

The New Middle East in Formation: Sovereignty, Deterrence, and Regional Order amid Israel's Gaza Campaign, the Iran Crisis, and Gulf Security Recalibration

Main Actors, Strategic Autonomy, and the Reordering of Regional Security

Abdullah Hemmet Abdullah

Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences. Islamic University Gaza IUG

Email 1 : hemmet.abdullah@hotmail.com

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Abstract

This article defines the current geopolitical situation in the Middle East as a regional order in formation. It does not treat recent events as isolated crises. It argues that the region is being reorganized through the interaction of five pressures: Israel's prolonged military campaign in Gaza; the Iran crisis and the weaponization of maritime chokepoints; the erosion of confidence in external security guarantees; the return of middle powers; and the renewed centrality of the Palestinian question (SIPRI, 2026; OCHA oPt, 2026; ACLED, 2026).

The central claim is that the Middle East is moving away from a hierarchy built around U.S. primacy, Arab-Israeli normalization, and Iran containment alone. It is entering a more fragmented order in which sovereignty, deterrence, humanitarian legitimacy, and strategic autonomy are all contested at the same time. The Israeli strike in Qatar is therefore not the core of the article. It is treated only as one revealing episode within a broader regional transformation (Alhasan, 2026; Reuters, 2026).

The article gives special attention to the main actors shaping the emerging order: the United States, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Türkiye, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, and international legal institutions. It argues that the new Middle East is not yet a stable system. It is a field of overlapping crises. Its future will depend on whether regional actors convert shock into diplomacy or allow deterrence failures to widen into a more destructive confrontation (Fawcett, 2023; Hinnebusch, 2015).

Keywords: *New Middle East; regional order; Israeli military campaign in Gaza; Palestinian question; Iran; Strait of Hormuz; Gulf security; deterrence; sovereignty; Türkiye; Egypt; Saudi Arabia; Pakistan; strategic autonomy*

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1. Introduction: Defining the New Geopolitical Situation

The Middle East is not simply passing through another cycle of violence. It is moving through a structural reordering. Older assumptions still matter, but they no longer explain the full picture. U.S. power remains central, yet it no longer produces automatic confidence among partners. Arab-Israeli normalization remains diplomatically relevant, yet it cannot escape the Palestinian question. Iran remains a major challenge, yet Gulf states increasingly combine deterrence with crisis management. These shifts define the new geopolitical situation (Fawcett, 2023; Gause, 2010).

The most decisive element in this transformation is Israel's prolonged military campaign in Gaza. It is not analytically sufficient to describe this only as a conflict episode. The campaign has involved aerial bombardment, ground operations, territorial fragmentation, mass displacement, severe restrictions on humanitarian access, and a continuing struggle over the political future of Gaza. The regional meaning of Gaza now exceeds Gaza itself (OCHA oPt, 2026; ACLED, 2026).

The Palestinian question has therefore returned to the centre of regional politics. It shapes the limits of normalization, the credibility of Arab governments, the legitimacy of mediation, and the language of international law. It also affects strategic calculations in Riyadh, Cairo, Ankara, Doha, Abu Dhabi, Islamabad, Tehran, Washington, and Tel Aviv (UN General Assembly, 2025; France at the United Nations, 2025).

At the same time, the Iran crisis has widened the map of insecurity. The Strait of Hormuz has become a strategic instrument, not only a maritime route. The Gulf states now treat pipelines, ports, sovereign wealth, air defence, diplomacy, and legal positioning as parts of one security package. Security is no longer only about weapons. It is also about logistics, insurance, food security, energy flows, and diplomatic room for manoeuvre (Loft, 2026; UK House of Commons Library, 2026).

Table 1. Main actors in the emerging Middle East

Actor / cluster	Core priority	Main instruments	Strategic constraint
United States	Preserve influence, protect energy routes, manage Iran and Israel	Bases, sanctions, diplomacy, naval power	Credibility gap when partners doubt restraint and protection
Israel	Military dominance, deterrence, and strategic depth	Airpower, intelligence, ground control, targeted operations	Legitimacy crisis, legal exposure, and regional isolation
Iran	Regime survival, sanctions relief, deterrence by disruption	Missiles, partners, Hormuz leverage, nuclear bargaining	Economic pressure and risk of direct confrontation
Saudi Arabia	Protect Vision 2030 and regional leadership	Diplomacy, finance, energy policy, defence partnerships	Avoiding escalation while demanding stronger guarantees
Egypt	Border security, Gaza mediation, Red Sea/Suez stability	Diplomacy, intelligence, treaty leverage, border control	Economic fragility and limited direct leverage over Iran
Türkiye	Regional influence and strategic autonomy	NATO membership, drones, diplomacy, Syria presence	Balancing NATO ties with independent regional ambitions
Qatar	Mediation, sovereignty, and diplomatic relevance	Talks, finance, Al Udeid relationship, soft power	Exposure when mediation space becomes a target
UAE	Energy resilience and commercial-security autonomy	Ports, pipelines, investment, technology, diplomacy	Vulnerability of maritime routes and oil infrastructure
Pakistan	Mediator role and security partnership with Gulf states	Diplomacy, military links, Islamic-world legitimacy	Balancing Iran ties with Saudi and U.S. relationships
International legal institutions	Norm clarification and accountability	Advisory opinions, warrants, resolutions, reports	Selective enforcement and political resistance

Source: the author

2. From an Old Regional Logic to a New Regional Grammar

The older regional grammar rested on three pillars. The first was the assumption that the United States could manage escalation and protect partners. The second was the belief that Arab-Israeli normalization could move forward without resolving Palestinian political rights. The third was the view that Iran containment could unify most U.S.-aligned states. Each pillar now faces stress (Fawcett, 2023; Gause, 2010; Ulrichsen, 2020).

The United States remains the most powerful external actor. Yet regional partners increasingly distinguish between American capacity and American political will. The problem is not only whether Washington can deploy force. The problem is whether it will use influence to prevent partners from being harmed, to restrain Israel, and to produce a durable diplomatic settlement with Iran (Ikenberry, 2020; Acharya, 2018).

Normalization also faces a harder environment. Before the destruction in Gaza, some governments hoped to separate strategic relations with Israel from the Palestinian issue. That separation has become much less sustainable. Public anger, humanitarian images, legal proceedings, and the diplomacy around Palestinian statehood have made Palestine a central test of regional legitimacy UN General Assembly, 2025; Hassan, 2025).

Iran containment has also become more complex. Gulf states still fear Iranian missiles, drones, and proxy networks. Yet they also fear a full regional confrontation. As a result, their policies mix deterrence, de-escalation, infrastructure protection, and pragmatic dialogue. This does not mean trust. It means risk management (Loft, 2026; UK House of Commons Library, 2026).

Table 2. From the older regional order to the emerging order

Dimension	Older logic	Emerging logic	Implication
Security guarantees	The U.S. umbrella was the default reference point	U.S. role remains central but is increasingly questioned	Regional actors diversify without fully abandoning Washington
Palestine	Could be postponed during normalization	Shapes legitimacy and regional diplomacy	Durable normalization becomes harder without Palestinian rights
Iran	Containment as the main axis	Containment plus bargaining and crisis management	Gulf states seek channels as well as defences
Energy routes	Hormuz vulnerability accepted as a strategic fact	Bypass routes become political insurance	Infrastructure becomes a security doctrine
Middle powers	Secondary actors in great-power competition	Active coalition builders and mediators	Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Egypt, Qatar, UAE, and Pakistan gain weight
International law	Often invoked after events	Part of active political struggle	ICJ, ICC, and UN texts affect diplomacy even when enforcement is weak
Regional order	Relatively legible blocs	Flexible alignments and ad hoc coalitions	The region becomes more autonomous but less predictable

Source: the author

3. The Gaza Campaign and the Re-Politicization of Palestine

The humanitarian and political consequences of Israel's military campaign in Gaza are now central to the regional order. OCHA reported in May 2026 that living conditions in Gaza remained dire, with displaced families sheltering in overcrowded tents or damaged structures and residential areas exposed to recurrent strikes, shelling, and shooting (OCHA oPt, 2026).

OCHA also reported that, between the ceasefire announcement on 10 October 2025 and 12 May 2026, Gaza's Ministry of Health recorded 856 fatalities and 2,463 injuries. These figures do not describe a settled post-conflict environment. They describe a ceasefire environment in which violence and humanitarian breakdown remain present (OCHA oPt, 2026).

The language used for Gaza matters. To call the situation merely a 'war' is too thin. The more accurate description is a prolonged Israeli military campaign in a densely populated occupied territory, accompanied by severe civilian harm, massive displacement, infrastructural destruction, restrictions on aid, and territorial control arrangements whose future remains contested (OCHA oPt, 2026; ICJ, 2024).

This does not reduce analysis to moral language alone. It clarifies the political mechanism. Gaza has become the point where security doctrine, humanitarian legitimacy, international law, and Arab public opinion converge. Every regional actor must now position itself in relation to that convergence (ICJ, 2024; ICC, 2024).

The Yellow Line arrangement deepens this problem. ACLED reported in May 2026 that Israel had gradually expanded the line westward and controlled about 58 percent of Gaza, compared with 53 percent under the original ceasefire map. This territorial fact matters because temporary lines can harden into political realities (ACLED, 2026).

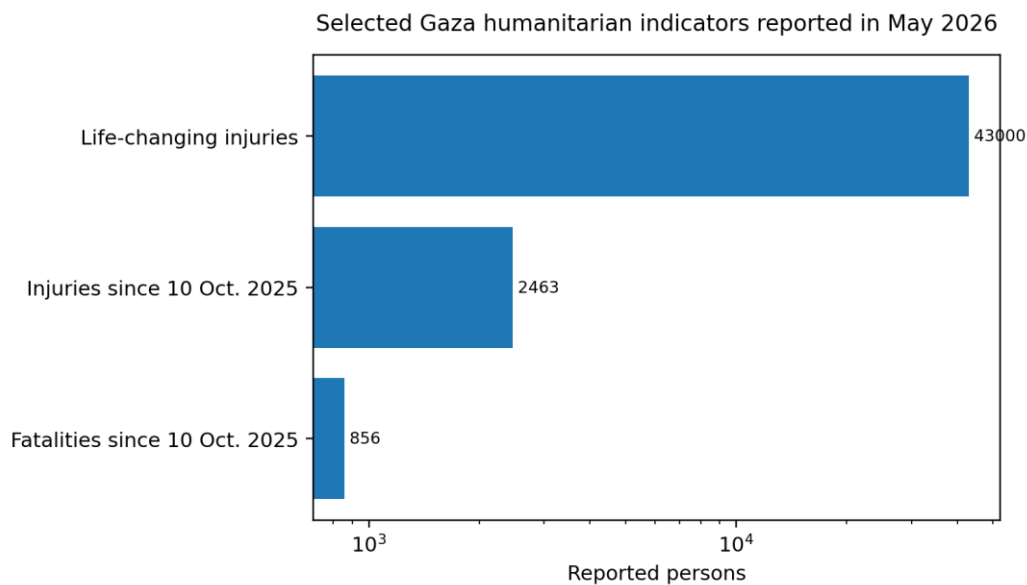


Figure 1. Selected Gaza humanitarian indicators reported in May 2026

Source: OCHA oPt Humanitarian Situation Report, 15 May 2026. Note: The chart uses a logarithmic scale because the indicators differ widely in magnitude.

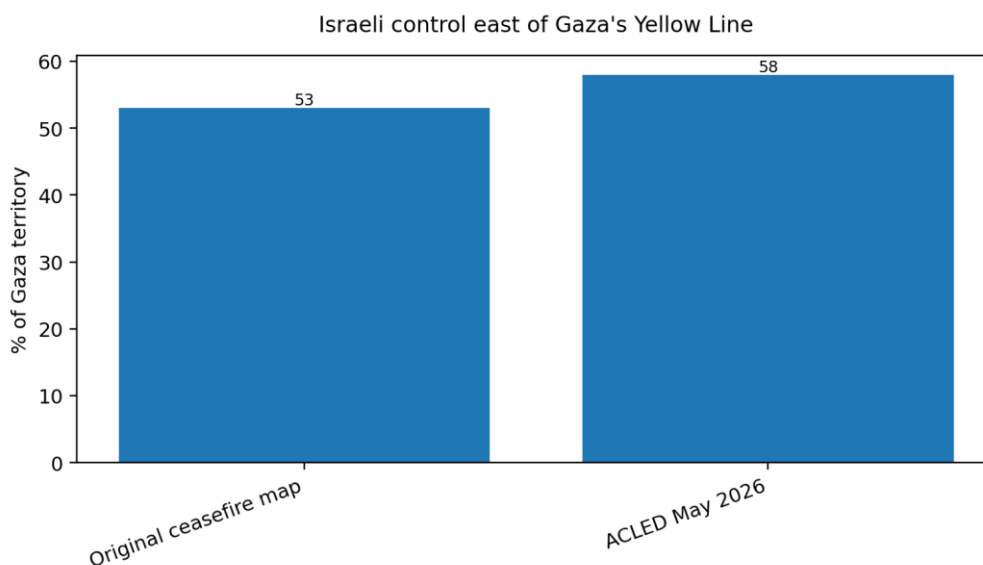


Figure 2. Israeli control east of Gaza's Yellow Line arrangement

Source: ACLED Middle East Overview, May 2026.

4. Deterrence after Iran and the Strait of Hormuz

The Iran crisis has changed the strategic geography of the Middle East. Hormuz is no longer only a chokepoint through which energy passes. It is a bargaining arena in which maritime access, sanctions, naval power, Gulf infrastructure, and great-power diplomacy intersect (UK House of Commons Library, 2026; Reuters, 2026).

The UK House of Commons Library described the 2026 U.S.-Iran talks as involving Hormuz navigation, Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programme, sanctions, reconstruction, and a long-term peace framework. This shows that maritime access is now part of a broader settlement agenda, not a technical shipping issue (Loft, 2026).

The same institutional briefing noted that the strait remained effectively closed despite a conditional ceasefire. This condition turns energy flows into leverage. It also makes Asian importers, European consumers, Gulf exporters, insurance markets, and naval coalitions part of the same crisis (UK House of Commons Library, 2026).

Reuters reporting in May 2026 described Iran as consolidating control of Hormuz through island checkpoints, diplomatic arrangements, and inspection mechanisms. It also reported that some shipping had been filtered through political deals and state-backed arrangements. This is not simply piracy or blockade. It is coercive gatekeeping (Reuters, 2026).

Reuters also reported that before the fighting around Iran, the Strait of Hormuz carried about 125 to 140 daily passages and around 20 percent of global energy supplies. In mid-May, Reuters cited data showing only a small number of vessels crossing within certain 24-hour periods. The numbers illustrate the global effect of regional military pressure (Reuters, 2026a; Reuters, 2026b).

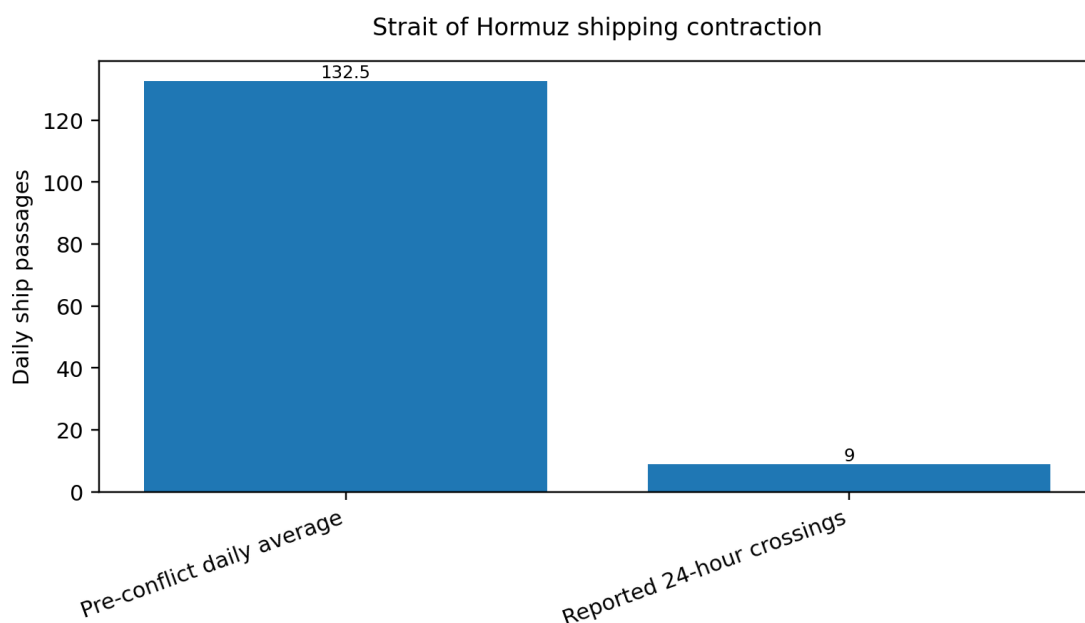


Figure 3. Strait of Hormuz shipping contraction

Source: Reuters reporting, 15 and 20 May 2026. Pre-conflict value shown as the midpoint of the 125-140 daily passage range.

5. Gulf Security: Autonomy without Abandonment

Gulf states are not leaving the U.S. security system. They are trying to reduce dependence on any single protector. This is the logic of strategic autonomy. It does not require anti-American alignment. It requires more options (IMF, 2025; World Bank, 2026).

The UAE pipeline strategy is a clear example. Reuters reported that the UAE's new crude pipeline bypassing Hormuz was about 50 percent complete and was intended to become operational by 2027. The project aims to double export capacity through Fujairah. It is an energy project, but it is also a security doctrine (Saba/Reuters, 2026).

Pipeline infrastructure, alternative ports, storage capacity, air defence, and sovereign wealth are now parts of one Gulf security architecture. The Gulf is learning that geography can be weaponized. It is also learning that maritime insurance and logistics may become as important as fighter aircraft in a regional crisis (Reuters, 2026; UNCTAD, 2025).

Qatar belongs in this broader discussion, but it should not define it. The strike that targeted Doha revealed the vulnerability of mediation space and the limits of external protection. Yet the deeper issue is not Qatar alone. It is the wider question of whether Gulf states can protect sovereignty while hosting foreign forces, mediating conflicts, and maintaining relations with competing regional actors (Ulrichsen, 2020; Alhasan, 2026).

Saudi Arabia faces a similar dilemma from a different position. It seeks to protect Vision 2030, maintain energy leadership, and avoid direct war. It also wants stronger regional influence. This pushes Riyadh toward more flexible diplomacy: coordination with Washington, dialogue with Tehran when necessary, pressure for Palestinian statehood, and exploration of wider regional formats (IMF, 2025; World Bank, 2025).

6. Military Expenditure and the Limits of Power

Military spending helps explain the regional order, but it does not explain it fully. SIPRI reported that global military expenditure reached about USD 2.887 trillion in 2025, while Middle East military expenditure reached an estimated USD 218 billion. The region remains heavily militarized, even when annual growth slows (SIPRI, 2026a; SIPRI, 2026b).

SIPRI also noted that Middle East spending in 2025 was only 0.1 percent higher than in 2024. This matters because the region's crisis is not only a story of expanding budgets. It is a story of uneven deterrence, asymmetrical leverage, and the use of non-traditional tools such as maritime obstruction, drones, lawfare, information campaigns, and infrastructure bypass (SIPRI, 2026b; SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, 2026).

Israel's military capabilities remain highly advanced. Yet military superiority has not produced strategic closure. The campaign in Gaza has increased legal exposure, diplomatic isolation, and pressure on normalization. Iran's conventional spending is much smaller, yet its ability to threaten maritime routes and activate partners gives it disproportionate coercive power (IISS, 2026; SIPRI, 2026a).

This is the central paradox of the new Middle East. The most expensive military does not always control the most important escalation lever. A state may possess aircraft, missiles, and intelligence reach, while another actor controls chokepoints, armed partners, or the political cost of escalation (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Gause, 2010).

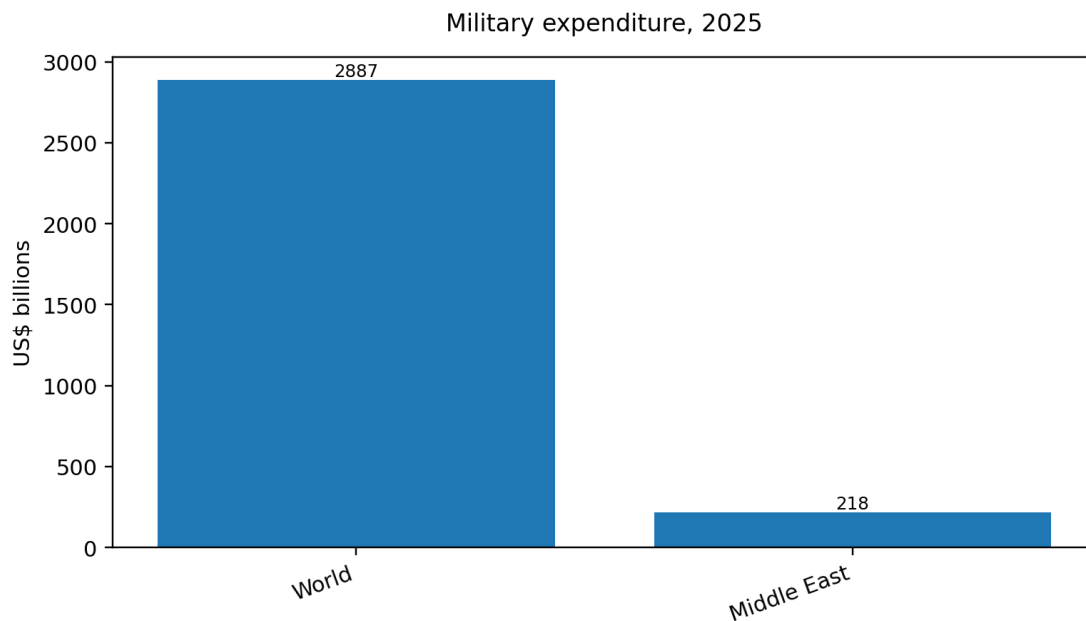


Figure 4. Global and Middle East military expenditure, 2025

Source: SIPRI Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2025, and SIPRI press release, April 2026.

7. Israel's Expanding Security Geography

Israel's current security geography extends beyond Gaza. It links Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and maritime security into one deterrence map. This approach seeks to prevent threats from consolidating near Israeli borders or inside hostile networks. Yet it also expands the number of states and non-state actors drawn into Israeli military calculations (Financial Times, 2026; ACLED, 2026).

The Financial Times reported in May 2026 that Israel had seized or controlled large areas across Gaza, southern Lebanon, and parts of Syria as part of a broader security-zone strategy. The implication is profound. Regional boundaries are being reworked not through treaties, but through force, buffer zones, and facts on the ground (Financial Times, 2026).

This expansion creates diplomatic costs. It invites legal scrutiny, increases Arab and Muslim public anger, and makes normalization politically harder. It also complicates U.S. diplomacy, because Washington must support Israel's security while containing the regional consequences of Israeli military reach (ICJ, 2024; ICC, 2024; UN General Assembly, 2025).

The legal dimension cannot be separated from the military one. The ICJ's 2024 advisory opinion concluded that Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful and must end as rapidly as possible. The opinion does not automatically change the balance of force, but it changes the language of legitimacy (ICJ, 2024).

The ICC's 2024 arrest warrants against Benjamin Netanyahu, Yoav Gallant, and Mohammed Deif also changed the legal context. They placed alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the centre of diplomatic debate. The later denial by the ICC in May 2026 that it had issued new warrants shows the sensitivity of the legal process, but not its disappearance (ICC, 2024; Reuters, 2026).

8. Middle Powers and the New Coalition Politics

The new Middle East is not governed only by great powers. Middle powers are becoming more decisive. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Türkiye, Qatar, the UAE, and Pakistan can mediate, finance, block, host, arm, or legitimize regional outcomes. None of them can impose order alone. Together, they can shape the cost of disorder (Fawcett, 2023; Hinnebusch, 2015).

IISS described the emergence of an Egypt-Pakistan-Saudi Arabia-Türkiye quadrilateral as a response to Israeli aggressiveness and the fallout from the U.S.-Israel war with Iran. Its importance lies less in becoming a formal alliance and more in functioning as an ad hoc committee of regional heavyweights (Alhasan, 2026).

This pattern is important because it is flexible. It does not require ideological unity. Saudi Arabia and Türkiye have different strategic cultures. Egypt and Pakistan have different geographic priorities. Yet all four can recognize when instability threatens their interests. The new regional politics is built from overlapping interests rather than permanent blocs (Alhasan, 2026).

Qatar remains essential because mediation still requires channels to actors whom others refuse to meet. Egypt remains essential because of geography and the Gaza border. Türkiye remains essential because it combines NATO membership with independent regional action. The UAE remains essential because it translates economic infrastructure into geopolitical resilience (Alhasan, 2026; Gause, 2010).

Pakistan's role is especially significant. Its involvement signals that the Middle East's security map now extends into South Asia. This is not a return to old pan-Islamic slogans. It is a practical recognition that Gulf security, Iranian diplomacy, and Pakistani military and diplomatic capacity intersect (Alhasan, 2026; Associated Press, 2026).

Table 3. Crisis theatres and escalation mechanisms

Theatre	Principal actors	Escalation mechanism	Possible stabilizer
Gaza	Israel, Palestinians, Hamas, Egypt, Qatar, U.S.	Territorial control, aid restrictions, renewed military operations	Humanitarian access, credible Palestinian governance, enforceable withdrawal benchmarks
Strait of Hormuz	Iran, Oman, U.S., GCC, Asian importers	Shipping restrictions, inspection regimes, naval counter-blockade	Maritime accord, sanctions sequencing, coastal-state mechanism
Lebanon/Syria	Israel, Hezbollah, Lebanese state, Syrian authorities, Iran	Buffer zones, strikes, militia retaliation	Ceasefire monitoring, border arrangements, reconstruction incentives
Gulf security	Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, U.S., China, Pakistan	Missile/drone attacks, base vulnerability, energy disruption	Air defence integration, diversified partnerships, infrastructure bypass
International law	ICJ, ICC, UNSC, states	Selective enforcement, legal backlash, legitimacy contest	Consistent application, reporting mechanisms, treaty-based accountability

Source: the author

9. Sovereignty and International Law

Sovereignty is not only a legal principle in the new Middle East. It is a security resource. When a state cannot protect its airspace, maritime access, borders, or mediation space, its diplomatic role becomes vulnerable. This is why attacks across borders now produce consequences far beyond the target itself (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Buzan & Hansen, 2009).

International law remains active, but enforcement is uneven. The ICJ, ICC, UN Security Council, and General Assembly shape language, legitimacy, and diplomatic pressure. Yet these institutions often lack the coercive capacity to force compliance when powerful states or protected allies resist (ICJ, 2024; ICC, 2024).

UN Security Council Resolution 2803 endorsed a Gaza plan and created a framework around reconstruction, stabilization, and governance. It also raised difficult questions about external administration, withdrawal benchmarks, Palestinian self-determination, and the risk that temporary arrangements could become indefinite control (UN Security Council, 2025; Security Council Report, 2025).

This legal tension matters. A ceasefire framework can reduce violence, but it can also freeze unequal power if withdrawal, governance, reconstruction, and accountability are not handled with clarity. For this reason, Gaza's post-ceasefire arrangements are not only humanitarian. They are constitutional in the broad political sense (Chatham House, 2025; Hassan, 2025).

The New York Declaration and the renewed international attention to the two-state solution reflect the same point. The regional order cannot stabilize while the Palestinian question is treated as secondary. Peace architecture without Palestinian political rights will remain fragile (UN General Assembly, 2025; France at the United Nations, 2025).

10. Scenarios for the Emerging Order

The region is not moving toward one predetermined outcome. Three scenarios are more plausible than a single forecast. The first is managed fragmentation. In this scenario, fighting remains contained, Gaza reconstruction advances slowly, and Hormuz gradually reopens through negotiated arrangements. The region stays unstable, but avoids a general war (OCHA oPt, 2026; UK House of Commons Library, 2026; Reuters, 2026).

The second scenario is competitive realignment. In this scenario, regional actors build new coalitions, diversify security partners, and reduce dependence on Washington without rejecting it. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Türkiye, Pakistan, Qatar, and the UAE gain room to shape outcomes. This scenario increases autonomy, but it also makes the alliance map more fluid (Alhasan, 2026; World Bank, 2026).

The third scenario is escalatory breakdown. In this scenario, attacks in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, or the Gulf trigger wider retaliation. Hormuz remains obstructed, energy prices rise, legal institutions are politicized, and regional actors begin to treat deterrence failures as existential threats. This is the most dangerous path (Reuters, 2026; ACLED, 2026).

The most likely near-term trajectory is neither full stabilization nor total collapse. It is a tense mixture of bargaining and coercion. Diplomacy will continue, but it will be diplomacy under pressure. Military moves will continue, but they will be constrained by economic and legal costs. This is why the new Middle East should be understood as a contested formation, not a completed order (Acharya, 2018; Hinnebusch, 2015).

Table 4. Scenarios for the new Middle East

Scenario	Drivers	Early indicators	Implications
Managed fragmentation	War fatigue, economic pressure, U.S.-Iran talks, Gulf caution	Partial Hormuz reopening; limited Gaza reconstruction; fewer cross-border strikes	Instability persists but broad regional war is avoided
Competitive realignment	Doubt in U.S. guarantees; middle-power diplomacy; security diversification	More quadrilateral meetings; GCC defence coordination; new energy bypass projects	Regional autonomy increases, but alignments become less predictable
Escalatory breakdown	Failed ceasefires; Hormuz obstruction; Israeli expansion of buffer zones; Iranian retaliation	Shipping collapse; missile/drone attacks; emergency summits; sanctions escalation	High risk of regional confrontation and global economic shock
Legal-diplomatic containment	ICJ/ICC pressure; UN frameworks; recognition diplomacy	Stronger monitoring, accountability debates, recognition of Palestine	Legitimacy pressure rises even if enforcement remains selective

Source: the author

11. Conclusion

The Middle East is entering a new phase of geopolitical formation. This phase is not defined by one incident, one state, or one front. It is defined by the interaction of Israel's destructive military campaign in Gaza, the reactivation of the Palestinian question, the Iran-Hormuz crisis, the vulnerability of Gulf security, and the return of middle-power coordination (SIPRI, 2026a; OCHA oPt, 2026; ACLED, 2026).

The region's main actors are learning that sovereignty is fragile when airspace, borders, maritime chokepoints, and mediation platforms can be violated or weaponized. They are also learning that military superiority does not automatically produce political legitimacy. This is why the new Middle East is as much a crisis of legitimacy as it is a crisis of deterrence (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Buzan & Hansen, 2009).

For Israel, the attempt to expand deterrence through force has created wider strategic liabilities. It has intensified legal scrutiny, damaged normalization prospects, and returned Palestine to the centre of regional diplomacy. For the United States, the challenge is to preserve influence while convincing partners that American power can restrain escalation as well as enable military action (ICJ, 2024; ICC, 2024; UN General Assembly, 2025).

For Gulf states, the lesson is strategic autonomy without abrupt abandonment. They will continue to work with Washington, but they will also build bypass infrastructure, diversify partnerships, coordinate with regional middle powers, and seek legal and diplomatic tools to protect sovereignty (IMF, 2025; Reuters, 2026).

For Iran, Hormuz remains a powerful lever, but also a risky one. The more it uses maritime disruption as bargaining power, the more it risks counter-blockade, sanctions, and regional pushback. Tehran's leverage is real, but it is not cost-free (Loft, 2026; Reuters, 2026).

For Palestine, the significance is deeper. Gaza has shown that the Palestinian question cannot be bypassed by normalization, containment, or crisis management. Any regional order that ignores Palestinian rights will remain unstable. Any security architecture that leaves Gaza fragmented, occupied, or administratively suspended will reproduce the conditions of future violence (UN General Assembly, 2025; ICJ, 2024).

The article therefore concludes that the new Middle East is not yet born. It is being negotiated through force, law, diplomacy, infrastructure, and public legitimacy. Its future depends on whether regional actors transform this moment into a framework for accountable security, or whether they allow fragmented deterrence to become the logic of permanent crisis (Acharya, 2018; Fawcett, 2023; SIPRI, 2026a).

Source and Data Note

The figures and tables in this article are analytical instruments. They do not claim to measure every dimension of regional power. They organize selected public data from SIPRI, OCHA, ACLED, Reuters, and official institutional sources so that the political argument remains transparent and verifiable (SIPRI, 2026; OCHA, 2026; ACLED, 2026; Reuters, 2026).

The military-spending data should be read with caution because budgets do not measure readiness, doctrine, intelligence capacity, proxy networks, or the political will to escalate. These variables are often more decisive than expenditure alone (SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, 2026; IISS, 2026).

The Gaza indicators used here are reported figures from humanitarian and conflict-monitoring sources. They should be treated as minimum indicators of a broader humanitarian and political catastrophe rather than as a complete measure of harm (OCHA oPt, 2026).

The Hormuz indicators are also indicative. They capture reported shipping disruption and reopening signals during a fast-moving crisis, where vessel-tracking, political exemptions, and state-controlled transit mechanisms can change quickly (Reuters, 2026a; Reuters, 2026b).

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