



The Evgeny Primakov  
Center for International  
Cooperation

# Russia and West Asia

## Through the Lens of International Experts

special report







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Moscow, 2026

# **The Evgeny Primakov Center for International Cooperation**

## **Special Report**

### **Russia and West Asia Through the Lens of International Experts**

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This special report compiles the insights of international experts on Russia's relations with West Asian countries and the key trends reshaping the regional and international order. The authors examine strategic shifts in Russia's relations with regional countries, with particular focus on political Islam, the influence of external powers, and the prospects for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Special focus is given to the interplay between global and local factors that are shaping the region's new diplomatic landscape. The report is intended for specialists in international relations, history, scholars of Asian and African studies, and political scientists.

**The opinions expressed in the material reflect solely the personal views and research positions of the authors and may not coincide with the stance of the Evgeny Primakov Center for International Cooperation.**

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# Contents

<b>Preface (Ruslan Mamedov)</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>SECTION I. Russia and West Asia: Between Ideologies and Pragmatism</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Reflections on the Future of Political Islam (Vasily Kuznetsov) .....	10
Russia and Iran in an Era of Global Turbulence (Ivan Pappinen) .....	14
Russia and the Gulf Monarchies: Toward a New Quality of Strategic Dialogue (Artem Adrianov) .....	23
<b>SECTION II. West Asia and World Order</b> .....	<b>31</b>
Iran war and the Transformation of Regional Dynamics and International Order (Armina Arm) .....	32
Constants and Variables of U.S. Policy in the Middle East (Andrey Evseenko) .....	38
China and the Middle East: External Intervention and the Fragility of Regional Order (Kadir Temiz) .....	45
The Rational of Jordan's Foreign Policy and its Determinants (Hasan Al-Momani) .....	51
<b>SECTION III. The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict</b> .....	<b>57</b>
Palestine and Israel: The 'Alternative Day After' and the Rethinking of Peace Process Strategies (Vladimir Morozov) .....	58
The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: Dim Scenarios of Peace Prospects (Rami Rayess) .....	65
<b>Authors and contributors</b> .....	<b>72</b>

# Preface

The geopolitical landscape of West Asia is shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including historical rivalries, ethno-confessional divisions, competition over resources, external intervention, and the search for new models of regional governance and cooperation. For Russia, the region holds particular importance, as a sphere of longstanding historical and cultural interaction, a crossroads of economic interests, and an area that directly influences the security of the country's southern borders.

**“Russia and West Asia Through the Lens of International Experts”** seeks to provide an analysis of the region's some key developments and emerging trends. It brings together contributions from experts representing different countries and intellectual traditions, offering perspectives that range from scholarly analysis to applied political forecasting. The editors and compilers conceived this work with the aim of presenting a broad diversity of viewpoints.

The report was timed to the 6th International Expert Forum “Russia and the Middle East”, organized by the Evgeny Primakov Center for International Cooperation and the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Since its inception in 2019, the Forum has established itself as a major international platform, bringing together Russian and foreign scholars and representatives of leading think tanks.

Preparing analytical papers for the Forum becomes a good tradition. In 2024, the Yevgeny Primakov Center published the report **“The Mission of Russia's Cultural and Scientific Diplomacy in the Middle East”** by Vitaly Naumkin, Mikhail Piotrovsky, and Vasily Kuznetsov. The authors noted that “the development of Russia's relations with the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, along with the emergence of new areas of cooperation, will require a broader agenda for scholarly support of these relations.” Building on this idea, the Primakov Center, together with an international team of contributors, prepared the new paper “Russia and West Asia Through the Lens of International Experts”.

The report opens with **Vasily Kuznetsov's** article **Reflections on the Future of Political Islam**. The author examines the current state of political Islam, the degree of pragmatism shown by movements associated with it, and their long-term goals. V.A. Kuznetsov also explores the ideological foundations and

evolution of Islamic political movements, as well as their impact on domestic stability in the region and on international relations.

**Ivan Pappinen** then assesses Russian-Iranian relations against the backdrop of the deep deterioration in both countries' ties with the West. In his article **Russia and Iran in an Era of Global Turbulence**, the author analyzes bilateral relations following the signing of the comprehensive strategic partnership agreement and calls for overcoming the insufficient level of humanitarian and economic cooperation. In **Russia and the Gulf Monarchies: Toward a New Quality of Strategic Dialogue**, Artyom Adrianov examines the prospects for deeper cooperation between Russia and the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The Russian expert also evaluates Russia's concept of collective security in the Gulf region. A.K. Adrianov argues that the parties need to minimize the risks stemming from regional instability and external pressure in order to elevate the strategic dialogue between Russia and the GCC countries, which is currently at a turning point, to a new level.

The second section focuses on the transformation of the global order and the role of external powers in the region. In her article **Iran war and the Transformation of Regional Dynamics and International Order**, Armina Arm analyzes how U.S.-Israeli aggression against Iran is reshaping the regional balance of power and the global order. In her view, "the trajectory of the current crisis indicates that the global order is gradually yet steadily moving toward a more complex, multi-layered, and dynamically balanced configuration.". In his study **Constants and Variables in U.S. Policy in the Middle East**, Andrey Evseenko examines Washington's strategic priorities, their continuity, and their transformation in response to new challenges. The author also offers his assessment of scenarios under which the Middle East could lose some of its significance in U.S. policy.

**Kadir Temiz's** article **China and the Middle East: External Intervention and the Fragility of Regional Order** examines China's growing role in the region, its economic and political instruments of influence, and the implications of China's expansion for regional stability. While the article focuses on China's role in West Asia, and offers compelling reflections on the subject, the author also emphasizes the agency of the Western Asia states themselves. In his view, the future regional order will largely depend on whether these states can transform external competition into forms of interaction that promote stability and cooperation.

**Hasan Al-Momani's** study **The Rational of Jordan's Foreign Policy and its Determinants** explores the role of a small state in regional politics,

focusing specifically on Jordan's foreign policy strategy, its core interests, and its mechanisms for adapting to regional crises. The Jordanian author argues that the country's geopolitical position serves both as a constraint and as an asset: despite its limited material capabilities, Jordan has successfully used external partnerships and diplomatic tools to maintain an active role on the regional and international stage.

The third section addresses the challenges of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through the articles **Palestine and Israel: The 'Alternative Day After' and the Rethinking of Peace Process Strategies by Vladimir Morozov** and **The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: Dim Scenarios of Peace Prospects by Rami Rayess**. The authors offer a critical assessment of existing approaches and propose possible scenarios for the future development of the conflict. Both the Russian and Lebanese authors regard the prospects for a sustainable peace settlement as very low. They draw attention to the difficult situation in the West Bank and argue that current dynamics are more likely to reinforce existing asymmetries than advance the peace process. At the same time, the two studies differ in focus and geopolitical perspective. V.M. Morozov concentrates on internal and regional mechanisms, including hybrid models of governance, and examines the conflict within the broader regional configuration involving the Gulf states, Turkey, and Iran. He also explores how regional actors and political systems adapt to conditions of permanent instability. Rami Rayess, by contrast, places greater emphasis on inter-Palestinian relations, the role of external powers such as the United States, Russia, and China, and the possibility of geopolitical shifts.

This report does not seek to provide an exhaustive account of all trends shaping West Asia. Its purpose is to encourage discussion, help readers better understand the complexity and interconnected nature of regional developments, and assess Russia's opportunities to pursue a balanced policy that takes into account both its own interests and the interests of its partners and neighbors. We hope that the materials presented here will prove useful to researchers, diplomats, students, and all those interested in contemporary political processes and international relations.

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# SECTION I

Russia and West Asia:  
Between Ideologies  
and Pragmatism

# Reflections on the Future of Political Islam

**Vasily Kuznetsov**, Doctor of Political Science, Deputy Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Head of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies, and Full Member of the Russian International Affairs Council (Russia)

Nearly a century has passed since various forms of Islamism emerged as the main political alternative in the Middle East when the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928. Over the course of that century, organizations representing this current of religious and political thought have undergone profound transformation. Their ideology has grown increasingly sophisticated, their political tactics more flexible, and their organizational forms more diverse. By the 2010s, the movement encompassed both respectable political parties integrated into the political systems of major regional states and jihadist terrorist groups rejected by the international community. What is striking, however, is that despite their long history, broad popular support across many countries, and considerable political skill, these movements almost nowhere succeeded in taking power. One partial exception was Hamas's control over Gaza, although even there it never achieved full dominance within the Palestinian political system. The Arab Spring appeared to offer Islamist movements a historic opportunity for political resurgence. Yet in Egypt, the experiment ended with the complete defeat of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, while in Tunisia, Ennahda Movement was first gradually marginalized and later crushed. In most countries across the region, moderate Islamist groups integrated into representative institutions were steadily pushed to the margins of political life. At the same time, radical organizations such as Islamic State faced strong resistance from the international community and were defeated relatively quickly, though not before seriously discrediting the very idea of political Islam, especially in the eyes of many Muslims themselves. As a result, by the early 2020s, it seemed that the Islamist rise in the region had passed and that an Islamic political alternative was unlikely to re-emerge in the foreseeable future.

At first glance, the situation today appears unchanged: there is hardly any clear surge in the popularity of Islamist organizations anywhere. Across North Africa, including countries once seen as strongholds of Islamism such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria, they now occupy a more or less marginal position. Even the Islamist background of Turkey's AKP is no longer commonly emphasized. In Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood was banned in 2025. In Palestine and Lebanon, Hamas and Hezbollah have lost significant resources as a result of Israeli military actions.

And yet, the present moment has also produced a set of conditions that may open the way for a renewed Islamist resurgence.

The most important of these factors is the ongoing socio-economic, and, in part, political, crisis across many countries in the region. The pandemic and the subsequent wave of global disruptions, which produced severe economic pressures, have not resulted in the renewal of the social contract widely anticipated throughout the 2010s. Instead, they have led to a form of political stabilization without meaningful systemic change and without any substantial strengthening of public trust in state institutions. This is reflected in electoral patterns in countries such as Algeria and Tunisia, as well as in the ongoing and often cyclical political crises in Libya, Lebanon, and Iraq.

Closely related to this is a second factor: the absence of an appealing ideological offer from the secular establishment and the broader crisis of political parties. Left-wing parties, which have always enjoyed only limited support, have not recovered anywhere in the region from the collapse of the socialist system. Even the political upheavals of the 2010s failed to revive leftist ideas. Centrist, pro-government parties remain largely de facto de-ideologized. The nationalist turn of recent years, which is clearly visible in official political discourse throughout the 2020s, can provide only a limited basis for consolidation. Without a persuasive vision of national development, however, it risks stagnation and turning into an endless reference to a great past without a clear vision of an equally great future. The main exceptions are the Arab monarchies of the Gulf, with their strategic Visions, as well as Egypt.

Thus, Islamist movements emerge as one of the few remaining ideological alternatives to the existing political reality.

The third factor is the demonstration effect of the Taliban's triumphant return to power in Afghanistan, the relative resilience of Iran's confrontation with Israel and the United States, and Israel and its allies' inability to deliver a decisive defeat to Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Ansar Allah. In all these cases,

the mere survival of anti-Western actors will likely be interpreted by their potential supporters as a clear victory, regardless of the actual losses they may have suffered. At the same time, Israel's increasingly assertive policies in recent years will once again be seen as evidence of its fundamentally hostile posture.

Finally, the list of Islamist victories may also include Ahmad al-Sharaa's rise to power in Syria. Despite the pragmatism demonstrated by his government in 2025, the Islamist roots of the new authorities remain firmly in mind not only for external actors, but also for supporters of the new leader himself, many of whom are dissatisfied with what they see as excessive political flexibility.

Of course, none of this suggests an imminent return of Islamism in its form from a decade ago. For any meaningful comeback, Islamist movements would need to do substantial homework and address a series of fundamental questions. What vision of the future can they offer to societies as a whole, rather than only to their own supporters? How can they respond to economic challenges—an area that has consistently been a weak point in Islamist political programs? How can they reconcile religious ideas with nationalism in their ideological frameworks, given that these two elements have only proven effective when combined? And what tactics can they adopt in a context where governments in most countries are now better prepared to manage mass protest movements, while societies themselves are increasingly fatigued by prolonged turbulence?

The regional context has also changed fundamentally. In the past, Islamist movements across the region could count on relatively steady external support, but this is no longer the case. Some states now adopt a firm anti-Muslim Brotherhood position, including the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, while others, such as Qatar, maintain a more flexible approach. The key difference today, however, is that even these more flexible actors are no longer prepared to invest in supporting Islamist movements abroad.

This situation could change under the influence of several factors.

First, the outcome of the ongoing confrontation with Iran and the subsequent evolution of the Islamic Republic's regional policy will play a major role. Will Tehran return to supporting the Axis of Resistance, or will it be forced to focus on domestic political processes? How will it shape its relations with the official authorities in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon? How deep will the rift become in its relations with the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council? And so on, and so forth.

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Second, much will depend on how the situation evolves within the Gulf monarchies. Will the Gulf Cooperation Council move toward greater consolidation, or will divergence between the United Arab Emirates and the Saudi Arabia continue? How significant will the real costs of the current war be for these monarchies, and will they still be able to sustain their support for allied forces in other countries at the necessary level? And how will all this affect developments in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt?

Finally, third, what will be the fate of the current Syrian regime? Will it ultimately manage to consolidate its power, or will the opponents of Ahmad al-Sharaa and his more pragmatic supporters eventually decide to disrupt the status quo in order to establish a more radical political order in the country?

There are no answers to any of these questions yet. However, it is already clear that normalization in the region will depend, on the one hand, on intraregional cooperation in addressing economic challenges, and, on the other, on the ability of governments and civil society to develop an ideological offer that is more attractive than the one put forward by Islamist movements.

# Russia and Iran in an Era of Global Turbulence

**Ivan Pappinen**, Project Manager at the Evgeny Primakov Center for International Cooperation (Russia)

In 2025, Russia and Iran signed a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement<sup>1</sup>. The agreement sets out shared principles of foreign policy for Russia and Iran and outlines a broad range of areas for developing cooperation. It replaces the 2001 Russia–Iran treaty as the political and legal foundation of bilateral relations. Granting the partnership a strategic character implies more than cooperation in areas of mutual interest; it also suggests a degree of resilience in the relationship to external pressures. At the same time, this does not mean abandoning a pragmatic approach to cooperation or prioritizing the partner’s interests over national ones. The analysis below outlines the main features of Russia–Iran relations at the current stage and the mutual interests of both countries. It also identifies what the author considers the most promising areas for bilateral cooperation, taking into account both international and domestic realities.

## **The Current State of Bilateral Political Relations and the Mutual Interests of the Parties**

Despite the complex historical trajectory of Russia-Iran relations, current circumstances appear to create favorable conditions for their further development. At this stage, the constructive potential of bilateral cooperation is especially visible against the backdrop of a deep deterioration in Iran’s relations with the West. As the United States continues to escalate pressure on Iran, seeking, at minimum, a fundamental revision of its foreign policy, Tehran has increasingly oriented itself toward closer ties with Russia and China as leading powers of the non-Western world, with relations that may

1 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran / Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation: official source URL: [https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/international\\_contracts/international\\_contracts/2\\_contract/62722/](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_contracts/international_contracts/2_contract/62722/) (accessed 06.05.2026).

take on an increasingly alliance-like character. Iran shares several core principles advanced by Russia in international affairs, including mutual respect for national interests and security concerns, multilateralism, peaceful dispute settlement, rejection of unipolarity, and support for a multipolar world order. This idea of multipolarity resonates strongly in Iran, which sees itself as a regional power and a natural leader in the Gulf region.

Russia and Iran share a strong concern for their own security, shaped by their geographic position and by historical upheavals in the form of foreign invasions, of which both countries have repeatedly been victims. Their access to the Caspian Sea, as well as their shared neighborhoods in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, creates a solid basis for cooperation in addressing security threats across this broader space. In today's geopolitical reality, Moscow and Tehran increasingly view each other as natural security partners, not only for historical and geographic reasons but also due to the structure of the current international order. While the West has effectively excluded Iran from the sphere of generally accepted international norms and rules, Russia acts as a key partner for Iran on the international stage, consistently supporting its full status as a sovereign international actor.

As a state with global interests, Russia views Iran as one of the leading powers in the Middle East. Moscow and Tehran have successfully cooperated in countering Islamist terrorist groups and in managing the Syrian crisis.

Contrary to the claims of some Western scholars, Russia does not set its partnership with Iran against its cooperation with Arab states or Israel. At the same time, tensions do arise in the bilateral relationship. In Iran, for example, there is a negative reaction to Russia's lack of an a priori recognition of Iranian sovereignty over the three islands in the Persian Gulf disputed between Tehran and Abu Dhabi<sup>2</sup>. Russia's position on this issue is understandable, predictable, and consistent with its core foreign policy principles. Moscow is not unique in this respect as it avoids taking sides in other states' territorial disputes, while seeking to preserve the potential for constructive relations with both parties involved. Russia also aims to maintain friendly relations with Israel, a key U.S. ally in the Middle East that aspires to regional leadership and significantly influences regional dynamics. In addition, Israel remains one of the countries

2 Kepfer L. Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned Russia's ambassador over Moscow's position on the three islands in the Persian Gulf // Kommersant. 12.07.2023. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6097581> (accessed 06.05.2026).



the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, since 2021 Russia has been the sole supplier of major categories of arms and military equipment to Iran<sup>10</sup>. In addition, the two countries cooperate in the field of surveillance systems and intelligence sharing. Notably, at a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in late April 2026, the Russian side included not only the President and the Foreign Minister, but also the head of the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces (GRU)<sup>11</sup>.

### **Trade, Investment, and Societal Ties: Current State, Constraints, and Prospects for Cooperation**

For a long time, Moscow and Tehran have sought to create conditions for a qualitative expansion of trade and economic cooperation, yet the current results in this area remain modest. Bilateral trade does not exceed 5 billion USD per year, with more than 80% consisting of food products and raw materials<sup>12</sup>. In terms of investment cooperation, apart from the construction of the first unit of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant and ongoing work on the second and third units<sup>13</sup>, there are no other significant implemented projects on record. Sanctions pressure on both countries remains one of the key obstacles to the development of trade and economic ties, as it increases transaction costs for businesses. However, more fundamental constraints include the systemic lack of interest and commitment among major Russian and Iranian businesses to pursue long-term projects, as well as difficulties associated with entering each other's markets. Various large-scale investment proposals in Iran's oil and gas extraction and processing sectors, as well as in transport infrastructure that advanced over more than two decades, have repeatedly failed to move beyond the planning stage for different reasons<sup>14</sup>. Ongoing projects also face difficulties. The International North–South Transport Corridor, more than 25 years after its announcement, still operates

10 Trends in international arms transfers, 2025 / SIPRI Fact Sheet. March 2026 [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2026/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2025> (Дата обращения: 06.05.2026).

11 Meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi // Official website of the President of Russia. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/79633> (Accessed 06.05.2026).

12 Trade turnover between Russia and Iran decreased by 17.3% in 2023, to \$4 billion // Interfax. 28.02.2024. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/948210> (Accessed 06.05.2026).

13 Likhachev spoke about the details of Russia's participation in the construction of two units of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant in Iran // Kommersant 17.11.2025. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8210740> (Accessed 06.05.2026).

14 See, for example: I. Kezik. Pipes Matter: Russia to Invest \$8 Billion in Iran's Gas Projects // Izvestia 06.06.202 . URL: <https://iz.ru/1899135/irina-kezik/truby-delo-rossiya-investiruet-v-gazovye-proekty-irana-8-mlrd> (Accessed 06.05.2026).

far below full capacity<sup>15</sup>. Meanwhile, the integration of Russian and Iranian payment systems<sup>16</sup>, as well as the opening of a VTB Bank branch<sup>17</sup> in Tehran, have so far not provided a significant boost to bilateral trade or cross-border financial transfers. The construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant now faces security risks due to reported strikes by the United States and Israel, making the issue of its protection a priority for both Moscow and Tehran. The long-term absence of flagship successful joint projects has created a negative perception of the state and prospects of Russia–Iran economic cooperation within political, academic, and business circles in both countries.

The escalation of the Iran–U.S. conflict has highlighted a number of opportunities for Russia–Iran relations. The crisis has exposed the high vulnerability of the global economy to disruptions in international logistics chains. A severe breakdown in maritime logistics through the Strait of Hormuz has increased demand for alternative international trade routes.

In particular, the International North–South Transport Corridor has gained objective importance for Iran, as it could help address shortages in the Iranian market for a range of goods that were previously supplied through southern ports<sup>18</sup>. The decline or interruption of Iran’s imports of several key goods previously purchased in large volumes from Western markets, such as grain<sup>19</sup>, coking coal, and others, could be offset by Russian supplies at lower prices. In addition, post-conflict reconstruction is likely to increase Iran’s demand for construction goods and services, technologies, and materials, thereby expanding commercial opportunities for Russian businesses. Given that the eastern and Caspian branches of the International North–South Transport Corridor are already equipped with the necessary infrastructure and provide a relatively low-cost and largely seamless route for shipments from Russia, the expansion of trade is unlikely to face major logistical

15 From the Varangians to the Persians: Prospects for the Development of the North–South International Transport Corridor: Report // N. Trans Lab. 2024. URL: <https://ntranslab.ru/analytic/doklady/iz-varyag-v-persy-perspektivy-razvitiya-mtk-sever-yug/> (Accessed 06.05.2026).

16 Iran Added to the Mir Card Network Map // Kommersant. 27.12.2024. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7397332> (Accessed 06.05.2026).

17 VTB Opened an Office in Iran // Kommersant 17.05.2023. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5987469> (Accessed 06.05.2026).

18 Because of the Hormuz Crisis, 2 Million Tons of Wheat May Be Sent to Iran via the Caspian Sea // Caspian Bulletin 15.05.2026. URL: <https://casp-geo.ru/iz-za-ormuzskogo-krizisa-2-mln-tonn-pshenitsy-mogut-poiti-v-iran-cherez-kaspij/> (Accessed 06.05.2026).

19 Cargill and Bunge Halted Deliveries to Iran Due to U.S. Sanctions That Paralyzed Banking Infrastructure: Details // Digital Platform Forkagro. URL: <https://forkagro.com/incubator/v/cargill-i-bunge-prekratili-postavki-v-iran-iz-za-sankcij-ssha-paralizovavshih-bankovskuyu-infrastrukturu-podrobnosti> (Accessed 08.12.2025)

constraints. At the same time, reciprocal investment in the development of Caspian port infrastructure could help eliminate existing bottlenecks in this area, reducing both costs and transit times for cargo transportation across the Caspian Sea<sup>20</sup>.

In the longer term, the deepening of Russia–Iran relations may be supported by cooperation in integrating production and technological chains. Despite significant external economic constraints, Iran has made notable progress in a number of high-tech sectors, including the production of gas turbine units for power plants, catalysts for the petrochemical industry, nanotechnology, unmanned aerial vehicles, and medicine, among others.<sup>21</sup> Iran has a well-developed human capital base, with a generally high level of education and a strong pool of highly qualified scientific personnel in the exact and natural sciences. At the same time, the country faces an acute need in several key sectors of the economy for innovative solutions and for the localization of production of sanctioned equipment, components, and related technologies. This applies in particular to oil extraction and petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, automotive manufacturing, and aviation. Against this backdrop, it appears reasonable to combine the efforts of Russian and Iranian business and scientific communities in developing innovative products and technologies and bringing them into industrial use. Russia could not only supply certain types of high-tech goods to Iran, but also cooperate with it in integrating their production chains. Given the rapid growth of Iran’s startup sector, the creation of a joint Russian–Iranian business incubator could also generate positive effects.

Energy remains a promising area of cooperation. Although the fuel-oriented nature of the Russian and Iranian economies might suggest that they compete on global energy markets, illegitimate sanctions pressure on both countries has created conditions for mutually beneficial cooperation in the export of oil and petroleum products. Russia is working closely with Iran on ensuring non-discriminatory access to global energy markets<sup>22</sup>. Moscow

20 Large-Scale Investment Projects with Iran Are Developing // Rossiyskaya Gazeta 17.03.2026. URL: [https://rg.ru/2026/03/17/reg-ufo/masshtabnye-investicionnye-proekty-s-iranom-razvivaiutsia.html?utm\\_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fyandex.ru%2F](https://rg.ru/2026/03/17/reg-ufo/masshtabnye-investicionnye-proekty-s-iranom-razvivaiutsia.html?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fyandex.ru%2F) (Accessed 06.05.2026).

21 A.R. Margoev, P. Artemyev. Neither East nor West: How the Iranian Economy Is Coping with Sanctions // Report of the Valdai International Discussion Club 09.09.2024. URL: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/reports/ni-vostok-ni-zapad/> (accessed 06.05.2026).

22 Nencini, T. Interview: Why China Has Not and Will Not Come to Iran’s Rescue w/ Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj // ChinaMed [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.chinamed.it/observer/interview-why-china-has-not-and-will-not-come-to-irans-rescue-w-esfandiyar-batmanghelidj> (Дата обращения: 03.03.2026).

is also seeking to develop cooperation with Tehran in the supply of natural gas, partly redirecting to the Islamic Republic the volumes of natural gas previously supplied to European markets. Iran faces challenges in gasifying certain regions of the country, and Russian gas supplies could help offset existing shortages and stabilize the situation in the energy sector<sup>23</sup>. A number of memoranda of understanding<sup>24</sup> have been signed between Russian and Iranian ministries and oil and gas companies, providing for major Russian investments in Iran's oil and gas sector, as well as joint geological exploration activities, among other areas of cooperation.

Public and humanitarian ties remain one of the least developed areas in Russia–Iran relations. Notably, during the Soviet period and before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, this dimension was significantly more active: there were substantially higher volumes of travel for business, tourism, and family purposes, and Soviet cultural figures and organizations regularly toured Iran. However, the overall deterioration and subsequent rollback of relations in the first decade after the Islamic Revolution, followed by the collapse of the USSR, effectively reduced the societal dimension of bilateral ties to a minimum. As a result, relations became largely confined to political and business levels. Today, bilateral tourism<sup>25</sup> flows and cultural exchanges remain negligible.

At the same time, some positive developments can also be observed. In February 2026, a Russian House<sup>26</sup> was opened in Tehran. Iranian experts regularly participate in forums and conferences organized by the Valdai Discussion Club, the Institute of Oriental Studies and IMEMO RAS, and the Yevgeny Primakov Center for International Cooperation<sup>27</sup>. Around 10,000 Iranian students are currently studying in Russia, and the InteRussia<sup>28</sup> cinternship programme is also popular among young Iranian<sup>29</sup> professionals.

23 Russia's gas supplies to Iran could compensate for one-third of the losses from the European market // Rossiyskaya Gazeta 20.01.25. URL: [https://rg.ru/2025/01/20/trubopovod.html?utm\\_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fyandex.ru%2F](https://rg.ru/2025/01/20/trubopovod.html?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fyandex.ru%2F) (accessed 06.05.2026).

24 Isaeva E.A. Current State and Prospects for Russia–Iran Cooperation in the Oil and Gas Sector // Eurasian Studies. V. 1, № 1. 2024. pp. 78–85.

25 Mutual tourist flows in 2024 were estimated at around 60,000 people. See: Analysts forecast growth in mutual tourist flows between Russia and Iran // PRIME. 24.04.24 URL: <https://1prime.ru/20240424/turizm-847647755.html> (accessed 06.05.2026).

26 Russian House opens in Iran // Rossotrudnichestvo 17.02.26. URL: <https://rs.gov.ru/news/v-irane-otkrylsya-russkij-dom/> (accessed 06.05.2026).

27 Fifth International Expert Forum “Russia – Middle East” opens in Moscow // TASS 20.10.25. URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/25394853> (accessed 06.05.2026).

28 Anniversary wave of InteRussia: results // MGIMO portal. 27.04.26. URL: <https://mgimo.ru/about/news/main/interussia-04-26/> (accessed 06.05.2026).

29 Number of Iranian students in Russian universities has doubled // Gazeta.ru. 05.05.25. URL: <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2025/05/05/25702532.shtml> (accessed 06.05.2026).

In addition, a certain asymmetry remains: while Iranian cultural representation has been actively operating in Moscow, the Russian House in Tehran was opened only recently and has not yet fully developed its activities. The expansion of Russia–Iran cultural and societal ties, together with the intensification of business cooperation, would help overcome mutual stereotypes and distrust that persist at the level of public perception. One measure that could give a strong boost to people-to-people contacts would be the simplification or even abolition of the visa regime between the two countries. Furthermore, building a more accurate and balanced understanding of each other within both societies requires deeper cooperation in the media sphere, the creation of additional direct communication channels through both traditional and new media, and the mutual promotion of national cultural achievements.

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Thus, the Russia–Iran partnership is built on the principles of mutual respect for interests, non-interference in internal affairs, and pragmatism. The declaration of a high-level partnership signals that the political leadership of both countries is interested in long-term cooperation across a broad range of issues, one that is not dependent on shifts in the international political environment. Beyond cooperation in the political, military, and military-technical spheres, which involve direct interaction between state institutions, the practical substance of the relationship requires identifying areas of overlap and mutual interest in the economic and social domains<sup>30</sup>. The expansion of business, scientific and educational, social, and cultural cooperation will help create a positive agenda in bilateral relations, which is a necessary precondition for their successful further development.

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# Russia and the Gulf Monarchies: Toward a New Quality of Strategic Dialogue

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The strategic dialogue between Russia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states is at a critical juncture. The experience they have built together, combined with shared economic and energy interests, is laying the groundwork for a move toward full-fledged partnership. Despite the escalation in the Gulf in March 2026, which strained the dialogue because of Russia's close ties with Iran, the two sides seem well positioned to bridge their differences. By focusing on mutually beneficial projects in energy, technology, and cultural exchange, they can take cooperation to the next level while also helping to strengthen regional stability..

## 1. Historical Chapters of Cooperation

Cooperation between Russia, and the Soviet Union before it, and the Gulf Cooperation Council states goes back several decades, evolving from cautious initial contacts to strategic partnerships with some countries. The historical groundwork for these ties was laid during the Soviet era. In 1926, the USSR became the first nation to officially recognize Saudi Arabia (then the Kingdom of Nejd and Hejaz), showing that it was ready to engage with Arab countries even when ideological differences stood in the way.

During the 1960s and 1970s, as the Gulf states were becoming independent, the USSR actively supported the newly formed monarchies. Kuwait was a particularly notable recipient of Soviet assistance. The Soviet Union sent experts to help develop its oil industry, contributed to building roads, ports, and power facilities, supplied machinery and equipment, and helped train local professionals. Kuwaiti students studied at Soviet

universities, while Soviet specialists worked on the ground to help build the country's institutions, a process vividly captured in the memoirs of renowned orthopedic surgeon V.F. Trubnikov, *Three Years in Kuwait*.<sup>31</sup>

A defining moment came with the USSR's response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Despite having close ties with Iraq in the past, the Soviet government suspended arms shipments on August 3, 1990, and condemned Baghdad's actions. It later backed the UN Security Council resolution demanding that Iraqi forces withdraw.

The USSR also made efforts to build constructive relationships with other Gulf monarchies. In early 1972, a Soviet delegation visited the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain — all newly independent countries at the time. The trip signaled Moscow's willingness to establish official ties with the emerging powers of the Gulf. Delegation members especially recalled the warm reception from Sheikh Zayed, the first president of the United Arab Emirates<sup>32</sup>.

Relations with Oman were strained at first because of the Dhofar War. But over time, the situation turned around: diplomatic relations were established in 1985, and in 1987 the Soviet Union opened an embassy in Muscat as a clear sign that constructive engagement had resumed.

## 2. Taking Stock of the Current Level of Partnership

Relations between Russia and the GCC countries started with trade and economics but have long since moved to a much higher level. At different points, ties with each nation have been shaped by military-technical cooperation, political coordination on Middle East affairs, Islamic connections, and various other factors. By 2026, cooperation, both with individual Gulf states and with the GCC as a whole, had reached a strategic level. At the same time, a clear intra-regional hierarchy has emerged: frontrunners in cooperation with Russia (the UAE and Saudi Arabia); countries seeking to deepen dialogue (Oman and Qatar); and countries taking a more cautious approach to partnership (Bahrain and Kuwait). This is evidenced by the agreements currently in place between the countries.

31 Trubnikov, V.F. *Three Years in Kuwait*. Moscow: Nauka, 1975

32 Veniamin Popov on the development of relations between Russia and the Gulf countries | About the Middle East Firsthand // Yevgeny Primakov Center. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-QCqKCuvT0&t>

**Table 1. Level of partnership between the Russian Federation and the GCC countries**

Country	Top-level document	Year / status
<b>Bahrain</b>	Agreement on Trade, Economic and Technical Cooperation between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the State of Bahrain	Signed on April 12, 1999; entered into force on February 20, 2001
<b>Qatar</b>	No common framework document exists	—
<b>Kuwait</b>	No common framework document exists	—
<b>UAE</b>	Declaration of Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the United Arab Emirates	Signed on June 1, 2018
<b>Oman</b>	Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Sultanate of Oman on Trade, Economic, and Technical Cooperation	Signed November 24, 1994; took effect August 10, 1996
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	Russia–Saudi Arabia Agreement on a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Program	Signed October 15, 2019

*Source: compiled by the author based on data from the Russian Foreign Ministry website*

Political dialogue with the GCC countries is also actively developing. This dialogue became particularly important in the context of the Special Military Operation (SMO), when the Gulf states maintained a neutral stance and remained open to cooperation despite Western sanctions. Since 2022, cooperation with the UAE and Saudi Arabia has intensified significantly, as reflected in the frequent high-level contacts between the sides. In 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Abu Dhabi and Riyadh. The President of the UAE, Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, regularly visits Russia, while regular phone conversations are held with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud.

**Table 2. Status of Russia–GCC joint intergovernmental commissions**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Date of the last meeting</b>
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	Regularly takes place once a year	December 1, 2025
<b>UAE</b>	Regularly takes place once a year	December 10, 2025
<b>Qatar</b>	Commission meetings resumed in 2025 after a pause from 2020 to 2024	March 16, 2025
<b>Oman</b>	The agreement establishing the Russia-Oman Intergovernmental Commission was signed on April 22, 2025	—
<b>Bahrain</b>	Commission meetings resumed in 2025 after a pause from 2020 to 2024	December 1, 2025
<b>Kuwait</b>	Has not been held since 2019. A meeting was planned for 2024, but it did not take place	March 4–6, 2019

*Source: compiled by the author based on data from news agencies*

The positive momentum in Russia's relations with the UAE and Saudi Arabia is also reflected in the work of the joint intergovernmental commissions (IGCs). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, meetings of the commissions with Saudi Arabia and the UAE were the first to resume. Meetings of the commissions with Bahrain and Qatar resumed in December 2025, while in April 2025 the intergovernmental commission with Oman was reestablished, amid rapidly developing economic cooperation between the two countries. At the same time, meetings of the commission with Kuwait have been repeatedly postponed, and its seventh session has yet to take place.

Dialogue between Russia and the GCC is also developing successfully within the framework of the Russia–GCC Strategic Dialogue. Meetings in this format are held on a regular basis, with the most recent taking place in Sochi in September 2025. As part of efforts to address the crisis in the Persian Gulf, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also held



highly valuable for the GCC states as they pursue ambitious digitalization programs<sup>34</sup>. Possible formats for cooperation include the establishment of joint research centers, technology transfer initiatives, and the exchange of expertise in regulation and standardization.

Second, nuclear energy remains a promising area for cooperation. Rosatom, which possesses extensive expertise in the construction and operation of nuclear power plants, has repeatedly expressed its readiness to participate in nuclear energy projects in the region, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Cooperation could develop across several areas, including the construction of nuclear power units, the training of national personnel, the provision of nuclear and radiation safety, as well as joint projects in research and nuclear medicine.

Third, space exploration represents another area of strategic convergence of interests. As space technologies become increasingly important for strengthening national sovereignty, diversifying partnerships in this field could carry strategic significance for the GCC states, which currently rely primarily on American projects. In addition to providing independent access to space through Russian satellite capabilities, cooperation could also include joint scientific initiatives and specialist training programs.

Fourth, the fields of healthcare and pharmaceuticals — often overlooked but potentially highly promising — offer further opportunities for cooperation. This area, which was actively developed in the 1970s–1990s, including through initiatives such as the floating ophthalmology clinic Pyotr the Great, which treated hundreds of patients from GCC countries in the early 1990s, could gain renewed momentum. Against the backdrop of global transformation in pharmaceutical markets and a growing drive toward import substitution, new opportunities are emerging for joint drug manufacturing, biotechnology research, diversification of supply and distribution chains, and the exchange of expertise in healthcare system management.

Finally, the potential for cultural cooperation remains underutilized, although in recent years this area has shown significant progress, largely driven by a sharp increase in bilateral tourism flows in the 2020s. Notable initiatives include the Russian Seasons projects in Bahrain

34 Artem Adrianov, *The Arab Monarchies of the Persian Gulf: A New Technological Pole?* Analytical notes No. 6/2025. Moscow: Primakov Center, 2025. p 37.

and Oman and the Moscow Seasons in Kuwait, as well as the Days of Russian Culture held in the UAE and Qatar. In turn, Russia has hosted the Days of Emirati Culture and the Kuwait Culture Week, along with major exhibitions such as *Treasures of Bahrain: The Art of Goldsmithing Through the Ages* at the State Historical Museum, *Silver Treasures of Oman* at the Moscow Kremlin Museums, and *Oman – The Land of Frankincense* at the State Hermitage Museum. A particularly promising initiative is the planned establishment of a Hermitage satellite center in the Dhofar Governorate in Oman, an agreement on which was signed in 2025. More broadly, the expansion of cultural cooperation, both in a general sense and specifically in the museum and performing arts sectors, could, over the long term, also contribute to strengthening political relations between the parties.

### **Conclusion**

Today, Russia's cooperation with the GCC countries is experiencing a period of strong growth: bilateral trade is expanding, partnership in the energy sector and investment flows is progressing successfully, and cultural exchange and technological cooperation are developing actively. Despite various challenges and divergences, Russia and the GCC states have consistently managed to find common ground — from the Soviet Union's support for the newly independent monarchies in the 1960s–1970s to the present-day strategic partnership. Over time, bilateral relations have evolved on the basis of mutual respect and shared interests.

The strategic dialogue between Russia and the GCC countries is at a turning point, opening the way toward a comprehensive partnership. Its success will depend on the ability of both sides to translate existing opportunities into concrete projects, while at the same time mitigating the risks posed by regional instability and external pressure.

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# SECTION II

## West Asia and World Order

# Iran War and the Transformation of Regional Dynamics and International Order

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The United States and Israel's attack on Iran in 2026 represents a pivotal moment in the transformation of both regional and global order. What initially appeared as a limited military confrontation rapidly evolved into a multidimensional crisis with far-reaching geopolitical, economic, and security implications. Rather than remaining confined to the Middle East, the conflict exposed deeper structural tensions within the international system, highlighting the erosion of established norms and the growing complexity of power relations in a transitioning global order.

The disruption of critical energy chokepoints — particularly the Strait of Hormuz — triggered immediate geoeconomic consequences, destabilizing global markets and intensifying inflationary pressures. These developments underscored a key reality of the contemporary system: even actors operating outside traditional hegemonic frameworks can exert disproportionate influence through asymmetric means.

## **Strategic Ambiguity and the Limits of U.S. Power Projection**

One of the defining features of the crisis has been the apparent lack of a coherent strategic framework underpinning the U.S. intervention. The absence of clearly defined objectives, coupled with a mismatch between declared goals and operational instruments, generated significant ambiguity in strategic calculations. This incoherence not only reduced the effectiveness of the intervention but also contributed to the escalation and prolongation of the crisis.

Moreover, the unilateral nature of the attack — conducted without meaningful multilateral backing and in the face of international opposition —

highlighted the growing constraints on U.S. power projection. While the United States remains as one of the main actors in the international system, rising costs of intervention, operational complexity, and diminished allied cohesion have limited its ability to impose outcomes unilaterally.

This situation reflects a broader structural shift: traditional models of hegemonic enforcement and unilateral deterrence are increasingly misaligned with the realities of a more fragmented and multipolar international environment.

### **From Pressure to Resistance: The Evolution of Iran's Strategic Posture**

Contrary to initial expectations, sustained military and economic pressure did not produce fundamental changes in Iran's behavior. Instead, it contributed to the consolidation of a strategy centered on resilience and asymmetric deterrence. Despite prolonged sanctions and a clear imbalance in conventional military capabilities, Iran demonstrated an ability to absorb pressure while reshaping the dynamics of confrontation.

This shift can be understood as a transition from reactive deterrence to proactive resistance. By leveraging asymmetric tools and exploiting vulnerabilities in the regional security architecture, Iran effectively transformed the strategic environment. Its approach can be conceptualized as an alternative model of deterrence — one that prioritizes endurance, adaptability, and indirect forms of pressure over direct military parity.

### **Regionalization of Conflict and Goeconomic Leverage**

A central component of Iran's strategy has been the regionalization of the conflict. By extending the scope of confrontation beyond its borders — particularly through actions affecting U.S. military assets and strategic infrastructure in the Persian Gulf — Iran increased the costs of escalation for its adversaries.

The Strait of Hormuz emerged as a critical instrument in this strategy. As one of the world's most vital energy transit routes, disruptions in this chokepoint had immediate global repercussions. By signaling its capacity to influence maritime flows, Iran demonstrated its ability to translate regional actions into global economic consequences.

This form of goeconomic leverage illustrates how strategic geography, when combined with asymmetric capabilities, can offset conventional power disparities and reshape broader systemic dynamics.

### **Reconfiguring Persian Gulf Security: From External Dependence to Strategic Diversification**

One of the most consequential outcomes of the conflict has been its impact on the security architecture of the Persian Gulf. For decades, regional security has been anchored in reliance on the United States as the primary external guarantor. Persian Gulf Arab states invested heavily in defense partnerships with Washington, expecting that the presence of U.S. military forces would deter threats and ensure stability.

However, the regionalization of the conflict and the targeting of U.S. military bases across the Persian Gulf have fundamentally challenged this assumption. By bringing the confrontation into the territories hosting American forces, Iran effectively blurred the line between host states and active participants. This has raised a critical question: does reliance on U.S. protection enhance security, or does it instead increase vulnerability by turning these states into direct targets during crises?

The events of the conflict suggest that foreign military presence may function not only as a deterrent but also as a source of risk under conditions of escalation. The exposure of infrastructure, combined with the economic sensitivity of Persian Gulf states to instability, has intensified concerns about the sustainability of a security model based on external dependence.

In response, the crisis is likely to accelerate a shift toward strategic diversification. Rather than relying exclusively on the United States, Persian Gulf Arab states may increasingly pursue multi-vector security policies. This includes expanding cooperation with other major powers such as Russia and China, while simultaneously exploring regionally driven security arrangements.

Such diversification does not necessarily imply a complete break from the United States, but rather a recalibration aimed at reducing overdependence and enhancing strategic autonomy. Cooperation with Russia may develop in areas such as defense coordination and geopolitical balancing, while engagement with China may focus on economic-security linkages and infrastructure stability.

At the same time, shared exposure to risk may create incentives for greater intra-regional coordination. Although political divisions remain, the evolving threat environment could encourage more pragmatic cooperation among Persian Gulf states.

### **The Changing Nature of Global Order: From Unipolarity to Complexity**

The crisis must be situated within the broader context of an evolving international system. Over the past decades, the global order has exhibited clear signs of transitioning from a unipolar configuration toward a more complex and multilayered structure. In this emerging environment, power is increasingly diffused among a wider array of actors, including regional powers and non-state entities.

The limitations exposed in U.S. crisis management, combined with the growing assertiveness of regional actors, suggest that the mechanisms sustaining unipolar dominance are gradually weakening. This does not imply the immediate emergence of a fully multipolar system, but rather a more fluid and contested order characterized by overlapping spheres of influence and shifting alignments.

### **Iran–Russia Relations: Between Tactical Convergence and Strategic Limits**

Within this transforming landscape, the role of non-Western powers — particularly Russia and China — has become more pronounced. However, the notion of a cohesive anti-Western bloc remains overstated. Relations among these actors are primarily driven by pragmatic considerations rather than ideological alignment.

Iran–Russia relations exemplify this pattern. While cooperation between the two countries has deepened in recent years — particularly in theaters such as Syria and in response to Western pressure — it remains largely tactical in nature. Both actors seek to preserve strategic autonomy and avoid excessive dependence.

This flexible and interest-driven relationship reflects the broader logic of the current international system, where partnerships are often situational and contingent rather than institutionalized and permanent.

### **Strategic Opportunity and Structural Constraints in Bilateral Cooperation**

The current crisis has nonetheless created a window of opportunity for expanding Iran–Russia cooperation. The relative weakening of U.S. influence in regional security dynamics, combined with the rising costs of unilateral intervention, has opened space for alternative forms of coordination.

Potential areas for deeper cooperation include energy market coordination, development of transit corridors, financial mechanisms independent of Western systems, and joint management of regional crises. However, the realization of this potential is contingent upon several factors.

First, both countries must maintain a high degree of strategic pragmatism, avoiding overestimation of mutual commitments. Second, existing differences — whether geopolitical or economic — must be effectively managed. Finally, cooperation must move beyond ad hoc coordination toward more institutionalized and long-term frameworks.

Absent these conditions, the current convergence risks remaining limited and temporary.

### **Reconfiguring Regional Balance and Perceptions of Power**

If Iran succeeds in sustaining its strategy of resistance and resilience, the broader perception of its role in the regional order is likely to shift. Rather than being viewed primarily as a constrained actor under pressure, Iran may increasingly be seen as an active participant in shaping deterrence dynamics.

Such a shift would have implications extending beyond the Middle East. It could influence the strategic calculations of major powers and contribute to the emergence of new forms of regional balance. In this context, Iran's interactions with Russia and China may gradually evolve toward more structured forms of engagement, particularly if aligned with broader trends toward multilateralism.

### **Conclusion: Toward a More Fragmented and Adaptive Global Order**

The developments examined in this analysis point to a broader process of structural transformation within the international system. Traditional models of hegemonic dominance and unilateral intervention are facing growing constraints, while alternative forms of power projection — rooted in resilience, asymmetry, and strategic geography — are gaining prominence.

If Iran is able to maintain its position under sustained pressure, and if the United States continues to face limitations in achieving its objectives through coercive means, the outcome may be the emergence of a new strategic equation. Such an equation would reflect a reduced effectiveness of hard power and a corresponding rise in the influence of adaptive and resilient actors.

At the same time, the evolving relationship between Iran and Russia illustrates both the opportunities and limitations inherent in the current

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system. While conditions for deeper cooperation exist, their realization depends on pragmatic decision-making and the ability to translate short-term convergence into long-term structural alignment.

Ultimately, the trajectory of this crisis suggests that the global order is moving — gradually but decisively — toward a more complex, multilayered, and dynamically balanced configuration. Whether this transition leads to greater stability or increased fragmentation will depend on how effectively key actors navigate the constraints and opportunities of this emerging environment.

# Constants and Variables of U.S. Policy in the Middle East

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Over the first quarter of the 21st century, the United States has incurred substantial human, material, and reputational losses in pursuing its foreign policy interests in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the networked alliance system it has built in the region remains flexible and adaptable to shifts in the international environment, allowing it to continue relying on the maintenance of a pro-American balance of power in the region<sup>35</sup>. Thus, any assessment of Middle Eastern dynamics and the region's conflict potential must take into account U.S. foreign policy interests, which have traditionally been closely shaped by domestic political considerations in the United States.

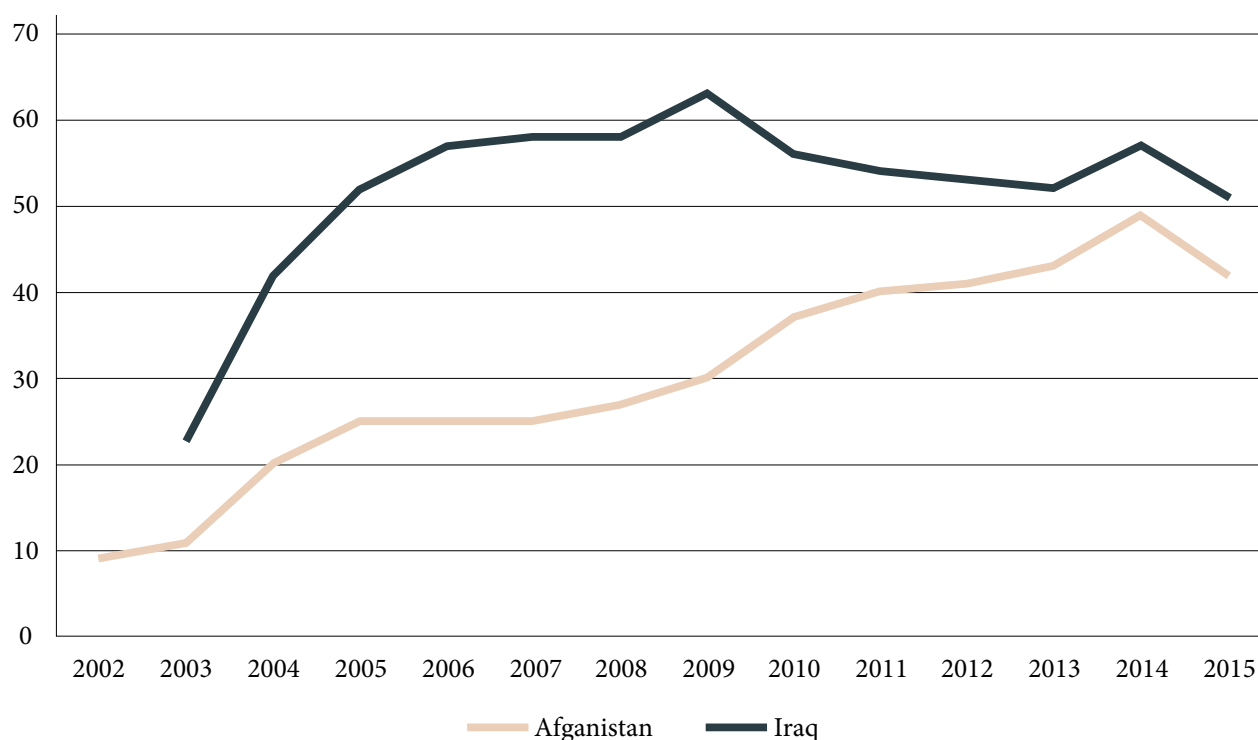
The latter, already in the 1990s, consolidated a set of U.S. foreign policy priorities in the region that remained broadly consistent throughout the post-Cold War era. The focus on securing stable hydrocarbon supplies to the United States and containing communism after the end of the Cold War gradually shifted toward ensuring the security of transport routes and preventing rival great powers from establishing dominance in the region. The fight against terrorism, once a central pillar of U.S. Middle East policy and a key element of American foreign policy discourse under the administration of George W. Bush, has gradually lost its prominence. By the second term of Donald Trump, the terrorist threat was increasingly framed as a domestic issue, with attention shifting away from jihadist groups toward concerns about political extremism within the United States. At the same time, the protection of Israel and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have remained enduring U.S. priorities.

However, these interests are not static. As early as the first administration

35 Maxim Suchkov, Maria Khodynskaya-Golenishcheva - Comparative Analysis of Russian Alliance Strategies in the Middle East // Comparative Politics. 2021. № 12(1). pp. 69–81. DOI: 10.24411/2221-3279-2021-10006

of Barack Obama, there was a shift away from Middle East *nation-building* in favor of the so-called *pivot to Asia*<sup>36</sup>. This shift was driven both by the unpopularity of the Afghan and Iraqi military campaigns within the United States and the increasing negative portrayal of the PRC in American society and the political establishment.

### Share of respondents in the United States who considered it a mistake to send American troops to Afghanistan and Iraq (2002–2015)<sup>37</sup>



The most significant shift in the foundations not only of U.S. Middle East policy but of U.S. foreign policy as a whole under the second administration of Donald Trump was the absence, in doctrinal documents, of any declared intention to promote democratic values globally<sup>38</sup>. Its clearest practical manifestation was the scaling back of the activities of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). However, describing these changes as revolutionary would be highly qualified. The United States has

36 Dolan C.J. *Nation-Building at Home and America First / The Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy and NATO*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. 2023. P. 115–145. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-30796-6\_5

37 Dugan A. Fewer in U.S. View Iraq, Afghanistan Wars as Mistakes. Gallup. 12.06.2015. URL: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/183575/fewer-view-iraq-afghanistan-wars-mistakes.aspx> (date of access: 8.04.2026).

38 National Security Strategy of the United States of America, November 2025. The White House (.gov). 05.12.2025. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf> (date of access: 04.04.2026).

not abandoned its policy of providing foreign aid<sup>39</sup>. USAID's responsibilities were transferred to the U.S. Department of State<sup>40</sup> while implementation functions were retained by the U.S. Department of Defense, the Department of Labor, and other U.S. government agencies<sup>41</sup>.

### Perceived threats to the United States stemming from China's military and economic policies in American public opinion<sup>42</sup>

Area of threats perception	Military		Economic		Military		Economic	
	Serious threat (%)		A threat, but not critical (%)		Not a serious threat (%)			
<b>2013</b>	51	52	39	39	9	8		
<b>2014</b>	46	40	41	36	11	10		
<b>2016</b>	41	41	46	45	10	11		
<b>2022</b>	67	57	29	34	4	8		
<b>2023</b>	66	64	27	30	6	6		

Moreover, the reduction in funding for the promotion of democratic ideas and practices in the Middle East began already under the administration of George W. Bush, which had initially framed the promotion of democracy within the context of the *global war on terror*. This trend continued during the first administration of Barack Obama in the context of the Arab Spring. On the one hand, scaling back support for local civil society actors made it possible to engage regional partners on a more pragmatic basis, without complicating relations through accusations of U.S. interference in domestic affairs. On the other hand, the revolutionary wave of the early 2010s brought to power Islamist movements that were far removed, in their ideological orientation, from democratic principles, which in turn provided grounds for criticism from political opponents.

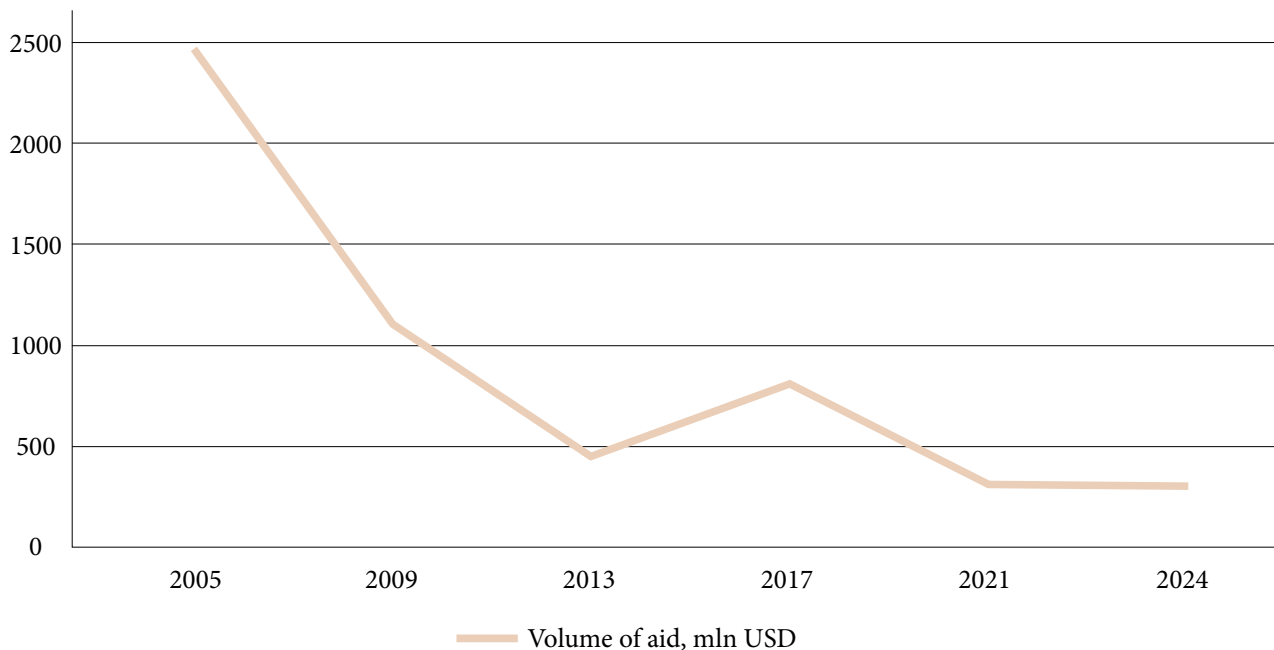
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40 McCabe E. M. U.S. Agency for International Development: An Overview. Congress.gov. 05.09.2025. URL: <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF10261> (date of access: 03.04.2026).

41 Obligations 2026. Managing Agency. Foreignassistance.gov. 31.03.2026. URL: <https://foreignassistance.gov/> (date of access: 03.04.2026).

42 Brennan M. Record-Low 15% of Americans View China Favorably. Gallup. 07.03.2023. URL: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/471551/record-low-americans-view-china-favorably.aspx> (date of access: 02.04.2026).

### Volume of U.S. international aid allocated to the promotion of democracy and human rights in the Middle East and North Africa region (2005–2025)<sup>43</sup>



Overall, there remains public support in the United States for providing foreign aid to other countries. However, Americans tend to prefer humanitarian assistance, such as food, water, and medical supplies, over programs aimed at promoting democratic values. It is also important to take into account the political polarization in the United States, which extends to this issue as well, as well as the somewhat exaggerated perceptions among ordinary Americans regarding the share of foreign aid in the overall U.S. federal budget<sup>44</sup>.

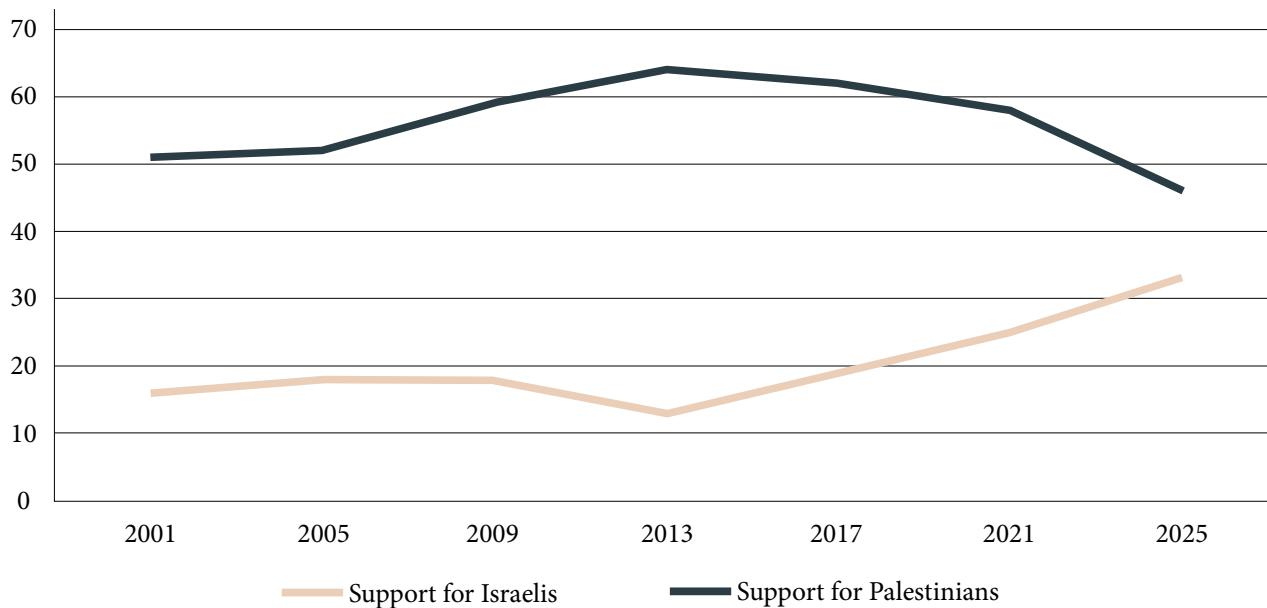
Another constant of U.S. Middle East policy, a bipartisan support for Israel's national security, is also undergoing change. First, new generations of Americans are emerging with limited knowledge of the Holocaust and the Arab-Israeli wars. Among them, traditional pro-Israel narratives about Israel as the *"only democracy in the Middle East"* and a Jewish people surrounded by implacable enemies no longer resonate as strongly. Second, these narratives are increasingly difficult to sustain through traditional media, as young Americans, when interested in the Israeli–Palestinian

43 Obligations 2005-2025. Middle East and North Africa. Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance. URL: <https://foreignassistance.gov/> (date of access: 06.04.2026).

44 Wike R., Fetterolf J., Clancy L., Lippert J. Majorities of Americans Support Several — But Not All — Types of Foreign Aid. Pew Research Center. 01.05.2025. URL: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/05/01/majorities-of-americans-support-several-but-not-all-types-of-foreign-aid/> (date of access: 06.04.2026).

conflict, tend to rely on social media and citizen journalism. Third, the figure of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu generates particular negative sentiment among segments of American youth, as he is increasingly seen not as a democratic leader but as a conventional Middle Eastern strongman. Fourth, among young American Jews and evangelicals, Israel is losing some of its former centrality in religious and identity-based outlooks<sup>45</sup>. Thus, even among its most committed and consistent supporters in the United States, there is a growing reassessment of the need for unconditional U.S. support for Israel.

### Share of U.S. respondents supporting Israelis and Palestinians in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (2001–2025)<sup>46</sup>



The region is likely to remain prone to conflict. This is not only due to political and economic contradictions between ruling elites and society, which are expected to persist in the foreseeable future, but also because of intensifying competition over vital resources. The Middle East continues to experience demographic growth while simultaneously facing the effects of climate change, including shrinking water resources and worsening food

45 Kuttab J. American Evangelicals' Declining Support for Israel. Arab Center Washington DC. 31.12.2025. URL: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/american-evangelicals-declining-support-for-israel/> (date of access: 11.04.2026).

46 U.S. Popular Support for Israel Hits Lowest Point in 25 years Poll. The Cradle. 14.12.2025. URL: <https://thecradle.co/articles/us-popular-support-for-israel-hits-lowest-point-in-25-years-poll> (date of access: 11.04.2026).

security challenges. One of the region's central conflicts, the Israeli–Palestinian one, will increasingly, due to these same demographic shifts in both societies, be characterized as a struggle between two peoples over living space.

This means that the United States will not be able to simply disengage from the region and its problems. Local crises will continue to spill beyond the Middle East and require responses from the international community, given the region's unique logistical and resource significance. A reduction in the American presence in the region, or its marginalization within U.S. foreign policy priorities, would only become possible in the event of fundamental shifts in the global economy. One such shift could involve changes in the geography of key transport corridors. Another could be the depletion of regional actors' resource base, which would in turn diminish the Middle East's relevance to U.S. foreign policy interests. Among potential military-strategic shifts, one could highlight the hypothetical emergence of power-projection capabilities comparable to those of the United States in one of its global rival states. Such a change in the balance of power could make the risks of intervention in the region unacceptably high for Washington. The most significant domestic political changes could include a weakening of the pro-Israel and pro-Qatar lobbies in the United States, as well as a loss of the ability of the American political establishment to reinforce its political capital through engagement in Middle Eastern affairs.

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# China and the Middle East: External Intervention and the Fragility of Regional Order

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One of the enduring dilemmas of Middle Eastern politics is the persistent imbalance between internal dynamics and external intervention. The more external actors become involved in the region's political, military, and economic affairs, the more fragile and distorted regional dynamics tend to become. This pattern has historically prevented the emergence of a stable, autonomous, and internally coherent regional order. Instead of producing equilibrium, external involvement has often deepened fragmentation, reinforced asymmetrical dependencies, and transformed local conflicts into wider geopolitical contests.

The Middle East occupies a uniquely strategic geographical position connecting Europe, Asia, and Africa while simultaneously controlling some of the world's most critical energy corridors and maritime chokepoints. As a result, regional politics have rarely evolved independently from global power competition. External powers have continuously attempted to shape political alignments, economic structures, and security arrangements according to their own strategic priorities rather than the sociopolitical realities of the region itself.

Yet attributing all instability solely to external intervention would oversimplify the problem. The Middle East has also struggled to generate durable regional mechanisms capable of managing ideological, sectarian, ethnic, and geopolitical competition internally. Consequently, regional fragmentation and external penetration have historically reinforced one another. This interaction between internal vulnerabilities and external ambitions continues to define the contemporary Middle East agenda.

Within this evolving context, China's growing role raises a critical question: will Beijing emerge as another external power reproducing exploitative and destabilizing patterns, or can it contribute to a more balanced and cooperative regional order? The answer to this question may shape not only China's Middle East policy but also the future trajectory of regional politics itself.

### **Historical Foundations of External Intervention in the Middle East**

The modern Middle East emerged largely through externally imposed geopolitical arrangements rather than endogenous political evolution. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War marked the beginning of a new regional order designed primarily around European strategic interests. The Sykes–Picot framework, colonial mandates, artificial borders, and externally supported monarchies produced political structures that often lacked historical, social, and institutional coherence.

This externally engineered order prioritized imperial connectivity, resource extraction, and geopolitical control over sustainable regional integration. The consequences of this legacy remain visible today. Many post-colonial states inherited fragile institutions, contested identities, and centralized authoritarian structures that relied heavily on external support.

The post-Second World War period deepened these dynamics. The establishment of Israel in 1948 fundamentally transformed regional politics and introduced a new long-term geopolitical fault line into the Middle East. Subsequent Arab Israeli wars internationalized regional conflicts and consolidated the strategic involvement of global powers. During the Cold War, the Middle East became one of the principal arenas of ideological and geopolitical competition between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Regional actors increasingly aligned themselves with broader global blocs, often sacrificing internal development and regional cooperation in favor of militarization and ideological confrontation. External military assistance, arms transfers, regime support, and proxy politics intensified regional rivalries while weakening indigenous conflict-management mechanisms.

The post-Cold War era did not reduce external intervention. On the contrary, American unipolarity expanded the scale and scope of direct interventionism. The Gulf War, the invasion of Iraq, intervention in Afghanistan, sanctions regimes, counterterrorism operations, and democracy-promotion strategies significantly reshaped regional politics. However, these interventions frequently generated unintended consequences, including state collapse,

sectarian polarization, radicalization, and the proliferation of non-state armed actors.

In this sense, the Middle East became one of the clearest examples of how externally imposed political engineering can destabilize rather than stabilize regional systems. Much of the post-colonial and post-imperial literature on the Middle East emphasizes precisely this point: external actors often attempt to manage the region according to global strategic priorities while neglecting the historical and sociological realities of local societies.

### **Internal Fragmentation and the Limits of Regional Agency**

Nevertheless, external intervention alone cannot fully explain the region's chronic instability. The Middle East has also faced significant difficulties in generating cohesive regional agency from within. Deep ideological, sectarian, ethnic, and political divisions have continuously constrained the emergence of stable regional cooperation frameworks.

The Cold War period intensified ideological polarization between Arab nationalism, socialism, monarchism, Islamism, and pro-Western alignments. These competing ideological visions frequently transformed domestic rivalries into broader regional confrontations. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 added another transformative layer by introducing revolutionary Shiite political ideology into the regional system, further intensifying sectarian and geopolitical competition.

Similarly, the Sunni-Shiite divide increasingly evolved from a theological distinction into a geopolitical instrument. Regional powers mobilized sectarian identities to expand influence across fragile political environments such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. The politicization of sectarianism weakened state institutions and reinforced transnational proxy networks.

Religious tensions have also intersected with broader geopolitical disputes. The Arab Israeli conflict, the status of Jerusalem, political Islam, radicalization, and transnational jihadist movements have all contributed to cycles of instability that transcend national borders. The rise of groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS demonstrated how weak governance structures, ideological radicalization, and foreign intervention can collectively produce highly destabilizing outcomes.

Ethnic fragmentation has further complicated regional dynamics. Kurdish political movements, Arab Persian competition, tribal fragmentation, and minority politics continue to influence regional security calculations.

Consequently, the Middle East often struggles to produce collective regional responses precisely because political identities remain fragmented across ideological, sectarian, and ethnic lines.

Thus, the weakness of internal regional mechanisms has frequently created openings for external actors to intervene more deeply. External penetration and internal fragmentation are therefore mutually reinforcing rather than separate phenomena.

### **Neoliberal Globalization, Energy Politics, and China's Rise**

The post-Cold War neoliberal era transformed the Middle East once again. Economic globalization, energy interdependence, financial liberalization, and technological integration created new forms of connectivity between the region and the global economy. Oil and gas markets became increasingly embedded within broader international production and consumption chains.

At the same time, China's rapid economic rise fundamentally altered global energy geopolitics. Beijing emerged as one of the world's largest energy consumers and gradually increased its strategic dependence on Middle Eastern hydrocarbons. Unlike previous external powers, however, China initially adopted a relatively cautious and economically driven regional approach.

China's Middle East policy has historically rested on several core principles: prioritization of economic engagement over military intervention, emphasis on state sovereignty and non-interference, balanced relations with competing regional actors, energy security and trade connectivity and avoidance of ideological confrontation.

Beijing's strategy differed significantly from Western interventionist approaches. Rather than attempting to redesign regional political systems, China focused on commercial integration, infrastructure investment, and long-term economic partnerships. The Belt and Road Initiative further institutionalized China's regional presence by connecting Middle Eastern energy corridors and logistical networks to broader Eurasian connectivity projects.

China simultaneously cultivated relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, the Gulf monarchies, and other regional actors without fully aligning itself with any single geopolitical camp. This multi-vector diplomacy enabled Beijing to maximize economic access while minimizing strategic entanglement.

However, China's growing economic presence has gradually generated new strategic dilemmas. As Beijing's interests in the region expand, maintaining strict political neutrality becomes increasingly difficult. Energy dependence, maritime security, supply-chain vulnerability, and geopolitical competition with the United States are pushing China toward a more active regional role.

### **China at a Strategic Crossroads: Disruptive or Constructive Power?**

Today China faces a critical strategic threshold in the Middle East. The central question is whether Beijing will eventually behave like previous external powers — primarily pursuing strategic dominance and resource control — or whether it can contribute to a more stable and cooperative regional order.

This dilemma reflects a broader debate about China's role in global politics. Thus far, Beijing has largely benefited from criticizing Western interventionism while avoiding the burdens of regional security management. Yet as China's economic footprint expands, expectations regarding its political and security responsibilities also increase.

The Middle East presents a particularly difficult test. The region's chronic security dilemmas, unresolved political conflicts, and institutional fragility cannot be managed solely through economic engagement. Infrastructure investment alone cannot resolve questions surrounding regional rivalries, state collapse, sectarian polarization, or armed non-state actors. Consequently, China increasingly faces pressure to clarify whether its regional role will remain primarily transactional or evolve into a more system-shaping posture. Several possibilities emerge.

First, China could continue its current strategy of cautious economic engagement while avoiding deep political involvement. This would preserve flexibility and reduce strategic costs but may also limit Beijing's long-term influence over regional security outcomes. Second, China could gradually evolve into a more active diplomatic and security actor. This would involve greater mediation efforts, regional conflict management, maritime security cooperation, and political coordination. Beijing's role in facilitating the Saudi-Iran rapprochement already suggests early signs of this direction. Third, China could eventually reproduce patterns historically associated with previous great powers by prioritizing strategic corridors, energy control, and geopolitical balancing over regional stability itself. If China increasingly securitizes its economic interests, its regional posture may become more coercive and interventionist over time.

This is the critical question shaping the future of China's Middle East policy: can Beijing remain a largely economic actor in a region where economics and security are inseparable?

### **Toward a More Balanced Regional Framework**

Ultimately, external actors are not inherently destabilizing. The problem is not the existence of external involvement itself but rather the absence of sustainable frameworks capable of balancing external influence with internal regional agency.

The Middle East's future stability depends on generating more rational and cooperative mechanisms that reduce zero-sum competition and prioritize positive regional agendas. Economic connectivity, infrastructure cooperation, energy coordination, technological integration, and institutional dialogue may provide alternative pathways beyond perpetual geopolitical confrontation.

In this context, external powers can either reinforce fragmentation or facilitate stabilization. Much depends on whether they approach the region primarily through extraction, militarization, and geopolitical rivalry or through long-term institutional and economic cooperation.

China's rise presents both risks and opportunities. Beijing could become another external actor reproducing exploitative geopolitical patterns. Yet it could also contribute to a less interventionist and more development-oriented framework if it successfully balances strategic interests with regional stability.

The broader challenge for the Middle East therefore lies not in completely eliminating external influence—an unrealistic objective in a highly interconnected global system—but in developing stronger internal regional capacities capable of managing external engagement more effectively.

The future regional order will likely depend on whether Middle Eastern actors themselves can transform external competition into frameworks that support stability, connectivity, and cooperative development rather than perpetual fragmentation and proxy confrontation.

# The Rational of Jordan's Foreign Policy and its Determinants

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To develop an understanding to the rational of the Jordan's foreign policy and its decision making process in terms of actors, issues and interests, a convenient analytical framework should be designed and employed. It is widely acknowledged that, studying the international politics of the Middle East is complex as many scholars consider the regional state system to be fragile, highly penetrated and unconsolidated<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, there is a high degree of overlapping between state and political regime in the region where in many countries the continuation of the regime is the primary concern to the ruling elites. This places limitations on the ability of the international relations theories to explain decision making processes, particularly in the relevant Arab countries. Moreover, the research of states' foreign policy has been dominated by studies of great and superpowers which was caused, above all, by the long-term predominance of realism paradigm in International Relations and its strong belief that only these powerful actors matter because they shape the international system. This resulted in the perception of small states as passive, weak vulnerable, and responsive to the constrains and pressure of external threats to their national security<sup>48</sup>. Therefore, it makes them more attentive to the characteristics of the regional and international context.

This small state geopolitical rational in which the outer environment is the most detrimental factor that influence its decision-making process and national interests particularly security and survivability. To overcome such a theoretical dilemma, and regardless of the abovementioned limitations, this study will use an analytical framework derived from realist-rationalist

47 F. Halliday, (2005), *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*, UK, Cambridge University Press, pp. 21-22.

48 Ponizilova M. The Regional Policy and Power Capabilities of Jordan As A Small State // Central European Journal of International and Security Studies. 2013. Vol. 7. P. 1-2.

thinking focusing on the relations between small state interests, security and power struggles, as well as the regional and international system. Therefore, the convenient approach that could explain Jordan's foreign policy issue is the three levels approach.

It is widely acknowledged that researchers use this approach as a framework for discussing independent variables that explains state policy behavior and its regional and international outcomes<sup>49</sup>. This level suggest that state foreign policy actions can be analysed at the level of leadership, the nation-state- (socio-economic) and the regional international system including the regional context in which the state operates<sup>50</sup>.

The individual level focuses on the human nature particularly on individual political leaders and their belief, personalities and psychological processes. Moreover, the nation-state level includes the structure of the political system, the nature of the decision making process, social, and economic, and the role of public opinion and interests groups. Furthermore, the international level includes the anarchic structure of the regional as well as the global system, the distribution of military and economic power among world powers, patterns of military alliances and international trade and other factors that forms the external context in which the state operates. As for Jordan and speaking of the individual level, the King enjoys a centrality in the political system of the state and the decision making process particularly in terms of foreign policy formations and executions. Moreover, at the nation-state level, although the King role is significant in the Jordanian decision-making process, the socio-economic factors including those social and political groups and public opinion also plays an important role in influencing the foreign policy making and execution. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that, the international system level including regional context in which Amman operates is the factor that heavily influences Jordan's foreign policy most.

It is important to investigate Amman's vulnerabilities and its potentials as this analysis would help to develop a comprehension of what made a small state like Jordan to peruse a functional and effective foreign policy particularly within its harsh regional context. The constitution, which was adopted

49 Levy J. S. *Theories of Interstate and Intrastate War: A Levels-of-Analysis Approach / Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict* / Ed. by C. A. Crocker, F. O. Hampson, P. Aall. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003. P. 4.

50 Ibid

in 1951, provides a central role for the King in the activities of the state<sup>51</sup>. Moreover; he is the head of the executive, legislative and the judiciary branches as well as the supreme commander of the security forces including the armed forces. The decision-making process has been dominated by the King often in conjunction with a number of key advisers. On issues related to foreign policy, the King, the Prime Minister, Chief of the Royal Court as well as leaders of the security forces are the decision making circle<sup>52</sup>. In addition to that, the King has certain advisers and confidants within and outside government whose closeness to him give them the opportunity to participate and influence the decision-making process. Simultaneously, the constitution guaranteed a considerable degree of democratic participation for the public. This is in the form of the parliament whose members are directly elected by the people and reflected largely religious, tribal, or regional interests<sup>53</sup>.

Jordan is situated at the heart of the Middle East with a land mass of 89,342 km<sup>2</sup> and surrounded by larger, more populous and economically stronger states involved in mutual political and ideological conflicts<sup>54</sup>. This rough context placed Amman into a position of buffer state between rivals that always generated serious challenges to its national interests particularly its existence. However, despite these challenges, many consider Jordan as one of the most stable countries in the region and that its geographical location is an element of strength that provides Jordan with a strategic and comparative advantage<sup>55</sup>. However, the lack of natural resources has been one of the elements that has greatly affected Jordan's foreign policy making and implementation. Unlike some of its neighboring countries, Jordan is a small country with limited natural resources. As for agriculture, Jordan is a semi-desert country which depends mainly on rainfall as the source of irrigation. This situation has caused fluctuations in its economy, which became highly vulnerable to

51 Dann U. The Hashemite Monarchy 1948–88: The Constant and the Changing – An Integration // *Jordan in the Middle East: The Making of a Pivotal State 1948–1988* / ed. by J. Nevo, I. Pappé. London: Routledge, 1994. P. 15–18.

52 Brand L. A. *Jordan's Inter-Arab Relations: The Political Economy of Alliance Making*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. P. 65.

53 Curtis R. R. *Jordan // Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East* / ed. by M. P. Angrist. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010. P. 110.

54 Fisher W. B. *Jordan: Physical and Social Geography // The Middle East and North Africa*. 42nd ed. London: Europa Publications, 1995.

55 Curtis R. What Jordan Means for NATO (and vice versa) // *Istituto Per Gli Studi Di Politica Internazionale*. URL: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/what-jordan-means-nato-and-vice-versa-20934> (date of access: 18.05.2026).

developments in the external environment. Therefore, Amman has relied on external financial aid so to deal with this economic vulnerability. The key aid providers to Amman are the Gulf countries, USA and the European Union. Jordan's strategic location and its constructive multiple roles mainly in the region made Amman a high valuable and reliable partner to these countries. However, Jordan's traditional reliance on foreign aid to meet her economic needs made Amman highly susceptible to external pressure and has limited its objectives. It has had to follow certain policies towards its conventional economic backers to ensure the continuous flow of such aid. However, speaking of current state of Amman's economy, the World Bank has estimated its GDP with 42.4 US\$ billion and GDP per capita is 4278<sup>56</sup>.

Jordan's population currently is estimated by 11 million where the majority of them are under the age 30 years. This suggests that Jordanian society is a youthful one which many perceive this as a strong element in Amman's national power. Moreover, despite its strained economy, Jordan has one of the most effective and advanced educational system in the region. Furthermore, Jordanians are well educated and highly trained as education is considered to be a core value in their culture. In addition to that, Jordan has one of the highest literacy rates in the world (about 98.01%) and it is ranked 80 out of 188 in the Human Development Index published by the UNDP in 2025. On the military side, although Jordan's army is a relatively small one, it is known to be as one of the most professional armies in the region<sup>57</sup>. Moreover, the Jordanian armed forces are estimated at 101,300. However, Jordan's lack of economic resources denied Amman the financial ability to arm itself with modern weapons systems.

Within the Middle East regional system, Jordan enjoys considerable status that exceeds its size as this position was gained mainly due to its geographical proximity to the Arab-Israeli conflict particularly to Palestinian question. Moreover, the Arab countries have also considered Jordan as a major actor within their system. However, since mid-90's of the last century Jordan's regional position has been consolidated and enhanced due to its active role in the larger Arab-Peace process that was initiated early 1990'. Jordan had concluded a peace treaty with Israel in October 1994. It established stable relations with Britain, mainly in terms of military and economic aid.

56 World Bank. Jordan Economic Outlook — 2025. URL: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/559531523636706267/pdf/125254-MEM-April2018-Jordan-EN.pdf> (date of access: 18.05.2026).

57 Schwarz R. War and State Building in the Middle East. Miami: University of Florida Press, 2012. P. 60–61.

However, since the 1950s, Jordan developed cordial relations with the U.S. who replaced Britain as its main economic and military international backer, Amman is considered to be a key U.S. ally in the region as both countries have cooperated on a number of regional and international issues motivated by their common and mutual interests. American interest in Jordan has been due to the latter's strategic importance and the role Amman has been playing in the Arab-Israeli peace process mainly its peace with Israel since 1994. Jordan is also a long term ally to the U.S. in fighting global terrorism, joint military training, intelligence sharing, and diplomatic cooperation. Jordan also has maintained good relations with most of the Muslim and Third World countries, as Amman has been an active member of the UN, Organization of the Islamic Conference and many regional and international agencies.

In addition to that, Amman has forged a close and strategic partnership with many European countries and the European Union. Amman is a key partner for EU at the bilateral, regional and international level since the EU considers Jordan as a key player in promoting, peace, stability, moderation and inter-faith tolerance in the Middle East, Moreover, both parties have a strong partnership in many areas and have been linked through an association agreement since 2002 and "Advanced Status" in 2010. Furthermore, EU is one of the largest financial aid provider to Jordan. Amman also has developed cordial relations with other regional and global powers including Turkey, Canada, Russia, China, Japan, Pakistan and India in addition to many countries in Africa and Latin America. This U.S., EU and Gulf support, in particular, has helped Jordan deal with serious vulnerabilities, both internal and external. Therefore, and despite its limited resources and vulnerability, Jordan is known to have achieved regional and international status that exceeded its resources which boosted its role.

The preceding analysis suggests that Jordan's geopolitics is a liability as much as an asset. Moreover, it also illustrates common efforts of a small state to play an active role in the regional and international politics despite its power limitations. Furthermore, the analysis indicates also that despite its material capabilities deficiency, Amman has been trying to compensated these weaknesses through expanding its soft power elements like geographical proximity to many conflicts particularly the larger Arab-Israeli conflict, the moderate policies, the reputation and skills of its leadership and its diplomatic experience that have been accumulated throughout the years and the relative domestic coherence. In addition to

that Jordan has been keen to join international and regional structures as this would enable Amman to compensate its weaknesses and achieve some objectives particularly security interests.

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# SECTION III

## The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

# Palestine and Israel: The ‘Alternative Day After’ and the Rethinking of Peace Process Strategies

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**B**y March 2026, the conflict remains in a fragile post-war phase: the ceasefire declared in October 2025 has failed to evolve into a stable security arrangement. In the Gaza Strip, episodes of airstrikes, shelling, and gunfire continue, including in civilian areas. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, dozens of people were killed and around one hundred injured between March 6 and 17 alone; since the announcement of the ceasefire in October 2025, 673 deaths have been reported<sup>58</sup>.

The humanitarian situation remains a major bottleneck for access and delivery. As of March 19, Kerem Shalom remained the only operational crossing point for humanitarian and commercial cargo entering Gaza, creating persistent logistical congestion and an imbalance between the inflow and distribution of supplies. Additional challenges include restrictions on so-called dual-use goods and the high rate of delays or denials in coordinating movements within Gaza, both of which continue to hinder infrastructure recovery<sup>59</sup>.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the conflict is increasingly taking the form of a mosaic of coercion: security operations, rising radical settler violence, threats of displacement, and restrictions on access

58 UN OCHA: Humanitarian Situation Report | 19 March 2026 // March 19, 2026

59 UN OCHA: Humanitarian Situation Report | 19 March 2026 // March 19, 2026; European External Action Service Rafah crossing reopens with EU Support, February 5, 2026

are reinforcing one another. According to the United Nations, settler attacks have become more severe; the number of injuries has increased by 54%, while displacement linked to settler-related incidents has risen more than fourfold compared to the 2025 average. Since January 1, 2026, more than 1,500 Palestinians have been displaced as a result of settler attacks and access restrictions<sup>60</sup>.

Within the framework of the *alternative day after* concept, it is more useful to consider not scenarios in their pure form, but rather trajectories emerging at the intersection of several vectors. In this report, we seek to examine these trajectories from a long-term perspective rather than through the lens of the current moment, without focusing on outbreaks of violence that may shape the situation temporarily but do not alter its underlying nature.

### Possible Classical Trajectories

**The first trajectory** implies the consolidation of a single space with a hierarchical system of rights. It does not depend on formal political decisions and instead develops gradually through inertia. Its stability rests on a combination of security control, economic integration, and the fragmentation of the Palestinian political landscape. The main risk lies in the buildup of internal tensions that could trigger systemic destabilization in the event of a shift in external conditions.<sup>61</sup>

**The second trajectory** implies the partial institutionalization of confederal elements. This does not imply the creation of a full-fledged confederation, but rather the introduction of limited mechanisms for joint governance, primarily in the areas of infrastructure, water resources, and the economy. Such an approach could serve as a way of managing interdependence without resolving the question of sovereignty. Its implementation, however, would require external guarantees and substantial investment.

**The third trajectory** is the regional reframing of the conflict. Under this scenario, the Palestinian issue becomes integrated into a broader regional context in which priorities are shaped by the balance of power among the Middle East's key actors. The Palestinian agenda does not disappear, but it loses its autonomy, becoming increasingly tied to other processes — particularly competition with Iran and the transformation of energy markets<sup>62</sup>.

60 UN OCHA: Humanitarian Situation Report | 19 March 2026 // March 19, 2026

61 Efron S. et al. Alternatives in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict // Santa Monica: RAND Corporation. 2015. P. 201–219.

62 Cook S. A. The End of the Arab-Israeli Conflict? // Foreign Affairs 99. № 4. 2020. P. 125–133.

***The fourth trajectory*** is the functional decomposition of the settlement process. It involves abandoning the idea of a final comprehensive agreement in favor of a set of parallel processes, each with its own logic and participants. Unlike the traditional step-by-step approach, this model has no defined end point; instead, the system functions as a dynamic equilibrium sustained through the continuous adjustment of its parameters.

In our view, a fundamentally important shift lies in moving from a model oriented toward a final settlement to an adaptive one. This means recognizing that the conflict may not necessarily have come to an end in the traditional sense, but can instead be transformed into a manageable condition characterized by an acceptable level of violence and a degree of predictability.

The technological factor is acquiring particular significance. Israel's model of digital control, which includes surveillance systems, algorithmic data processing, and the integration of civilian and military technologies, reduces the transaction costs of managing the conflict. This, in turn, weakens incentives to pursue a political solution. At the same time, the digital environment strengthens asymmetric mobilization, enabling the Palestinian side to compensate for its institutional weakness through network-based forms of organization.

### **The International Dimension**

At the international level, mediation efforts are becoming increasingly fragmented. The absence of a single coordinating center and growing competition among external actors mean that individual initiatives fail to coalesce into a unified strategy. In this context, more importance is attached to micro-formats, limited in scope but potentially more effective mechanisms of engagement.

Through the prism of international law, universalist norms are gradually giving way to more pragmatic approaches. The lack of effective enforcement mechanisms, combined with the growing politicization of international institutions, is weakening their role as impartial arbiters. As a result, the conflict is becoming increasingly de-juridified, with greater reliance placed on coercive measures and political-economic instruments.

In the context of this discussion, particular attention should be given to Russian expertise on the conflict.

Overall, the Russian research tradition offers a more sceptical and structurally oriented approach, viewing the conflict as part of a broader international system rather than an autonomous case of conflict resolution. From the perspective of Russian schools of international studies, a key argument is that the existing status quo should not be seen as a transitional phase, but rather as a relatively stable model sustained by the balance of power and the interests of both external and internal actors. In contrast to the Western normative paradigm, which is oriented toward achieving a final settlement, Russian scholars tend to emphasize the system's capacity for self-reproduction through recurring cycles of escalation and de-escalation.<sup>63</sup>

In this sense, episodes of escalation, including those of 2023–2024, are interpreted not as systemic failures, but as functional elements of the system. They serve as a form of “reset” of the balance, allowing the parties to adjust the parameters of interaction without moving beyond the bounds of a controlled conflict<sup>64</sup>. This interpretation helps explain the persistence of the conflict even under conditions of high-intensity violence. A similar line of reasoning is developed in the author's own work<sup>65</sup>, where the conflict is framed as a specific case of a broader model of managed asymmetric systems. Comparable approaches can be found in the research of Andrey Kortunov<sup>66</sup>, who emphasizes the limitations of normative frameworks under conditions of global order transformation, as well as in the work of Fyodor Lukyanov, who interprets regional conflicts as elements of a wider system of strategic competition<sup>67</sup>.

A key contribution of Russian analytical approaches is their emphasis on the external dimension of the conflict. The Israeli–Palestinian issue is understood as part of a broader regional and global configuration in which not only the United States, but also other centers of power, such as the Gulf states, Turkey, and Iran, play an important role. In this context, the Palestinian track is increasingly interpreted

63 A.A. Yermakov, I.V. Ryzhov. Escalation of the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict: Operation ‘House and Garden’ // Tambov University Review. Series: Humanities 29. № 5. 2024. C. 1509–1520.

64 Timur Khairullin, The 2023 Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: Reactions of Global and Regional Actors // Asia and Africa Today. № 6. 2024. pp 15–24.

65 Morozov V.M., Shebalina E.O., Melnikova S.V. The Promise and Failure of Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process in 1990s: A Literature Review // Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta, 17. № 4. 2024. P. 136–154.

66 Kortunov A.V. Between Polycentrism and Bipolarity: On Russia's World Order Evolution Narratives // Russia in Global Affairs, 17. № 1. 2019. P. 10–51.

67 Lukyanov F.A. Out of Order // Russia in Global Affairs, 22. № 4. 2024. P. 5–8.

as an instrument embedded within wider geopolitical strategies<sup>68</sup>.

This approach aligns with the observed trend toward the regionalisation of the conflict, whereby its dynamics are shaped less by bilateral interactions and more by shifts in the regional balance of power. Within this logic, the normalisation of relations between Israel and a number of Arab states can be seen as a factor that reduces the salience of the Palestinian issue and transforms it into a variable within a more complex equation.

Particular attention should be paid to the discursive dimension highlighted by Russian scholars. The conflict is increasingly taking shape within the media and information space, where competing narratives and interpretations vie for dominance. This amplifies its global resonance while also making consensus more difficult to achieve, as differences in interpretation become no less significant than factual disagreements<sup>69</sup>.

Despite differences with Western models<sup>70</sup>, the convergence lies at least in the need to move away from a teleological model of conflict resolution, that is, one oriented toward a definitive resolution. Instead, the conflict is increasingly seen as a system that requires management rather than a final settlement.

When examining different models, several common principles can be identified:

- maintaining a controlled level of violence;
- preventing uncontrolled escalation;
- preserving channels of communication and interaction;
- integrating the conflict into broader regional frameworks.

This approach largely converges with the concept of functional decomposition, while at the same time reflecting a higher degree of realism and a reduced reliance on normative assumptions.

68 Evgeny A. Nesterov, Anna A. Nesterova — “Representation of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict (2023–2024) in Official Statements” // Russian Social Sciences and Humanities Journal. № 3. 2025.

69 Tatyana S. Yakova, The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict in the Mental Landscape of Countries Around the World // Vlast 33. № 3. 2025. C. 166–172.

70 In the Western academic tradition (for example, in the work of Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer), scholars emphasize institutional pressure on Israel as a key mechanism for changing the status quo. By contrast, many Russian researchers argue that such approaches have clear limits, stressing that external pressure does not fundamentally alter the core security parameters that shape Israeli state behaviour.

## Scenarios of the Alternative Day After

In light of current trends, several possible trajectories for the development of the conflict can be identified.

**The inertial scenario** assumes the continuation of the existing model with a gradual institutionalization of asymmetry. It does not require radical political decisions and largely relies on already established practices. A case in point is the situation in the West Bank, particularly in the Jenin area, where regular security operations coexist with formally functioning administrative structures of the Palestinian Authority. Such a configuration does not indicate the breakdown of the system, but rather its adaptation to conditions of permanent instability.

**The regionalized scenario** involves further integration of Israel into regional economic and political structures alongside the relative marginalization of the Palestinian issue. In this case, the conflict persists, but its significance is redistributed.

**The confederal and hybrid scenarios** envisage the development of limited mechanisms of joint governance without a comprehensive resolution of the sovereignty question. Despite their conceptual appeal, their implementation faces significant political and institutional constraints.

Finally, there remains a possibility of a **destabilization scenario** involving escalation beyond a manageable level. However, at the current stage, this outcome appears less likely than scenarios based on the adaptation of the existing system.

In any case, the number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank has exceeded 700,000, making a classical territorial partition virtually unfeasible without large-scale coercive measures<sup>71</sup>. It should also be noted that any scenarios and models may underestimate the risk of sudden destabilization linked to internal political crises in Israel or the radicalization of Palestinian society.

Thus, the *alternative day after* of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be understood not as a single scenario, but as a field of competing models. What they share is a rejection of a linear conception of the peace process and a shift toward more complex, flexible, and often less normatively defined forms of interaction.

71 Peace Now: Settlement Population Statistics (Jerusalem: Peace Now, 2023); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), West Bank Settlements and Palestinian Communities (New York: United Nations, 2023).

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# The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: Dim Scenarios of Peace Prospects

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Peace in the Middle East seems far-fetched more than ever. Discourse about peace and stability has been replaced by war in Iran and Lebanon and genocide in Gaza. There seems to be no more room for diplomacy and negotiations rather strictly violent wars and mass killings.

With the outburst of the American- Israeli war on Iran on February 28, 2026, a whole new Middle East seemed to be in the making, despite the fact that this idea has been always present in the American and Israeli minds, openly expressed in the past by the former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The conflict has spilled over to Lebanon that has suffered from overriding conflicts for decades. This makes the next day seem very ambiguous and unpredictable.

In its wars against the Gaza Strip (2023-2025) and Lebanon (2024 and 2026), Israel has continued to employ the customs it set from its inception, namely granting itself the right to violate the ceasefire agreement and continue bombarding areas or targeting certain persons, civilians included. An average of five Palestinians were killed daily since the war stopped.<sup>72</sup> The Trump Peace Plan seems to be put on hold as the war on Iran has overcome all the developments in the region and shifted priorities.<sup>73</sup>

72 Average of five Palestinians killed by Israel every day in Gaza since ceasefire // The New Arab. 22.02.26. URL: <https://www.newarab.com/news/average-five-people-killed-gaza-every-day-ceasefire#:~:text=Average%20of%20five%20people%20killed%20in%20Gaza%20every%20day%20since%20ceasefire> (date of access: 18.05.2026).

73 Trump's 20-point Gaza peace plan in full // BBC. 09.09.25. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c70155nked7o> (date of access:18.05.2026).

The traditional concept of peace has been diluted to the extent that even the two-state solution that was set in Madrid conference (1991)<sup>74</sup> along with the principle of land for peace are no longer in discourse. “For the past quarter-century, U.S. policy — endorsed by Republican and Democratic administrations alike — has advocated for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the advancement of a two-state solution”<sup>75</sup>; however, this has gradually eroded. “The United States will establish a dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians to agree on a political horizon for peaceful and prosperous co-existence”, according to the aforementioned twenty-point peace plan<sup>76</sup>. In this regard, Edward Said, in his book "The End of the Peace Process," attempted to explore the prospects of the Oslo process, predicting that it "cannot lead to genuine peace, nor can it lay the foundation for peace in the future."<sup>77</sup> He was right long ago.

With the retreat of the peace discourse, there was an advancement of recurring wars that has led catastrophic repercussions. Since 2007, Israel has imposed a severe blockade on Gaza, and has launched wars on the strip in 2008-09, 2012, 2014, 2021 and of course in 2023 that has led to the death of almost 72,000 people<sup>78</sup>. Instead of calling for peace and stability, consecutive Israeli cabinets have launched wars and took measures, whether in Gaza or the West Bank to counter any actual possibility of peace via a two-state solution or any other path.

Ever since the signature of the Oslo Agreements in 1993, which was the first actual agreement between the Palestinians and Israel since the Nakba in 1948, little progress has been done: “Oslo has obviously failed to deliver Palestinian statehood by the end of the “interim

74 Michael Fischbach. Madrid and the Oslo Agreement, 1991–1993: Short-Lived Promises of a Negotiated Settlement // Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question. URL: <https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/171/madrid-and-oslo-agreement-1991-1993> (date of access: 18.05.2026).

75 Two-state solution in the Middle East has been a core US policy for 25 years — is the Trump administration eyeing a change? // The Conversation. 12.06.25. URL: <https://theconversation.com/two-state-solution-in-the-middle-east-has-been-a-core-us-policy-for-25-years-is-the-trump-administration-eyeing-a-change-258753#:~:text=For%20the%20past%20quarter%2Dcentury,negotiations%20between%20Israelis%20and%20Palestinians> (date of access: 18.05.2026).

76 Trump's 20-point Gaza peace plan in full // BBC. 09.09.25. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c70155nked7o> (date of access: 18.05.2026).

77 Khatib G. Palestinian Politics and the Middle East Peace Process (In Arabic). Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2014. P. 14.

78 Death Toll from Gaza Attacks Rises to 72,285 Killed and 172,028 Wounded // Qatar News Agency. 31.03.26. URL: <https://qna.org.qa/en/news/news-details?id=death-toll-from-gaza-attacks-rises-to-72285-killed-and-172028-wounded&date=31/03/2026> (date of access: 18.05.2026).

period”<sup>79</sup>, according to former Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayad. All the ancillary agreements that followed fell short of committing Israel to fulfill any of the terms of those agreements. Israel has refused to even discuss all the issues of the final solution such as: borders, the status of Jerusalem, the return of the refugees and the Palestinian state.

In the occupied West Bank, the Israeli authorities have refused to withdraw their troops, instead they have enhanced the settlements activities: “Under the current far-right government, the number of settlements and outposts in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has risen by nearly 50 percent — from 141 in 2022 to 210 in 2025. Approximately 700,000 settlers, making up nearly 10 percent of Israel’s Jewish population, now live in these illegal settlements”.<sup>80</sup>

In this field, researcher Ahmed Ezz Asaad writes in the book “The General Survey of Israel 2025: Readings in Transformations” that “the Israeli occupation is not just a military occupation, but also a complex settler-colonial reality. The settlements aim to control the largest area of Palestinian land populated by the fewest number of Palestinian residents, according to the logic of ‘more land and fewer people’.”<sup>81</sup> Arab thinker Dr. Azmi Bishara says that “it has become clearer than ever that what is being built in Palestine is a special kind of apartheid system, Israeli in character, and similar to the defunct apartheid system in South Africa. Unlike the Israeli governments since 1967, the current Israeli government clearly states that it will not accept any withdrawal from any part of the territories occupied in 1967, and that it would be satisfied, if it were satisfied, with a functional Palestinian authority or authorities within the framework of Israeli sovereignty.”<sup>82</sup>

79 Faydad S. Oslo Is Dead: How To Fix the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process // Foreign Affairs. 02.10.2014. URL: [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-10-02/oslo-dead?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=dsa\\_middle\\_east\\_tfd\\_am&gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=21047307262&g-braid=0AAAAAD7NbWkVXckWwhCPtm9zHt7xk51NS&gclid=Cj0KCQjw7cLOBhDmARIsAGsuA0myAc8iZd6GntFk3EQYMYN\\_jmBm\\_BMWo\\_QJnSZB72Iawf5h4eMDq-8aAtkVEALw\\_wcB](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-10-02/oslo-dead?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=dsa_middle_east_tfd_am&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=21047307262&g-braid=0AAAAAD7NbWkVXckWwhCPtm9zHt7xk51NS&gclid=Cj0KCQjw7cLOBhDmARIsAGsuA0myAc8iZd6GntFk3EQYMYN_jmBm_BMWo_QJnSZB72Iawf5h4eMDq-8aAtkVEALw_wcB) (date of access: 18.05.2026).

80 Mansour M. How Israel’s record budget will finance expanding illegal settlements // Aljazeera. 02.04.26. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2026/4/2/how-israels-record-budget-will-finance-expanding-illegal-settlements#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20UN%2C%20Israeli,live%20in%20these%20illegal%20settlements> (date of access: 18.05.2026).

81 Several Authors. The General Survey of Israel 2025: Readings in Transformations. Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2025. P. 969.

82 Azmi B. The National Palestinian Project in the Current International/Arab Context // Journal of Palestine Studies (In Arabic). 2026. Issue 146 (Spring). P. 113.

The far- right Israeli government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu has also undermined the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah by imposing a financial blockade by refusing to transfer its revenues in the aim of drying the most essential source of income for it to exercise power.<sup>83</sup> This, in Israel's calculations, would increase public distrust and weaken the PA as a potential partner for peace which Israel is not aiming for.

On the Palestinian front, political divisions have reached unprecedented stages in the last few years. With " Hamas " winning the public elections in the Gaza Strip in a sweeping victory in 2006, a vertical and horizontal divorce has happened between the Palestinians themselves. Recurring Arab attempts by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and others to reconcile " Fatah " and " Hamas " Movements have failed. The two parties have signed multiple agreements but failed to commit to executing them. Differences between the two movements are not related to tactical steps in the conflict or minute details, rather they are related to strategic choices and objectives. While " Fatah " encourages the route of peaceful negotiations, " Hamas " prefers military resistance.

This Palestinian-Palestinian division hinders the possibility of joining collective efforts and building a national strategy on liberation and regaining the lost lands of Palestine. The two groups have not only failed to construct a common plan for the future, but also have occasionally clashed politically and on the ground.

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Hence, with all of the above obstacles, talking about a peace process per se seems illusional; therefore, here are the possible scenarios:

1. If the balance of power keeps tilting towards Israel, it is unlikely that any advancement would take place on the negotiations track or the so- called peace process. More dramatic measures would be taken in the West Bank, in the aim of annexing it and imposing Israeli sovereignty on it (probably with American support) such as multiplying the numbers of settlements and increasing the attacks

83 Palestinian finance minister warns of 'existential threat' as Israel withholds tax revenues // The New Arab. 14.02.26. URL: <https://www.newarab.com/news/pa-minister-warns-existential-threat-israel-blocks-funds> (date of access: 18.05.2026).

of settlers on indigenous Palestinian resident, home demolition and confiscation, etc.

Regarding Gaza, Israel will not hesitate to further disrupt the execution twenty-point peace plan of US President Donald Trump, and the so-called Council of Peace that met only once with minimal effects on the ground. The Israeli policies aiming at separating Gaza and the West Bank as the basic pillars of the awaited Palestinian State will persevere with more deep and intense steps.

There is serious concern that the "Peace Council" project is a real undermining of the United Nations system established after the Second World War in 1945, and the values it represents related to public international law, humanitarian law and human rights, and that it will spread total chaos on a global scale so that international relations in the new era are limited to domination of the strong over the weak.

2. Another fundamental change would be possible if Russia and China step in with what they resemble of international weight. Traditionally, these two nations have been far more supportive of the Palestinian right more than most other regional and international players. They can always counter the American-Israeli wars by intervening, not necessarily at the military level, rather at the political level. The distant and 'soft power' policies adopted by these two powerful nations regarding the Middle East could develop into more active policies that would alter the balance of power or at least make it more 'balanced'.
3. A third, though far-fetched scenario, would be that Washington commences distancing itself from Israel in slow and concrete steps. Though Trump had promised in his electoral campaign that he was the man to end wars and he boasted that he terminated eight wars, there is growing conviction within the United States that Israel had dragged Washington to the Iran war, and that Tehran did not constitute a real threat to the American national security, rather maybe a threat to Israel itself.

Though it is hard to expect any such distancing between Israel and America to materialize soon, but this heated discussion has started to take route in the American mainstream media and social media platforms, especially when it is portrayed to the American taxpayer how much they are paying to support Israel and its never ending wars.

Finally, the Middle East has historically been a hot spot for conflicts, and this does not seem to be ending soon. The longest occupation ever has left its marks on all of the region and the repercussions are unprecedented. More developments seem to be in the making.

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**Russia and West Asia Through the Lens of International Experts  
Special Report**

Designed by Anna Gorokhova

Editors: Mamedov R. (PhD in History), Karslieva V. (PhD in Political Science),  
Isakova A., Yuzopololsky M., Pappinen I.



