can prevent other actors from fixing a new role for Syria before the state acquires the capacity to define its position according to its own interests. For this reason, forcing the current Syrian and regional scene into pre-defined scenarios for the future of Syria's role and geography would flatten the complexity of the moment.

Time has therefore become Damascus's central strategic wager. It gives the new government room to rebuild institutions, widen its margin of autonomy, and shape its relationship with Turkey in accordance with Syrian interests. It also gives

Israel further opportunity to deepen its policy of attrition, and gives local actors beyond the authority of the state, especially in As Suwayda, time to consolidate facts on the ground. The central question has moved beyond Syria's departure from the Iranian axis, a transition already under way. It is whether Damascus can turn that transition into real capability before geography draws Syria into a new regional role it did not choose for itself.

Critical Balance: Iraq Under the Pressure of the American-Israeli War on Iran

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The U.S.–Israeli war against Iran has once again repositioned Iraq at the center of regional confrontation, though this time within a context far more complex than the traditional framework of rivalry between Washington and Tehran. The war revealed that Iraq is no longer merely an open arena of competing influence; rather, it has become a concentrated model of the crisis of a state ostensibly attempting to preserve its sovereignty amid the presence of political and armed actors, as well as regional networks, that clearly transcend the boundaries of formal state authority.

Baghdad has navigated this crisis through a difficult equation. On the one hand, the Iraqi government has officially declared its rejection of transforming Iraqi territory into a battlefield or a launching ground for proxy wars. On the other hand, armed factions continue to possess tangible capabilities to shape the trajectory of escalation, while regional and international powers increasingly treat Iraq as an integral component of their broader security and strategic calculations. Consequently, the war has exposed not only the fragility of Iraq's position between the United States and Iran, but also the depth of the internal crisis associated with the multiplicity of political and security decision-making centers within the Iraqi state.

This article examines Iraq's position in the current regional war as a dual test of sovereignty, state presence, and the government's capacity to manage crises in a manner consistent with its national interests. Externally, Iraq faces mounting pressures stemming from its geopolitical proximity to Iran, Tehran's regional influence, and the continued American military presence in the region.

Internally, the Iraqi state confronts the challenge of controlling armed factions and preventing them from dragging the country into escalatory trajectories whose costs and consequences remain beyond Baghdad's control. In this sense, the war represents a revealing moment for a deeper Iraqi dilemma: a state that possesses formal institutions yet continues to struggle to transform these institutions into a unified sovereign authority. This challenge is further intensified by the multiplicity of external alignments-which, in one way or another, reflects a multiplicity of loyalties-at the expense of an official and coherent foreign policy, as well as by the state's ongoing inabili-

ty to monopolize the legitimate use of force and confine arms exclusively to its own institutions.

Iraq as an Arena for Reciprocal Responses

Since the outbreak of the war, Iraqi territory has appeared increasingly vulnerable to targeting by multiple actors. Iran launched strikes against areas in northern Iraq, including the Harir base in Erbil, while the United States carried out airstrikes against sites affiliated with armed factions and the Popular Mobilization Forces across several Iraqi cities and provinces. Simultaneously, Iraqi factions were accused of attacking oil facilities operated by foreign companies, as well as vital civilian infrastructure both inside and outside Iraq. Some of these groups openly acknowledged attacks against diplomatic and military installations, most notably the U.S. Embassy. More recently, reports have emerged alleging that Israel established temporary military bases in western Iraq to launch strikes against targets deep inside Iranian territory.[1] In this sense, the central problem no longer lies merely in Iraq's exposure to external attacks, but rather in the state's inability to prevent its territory from becoming an open platform for the reciprocal escalation signaling among the parties to the conflict.

The war has placed Baghdad before a clear dilemma: an official position advocating dissociation from regional confrontation, contrasted with a fragmented security environment in which armed factions operate according to calculations that exceed the government's capacity for full control. More fundamentally, this dilemma has once again exposed a structural crisis embedded within the political system itself, one rooted in the fragmentation of political consciousness as a result of the sharp divergence among political forces that, for more than two decades, have invested in mobilizing subnational and sectarian identities at the expense of a unifying national identity. Inevitably, this dynamic has shaped the manner in which the Iraqi state responds to its surrounding environment, including the opportunities and challenges it presents. Rather than consolidating a coherent national interest, political actors have increasingly politicized identities and formulated policies that reflect the calculations and interests of specific political groups that maintain control over the levers of power.

> ***The war exposes not only the fragility of Iraq's position between the United States and Iran, but also the depth of its internal crisis stemming from the existence of multiple political and security decision-making centers within the state.***

Politically and in security terms, the divergence between the Iraqi government's rhetoric of neutrality and sovereignty and respect for sovereignty-and the behavior of armed actors operating outside the framework of the state reflects the depth of Iraq's crisis of authority and the complexity of its internal and regional balances. Such an outcome has become increasingly inevitable within a fragmented environment characterized by the competing centers of power shaping the Iraqi scene. Consequently, the Iraqi government repeatedly finds itself trapped in the challenge of constructing a viable balance between the state's external interests and the competing considerations of domestic political and armed actors.

1 Erika Solomon and Falih Hassan, "In Iraqi Desert, Two Israeli Outposts Were Kept Secret for Months," The New York Times, May 17, 2026, accessed June 1, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/17/world/europe/israel-iraq-iran-bases.html

In the case of the Iraqi government's position-among many other examples-which attempted to pursue a policy of dissociation following the events of October 7 amid Israel's efforts to regionalize the conflict, several Iraqi armed factions instead chose to become actively involved by targeting American military bases in Iraq and Syria.[2] These attacks continued until the United States launched strikes against 85 targets after the factions attacked an American base located along the Syrian–Jordanian border using a drone strike that killed three U.S. soldiers in January 2024. Similarly, Israel, during a United Nations Security Council session in December of the same year, openly invoked its right to "self-defense" against attacks carried out by Iraqi factions.

The conflict, however, has entered a more dangerous phase. Armed factions-commonly referred to as the "Islamic Resistance factions"-have opted for a broader and more direct level of engagement through attacks targeting diplomatic facilities, critical civilian infrastructure, and economic installations both inside and outside Iraq. In response, the United States has repeatedly carried out strikes against headquarters affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Forces across different regions of the country, particularly in strategically significant areas such as Jurf al-Sakhar and the city of al-Qaim. Some of these strikes have even targeted locations situated within residential neighborhoods in Baghdad. Consequently, Iraq finds itself trapped in a recurring cycle defined by the inability to regulate the security environment or insulate the country from the expanding war arena, leaving it exposed to continuous attacks from multiple directions.

Although the Iraqi actors most deeply involved in the conflict are those affiliated with the so-called "Islamic Resistance," American strikes have targeted numerous brigades within the Popular Mobilization Forces, including some that were ostensibly uninvolved in the conflict-despite the ambiguity surrounding the extent of their noninvolvement. In certain cases, Iraqi army facilities themselves have also been targeted. This reality reflects the structural configuration of Iraq's military and security apparatus and the broader dilemma of functional duality and layered identity between the Popular Mobilization Forces as an official state institution and the resistance factions as transnational actors operating beyond the effective authority of the state within the framework of the Iranian-led Axis of Resistance.

This dynamic is deeply embedded in the structural nature of Iraq's security architecture. While the Islamic Resistance factions are formally incorporated into the Popular Mobilization Forces-which themselves were integrated into the Iraqi armed forces in 2016-and while their members receive salaries from the state treasury, several figures associated with these factions simultaneously occupy senior leadership positions within the PMF structure. Yet these same factions often operate independently of the directives of the Iraqi commander-in-chief, and some openly declare their ideological allegiance to the Supreme Leader in Iran.

Perhaps the most consequential-and potentially most dangerous-aspect of this reality lies in the fact that these factions have preserved highly complex networks and external relationships that function with near autonomy from the Iraqi state. Combined with the extensive political, economic, social, and security influence they have accumulated over time, the factions operating under the umbrella of the Popular Mobilization Forces increasingly appear not merely as armed

2 Abdullah Mohammed Al-Taie, "Between State Considerations and the Logic of Factions: Iraq and the Test of the 'War on Gaza,'" Politics and Society Institute, December 31, 2023, accessed June 3, 2026, https://l1nq.com/3cgpz6u.

groups, but as actors central to the protection and continuity of the post-2003 political order itself. In many respects, they have also become instruments for safeguarding the dominance of Shiite Islamist political forces. Under such conditions, any attempt to curtail their activities becomes an exceptionally difficult and highly risky undertaking.[3]

The Strategic Importance of Iraq to the Parties of the War

Iraq increasingly appears no longer as merely an arena of influence contested between Iran and the United States, but rather as a central battlefield through which their confrontation manifests itself across political, security, and economic dimensions. The nature of this conflict has also evolved beyond conventional forms or the confines of diplomatic channels. Instead, it is increasingly managed through indirect mechanisms in which the roles of the state intersect with those of non-state actors, while Iraqi territory serves as a platform for exchanging strategic messages and exerting pressure. This entanglement has produced a fragile equilibrium in which no actor possesses the capacity to achieve decisive victory, while Iraq continues to bear the costs of an ongoing confrontation. Rather than functioning as an autonomous actor, Iraq frequently finds itself constrained by these balances and unable to disengage from either side.

During periods of war, Iran relies on an extensive and highly complex network of influence within Iraq that spans political, security, economic, and societal dimensions. Beyond these forms of influence, Tehran has long sought to project itself as the political protector of Shiite communities worldwide, particularly in Iraq, despite the doctrinal distinctions between the Iraqi and Iranian Shiite religious schools. Iraq's large Shiite demographic composition, combined with its profound religious and historical significance, grants it a central position within the Shiite world and the broader Islamic sphere. This discourse became especially pronounced after the events of October 7, a period marked by the relative decline of the Axis of Resistance's regional influence.

In contrast, the United States maintains its presence through its broader international and regional standing, as well as through the instruments of influence at its disposal, including security and economic support. Washington also retains highly influential pressure mechanisms tied to Iraqi oil revenues deposited in the U.S. Federal Reserve, alongside additional political and diplomatic leverage that reinforces its ability to shape Iraqi decision-making.

On the ground, and within the broader logic of wartime strategy, the parties involved increasingly appear to regard Iraq's involvement in the conflict as unavoidable. This perception is driven by a combination of geopolitical considerations and factors related to proxy networks, spheres of influence, and intersecting interests. For Iran, Iraq represents the final stronghold of its broader strategic project, functioning as a vital corridor that sustains relations with regional allies and proxy actors while providing critical support under conditions of international isolation and economic sanctions. At the same time, Iraqi territory hosts American military bases as well as armed Iranian Kurdish opposition factions, whose activities American and Israeli officials-particularly during the early stages of the war-signaled a willingness to support and potentially utilize. These dynamics are further reinforced by Iran's long-term political, economic, and at times social investment in Iraq, which has deepened the structural inter-

3 Harith Hassan, "'Militant Shiism': The Popular Mobilization Forces and the Emulation of the Revolutionary Guard," Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, April 5, 2026, accessed June 3, 2026, https://l1nq.com/4cxhwf3.

dependence between the two countries.

Accordingly, from an Iranian strategic perspective, Iraq occupies a pivotal role within the context of the ongoing war. Its direct geographical connectivity with Iran makes it a critical arena for logistical transportation and operational management. At the same time, Iraq's political and security environment has enabled the emergence of armed factions capable of carrying out proxy roles without necessarily imposing direct operational costs on Tehran. Moreover, Iraq represents a point of intersection between American and Iranian interests, granting it amplified strategic value as a theater for signaling and the exchange of strategicmessages.[4]

However, amid the intensifying American targeting of strategic sites associated with leadership and logistical infrastructures-particularly those possessing high political and security significance-it appears that Iran has gradually shifted from a strategy centered on expanding the scope of conflict and dispersing its instruments of confrontation toward a more cautious approach focused on minimizing operational costs while preserving a minimum degree of effectiveness. This shift reflects an increasingly vulnerable security environment characterized by deeper penetration and a higher susceptibility to precise targeting.[5]

Conversely, the United States-which continues to exercise substantial political and economic influence-appears fully aware of the strategic significance of the Iraq–Iran border, which extends for more than 1,500 kilometers. From Washington's perspective, containing or regionally neutralizing Iran requires dismantling the foundations of Iranian influence within Iraq. In practice, this influence extends far beyond the realms of politics and armed power; it has penetrated state institutions and facilitated the construction of broad and highly complex economic networks through which Tehran and its allied actors have cultivated durable social constituencies. Some of these networks are rooted in ideological affiliation, while others are sustained through systems of political patronage and clientelism.

Beyond the aforementioned dimensions, the United States appears not merely focused on degrading the material capabilities of armed factions, but also on reshaping their strategic behavior. Washington's objective extends beyond limiting these groups' operational capacities toward compelling them to reassess their calculations and transition from offensive actors into more cautious and defensive ones. Simultaneously, this approach carries a broader political dimension centered on pressuring the Iraqi state to redefine its security role and to engineer a new relationship between state institutions and these armed factions. In practical terms, this implies an attempt to redefine Iraq's function within the broader regional conflict equation-from a pressure arena through which leverage can be exerted against Washington into a more controlled environment in which adversarial actors possess reduced room for maneuver.[6]

In essence, the parties involved in the war increasingly perceive Iraq as far more than a mere geographical neighbor of Iran. For Tehran, Iraq constitutes a strategic depth and a vital logistical and political artery sustaining its network of regional allies and partners. For the United States, Iraq represents more than simply a territory requiring stabilization; it is a strategic space that must be regulated in order to diminish Iran's ability to employ it as a platform of influence. The

4 Firas Elias, "Iraq in the Structure of the American–Israeli Conflict with Iran: When the State Becomes a Theater of Regional Conflict," Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, March 30, 2026, https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/6479.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

convergence of these competing strategic perceptions has significantly constrained the Iraqi state's capacity to pursue policies capable of safeguarding its sovereignty and independence. Under the combined pressures of regional confrontation and a fragmented domestic environment, Iraq has increasingly been transformed into an entrenched arena of confrontation rather than an autonomous regional actor.

Iraq and the Difficult Economic Test

The war reveals that Iraq's fragility is not confined to the security and political spheres alone, but extends deeply into the structure of its economic model itself. A state that relies overwhelmingly on oil as its principal source of revenue becomes exceptionally vulnerable to any disruption affecting maritime corridors or energy infrastructure. Within this context, the Strait of Hormuz is transformed from an external maritime passage into a direct component of Iraq's internal stability equation. Any disruption to the strait rapidly affects state revenues, particularly for a government carrying extensive obligations related to salary distribution, public services, and the preservation of a minimum level of social stability.

Perhaps one of the most dangerous developments witnessed in Iraq since the outbreak of the war has been the targeting of two fuel tankers at the port of al-Faw, in addition to attacks on the Majnoon oil field, one of Iraq's largest and most strategically important oil fields. These developments contributed to a decline in Iraqi oil production estimated at nearly 70 percent, placing Iraq among the states most severely affected by the conflict. Approximately 90 percent of Iraqi oil exports pass through its maritime outlet overlooking the Strait of Hormuz, creating an acute threat to state revenues in an economy whose public budget remains overwhelmingly dependent on oil rents due to its deeply rentier structure.

At the same time, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz exposed the extent of Baghdad's strategic complacency in developing alternative export routes despite the existence of several promising but stalled projects. Some of these obstacles appear political in nature, such as export routes extending from Kirkuk and the Kurdistan Region toward Turkey, while others remain less clearly understood, including the Basra–Aqaba pipeline project. Meanwhile, the Iraqi government resorted to reviving the Kirkuk–Banias pipeline through Syria, despite the fact that it had remained inactive for decades. Nevertheless, Iraq's response plans still appear disproportionate to the reality of a state whose primary revenue lifeline depends almost entirely on oil rents and petroleum exports.

These developments unfold against the backdrop of an already strained economic environment characterized by an inflated public sector, domestic debt exceeding 100 billion dollars, and a fiscal deficit surpassing 45 billion dollars. All of this occurs while Iraq remains structurally dependent on oil, raising serious questions regarding the sustainability of public financing and the state's capacity to continue supporting those dependent on government income, including public employees, pensioners, social welfare recipients, and the broader system of essential public services.

Ali al-Zaidi's New Government and the Question of State Restoration

It can be argued that the war is testing not only the new government's ability to manage a passing regional crisis, but also its capacity to restore the centrality of decision-making within a state where power remains divided between formal institutions and armed factions. Consequently, the success of the government will not be measured solely by its ability to articulate a balanced political position, but rather by its ability to translate

that position into enforceable security and economic policies capable of being implemented on the ground.

The nomination of Ali al-Zaidi by the Coordination Framework came as a surprise. Al-Zaidi had maintained little public political visibility and was primarily known as a wealthy businessman with significant influence within economic-and perhaps political-circles, largely operating behind the scenes. Yet his nomination was quickly met with regional and international acceptance, particularly from the United States. Washington may view the formation of his government as an opportunity to initiate steps aimed at pressuring armed factions in Iraq while engaging with a figure perceived as distinct from the country's traditional and deeply entrenched political elites.

Despite the Coordination Framework's efforts to preserve its internal cohesion and unified political posture, its selection of al-Zaidi appears, in many respects, to have represented an attempt to break a prolonged political deadlock that had persisted for months. The crisis escalated to the point where the President of the United States reportedly imposed a "veto" against a figure with the depth of influence possessed by Nouri al-Maliki. Against this backdrop, the decision to advance a relatively unknown figure may reveal the extent of conflicting interests and competing visions within the Coordination Framework itself, as well as the scale of the pressures confronting it amid persistent American efforts to reduce Iranian influence and dismantle the network of armed factions whose strategic importance increased following the intense pressure on Hezbollah in Lebanon and the collapse of the Syrian regime. The factions within the Coordination Framework appear fully aware that Washington's welcoming posture toward al-Zaidi does not necessarily constitute unconditional support, but rather may reflect the granting of a limited political "grace period" within which he is expected to address American demands inside Iraq.

As Iraqi Prime Minister, Ali al-Zaidi faces a complex set of challenges, foremost among them the ongoing regional war and the questions it has raised concerning armed factions linked to external actors. Simultaneously, Iraq confronts mounting economic risks tied to declining oil revenues, an inflated public sector dependent on state spending, and deeply entrenched corruption within state institutions. In addition, Iraq faces growing pressure in the sphere of foreign relations as neighboring countries increasingly come under attack from operations launched from Iraqi territory. This occurs alongside mounting international and American pressure linked to sanctions imposed on individuals and banking entities accused of facilitating Iran's access to hard currency.

The fundamental dilemma confronting any Iraqi prime minister lies in the management of foreign policy. Moving toward accommodating or implementing American pressures and demands risks provoking confrontation from opposing regional actors and from domestic allies aligned with them inside Iraq. Conversely, disregarding American considerations exposes Iraq to broader international and regional pressures. This dilemma was illustrated, for example, when armed factions in Iraq launched drones targeting Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates only days after Tom Barrack, the U.S. special envoy to Iraq, congratulated al-Zaidi. This incident followed earlier remarks by Donald Trump describing al-Zaidi's appointment as the beginning of a new chapter in relations between Washington and Baghdad.

Conclusion

The current regional war places Iraq before a

complex test that extends far beyond the boundaries of direct military escalation. The crisis is not merely connected to the reciprocal strikes unfolding across the region, but rather to the Iraqi state's ability to protect its political and security decision-making within an intensely interconnected regional environment. In this environment, international and regional powers, alongside armed factions, operate according to overlapping calculations that at times exceed Baghdad's capacity for full control over the trajectory of events.

The war has demonstrated that Iraq continues to experience a persistent overlap between the authority of formal state institutions and the influence of armed actors linked to broader regional calculations. The Iraqi government repeatedly declares its rejection of transforming the country into a battlefield and consistently emphasizes its commitment to de-escalation and dissociation from regional confrontation. Yet developments on the ground reveal the difficulty of translating this position into effective control over the security sphere. Several armed factions do not interpret the conflict solely through the lens of Iraqi national interests, but rather through their connection to the broader confrontation involving Iran, the United States, and Israel. As a result, the government's capacity to impose a unified security framework remains limited in many instances.

Within this context, Iraq's dilemma appears deeper than the mere existence of multiple armed actors. Iraq possesses formal institutions, an army, security agencies, and broad diplomatic relations, yet it continues to struggle to confine decisions of war and peace exclusively within state institutions. Consequently, the war exposes one dimension of the structural crisis that has accompanied the Iraqi political system since 2003, whereby the state was formed within highly complex domestic and regional balances that left the security sphere vulnerable to overlapping roles among the state, armed factions, and external powers.

Economically, the war has once again exposed the scale of Iraq's vulnerability to any broad regional disruption, whether through threats to maritime corridors or fluctuations in oil and energy markets. Despite its considerable resources, Iraq remains fundamentally dependent on a rentier economic model that reacts rapidly to any prolonged escalation. With every threat to the Strait of Hormuz or disruption in energy flows, concerns re-emerge regarding the state's ability to sustain salaries, public services, and economic activity. The current crisis has therefore reinforced the reality that Iraqi economic stability remains deeply tied to the stability of the broader region itself, placing Baghdad before challenges that extend beyond the traditional security dimension.

Ultimately, Iraq's problem does not stem solely from its geopolitical location, but from its ability-or inability-to manage that location and transform it into a source of stability and genuine sovereignty. A state that does not monopolize control over its own security decisions will consistently find itself more exposed to absorbing the repercussions of regional crises than capable of shaping their trajectories or reducing their costs. Without addressing this structural imbalance, Iraq will remain vulnerable, with every new crisis, to renewed cycles of political, security, and economic attrition, even if it officially seeks to adopt a policy of neutrality and distance itself from regional conflicts.

The Impact of the U.S.–Israeli–Iranian War on Gulf Digital Discourse Regarding Relations with the United States

A Digital Listening Analysis for the Period 27 February – 30 April 2026

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- This study examines public digital discourse across the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman) concerning relations with the United States during the period from 27 February to 30 April 2026.
- The study's timeframe encompasses three principal phases: the initial shock phase marked by the outbreak of the war and the first Iranian strikes targeting the Gulf; the escalation phase characterized by intensified military and political developments; and the post-ceasefire phase following the U.S.–Iranian truce, accompanied by emerging strategic questions and reassessments.
- The study employed a digital listening methodology to monitor and analyze 55,600 independent digital discussions[1] generated by 29,800 unique users[2], producing a total of 531,600 interactions[3] and achieving an estimated potential reach of 4.5 billion users.
- The findings indicate that 76.6% of the discussions expressed negative attitudes toward U.S. security protection, while 22.5% consisted of neutral or news-oriented content. Less than 1% of the discussions reflected supportive views of U.S. protection.

1 Every original public post published by any digital user in the Gulf states on an open digital platform that directly addresses the issue of American protection. This definition excludes comments and likes, which are classified as forms of engagement rather than independent contributions to the discussion.

2 Every electronic account in the six Gulf states that published at least one independent discussion related to the topic during the observation period. Each account was counted only once, regardless of the number of posts it published.

3 The total number of user responses to the monitored discussions, including likes, reactions, comments, and shares.

- The results reveal a notable shift within Gulf digital discourse, moving beyond assessments of U.S. performance during the crisis toward broader questioning of the resilience and credibility of the regional security architecture upon which Gulf states have relied for decades.

For access to the full study, including an expanded discussion of the historical foundations of Gulf–U.S. security relations, the evolution of the American security umbrella in the Gulf, the military and political context of the U.S.–Israeli–Iranian war, the study's theoretical and methodological framework, temporal peaks in digital discourse, discursive frameworks challenging U.S. protection, the evolution of digital sentiment over time, analyses of the roles of Israel, Russia, and China within Gulf discussions, as well as the study's strategic conclusions and comprehensive Arabic and international bibliography, **please visit the following website: https://wp.me/pdSIuF-5R7**

Scan to View the Study

The Gulf Digital Sphere

The digital sphere across the Gulf states is shaped by a regulatory and legal environment in which overt political dissent often carries significant social and legal costs. Nevertheless, as in other digital environments, periods of major crisis tend to create broader-albeit cautious and carefully calibrated-spaces for public expression. Digital data indicate that X (formerly Twitter) occupies a particularly central position within the Gulf digital ecosystem. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) rank among the world's leading countries in social media usage rates, with Saudi Arabia alone accounting for approximately 15.7 million users on the platform,[4] making it one of the most intensive users of X globally relative to population size. This has consolidated the platform's role as the primary Gulf digital arena for sensitive political and strategic debate.

The scholarly significance of this study stems from the fact that Gulf digital discourse surrounding strategic security issues remains an underexplored area within the academic literature, particularly through methodologies capable of capturing its dynamic characteristics. Conventional monitoring and survey instruments were generally not designed to detect the spontaneous, real-time expressions generated within digital spaces during periods of crisis. Digital listening tools, by contrast, offer a methodological avenue for examining this environment and provide an opportunity to analyze discussions taking place within the Gulf digital public sphere beyond formal governmental and institutional channels.

Against this backdrop, the study seeks to address a central question: What forms of discourse emerged within the Gulf digital public sphere when the region faced what may be described as the first genuine test of the American security umbrella in its modern history?

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis to examine public digital discourse originating from the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states concerning relations with the United States and the issue of American security protection in the context of the U.S.–Israeli–Iranian war.

Quantitative data collection and analysis were conducted using the AI Listening Tool, a digital listening and analytics platform designed to monitor and evaluate large-scale online conversations. The dataset was drawn from a diverse range of publicly accessible digital sources, including social media platforms (X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube), online news blogs, and publicly available websites in both Arabic and English. The sample was not limited to official media outlets or news agencies; rather, it was designed to capture the broader spectrum of public digital discourse across the Gulf region.

The search query and data retrieval framework were carefully constructed to identify digital inter-

4 Statista, "Social Media Penetration Rate Worldwide by Country," 2025, https://www.statista.com/statistics/282846/regular-social-networking-usage-penetration-worldwide-by-country ; "X Users by Country (2025)," DataReportal, January 2025, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-global-overview-report

actions generated specifically by users residing in the six GCC countries. The dataset was further refined through the exclusion of electronic noise, coordinated inauthentic activity, automated bot networks, and AI-generated content lacking meaningful human participation. As a result, the final corpus was restricted to Gulf-origin digital content directly addressing the issue of American security protection and Gulf–U.S. relations during the period under examination.

The study is theoretically grounded in Framing Theory,[5] which serves as the principal analytical framework for interpreting the findings. Within the context of this research, the theory is employed to identify and examine the interpretive frames through which Gulf-based digital users-particularly those expressing negative attitudes toward American protection-understood and discussed the issue. The analysis therefore seeks to determine whether opposition to the American security umbrella was primarily articulated through a sovereignty-based frame linked to national dignity and autonomy, a security-oriented frame focused on protection and deterrence, or a broader identity and civilizational frame reflecting deeper perceptions of regional order, external influence, and collective self-definition.

With regard to data collection and sample construction, the digital listening and analytics tool monitored online discussions during the period from 27 February to 30 April 2026. This timeframe extends from the day preceding the outbreak of the war on 28 February 2026 through several weeks after the announcement of the U.S.–Iranian ceasefire on 8 April 2026.

During this period, the platform identified a total of 55,600 original discussions originating from Gulf-based public digital spaces that addressed either the issue of American security protection for the Gulf or proposed alternatives to that security framework. These figures refer exclusively to independent discussion units and do not include comments, likes, reposts, or other engagement activities, which were classified separately as interactions rather than original discussions.

These discussions were generated by 29,800 unique users located across the six GCC member states: Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the Sultanate of Oman. The resulting dataset provides a substantial corpus for examining how Gulf digital audiences interpreted, debated, and reassessed the role of the United States as a security guarantor during one of the most consequential regional crises in recent decades.

Results and Analysis

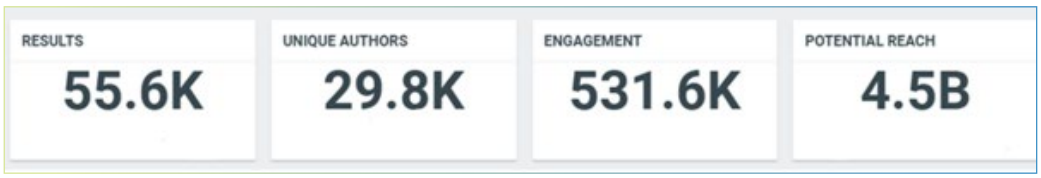
1. Volume of Digital Discourse

The study identified 55,600 original digital discussions generated by 29,800 unique users, which collectively produced 531,600 interactions across the monitored digital platforms. The scale of this activity carries several important implications.

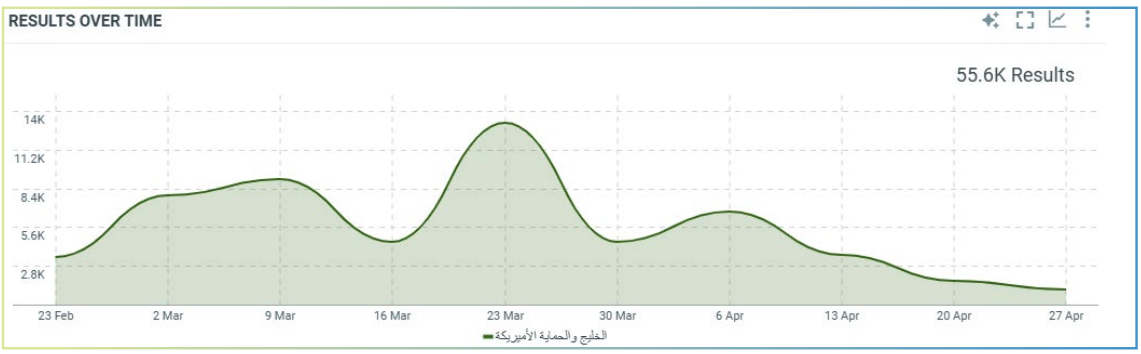
5 The most widely cited definition of framing was formulated by Robert M. Entman, who argues that framing involves selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicative text in a way that promotes a particular definition of a problem, a causal interpretation of it, a moral evaluation of it, or a recommendation for its treatment.
Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," Journal of Communication 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–58.

First, Gulf digital discourse concerning relations with the United States was overwhelmingly framed through the lens of security protection. Rather than occupying a peripheral position within public debate, the question of American protection emerged as a central organizing theme through which users assessed the broader relationship between the Gulf states and the United States. The war and its regional repercussions appear to have transformed the concept of protection from a long-standing strategic assumption into a subject of active public scrutiny and debate.

Second, the exceptionally high level of engagement relative to the number of original discussions suggests that the issue resonated deeply with Gulf audiences. The ratio between original content and subsequent interactions indicates that conversations concerning American protection touched upon a highly sensitive public concern, generating levels of participation that exceeded routine political or international affairs discussions. This pattern reflects the extent to which questions of security, vulnerability, deterrence, and strategic dependence became matters of widespread public interest during the crisis.



2. Peaks in Gulf Digital Discourse on American Security Protection



The trajectory of Gulf digital discourse concerning American security protection exhibited four distinct peaks between the day preceding the outbreak of the war and 30 April 2026. Each peak corresponded closely to major developments in the conflict, highlighting the extent to which the Gulf digital sphere operated as an event-responsive environment, with shifts in discussion volume closely tracking developments on the ground.

The first major surge occurred on 2–3 March, driven by the initial days of direct Iranian attacks against U.S. military installations and Gulf cities in Bahrain, UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar. During this phase, the dominant question shaping Gulf digital discourse was straightforward yet strategically significant: Why had the American military presence and network of bases failed to prevent Iranian strikes against the Gulf? The discussion therefore centered less on the attacks themselves and more

on the perceived effectiveness of the American security umbrella under conditions of direct military confrontation.

A second and even larger peak emerged on 9 March, surpassing the first wave of discussion. This surge followed a public statement by Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who explicitly declared that Gulf states would remain legitimate targets as long as they continued to host American military bases. The significance of this statement lay in its transformation of Iranian targeting from a wartime military response into a broader political position. In effect, it presented Gulf audiences with a new strategic equation: the American military presence was being portrayed as a source of insecurity rather than protection. The discussion was further amplified by reports that Ukraine intended to deploy military experts to the region, introducing an additional layer of complexity and reinforcing perceptions that Gulf territory was becoming increasingly entangled in wider international rivalries. Following this period, discussion volumes declined once again between 12 and 20 March.

The most significant and sustained wave of digital engagement occurred between 16 and 27 March, culminating in the highest peak recorded throughout the entire study period. Yet the shape of this peak is as revealing as its magnitude. Rather than emerging as a sudden digital eruption triggered by a single event, the discussion expanded gradually over several days. Activity began to increase steadily from 16 March onward, maintaining a continuous upward trajectory until reaching its apex on 23 March. This pattern suggests a cumulative process of strategic reassessment among Gulf digital audiences, whereby successive developments reinforced existing concerns and progressively intensified debate regarding the credibility, effectiveness, and long-term implications of American security protection in the Gulf.

The gradual nature of this escalation suggests that the drivers of digital engagement preceded President Donald Trump's 21 March threat to destroy Iranian power stations within forty-eight hours unless the Strait of Hormuz was reopened. In the days leading up to the statement, Gulf audiences had already been exposed to an intensification of Iranian attacks on Gulf infrastructure and increasingly forceful Iranian declarations regarding the continuation of military operations. As a result, the Gulf digital sphere had entered a state of accumulating anxiety before Trump's warning injected additional momentum into an already expanding debate.

The deeper significance of this particular episode lay in its association with energy security and the continuity of essential services. During this period, the term "electricity" emerged as one of the most prominent themes across digital discussions. Within the Gulf collective consciousness, threats directed at Iranian power infrastructure were interpreted not merely as military coercion but as a signal of potential reciprocal retaliation against Gulf infrastructure. Such a prospect touched directly upon everyday life and therefore resonated far beyond the realm of conventional strategic discourse. Consequently, concerns regarding deterrence became intertwined with fears surrounding economic stability, public services, and societal resilience.

Trump's subsequent decision on 26 March to postpone the threatened strikes for ten days in exchange for allowing oil tankers to transit further intensified these discussions. Among many Gulf digital

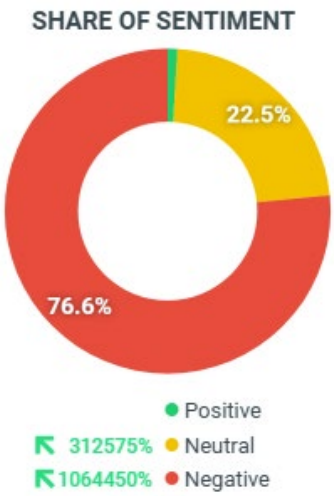
users, the episode reinforced perceptions of inconsistency between presidential rhetoric and developments on the ground. Viewed analytically, the significance of this period extends beyond reactions to specific statements or military actions. The broader pattern suggests that Gulf audiences were responding to a growing perception that critical decisions affecting their security and future were being made without their participation. Gradually, the dominant digital question shifted from "What is happening to us?" to "Who is making decisions on our behalf?" This transition helps explain why this phase generated the highest level of engagement recorded during the entire study period.

A second period of gradual growth emerged between 30 March and 8 April, although its character differed markedly from previous peaks. Rather than reflecting immediate reactions to military escalation, this phase signaled a process of Gulf strategic repositioning. As the prospect of a ceasefire became increasingly likely, digital discussions began to move away from questions centered on ongoing events toward broader considerations of future implications. The focus gradually shifted from "What is happening?" to "What comes next?"

Following the announcement of the ceasefire on 8 April, discussion volumes entered a sustained downward trend that continued through the end of the month. This decline does not necessarily indicate a reduction in public concern. Instead, it may reflect the transition of the crisis from a phase characterized by rapid developments and intense public engagement to a period of strategic observation and reassessment. In such circumstances, digital production often declines as uncertainty gives way to cautious monitoring, with audiences moving from active participation in unfolding events to a more restrained posture of waiting and evaluation.

3. Sentiment Analysis of Gulf Digital Discourse on American Security Protection

The sentiment analysis reveals a striking pattern in Gulf digital discourse concerning American security protection. Approximately 76.5% of all relevant discussions expressed negative attitudes toward the American security umbrella, making negative sentiment by far the dominant pole of debate throughout the study period. These expressions ranged from skepticism regarding the operational effectiveness of American protection during the conflict, to criticism of security dependence as a factor that may attract threats rather than deter them, and to broader questions concerning the strategic value of hosting American military bases when Gulf infrastructure ultimately bore the costs of escalation.



Within the context of a political environment where public criticism of major security arrangements is often expressed cautiously, the scale of negative sentiment represents a significant development in

the willingness of Gulf digital audiences to engage critically with the region's most important external security partnership. Rather than reflecting a temporary reaction to wartime events alone, the findings suggest a broader process of reassessment regarding long-standing assumptions about security, deterrence, and external protection.

The broader wave of rejection, which accounted for 76.6% of the discourse, can be categorized into four distinct yet interconnected discursive frames, each representing a progressively deeper level of strategic questioning.

The first is a sovereignty frame, which moves beyond criticism of American performance and instead reframes the very presence of U.S. military forces as a source of vulnerability. Within this perspective, American bases located on Gulf territory are viewed as transforming Gulf states into potential targets during periods of regional confrontation. Iranian military strikes, which represented some of the most direct and intense attacks experienced by Gulf states in recent history, reinforced this interpretation by demonstrating how strategic assets associated with American power could simultaneously function as strategic liabilities.

The second may be described as a pragmatic frame, characterized by an attempt to evaluate American protection according to measurable outcomes rather than ideological preferences. Discussions within this frame focused on practical questions: Did the United States successfully intercept missiles directed toward Gulf states? Did it effectively protect critical Gulf infrastructure? From this perspective, the war constituted an unprecedented real-world test of the American security commitment. The conflict therefore shifted the debate from theoretical assumptions about protection to empirical assessments of performance, leading many participants to identify a perceived gap between the implicit promise of security and actual outcomes on the ground.

The third is a frame of alternatives, representing one of the most advanced stages of strategic debate within the digital sphere. Rather than limiting itself to criticism of the existing security arrangement, this discourse seeks to explore future options and alternative security models. Participants operating within this framework increasingly asked, "What comes next?" Discussions frequently referenced the possibility of deeper partnerships with powers such as China, Turkey, and India, the development of a more autonomous Gulf defense architecture, or the adoption of strategic approaches inspired by the Omani model of calibrated neutrality and balanced regional engagement. The significance of this frame lies in its movement beyond dissatisfaction toward the active exploration of alternative strategic futures.

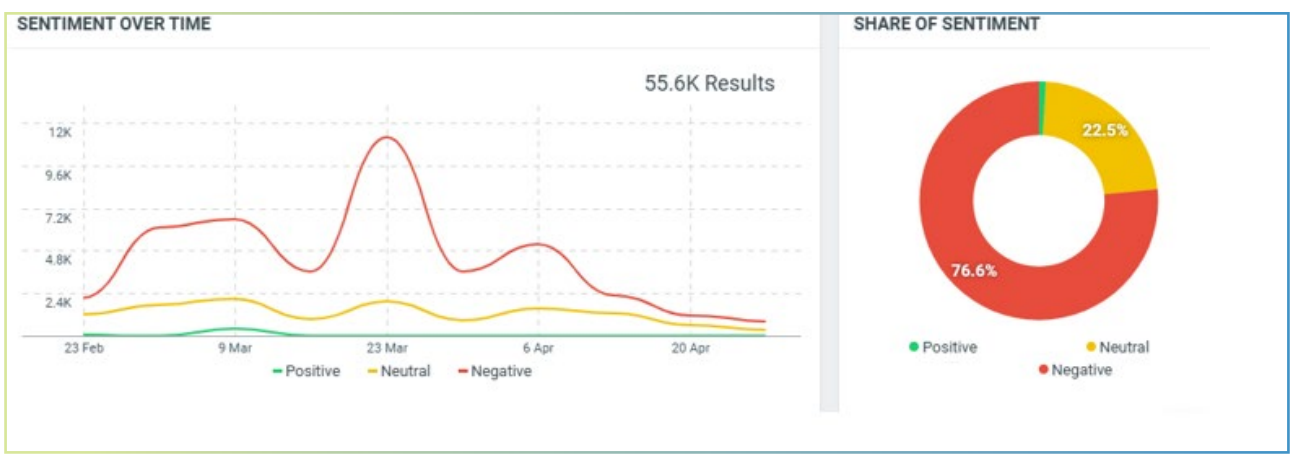
The fourth frame may be described as a Gulf civilizational and identity-based frame, which is also the most difficult to capture through quantitative measurement alone. This perspective extends beyond conventional security calculations and raises broader questions concerning the historical relationship between the Gulf and the West. Its underlying narrative is shaped by a recurring perception: Gulf societies are being required to bear substantial costs resulting from strategic decisions in whose formulation they played little or no role. Consequently, the debate moves beyond questions of military effectiveness and enters a deeper realm involving agency, autonomy, historical experience, and the region's place within the broader international order.

Turning to other sentiment categories, the findings indicate that approximately 22.5% of Gulf digital content related to American security protection was classified as informational or news-oriented. Users within this category primarily circulated reports, updates, and factual information concerning military operations, political developments, and security incidents without explicitly expressing support or opposition. To some extent, this pattern reflects the culture of caution that characterizes political engagement within the Gulf digital sphere.

At the same time, such apparent neutrality carries analytical significance of its own. The selection and dissemination of particular news stories are not entirely devoid of meaning. The widespread circulation of reports highlighting perceived shortcomings in American security performance, military vulnerabilities, or failures of deterrence constituted an implicit form of evaluation. Although these users did not directly articulate critical judgments, the prominence given to such narratives contributed to a broader informational environment that tended to reinforce negative perceptions of the American security umbrella.

By contrast, positive sentiment toward American protection represented less than one% of the total digital discourse originating from the Gulf states. This extremely limited share exerted little influence on the overall direction of the debate and remained largely marginal throughout the study period. The small size of this category suggests that explicitly supportive voices were exceptionally rare and appeared primarily in the form of reposted official statements, institutional messaging, or content published in English that adopted a more accommodating tone toward the continued American military presence in the Gulf.

4. Temporal Evolution of Sentiment



A comparison of Gulf digital discourse across the period from 27 February to 30 April 2026 reveals a distinctly phased temporal structure, suggesting that the Gulf digital sphere functioned primarily as a responsive arena shaped by unfolding events rather than as a static reflection of fixed attitudes.

The first methodological observation emerging from the temporal trend is that the red line (negative discourse) and the yellow line (news-oriented discourse) moved in near parallel throughout the study

period. The two trajectories neither intersected nor exchanged positions at any point. This pattern indicates that the primary driver of discussion peaks was not a transformation in sentiment from neutrality to rejection, but rather an overall increase in the volume of conversation in response to major developments, while the proportional relationship between sentiment categories remained remarkably stable.

During the first phase, extending from 27 February to 8 March, neutral and informational content remained comparatively closer in volume to negative discourse than at any subsequent stage. This relative proximity reflects the dynamics of the initial shock period, when users were primarily engaged in reporting, sharing, and documenting events rather than interpreting or evaluating them. In the earliest days of the conflict, Gulf users acted more as observers transmitting information than as commentators assigning responsibility or judgment.

As military and political developments intensified throughout March, the gap between the two trajectories widened steadily in favor of negative sentiment. This divergence reached its maximum during the major peak of 23 March, which represented the highest concentration of negative sentiment recorded during the entire study period. What distinguished this phase was not simply the increase in negativity but also the growing sophistication of its content. Negative discourse was no longer confined to criticism of perceived shortcomings in American military performance. Instead, it expanded to encompass broader questions regarding the logic of the security partnership itself, accompanied by increasingly explicit discussions of alternative strategic arrangements and future security options.

Following the ceasefire of 8 April, the volume of negative discourse declined in parallel with the overall reduction in digital activity. Yet its proportional share remained remarkably stable at approximately 76.6% throughout the post-ceasefire period. This represents perhaps the most significant finding of the sentiment analysis. When the acute phase of the crisis came to an end, those expressing critical attitudes toward American protection did not become more supportive. Rather, many participants simply became less active. The decline in discussion therefore reflected reduced engagement rather than a change in underlying perceptions.

From an analytical perspective, this distinction is important. Silence should not necessarily be interpreted as acceptance. Instead, it may indicate a withdrawal from a digital environment that was no longer generating developments requiring immediate reaction. While public expression diminished, the underlying attitudes that had emerged during the conflict appear to have retained their weight and persistence beneath the surface of digital activity.

5. Word Cloud Analysis: What Dominated Gulf Digital Discourse on American Security Protection?

The word cloud provides an independent visual layer of analysis that complements the findings derived from volume and sentiment analysis. Rather than measuring the scale of discussion or the emotional orientation of participants, it addresses a different question altogether: through which concepts, narratives, and interpretive frames did Gulf digital users understand and discuss American security protection? The prominence of multi-word expressions within the cloud is particularly revealing, as these phrases illuminate underlying structures of thought rather than merely identifying topical interests.

The overall picture emerging from the word cloud is unambiguous. American protection was discussed simultaneously as a security guarantee and as a security arrangement increasingly subjected to scrutiny and reassessment.

The most striking feature of the cloud is the overwhelming prominence of the phrase “American military bases.” This dominance is analytically significant in itself. When Gulf users reflected upon American protection, they did not primarily invoke abstract concepts such as “alliance,” “partnership,” or “security guarantees.” Instead, they consistently referred to the physical reality of military bases located on Gulf territory. Such framing transforms the debate from a discussion of political commitments into a discussion of direct military presence. In doing so, Gulf digital discourse largely displaced abstract strategic assurances in favor of a focus on the tangible infrastructure through which American power is projected in the region.

Within this broader context, several recurring expressions reveal three distinct discursive frames through which American protection was interpreted.

The first may be described as a frame of perceived dual-purpose intentions, encapsulated by the recurring expression "killing two birds with one stone." This phrase reflects a belief among many participants that American protection of the Gulf is not an objective in itself but rather an instrument serving broader American and Israeli strategic goals. Within this frame, Gulf states are portrayed as bearing the security and infrastructural costs of policies designed primarily to advance external agendas. The prominence of the phrase "under the pretext of defense" reinforces this interpretation by expressing skepticism toward the publicly stated rationale for the American military presence. From this perspective, the language of protection serves as a legitimizing narrative through which broader geopolitical objectives are pursued, while Gulf security becomes a secondary consideration rather than the central purpose of the arrangement.

The second frame centers on questioning the functional effectiveness of the American military presence itself. This perspective is reflected in recurring formulations that distinguish between the existence of military bases and their actual utility. The underlying argument is that bases established to provide security protection failed to perform the function for which they were ostensibly intended. This theme captures what emerged as one of the central paradoxes of Gulf digital discourse during the conflict: American military installations were visibly present across Gulf territory, yet many users perceived security protection as insufficient or absent. Importantly, this discourse does not dispute the existence of American facilities. Instead, it questions their strategic purpose, arguing that these installations primarily support broader American operational objectives rather than serving as instruments dedicated to Gulf defense. Within this interpretation, the war exposed what many participants viewed as the true nature of these facilities, revealing a divergence between their perceived purpose and their actual role.

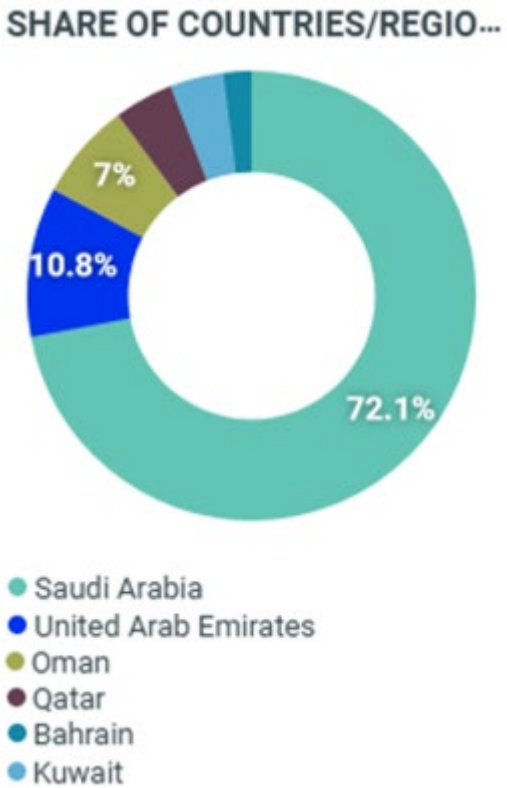
The third frame concerns the economic cost of protection. This narrative is reflected in recurring references to regional resources, gas pipelines, and oil production. Participants operating within this frame connected perceived shortcomings in American protection with the substantial economic investments Gulf states have made over decades in support of the security partnership. The central argument is not merely that protection was ineffective, but that the costs associated with maintaining the relationship have been exceptionally high. As a result, the discussion increasingly linked questions of security performance with broader concerns regarding economic returns, strategic value, and long-term cost-benefit calculations.

The appearance of references to Senator Lindsey Graham is equally revealing. It suggests that segments of Gulf digital audiences were closely following debates within the United States itself and incorporating American domestic political discussions into their assessment of security protection. This indicates a relatively sophisticated level of political engagement. Rather than viewing the United States as a single, unified actor, these users distinguished between competing political currents and policy preferences within the American system. Consequently, the debate evolved beyond the question of whether the United States could provide protection and toward a more nuanced inquiry: which United States is providing that protection? The significance of this shift lies in its movement from

evaluating security guarantees in the abstract to evaluating the internal political dynamics shaping American strategic commitments.

Perhaps the most revealing finding, however, lies in what is absent from the word cloud. Terms traditionally associated with positive security relationships-such as "guarantee," "ally," "shield," or "security partnership"-are notably missing. The lexical universe through which Gulf digital users discussed American protection was overwhelmingly centered on scrutiny, reassessment, accountability, and strategic calculation. This transformation in political vocabulary may constitute the most profound insight generated by the word cloud analysis, as it suggests a shift in the conceptual language through which security relations themselves are understood and debated.

6. Geographic and Demographic Analysis



Saudi Arabia overwhelmingly dominated Gulf digital discourse concerning American security protection, accounting for 72.1% of all recorded discussions. It was followed by UAE with 10.8%, while Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain contributed substantially smaller shares of the overall conversation.

Saudi Arabia's dominance can be explained through the interaction of two principal factors. The first is demographic weight. The Kingdom accounts for approximately two-thirds of the population of GCC, naturally increasing its contribution to region-wide digital discussions. The second relates to the scale and dynamism of the Saudi digital sphere, which has historically exhibited a greater degree of engagement with strategic, political, and security-related issues than many other Gulf digital environments.

In addition, the issue of American protection carried a particularly significant dimension within the Saudi context. Prior to the outbreak of the war, negotiations concerning a prospective Saudi–American security agreement had occupied a prominent place in regional strategic discussions. As a result, questions regarding the credibility, effectiveness, and future of American security commitments were linked not only to the immediate wartime environment but also to an ongoing policy debate with direct implications for Saudi national security. This contributed to making the issue especially salient within Saudi digital discourse.

The UAE ranked second with 10.8% of total discussions. This position is consistent with the country's

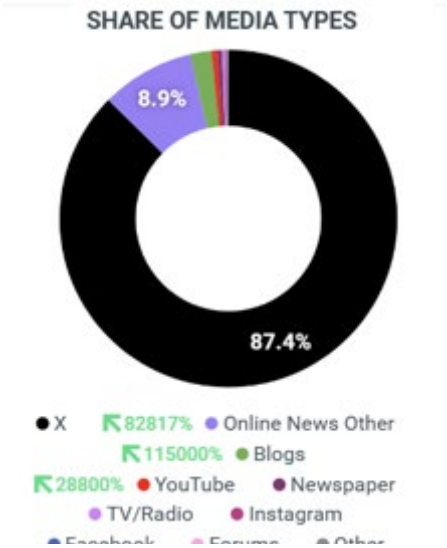
exceptionally high levels of internet penetration and digital engagement. Nevertheless, the volume of Emirati discourse remained considerably lower than that recorded in Saudi Arabia, underscoring the disproportionate role played by the Saudi digital sphere in shaping the overall Gulf conversation.

Qatar and UAE both registered relatively modest levels of participation in discussions specifically related to American security protection. One important methodological consideration is that both states introduced publicly announced restrictions on digital content relating to sensitive security matters during the conflict. This factor provides a direct explanation for part of their reduced visibility within the monitored sample and should be explicitly acknowledged when interpreting the distribution of discourse across Gulf states.

Another contributing factor may be the demographic composition of both countries, where expatriate populations constitute a substantial proportion of residents relative to citizens. Non-citizen residents may have been less inclined to participate actively in discussions concerning security and strategic affairs, particularly given concerns regarding legal accountability and the sensitivities associated with commenting on national security issues. Consequently, levels of digital engagement may not necessarily reflect levels of interest alone but also differing perceptions of the risks associated with public participation.

Oman's comparatively small share of the discussion is likewise understandable in light of its long-standing security doctrine, which emphasizes strategic neutrality, mediation, and balanced regional engagement. Within such a framework, questions surrounding American security protection may carry less immediate relevance than they do in neighboring states whose security architectures are more directly linked to external military guarantees. As a result, the issue occupied a less prominent position within the Omani digital sphere throughout the period under study.

7. Distribution of Digital Discourse Across Platforms



The platform X (formerly Twitter) overwhelmingly dominated Gulf digital discourse concerning American security protection, accounting for 87.4% of all recorded discussions. The remaining 12.6% was distributed across a variety of sources, including online news websites (8.9%), blogs, discussion forums, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, each contributing only marginal shares of the overall conversation.

The predominance of X at this scale is not surprising within the Gulf context. Historically, the region has ranked among the world's most intensive users of the platform relative to population size, and X has firmly established itself as the principal digital arena for political, strategic, and security-related debate. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is what this dominance reveals about the nature of the discussion itself. In the context of American security protection, the overwhelming concentration of discourse on X suggests that the conversation was largely spontaneous, individual-driven, and reactive rather than institutionally managed or editorially curated.

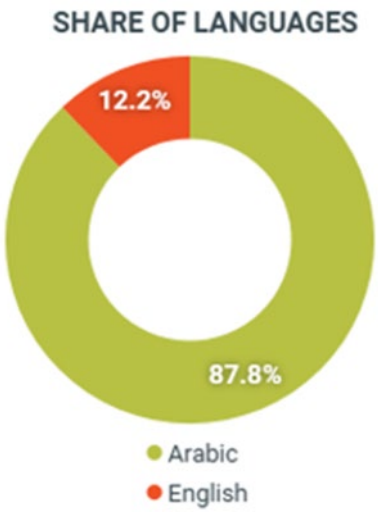
Unlike traditional media outlets or professionally produced digital content, X functions primarily as a platform for personal commentary, immediate reactions, and real-time political engagement. Consequently, the dataset captured through the platform offers valuable insight into public sentiment and grassroots perceptions, bringing researchers closer to the dynamics of popular opinion than would be possible through the analysis of official statements or institutional communications alone.

The comparatively limited presence of Facebook and Instagram is equally revealing. Both platforms occupy a central position in everyday social interaction across the Gulf and command substantial user bases. Yet their role diminishes considerably when discussions move into the realm of contentious political and security issues. This pattern suggests that debates concerning American security protection were not treated as topics of social or lifestyle-oriented content. Rather, they belonged to the category of intensive analytical and political discussion that finds its most conducive environment on X, where rapid exchange of views, strategic commentary, and engagement with current affairs are deeply embedded in platform culture.

The distribution across platforms therefore highlights an important characteristic of Gulf digital discourse during the crisis: the debate was shaped primarily within spaces designed for political conversation and real-time interpretation of events, reinforcing the conclusion that discussions surrounding American protection were perceived as matters of strategic significance rather than routine public affairs.

8. Linguistic Distribution of the Discourse

The linguistic composition of Gulf digital discourse concerning American security protection was overwhelmingly dominated by Arabic, which accounted for 87.8% of all recorded discussions, while English represented the remaining 12.2%. Although the English-language share appears relatively modest, it warrants closer analytical attention because it reflects the participation of two distinct groups of contributors.



The first consists of expatriate residents living in Gulf states who articulated their concerns and perceptions in their primary language while experiencing the consequences of the crisis directly within the region. The second includes Gulf citizens who chose to communicate in English either because of its widespread use as a second language across the Gulf or because they sought to engage audiences beyond the region and participate in broader international conversations. As a result, English-language discourse served not only as a medium of communication but also as a channel linking local Gulf concerns to wider global audiences.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study provides empirical evidence that the U.S.–Israeli–Iranian war generated an exceptional moment in the evolution of Gulf digital discourse concerning American security protection during wartime. The findings demonstrate that nearly three-quarters of all Gulf-origin digital discussions expressed negative attitudes toward the American security umbrella, despite operating within a digital environment historically characterized by comparatively high levels of political caution in discussions of security and strategic affairs.

These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how Gulf digital publics respond to major security crises and what such responses may reveal about evolving collective perceptions. The study identified a clear divergence between official discourse, which remains anchored in the logic of alliances and defense agreements, and the prevailing sentiment within the digital public sphere, where 76.6% of discussions expressed varying degrees of rejection or skepticism toward American protection, even when articulated through relatively cautious language.

The results further indicate that negative attitudes developed gradually through the accumulation of field-level indicators related to security performance rather than as immediate reactions to isolated events. This finding suggests that public discourse was shaped more by the cumulative trajectory of

developments than by any single incident. The four major peaks identified during the study period illustrate the extent to which Gulf digital discourse responds to symbolic turning points that reshape public interpretations of crises and redefine their broader meaning.

The significant presence of English-language content also reflects an increasing awareness among some users of the importance of the international digital sphere as a channel for influencing external audiences and policy communities. At the same time, it highlights the contribution of expatriate communities residing in Gulf states to discussions surrounding regional security and political developments.

The findings concerning Israel, Russia, and China introduce a broader strategic dimension that extends beyond the bilateral relationship between the Gulf states and the United States. Israel appeared in more than 23,800 posts, with discussions frequently portraying the American–Israeli relationship as one of the factors that exposed American military facilities in the Gulf to Iranian retaliation. This narrative strengthened perceptions linking Gulf security to the wider dynamics of regional conflict and strategic competition.

Taken together, the findings contribute to the growing academic debate concerning potential transformations in Gulf collective perceptions of the regional security order. While the results document an extraordinary digital moment produced by highly unusual crisis conditions, they do not permit definitive conclusions regarding the long-term durability of these attitudes. The evidence cannot determine whether the observed patterns represent a temporary response to an exceptional event or the early stages of a deeper and more enduring shift in Gulf perceptions of a security architecture that has constituted a central pillar of regional politics for decades.

The study concludes by emphasizing that the 55,600 Gulf digital discussions analyzed here constitute an important collective record of how digital public opinion responds to a major security crisis. As such, they provide valuable insight into contemporary Gulf political perceptions while opening important avenues for future research aimed at tracking whether these attitudes persist, evolve, or recede during the post-crisis period.

ARTICLES

The Regional Landscape After the War: Between the Test of Stability and the Reconfiguration of Power Balances

Bader Al Madi

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The war between the United States and Israel on one side and Iran on the other places the Middle East before a defining regional moment that extends beyond the outcomes of military confrontation itself to the very nature of the transformation affecting the logic of the regional order. A region that long operated according to the premise of fixed axes and enduring alignments now appears increasingly unstable and more inclined toward temporary coalitions and shifting calculations.

In this sense, the war represents an accelerant for transformations that had been accumulating for years. Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Tehran has redefined its regional role through a project that transcends the boundaries of the nation-state and combines political ideology, networks of allies, and expansion through fragile arenas within the Arab regional system. This trajectory was reinforced through successive milestones: the Iran–Iraq War between 1980 and 1988, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the strategic vacuum it created, Iran's intervention in Syria since 2011, its expansion in Yemen since 2014, and the consolidation of influence in Lebanon through Hezbollah. These developments enabled Iran to construct a broad regional sphere of influence, yet they also accumulated political, security, and economic costs that became more evident after the latest confrontation.

The central paradox is that the war neither produced a decisive regional settlement nor paved the way for a stable new order; instead, it exposed the limitations of the old frameworks. The politics of regional axes no longer appears capable of generating stability, military deterrence alone is no longer sufficient to regulate regional interactions, reliance on allies and proxies has become increasingly costly, and states that once operated within relatively fixed alignments have begun searching for broader spaces of maneuver. Consequently, the conflict is no longer centered solely on who leads the region, but rather on who can endure the costs of the emerging phase while sustaining the fewest possible losses.

Iran: The Rising Cost of Influence

Iran emerged from the war confronting a different question than before: how can regional influence be preserved without turning into a permanent source of attrition? Over the past decades, Tehran succeeded in constructing a transnational network of influence stretching from Iraq to Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, benefiting from fragile state structures, the weakness of the Arab regional order, and declining confidence in international guarantees. Yet the very model that granted Iran extensive regional leverage has now become increasingly vulnerable to exhaustion.

The Iranian challenge no longer lies primarily in sanctions or military strikes, but rather in the growing cost of sustaining influence itself. Every arena requires financing, protection, and continuous political and security management. Every ally has become more exposed to both domestic and external pressure. Every regional move by Tehran now generates broader reactions than in previous periods. As a result, the network of influence that once provided Iran with significant room for maneuver is gradually transforming into a costly structure that demands resources beyond what the Iranian economy can sustainably provide. The central Iranian dilemma is no longer how to expand influence, but how to absorb its escalating costs.

Within this context, long-term attrition appears to be the most likely framework shaping the coming phase. The United States does not appear capable of easily producing a fundamental internal transformation in Iran, while experiences of prolonged pressure-such as Iraq between 1991 and 2003 or Venezuela more recently-illustrate Washington's capacity to exhaust adversaries through sanctions and sustained political and economic pressure. At the same time, the Iranian case remains considerably more complex due to the depth of the state, the size of society, and the breadth of Tehran's regional instruments. Iran continues to rely on its ability to absorb prolonged pressure, yet it faces a regional environment that is increasingly less willing to tolerate open-ended conflict.

Endurance alone, however, does not produce sustainable influence. Iran, which once succeeded in transforming the discourse of resistance into a form of transnational political capital, now confronts an Arab and regional environment that has become more sensitive to the costs associated with this role. The central question facing Tehran is therefore becoming less about its capacity to retaliate and more about its ability to sustain a regional project that requires con-

> The central paradox is that the war neither produced a decisive regional outcome nor paved the way for a new stable order. Instead, it exposed the limits of old frameworks. Axis-based politics can no longer generate stability, military deterrence alone is no longer sufficient to contain regional dynamics, reliance on allies and proxies has become increasingly costly, and states once anchored in fixed alignments are now seeking wider room for strategic maneuver.

tinuously expanding resources in the context of a strained economy, a pressured society, and allies operating within increasingly narrow margins.

The rising cost of Iranian influence has directly affected the behavior of its allies. Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iraqi factions, and the Houthis in Yemen no longer operate within the same open political and security space that existed in earlier phases. Any escalation undertaken by these actors now exposes both them and Tehran to broader possibilities of targeting, sanctions, and international pressure. Consequently, the network of allies has gradually shifted from a logic of broad offensive initiative toward one centered on calibrated responses and cost management.

This transformation has also altered the meaning of Iranian deterrence itself. Previously, deterrence rested on Tehran's ability to widen pressure fronts through its allies. After the war, however, deterrence has become more closely tied to Iran's ability to prevent the collapse or excessive exhaustion of this network. Iranian power is therefore no longer measured solely by the number of arenas in which it possesses influence, but by its capacity to keep those arenas operational and usable without allowing them to evolve into a permanent political, economic, and security burden.

The Gulf: From Security Reassurance to Risk Management

The Gulf states are approaching the current phase as a direct test of their economic security rather than merely their military security. The Gulf no longer views Iran solely through the lens of direct military threat, but increasingly through the unpredictability of its regional behavior and the potential consequences that any major confrontation could generate for maritime routes, energy markets, critical infrastructure, and supply chains. Consequently, Gulf capitals are reconsidering the meaning of security itself: Is reliance on the American security umbrella still sufficient? Do traditional alliances continue to provide genuine reassurance? And how can the costs of exposure be reduced in the face of a conflict whose outbreak and termination are not solely within Gulf control?

The coming phase appears increasingly characterized by a Gulf transition from the logic of traditional alignment toward more cautious and calculated policies. This does not imply a rupture with the United States, unconditional openness toward Iran, or full integration into Israeli-regional arrangements. Rather, the Gulf states are likely to expand their room for maneuver across all of these trajectories simultaneously through diversifying security and economic partnerships, strengthening defensive capabilities, and accelerating regional cooperation in the fields of energy, ports, trade corridors, and investment. This dynamic became evident whenever threats emerged against maritime navigation in the Red Sea or the Gulf, where the effects of escalation were immediately reflected in shipping costs, insurance rates, and energy prices.

The Abraham Accords of 2020 reflected part of this transformation by demonstrating the willingness of certain Gulf states to think beyond traditional frameworks in managing security and partnerships. Yet the latest war places this trajectory before a far more sensitive test. Relations with Israel may

provide certain technological and security advantages, but they also carry substantial political and societal costs, particularly in light of the profound shifts that the Gaza war has generated within Arab and international public opinion.

At the same time, the Gulf regional system has, over recent years, moved beyond many of the internal disputes and tensions that once threatened its cohesion. Nevertheless, the post-war phase may impose a new challenge: will political cohesion alone be sufficient, or does the moment require the construction of a deeper concept of collective Gulf security? The current period appears particularly conducive to redefining Gulf alliances beyond symbolic displays of consensus and toward more practical arrangements capable of crisis management, securing strategic corridors, protecting critical infrastructure, and reducing vulnerability to major regional shocks.

This transformation has reshaped Gulf calculations toward the United States, Israel, and Iran simultaneously. Gulf capitals have become more inclined to preserve their security relationship with Washington while reducing the degree of complete dependence upon it. At the same time, they have grown increasingly cautious toward any regional trajectory that could place them in direct confrontation with Iran or turn their vital infrastructure and maritime routes into part of the target matrix in any future escalation.

The Arab Mashreq: Pragmatism as a Strategy of Survival

The war demonstrated that several states in the Arab Mashreq have begun approaching regional transformations through a framework that is less ideological and more closely connected to calculations of survival and opportunity. Within this context, Jordan and Syria emerged as two important cases in managing regional balances without directly sliding into the conflict itself. Both states adopted cautious policies based on avoiding confrontational alignments, preserving channels of communication, and attempting to transform geographic position into a political and economic opportunity.

Jordan possesses a particular advantage within this framework. It occupies the center of the connecting spaces linking the Gulf, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and the Mediterranean. The crisis highlighted Amman's capacity to absorb shifting dynamics, present itself as an actor capable of communicating with multiple parties, and diplomatically and politically fill certain regional gaps. Yet the central Jordanian challenge does not lie in the recognition of its role or the willingness of regional actors to engage with it, but rather in transforming that acceptance into tangible domestic outcomes: investment flows, logistical opportunities, trade expansion, participation in reconstruction efforts, and improvements in developmental conditions.

From another perspective, Syria appears to stand before an opportunity shaped by changing balances after years of attrition. To a certain extent, Damascus has moved beyond the logic of unproductive alignments and has begun operating with a form of political pragmatism that could influence its future alliances. If emerging economic transformations acquire greater clarity, Syria may find itself able to

recover part of its geopolitical function as a corridor linking the Mashreq, the Gulf, Turkey, and the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, this trajectory will remain contingent upon the Syrian state's ability to rebuild its institutions, regulate its external relations, and provide a minimum degree of political and economic stability.

Together, Jordan and Syria present a broader model of transformation within the Mashreq: the transition from geography as a security burden to geography as a strategic resource. States capable of converting their geographic position into an economic and logistical function are likely to possess greater room for maneuver in the coming phase. By contrast, states that remain trapped within rigid alignments or persistent internal instability will continue to bear the costs of geography without benefiting from its advantages.

The importance of Jordan and Syria lies in the fact that both are attempting to transform political caution into a regional function. Jordan recognizes that geographic location alone is insufficient. After decades of performing primarily political and security roles, the Jordanian state is now seeking to translate that role into economic value, particularly amid increasing discussions surrounding transport corridors, energy projects, and reconstruction efforts in the Mashreq. Jordan is therefore not merely avoiding involvement in the war; it is seeking to consolidate its position as a connecting node linking the Gulf, the Levant, Palestine, and Iraq. Syria, after years of exhaustion, is similarly searching for a path toward gradual reintegration into the regional system through economic interests, reconstruction, and commercial connectivity. The underlying wager in both cases is that geography can be transformed from a security liability into an economic opportunity.

The conflict is no longer about who leads the region, but about who can bear the costs of the new era while sustaining the fewest possible losses.

Egypt: Managing Balance Rather Than Exercising Singular Leadership

Egypt is navigating the current phase with a considerable degree of caution and relative ambiguity. It continues to possess the demographic, geographic, and historical weight that makes it an indispensable actor within the broader equation of Arab security. Yet Cairo increasingly faces questions regarding its ability to translate this weight into effective regional influence. The structure of the Arab regional order has changed substantially, new centers of power have emerged in the Gulf, and Egypt's ability to act as the sole or natural center of regional leadership has gradually diminished.

An increasingly common perception within certain Gulf capitals is that Egypt is no longer the actor automatically called upon in every regional equation. This is not merely a symbolic shift, but rather

an indication of a broader transformation in the distribution of Arab power. Financial, investment, and political influence has increasingly moved toward the Gulf, while Egypt faces significant domestic economic pressures that make its external posture more closely tied to considerations of financing and internal stability.

Nevertheless, Egypt remains central to several strategic files that are difficult to bypass, particularly Gaza, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean. Yet Cairo today operates through the logic of balance management more than through the traditional logic of regional leadership. The significance of the Egyptian role in this phase derives from the arenas in which Cairo continues to maintain direct leverage: Gaza, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean. These files ensure Egypt's continued relevance by virtue of geography, security, and vital national interests, even if it no longer possesses the capacity to lead the region according to older regional frameworks.

Accordingly, the Egyptian challenge no longer revolves around restoring a previous position in its traditional form, but rather around formulating a more realistic regional role centered on mediation, the protection of strategic corridors, and the management of balance among the Gulf states, Washington, Israel, and the Palestinian question.

Iraq: State Fragility and the Question of Function

Iraq remains one of the most fragile actors within the regional landscape. The state has not fully emerged from the consequences of 2003 and continues to operate under the pressure of overlapping external influence, internal fragmentation, and multiple competing centers of power. The persistence of Iranian influence within Iraqi institutions, the possibility of new sanctions targeting individuals or entities, and the presence of armed factions with regional affiliations all make Iraq particularly vulnerable to the repercussions of the war.

At its core, the Iraqi crisis is a crisis of state function. Iraq possesses vast oil resources, a strategic geographic position, and substantial demographic depth, yet it continues to struggle to transform these assets into effective sovereignty and an independent political posture. With every regional escalation, the same question re-emerges: can Iraq become a state capable of managing its position and balancing its interests, or will it remain an open arena for the intersection of American and Iranian influence as well as domestic conflicts?

Any new sanctions or economic disturbances could open the door to renewed waves of protest, particularly amid the accumulation of crises related to public services, unemployment, corruption, and declining confidence in state institutions. Here, the Iraqi paradox becomes especially clear: the state possesses numerous elements of strength, yet it lacks a unified decision-making center capable of transforming these elements into a coherent national project.

This fragility becomes evident during almost every American-Iranian confrontation. Baghdad attempts to declare neutrality while political and armed actors within Iraq continue to move according

to the dynamics of the relationship between Washington and Tehran. As a result, Iraq often finds itself unable to separate its national interests from the calculations of external powers, particularly when armed factions, sanctions, or the energy sector become instruments of reciprocal pressure.

Iraq does not suffer from a shortage of power, but rather from its fragmentation between the state and actors operating beyond its institutional framework. For this reason, the function of the Iraqi state itself lies at the heart of the crisis. Iraq's challenge is not a lack of resources or geopolitical significance, but the weakness of its ability to transform both into an independent and coherent national policy.

Israel: Military Superiority and the Crisis of Legitimacy

On the other side of the regional equation, Israel emerges from the war with clear military superiority, yet simultaneously confronts a challenge of a fundamentally different nature. Military power can alter battlefield balances, degrade the capabilities of adversaries, and impose temporary realities, but it cannot by itself guarantee political legitimacy or long-term regional stability.

Since the Gaza war between 2023 and 2025, Israel's image has deteriorated significantly across broad sectors of Western public opinion, particularly in Europe and the United States. Criticism related to the humanitarian costs of military operations and the nature of Israeli policies toward the Palestinians has intensified considerably. This shift may not immediately produce a dramatic reversal in the policies of Western governments, but it is reshaping the political and moral environment within which Israel operates.

The Israeli dilemma lies in the fact that every expansion in the use of force increases the difficulty of presenting Israel as a stabilizing actor within the region. Israel may succeed in imposing security arrangements or weakening specific adversaries, yet it will face growing challenges in translating these military achievements into stable regional and international acceptance. In this context, power remains capable of producing deterrence, but incapable on its own of producing legitimacy.

The limits of Israeli power are increasingly visible in the widening gap between the ability to impose realities on the ground and the ability to politically justify and sustain them. The Gaza war between 2023 and 2025 exposed Israel to mounting criticism within universities, media institutions, and human rights organizations across Europe and the United States, while simultaneously widening the distance between official Western support and emerging public opinion trends that increasingly perceive Israeli power as having moved beyond the boundaries of self-defense toward the production of a continuing moral and political crisis. Israeli military superiority therefore appears more capable of managing crises than resolving them.

This transformation became particularly evident in the expansion of protests across American universities and the escalation of European criticism associated with the Gaza war. The resulting gap is likely to shape Israel's regional position in the post-war environment. States that may cooperate with

Israel economically or in the security sphere are expected to do so according to highly calculated interests, while remaining cautious regarding the political costs of full strategic alignment. Consequently, Israel may retain substantial deterrent and coercive capabilities, yet it will encounter greater difficulty in transforming itself into an accepted center of regional stability, particularly so long as the Palestinian issue remains unresolved in its current form.

From an Ideological Middle East to the Pragmatic Middle East

The most profound transformation emerging from the post-war phase lies in the gradual transition from a Middle East governed by ideological alignments and rigid regional axes toward a more pragmatic and fluid regional order. States are no longer operating solely according to the traditional slogans of resistance, normalization, confrontation, and bloc politics, but increasingly according to more direct calculations centered on security, economics, energy, strategic corridors, investment, domestic stability, and the capacity to absorb the costs of crisis.

This does not signify the end of ideology or the disappearance of longstanding conflicts. The region remains shaped by a dense historical memory of confrontation and by unresolved issues such as Palestine, Gulf security, the future of Iran, and the crisis of the state in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. What is new, however, is that states have become increasingly inclined to manage these issues through a logic of maneuverability, diversified partnerships, and the avoidance of complete integration into closed regional blocs.

The central problem in today's Middle East is not the absence of alliances, but the speed with which they shift under the pressure of crises. The region is increasingly defined by changing spaces, overlapping networks of interest, and security and economic arrangements that continuously emerge and are subsequently reconfigured in response to evolving pressures. States capable of understanding this fluidity at an early stage and transforming it into a strategic framework are likely to hold a comparative advantage in the coming period.

The new pragmatism is evident in the fact that rivalry and partnership no longer operate along rigid or linear lines. A state may oppose another actor in a security file, cooperate with the same actor economically, and simultaneously maintain indirect diplomatic channels on a separate issue. This pattern is visible in Gulf relations with Iran, Israel, and the United States; in Jordan and Syria through attempts to transform geography into strategic utility; and in Egypt through the management of multiple regional roles without claiming comprehensive leadership over the Arab system.

These developments do not indicate the disappearance of ideological conflict, but rather demonstrate that states have become more sensitive to cost calculations. Power, alliances, geographic position, and even political discourse are increasingly evaluated according to their ability to protect economic interests, preserve domestic stability, and expand room for maneuver. For this reason, the coming phase is unlikely to resemble the era of rigid regional axes that characterized earlier decades. Instead,

it is likely to be defined by fluid and overlapping relationships in which rivals and partners intersect simultaneously across multiple arenas.

The most significant transformation in the region therefore does not concern only changes in the balance of power, but also changes in the logic of political thinking itself. States that spent decades managing the region through rigid alignments have gradually begun to recognize that the costs of prolonged attrition now exceed the ability of all parties to sustain them indefinitely. The current phase is consequently less driven by ambitions of decisive victory and more oriented toward managing losses and expanding strategic flexibility.

Conclusion

The Middle East stands before a prolonged transitional phase in the aftermath of the war. Iran will continue defending its position and regional influence, though at a significantly higher cost. The Gulf states will seek forms of security less dependent on external reassurance and more centered on risk management. The Arab Mashreq will attempt to transform geography into political and economic opportunity. Egypt will seek to redefine its role within a multi-centered Arab regional order. Iraq will remain confronted by the unresolved question of statehood and political function. Israel, meanwhile, will face the dilemma of translating military superiority into legitimacy and durable stability.

The Middle East after this war is no longer a region governed by rigid and fixed axes as in previous eras. Alliances have become more flexible, rivalries less clearly defined, and states increasingly operate according to calculations tied to security, economics, and domestic stability rather than grand ideological narratives. As regional actors attempt to protect their positions and interests, the region appears to be entering a prolonged period of shifting balances in which the ability to manage costs becomes more important than the ability to impose decisive outcomes.

Hedging Its Bets: Egypt's Calculated Position in the US-Israeli War on Iran

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The US-Israeli Operation Epic Fury, launched on February 28, 2026, has thrown the Middle East into profound turmoil, as Iran's three-pronged defense strategy triggered full-scale regional destabilization. First, by targeting Israel as well as US military bases and economic interests across the region, Iran placed GCC countries, along with Jordan, in a precarious position, effectively catching them in the middle of the conflict. Second, Iran's regional network of non-state allies was mobilized against what they perceived as an existential threat to the regime. As a result, additional countries, including Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, became involved. Finally, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz negatively impacted oil prices and disrupted supply chains, further worsening the economic conditions of many already struggling countries in the Middle East.

Amid this regional crisis, Egypt's position cannot be understood as a form of passive neutrality. Rather, Cairo has developed a pattern of "flexible positioning" characterized by several key features: solidarity with the Gulf states, avoidance of a rupture with Washington, resistance to the expansion of Israel's regional influence, and a sustained commitment to preserving open channels for mediation.

Accordingly, the significance of the Egyptian case lies not merely in defining Cairo's position toward the war, but in what it reveals about the transformation of Egypt's role within the Arab regional order. Does this policy reflect Egypt's return as a regional mediator capable of managing strategic balances, or does it instead expose the limits of its capacity for leadership within an Arab system increasingly shaped by Gulf resources, Israeli military initiative, and American security guarantees? This paper argues that Egypt now operates within an intermediate position between leadership and mediation. It no longer possesses the capacity to lead the Arab order through the logic of a single regional center, yet it still retains sufficient geopolitical weight, diplomatic experience, and political legitimacy to manage spaces of de-escalation, negotiation, and the prevention of full-scale regional polarization.

Egypt's Official Stance: Opposing Escalation, Solidarity with the Gulf

A review of the official statements issued by the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) throughout the conflict reveals three consistently recurring themes: calls for restraint and the resumption of negotiations to contain the escalation, expressions of support for the Gulf countries alongside condemnation of Iranian hostile attacks, and criticism of Israeli aggression while carefully avoiding direct condemnation of the United States.[1]

The fine line that Egypt sought to navigate is best exemplified in the reported revision of its first official statement on February 28. According to some reports, Egypt's initial MFA statement was withdrawn shortly after publication, amended, and then republished. Initially, the statement expressed Egypt's deep concern over the military escalation and warned of a widening conflict. However, following the Iranian retaliatory response, the statement was revised to emphasize strong condemnation of attacks that violated the territorial sovereignty of the GCC states.[2] A similar message was reiterated by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on March 1, while addressing the Egyptian military leaders. He stated that Iran had miscalculated and should not have targeted Arab states under any circumstances.[3]

> Egypt no longer appears as the leading Arab power in the traditional sense, nor as a marginal state devoid of influence. Rather, it has become a balancing power that operates within the limits of its capabilities, transforming constraints into diplomatic space for strategic action.

Egypt's solidarity with the Gulf countries came as no surprise. Historically and ideologically, Egypt has long positioned itself as a primary defender of the Arab world. This stance is best encapsulated by el-Sisi's *Masafat al-Sikka* (meaning within reach) doctrine, which asserts that Egyptian military power is ready to defend the Gulf at any time.[4] Furthermore, for decades, Egypt has viewed the GCC states as a vital economic lifeline for its own chronically strained economy. Since 2013, the need for Gulf countries' economic support has further intensified. They supported the Egyptian regime by loans, direct deposits to the central bank, investments, and by acting as guarantors to its IMF programs.[5] A recent example is the $35 billion Ras El-Hekma deal with the UAE in early 2024,

1 Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Statements and Words of the Minister of Foreign Affairs," https://www.mfa.gov.eg/ar/Ministers/StatementsAndWordsOfTheMinisterOfForeignAffairs (accessed May 3, 2026).

2 Hamza Hendawi, "Egypt's War Problem: US Ties, Iran Relations and Bonds with Gulf Arab States," The National, March 2, 2026, https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/202602/03//egypts-war-problem-us-ties-iran-relations-and-bonds-with-gulf-arab-states (accessed May 3, 2026).

3 Mariam Wahba, "Sisi Faces Modest Fury Over Iran War," Foreign Policy, March 9, 2026, https://foreignpolicy.com/2026/03/09/egypt-sisi-iran-war-israel-us/ (accessed 3.5.2026).

4 Al Arabiya, "Al-Sisi: Protecting Arab and Gulf Security… 'Masafat al-Sikka,'" May 20, 2014, www.t.ly/xSoQY (accessed May 3, 2026).

5 Khalil Al-Anani, "Gulf Countries' Aid to Egypt: It Is Politics, Not the Economy, Stupid!," Arab Center Washington DC, May 5, 2022, https://arabcenterdc.org/

which marked the largest foreign direct investment in the country's history.[6]

In this context, Egyptian solidarity with the Gulf should not be interpreted merely as a rhetorical extension of the "Masafat al-Sikka" doctrine, but rather as a structural interest tied to the stability of the Gulf sphere itself. For Cairo, Gulf security has become intertwined with the conditions of Egypt's own financial and monetary stability. Through investments, deposits, remittances, employment opportunities, and energy linkages, the Gulf has evolved into a vital economic depth for the Egyptian state. Consequently, any major disruption in the Gulf directly affects Egypt's capacity to manage its domestic economic crises, rendering regional escalation a dual threat: a threat to the security of its allies and a threat to the equation of internal Egyptian stability itself.

Given its deep economic dependence on the Gulf, preventing further escalation is a vital interest for Egypt, whose economy has already been adversely affected by the war. Beyond its actual and projected negative impact on the key sources of Egypt's national income, namely the Suez Canal fees, tourism revenues, and remittances from workers abroad (predominantly in the GCC countries), the conflict triggered a sharp decline in Egypt's reported exports (by 77% in the first two to three days) and a significant outflow of short-term foreign investments, or hot money, estimated at $5–8 billion. Consequently, the Egyptian pound depreciated rapidly, surpassing 52 EGP per US dollar within a matterofdays.[7]

Egypt's other major concern is its energy security. As a result of the war, its two primary gas suppliers have significantly been compromised. Imports from Israel, previously secured under a $35 billion contract, have declined by 95%, while supplies from Qatar were disrupted following Iranian missile strikes that disabled 17% of its production capacity. As a result, Egypt's gas import bill has more than doubled, according to Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly. In response, the government has enacted emergency measures, including a 17% increase in fuel prices and mandatory early closure of businesses to ration electricity consumption, triggering widespread dissatisfaction within the domestic businesscommunity.[8]

Countering Israel: Balancing Economic Imperatives and Geopolitical Constraints

Egypt's economic imperatives and its strategic commitment to Gulf security are not the sole determinants of its behavior in the current crisis. Equally significant is its concern over the rise of Israeli aggressive posture in the region. Despite the peace treaty signed nearly five decades ago, relations between the two countries can best be described as a "cold peace." Moreover, under the right-

resource/gulf-countries-aid-to-egypt-it-is-politics-not-the-economy-stupid/ (accessed 3.5.2026).

6 Yahia Shawkat, "Understanding Egypt's Ras Al-Hekma Land Deal: No Panacea", The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, March 12, 2024, https://timep.org/2024/03/12/understanding-egypts-ras-al-hekma-land-deal-no-panacea/ (accessed 3.5.2026).

7 Mohamed Ezz and Patrick Werr, "Iran War Tests Egypt's Unsteady Economy", Reuters, March 10, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-war-tests-egypts-unsteady-economy-2026-03-10/ (accessed 3.5.2026).

8 El Fadil Ibrahim, "Can a drowning Egypt really play Iran war mediator too?", Responsible Statecraft, April 1, 2026, https://responsiblestatecraft.org/egypt-iran-mediator/ (accessed 3.5.2026).

wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Egyptian regime has perceived several warning signs. Contrary to the provisions of their mutual agreements, during its war on Gaza, Israel assumed control over the Philadelphi Corridor along its border with Egypt. In addition, a number of Israeli officials have repeatedly called for the displacement of Gazans into Sinai. More alarmingly, expansionist ambitions framed as "Greater Israel", which include references to parts of Egyptian territory, have been promoted in public discourse by senior officials, including Netanyahu himself. In response to these provocations, Egypt enhanced its military capabilities through major arms deals and expanded the deployment of its forces in Sinai.[9]

> The significance of Egypt's position lies not merely in how Cairo has responded to the war, but in what it reveals about the transformation of Egypt's role within the Arab order. Does this policy signal Egypt's return as a regional mediator capable of managing strategic balances, or does it instead expose the limits of its leadership in an Arab system increasingly shaped by Gulf resources, Israeli military initiative, and American security guarantees?

Perceived as a direct threat to Egypt's national interests, the war on Iran, coupled with ongoing Israeli aggression in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, has echoed Netanyahu's statements about reshaping the Middle East.[10] In this context, Iran and its regional allies, classically seen as a threat by the GCC countries, serve a paradoxically significant function from Egypt's perspective by keeping Israel under sustained pressure. Hence, if Israel succeeds in toppling the Iranian regime and dismantling its network of regional allies, it might be emboldened and become in a better strategic position to implement its plans for Gaza that could undermine Egypt's interests.

From this perspective, Cairo does not view the war on Iran merely as a conflict between Washington and Tel Aviv on one side and Tehran on the other, but rather as a moment that could reshape the regional balance of power in ways that place Egypt within a more constricted security environment. A fundamental weakening of Iran, coupled with continued Israeli escalation in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, could shift Israel from the position of a militarily superior power to that of a regional power capable of redefining the security order surrounding Egypt itself.

Accordingly, Egyptian concerns regarding Israel are connected not only to the trajectory of the war, but also to the postwar regional order: who will define the rules of the region, and who will prevent

9 David Ben-Basat, "Israel-Egypt Relations: A Fragile Peace Under Growing Tension", Jerusalem Post, February 15, 2025, https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-842083 (accessed 4.5.2026).
Middle East Eye, "Netanyahu Says He Backs 'Greater Israel', Which Includes Parts of Jordan and Egypt", August 13, 2025, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/netanyahu-embraces-greater-israel-vision-including-parts-jordan-and-egypt (accessed 4.5.2026).

10 Akram Zaoui, "Netanyahu's Long Game to Reorder the Middle East", IAI, March 16, 2026, https://www.iai.it/en/publications/c05/netanyahus-long-game-reorder-middle-east (accessed 4.5.2026).

Gaza, Sinai, and the Eastern Mediterranean from being transformed into arenas of direct pressure on Egyptian national security?

Balance or incapacity?

Egypt's conduct during this war raises a fundamental question: does Cairo's policy represent a calculated balancing strategy, or does it reflect an inability to adopt a decisive position? The more persuasive answer is that Egypt is practicing a form of constrained balancing under heavy structural limitations. Cairo does not possess the luxury of fully aligning with any single side, because each alignment carries direct costs for its national interests. Broad military alignment with the Gulf could place Egypt in open confrontation with Iran and its allies, while excessive proximity to Washington and Tel Aviv could erode its Arab legitimacy. At the same time, tolerance of an unconstrained Israeli rise threatens Egypt's own security environment in Gaza, Sinai, and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Conversely, Egypt's geographic position, negotiating experience, and diversified regional connections provide it with a greater capacity to manage de-escalation than to lead confrontation. In this sense, Egypt no longer appears as a leading power in the traditional Arab sense, nor as a marginal state devoid of influence. Rather, it functions as a balancing state operating within the limits of its capabilities, transforming structural constraints into a space for diplomatic maneuverability.

Consequently, in contrast to the *Masafat al-Sikka* approach, Egypt's military support to the GCC states during this conflict has remained limited and largely defensive.[11] Even the deployment of Egyptian Rafale fighters to UAE, which was revealed during President el-Sisi's official visit in May 2026, was seen as "primarily symbolic".[12] Instead, it seems that Egypt opted to prioritize diplomatic engagement in coordination with both Pakistan and Türkiye.[13] Beyond formal contacts and official visits, Egypt, primarily through its General Intelligence Service, facilitated indirect communication between Washington and Tehran during the ceasefire negotiations.[14]

Though it may seem wisely calculated, Egypt's balanced response has placed it in an uneasy position. While navigating this trilemma, its tensions with Israel have grown, fueled by sharp diplomatic rhetoric and accusations regarding its military deployments in Sinai.[15] Simultaneously, it seems that its Gulf allies were somewhat frustrated, expecting from the Egyptian regime more tangible backing in the face of the Iranian threat.[16] Furthermore, Egypt's pursuit of de-escalation runs counter to the

11 Africa Intelligence, "Rabat and Cairo's Military Support for Gulf States in Face of Iran Bombs," April 21, 2026, https://www.africaintelligence.com/north-africa/2026/04/21/rabat-and-cairo-s-military-support-for-gulf-states-in-face-of-iran-bombs%2C110708197-art (accessed 4.5.2026).

12 Egypt Deploys Rafale Fighters to Abu Dhabi to Reinforce UAE, U.S. and France Against Iranian Strikes, Military Watch Magazine, May 8, 2026, https://militarywatchmagazine.com/article/egypt-deploys-rafale-abu-dhabi-reinforce-uae (accessed 11.5.2026).

13 Muhammed Yasin Güngör, "Türkiye, Egypt, Pakistan Working to Bring Iran to Table, No Tangible Results Yet: Reports", Anadolu Agency, April 5, 2026, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkiye-egypt-pakistan-working-to-bring-iran-to-table-no-tangible-results-yet-reports/3894022 (accessed 4.5.2026).

14 Angie Omar, "Egypt's Discrete Role in the Ceasefire with Iran", Diwan, April 16, 2026, https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2026/04/egypt-discrete-role-in-the-ceasefire-with-iran (accessed 4.5.2026).

15 Ben-Basat, "Israel-Egypt Relations".

16 Imad K. Harb, "Egypt and the Gulf: A Relationship under Pressure", April 21, 2026, Arab Center Washington DC, https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/egypt-and-

objectives of some GCC states, which have lobbied the US administration not to end the war before the Iranian regime is strategically weakened, arguing that "a simple ceasefire is not enough".[17]

The war reveals that Egypt's regional role is no longer based on leading the Arab order from a single center of power, but rather on managing balances among multiple power centers. Cairo is operating within a highly delicate equation: deep economic dependence on the Gulf, a strategic relationship with the United States, growing concern over the persistence of regional instability driven by Iran's wartime strategies, and acute security sensitivities toward any Israeli expansion in Gaza, Sinai, and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Accordingly, Egypt's policy throughout the war presents a model of what may be described as "flexible positioning" - the ability to support allies without sliding into open confrontation, preserve relations with Washington without granting Israel an unrestricted strategic mandate, and engage in mediation without compromising national security calculations.

the-gulf-a-relationship-under-pressure/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed 4.5.2026).

17 Samia Nakhoul, "Gulf States Tell US Ending the War Is Not Enough, Iran's Capabilities Must Be Degraded", Reuters, March 27, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/gulf-states-tell-us-ending-war-is-not-enough-irans-capabilities-must-be-degraded-2026-03-27/ (accessed 4.5.2026).

Palestine at the Heart of the Regional Storm: Siege, Marginalization, and Replacement

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The prospect of regional wars has always constituted a strategic concern for the Palestinian cause, given the sensitivity of Israeli colonial policies to regional and international responses - responses upon which Palestinians have long relied as a form of political and regional protection, particularly considering the deepening expansion of the colonial project. With the outbreak of war in February 2026 and the region's descent into escalating instability and compounded security, economic, and political challenges, it became increasingly evident that Israel was exploiting the war as a shield for its policies on the ground. This further intensified the already difficult phase confronting the Palestinian cause, amid the accelerating decline of both regional and international attention toward issues that had previously occupied the forefront of Palestinian concerns before the confrontation - including Gaza, the West Bank, and the Palestinian question in its broader strategic dimension.

It is important to note here that the war is still ongoing, even if fought through less overtly destructive and lethal means. Politically, the war continues to occupy the highest position on the hierarchy of urgent and volatile regional issues, whose resolution constitutes a necessary gateway for restoring some degree of centrality to the Palestinian issue. This applies particularly to the two principal arenas of conflict: Iran and Lebanon. Economically, the process of strategic exhaustion affecting both the region and the wider world also remains ongoing, making the war a continuing priority for political debate and international engagement, not least because of its direct impact on citizens' livelihoods and on the political standing of governments around the world.

The current regional war reveals that the greatest threat facing the Palestinian cause lies not solely in the escalation of Israeli violence on the ground, but in the gradual transition of Palestine from a central issue in regional discourse into a deferred file within a new regional security architecture increasingly preoccupied with Iran, strategic corridors, deterrence, and post-war arrangements. Within this transformation, Israel has acquired greater space to advance its project in Gaza and the West Bank at a significantly lower political cost, benefiting from a regional and international environment absorbed

by more urgent security and economic priorities.

From this perspective, this article does not approach the war merely as an external event that has affected the Palestinians, but rather as a moment that has fundamentally reordered the position of the Palestinian issue within the regional system itself. Gaza has shifted from being the focal point of international attention in the aftermath of war to becoming marginalized within broader security bargaining processes. At the same time, the West Bank has increasingly turned into an open arena for the acceleration of settlement expansion and demographic restructuring policies, while the Palestinian Authority faces growing political and financial exposure. Accordingly, the central question is no longer simply how Israel exploited the war, but how the war itself contributed to reproducing Palestine as a postponed issue within a regional order that is actively redefining its strategic priorities.

Gaza: From the Center to the Margins

Gaza stands as the clearest example of the transformation of the Palestinian cause from the center of regional attention to its margins. While the war on Gaza had previously imposed itself upon regional and international diplomacy as a primary issue, the broader regional war has displaced it from the forefront of political priorities, granting Israel greater space to manage the sector through a framework that is politically quieter yet operationally more severe on the ground. Israeli policies toward Gaza have not ceased; rather, they have become less visible within the international arena, and this, in itself, constitutes the essence of the transformation.

On 19 February 2026, the Peace Council held its first meeting in Washington, attended by representatives of twenty-seven states that had officially joined the council, alongside twenty-one additional states participating as observers. Despite the broad European absence from the council amid disagreements over its charter, the meeting nevertheless produced pledges amounting to seven billion dollars for reconstruction efforts. It was also announced that Japan would host a subsequent donor conference in support of the council, while the President of the World Bank declared the initiation of a Gaza Reconstruction and Development Fund.[1]

In parallel, the National Committee for the Administration of the Gaza Strip moved to institutionalize its operations, announcing in mid-February its intention to establish a police force as a foundational step toward building a system based on the rule of law. At the same time, the committee continued to demand full empowerment and the granting of all necessary authorities required to carry out its responsibilities, amid Israel's refusal to allow its members to enter the territory. Meanwhile, Hamas announced the completion of procedures for transferring governing powers in all areas of administration to the committee.[2]

1 $7 Billion for Gaza Relief at the First Meetings of the 'Peace Council'," Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, 19 February 2026, https://2u.pw/b8Qv0Y

2 "Gaza Administration Committee Announces Efforts to Establish a Professional Police Force in the Strip," Xinhua News Agency, 19 February 2026, https://arabic.news.cn/20260220/9c54b-583562b4355a50e101fb64852f0/c.html

Israel exploited the decline in international attention toward Gaza along three parallel trajectories: hollowing out the framework for governing and reconstructing the sector, expanding territorial and operational control under the cover of security arrangements, and pushing the population into an increasingly coercive environment through the reduction of humanitarian assistance and the intensification of daily pressure. In this way, the marginalization of Gaza did not emerge merely as a secondary consequence of the regional war, but evolved into an Israeli opportunity to reshape realities within the sector itself.

> The ongoing regional war reveals that the greatest threat to the Palestinian cause lies not only in escalating Israeli violence on the ground, but in Palestine's shift from being the region's central issue to becoming a deferred file within a new security architecture focused on Iran, strategic corridors, deterrence, and post-war arrangements.

Regarding the peace plan, the continued prevention of the National Committee's entry into the Gaza Strip generated no meaningful international pressure or response. At the same time, United States announced its intention to close the Civil-Military Coordination Center operated by the U.S. Army in southern Israel, while also reducing the number of American personnel serving within the International Stabilization Force from 190 members to only 40.[3]

Less than three weeks after the outbreak of the war, the number of aid trucks entering the Gaza Strip had declined by nearly 80%, falling from approximately 4,200 trucks per week to around 590 trucks during the first week of the war alone. At the same time, intensified killings and systematic targeting operations escalated sharply. Under the cover of this declining international attention, Israel expanded its buffer zone to encompass nearly 60% of the total area of the Gaza Strip, rather than the 53% stipulated in the agreement.[4]

Israel, therefore, exploited the war to shift Gaza Strip from the center of regional attention to the margins. In doing so, it was able to advance its strategy of consolidating the so-called "yellow zone" as a permanent area of control within a broader framework of enduring security belts. This strategy effectively confined Palestinians to roughly one-third of the territory of the Gaza Strip, while reintroducing humanitarian aid as an instrument of pressure and coercion. Simultaneously, policies of killing and targeted assassinations escalated in a gradual but systematic manner, with the rate of Palestinian fatalities increasing by nearly fivefold during the two weeks following the cessation of the war[5].

In parallel, and at the present moment, Israel has placed a clear slogan on the table: "Hamas's weapons obstruct the ceasefire and reconstruction." This signals Israel's success in confining the entire dis-

3 "Report: Washington to Close Coordination Center in Israel amid the Stalling of Trump's Plan… How Did the 'Peace Council' Respond?", Arab 48, 2 May 2026, https://2u.pw/K4uRGj

4 "Netanyahu Admits Undermining the Ceasefire: Israel Advances inside Gaza and Turns the 'Yellow Line' into Open Occupation," Quds Net

5 "The Number of Gaza Martyrs Increased More Than Fivefold during the Iran War Truce," Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, 25 April 2026, https://2u.pw/YvascR

cussion to the issue of Hamas's armaments as a precondition for moving toward any step - however limited - concerning the administration of the Gaza Strip, Israeli withdrawal, or reconstruction efforts. This position has also been adopted by the Peace Council, represented by its High Commissioner Nikolay Mladenov.[6]

These developments indicate that Gaza Strip has emerged as a principal loser in this war, amid the fragmentation of regional priorities, the declining enthusiasm of Donald Trump for his Gaza-related initiative, and the broadening freedom granted to Israel in its conduct there. The current state of political stagnation appears to serve Israel's efforts to freeze the file and transform it into a domain governed primarily by Israeli policy calculations, particularly in the context of electoral competition and political posturing.

At this stage of the war, Israel appears to be adopting a pattern of gradual escalation with limited political cost - a form of "soft escalation strategy." Through measured, quiet, yet cumulative steps, Israel advances incrementally toward tightening its grip over Gaza and restoring conditions resembling those that existed prior to the ceasefire. Simultaneously, however, it maintains a political and media discourse emphasizing its formal commitment to the ceasefire arrangement.

This reality has also been reflected in the discourse of Hamas, which increasingly conveys frustration and an inability to effectively confront such a situation. With the decline of international momentum in support of Gaza, the inability of the National Committee to exercise its functions, and the continuation of field operations and targeted strikes - including the recent targeting of the movement's leading figure in the Strip, Izz al-Din al-Haddad - Hamas faces mounting pressure amid the erosion of both its political and operational room for maneuver, particularly as discussion surrounding its weapons has become the foundational threshold for any transition beyond the current state of stalemate.

The West Bank: A Different Context

The West Bank differs from Gaza in both the nature of the Israeli project and the instruments through which it is pursued. In Gaza, Israel's strategy is centered on managing demographic density, enforcing security control, and maintaining siege conditions. In the West Bank, however, the project is based on the gradual reconfiguration of land, population, and political authority. From this perspective, the regional war did not generate a new Israeli policy in the West Bank; rather, it provided existing policies with broader operational space and reduced the international political costs associated with settlement expansion, escalating violence, and creeping annexation.

Israel activated an extensive system of closures and surveillance across the West Bank, imposing a comprehensive cordon around cities, villages, and residential communities. At the same time, Israeli settlers intensified their attacks, taking advantage of the region's preoccupation with the war. These assaults resulted in the killing of six Palestinians during the first two weeks of the conflict through

6 "Hamas's Weapons Blow Up the Gaza Truce… Is a New Invasion Imminent?", Blinks, 14 May 2026, https://2u.pw/bmEnf6

direct attacks carried out by settlers.[7]

These attacks, however, were not exceptional incidents, but rather an extension of an escalating strategy through which settler violence has expanded both geographically and in terms of its intensity, boldness, and levels of violence. This has unfolded amid multifaceted support provided by Israeli authorities, including - not least - the effective suspension of the enforcement of Israeli law against settlers. During the Iranian war, settler attacks occurred in successive and closely timed waves, involving large and organized incursions into Palestinian villages, live gunfire, property destruction, theft, and, notably, expanded activity in areas classified as A and B.

This policy, aimed at displacement and forcing Palestinians into retreat and confinement, has proceeded in parallel with the establishment of settlement outposts within the targeted areas, pointing to a coordinated strategy managed by an integrated settlement apparatus. At the same time, settlers pressured their government to adopt measures designed to "eradicate armed infrastructure" in the West Bank, particularly in Jenin, where settlement activity resumed intensively through rapid and expansive confiscation measures and settlement-unit construction.[8]

On the security level, Israel exploited the skies over the West Bank as an advanced air-defense zone, intercepting Iranian missiles above different areas of the territory. Shrapnel and debris scattered across multiple locations, leading to the deaths of several Palestinian civilians as a result of these interception operations.

The question here is whether the Iranian war can be understood as a cover that Israel exploited to advance its project in the West Bank. I am inclined to argue that it cannot, because the structure of Israeli colonial policies in the West Bank differs fundamentally from that of the Gaza Strip.

The Zionist project in the West Bank is built upon intensive settlement expansion, replacement, internal displacement, and the empowerment of a settlement structure that increasingly resembles a semi-autonomous "settler state." This project is managed through the framework of Religious Zionism, including its representation within the government and the Knesset, its strong presence within the military establishment, and an extensive institutional network that exclusively administers the settlement enterprise according to a clear strategy largely indifferent to international public opinion or threatened sanctions.

Yet, as in Gaza, Israel today operates in the West Bank with relative freedom from international pressure. Although periodic international criticism has emerged - including some criticism from the United States - it has not altered the strategic landscape. In response to modest European sanctions imposed in May 2026 on settlement organizations and figures supporting settlement expansion, Israel instead moved toward allocating additional governmental support to the settlement project.

7 "Settlers Double Their Attacks in the West Bank since the War on Iran," Al Jazeera, 11 March 2026, https2//:u.pw74/AJ6a

8 Antoine Shalhat, "The West Bank in the Shadow of the War with Iran," Al-Mashhad Al-Israeli, 9 March 2026, https://2u.pw/FLRQuL

Here, the Palestinian Authority appears almost entirely incapable of altering this reality. It possesses neither the capacity nor the political room for maneuver necessary to change the situation. Given that the strategy of the Palestine Liberation Organization relies almost exclusively on supportive international and regional pathways, the Palestinian Authority finds itself with severely limited influence in the face of such an asymmetrical confrontation. This, in turn, has generated a broad sense of public frustration, alongside scattered individual efforts to confront settler attacks and violence.

From the Centrality of Palestine to the Centrality of Regional Security

One of the most significant consequences of the regional war has been the shift in the center of political debate in the Middle East from the question of Palestine to the question of regional security. Priorities that once revolved around ending the war in Gaza, reconstruction efforts, the future of the Palestinian Authority, and the two-state solution have increasingly been displaced by issues considered more urgent for regional and international capitals: Gulf security, the future of Iran, energy flows, maritime corridors, and post-war deterrence arrangements.

Israel has benefited from this transition because it has been able to position its policies in Gaza and the West Bank within a less scrutinized political environment. The more the region becomes preoccupied with the Iranian threat and with broader security and energy arrangements, the less capable the Palestinians become of imposing their cause as a diplomatic priority. In this context, marginalization does not appear as the complete absence of Palestine from regional discourse, but rather as a decline in its weight within the regional agenda. Palestine remains present morally and rhetorically, yet increasingly less capable of constraining Israeli policies on the ground.

The Repercussions of the Regional War on the Palestinian Cause

The Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization had been actively engaged with the international coalition supporting the two-state solution, while simultaneously working intensively to fulfill requirements related to reform and institutionalization. Parallel to this effort, they were attempting - increasingly desperately - to secure the minimum financial resources necessary to maintain essential public services and ensure the payment of public-sector salaries.

During the war, however, the transfer of Palestinian financial revenues withheld by Israel - commonly referred to as clearance revenues - was suspended. The Palestinian Ministry of Finance ceased receiving any portion of these funds, which had exceeded five billion dollars. At the same time, Israel continued to erode the authority of the Palestinian Authority, restricting its ability to move, operate, and provide support and services to its population. This escalated further when Israel seized land within areas classified as Area A for military purposes, marking the first such action since the signing of the Oslo Accords.

As the Palestinian issue continues to fade from the hierarchy of regional priorities, prospects for providing political and economic safety nets to the Palestinian Authority have also diminished. Mean-

while, the economic crisis in the West Bank has intensified to unprecedented levels, while settler violence has evolved into an existential threat for many villages and key regions. For example, the number of displaced Bedouin communities has reached thirty-three, despite the fact that these communities historically constituted the backbone of Palestinian presence in the Jordan Valley. Simultaneously, the Gaza Strip remains trapped in a prolonged and exhausting state of attrition.

Palestinian political elites believe that no meaningful horizon of security will emerge except through a comprehensive regional settlement that places all regional issues - foremost among them the Palestinian question - on a single negotiating table capable of addressing the difficult questions and imposing structural solutions. Yet the coming months, shaped by anticipation surrounding the outcomes of the war and the eventual contours of the regional order, are likely to witness a Zionist political competition driven by electoral calculations, with efforts to score gains in Lebanon and Gaza, while Religious Zionism seeks to secure even more radical gains in the West Bank.

At the same time, despite profound frustration among nearly all Palestinian political and social actors, the Palestinian Authority continues to pursue the path of the two-state coalition and Palestinian-European understandings. Local elections were held at the end of April 2026, while Fatah convened its Eighth Congress, during which elections resulted in the replacement of roughly half of its highest leadership body, the Central Committee, with the arrival of figures enjoying broader popular and social legitimacy. In parallel, draft versions of both the constitution and the political parties law were issued, alongside the completion of the first phase of the government's comprehensive reform plan.

Despite this political activity, however, its timing, the limited visibility of its immediate effects, and the overwhelming burdens placed upon ordinary Palestinians have led many within the Palestinian public to view these measures as insufficient relative to the scale of the challenges confronting them. Public sentiment increasingly demands steps capable of producing meaningful transformations, at minimum in terms of resilience and protection.

In conclusion, The current regional war reveals that the Palestinian cause faces not only the danger of Israeli violence, but also the danger of declining within the hierarchy of regional and international priorities. As the center of attention shifts toward Iran, Gulf security, strategic corridors, and post-war arrangements, Israel acquires broader space to manage its project in Gaza and the West Bank at a lower political cost, while Palestinians confront a reality marked by greater exposure and diminished capacity to mobilize effective external pressure.

> Israel has benefited from this shift by pursuing its policies in Gaza and the West Bank under far less scrutiny. As regional attention becomes increasingly absorbed by the Iranian threat and by security and energy arrangements, the Palestinians' ability to keep their cause at the forefront of diplomatic priorities continues to diminish.

In Gaza, this transformation is reflected in the tran-

sition from a moment of intense international centrality to a prolonged condition of stagnation and exhaustion, in which reconstruction, governance, and withdrawal become deferred or heavily conditioned files. In the West Bank, marginalization manifests differently through the acceleration of settlement expansion, increasing settler violence, and attempts to reshape land and population dynamics under the cover of a region preoccupied with war. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority faces a multidimensional crisis combining financial suffocation, declining political capacity, and a widening gap between the demands for institutional reform and the daily threats confronting Palestinian society.

Accordingly, the most dangerous consequence of the war lies not merely in granting Israel an additional opportunity to expand its policies, but in restructuring the broader environment within which the Palestinian cause operates. Palestine remains present in political and moral discourse, yet it has become increasingly absent from the centers of regional and international decision-making. This constitutes the essence of strategic marginalization: a condition in which the cause continues to receive political and ethical recognition, while progressively losing its ability to impose tangible costs on the occupation or alter the trajectory of policies being implemented on the ground.

Lebanon and Hezbollah in an Era of Transformation: From the Deterrence Equation to the Test of Readaptation

Sohaib Jawhar

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The involvement of Hezbollah following the American–Israeli attack on Iran in February 2026 was not merely a circumstantial response to the assassination of the Iranian leadership.[1] Rather, it represented a revealing moment of a deeper transformation in the party's position within the regional order. This war, with the strategic shock it inflicted upon Iran, placed Hezbollah not only before the imperative of solidarity, but also before the necessity of redefining its role and function within a rapidly changing environment in which long-standing constants that once appeared firmly entrenched are steadily eroding.

The American–Israeli war against Iran revealed that Hezbollah no longer operates within the same regional environment that facilitated its rise over the past decades. The organization, long accustomed to functioning as one of Iran's principal deterrence instruments against Israel, found itself confronted with a far narrower equation: the need to demonstrate solidarity with Iran and preserve the image of deterrence on the one hand, while simultaneously avoiding dragging Lebanon into a large-scale war that the country lacks the capacity to endure on the other.

Within this narrow space emerged what may be described as a strategy of "edge management" - a calibrated approach based on approaching escalation without sliding into comprehensive confrontation. This strategy reflects not only Hezbollah's remaining capabilities, but also the new constraints surrounding it. Hezbollah continues to possess the ability to influence events and send military signals, yet it has become increasingly compelled to calculate the Lebanese, regional, and international costs of any step with far greater caution than in previous periods.

1 France 24, "Why Did Hezbollah Decide to Support Iran and Enter a Confrontation with Israel at This Time Despite Its Military and Political Weakness?", March 2, 2026. Available at: https://f24.my/Bm7r

This article examines Hezbollah's transformation from a deterrence actor operating with broad strategic margins into one constrained by a changing regional environment, positioned between Iranian pressure, the fragility of the Lebanese domestic arena, the Israeli drive to impose new security realities, and the American effort to reintegrate Lebanon into wider regional arrangements. In this sense, the war appears not merely as a military test for Hezbollah, but as a test of its future function within both Lebanon and the broader regional order.

First: The Transformation of Hezbollah's Function within the Regional Equation

The significance of the war lies in the fact that it revealed Hezbollah's transition from a logic of open deterrence to one of constrained deterrence. The organization has not lost its ability to employ force or influence the broader confrontation equation, yet it now operates within a far narrower strategic margin shaped by three interconnected factors: the scale of the blow sustained by Iran, Lebanon's declining capacity to endure a large-scale war, and Israel's attempt to exploit the moment in order to reshape the security environment in southern Lebanon.

For decades, Hezbollah represented one of Iran's most significant instruments in maintaining the balance of deterrence with Israel. However, the strike targeting Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei revived a fundamental question: does the party still operate within a cohesive regional command structure, or is it gradually transforming into a semi-autonomous actor compelled to redefine its own priorities?

The launch of rockets toward the Israeli interior carried a dual message: Hezbollah remains present within the confrontation and retains the capability to respond, yet it does not seek to drag Lebanon into a comprehensive war. In this sense, the response was less an expression of regaining strategic initiative than an attempt to preserve the image of deterrence within limits that would not trigger the collapse of the Lebanese domestic arena.[2]

This transformation reflects Hezbollah's shift from the position of a "strategic initiator" to that of a "strategically constrained actor," operating within a narrow margin between the necessity of preserving deterrence and the risks of slipping into a confrontation whose conditions it can no longer fully control. In turn, this shift also reflects Iran's declining ability to impose a unified rhythm upon its network of allies amid unprecedented military and political pressures.

If the regional factor compelled the party to recalculate its position, the Lebanese factor constituted the most decisive constraint shaping its behavior. Lebanon after 2019 differs fundamentally from the Lebanon that preceded it. Economic collapse, the erosion of state institutions, and deep vertical political polarization have all rendered any large-scale military adventure an exceptionally costly option.

2 Anadolu Agency, "Lebanon.. 'Hezbollah' Announces the Launch of a Batch of Rockets and Drones at Israel." Available at: https://v.aa.com.tr/3845849

Within this context, the position adopted by the Lebanese state - under the presidency of Joseph Aoun and the government of Nawaf Salam - appeared to represent a clear attempt to reassert the authority of the state over decisions of war and peace,[3] at least on the political and rhetorical levels. Yet this trajectory was not merely an expression of sovereign will; it also emerged in response to direct international pressure, particularly from the United States, which linked Lebanon's stability to progress in efforts aimed at the disarmament of Hezbollah.

However, the central dilemma lies not in the official position itself, but rather in its limited capacity to evolve into an executable policy. Despite its sovereign rhetoric, the Lebanese state lacks the necessary instruments to enforce such a position, leaving it trapped in an intermediate space: neither capable of fully containing Hezbollah nor able to completely sever itself from it.

Here emerges one of the structural paradoxes of the Lebanese system: a state that formally demands a monopoly over the legitimate use of force, yet operates within a balance-of-power system that renders such a monopoly more theoretical than practical.

> The U.S.–Israeli war against Iran revealed that Hezbollah no longer operates within the same regional environment that enabled its rise over the past decades. Long regarded as one of Iran's principal deterrence assets against Israel, the group now faces a far narrower equation: demonstrating solidarity with Iran and preserving its deterrent image on the one hand, while avoiding dragging Lebanon into a large-scale war that the country is in no position to endure on the other.

Second: Israel and the Strategy of Imposing Facts on the Ground

In contrast to Hezbollah's strategy of managing the edge of escalation, Israel sought to push that very edge toward the construction of a new security reality. It did not interpret Hezbollah's calibrated restraint merely as a factor of de-escalation, but rather as an indication of the narrowing limits of the organization's strategic freedom of movement, and therefore as an opportunity to impose new realities on the ground in southern Lebanon that would become increasingly difficult to reverse in the future.

Israel interpreted Lebanon's fragile reality as a strategic opportunity, shifting from a policy of gradual escalation to one centered on the imposition of faits accomplis. The objective is no longer limited to weakening Hezbollah, but rather extends to reshaping the security environment in southern Lebanon in ways that would permanently constrain the party's future freedom of movement.

3 Al Jazeera Net, "Lebanon Bans Hezbollah's Military Activities and Demands It Surrender Its Weapons", March 2, 2026. Available at: https://aja.ws/9c0sbv

The establishment of the so-called "Yellow Line,"[4] alongside attempts to consolidate a buffer zone inside Lebanese territory, represents a practical manifestation of this strategy. These measures are designed not merely to prevent direct threats, but to create a new geographic and security reality that unilaterally redraws the rules and boundaries of engagement.

The most dangerous dimension of this trajectory lies in its demographic implications. The displacement operations and the prevention of residents from returning to their villages point toward an attempt to reengineer southern Lebanon - that is, to reshape its demographic and security landscape in a manner that produces a depopulated space more easily controlled and managed. This places Lebanon before a challenge that extends far beyond the military dimension, reaching into the foundations of its social and political structure.

The so-called "yellow line" and the buffer zone do not represent merely temporary military arrangements, but rather an Israeli attempt to unilaterally redefine the rules of engagement. Instead of limiting its objective to weakening Hezbollah militarily, Israel is working to reduce the geographic and social space within which the organization operates through sustained security pressure, displacement dynamics, and the gradual prevention of return to certain villages in southern Lebanon.

Third: Negotiations as a Tool for Reshaping the Regional Order

The negotiations held in Washington, D.C. between Lebanon and Israel at the ambassadorial level in the United States were not merely a technical stage aimed at securing a ceasefire.[5] Rather, they formed part of a broader attempt to reintegrate Lebanon into a new regional order. The American proposal is based on a gradualist approach: a temporary halt to military operations, followed by a negotiated process leading toward long-term security arrangements that could later evolve into wider political settlements.

The significance of the negotiations lies in the fact that they are aimed not merely at securing a ceasefire, but at redefining Lebanon's regional function. Washington increasingly views Lebanon as a state that can be integrated into broader post-war security arrangements, beginning with the stabilization of the southern border, extending through the reorganization of relations between the Lebanese state and Hezbollah, and potentially evolving into a new formula governing Lebanon's place within the wider regional security architecture. From Hezbollah's perspective,

This transformation reflects Hezbollah's shift from a strategic initiator to a strategically constrained actor, operating within a narrow margin between preserving deterrence and avoiding a confrontation whose consequences it can no longer fully control.

4 Yasser Manna, Al-Modon, "The Yellow Line in Southern Lebanon… A Fragile Truce and an Open-Ended War of Attrition", May 1, 2026. Available at:

5 Asharq Al-Awsat, "Lebanon Reluctantly Swallows Direct Negotiations with Israel", April 15, 2026. Available at: https://aawsat.news/8q2rm

therefore, the negotiations represent far more than a technical diplomatic process; they constitute a potential gateway to the restructuring of its role inside Lebanon and the gradual reduction of its regional function linked to Iran.

This trajectory reflects a transformation in how Lebanon is perceived - from an arena of conflict into a manageable file within a broader regional architecture that includes normalization tracks and the redistribution of influence. Yet this transformation collides with Lebanon's deeply complex internal reality, where no domestic consensus exists regarding the nature of such arrangements.

While some Lebanese political forces view negotiations as an opportunity to escape the cycle of war, Hezbollah perceives them as a process intended to strip the party of its sources of power and perhaps fundamentally redefine its role within the Lebanese political system.[6] This divergence reflects not merely a political disagreement, but two competing visions for Lebanon's future: either a state integrated into the emerging regional order, or a resistance arena embedded within an alternative regional axis.

Fourth: American Pressure and the Management of Difficult Choices

This negotiating track has been accompanied by intense American pressure combining both incentives and threats. On the one hand, promises have been offered regarding an end to the war, reconstruction efforts, and support for the Lebanese economy. On the other hand, implicit warnings have been issued that Israel could be given broader freedom of action should Lebanon refuse to engage with the proposed framework.

This approach places Lebanon before a coercive equation: either accept painful concessions in exchange for stability, or confront the risks of military escalation and internal collapse. Within such a context, the Lebanese decision-making process becomes less an expression of sovereign will and more a reflection of external balances of power operating amid competing and contradictory agendas.

What further complicates the situation is that these pressures are not exercised in a vacuum.[7] Rather, they intersect with internal political dynamics, as certain Lebanese forces seek to exploit external pressure to strengthen their own positions within the domestic political struggle. This raises the possibility that external pressure could itself become a catalyst for internal fragmentation and conflict.

Against the backdrop of these developments, Lebanon is undergoing a delicate process of internal rebalancing. An open confrontation between the Lebanese state and Hezbollah remains unlikely in the foreseeable future, not because disagreements are absent, but because both sides recognize the potentially catastrophic costs of such an explosion.

The role played by Nabih Berri in this context reflects an effort to keep tensions within manageable

6 Al Arabiya, "Hezbollah Reiterates Its Rejection of Direct Negotiations with Israel", April 27, 2026. Available at: https://ara.tv/j43nm

7 Sky News Arabia, "Samir Geagea: A Meeting Between Aoun and Netanyahu Is Necessary", April 20, 2026. Available at: https://www.skynewsarabia.com/video/1865142

limits and prevent them from escalating into open confrontation. In doing so, Lebanon once again reproduces a familiar political pattern: the management of crises rather than their resolution.[8]

Yet this pattern now faces unprecedented challenges. The scale of regional and international pressure, combined with the fragility of Lebanon's economic situation, has drastically narrowed the margin for maneuver compared to previous periods. This raises a fundamental question: to what extent can Lebanon continue managing its contradictions without eventually sliding into a broader rupture?

Potential Scenarios

The forthcoming scenarios can be understood through the extent to which the involved actors remain within the limits of edge management or move beyond them. The first scenario is the continuation of edge management, in which escalation remains controlled, negotiations continue, and Israel persists in imposing limited realities on the ground without triggering a comprehensive war. The second scenario is a constrained settlement based on gradual security arrangements that redefine Hezbollah's role within the Lebanese state without leading to direct confrontation. The third scenario is the breaking of the edge, meaning the collapse of mutual restraint and Lebanon's slide into either a broader military confrontation or an open internal crisis.

Each of these scenarios remains tied primarily to external dynamics, especially the trajectory of American–Iranian negotiations, reflecting the continued dependence of the Lebanese arena upon regional and international balances of power.

Lebanon between Redefinition and the Risks of Fragmentation

Hezbollah no longer operates as a deterrence actor with broad strategic latitude, but rather as a strategically constrained actor seeking to manage the edge of escalation instead of leading it. The war reveals that Hezbollah has entered a phase markedly different from the one that shaped its regional position over the past two decades. The organization still retains the capacity to influence events and respond militarily, yet it no longer operates within the broad strategic margin it once enjoyed. The blow sustained by Iran, Lebanon's exhausted domestic reality, sustained Israeli pressure, and the American drive toward new regional security arrangements have collectively pushed Hezbollah toward becoming a strategically constrained actor focused on managing the edge of escalation rather than leading it.

At the same time, the Lebanese state faces a challenge of equal complexity. It seeks to reclaim its role in decisions of war and peace, yet it operates within internal balances that do not permit direct confrontation with Hezbollah, while simultaneously confronting external pressures pushing it toward accepting arrangements that may redefine Lebanon's regional position.

8 Justin Antar, Al-Modon, "Bin Farhan's Visit: Clear Support for the Salam Government and a Warning Against Internal Instability", April 25, 2026. Available at: https://www.almodon.com/politics/2026/04/25/%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%86-%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B6%D8%AD-%D9%84-%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B0%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AA%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%84

Consequently, the Lebanese challenge is no longer limited to ending the war itself, but extends to preventing post-war arrangements from evolving into a new internal crisis.

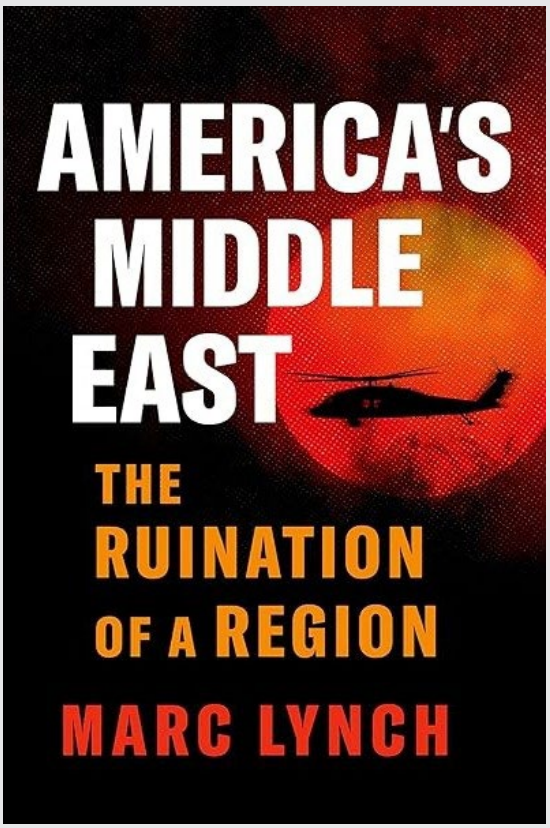
Israel, meanwhile, approaches this moment as an opportunity to reshape southern Lebanon and redefine the rules of engagement with Hezbollah. In this sense, Lebanon's near future will depend largely on the ability of all actors to remain within the logic of edge management: controlled escalation, open-ended negotiations, and sustained pressure without sliding into comprehensive confrontation.

Ultimately, the Lebanese question is no longer confined to the traditional dilemma of war or peace, but has evolved into a deeper question: can Lebanon transform the management of the edge into a pathway toward restoring the state, or will the edge itself become a permanent condition that exhausts the state, Hezbollah, and Lebanese society alike? This constitutes the central test facing Lebanon in the post-war phase.

BOOK REVIEWS

America's Middle East: The Ruination of A Region

Written by: Marc Lynch
Publisher: Oxford University Press
Number of pages: 304



Reviewed by: Angela El Fayez

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Ph.D candidate with the University of South Florida School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies. Angela has worked as a lecturer, translator, and research coordinator on issues related to vulnerable populations in the Jordanian Badi. Her research focuses on global political development in Arab and Global South nations through shifting relations among key domestic and international forces. Highlighting the role of shared norms such as trust, culture, and history for reform and security, she emphasizes the role of youth and women as key to sustainable growth and political transformation.

In his latest book, *America's Middle East: The Ruination of a Region,* academic Marc Lynch takes an in-depth look at the role of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East across six presidencies since 1991. Presenting a chronological overview of U.S administrations over the last thirty-five years, he highlights the remarkable endurance of the U.S'e hegemonic strategy in the Middle East. This strategy he argues is one rooted in the guarantee of U.S diplomatic and security primacy of the region, while disregarding the long history of human rights abuses that plagues many nations. This continuity of flawed foreign policy corroborates Lynch's claim that the role of the United States in the Middle East is one that reflects a powerful and deeply institutionalized structure which has shaped the identity and politics of the Middle East since the Gulf War of 1991. Lynch argues that this institutionalized structure has consistently devolved from bold ambitions to transform the region by each U.S. president, and eventually reverts to the same patterns and relationships that guarantees U.S. primacy in the Middle East. He acknowledges the role of adversaries and allies alike in upholding the status quo to maintain regime stability. Yet, he argues that the pattern of entrenched regime stability in various nations across the region – be they friend or foe - have persisted in being tied to U.S objectives.

Throughout the book, there is an underlying theme that characterizes the role of the United States: despite the "deep political polarization" (pg. 5) in virtually all other areas within U.S foreign and domestic policy, there is a startling unwillingness of virtually every American president to fundamentally change the core of its foreign policy in the Middle East. Indeed, despite broad ambitions to bring political and economic progress, U.S dominance at all costs, remains the key objective. Rather than acknowledging it's own complex and embedded role within Arab states, U.S policy is conditioned to point blame towards actors within the region. Failures of political and economic development or security is viewed as a "pathology" (pg. 9) of the region, an endemic issue, rather than the result of the powerfully entrenched structure of the U.S across virtually all states. Lynch points to how powerful regional actors have influenced knowledge reproduction, and in turn, regional policy to their own advantage. From the stable Gulf monarchies like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, to the U.S's closest ally Israel – all have influenced the cultural, social, and political perceptions and understandings of the Middle East at large. Thus, while Lynch acknowledges the roles of these powerful actors, he centers the role of the U.S as one that has, for better or worse, been the most influential across the complex connections which ties the Middle East together.

The American Strategy

Throughout the text, Lynch proposes evidence to support three major objectives of the U.S and; and how it is those goals characterize the relationship of different presidential administrations with varying state actors in the region. Across an array of seemingly different presidencies throughout recent history, American interests have remained largely the same: maintaining oil flows from Gulf partners, containment of adversaries, and perhaps the most consequential to date - the security of Israel. The relationship with Israel, although initially less "politically co-dependent" developed more significantly with the Nixon Doctrine (pg. 36 & 37) which, decades later, has culminated in the horrific outcomes of the Israel genocide in Gaza and as Lynch himself admits, served as a major impetus for the writing of this text.

Different Presidents – Similar Outcomes

In the introduction of the text, Lynch lays the claim that despite the difference in tactics to approaching Middle East foreign policy, yet a commitment to maintaining the status quo has been virtually the same. Throughout the book, Lynch alludes to the knowledge production and scholarship which has informed U.S policy as one that is produced and reproduced by wealthy elites in the region and a small group of regional experts and policy analysts in government (pg 61-64). The failures to listen to the voices of the Arab public has consistently been the issue of entrenched failures in the region – and characterizes the fallacy of American logic. It was only the horrific war in Gaza – which he describes as "exceptional only in details" which painted a candid picture of the long suffering patterns of Amer-

ican actions in the region.

In the first two chapters, Lynch describes the rise of American primacy in the region as one that supplanted the British and French colonial frameworks of old. He traces the historical origins of the U.S's role in the Middle East, which coincided with its global rise in the twentieth century at the end of the Cold War. During this time, Lynch details how the balance of power in the international system was one of bipolarity - where American and Soviet interests had the potential for major collisions, particularly in the Arab world. It was the Cold War framework that informed policy in the region and concerns that establishing direct dominance over local leaders (along the lines of the earlier British and French colonial systems) would trigger repercussions across the region globe (pg. 32). The U.S thus avoided expansion in the region as fears that Arab nationalism would lead state leaders to turn to the socialist principles of the Soviet Union. The core interests were economic in nature at the time and revolved around oil supplies in the Gulf region. Preventing the Soviets from disrupting oil flows that could significantly impact the U.S -led international system of Western economies meant securing a military and political presence in the Gulf (pg. 35). In the same vein of Cold War politics, Lynch also focuses on the U.S-Israel relationship and the role of Arab nations (in particular Palestine) during the Nixon and Reagan administrations. Lynch alludes to the evolving relationship between the U.S and Israel, where, despite the difficulties of Israeli leaders and negotiations throughout the decades-long "special relationship" between the two nations, and Israel has long been viewed as an asset to serve U.S interests in the region (pg. 37). In Chapter 3, Lynch highlights the roles of both the first Bush presidency, as well as the presidency of Bill Clinton attempted to remake the Middle East in their image and reach the goal of maintaining U.S primacy in the Middle East. The first Palestinian Intifada, nonviolent in nature, opened the way for fundamental changes in the region, and a step towards the two-state solution. However, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent U.S actions both there, and in Iran brought to light the impacts of dual containment in the region in terms of human suffering and loss. Lynch questions U.S assumptions of taking such a leading role in the Palestinian Israeli peace process, while at the same time attempting containment of two nations. Isolating the two issues reflects the failure of both the Bush and Clinton administrations in promoting peace and democracy in the region.

In Chapter 4, *From Clinton to Bush: Breaking America's Middle East*, Lynch focuses on the Global War on Terror in the wake of the September 11th attacks during the presidency of George W. Bush. Shifting from the Soviet ideology as the largest threat to America, a religious war rooted so-called Islamism and jihadism became the primary existential danger to the U.S. It was during this time that surveillance of perceived and real threats expanded, as well as the violent wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Most significant perhaps, was the "war of ideas" through the Freedom Agenda where the goal of democratizing the Middle East would support an American-led Middle East order. The Free-

dom Agenda was rooted in the assumption that repressive regimes that failed to address economic and political grievances, were usurped by radical and violent religious ideologies, and only democratic openings would resolve these issues. Yet, Lynch speaks candidly when he says that the Freedom Agenda was created by those who had "utter contempt for the actual people of the region;" and like autocratic allies in the region, had no interest in democratization, only containment of the traditional adversary Iran. In Chapter 5, Lynch highlights the role President Barack Obama as one that attempted to make actual change in the Middle East, yet the entrenched structural character of the region, one formed by the U.S proved to be a significant challenge. In the case of the Obama, the institutionalized structure of regional allies proved to be the major obstacle to fundamentally changing the regional and domestic political landscapes. During the Arab Spring, when there was an opportunity to make a historic difference with bottom-up democratization, Lynch points to how the Obama administration stood aside. When it came to the issue of recognition of Palestinian statehood, despite his willingness to address the issue, Israel (and Netanyahu) exerted their power in blocking efforts to peace and instead received a massive military aid package. Overall, despite Obama's ambitions, the collusion of forces across the Middle East and within Washington prevented any change to the structures of political, economic, and military power.

In the final two chapters, Lynch focuses on the consecutive eras of two of the oldest presidents in U.S history – Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden. The backgrounds of each president could not be more different, yet the outcome of both administrations eventually built on the policies of the other. In Chapter 6, *Trump: America Without Illusions*, there is a stark contrast in Lynch's description of President Donald Trump in comparison to other presidents (in particular his predecessor). His disregard for traditional protocol in policy and diplomacy reflects the difference in tactics Lynch mentioned in his introduction, particularly his rhetoric which eschewed talk of dignity and human rights. However, at the core of the Trump foreign policy agenda, his administration adhered to the same roadmap of pushing for normalization of Arab Israeli relations, containing Iran, and creating closer economic relations with Gulf nations. Stacking his administration with seasoned conservatives, President Trump sought to form closer relationships with powerful regional allies, yet Lynch pointed to his administration's failure to see the tenuous relationships between Saudi Arabia and UAE on the one hand, and Qatar on the other hand. The unconventionality of Trump's political approach led to a missed opportunity to resolve a key ongoing dispute, which the Biden administration resolved immediately upon entering office. In Chapter 7, *Biden: The Violent Reordering of the Middle East*, Lynch was quick to point out the overconfidence of Biden in his abilities to force through change in the Middle East as a mistake, particularly in light of the fact that the Biden administration simply continued down the same path of the previous administration – including the normalization of Israeli-Arab relations and the continued sanctions against Iran. He further criticizes the entirety of the Biden foreign policy team as having not only prevented the genocide in Gaza but enabling the atrocities and human rights abuses their despite

long records of championing human rights throughout their individual careers. Lynch emphasizes the waning influence of U.S primacy in the region prior to the October 7th Hamas assault on Israeli settlements along the Gaza security border. During the Trump era, many leaders, specifically those in Israel and in the Gulf, had enjoyed direct access to the U.S president. Under Biden, an attempt to return to normalcy, through traditional diplomatic protocols, as well as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, led to many long-time allies choosing to remain neutral and not join any side. By 2023, an emerging multipolarity was becoming more accepted among nations of the Global South (pg. 201-202). It was only when Biden gave Israel unmitigated support to unleash horrors upon Gaza, and subsequently Lebanon, that Lynch points to the Biden legacy as one that failed to prevent a genocide despite the power of American presence in the region.

Lynch argues that the issue of oversimplification of the Israel-U. S relationship, the continued support for autocratic leaders, and the unwillingness to bring Israel to heel in its atrocities can only be viewed against the broader backdrop of American presence in the region. From the first Bush presidency to the one-time Biden term, American entrenchment is no longer sustainable in the eyes of the Arab world. Emerging generations of youth in the Middle East are no longer accepting the status quo of foreign interference, over the possibility of economic prosperity, freedom, and dignity.

Conclusion

In the preface of the book, Lynch openly admits to beginning this work in a moment of visceral emotion. The deep emotions of rage, and guilt, was born out of the understanding that the consistent dehumanization of millions across the region over successive US presidencies ranks low on the priorities of US foreign policy.The genocide in Gaza, the legacy of the Biden administration, and the unprededented student protest movements across U.S university campuses all played a role in the motivation for this text. Centering his postion as an academic and researcher in U.S foreign policy in the region, Marc Lynch concedes to his own role through a long career in publications and policy. Speaking to his amicable relationships with many of his long-time interlocutors (those who supported the most extreme version of common pattern off violent U.S policy in the Middle East), Lynch recognizes - with unflinching honesty – an uncomfortable truth: that the people of the Middle East are full human beings with all the attached capabilities of feeling and experience the pain and hope that comes to those who live in the region.

In writing this book, Lynch puts forth an easily digestible text that brings together perspectives of Arab politics and Washington's Middle East policies by navigating the legitimacy of the U.S. actions against hegemonic interests over the last thirty five years. By analyzing U.S. primacy in the region, and acknowledging the failures of policy that advocated for the continuation of autocratic rule and violent forever wars, Lynch does not offer a clear solution. Rather he asserts that U.S. regional su-

premacy is coming to an end due to the "internal contradictions" which are the result of paradoxical assumptions about the state of the Middle East. Oscillating between beliefs of the people of the Middle East as one of two extremes – from those fervently seeking U.S liberation from oppression to those bent on American destruction - has been the fallacy of hegemonic foreign policy in the region. Rather than basing U.S objectives on outdated essentialist cultural frameworks (rooted in orientalist discourse) Lynch highlights the burgeoning talent of the Arab nations that does not seek American appeasement. Indeed, he cautions against continuing down the same path of policy in the region. Instead, he proposes that future relations in the region would actively seek to promote order by not siding with those with a history of repression, and instead uphold the values and principles that the U.S has championed around the world for decades.

Islamists After October 7: The Question of Identity and Destiny

Editors: Mohammad Affan and Maryam Al-Batoush
Foreword by: Mohammad Abu Rumman
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In a region marked by persistent crises and accelerating transformations-where distinguishing between immediate developments and pivotal historical turning points often becomes increasingly difficult-most changes are portrayed as "strategic" in nature and as possessing the capacity to reshape the region and alter its balance of power.

Yet two defining moments in contemporary Arab history since the turn of the millennium continue to generate repercussions that are still unfolding and reshaping reality itself: the Arab Spring/Arab uprisings on the one hand, and October 7 on the other. Despite the differences in context and outcome between the two events-particularly given that the consequences of October 7 remain incomplete and still in formation-both moments fundamentally reopened the region's major questions: the state, citizenship, freedoms, and the place of political and social actors, foremost among them Islamist movements in their various formations, schools, and affiliations, as well as their positioning within the state and the public sphere. October 7 also revived questions surrounding resistance, the utility

of normalization, identity, popular agency and capacity, the future of the Palestinian cause, and the "Axis of Resistance" as a central determinant in reshaping the region once again. It represents another historical moment of profound significance and long-term repercussions, even if its outcomes and transformations remain unsettled.

The Arab Spring, and the subsequent rise of Islamist movements to power in several Arab states-particularly in Egypt and Tunisia-marked a decisive turning point in the history of these movements. It also transformed the political trajectories of these countries and others. After decades spent in opposition or semi-opposition, Islamist movements suddenly found themselves confronted with the test of governing, only for those experiences, to varying degrees, to face failure, exclusion, or outright reversal. What followed was a broader phase of repression, political retreat, and organizational erosion that affected both these movements and the wider public sphere alike. Islamist movements were thus pushed back into opposition, exile, imprisonment, or marginal political relevance in other states, albeit through new forms and methods. Over the course of more than a decade, political Islam appeared to be experiencing one of its most disoriented historical moments, especially amid the declining appeal of the grand narratives that had long structured its discourse.

Then came the moment of October 7, once again reshuffling the regional landscape. Beginning with October 7 itself, and continuing through Israel's war of annihilation on the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian question returned to the center of regional and international attention. At the same time, old yet renewed questions concerning Islamist movements and their position within the political and regional order resurfaced. One of the most striking paradoxes is that this historical moment did not necessarily restore Islamists to the political scene as much as it restored debate about them: about their intellectual and political projects, their organizational and ideological transformations, their relationship with the state, their position on resistance, and their ability to reinvent themselves and their projects beyond the language of mobilization, emotion, and spontaneous popular outbursts, within a regional environment increasingly hostile to them in absolute terms.

From this perspective, the first two decades of the twenty-first century can be understood as structured around two foundational moments in the modern history of the region: the Arab Spring on one side and October 7 on the other. If the first moment reopened questions of authority, democracy, and the state, the second revived questions of identity, resistance, hegemony, and the role of non-state actors. At the same time, current transformations also suggest the reemergence of supra-national imaginaries alongside the reconstruction of the territorial nation-state in new forms within what may be described as a "post–October 7 world."

It is within this context that the book Islamists after October 7: The Question of Identity and Destiny, published in early 2026, emerges as a collective scholarly contribution jointly produced by the Forum

for the East in Istanbul and the Politics and Society Institute in Amman. The volume was edited by Dr. Mohammed Affan, with research assistance from Mariam Al-Batoush, and includes a foreword by Dr. Mohammed Abu Rumman. The book is the outcome of a workshop held in Istanbul, Turkey, in September 2025 under the title "The Future of Political Islam in Light of Regional Transformations."

The volume consists of seven medium-sized chapters and includes twelve research papers in addition to a concluding chapter that presents the most significant discussions and commentaries that emerged during the workshop sessions. The volume moves across a broad geographical landscape extending from Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq to Yemen, seeking to trace the impact of the seventh of October on Islamist movements, as well as on prevailing perceptions regarding the future of these movements and the broader field as a whole.

Book Overview

The volume is organized into seven chapters that combine scholarly analysis with collective discussion, with its contributions revolving around one central question: how did October 7 reopen debate surrounding Islamist movements, their political positioning, and their capacity to adapt to a rapidly transforming regional environment?

The book opens with a chapter examining political Islam between the Arab uprisings and the events of the seventh of October. In Mohammad Abu Rumman's paper, the rise of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham to power in Syria is presented as a new test for the trajectory of localized jihadism and for the ability of former Islamist actors to transition from the logic of factions and الثـورة to the logic of statehood. Meanwhile, Mohammad Affan's paper explores the impact of the seventh of October on Islamist movements in the frontline states, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, through the paradox between a moment that was expected to represent the "qibla of political Islam" for these movements and a reality that instead intensified the political and security pressures imposed upon them.

The second chapter shifts its focus to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement. Tareq Hammoud's paper discusses the future of Hamas through three interconnected levels: the restructuring of the movement's internal organization through new leadership elections; the repositioning of the movement within its regional alliance networks, stretching from the Axis of Resistance to mediator states; and the evolving relationship between its political and military wings. The paper argues that Hamas's ability to adapt to post-war arrangements in Gaza will remain a decisive factor in shaping its future and its relationship with its social constituency. Khaled al-Zawawi's paper, by contrast, examines the distinctiveness of the Islamic Jihad movement as a resistance movement that has avoided formal political engagement since its establishment, rendering its post-war options considerably more complex, particularly under ceasefire conditions and amid declining military capabilities resulting from sustained attrition in confrontations with the Israeli occupation both before and after the seventh

of October.

The third chapter is devoted to Hezbollah through two approaches examining transformations in its domestic and regional position after the seventh of October. Muhannad al-Hajj Ali analyzes the party in light of its leadership and military losses and the erosion of its status from a major regional actor to a force primarily concerned with preserving what remains of its role and weapons within Lebanon's internal political equation. From another perspective, Bashar al-Laqis interprets Hezbollah as a complex phenomenon shaped by the interaction of two foundational determinants: its role as a resistance actor established to confront Israel, and its identity as a Shi'i Islamist party. The interaction between these two dimensions, he argues, has also produced Hezbollah's function as an advanced extension of Iranian regional influence, a defining factor that will continue to shape the party's identity, role, and future balances of power.

The fourth chapter addresses the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen within a broader inquiry into the future of the Axis of Resistance. Firas Elias highlights the ambiguity surrounding interpretations of the PMF and the tendency to reduce it solely to its Iranian reference point without adequately accounting for its internally fragmented and composite nature, including tensions between factions seeking full integration into the Iraqi state and ideologically aligned groups that view themselves as part of the Axis of Resistance. Ateq Jarallah's paper demonstrates how the seventh of October granted the Houthi movement significant political and popular momentum, temporarily postponing many domestic pressures and crises associated with its political and economic conduct. At the same time, the paper stresses that this development did not eliminate the movement's structural economic and internal crises or the growing social resentment directed toward it; rather, these tensions have merely been deferred or opened onto new possibilities.

The fifth chapter focuses on Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and the Syrian transformations. The papers collectively reveal a broader shift within the Islamist sphere from the fragmentation of the caliphate as a transnational political imaginary toward more localized and pragmatic national approaches. Through the contributions of Abd al-Rahman al-Hajj and Fadel Khanji, the chapter further examines the challenges confronting the new Syrian state, the stakes of regional and international openness, and the difficulties involved in constructing stable political legitimacy within a deeply fragmented domestic environment.

The sixth chapter investigates the future of global jihadism in ISIS and al-Qaeda in light of ongoing regional transformations. The papers argue that the decline in international attention to terrorism does not signify the disappearance of the jihadist phenomenon so long as the political, security, and structural crises that sustain it remain unresolved.

The book concludes with a chapter summarizing the discussions that took place among the partici-

pating researchers. Here, major conceptual questions return to the forefront, including the meaning of political Islam and the limits of the relationship between ideology and pragmatism, the local and the transnational, and the political and the military. Through this broad analytical map, the book does not seek to provide a definitive answer regarding the future of Islamist movements as much as it attempts to reopen debate and encourage a reconsideration of this field in the aftermath of the seventh of October.

Through these multiple thematic axes, the volume does not aim to offer a singular or conclusive answer concerning the future of Islamist actors. Rather, it seeks to sketch a preliminary map of the questions and transformations imposed by the seventh of October upon the diverse currents of political Islam, whether resistance movements, classical Islamist organizations, armed jihadist actors, or groups linked to the regional Axis of Resistance.

At the level of recommendations and proposals, the concluding chapter stresses the need to develop cumulative and methodologically grounded indicators for monitoring transformations within Islamist movements in ways that would allow researchers to track their trajectories, understand their future directions with greater precision, and anticipate their transformations in real time rather than merely documenting them retrospectively. The book also advances the need for a major project of historical reconciliation in the region among its principal components-Arabs, Kurds, Turks, and Persians-as well as between Sunnis and Shi'a, as a structural prerequisite for transcending the logic of civil conflict and external manipulation. Such a project, the authors argue, would require intellectual elites capable of redefining the relationship between history and contemporary political reality.

Yet the importance of the book does not lie solely in the breadth of cases it examines, but also in its ability to gather them within a single regional moment. It is precisely here that the critical value of the review begins: the volume succeeds in capturing the essential questions, yet leaves many of them open at the conceptual, methodological, and predictive levels. Consequently, reading the book should not stop at the descriptive presentation of its chapters, but rather move toward interrogating the broader framework that brings together these highly diverse actors under a single conceptual title.

Strengths and Scholarly Contribution of the Book

The significance of this volume lies not only in its subject matter, timing, or thematic focus, but also in the nature of the questions it raises. On one level, the book attempts to engage with questions more directly connected to political realities and their implications for the future of Islamist movements. In doing so, it moves beyond narrowly security-centered or military-focused approaches-despite the importance of such perspectives-by treating October 7 as a critical historical moment that reopened debate surrounding Islamists and their future after years of stagnation and political decline. The volume thus represents an early attempt to capture emerging transformations and to reconstruct a new

research agenda capable of understanding the shifts imposed by October 7 on the Islamic political sphere and on the future of the region more broadly.

Perhaps the book's most important contribution lies in its effort to produce Arab-centered knowledge on Islamist movements grounded in the experiences, debates, and realities of the region itself. In a field long dominated either by security-oriented approaches or by Western academic literature, such collective works constitute a serious attempt to build a more locally rooted Arab research agenda, one more closely connected to ongoing regional transformations and to the lived political realities of the Middle East. From this perspective, the book can be regarded as an important step within a broader intellectual trajectory that moves beyond studying Islamist movements merely as ideological organizations, toward understanding them as complex social and historical phenomena requiring more diverse and multidimensional analytical tools.

The volume also deserves credit for successfully identifying an important transformation within the field of political Islam itself: the shift from the question of the "civilizational project" to the question of "political survival." After decades dominated by discussions surrounding the "Islamic state" or the restoration of the caliphate, many Islamist movements today appear increasingly preoccupied with narrower national contexts, organizational survival, and adaptation to fluctuating regional balances and constraints.

Yet despite the strength of this observation across several contributions, the book does not fully develop this transformation at the theoretical level. It remains unclear whether this shift reflects deep strategic revisions within these movements or merely temporary adaptations imposed by current political realities. Here, the volume reveals a noticeable disparity among its chapters in terms of analytical depth and their ability to generate conclusions that transcend the immediacy of current events.

The papers vary in terms of analytical depth and their ability to interpret structural transformations over the medium and long term. While some studies succeed in presenting indicators and scenarios that help explain the trajectories of these developments, others remain closer to political assessment or commentary on immediate events. Although such variation is relatively common in collective academic works, it nevertheless affects the overall coherence of the volume, particularly with respect to the existence of a unifying conceptual thread and the level of consistency across its different chapters.

Across the book's chapters, three principal observations emerge that together constitute the underlying thread connecting the transformations under discussion. The first concerns the rise of localized jihadism and its functional transformations as the outcome of an accumulated trajectory of change within the broader jihadist current itself. The second relates to the state of disorientation experienced by traditional Islamist movements following the transformations initiated by the Arab uprisings and further intensified after the seventh of October. The third observation concerns the decline of the

regional influence of Shi‘i political Islam, particularly in the aftermath of the blows sustained by Hezbollah and the wider regional repercussions of the Israeli–Iranian war.

Critical and Methodological Observations

Despite the cognitive and scholarly value offered by the book - and despite the fact that it deserves recognition once again as a “laboratory of questions” for the important inquiries it raises regarding the ongoing transformations within the sphere of political Islam - this does not prevent the recording of a number of critical observations related to its conceptual structure and general methodology, if we move beyond some of the technical and formal details of its production. These observations do not detract from the importance of the work as much as they open the way for its further development and expansion in revised and enlarged editions or in future research projects.

The most important observation lies in the fact that the book deals with October 7 as a unifying moment, yet it requires a more precise distinction between the event as a political and symbolic shock and its actual consequences for each Islamist actor individually. The event did not produce one unified effect on all actors; rather, it granted some movements symbolic momentum, imposed high security and political costs on others, and pushed a third group of actors toward redefining their roles. Thus, October 7 appears in the book more as a revealing moment exposing the divergence of Islamist trajectories than constituting a turning point that converges toward a single outcome.

The first of these observations concerns the conceptual problem related to the definition of the “Islamists” themselves. The book places within a single analytical space actors that differ profoundly in terms of origins, organizational structures, intellectual references, and political objectives: from Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to the Muslim Brotherhood, passing through Hezbollah, the Popular Mobilization Forces, and the Houthis, and extending to Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, al-Qaeda, and ISIS. Although common denominators exist among these actors - represented in ideology, the employment of Islamic identity, or their presence within the broader field of Islamic politics, and even in some of their objectives - they nevertheless differ fundamentally and extensively at the structural level, whether in terms of ideology, national particularities, local contexts of formation and emergence, their relationship with states and social bases, the nature of the projects they adopt, or even the paths of action and tools they have employed.

Here, the need becomes evident for a more rigorous conceptual framework that clearly defines what is meant by “Islamists,” and whether it is possible for all these highly divergent actors to be placed within the same analytical category. It also raises the question of where conservative official religious discourse and state religious policies stand within this definition. This makes the concept somewhat fluid and insufficiently disciplined in both meaning and intent within the book and within the broader research field itself, thereby necessitating further reconsideration and redefine it..

With regard to the theoretical framework as well, although the question of the future constitutes the organizing thread across most of the book's chapters, the reader does not encounter a coherent or unified theoretical framework governing the process of foresight itself. The papers vary in their definitions of the future, in the tools they rely upon to estimate possible trajectories, and in their use of specific forecasting methodologies or clear cumulative indicators that could later be tested or built upon. Consequently, the transition from analysis to foresight remains uneven from one chapter to another. Some papers perhaps rely more heavily on the researcher's subjective estimations than on recognized methodological models or tools within futures studies. This makes some scenarios closer to political assessment than to systematic scholarly forecasting. The book could have achieved a greater degree of coherence had it dedicated a methodological introduction clarifying the adopted approach to futures analysis and the indicators used in constructing scenarios concerning these movements and their transformations.

Related to this issue as well is that, despite the editors' effort to move beyond purely historical and ideological contexts, some papers become deeply immersed in them. While such historical engagement is important in certain respects, excessive immersion in it deprives many chapters of the analytical space needed for genuine future-oriented exploration.

The second observation concerns the concluding chapter. Despite its importance and distinctiveness in collecting the discussions and debates raised throughout the workshop, the ongoing debate still does not resolve or adequately frame the research problematics that have long dominated this field, particularly concerning "political Islam," "post-Islamism," and the relationship between the local and the transnational. Nor does it offer a decisive attempt to redefine these concepts or establish clearer theoretical boundaries for them. Perhaps this reflects the nature of the field itself as one still undergoing formation and redefinition. Nevertheless, it leaves broad space for further conceptual engagement in future works.

The third observation concerns the prevalence of a number of assumptions-many of which have increasingly taken on the character of analytical "clichés"-in interpretations of Islamist movements and their transformations. These linear assumptions now require substantial reconsideration. Although the book deserves credit for moving beyond some of these assumptions in the contributions of Abd al-Rahman al-Hajj and Shafiq Shqair, as well as in a collective observation presented in the concluding chapter, where the authors argue that the Islamist sphere will continue to evolve, interact, and generate new and diverse forms, and that the decline of these movements does not signify the disappearance of the enduring debate over the relationship between religion and politics in the contemporary world.

Nevertheless, many of these assumptions remain present and in need of critical reassessment, par-

ticularly in the Syrian context. Among them is the assumption that every split within jihadist organizations necessarily produces greater radicalization, or that pragmatic transformations inevitably lead to the dismantling of the ideological identity of these movements, whether at the level of vertical or horizontal divisions and fractures within their organizational structures.

Similarly, some interpretations treated the seventh of October as a deterministic and unified turning point for all Islamist movements, an assumption that itself requires reconsideration. Although the event undeniably returned these movements to the forefront of political and intellectual debate, its effects were far from uniform. While it strengthened the position of certain actors and granted them renewed political or popular momentum-such as Hamas and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham-it simultaneously subjected other actors to greater pressure, attrition, or the redefinition of their roles and functions, including Hezbollah, the Popular Mobilization Forces, the Islamic Jihad movement, and even the Muslim Brotherhood, both in the present moment and, perhaps more urgently, in the future.

Accordingly, it may be more accurate to understand the seventh of October as a moment that exposed the divergence of Islamist trajectories rather than unified them, instead of viewing its consequences as producing a single, shared outcome for all Islamist actors. These observations, perhaps, call today for deeper reflection, broader debate, and renewed reassessment.

The fourth observation concerns the absence of discussion regarding what may be termed the rise of the "new Islamist actors" - a younger generation fundamentally different from previous generations in its detachment from traditional organizational frameworks, its networked religiosity, and related patterns of engagement. Taken collectively, these actors constitute an interactive sphere that both engages with and critiques the behavior, discourse, and projects of existing Islamist movements. These transformations still require further study and theoretical framing, particularly as one of the more promising future research trajectories. Part of the current transformation is therefore linked not only to classical Islamist movements, but also to the transformation of the digital religious sphere and the rise of new actors who are less connected to organizational structures and more connected to transnational media spaces.

The book also overlooks an important question concerning whether October 7 contributed to restoring the centrality of the nation-state, or whether it instead revived the idea of the "ummah" and strengthened the role of transnational actors. Likewise, some of the readings within the volume do not sufficiently distinguish between the immediate impact of the event and its long-term strategic repercussions.

The fifth observation concerns what may be described as an overly condensed treatment of the experiences of some Islamist movements, foremost among them the Muslim Brotherhood as the largest and oldest actor within this sphere. The significant differences in the size of the Brotherhood's social

bases across countries, the varying pressures it has faced, and the national, local, and social particularities characterizing each case make it difficult to study its trajectories through a single analytical lens.

For example, the banning of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan emerged within a context different from that of other states, as it represented the culmination of a long legal trajectory whose outcome had become inevitable sooner or later. Likewise, the repercussions of October 7 and the official and popular transformations that followed were not identical across the various national contexts, particularly given that the movement still retains varying margins for maneuver and repositioning in some cases. The book could have gained greater analytical depth had it devoted broader space to examining and analyzing these differences.

Finally, there remains a substantial difference between the restoration of "symbolism" and the restoration of a "project" or "social constituency." Islamist movements may succeed in regaining part of their emotional or moral presence within the public sphere, but this does not necessarily mean that they have regained their capacity for political action, organizational reconstruction, mobilization, recruitment, or the ability to present a coherent political project capable of rebuilding and expanding its social base. This is perhaps one of the most important ideas that the book could have developed in a clearer and more coherent manner, especially given that this assumption dominated much of the writing that accompanied October 7 as a supposed "gateway for the return" of these movements to the political arena.

From this perspective, the crisis confronting Islamists today appears deeper than merely a crisis of organization or political authority. It is a crisis related to their historical function and political role within the public sphere itself. What do Islamists actually seek today? What project do they genuinely carry? And where exactly lies the dividing line between the "political" and the "Islamic" within their contemporary project?

Despite these observations, the book deserves recognition for the serious questions it raises and for its preliminary attempts to engage with them during a regional moment characterized by fluidity and uncertainty. The value of this effort becomes even greater when one considers the limited volume of collective Arab scholarly production specializing in the study of Islamist movements and their contemporary transformations, alongside the growing need to develop analytical and methodological tools more capable of understanding these transformations and anticipating their future trajectories.

Conclusion

At a moment marked by renewed crises and conflicts, theoretical debate may appear to some as a form of intellectual luxury. This perception has accompanied many of our defining regional crises under the argument that there is a need to move beyond both political and academic theory in favor

of direct action and immediate engagement with unfolding events, often at the expense of thought, knowledge, and critical debate. Yet the experiences of the region over the past two decades - and perhaps even longer - have demonstrated the urgent necessity of developing our debates and analytical approaches. Understanding major transformations and historical turning points remains fundamentally dependent on our ability to develop approaches that move beyond ideological biases and that follow ongoing transformations without becoming imprisoned either by the immediacy of the present moment or by the weight of the past.

From this perspective, research works of this kind acquire particular importance, not because they provide definitive answers, but because they may constitute a necessary and serious step toward reviving and reconstructing our theoretical debates, which have long remained marginalized amid political polarization and struggles for power. Such efforts create the possibility for rebuilding a more substantial intellectual discussion capable of understanding the transformations taking place across the region, while preserving the continuous ability to reassess assumptions and reexamine hypotheses in light of changing realities.

At a historical stage in which ideas and visions increasingly transcend the boundaries of geography and language, the need remains for the construction of a knowledge community capable of studying its own social and political movements from within its own intellectual frameworks, and of producing a deeper understanding of its reality, transformations, and future trajectories. This necessarily requires the further development of this book through a revised and expanded second edition grounded in a more rigorous methodological and academic framework.

In a historical era where ideas and visions continue to move beyond the limits of geography and language, the need persists for the development of a knowledge community capable of examining its social and political movements through its own perspectives and of producing a deeper understanding of its reality, transformations, and future.

PSI'S ACTIVITIES DURING THE FIRST HALF OF 2026

PSI Expands Its International Engagement through Participation in Moscow, Cyprus, and Tunisia

The Politics and Society Institute (PSI) participated in a series of international events in Moscow, Cyprus, and Tunisia as part of its efforts to strengthen its international research presence and expand its network of cooperation with leading think tanks and academic institutions.

In Moscow, PSI contributed to the Middle East Dialogue, organized by the Primakov Center for International Cooperation, where it participated in a session titled "Palestine and Israel: The Alternative Day After and Rethinking Peace Process Strategies."

In Cyprus, the Institute took part in the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference 2026 in Larnaca under the theme "Strategic Partnerships under Pressure: Reframing Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation in an Era of Global Competition." PSI also participated in a regional dialogue of Middle East and North Africa think tanks in Tunisia, focusing on the transformation of think tanks and the challenges of knowledge production across the region. These engagements reflect the Institute's commitment to expanding its international partnerships and advancing collaborative research on regional and international affairs.

New Publication | Islamists after October 7: Identity and Destiny

The Politics and Society Institute, in partnership with the Sharq Forum, has published a new edited volume titled Islamists after October 7: Identity and Destiny. The book offers an in-depth analysis of how the events of October 7 have examines the transformations within Islamist movements following the events of October 7.

The volume explores the future of political Islam, transformations within Islamist movements, the impact of regional developments on Islamist actors, the Syrian case, and the future trajectory of jihadist organizations. It forms part of the Institute's broader research agenda on political transformation, social movements, and non-state actors in the region.

New Study | Game Theory in Conflict Analysis

The Politics and Society Institute has released a new study titled Game Theory in Conflict Analysis, examining the contribution of game theory as an analytical framework for understanding strategic interaction, decision-making, conflict, and cooperation.

The study discusses applications of game theory in international negotiations, crisis management, and public policymaking, while demonstrating how it can explain patterns of escalation, strategic bargaining, and failed cooperation. It also emphasizes that game theory should be employed alongside broader political, institutional, and psychological perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of conflict dynamics.

PSI Concludes the "Women Researchers in Green Policies and Women's Empowerment" Project

In cooperation with the Australian Embassy in Amman, the Politics and Society Institute concluded the Women Researchers in Green Policies and Women's Empowerment project, which aimed to strengthen the research capacities of young women in the fields of environmental sustainability, green policy, and the green economy.

The project combined academic training with applied policy research and concluded with the presentation of research papers covering climate change, water security, sustainable agriculture, the green economy, green architecture, and air quality.

Former Prime Minister Samir Al-Rifai Discusses Jordanian National Security at PSI

The Politics and Society Institute hosted former Jordanian Prime Minister Samir Al-Rifai for a policy dialogue titled "The Current Regional War and Jordanian National Security: The American–Israeli War on Iran."

The discussion brought together researchers, policy experts, and young professionals to examine the evolving regional geopolitical landscape. Al-Rifai emphasized the importance of realistic strategic assessment based on changing balances of power and national interests, while stressing the need to avoid political and societal polarization amid regional instability.

New Policy Paper Calls for Strengthening Inclusive Education Governance in Jordan

The Politics and Society Institute has released a new policy paper calling for a comprehensive reform of the governance framework for inclusive education for persons with disabilities in Jordan. Developed in partnership with the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and supported by the Embassy of Austria in Amman, the paper proposes integrating disability-related issues into the forthcoming Local Administration Law while strengthening the role of municipalities in supporting inclusive learning environments.

Among its key recommendations are improving evidence-based planning, expanding the participation of persons with disabilities in local councils, and enhancing institutional coordination to promote a more inclusive and equitable education system.

Advisory Committee and Editorial Board

About PSI

The Politics and Society Institute is an independent Jordanian think-and-do tank, established in 2020. It works to produce applied knowledge and bridge research with public policy through analytical studies, workshops, and dialogue with decision-makers, contributing to policy development and evidence-based national debate.

The institute is an independent organization that aims to deepen the understanding of public policy and decision-making processes and to build a better knowledge platform of domestic and regional dynamics that will define our future.
The institute advances its mission guided by the values of the rule of law, civil society, good governance, and moderation. It provides an innovative, integrated, and global approach to its analysis of complex trends and transformations with particular attention to youth dynamics.

The institute aims to provide practical solutions, based on up-to-date studies and research in political, economic, security, and social fields. The institute hopes to define future trends for Jordan and the region through its analysis and projections, focusing on the impact of accelerating transformations on the politics and societies of the Middle East.

By bringing together experts and thinkers from various disciplines and regions, the institute hopes to be able to build ideas and solutions through current and relevant research and integrated analysis that can help policymakers advance national interests and build a more stable region by effectively responding to complex challenges and rapid transformations.

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