



Politics & Society Institute

Transformations in the International Order and the Reshaping of Security in the Middle East

A Strategic Assessment Based on a Qualitative Expert Survey: The Three Thresholds and the Future of the Regional Order

Prepared and analysed by

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First: Introduction and Context of the Research Questions

Three interrelated questions increasingly shape debates about the Middle East: the nature of the international order, the rules governing regional security, and the capacity of states to protect their interests and societies. The Russia–Ukraine war has revived the question of European security and the limits of reliance on the United States, while successive wars in the region have tested the relationship between military superiority and political stability. Maritime corridors, energy, and infrastructure have become increasingly central to calculations of conflict, extending the effects of confrontation to states that are not directly involved in the fighting.

In Europe, efforts to develop broader defence capabilities have taken an institutional form, as reflected in the White Paper for European Defence, presented by the European Commission and the EU High Representative on 19 March 2025 to strengthen defence readiness by 2030. This process covers the defence industry, ammunition, air defence, and joint equipment procurement. However, it leaves open questions about the extent of strategic autonomy these measures can deliver and how they will interact with existing US security guarantees.¹

At the regional level, the repercussions of the war in Gaza have widened since October 2023. The US-Israeli attack on Iran on 28 February 2026 and the confrontations that followed introduced a further layer of risk.² An investigation published by Reuters on 15 October 2026 revealed that critical infrastructure in Gulf states had been targeted by precision strikes, thereby extending the war's effects to energy production, transport and other economic infrastructure.³ These developments renew questions about the capacity of military power to safeguard economic continuity and the costs borne by regional states when their infrastructure and transport corridors become instruments of reciprocal pressure.

These developments coincide with efforts to establish new political and security arrangements. Among them is the mutual defence agreement between Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Pakistan,

¹ European Commission and High Representative of the European Union. Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030. Presented on March 19, 2025.

² United Nations. “Security Council Meeting Coverage on the United States, Israel, and Iran.” February 28, 2026.

³ Reuters. “Investigation into Iran’s Precision Strikes on Gulf Infrastructure and Their Impact.” October 15, 2026.



whose signing in Mecca was announced in August 2026, although implementation and the scope of its practical commitments remain to be tested.⁴

In Lebanon, Security Council Resolution 2790, adopted in August 2025, provides for the termination of UNIFIL operations on 31 December 2026, followed by an orderly withdrawal in the subsequent year. This transition will require institutional security arrangements.⁵

In Palestine, a contradiction persists between diplomatic momentum towards a two-state solution, exemplified by the General Assembly's endorsement of the New York Declaration in September 2025, and the risks to territory, institutions and the prospects for a settlement identified in the expert contributions.⁶

Against this backdrop, the Politics & Society Institute's expert survey addresses three interrelated questions. The first asks: Does the confrontation between Russia and Europe reflect a structural transformation in the international system, and what trajectories and implications might it have for the Middle East? Its significance lies in distinguishing between changes in the global balance of power and changes in commitments within alliances, and then identifying how these transformations affect the region through energy, armaments, and diplomacy.

The second asks: How do the centres of conflict in Palestine, Iran and Yemen interact, and what regional scenarios are possible? This question concerns the extent to which these arenas are interconnected, the extent to which externally negotiated settlements can influence local actors, and the possibility that escalation in one area may continue despite de-escalation in another. The discussion also extends to Lebanon, the Levant, and the Red Sea where these areas arise in the experts' contributions.

⁴ Reuters. "Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan Pledge Mutual Defence as Regional Turmoil Escalates." August 7, 2026.

⁵ United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. "Extension of UNIFIL's Mandate and Security Council Resolution 2790 (2025)." August 29, 2025.

⁶ United Nations. "General Assembly Endorses the New York Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution." September 12, 2025.



The third question is: What is the future of the Middle East's security environment, and what roles and options will Arab states have? This question shifts the focus to the ability of Arab states to influence future arrangements, choose their partnerships, protect institutions and infrastructure, and determine what can be achieved collectively despite differences in interests and sources of threat.

The report is based on a qualitative expert survey, conducted in a single round. The contributions are presented in separate sections as edited summaries that convey the substance of each participant's views; these are neither verbatim transcripts nor newly approved statements by the participants. The space allocated to each expert reflects the material available. A separate analytical section then draws conclusions by comparing the different positions, without presenting them as reflecting a collective consensus or presenting them as the results of completed Delphi rounds. Forecasts are considered in the context in which they were made, with a distinction maintained between interpretive opinion, documented fact, and forward-looking inference.

Second: Expert Perspectives

Ibrahim Freihat

Ibrahim Freihat cautions against treating Russian–European tensions as sufficient evidence of a structural transformation in the international system. In his analysis, Moscow is exploiting divergences between Washington and its European allies to increase pressure and secure gains in Ukraine. European deterrence capabilities, including the British and French nuclear capabilities, continue to constrain the scope of Russia's ambitions. He therefore links Russian escalation more closely to the opportunities created by US policies and to the calculations surrounding negotiations over Ukraine than to a Russian project capable of reshaping the continent or the global system.

The distinction between military gains and structural transformation also shapes his assessment of the Middle East. Freihat rejects the conclusion that weakening Iran would automatically lead to stable Israeli hegemony, arguing that Israel lacks the capabilities and political foundations required to manage the region and impose a sustainable political order upon it. He considers the future of Iran's capabilities as a decisive variable: the continued functioning of state institutions and regional ties would preserve Iran as an influential centre of power, whereas their collapse would create



greater scope for its rivals. Nevertheless, neither outcome would in itself establish a durable regional order in the near term.

On the Palestinian issue, he distinguishes between Netanyahu and his coalition remaining in power and the formation of an alternative government. In the first scenario, he anticipates greater pressure on land and population, alongside continued obstruction of reconstruction. In the second, he considers that some restrictions and settler violence might ease, without a fundamental change in settlement policy or the opening of a rapid path towards Palestinian statehood. Over the one-year horizon discussed in the contribution, he rules out the completion of a comprehensive displacement programme or extensive annexation, as well as the start of substantial reconstruction in Gaza, and instead anticipates continued stagnation. He also points to the effects of Palestinian division and the patterns of governance within the Palestinian Authority, which limit the prospects of translating a change of Israeli government into a political breakthrough.

With regard to security options, he interprets Saudi-Turkish-Pakistani cooperation as a shift beyond the traditional Arab framework towards a wider West Asian security space. He regards this shift as a potential opportunity but assesses its impact in terms of the tangible capabilities it generates and the commitments that can be implemented. He therefore cautions against premature judgments about alliances, whether by viewing them as a decisive transformation or as an undertaking destined to fail, before their mechanisms and the extent to which their parties are prepared to bear the costs become clear.

Imad Rawashdeh

Imad Rawashdeh focuses on changes in how the United States defines its interests and manages relations with its allies. He compares the Biden administration's vision of the Western partnership in confronting Moscow and Beijing with the emphasis placed by Trump and the MAGA movement on immediate US interests and redistributing the costs of defence and trade. According to this analysis, tensions with Europe reflect changing terms of partnership and the declining predictability of American security guarantees, prompting Europeans to reassess their political and security dependence on Washington.



Rawashdeh links this approach to the pressure on Ukraine over territory, negotiations and economic concessions. He argues that pushing Kyiv towards concessions, alongside negotiations over mineral resources and other material benefits, could intensify Ukrainian resistance to US proposals. At the same time, he does not regard US policy as unconstrained; he suggests that calculations surrounding the next presidential election and competition among figures within the Republican camp could play a role in restraining ill-considered escalation in Europe or Iran.

In his analysis, the implications of the transatlantic divide extend to the Middle East. He links Europe's pursuit of a degree of political autonomy to the firmer positions some European countries have adopted towards Israel and their reservations about participating in the war with Iran. He argues that these disagreements have implications beyond the war in Ukraine to the way European capitals respond to crises in the region. His analysis therefore emphasises the changing transatlantic relationship and its regional repercussions, while maintaining that the extent of Europe's actual autonomy depends on the decisions taken by individual states and their ability to bear the consequences of those decisions.

Ahmad Jamil Azem

Ahmad Jamil Azem begins by examining the limits of Russian capabilities. He argues that Moscow's inability to end the prolonged war decisively, together with its declining influence in Syria, complicates claims of Russia's global resurgence. He also argues that Europe has managed to contain some of its losses. He places particular emphasis on Trump's trade and expansionist policies, suggesting that their impact on the reordering of international relations may exceed that of the war alone. One possibility he raises is that the growing divide between the United States and Europe could lead to closer economic ties between China and Europe, potentially altering established calculations about partnerships and earlier reservations.

Azem argues that international relations remain in a state of flux, and that the extent of the transformation depends on the United States' ability to avoid military and trade attrition and to manage the crises in which it is involved. In the Middle East, one of his main concerns is the possibility that crises in the Gulf could develop into a prolonged war of attrition, with repercussions extending to neighbouring states. This risk is inseparable from the absence of an influential Arab



role in negotiations with Iran and the confrontation that followed, as other powers make decisions affecting regional security with limited Arab participation.

Azem links the Yemeni issue to its internal power balances, the Horn of Africa, Sudan, external interventions, and the contradictions within the anti-Houthi camp. He therefore places the establishment of an inclusive Yemeni political system at the centre of any settlement, including the integration of the Houthi movement within the institutions of a functioning state. He regards Arab divisions, particularly Saudi–Emirati rivalry, as factors that could weaken negotiations with Iran and obstruct efforts to address the Yemeni crisis.

On Palestine, he calls for strengthening the International Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution and for using the New York Declaration, while continuing efforts concerning the West Bank and avoiding making all Arab diplomatic action contingent on arrangements for Gaza. He warns that a weak official response to Israeli expansion in Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon could create space for unpredictable popular reactions. For him, this observation is linked to the gap between the scale of the risks and the extent of Arab political initiative.

His proposals centre on an Arab dialogue addressing three interconnected issues: a regional understanding with Iran involving Egypt and Jordan alongside the Gulf states; a Yemeni political process to address internal divisions; and an international Palestinian track that preserves rights and prospects for a settlement. He attaches practical importance to coordination among these tracks, because managing each crisis in isolation diminishes Arab leverage over broader regional arrangements.

Amr Hamzawy

Amr Hamzawy characterises the Russian–European confrontation as a hybrid conflict that extends beyond operations in Ukraine. Its instruments include energy policy, sanctions, intelligence operations, cyberattacks, competition in defence and drone production, and contests over narratives and influence. He identifies Africa and the Mediterranean as additional arenas of competition, bringing the confrontation closer to the Arab region. In the near term, he expects competition to continue without an open war, while noting the potential influence of European political movements more open to accommodation with Moscow.



At the regional level, Hamzawy interprets the period since October 2023 as a series of attritional conflicts that fluctuate in intensity without addressing their underlying drivers. He notes the extensive use of military force by Israel and Iran, with differences in their methods of direct and indirect engagement, alongside the involvement of the United States in multiple dimensions of the conflict. He links the continuation of attrition to the inability of regional powers to agree on rules for peaceful conflict management, as well as to changes in the way the traditional international guarantor intervenes.

Hamzawy judges that Israel has made military and strategic gains, while Iran and its networks have suffered losses. However, he distinguishes these gains from the ability to translate them into stable political arrangements. This gap informs his expectation that the conflicts will continue. Regarding maritime security, he advocates a multilateral approach to protecting shipping, while recognising that escorting ships or deploying forces cannot, on their own, address the political causes of escalation.

He distinguishes between a short-term defence-alliance track and a broader collective-security track in the Arab response. The former addresses immediate threats and provides additional guarantees, as exemplified by Saudi-Turkish-Pakistani cooperation. The latter is based on respect for sovereignty, non-interference, state institutions' exclusive control over arms, and peaceful settlement. He links this approach to policies pursued by Egypt, Qatar and Jordan. This track requires time, trust, and the management of differences, but it addresses a broader range of the causes of instability.

In his analysis, the Arab opportunity is linked to the declining effectiveness of traditional reliance on major powers to resolve regional conflicts. This creates scope for initiative while simultaneously increasing the cost of delay. The central dilemma remains how to reconcile immediate protection needs with the longer process of establishing regional rules that are acceptable to the actors involved and can be implemented by institutions.

Suhaib Jawhar

Suhaib Jawhar's analysis focuses on Lebanon, where he identifies a fundamental shift away from the balance established after the 2006 war. That balance rested on Hezbollah's deterrence



capabilities, Israel's ability to inflict widespread damage while remaining aware of the costs, the role of UNIFIL and Security Council Resolution 1701 in limiting friction, and a Lebanese state that retained formal authority without fully monopolising the use of force. He assesses that the effectiveness of these pillars has eroded and that the issue of arms held outside state control has become more closely connected to questions of sovereignty, financing, reconstruction, and the role of the army.

Jawhar moves beyond the size of Hezbollah's remaining arsenal to examine which actors can provide security and establish rules governing the use of force. He distinguishes between the functions of the party's military apparatus: deterring Israel, protecting territory and missile capabilities, maintaining links to Iran's strategy, and sustaining its domestic political weight. In his view, this distinction makes it possible to envisage a gradual change in some of these functions through restrictions on supply lines, deployments and geographical reach, alongside the transfer of responsibilities to the state, even before a comprehensive settlement on arms is reached.

He argues that this transition requires political and social safeguards to prevent security reform from excluding or threatening Hezbollah's social constituency. This illustrates the challenge of sequencing commitments, as the state calls for an Israeli withdrawal in parallel with the deployment of the army and the regulation of arms, while Israel seeks guarantees against the rebuilding of military capabilities before its complete withdrawal. Jawhar proposes limited, verifiable arrangements linking a phased Israeli withdrawal to sustained Lebanese army deployment and reciprocal commitments, with any expansion contingent on demonstrated compliance.

Jawhar distinguishes army deployment from sustained security control, which requires intelligence, funding, logistics, border monitoring, and human resources. This distinction becomes particularly important in light of the scheduled termination of UNIFIL operations at the end of 2026 and its subsequent withdrawal, raising questions about monitoring, communication, verification and support for the Lebanese armed forces.⁷ He also assigns a decisive role to the

⁷ United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. "Extension of UNIFIL's Mandate and Security Council Resolution 2790 (2025)." August 29, 2025.



Syrian-Lebanese border, arguing that measures in the south alone are insufficient while supply and transit networks elsewhere remain beyond effective control.

He treats economic recovery as a prerequisite for sustainable security. Deploying state institutions in devastated areas without restoring services, employment and reconstruction undermines public acceptance and the consolidation of state control. In this light, he proposes three pathways: a gradual security transition supported by guarantees and funding; prolonged crisis management amid limited state capacity; or renewed militarisation through external intervention if the regional confrontation expands. The indicators for distinguishing between these pathways revolve around the Israeli withdrawal, the effectiveness of the army's control, the regulation of arms and borders, post-UNIFIL arrangements, and the extent to which Lebanon is insulated from external conflicts.

Mahjoub Zuweiri

In addressing the European question, Mahjoub Zuweiri focuses on the change in perceptions of Russia from a potential partner to a persistent threat, and on the differences between European and American threat perceptions, shaped partly by geographical proximity. He also highlights an energy dilemma: continued disruption of Gulf maritime corridors could renew pressure on Europe's choices regarding Russian gas, despite sanctions and political opposition. He links the weakness of the European position to differences among member states and the impact of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, and situates the relative decline of US and Western influence within a longer-term global transformation.

In his analysis of Iran, Zuweiri argues that the weakening of its regional networks and developments in Syria created an opportunity to reduce Iranian influence through stronger state institutions and sanctions, while direct military escalation provided Tehran with new means of disruption despite the costs it incurred. He questions the capacity of international organisations to curb acts of aggression and protect the countries of the region. He treats Iran as a challenge that extends beyond its current political system, highlighting the persistence of elements of national identity and regional ambition under both the monarchy and the republic, despite differences in their ideological and sectarian orientations.



Zuweiri places the Arab state at the centre of his proposed response. In his analysis, external intervention exploits weak institutions, declining public trust, and social, sectarian, and regional divisions. He identifies justice, development, combating corruption, and bringing weapons under state institutional control as prerequisites for security, since they increase societies' resilience to shocks and reduce the exploitation of social divisions. He therefore attaches greater importance to rebuilding the state in Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria than to direct military solutions alone.

On the Palestinian issue, Zuweiri warns against displacement in Gaza and the West Bank, regarding the ability of Palestinians to remain on their land, along with their rights and right of return, as integral to Arab security. He does not separate confronting Iranian interventions from confronting Israeli expansion; rather, his approach centres on restoring national capacity to protect society and safeguard decision-making autonomy. His contribution prioritises domestic legitimacy and institutional capacity, enabling external alliances to translate into sustained security rather than leaving the state dependent on ad hoc responses to crises.

Essam Boraey

Essam Boraey argues that the most significant change in Russian–European relations concerns the movement from an assumed US security guarantee to one that is increasingly conditional and selective. He does not interpret this as a shift in the balance of power towards Russia, which he describes as a power capable of disrupting security and raising the costs of European defence despite the attrition it has suffered in Ukraine. He links the reorganisation of European defence to this shift, with particular attention to the risk of security incidents in the Baltic region, Kaliningrad, and the Suwałki Gap, as well as the possibility of an American-Russian settlement that could widen divisions among allies.

In his analysis, Europe and the Middle East are linked by competition for air-defence capabilities, energy supplies and US strategic attention. With regard to Iran, he distinguishes between the decline in conventional military capabilities and its continuing capacity to disrupt maritime activity. He links the security of Yemen's coastlines to the strategic triangle formed by the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal, arguing that pressure on one route may shift traffic towards alternatives and increase the costs of trade and exports. He considers regional defence



cooperation valuable only to the extent that it delivers operational capabilities, while expressing concern that American security guarantees may erode before a viable alternative becomes available.

On Palestine, Essam Boraey warns against reducing the issue to security and humanitarian administration divorced from questions of statehood and borders. He proposes making Arab financial contributions to reconstruction or stabilisation conditional on a halt to annexation measures and the establishment of a clear political process. He also highlights the risks of formal Israeli annexation of parts of the West Bank and a Palestinian financial crisis, arguing that both scenarios warrant preparation without treating either as a foregone conclusion.

Egypt occupies a prominent place in his contribution. He identifies a relationship of mutual need between Egypt's demographic, military, institutional and geographical weight and the Gulf states' resources, while acknowledging the tensions that hinder the transformation of this relationship into a partnership. Support has increasingly taken the form of conditional investment and asset transactions, alongside the interplay between Egypt's economic pressures, differing assessments regarding Sudan and Libya, and the expanding ambitions of the Gulf states. He therefore does not assume that the relationship will continue in its traditional form, and proposes rebuilding it around shared benefits and responsibilities.

His proposed framework includes economic reforms in Egypt to expand the private sector and improve the investment climate, alongside greater coordination on regional issues. In parallel, it envisages long-term Gulf investment in the Suez Canal Zone, ports, and Red Sea security, as well as coordination on Gaza.

This approach draws on Egypt's geographic position between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, its role in Rafah and border security, and its exposure to developments in Sudan, Libya, the Nile waters, and international trade. He acknowledges the argument that previous support failed to produce lasting reform, and presents the proposed partnership as a functional division of roles rather than a return to unilateral Arab leadership.

Essam Boraey favours a defensive maritime role in the Red Sea centred on surveillance, coordination and protection, and warns of the costs of open-ended ground involvement in Yemen.



In his view, Egypt's regional importance depends on its ability to provide security and economic functions that its partners value, and to convert their stake in Egypt's stability into sustained negotiating leverage and productive capacity.

Mohammad Abu Rumman

Mohammad Abu Rumman situates the Russian-Ukrainian war within a broader redistribution of global influence, without reducing this shift to Moscow's gains or losses. He identifies a gradual shift from US unipolarity towards strategic and geoeconomic competition centred on the United States and China, involving technology, semiconductors, rare earth minerals, artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, energy, and transport corridors. He attaches particular importance to the weaponisation of economic interdependence as a means of exercising power.

He links this analysis to Washington's reassessment of its role since the Obama administration, the costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Trump's more transactional and coercive approach to relations with allies. He uses the concept of "predatory hegemony" to explain the extraction of concessions from partners and adversaries alike. In his view, the wars in Gaza and Iran reveal the limits of translating American military superiority into broad international consensus, while exposing moral and political divisions within the Western alliance.

At the regional level, Abu Rumman interprets the current phase as a transition characterised by the intersection of fragile Arab state institutions, the rise of regional powers and changing instruments of influence. He draws on the concept of the regional security complex to examine borders, the distribution of power, patterns of amity and enmity, and the role of external powers. He points to the expansion of regional linkages to include Turkey, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, India, the Horn of Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean, without treating them as a single, clearly bounded regional security complex.

In this analysis, alliances are becoming more flexible and issue-specific. A state may maintain a security relationship with the United States, economic and technological cooperation with China, issue-based partnerships with Turkey and Pakistan, and channels for dialogue with Iran. Competition over ports, railways and economic corridors reflects competing visions for the



region's future. Accordingly, he emphasises the importance of influencing these connections and the rules governing economic relations, alongside military power.

In Yemen, Abu Rumman warns against reducing the Houthis to the role of an Iranian proxy, as local motivations, political history and power balances do not disappear automatically following a US-Iranian agreement. At the same time, he regards Iranian participation in any viable regional security framework as a geopolitical necessity, alongside deterrence and opposition to Iranian interventions. Security diversification therefore involves seeking additional partnerships beyond the US security guarantee, while their success remains conditional on institutions, cooperation mechanisms, and the ability to manage differences.

Palestine retains a central position in his conception of regional security. He rejects security arrangements that bypass Palestinian political rights and argues that the war on Gaza has exposed the costs of separating these rights from security arrangements. His analysis links the diversification of Arab capabilities, stronger state institutions and the resolution of local conflicts, as mutually reinforcing foundations of influence within the emerging regional order.

Mohammad Sari Al-Zoubi

Mohammad Sari Al-Zoubi focuses on the changing distribution of responsibility for European security and the conditions underpinning the American security guarantee. He argues that Russia can employ low-cost measures to raise defence costs without this necessarily demonstrating its capacity to establish an alternative order. He points to the transfer of additional responsibilities to European states and Canada, and to the possibility of a freeze along existing lines of contact in Ukraine while the underlying causes of hostility remain unresolved. He also attaches importance to security incidents and grey-zone escalation, as disputes over attribution or response timing may test alliance cohesion.

Al-Zoubi links this equation to competition between Europe and the Middle East over energy, defence supplies, and American political resources. On the Iranian issue, he highlights Washington's dual role as a belligerent and a potential mediator, making guarantees and the sequencing of commitments central concerns. He raises the question of how to sequence the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz and the relaxation of restrictions, on the one hand, and nuclear



verification and reciprocal commitments, on the other. He also considers the outcome of mediation and inspectors' access as important factors in reassessing the situation.

In Yemen, Al-Zoubi argues that geographical position can confer influence beyond economic weight. He links threats to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and alternative energy routes to Suez Canal revenues and the security of Jordan and importing countries. He expresses concern about the simultaneous disruption of maritime routes, or the conclusion of a US-Iranian deal that fails to address Gulf security. He therefore calls for turning maritime and defence cooperation agreements into operational capabilities, managing Saudi-Emirati competition, and strengthening Egypt's role in protecting the Red Sea.

Al-Zoubi describes the region as an arena in which containment, escalation, and territorial changes may occur simultaneously. Fragile negotiations with Iran may proceed alongside a stalemate in Gaza, gradual changes in the West Bank, and new facts on the ground in Lebanon. He attaches importance to Israeli elections, mediation, and nuclear monitoring as factors that may redirect these trajectories, without assuming that a change in one arena will determine outcomes elsewhere.

This approach is particularly evident in Al-Zoubi's analysis of Jordan. He warns against settlements that address missiles and Iran-aligned actors while neglecting the West Bank, leaving the Gulf states and Jordan to bear the costs of the post-war period. He calls for direct Arab participation in the arrangements and for linking de-escalation to measurable steps in the West Bank and the financial sustainability of Palestinian institutions. He emphasises measurable indicators of implementation, since the announcement of an agreement alone is insufficient to assess its impact on the security of the states most exposed to its consequences.

Third: Comparative Analysis and Findings

This section synthesises the preceding expert contributions. It distinguishes between convergences in diagnosis and differences in interpretation and policy priorities, and identifies implications that can be assessed and tested. Shared assessments are not presented as a statistically measured consensus, and the omission of a particular position from an expert's summary does not imply disagreement.



Different Levels of Change in the International Order

Some of the differences between Freihat and Abu Rumman arise from the distinct levels at which they frame the question. Freihat is cautious about inferring a structural global transformation from Russia's conduct in Europe, whereas Abu Rumman interprets these developments within the context of US–Chinese competition and shifts in the sources of influence. Both assessments can hold simultaneously: Russia's limited capacity to establish an alternative European order does not rule out changes in the global distribution of economic and technological power.

Al-Zoubi and Essam Boraey identify an intermediate level: the architecture of transatlantic security guarantees, while Rawashdeh and Azem emphasise the independent effects of changes in US policy on international relations. The comparison therefore becomes more precise when it distinguishes between power resources, the terms of alliances, and the way instruments are used. The implication is that Arab policymakers should not base their expectations on broad judgments such as the end or restoration of hegemony, but rather on specific commitments: what can a partner deliver, at what cost, within what timeframe and under which conditions?

This finding means that diversifying partnerships requires identifying the specific functions to be diversified. Economic relations with China cannot automatically substitute for US security guarantees, just as political divergence from the United States does not immediately enable Europe to provide a defence alternative. The feasibility of strategic autonomy depends on industrial capacity, financing, intelligence and force deployment—capabilities that take longer to develop than the current crisis cycle allows.

The Gap Between the Capacity to Inflict Harm and the Capacity to Establish Order

Hamzawy's observations on Israeli military gains converge with Freihat's reservations about assuming the emergence of stable regional hegemony, raising the question of how military power translates into durable political arrangements. Essam Boraey's distinction between conventional capabilities and the capacity to inflict harm at sea shows that military losses need not eliminate disruptive capacity. Zuweiri adds the possibility that escalation may generate new instruments of pressure for the targeted party, even as it sustains damage.



This framework is an analytical conclusion of the report rather than a position attributed collectively to the experts. Different dimensions of the problem require different policy instruments. Interception systems address one aspect of the threat, while alternative routes, maintenance, and stockpiles help limit its impact; agreements and verification mechanisms can reduce the likelihood of renewed confrontation. Investment in one area may increase costs without addressing the underlying sources of vulnerability in others. Temporary protection becomes sustainable security only when it is linked to institutional capacity and to a settlement or rules for managing disputes.

Interconnected Conflicts and the Autonomy of Local Actors

Abu Rumman's approach to regional interconnectedness and Al-Zoubi's observation regarding the simultaneous occurrence of containment and escalation help explain how different conflict arenas are linked. However, Abu Rumman's warning against reducing the Houthis to a proxy, Azem's proposal to rebuild Yemen's political system, and Jawhar's analysis of Lebanon reveal that these interconnections do not give external powers automatic control over the termination of each conflict. Each arena has its own local interests, organisational structures, sources of legitimacy, and capacity to obstruct agreements.

Interconnections can be observed in the movement of weapons and resources, increases in energy and insurance prices, or the use of one front to exert pressure in negotiations on another. Such connections require more evidence than the simultaneous occurrence of events. If confrontation in the Gulf subsides while fighting in Yemen continues, this may indicate the persistence of local drivers or difficulties in implementing arrangements. This alone establishes neither that de-escalation was deceptive nor that the conflicts are mutually independent.

This points to the need to design mutually reinforcing settlements while preserving the specific requirements of each conflict. Maritime security requires regional commitments and measures addressing the actors capable of threatening it; Lebanon requires external guarantees and a viable domestic arrangement; and Palestine requires rights, institutions, and political representation that go beyond its role as a bargaining chip in broader negotiations. An agreement should be judged by



its effects on actors' behaviour in each arena, rather than the breadth of the label under which it is presented.

Rebuilding State Authority through Sequenced, Reciprocal Commitments

Zuweiri places the legitimacy, justice, and service-delivery capacity of the state at the centre of his analysis, while Jawhar's examination of Lebanon illustrates what is required to move from formal deployment to sustained security control. This analysis converges with Abu Rumman's concern about institutional fragility and Azem's call to rebuild Yemen's political system. The comparison identifies a requirement that extends beyond a general call to strengthen the state: security capacity cannot be separated from social acceptance, sustained funding, and a settlement governing relations among the actors involved.

The Lebanese case also reveals that the order of implementation is integral to the settlement itself. Requiring full guarantees before any withdrawal, or complete withdrawal before taking any domestic measures, may render an agreement impossible. Limited, reciprocal, and verifiable arrangements can test compliance and reduce risk, but they require a monitoring mechanism and clearly defined consequences for non-compliance. In terms of the commitment problem, this resembles Al-Zoubi's concerns about sequencing maritime measures and verification requirements in negotiations with Iran, although the parties and contexts differ.

This similarity does not imply that a solution can be transferred from one arena to another. Rather, it indicates that many crises become deadlocked because the parties fear taking a step that will not be matched by a corresponding commitment. Sequencing, monitoring, financing and mechanisms for responding to violations therefore merit as much attention as the political principles themselves. Reconstruction and public services remain integral to consolidating an agreement, as they influence communities' willingness to bear its costs and support its implementation.

Palestine: Easing Pressure versus Resolving the Conflict

Freihat distinguishes between the possibility of easing certain policies following a change in the Israeli government and a fundamental change in settlement policy and the prospects for a political settlement. Essam Boraey assigns greater weight to the risks of formal annexation and financial



disruption in his assessment of potential scenarios, while Al-Zoubi focuses on gradual changes that may advance while the region is preoccupied with other issues. The disagreement concerns the pace, forms and likelihood of change, rather than a simple divide between optimism and pessimism.

The centrality of rights in Abu Rumman's and Zuweiri's analyses, Essam Boraey's warning against reducing the Palestinian issue to administrative management, and Azem's call for international action converge in opposing any lasting separation between humanitarian and security arrangements and a credible political horizon. The comparison suggests that the continued functioning of Palestinian institutions and the protection of the population and land are prerequisites for preserving the possibility of a meaningful political process. If these conditions erode, a declared settlement may become less viable in practice, regardless of the breadth of diplomatic support it receives.

Policy responses should therefore treat changes in Israeli leadership as one variable among several, while monitoring actual decisions concerning land, resources, governance, and financing. Preparing for a high-impact risk remains justified even when that risk is not the most likely scenario. Linking Arab reconstruction funding to a political process requires practical coordination and safeguards to protect civilian access to essential services from political disputes.

Effective Arab Action Requires a Clear Division of Roles

Several contributions express concern that decisions affecting the region are being made with limited Arab participation, although they identify different reasons for this limited influence. Azem assigns considerable weight to Arab divisions, while Al-Zoubi focuses on participation in decision-making arrangements and their implementation mechanisms. Essam Boraey, meanwhile, highlights the tensions between Gulf resources and Egypt's capabilities. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that financial resources, geographical advantages and external relationships produce influence only when converted into negotiating leverage or valuable commitments to other parties.

Coordination can begin with specific shared interests: protecting civilian facilities and maintaining trade flows, supporting the capacity of Palestinian institutions, improving Red Sea security,



financing Lebanese state capabilities, and incorporating Arab interests into any understandings affecting maritime navigation and the Gulf. Each issue calls for a suitable coalition and a different combination of resources, and cooperation does not require complete alignment in foreign policy. However, it does require identifying who is responsible for implementation, how costs will be shared, the scope of each party's mandate, and the mechanism for resolving disagreements among partners.

The proposed Egyptian-Gulf partnership illustrates the possibility of combining complementary resources, while also revealing the conditions required for it to work. A viable partnership must be founded on concrete projects, expected returns and accountability rather than presumed leadership or open-ended financing. Jordan's importance stems from the intersection of the Palestinian issue, borders, energy and transit, while effective mediation depends on states' ability to forge verifiable understandings. These roles become more effective when exercised within an agreed framework and less effective when they turn into instruments of competition among the states themselves.

Combining Immediate Protection with Long-Term Regional Rules

Hamzawy's distinction between defensive alliances and collective security helps clarify the available policy alternatives. Specific defence arrangements may offer more rapid assistance in the face of an immediate threat, whereas establishing regional rules requires prolonged negotiations, trust, and institutions. Freihat's caution against premature judgments highlights the need to assess alliances by their actual performance, while Zuweiri's approach highlights that an alliance alone cannot address the underlying causes of domestic weakness.

The report recommends pursuing immediate protection, institution-building and negotiations in parallel. In the short term, the focus should be on maintaining the continuity of essential services and infrastructure, early warning, transport coordination and strategic reserves. In the medium term, arrangements for verification and communication, sustained institutional funding and targeted cooperation programmes can be developed. The longer-term horizon concerns rules on non-interference, conflict resolution, and placing weapons under the control of state institutions. These objectives require changes in the behaviour of actors and in the sources of their legitimacy, rather than declarations of intent alone.



Each policy option carries costs and risks. An alliance may strengthen deterrence but expand a member's commitments; dialogue may reduce tensions without eliminating the capacity to inflict harm; and an alternative logistical route may reduce the risk associated with a single strait while shifting dependence to other borders and facilities. Policy options should therefore be evaluated according to their net effect on exposure to risk. Limited pilot initiatives can be expanded once their effectiveness has been demonstrated, rather than assuming that diversification is beneficial under all circumstances.

Fourth: Analytical Synthesis — The Three Thresholds and the Future of Regional Order

The responses to the three questions reveal that international and regional transformations are linked by a common strategic problem: the widening gap between the capacity to use force and the ability to translate military outcomes into political stability.

In Europe, Russia is capable of prolonging the confrontation and increasing its costs, while European states face the challenge of building greater autonomy in defence. In the Middle East, regional powers can inflict extensive military and economic damage on their adversaries, yet face difficulties in establishing sustainable security arrangements. Arab states, meanwhile, possess significant economic, geographic, and diplomatic resources, but need to transform these resources into effective institutional mechanisms for managing conflicts and negotiating their outcomes.

These transformations can be interpreted through three interconnected thresholds.

- The first is the military threshold, which concerns the ability to inflict and prevent harm, achieve gains on the ground, and maintain deterrence. Its importance is evident in the war in Ukraine, the confrontation with Iran, Israeli military operations, and the war in Yemen. However, military superiority reaches its limits when battlefield gains fail to produce durable political arrangements.
- The second is the operational threshold, which concerns the ability to keep essential economic and social systems functioning during crises, including energy, ports, straits, communications, water, food, and transport. Operational resilience has become an important source of power because an actor capable of disrupting a vital function can increase the cost of confrontation for



adversaries that are militarily stronger. Conversely, a state's ability to absorb and recover from shocks reduces the impact of coercive instruments.

- The third is the political threshold, which concerns the ability to translate military achievements and economic resilience into security and political rules that the parties are willing to uphold. Reaching this threshold requires understandings, verification mechanisms, institutions, incentives and consequences for non-compliance, as well as addressing the rights and interests that underlie conflicts.

These thresholds explain why instability persists despite the proliferation of military and diplomatic initiatives. A state may achieve gains at the military threshold while remaining unable to guarantee the continuity of maritime routes or impose a settlement. An armed group may possess the capacity to disrupt maritime navigation without being able to establish a stable political order. Likewise, a small state with a strategic transit location or mediation capacity may exercise influence at the operational and political thresholds beyond what its military strength alone would suggest.

Time is an additional variable shaping outcomes. Military gains can be achieved within days or weeks, whereas rebuilding institutions, economies, and alliances requires years. Conversely, measures that alter geography and governance on the ground may advance at a pace that makes a return to the previous situation more difficult. Delays in establishing implementable arrangements may therefore allow temporary conditions to become entrenched features of the regional order.

This equation suggests that the emerging regional order may be characterised by multiple sources of influence and uneven capacities to establish and enforce rules. Actors' positions will depend on their ability to combine military power, economic and institutional resilience, and negotiating capacity, rather than by superiority in any single domain.

For Arab states, the principal challenge is to influence all three thresholds simultaneously: deterring sources of direct threats, maintaining economic and service continuity during crises, and participating in shaping the political and security rules that will govern regional relations.



Fifth: Rethinking Arab Security

Ongoing transformations require Arab states to reassess the foundations of their security policies. Direct military threats are increasingly intertwined with threats to trade, energy, food, water, airports, communications, and essential services. This relationship is particularly evident in attacks on critical infrastructure and maritime routes, where a limited military operation can trigger economic and social disruption far exceeding the immediate physical damage.

This environment requires a broader understanding of security that combines border and infrastructure protection with the capacity of states and societies to maintain essential functions during crises. Air and maritime defence are important components of protection, but they need to be complemented by early-warning systems, strategic reserves, operational alternatives, and plans to repair damaged infrastructure and restore services.

This broader approach is especially important when Arab states face simultaneous shocks. An energy-exporting state may experience disruptions to its ports or pipelines, while an importing state may face rising food, fuel, and insurance prices. Border states, meanwhile, may come under pressure from displacement, security disturbances, and political changes in neighbouring countries.

These differences define the scope of feasible Arab cooperation. States do not face the same threats to the same degree, nor do they possess the same resources to address them. An effective response therefore requires flexible arrangements that identify shared functions and interests amenable to coordination, while accommodating distinct national priorities.

Defence Alliances and Collective Security: Distinct Functions and Time Horizons

Recent developments point to a growing need among Arab states for additional security guarantees amid declining confidence in the continuity of certain external commitments. New defence arrangements involving Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Pakistan have emerged alongside initiatives to strengthen maritime cooperation and protect critical infrastructure and trade routes.

These arrangements respond to the need for rapid protection against threats, particularly in the areas of air and maritime defence, information sharing, and armaments. However, they face the



challenge of translating political commitments into joint operational capabilities, as well as ensuring clarity regarding the parties' obligations and the limits of their involvement.

Regional collective security, by contrast, requires the development of broader rules encompassing respect for state sovereignty, non-interference in domestic affairs, the restriction of the use of force to national institutions, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Putting these rules into practice requires political understandings, mutual trust, and verification mechanisms. Consequently, building such a framework takes longer than establishing a limited defence alliance.

The two approaches serve distinct but potentially complementary functions. A defence alliance can offer immediate protection against specific threats, while collective security aims to reduce the incentives for generating threats over the longer term. The two approaches can be combined by developing protective capabilities immediately while opening regional negotiation channels on rules of conduct, borders, maritime routes, and civilian infrastructure.

This approach gives priority to existing institutions before creating new arrangements with expansive mandates. It also requires distinguishing between the defence of facilities and citizens and engagement in prolonged wars that could increase the costs of preserving stability for participating states.

The Gulf States and Saudi Arabia: Protecting Infrastructure and Sustaining Economic Transformation

The Gulf states face the challenge of maintaining economic stability and implementing development projects in an environment where oil facilities, airports, cities, and ports are exposed to threats. This challenge is particularly significant because economic transformation plans rely on investment, tourism, logistics and international events—all sectors that are highly sensitive to declining confidence in security.

Recent attacks on Saudi Arabia underscore the need to complement higher defence expenditure with early-warning systems, service-continuity measures and rapid recovery mechanisms. Protecting energy infrastructure also entails securing pipelines, ports, control centres, communications systems, and supply chains, in addition to intercepting incoming projectiles.



Gulf coordination becomes increasingly important given differences in interests and relationships with Iran, Yemen, and international powers. Disagreements over the management of a particular conflict arena may undermine the effectiveness of security cooperation, while a shared threat may create new opportunities for operational coordination. This creates scope for Saudi–Emirati operational cooperation on Yemen even while political differences over the country’s future persist.

The Gulf states should participate directly in shaping arrangements concerning the Strait of Hormuz, the nuclear issue, and maritime security. Bilateral understandings between major powers and Iran may ease certain aspects of the confrontation, but they may leave issues relating to missiles, facilities, militias, and maritime routes insufficiently addressed if the states most exposed to their consequences are excluded.

Egypt: Strategic Geography and Economic Constraints

Egypt’s strategic location makes it a central participant in any arrangements concerning the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, Gaza, Sudan, and Libya. It also possesses demographic, military, and institutional weight that enables it to participate in shaping regional arrangements, particularly where security issues intersect with trade, maritime navigation, and borders.

However, this geographical advantage is constrained by economic pressures that limit Egypt’s capacity to assume additional burdens. Suez Canal revenues have been affected by disruptions to maritime navigation in the Red Sea, while energy and import costs have risen. At the same time, crises in Sudan and Libya, along with disputes over Nile waters, intersect with the requirements of domestic stability.

Egypt is also affected by shifts in the international order through its grain imports from Russia and Ukraine, the El Dabaa nuclear power plant project, its economic relations with the European Union, and remittances from workers in the Gulf states. Stability in the Gulf, the Red Sea and Europe therefore directly shapes Egypt’s economic calculations.

These connections highlight the need for a more sustainable Egyptian–Gulf partnership based on a clear distribution of roles and interests. Egypt can contribute political, military, geographic, and



institutional capabilities, while the Gulf states possess financial and investment resources that could support connectivity projects, ports, the Suez Canal Economic Zone, and maritime cooperation. However, the success of this partnership requires Egyptian economic reforms that improve the investment climate, alongside political understandings that reduce competition over issues such as Sudan and Libya.

This approach calls for moving beyond the model of short-term financial assistance towards productive, strategic projects with shared returns. Egypt's security contribution in the Red Sea should also be defined in accordance with its actual capabilities and direct interests, while avoiding involvement in an open-ended ground war in Yemen that could intensify economic and military pressures.

This approach would strengthen Egypt's role without presuming a return to a model of unilateral Arab leadership. The future regional security order requires a division of responsibilities based on capabilities, interests and mutual consent, supported by institutions that sustain cooperation even when political priorities diverge.

Jordan: Protecting National Security and Leveraging Strategic Geography

Jordan's security calculations are shaped by several intersecting regional issues, most notably the future of the West Bank and Jerusalem, the borders with Syria and Iraq, energy and trade security, and stability in the Gulf and the Red Sea. These issues have become more sensitive amid continuing political and military changes in the Palestinian territories and the increased risk of economic and security shocks spreading across borders and transport corridors.

The first priority is to recognise the Palestinian question as integral to Jordan's national security, particularly regarding displacement, demographic and geographic changes in the West Bank, and the continued functioning of Palestinian institutions. This requires sustained political and diplomatic coordination with Arab and international partners, while maintaining clear positions on borders, rights, and institutions.

The second priority concerns strengthening the capacity to withstand disruptions to maritime routes and energy supplies. Jordan depends on trade, imports, and regional transport networks, and



is affected by changes in fuel, shipping, and insurance costs. The Port of Aqaba and overland transport links with Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Syria therefore assume additional importance in providing operational alternatives and diversifying supply routes.

Jordan's geographic position could yield greater economic and strategic influence when combined with the development of storage and re-export services, transport-related industries and digital customs systems. This transformation requires investment, operational agreements, and measures that reduce transit times and strengthen the ability to maintain trade flows during crises.

The third priority concerns the security of Jordanian airspace and critical infrastructure, as well as emergency-response capabilities, particularly when regional confrontations involving missiles and drones intensify. Regional cooperation in early warning, information sharing, and emergency planning can help reduce exposure to risk.

Jordan's situation illustrates the importance of combining preventive diplomacy with domestic operational capacity. A state occupying a strategically sensitive position can strengthen its negotiating leverage by maintaining reliable services and transport corridors, participating in regional security arrangements, and building economic partnerships that make its stability a shared interest among neighbouring states.

Economic Corridors and the Continuity of Essential Functions

Maritime and overland corridors have become increasingly important sources of security and influence. A state's ability to maintain flows of energy, trade, and essential goods has become a source of negotiating power, particularly when it possesses alternative routes, strategic reserves, and flexible operational infrastructure.

However, the value of these alternatives depends on their design and practical effectiveness. A corridor that relies on a single transit point or infrastructure that is difficult to repair may merely relocate risk. Networks with multiple routes, by contrast, give states greater flexibility during crises.

This consideration is increasingly important for infrastructure projects involving pipelines, ports, railways, electricity interconnections, and road networks linking the Gulf, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq,



Syria, and the wider Levant. Evaluating these projects requires assessing operational capacity, costs, environmental and security risks, financing, and the time required to reroute shipments during disruption.

Corridor protection should also encompass digital systems, payment networks, communications, cold chains, storage, and food and pharmaceutical reserves. A disruption at a port can affect distant markets through contracts, insurance, and financing arrangements before the disruption appears in conventional trade statistics.

Strategic Conclusions and Policy Options for Arab States

The first priority is to develop joint capabilities for protecting critical infrastructure, strengthen early-warning systems, and exchange information while preserving each state's control over sensitive security and sovereign data. This should cover airports, ports, desalination plants, energy facilities, electricity grids, communications networks, and healthcare infrastructure.

The second priority is to establish a minimum set of shared Arab rules on maritime security and the prohibition of attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, while ensuring Arab participation in any negotiating arrangements concerning the Strait of Hormuz, Iran, Yemen, and the Red Sea. These rules can be developed incrementally through specific operational agreements before advancing towards broader regional frameworks.

The third priority is to preserve the Palestinian issue as an integral part of any regional security framework and to tie Arab participation in reconstruction and security arrangements to a credible political horizon that protects land, institutions, and rights. Humanitarian assistance necessary to protect civilians should remain independent of political disputes.

The fourth priority concerns strengthening Arab economies' resilience to simultaneous shocks by diversifying energy and trade routes, developing strategic reserves, and improving coordination among central banks, financial institutions, port authorities, and transport and insurance companies.



The fifth priority is to support national institutions in fragile states, focusing on security, public services, governance, reconstruction, anti-corruption efforts, and social cohesion. This requires long-term programmes with measurable indicators and sustained support.

The comparison shows that the reshaping of regional security depends on actors' capacity to convert power and resources into durable commitments. Military superiority remains influential, but its political impact is constrained by adversaries' capacity to disrupt, institutional resilience, and societies' willingness to accept imposed arrangements. The United States also remains central to multiple assessments, although the terms, costs and limits of reliance on Washington remain increasingly contested.

Arab states have an opportunity to turn dispersed resources into collective capacity for action through clearly articulated interests, targeted partnerships, measurable commitments, and institutions capable of functioning under pressure. Palestine, state-building, and the protection of strategic corridors are interconnected components of this effort. Any stability that neglects rights or essential services, or leaves domestic decision-making vulnerable to external domination, remains vulnerable to renewed conflict.

These conclusions derive from a comparative reading of the expert contributions; differences in interpretation and judgement remain integral to the findings.



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