

Crises and New Order in the Middle East: The American-Israeli Strategy and its limits.

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The “12-Day War,” triggered by strikes against Iran (June 13–25, 2025), the war in Gaza (ongoing since October 2023), the war against Hezbollah in Lebanon (since October 2024), and the intervention in Syria (since December 2024), must all be understood as part of a broader preemptive strategy carried out by the United States and Israel. These conflicts are a continuation of decades of American wars in the region, and policies aimed at preventing the emergence of alliances between regional powers and China and Russia.

Israel is integrated into this strategy as a subsystem, pursuing two parallel agendas: one aligned with U.S. objectives, and the other driven by its own logic of colonization¹ and neutralizing the Palestinian nation-state and territorial claims. Thus, bombing civilians in Gaza so that, ultimately, the only matters for negotiation and international pressure are a cessation of hostilities and reconstruction (and not the establishment of a Palestinian state) is nothing new. What is new, however, is the duration and intensity of the war, which is widely referred to—even within Israeli leftist circles²—as a genocide, as well as the simultaneous engagement on multiple fronts (Gaza, West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran).

I- The American Strategy for Maintaining Access to the Middle-East

The United States has pursued for decades an offensive strategy to maintain access to the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf-Levant subregion. The instruments employed are military, political, and economic: the Gulf War and embargo (1990–2003); the invasion and occupation of Iraq (2003–2011); military bases (with nearly 40,000 troops deployed—see map in annex) and the deployment of ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) systems in the subregion; financial and commercial aid and pressures; sanctions involving restrictions on dollar access; and various sociopolitical engineering policies (conditionalities attached to aid and technology transfers, incentives for reform, etc.).

This strategy aims at influence and containment of emerging regional powers, as well as preemption³ to thwart the creation of geostrategic axes that would limit U.S. access to the region.

¹ Today there are more than 517.000 Israeli settlers in occupied territories + 200.000 in East Jerusalem, there were 110.000 + 140.000 in 1993, see, « 30 Years After Oslo », *Peace Now*, 11 September 2023, <https://peacenow.org.il/en/30-years-after-oslo-the-data-that-shows-how-the-settlements-proliferated-following-the-oslo-accords> ; “West Bank settler population grew by nearly 3% in 2023 — report”, *The Times of Israel*, 11 February 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/west-bank-settler-population-grew-by-nearly-3-in-2023-report/#:~:text=The%20report%2C%20released%20Sunday%20by%20the%20pro-settler%20group.in%20the%20last%20five%20years%2C%20the%20report%20said>

² For a summary of these positions, see Pierre Louis Caron « Guerre dans la bande de Gaza : qui utilise le mot génocide pour décrire les opérations israéliennes ? » *France Info*, 2 juin 2025, https://www.franceinfo.fr/monde/proche-orient/israel-palestine/guerre-dans-la-bande-de-gaza-qui-utilise-ou-non-le-mot-genocide-pour-decrire-les-operations-israeliennes-et-pour-quelles-raisons_7277304.html See the Betsalem report, « Our genocide », (juillet 2025): https://www.btselem.org/publications/202507_our_genocide

³ The term “preemption” in the U.S. post-Cold War strategic lexicon refers to a shift beyond deterrence toward a more anticipatory posture—aimed at influencing and countering, by all possible means and channels, factors that could limit American power. The preemptive strategy encompasses the preservation of: the control over international institutions; the hegemony of the dollar; technological

Indeed, regional powers such as Türkiye, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt have developed ambitions and power strategies leading them to free themselves from dependence on or alignment with Washington. The desire of these Global South⁴ countries to participate in international decision-making and to no longer endure normative, economic, and political constraints imposed by the United States (dollar hegemony⁵, sanction regimes⁶, conditionalities, etc.) drives them to rebalance their relations with Russia and China and to move toward greater South-South cooperation (BRICS+, diplomatic normalization, joint technological and energy projects, etc.).

The stakes in the Middle East are considerable, as the region remains a central arena of strategic competition among global powers. It is: the world's leading exporter and reserve hub of hydrocarbon; home to key maritime transit routes essential to global trade; a zone of interconnection between Europe, Africa, and Asia; a major importer of arms; and a cluster of emerging markets undergoing gradual integration into the global economy. In the face of the rising influence of continental states as emerging poles of global order—such as China, Russia, India, and Brazil—as well as increasingly assertive regional powers, the United States will retain a central position only if it succeeds in maintaining its influence over the critical structures (institutional, informational, monetary-financial), ways and resources that underpin globalization.

Thus, the issue of Middle Eastern hydrocarbons remains strategically decisive, even though the United States imports very little from the region and has, in fact, become the world's leading oil producer⁷—primarily due to the expansion of its shale oil sector, which now accounts for three-quarters of its total production⁸. This issue will continue to be embedded in U.S. strategic thinking for two key reasons: first, oil from the region remains a major determinant of global energy markets and, by extension, of the stability of the world economy; second, Europe, India, and China's continued dependence on Middle Eastern energy supplies reinforces the geopolitical value of the United States' role as a security guarantor of critical resource flows and strategic transit routes.

superiority, particularly in military and information fields, with the goal of achieving a decisive breakthrough (outpacing peer competitors) by 2030–2050; and access to pivotal countries situated along logistical routes and that harbor critical resources for the global economy.

⁴ The Global South refers to the former Third World, including China, as well as Russia. Russia sometimes uses the term “Global South and East” as opposed to the “Collective West.” It also explores the concept of the “Global Majority,” especially following the observation that a large majority of countries at the UN refused to sanction it for its war against Ukraine.

⁵ Monetary hegemony is a concept employed by economists to describe a state whose currency performs a central regulatory role within the international monetary system. Such a state exercises dominance through: mastery over the international unit of account and the principal global reserve currency—currently, approximately 60% of global reserves are held in U.S. dollars (compared to 20% in euros, 7% in yuan, 6% in yen, and 5% in British pounds); control over access to international credit markets; exemption from balance of payments constraints; and the capacity to sustain a substantial debt burden (as of late July 2025, the U.S. national debt amounts to \$37.18 trillion, equivalent to 123% of GDP). For an in-depth analysis, see Saïda Bédar, “Globalization and the Reproduction of U.S. Hegemony,” *Études & Analyses – Géostratégie Analyses*, October 2019. https://www.geostrategie-analyses.com/?page_id=31

⁶ Iran has been subjected to an economic sanctions regime since 1979 and is currently excluded from the international clearing system, with restricted access to the dollar and international investors. Syria had been under sanctions since 1979, which were lifted in June 2025. Various actors (the “specially designated persons”) are under sanctions in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and Yemen. It is worth noting that Iraq, which has maintained an account with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (FRBNY) since May 2003—where its oil revenues (currently \$120 billion) are deposited—is regularly restricted in its access to dollars if it fails to comply with the electronic enforcement system ensuring transaction transparency. The first Trump administration even threatened, in January 2020, to close Iraq's account at the FRBNY should U.S. troops be expelled from Iraq.

⁷ US, Energy Administration, *United States produces more crude oil than any country, ever*, March 11, 2024, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=61545>

⁸ Shariq Khan, “US oil production to peak by 2027 as shale boom fades, EIA forecasts”, *Reuters*, April 15, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-crude-oil-output-peak-by-2027-eia-projects-2025-04-15/>

Military interventionism remains a core component of U.S. strategy in the Middle East, primarily aimed at countering adversaries' efforts to restrict access—commonly referred to as “*anti-access*” or “*access-denial*” strategies. The Pentagon encapsulates this posture with the phrase: “*disrupt, degrade, and work to defeat and/or diminish.*” This formulation reflects an approach centered less on achieving outright battlefield victory than on preemptively neutralizing the adversary's capabilities—it amounts to disarming the adversary preemptively before the prospect of battle arises. This strategy of capability containment, directed at both actual and potential adversaries, is officially justified by the increasing adoption of asymmetric and hybrid⁹ strategies by these adversaries, enabled in part by their access to advanced *off-the-shelf* technologies (commercially available systems requiring little or no R&D investment). This concern was notably expressed by General Bryan P. Fenton, Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, during a Senate hearing in April 2025:

“Meanwhile, the character of war is changing at a rate faster than we've ever seen. The innovation cycle now turns in days and weeks, not months and years. Our adversaries use \$10,000 one-way drones that we shoot down with \$2 million missiles. That cost benefit curve is upside down. To summarize this is the most complex, asymmetric, and hybrid threat security environment I've seen in 38 years of service.”¹⁰

Strategic risk also would stem from the potential that peer competitors—namely Russia and China—could achieve a technological leap, primarily through advances in artificial intelligence, and combine this edge with a financial and commercial policy of “de-dollarization,” thereby directly challenging the United States' unparalleled comparative advantage. Indeed, the foundation of American power lies in monetary hegemony, a status increasingly contested by Global South states, including emerging powers in the Middle East, which are progressively integrating—either as full members or strategic partners—into alternative multilateral frameworks such as BRICS+ and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)¹¹.

The Middle East, in particular, is acutely affected by the perverse effects of dollar hegemony. The obligation to use the U.S. dollar as the global unit of account and reserve currency ensures, on the one hand, a perpetual rent for the United States—via its ability to accumulate debt without facing solvency risk, thus enabling virtually unlimited defense budgets (\$850 billion for 2025)—and on the other hand, the capacity to impose sanctions. Paradoxically, Middle Eastern states, through their

⁹ Asymmetry in strategic thought refers to the use of capabilities (weapons systems, operational concepts, tactics, techniques, and procedures), as well as maneuver in time and space, in ways that avoid symmetrical force-on-force engagements. It involves targeting adversary vulnerabilities while circumventing their strengths, relying on deception, surprise, and destabilization, including actions outside the traditional domain of warfare—and at times beyond the boundaries of law and morality. It is important to underscore that asymmetry is by no means synonymous with a weak-versus-strong dynamic; rather, it has become a central component of the strategic doctrines of major powers. Hybrid warfare is a key instrument of asymmetry, combining conventional, irregular, and cyber capabilities.

¹⁰ General Bryan P. Fenton, USA Commander, US Special Operations Command, *Hearing on United States Special Operations in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2026*, Committee on Armed Services, US Senate, April 8, 2025

¹¹ These are groupings focused on economic cooperation, political dialogue, and security. The BRICS+ — Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia — represent 40% of global GDP (measured by purchasing power parity), 40% of global oil reserves, 50% of gas reserves, and 72% of rare earths. Saudi Arabia has not yet given its final approval to become a member (it is assumed to be waiting to see if a balanced strategic partnership agreement with the United States can be ratified), while Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Uganda, and Uzbekistan are partner countries. Algeria and Türkiye have expressed their intention to join as full members. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) includes China, Russia, India, Iran, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan as members, with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cambodia, Egypt, Kuwait, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates as partners.

petrodollar revenues, are among the largest purchasers of U.S. Treasury bonds, yet they are also among the primary targets of American sanctions and military interventionism. Today, several of these states are actively pursuing de-dollarization strategies, including the diversification of reserve currencies, swap agreements, the use of national currencies in South-South trade, and transregional investments in advanced technologies—such as AI, data centers, green energy, and digital hubs—aimed at strengthening their strategic autonomy

American preemption thus consists in disarming (and denying access to advanced systems), curbing de-dollarization, and countering geopolitical alignments that promote multipolarity. One of the means to prevent these alignments is to foster division, or at least to block rapprochements—Beijing-Moscow-Tehran, and potentially Beijing-Moscow-Tehran-Ankara (plus Riyadh, Cairo, Doha, etc.). From this perspective, Washington's interest in bombing Iran and neutralizing its allies in Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon—with or without Israeli assistance—becomes clearer. What is more difficult to understand is Washington's incentive to assist (arm, support through military operations, finance, politically back, and refrain from obstructing) Israel in its campaign of genocide in Gaza. This requires considering that Israel has become a strategic American subsystem embedded in the region, and that its reproduction as a U.S. subsystem entails its radicalization

II – Israel, as an American strategic subsystem

Israel was not always a strategic American subsystem; it gradually evolved toward this status. It was the “defeat” of 1973 that prompted it to seek closer ties with the actor offering protection, intelligence, and sophisticated weaponry—the first Israeli-American strategic cooperation agreement was only signed in 1981. Israel's successive military failures during the 1980s accelerated its integration into the American strategic system. The hasty withdrawal from Beirut in 1982 demonstrated the limitations of a doctrine and force structure based on the shock of overwhelming firepower and maneuverability in urban environment when confronted with adversaries employing asymmetric access-denial methods. The 1987 Intifada brought forth the specter of perpetual guerrilla warfare—the “unwinnable war,” pitting a state army against a population wholly mobilized for resistance, generation after generation

Israeli strategic doctrine then shifted from a configuration described as “aggressive defense,” focused on the frontal clash of armies and defense against *fedayeen* incursions, to a deterrent/preemptive posture with three intervention perimeters: combat at the borders (Syria, Lebanon), beyond the borders (Iran), and within the borders (in the occupied territories). This strategy is based on dual deterrence, nuclear (Israel is estimated to have between 300 and 400 warheads) and conventional—through *airpower* (superiority in air denial, precision, and rapid elimination of critical targets), informational dominance (ISR and cyber warfare), and missile defense. This transformation and buildup of the Israeli force structure largely results from American techno-military assistance. This assistance amounted to \$12.5 billion for fiscal year 2024 and \$3.8 billion for fiscal year 2025. Nearly 65.6% of weapons delivered to Israel between 2013 and 2023 came from the United States (29.7% from Germany, 4.7% from Italy)¹². American techno-

¹² U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel: Overview and Developments since October 7, 2023, *Congressional Research Service*, 28 May 2025, pp.1 et 8.

military aid to Israel (arms transfers and access to the U.S. R&D and production apparatus) has for decades aimed to maintain Israel's "qualitative military edge" over the countries in the region.

Regarding the Palestinian question, U.S. support for Israel has been both military and political—particularly through its long-standing mediation role in the so-called "peace process" since 1993. This process, initially framed under the formula "land for peace," gradually devolved into a form of conflict management with no viable political outcome for the Palestinians, who have endured recurrent bombardments in Gaza and escalating colonization and repression in the West Bank. The final phase of the process, as proposed by Washington in 2020, even envisioned a solution without the Palestinians themselves, through the Abraham Accords—bilateral agreements between Israel and Morocco, the UAE, Bahrain, and the former Sudanese government. While the U.S. officially supported the "two-state solution," Israel progressively rendered that outcome unattainable—through relentless settlement expansion on the one hand, and the systematic dismantling of Palestinian institutions on the other. Successive U.S. administrations have demonstrably failed to restrain settlement activity or prevent the erosion of what might have served as the foundation for a viable Palestinian state. In effect, they have supported Israel in its prolonged attempt to win what is often described as an "unwinnable war"—the kind of war that other colonial powers eventually abandoned.¹³ This attempt, now culminating in genocide, has been structured around three core parameters:

1. Militarily, new weapons and information systems have made it possible to compensate for the loss of strategic depth through the acquisition of "real-time" capabilities—early warning, missile defense, surveillance and intelligence—and through the use of asymmetric methods, including those operating outside the bounds of international law (targeted assassinations, the siege of occupied territories, movement restrictions, and even the use of Palestinian criminal gangs against Palestinian resistance, etc.);
2. Politically and ideologically, Israel does not frame its struggle as a colonial conflict, but rather as a confrontation between a central power and its Arab periphery—one that must be weakened and kept under control. For an increasingly significant portion of Israeli leaders and citizens, this is also seen as a religious war;
3. At the international level, Israel has acquired a form of default legitimacy—either due to the weakness of the international system's responses, or through its deterrent status as a strategic subsystem of the United States (and, to some extent, of Europe) ¹⁴.

The repressive social control of the Arab peripheries is broadly defined: it includes both Arab citizens of Israel (who make up 20% of the population) and Palestinians in the occupied territories, as well as border zones—partially occupied or controlled—in Lebanon and Syria. The "surprise" Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, was interpreted by some observers as potentially manipulated by

¹³ The notable exception is the U.S. hundred years (1780-1890) "Indian wars" which ultimately subdued the Indigenous American nations and confined them to reservations.

¹⁴ The European position today is clearly established: even in the case of undeniable genocide in Gaza, the European Union refuses to impose sanctions against Israel, including restrictions on arms sales. The United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy have continued to deliver weapons, and some states, including France, have criminalized the act of criticizing the State of Israel, labeling anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism. That some "anti-Zionists" use the Palestinian cause to legitimize their anti-Semitism is a fact, but the vast majority of criticism against Israel's colonial and genocidal policies does not fall under this. See, notably, François Meunier, "Banning anti-Zionism will not stop anti-Semites, *La Croix*, 7 avril 2025, <https://www.la-croix.com/a-vif/interdire-l-antisionisme-narretera-pas-les-antisemites-20250407> ; Dror Even-Sapir, « Réflexions sur la longévité de Benjamin Netanyahu », *DDV*, 2025,2/ N° 695, (accessible via CAIRN)

Israeli authorities, given Israel's unparalleled surveillance and intelligence capabilities, and the fact that warnings had reportedly been issued by the Egyptians or even by Israeli soldiers stationed along the border¹⁵. However, such speculation adds little to the substance of the debate. Even if the Hamas operation had been intercepted at the border, and even if the number of Israeli casualties and hostages (nearly 1,200 killed, including 380 members of the security forces, and 250 hostages) had been ten times lower, the Israeli—or more precisely, the American-Israeli—response plan would likely have been the same. The shock of October 7 may indeed have succeeded in rallying a large portion of the Israeli public around its leadership. Yet, a majority of that public already supported the use of overwhelming force. This is evidenced by recent opinion data showing that, even after months of genocidal acts in Gaza, 82% of Israelis support the expulsion of all Palestinians from Gaza, and 47% support the killing of all Palestinians present in conflict zones—justified, according to them, by biblical texts.¹⁶

The October 7 attack thus served as a starting point for a broader regional operation aimed at restoring the deterrent credibility of Israel as a U.S. strategic subsystem, and at creating a rupture scenario favorable to American interests

III - Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iran: restoring Israeli conventional deterrence and U.S. access.

The war in Gaza (and in the West Bank) to break Palestinian resistance, the air-ground operation in Lebanon to militarily neutralize Hezbollah, the strikes in Syria aimed at demilitarizing the south of the country and attempting to establish a Kurdish-Druze zone of influence, the strikes on Iran, as well as the regular strikes against the Houthis in Yemen, should all be understood as components of a single American-Israeli strategy—one that is deterrent, preemptive, and disarming. This strategy seeks to weaken adversaries by destroying both technological-military and human capacities, while also signaling the weakness of the Iranian regime and its regional proxies, and the inability of Russia and China to intervene effectively. However, the outcomes of these operations are not as positive—nor as strategically deterrent—as presented by Washington and Tel Aviv.

The destruction of Gaza and of the option of a Palestinian State

Israel fought Hamas in Gaza in 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021, and each time proclaimed victory — yet each time the Islamist movement strengthened its political position within the Palestinian

¹⁵ “Egypt intelligence official says Israel ignored repeated warnings of ‘something big’”, *The Times of Israel*, 9 October 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/egypt-intelligence-official-says-israel-ignored-repeated-warnings-of-something-big/> “Surveillance soldiers warned of Hamas activity on Gaza border for months before Oct. 7”, *The Times of Israel*, 26 October 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/surveillance-soldiers-warned-of-hamas-activity-on-gaza-border-for-months-before-oct-7/>

¹⁶ Shay Hazkani, “Yes to Transfer: 82% of Jewish Israelis Back Expelling Gazans”, *Haaretz*, 28 May 2025, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-05-28/ty-article-magazine/.premium/yes-to-transfer-82-of-jewish-israelis-back-expelling-gazans/00000197-12a4-df22-a9d7-9ef6af930000> 47% think that when the Israeli army conquers an enemy town it should act as the Israelites did at Jericho by killing all its inhabitants. 65% believe in the existence of a modern incarnation of Amalek, the biblical Israelite enemy whom God ordered to eradicate in Deuteronomy 25:19. Among those believers, 93% said that Amalek (today incarnated by the Palestinians) must be destroyed.

territories. Today Israel declares the destruction of Hamas as its war aim, but it is evident that far more than Hamas is being destroyed: Gaza itself¹⁷, its population, and the very possibility of restoring viable governance (whether Hamas or another authority¹⁸). Washington continues to state that it does not want Israel to reoccupy Gaza, but this misses the point: the outcome will not be a formal occupation so much as a permanent and violent system of social control. Mirroring the occupied West Bank (both currently and in ongoing projects), Gaza will be structurally transformed: territories will be segmented by control and surveillance systems; there will be zones of military occupation; some roads and some areas will be inaccessible to Palestinians; Palestinian “authorities” will function as intermediaries for Israeli administrations; and settlements will expand. The genocidal option — particularly through induced famine — aims to interrupt, at least temporarily, the cycle of reproduction of armed resistance. At the outset of the conflict (as is the case in conflicts of this type), recruitment flows were relentless: the more Israel bombed both fighters and civilians, the more relatives of bombardment victims volunteered to fight. With famine, the pool of physically able men available for combat is significantly reduced. Washington signals full support for this macabre tactic through its involvement in plans to reduce humanitarian assistance to very low levels and to channel it through an American organization (the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation), which relies on a private security company whose agents, like Israeli soldiers, allegedly fire on Palestinians seeking aid.¹⁹

While the United States is not, in principle, opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state, in practice it appears willing to sacrifice this option in favor of a geopolitical equation that it likely sees as more aligned with its long-term interests: contributing to the consolidation of a “strong” Israeli state that continues to function as an American strategic sub-system. To this end, it is preferable that Israel continues to frame itself as a besieged bastion, with a population gripped by fear and largely won over to the ultra-security ideology of the far right. Israel now even risks being depopulated of its more liberal citizens, particularly in light of the emigration wave since October 2023²⁰. For Washington, it is essential that such a radicalized and security-dependent state does

¹⁷ Nearly 70% of Gaza’s infrastructure is destroyed (92% of housing is destroyed or damaged, 83% of agricultural land is damaged). The number of direct civilian casualties (as of the end of July 2025) has reached over 60,000 deaths according to Gaza’s health authority (over 100,000 according to experts from the University of London), see Anne Bernas, « Bande de Gaza: le nombre de morts dépasserait largement les chiffres officiels », *RFI*, 8 Juillet 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/moyen-orient/20250708-bande-de-gaza-le-nombre-de-morts-d%C3%A9passerait-largement-les-chiffres-officiels> ; « Estimated infrastructure damage in Gaza as of June 2025 », *Statista*, July 21, 2025, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1616491/gaza-war-infrastructure-damage-destruction/>

¹⁸ Hamas is the dominant Palestinian resistance movement “of the moment”, i.e. prevailing by default due to circumstances — the weakening of other movements and ideologies, divisions within the resistance, the weak governance of Fatah, and foreign funding (including some facilitated by Israel, see notably: “Qatar sent millions to Gaza for years – with Israel’s backing”, *CNN*, 12 December 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/12/11/middleeast/qatar-hamas-funds-israel-backing-intl/>.) But even if the dominant movement had been a faction of the PLO—leftist, secular, or otherwise—it would not have changed the situation, i.e., the decision by Israel and the United States to carry out genocide. The call for Hamas to disarm makes little sense today, as it has been militarily crushed. Such calls are part of stalling tactics, just like the threat to recognize a Palestinian state or the air-dropping of humanitarian aid: they allow Israel and Washington to buy time and play the card of letting the situation fester so that ultimately their plan is accepted—that is, to create not a Palestinian state but reserve territories under Israeli control (likely with the possibility of Israeli-American oversight during a transitional phase).

¹⁹ “Video of US contractors cheering after firing at Gaza civilians ignites fury online”, *Middle East Eye*, 3 July 2025, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/trending/fury-online-ap-reveals-us-contractors-fired-gaza-civilians-aid-sites> ; « Un ex-employé de la GHF dénonce des “crimes de guerre” », *20 Minutes*, 30 juillet, 2025, <https://www.20minutes.fr/monde/4165996-20250730-enfant-dit-merci-apres-tue-ex-employe-ghf-denonce-crimes-guerre-gaza>

²⁰ The reasons for this exodus are multiple: the economic crisis, insecurity, and the desire to live in a more peaceful socio-political (and psychological) climate. See, in particular, Ayesha Malik, “40% of Israelis are Considering leaving: Many of whom are Secularists”, *s2jnews*, 2 April 2025, <https://s2jnews.com/40-of-israelis-are-considering-leaving-many-of-whom-are-secularists/> ; “Jaw-dropping amount of

not question its exclusive strategic relationship with the United States, nor seek closer alignment with Moscow or Beijing

Indeed, Washington's concern over the possibility that Israel may, over time, draw closer to Russia and China is not unfounded. Israel is, in part, “Russified,” given that it is home to the third-largest Russian diaspora community in the world — around 1.5 million people, or approximately 15% of Israel’s population — as a result of three waves of immigration: in the 1970s (with the Soviet Union aiming to implant a Russian-speaking community to increase its influence in Israel), in the 1990s following the collapse of the USSR, and more recently after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war.²¹ Russia often presents itself as a Middle Eastern actor, citing the long-standing presence of Russian communities in the region, and the Israeli case serves to reinforce this image. However, this has not prevented Russia from supplying Iran with sophisticated offensive and defensive weaponry — including the S-300 missile defense system, the SU-35 fighter jet, and Mi-28 attack helicopters — nor from importing Iranian arms (particularly drones), or concluding a 20-year strategic partnership with Tehran (ratified in early 2025). Similarly, Moscow has openly condemned the genocide in Gaza and Israel’s destabilizing actions in Lebanon and Syria.

Russia is betting that, eventually, Israel will drift away from its role as a U.S. “satellite.” Since May 1948, when diplomatic relations were established, Russia has sought this rapprochement — encapsulated in the phrase: “*Israel’s national security runs through Moscow.*” This expression reflects Moscow’s belief that, given its strong ties with Israel’s adversaries, it can serve as a mediator or de-escalatory force. Israel, for its part, does not appear willing to sever its ties with Moscow. It has notably refused to vote in favor of sanctions against Russia in the context of the Ukraine conflicts (in both 2014 and 2022–present), and has declined to provide military assistance or advisors to Kyiv

China’s involvement in Israel is primarily techno-economic, to the extent that Chinese investments are catching up with those of the United States — rising from \$20 million annually in 2002 to \$200 million in 2020 — making China Israel’s second-largest trading partner.²² Numerous Chinese companies operating in Israel focus on communications, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and port infrastructure. Since 2014, Israel has been a member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the investment bank for China’s Belt and Road Initiative (which aims to develop rail-road-port transcontinental corridors). Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, ties between the two countries have gradually deepened, with China seeking to benefit from a major international investment center in high-tech sectors, and Israel aiming to become a techno-financial hub connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe. However, like Russia, China maintains a strategic partnership with Iran (a 25-year strategic partnership agreement signed in 2021), and condemns the war in Gaza as well as the destabilization in Lebanon and Syria.

Israelis thinking of leaving in wake of war”, *Israel Hayom*, 20 July 2025, <https://www.israelhayom.com/2025/07/20/jaw-dropping-amount-of-israelis-thinking-of-leaving-in-wake-of-war/>

²¹ The Russian community in Israel is socially influential in several ways: stemming from the Russian scientific elite, this community has greatly contributed to making Israel a “start-up nation.” It has also served as a kind of buffer between opposing Israeli social classes — the Ashkenazi upper classes versus the rest of the population, liberals versus the ultra-Orthodox (the latter often refusing to recognize many children of these Russian immigrants as Jewish).

²² “China-Israel Bilateral Trade and Investment Outlook”, *China Briefing*, 11 October 2023, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-israel-investments-trade-outlook-belt-and-road-initiative>

Lebanon and Syria conflicts in the perspective of the U.S. “Greater Levant” strategy.

The United States considers the "Greater Levant"²³ region a pivotal area to control, situated between Asia-the Gulf, and Eastern Mediterranean- Europe, and Africa. Their influence in Israel and Jordan (two "non-NATO allies") is uncontested, though somewhat less so in Egypt (which received \$1.3 billion in military aid for 2025; the Trump administration threatened to cut this aid if Cairo continued to refuse the option of deporting Gazans onto its territory). The relationship with Turkey (a NATO member) is good but complex, sometimes antagonistic regarding the Middle East, particularly over the Kurdish issue. The U.S. holds significant security and financial sway over Iraq; and it maintains good relations with the Lebanese government (Lebanon has received \$3 billion in military aid since 2006, and \$3.5 billion in humanitarian aid between 2019 and 2025)²⁴. They have had a military presence in Syria since 2012 and, following the fall of Bashar al-Assad, have moved closer to the new government — lifting all sanctions at the end of May 2025. The Levant is a strategic crossroads and a hydrocarbon development zone, with onshore resources whose exploitation still requires renovation, notably in Syria²⁵, as well as new offshore resources. Gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean are estimated to reach nearly 3,600 billion cubic meters, with mega-fields off the coasts of Egypt, Cyprus, and Israel; two blocks, including Block 9, are disputed between Israel and Lebanon; one Syrian block remains unexplored; and there is a field off Gaza.²⁶

For Washington, the objectives are: to influence the new energy landscape in the region (exploration, production, transit routes — particularly to reduce Europe’s dependence on Russia); to reinforce the security of NATO’s southern flank; and to de-escalate conflicts over maritime border delimitation between allies (Türkiye/Greece-Cyprus, Israel/Lebanon). Another goal is to promote Israel’s energy — and ultimately economic — integration into the region (energy corridors, co-development pathways, regional hub initiatives, etc.). Here again, one may question why this vision of regional integration for Israel begins with a campaign of destruction. For decades, U.S. administrations have justified destruction — both through their own wars and through those they support — as necessary to create new sociopolitical conditions favorable to their interests. This could be seen as a form of “creative destruction,” as expressed by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who in 2006 justified not halting the Israel-Lebanon war by stating: *"I have no interest in diplomacy for the sake of returning Lebanon and Israel to the status quo ante. [...]. What we’re seeing here, in a sense, is the growing — the birth pangs of a new Middle East and whatever we do we have to be certain that we’re pushing forward to the new Middle East not going back to the old one."*²⁷

²³ For the successive U.S. administrations « Greater Levant » includes Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Türkiye.

²⁴ *Lebanon*, Congressional Research Service, 16 January 2025.

²⁵ John V. Bowlus, *Eastern Mediterranean gas: Testing the field*, European Council on Foreign Relations, may 2020, https://ecfr.eu/special/eastern_med/gas_fields

²⁶ John V. Bowlus, *Eastern Mediterranean gas: Testing the field*, European Council on Foreign Relations, may 2020, https://ecfr.eu/special/eastern_med/gas_fields

²⁷ in, Fred Kaplan, “There Are Worse Things Than the Status Quo”, *Slate*, July 24, 2006, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2006/07/condi-s-witless-optimism-about-the-middle-east.html>

Israeli and American interests diverge slightly in Lebanon and Syria. Israel seeks to prevent Iran and Hezbollah from reestablishing presence; to stop arms transfers from Iran via Iraq-Syria to Lebanon; to demilitarize the Lebanese-Israeli border zone (up to the Litani River); and to consolidate its security control over the occupied Golan and the buffer zone (previously under UN forces), even aiming for a fully demilitarized zone in all of southern Syria — in short, to optimize control over its “Arab peripheries,” expand settlement, and control critical water sources (such as Mount Hermon). For the United States, militarily present in Syria since 2012 (with several bases in the Kurdish northeast zone, and a base in the central-east at al-Tanf), the goals are to push out Iranian influence but also to thwart Russian plans for establishing a foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean — which ensures them continuous access from the Black Sea through to the Mediterranean and serves as a springboard toward Africa

The Israeli air-ground operation of October 2024 against Hezbollah in Lebanon was directly supported by the United States in terms of arms supplies, naval force deployments, and anti-air and missile-defense capabilities in the area. While Hezbollah’s leadership suffered decapitation, it is neither fully disarmed nor politically neutralized in Lebanon. Washington has tried for decades to weaken Hezbollah through economic sanctions, placing it on its list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations since 1997, while at the same time recognizing its status as a “major political actor.”²⁸ Today Washington is pressuring the government of Joseph Aoun to disarm Hezbollah, but the risk of civil war that could result from forcible disarmament makes that option unrealistic. Naim Qassem, the deputy secretary-general of Hezbollah, stated in early July 2025 that only the implementation of the Taif Agreement remains a viable option.²⁹ The Taif accords, signed in 1989, called for disarmament of all Lebanese factions except Hezbollah, which was the only faction not to have participated in the civil war, and whose stated mission has been to defend Lebanon against Israeli air-ground operations (1982, 2000, 2006). From 2000-2006, Hezbollah was considered by some Lebanese to be part of Lebanon’s territorial defense. Its involvement in Syria (starting in 2012) has also been seen by some as a bulwark against jihadist infiltration into Lebanon. But its subordination to Tehran has generated hesitation, even opposition, among many Lebanese, including among Shi’a (those who reject Khomeinism).

Now, the future of the Hezbollah movement is uncertain — not in the sense that it is threatened with extinction, but in that its new directions are still imprecise: refocusing on its Lebanese project at the expense of pro-Iranian regional commitments; reshaping political alliances; partial disarmament and tactical withdrawal? Let us recall that Hezbollah’s original project was not to become an Iranian “proxy.” The project was certainly to secure a consolidated social standing for the Shi’a, but also to re-found the Lebanese sociopolitical orientation in creating a new Lebanese

²⁸ *Lebanon*, Congressional Research Service, 16 January 2025. It should be noted that US sanctions have never been able to target all of Hezbollah’s extensive economic and logistical activities (both informal and formal). In the aftermath of the October 2024 conflict, US agents helped the Lebanese state regain control of Beirut airport and port (it is likely that Hezbollah agreed to relinquish this control to prevent Israel from bombing these facilities). See notably, « Le port et l’aéroport de Beyrouth enfin “distanciés” du Hezbollah ? », *L’Orient le Jour*, 14 octobre 2024. https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1430953/le-port-et-laeroport-de-beyrouth-enfin-distancies-du-hezbollah-.html?_gl=1*c4y8yq*_gcl_au*Njk3NzgxNTYOLjE3NTMwODYyMDc.

²⁹ « Le Liban n’existera pas sans nous ». Cheikh Qassem fait le point sur tous les dossiers épineux, libanais, syrien, iranien », *Al-ManarTV*, 8 juillet 2025, <https://french.almanartv.com.lb/3335598>

subjectivity that would permanently dispel the specter of civil war — and thus resistance to Israel became an anchoring point.³⁰

The situation in Syria can be described as chaos in the making, with some signs that regional and global powers may agree on a minimalist peace solution — lifting sanctions, resuming trade and investments, delivering humanitarian aid, rejecting partition and preserving Syria's territorial sovereignty within its current borders. The prospect of short-term security chaos is emerging for several reasons: the faction that has de facto taken power, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), does not control the entirety of the territory; the conflict between the Turkish army with its Syrian proxies (Syrian National Army, SNA) and the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces), which are predominantly Kurdish, continues³¹; clashes between HTS and various other combatant groups (Assad loyalists, Alawites, Islamist/jihadist factions including dissident HTS subgroups, and mafioso clans) persist in areas under HTS control; even the provincial police appointed by HTS are targeted by local clans, previously armed by Bashar al-Assad (even if they weren't regime loyalists), and who are currently un-disarmed.³²

The fall of Assad's regime in early December 2024 has de facto created a strategic gain for Israel, strengthened Türkiye's position in the region, and pushed back the interests of Russia and Iran. However, while it is undeniable that Israel and Türkiye have gained in strategic depth, the Russians and Iranians have not been totally eclipsed.

- Israel, having launched a massive aerial campaign to destroy Syrian arsenals in December 2024 and continuing to conduct targeted strikes, aims to secure a prolonged period during which its occupation of the Golan Heights and the buffer zone, along with a large demilitarized area in southern Syria (the provinces of Quneitra, Daraa, and Sweida)³³, will not be challenged. The Israelis once again appear to believe they can succeed where former colonial powers failed. They are attempting to reproduce, in a more indirect form, the project France pursued during its mandate over the Levant, namely, the creation of an independent Druze state in Sweida (then totally Druze, today around 90% of the population are Druze) between 1922 and 1936 — a partition of Syrian territory designed at the time to undermine Syrian national claims. When Bashar al-Assad's regime was nearing collapse in late 2024, the Israelis — through Emirati and Jordanian mediation — proposed a plan: Assad would receive substantial funding and

³⁰ Hezbollah's weapons resources were considerable, amassed since 2006, recovered from the Syrian army in disarray after 2011, and constantly supplied by Iranian flows via Syria—hundreds of thousands of drones, rockets, and missiles are said to be stored in tunnel fortresses in the south and east of the country. Hezbollah had an army of around 100,000 men. Today, it is difficult to assess what remains of its military capabilities and to evaluate the effects of the loss of almost the entire political and military leadership of Hezbollah.

³¹ In February 2025, Ankara signed an agreement with Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, who is imprisoned in Türkiye, under the terms of which the Kurds would be granted greater political and cultural participation in exchange for renouncing separatism and disarming the PKK and its Syrian allies the YPG (Kurdish elements of the SDF). Disarmament was supposed to begin on July 11, 2025, but the YPG has shown no willingness to disarm, so Türkiye will continue its air and ground campaign in Syria and also in Iraq.

³² The rebel offensive in Syria was prepared for months by HTS in the northwest, armed and supervised by Türkiye. HTS then coordinated with rebel groups in the south and center in November-December 2024. It should be noted that these rebels were either allied with the United States, around the al-Tanf base, or were groups who were Bashar al-Assad's allies of convenience. Without truly pledging allegiance to the regime, they used their weapons and positions to secure their formal and informal activities (smuggling, human trafficking, drug trafficking, particularly in the province of Sweida, which is a hub). The weakness of the central state authority in these areas has favored the rise of tribal militias.

³³ Netanyahu declared in February 2025 "We demand the complete demilitarization of southern Syria in the provinces of Quneitra, Daraa and Sweida from the forces of the new regime. Likewise, we will not tolerate any threat to the Druze community in southern Syria.", quoted in Sebastian Usher, "Israel demands complete demilitarization of Southern Syria", *BBC*, 25 February 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgenz02lp8o>

assurances of retaining control over Damascus and Homs, while a rapprochement between Syrian Kurds and Druze could lead to the expulsion of Iranian forces.³⁴ This proposed Israel-Kurd-Druze alliance likely influenced Ankara's decision to push HTS (Hayat Tahrir al-Sham) to launch its offensive from Idlib in December 2024. In October 2024, President Erdoğan had publicly denounced Israel's "expansionist ambitions," which he claimed could even extend into parts of Anatolia.³⁵ The Druze-Kurdish project does not appear to have been abandoned, given the following developments: Israel went so far as to bomb Syria's Ministry of Defense in Damascus (on July 15, 2025) to dissuade the new regime from retaking Sweida province; Israeli intelligence is reportedly supporting a coalition of Druze militias, the Sweida Military Council, which favors Druze autonomy (allegedly advised by the SDF); the SDF sent humanitarian aid to the Druze and called on Kurdish populations to demonstrate in solidarity with the Druze during clashes with Sunni clans.³⁶ The position of Washington on this matter remains ambiguous: on one hand, the Trump administration backs the Al-Sharaa government; on the other, a Druze autonomous zone (under Israeli-American influence) would align with U.S. strategy on the ground — establishing a buffer along the Syria-Iraq border against Iranian proxies, via Kurdish forces in the northeast, Arab tribal groups near the al-Tanf base in the center-east, and the Druze in the southeast. This would also serve to pacify and control a transit corridor from Jordan to Syria and Israel — and potentially from Iraq Jordan and Syria to Israel — with possible commercial and energy routes in view. Washington's special envoy to Syria, Thomas Barrack, has expressed support for the idea of establishing a federal system in Syria.³⁷

- Ankara's primary objective in Syria is the disarmament of the PKK/YPG and the dismantling of the Kurdish autonomy project. The Turkish military continues its offensive against Kurdish forces, supported by its local proxies (the Syrian National Army, SNA) in northern Syria and in coordination with troops from the new Syrian government in Deir Ezzor. More broadly, Türkiye seeks to reassert its central position across the MENAT region (Middle East, North Africa, Türkiye) and to capitalize on the current wave of regional normalization — including the Iran-Saudi rapprochement, the resolution of the intra-Gulf conflict, the thaw in Ankara's relations with Arab countries, and the effective freezing of the Arab Spring dynamic — to promote regional co-development. Ankara is firmly opposed to Israel's plan to fragment Syria, particularly the creation of a Druze zone allied with the Syrian Kurdistan. As a result, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has issued warnings of a potential Turkish military intervention in Syria to counter what he describes as "Israel's dangerous plans."³⁸

³⁴ David Hearst, "Revealed: How Israel's plan to carve up Syria was thwarted by Assad's downfall", *Middle East Eye*, 20 December 2024, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/revealed-how-assads-downfall-thwarted-israels-plan-carve-syria>

³⁵ Erdogan said: « Israel's expansionist agenda, driven by religious fanaticism, does not stop at Gaza. Their next target may well be our homeland.» in, "Israeli gov't committee warns of potential war with Turkey after Assad's fall", *Turkish Minute*, 8 January 2025, <https://turkishminute.com/2025/01/08/israeli-govt-committee-warns-of-potential-war-with-turkey-after-assads-fall3/>

³⁶ "Suweida Military Council - what does it want and who is behind it?", *the New Arab*, 22 February 2025 <https://www.newarab.com/news/what-suweida-military-council-and-why-did-it-appear-now> ; "Syria's Druze seek access to Rojava as Kurds send humanitarian aid", *Rudaw*, 17 July 2025 <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/170720252>

³⁷ "Attacks on Syria's minorities fuel US-Turkish fears of fragmentation, collision with Israel", *The Arab Weekly*, 23 July 2025, <https://theArabweekly.com/attacks-syrias-minorities-fuel-us-turkish-fears-fragmentation-collision-israel>

³⁸ "He said Türkiye is working with various parties in Syria to stabilize the country and counter what he called "Israel's dangerous plans," warning that any attempt by groups to sow division and destabilization through violence would be seen as a direct threat to Turkish national security. "We will intervene," Fidan added, stressing that Türkiye would not tolerate any attempt to fragment Syria's territorial integrity. ", in, "Türkiye's Fidan: Israel aims to destabilize Syria", *Shafaq News*, 22 July 2025, <https://www.shafaq.com/en/Middle-East/Turkiye-s-Fidan-Israel-aims-to-destabilize-Syria>

- Iran, like Russia, abandoned Bashar al-Assad in December 2024. The post-crisis assessments from both sides were revealing: the Iranians accused the Russians of failing to target rebel forces, instead dropping bombs in semi-desertic areas; the Russians, in turn, blamed the Iranians (and Hezbollah) for having vacated key checkpoints on the ground. The situation in Syria had become untenable: Assad refused to negotiate with the opposition despite controlling barely 35% of Syrian territory, while Israeli and American forces maintained constant pressure through repeated airstrikes on Iranian positions and harsh economic sanctions. Nonetheless, Syria — as a strategic gateway to the Eastern Mediterranean — remains a critical interest for Tehran. Iran has maintained networks on the ground, including among some Syrian rebel groups that participated in Assad’s downfall. Today, it is in Iran’s interest to conduct a tactical withdrawal from the Syria–Lebanon arena, while also restructuring its hybrid strategy — relying less on “proxy”³⁹ militias and increasingly seeking to engage with Ankara and the Gulf states.
- Russia still retains key assets in Syria: its military bases — *Tartus*, a strategic naval base capable of hosting nuclear submarines and serving as a maintenance hub for the Russian fleet transiting between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean; and *Khmeimim*, an airbase that functions as a regional power projection platform. By dropping its support for Assad, Moscow has gained favor with Syria’s new leadership. Russia also positions itself as a potential mediator in conflicts involving Alawite and Christian minorities, and maintains good relations with the Kurds. Moscow remains a relevant player and interlocutor for both Türkiye and Arab states when it comes to the Syrian file.

The « 12 Day War »: between a Window of Opportunity and a Tactical Retreat

Between October 2023 and June 2025, Iran suffered a series of attacks that seriously undermined the strength of its counterintelligence and air defense systems. In 2023-2024, Iranian generals were targeted in Syria and Lebanon; the political leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, was assassinated in Tehran (inside the very headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards); the “Pagers Operation”⁴⁰ decimated part of Hezbollah’s mid-level command; and Hassan Nasrallah along with senior Hezbollah leaders were eliminated in Beirut in September 2024. However, the missile wars in April and October 2024⁴¹, and especially the “12-day war”⁴² in June 2025, provided Iran with an

³⁹ The term “proxy” is ambiguous; it can give the impression that we are dealing with actors who are completely subservient to Iranian interests, but this is not the case. In fact, Tehran prefers to deal with actors who are institutionalized in their respective states and local administrations, which guarantees their longevity. Thus, these “proxies” may sometimes show disagreement, not rush to defend Iran and its regional interests, and have a parallel and autonomous agenda. Furthermore, the network of “proxies” was set up not to spread the Islamic revolution (nor really to defend Shiism) but to: 1) establish a presence in the Levant-Eastern Mediterranean-Red Sea region and exert a balance of power mainly against the United States, but also against Russia and Türkiye; 2) circumvent sanctions, via relays in the formal economy with the creation of front companies, and informally via trafficking (oil, arms, gold, and others).

⁴⁰ On September 17 and 18, 2024, thousands of pagers and hundreds of walkie-talkies owned by Hezbollah members exploded almost simultaneously in Lebanon and Syria, killing and injuring nearly 5,000 people (including civilians). Five months earlier, Hezbollah had purchased the equipment from a front company actually controlled by the Mossad, which manufactured and integrated the explosives into the devices.

⁴¹ On April 1, 2024, Israel bombed the Iranian consulate in Damascus, killing several senior Iranian officials. In response, Iran launched drone and missile strikes on Israel on April 13 (the Houthis also launched missiles), some of which were intercepted by the Americans, Jordanians, and British. Israel retaliated with strikes on military sites in Iran and Syria on April 19. In response to the assassination of Haniyeh in Tehran and Hezbollah military commander Fouad Shukr on July 31, 2024, Iran launched 200 ballistic missiles at Israel on October 1. On October 26, Israel retaliated with strikes in Iran.

opportunity to demonstrate its capability for rapid retaliation, escalation control, and targeted deterrent strikes — against military sites, energy facilities, airports, and residential areas, impacting the morale of the Israeli population.

This series of attacks against Iran, concentrated over a short period of less than 18 months, tends to demonstrate that the United States and Israel sought to exploit a “window of opportunity.” The first aspect of this window of opportunity was the need to act before the Iranians could make a qualitative leap in their counterintelligence system. Indeed, in recent years (during Ebrahim Raisi’s term), the Iranians have restructured their system by increasing intelligence integration between agencies (notably by breaking the isolation of the Revolutionary Guards’ intelligence) and have multiplied their intelligence budget by ten. They were therefore close to acquiring the capabilities to undermine the espionage system that the Americans and Israelis had put in place for decades.⁴³ The assassination of the scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, known as the “father of the Iranian nuclear program,” in 2020 was a decisive factor in the strengthening of Iranian counterintelligence. The counterintelligence effort notably involved “casting a wide net” across all sectors—dissidents, separatists, NGOs, journalists, activists from all backgrounds, mafias, but also security services—any domain that could harbor agents working for foreign powers. Over three years, record numbers of arrests, trials, and executions have taken place—the prevailing idea today is that dissent and mass rebellion both favor and are favored by foreign intelligence activities in Iran. The second aspect of the window of opportunity exploited by the Americans and Israelis was the fact that the Iranians were about to produce and/or acquire sophisticated anti-aircraft and missile defense systems⁴⁴.

For now, the overall assessment of the “12-Day War” remains difficult to establish, as both sides have released contradictory information, particularly regarding the targets hit on each side, the number of missiles and drones used, and the impact of cyber warfare operations. However, based on converging reports in the international press, the following can be said:

- 1) The Israeli-American strikes significantly weakened Iran’s air and missile defense systems; the Iranian high military command was impacted, with 8 generals eliminated; the number of Iranian ballistic missiles was reduced (Israel claims 200 out of 400 launchers were destroyed, and between 2,000 and 2,500 missiles may remain)⁴⁵; a vast majority of the Iranian missiles

⁴² On June 13, 2025, two days before the scheduled date for a U.S.-Iranian meeting in Oman to negotiate on nuclear issues, Israel launched a surprise attack targeting senior military and political officials, nuclear scientists, and Iranian military and nuclear facilities. The Mossad is even said to have established a drone base on Iranian soil. Iran retaliated by launching missiles at military sites, airports, and residential areas in Israel. This time, the United States took direct part in the offensive on June 22, 2025, striking three Iranian nuclear sites (Natanz, Fordow, and Isfahan). On June 24, Israel and Iran accepted a ceasefire proposed by the United States. The human toll announced by the authorities is: 28 dead (civilians) and 3,238 wounded on the Israeli side; 1,062 (including 276 civilians) dead and 4,475 wounded on the Iranian side. See, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/the-israel-iran-war-by-the-numbers-after-12-days-of-fighting/#:~:text=Iran%E2%80%99s%20ballistic%20missile%20attacks%20on%20Israel%20during%20the,them%20civilians%20%E2%80%94%20and%20wounded%20over%203%2C000%20people.>; <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202507221507>

⁴³ “Senior Iranian Officials Discussed Common Strategy To Counter Alleged Plots By ‘Enemies’”, *Radio Free Europe*, 23 June 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-protests-officials-common-strategy-enemies-plots/32472873.html>

⁴⁴ The Iranians refused to purchase the S-400 Triumph anti-missile system because they preferred to develop their own Bavar-373 system at the time, and today it seems likely that they would rather purchase the S-500 Prometheus version, which is capable of stopping all types of missiles, including hypersonic ones. See, in particular, “Iranian Defence Chief Explains Why His Country Doesn’t Need Russian S-400 Missile Systems”, *Military Watch Magazine*, 7 March 2023, <https://militarywatchmagazine.com/article/iran-mod-why-no-need-s400s>

⁴⁵ “Iran struck five Israeli military bases during 12-day war”, *The Telegraph*, 5 July 2025, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2025/07/05/iran-struck-five-israeli-military-bases-12-day-war/?msoclid=21fb469511036ac418d650a410f06b1f>

launched (the commonly cited figure is 87%) were intercepted by Israeli and American missile defense systems, both on land and in the Red Sea.

2) Iran surprised observers with: its targeting capabilities and its ability to saturate the Israeli missile defense system, by launching waves of unsophisticated missiles and drones, using ultra-maneuverable re-entry missiles, hypersonic missiles, decoy warheads, and electronic jamming; its ability to replace eliminated senior commanders — since the Iran-Iraq War, the alternative chain of command has been a key part of military contingency planning; the rapid restoration of its C4 system (Command, Control, Communications, Cyber). Additionally, the deeply buried uranium enrichment facilities at Fordow appear to have been only minimally affected by the U.S. strikes — and the highly enriched uranium (400 kg) is believed to have been evacuated before the attacks. According to American academics analyzing radar satellite imagery, the Iranians struck and partially destroyed five military sites in northern, southern, and central Israel — including an air base, an intelligence collection center, and a logistics base.⁴⁶

Overall, in terms of the military balance of power, the following can be established. Israel, with the support of the United States, currently possesses the capabilities to penetrate Iranian airspace and defense systems, and its “conventional deterrence” has been partially restored — partially, because despite its surprise offensive, it was unable to prevent Iran from retaliating. Iran, for its part, saw a portion of its capabilities destroyed but demonstrated that even with only 10% to 15% of its missiles breaching the Israeli-American defense system, it can inflict significant damage. Therefore, its “conventional deterrence” has also been at least partially validated. Both states reaffirm their respective doctrines: Israel through the superiority of its airpower, and Iran through its combined conventional and hybrid warfare strategy. It is likely that both sides will now pursue rearmament efforts aimed at addressing shortcomings in extended territorial defense (*multi-layered defense*), fortification of critical sites, and intelligence gathering.

Geopolitically, the balance of power is more ambiguous. Israel has demonstrated its strategic importance within the United States’ value chain, but this comes with significant counter-effects: Israel now appears increasingly dependent and weakened by the overwhelming militarization of its socio-political sphere (impacting its social cohesion, democracy, identity, worldview, etc.); the prospect of regional normalization is receding; economic losses are enormous; and the resort to genocide against the Palestinians is perceived as an Israeli decision even though the United States bears overwhelming responsibility. Iran, which since the 1980s has developed its power capabilities independently (as a strategic choice and as a consequence of sanctions), has shown resilience, but also serious vulnerabilities in its defense system. Addressing these weaknesses will likely lead to further militarization and authoritarianism within the regime, particularly through an extreme centralization of political and strategic decision-making around a small circle close to the Supreme Leader.

In conclusion

⁴⁶ *idem*

One may wonder whether this series of American-Israeli military operations, including the genocide in Gaza, will lead to a New Middle East, as successive U.S. administrations for decades—and Benjamin Netanyahu just before October 7, 2023⁴⁷—have announced. The concept of a "New Middle East" for U.S. administrations corresponds to two approaches: 1) Military interventions (1990–2011) intended to break the status quo through “creative destruction”; 2) The rapprochement between Israel and Arab countries through peace agreements in exchange for security, financial, and political support—Jordan and Egypt in the late 1970s, Morocco, Bahrain, and the UAE since 2020. The October 2023-2025 rupture was supposed to produce a new situation favorable to the emergence of a Middle East aligned with American interests: the strengthening of Israel, Türkiye and major Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar) at the expense of Iran; the possible containment of rapprochements or even strategic partnerships of some regional actors with China and Russia. However, it is important to highlight the contradictions:

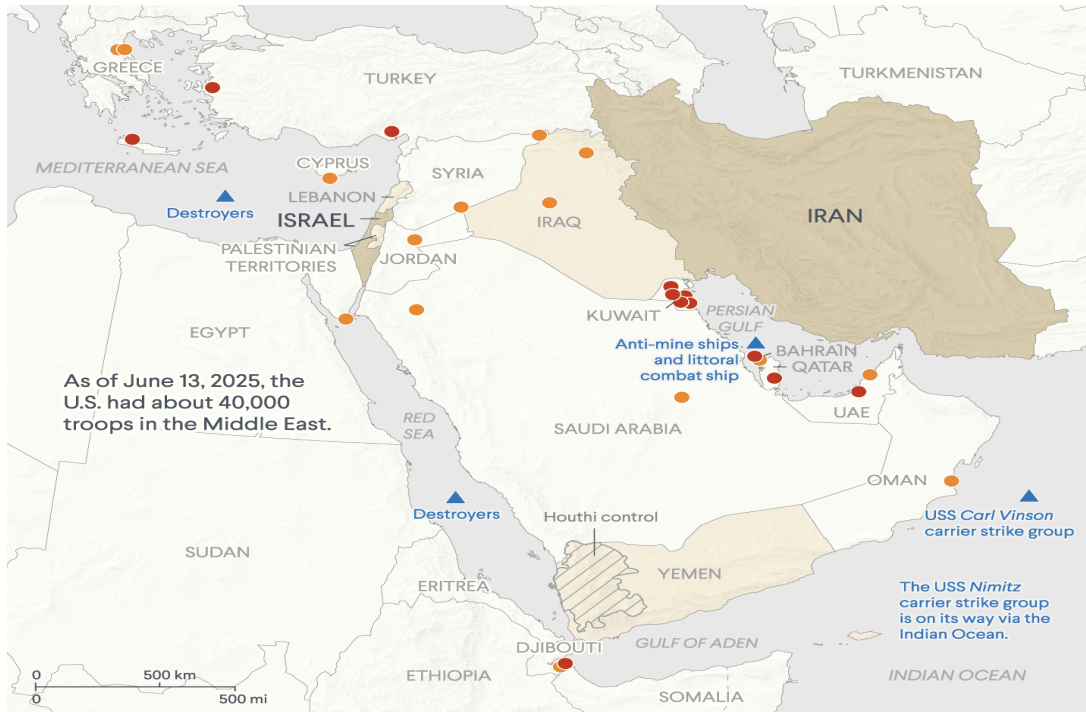
1. Nearly two years of genocide in Gaza have seriously undermined the Abraham Accords, and although some Gulf leaders believe there is an interest in pursuing this direction—particularly in terms of comprehensive strategic partnership with Washington (transfer of high technologies, civil nuclear)—public opinion and the young elites in Arab countries have now firmly aligned themselves with the Palestinian cause;
2. Regarding Gaza and the crises in Syria and Lebanon, Türkiye, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia oppose the Israeli-American options;
3. After the "12-day war" and the series of targeted strikes in 2024-2025, the Iranian strategic system has not been neutralized; it has even demonstrated its effectiveness. Iran is no longer influential in Lebanon and Syria but remains so in Iraq and Yemen. The Iranian regime has not been threatened, neither by disorganization of the state apparatus nor by popular revolt;
4. A priori, the strategic partnerships already established between regional states and China and Russia have not been challenged.

In sum, it can be established that inevitably a new Middle East is emerging, and that the United States and Israel seek to influence the conditions of this emergence by fostering division and violent conflicts. However, it will be difficult for them to constrain all the regional powers that have an interest in the integration of their region, connected by major energy, logistics, and economic co-development projects. This integration implies political normalization within the region and connections with the entire Eurasian space and, ultimately, Africa. There is no reason for Israel to be excluded from such integration; it simply needs to regain its geopolitical autonomy and normalize its strategic approach, notably by renouncing colonization and genocide.

⁴⁷ “Full text of Netanyahu’s UN address: ‘On the cusp of historic Saudi-Israel peace’”, *The Times of Israel*, 22 September 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-netanyahus-un-address-on-the-cusp-of-historic-saudi-israel-peace/> Excerpts : “I’ve long sought to make peace with the Palestinians. But I also believe that we must not give the Palestinians a veto over new peace treaties with Arab states. [...] Peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia will truly create a new Middle East. [...] Now look at what happens when we make peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia. The whole Middle East changes. [...] Now you know, Ladies and Gentlemen, you know there’s a fly in this ointment, because rest assured, the fanatics ruling Iran will do everything they can to thwart this historic peace. [...] Sanctions must be snapped back and above all, Iran must face a credible military threat.”

US bases and deployments in the Middle East (June 2025)

- U.S.-controlled base in operation for at least 15 years
- Other site with U.S. military presence
- ▲ U.S. naval deployment as of June 16, 2025 (approximate location)
- Countries or territories where major Iran-backed militias are active



Note: Bases and sites are as of July 2024. Locations of bases and sites are based on unclassified sources and do not include all bases and sites in the region.

Sources: Congressional Research Service; U.S. Naval Institute; Liveuamap; Associated Press; Council on Foreign Relations

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