
A NEW GEOPOLITICAL ORDER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Introduction

It is uncommon for scholars and policymakers to reach unanimous agreements. However, by the spring of 2025, there emerged a shared belief that the existing international system, as perceived and taught in Western tradition, is no longer viable.

The era following the Cold War, characterized by debates over unipolarity versus multipolarity, has concluded. We have entered a period marked by dynamic interactions among middle powers and diversified bilateral relations across various levels and sectors. Alliances are forming and dissolving with ease, crises are overlapping, and conflicts remain unresolved. The Middle East is undergoing significant transformation in 2025, influenced by a complex interplay of historical legacies, emerging powers, and evolving alliances. As the region grapples with the aftermath of historical conflicts, and shifting global dynamics, the emergence of a new geopolitical order has become a focal point for analysts and policymakers alike.

This White Paper is the result of a collaborative effort to understand this uncertain world, promoting rigorous analysis, innovative thinking, and policy dialogue rooted in regional realities.

The two think-tanks, EDAM and GISR, joined forces to encourage an unprecedented dialogue among scholars, ex-diplomats and experts on the region, to investigate the transformation of the geopolitical order in the Middle East. This proved to be an overwhelming task under the pace of change taking place not only in American foreign policy but also in the regional developments, most clearly in the abrupt fall of Bashar al-Assad and the regime change in Syria. The path toward a new geopolitical order in the Middle East is fraught with challenges and opportunities, as regional actors navigate a multipolar world while addressing their internal complexities. Understanding these dynamics is essential for anticipating the region's future trajectory, as power relations continue to evolve in response to shifting economic, political, and security paradigms.

We convened regional experts on three panels to explore the new Middle Eastern landscape. The first panel in mid-March examined the situation in Gaza, widely described by leading jurists as genocidal, its impact on the Palestinian issue, and the situation in Syria. The second panel in early April assessed the influence of Russia, China, and the United States on the Middle East's geopolitical order. The final panel considered future scenarios and recommendations for Middle Eastern governments and regional powers.

This White Paper is informed by observations and discussions from these meetings, supplemented by comprehensive desk research. It aims to provide more than just a historical overview of the relationships among global powers or the daily developments accessible to most readers. We strive to present an overarching perspective on the region during a period of unprecedented rapid change, offering readers insights into regional collaborative efforts. An interdisciplinary and multicultural team of experts came together to promote an informed dialogue in the region.

The White Paper is structured into four main parts. The section titled "The Big Picture" begins with the most recent developments in the Middle East, primarily Trump's trip to the Gulf. However, it contextualizes these developments within a discussion of the unipolar versus multipolar systems and the United States' position in the region. The section also discusses the effects of Israel's siege of Gaza, the fall of Assad, and the rise of Ahmed al-Sharaa's leadership on the Middle East, considering the wider repercussions and possible solutions. The second part takes a deeper look at the positioning of the major powers, as well as the regional non-Arab actors. These include Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, and Israel. The focus on these actors, who have been involved with the region and, in the case of Turkey, Iran, and Israel, are situated in it, is deliberate. International observers, Arabs, and even these actors themselves consider them as outsiders. The international system's explanations of world order, great powers, and middle powers align with this view, even while considerable distinctions exist among and within Arab states. Since the paper includes recommendations for the Gulf States and regional powers, it is necessary to examine the perceptions and expectations of these "outsiders" to understand their actions better. The third section of the paper draws largely from discussions at our roundtable sessions, which addressed the best- and worst-case scenarios. It is important to remind readers that these sessions occurred before Trump's recent visit to the Gulf. Nevertheless, their relevance remains intact. The fourth section presents the recommendations that emerged from our collaboration and were discussed at length during our final panel. The recommendations are presented in a unique manner to ease their applicability.

In light of current events, the need for common solutions to overarching problems is essential, as is the need for a regional cooperation mechanism in the Middle East that improves economic and security ties within the region. This White Paper presents the norms and principles that would underlie a common economic and security agenda and possible areas of cooperation. It proposes regional development and interconnectivity in economics, trade, and financial exchanges, as well as a regional conflict management and resolution mechanism.

We are observing the crafting of a new geopolitical tapestry, one where the threads are woven not by historically dominant powers with grand strategies but through a mosaic of regional aspirations and global influences. This is the time for bilateral deals, economic leverage and selective engagement over multilateralism. As the Middle East navigates this intricate labyrinth, the key to stability and prosperity lies in fostering inclusive dialogue, mutual respect, and regional ownership of the historical issues that have shaken the region.

Big Picture as of 21 May 2025

The global system is moving towards multipolarity, and middle powers are seeking strategic autonomy within this changing environment. Middle powers view multipolarity as an opportunity to balance between major global powers, pursue independent foreign policies, and improve their economies and regional influence.¹ The United States, which once held a dominant position in a unipolar world, now coexists with other great and middle powers.

Amid this rapidly shifting landscape, the United States has sought to recalibrate its strategy, especially under the Trump administration. The focus has shifted from multilateral engagement to bilateral agreements, emphasizing transactional diplomacy and economic leverage over traditional alliance-building. Trump has a reduced appetite for multilateralism, and his proclaimed “peacemaker” role is aimed towards American isolationism, with waning U.S. involvement in regional diplomacy and state-building initiatives. On the other hand, depending on its economic profitability, the US will continue to have a significant military role through its military bases and as a supplier of weapons. The US appears to be recalibrating its military posture in the Middle East, reinforcing deterrence in the Gulf with aircraft carriers while reportedly drawing down its presence in Syria.

On the other hand, Trump administration’s shift back to transactional foreign policy, with a focus on bilateral deals, economic leverage, and selective engagement, is based on his assumptions of international threats and his own policy making style and leadership goals. The overarching policy objective of President Trump is centered around deal-making. Trump takes pride in his reputation as a deal-maker, approaching both business and political goals through a lens of financial gains for himself and the United States. Therefore, within the context of major power dynamics and his ambition to “Make America Great Again,” it is essential to consider how his actions and approach to foreign policy align with these overarching goals.

First, Trump sees China as the US’s primary adversary and would like to focus most, if not all, of his foreign policy initiatives on addressing the threat of and containing the rise of this main adversary. Therefore, the Trump administration is working to resolve conflicts on other fronts. Second, he would like to see himself as a leader who “makes deals” and “ends wars.”

Under the perceptions that China is the main threat and he is a deal-maker, Trump makes his strategic choices in policy-making. Thus, making Gaza “a freedom zone”, and ending the war in Ukraine, align with this effort to focus on containing China. A closer look at his Gulf trip illustrates this desire as well. The launch of significant Gulf investments in artificial intelligence, along with the announcement of constructing the largest UAE-US AI complex outside the United States, featuring a 5-gigawatt capacity in

¹ Dani Rodrik, “Middle Powers Will Make a Multipolar World,” Project Syndicate, November 11, 2024, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/middle-powers-means-multipolar-world-not-us-hegemony-or-us-china-bipolarity-by-dani-rodrik-2024-11>.

Abu Dhabi, and the establishment of the "US-UAE AI Acceleration Partnership," all served one overarching objective: to shift the focus of GCC states away from China.²

Containing China also means severing the ties between China and the US' other traditional rivals, particularly Russia and Iran. The US's traditional adversary, Russia, while scarred from the events in Syria, has deep historical relations with the Middle East. Further, both Russia and China have been working diligently in the region to strengthen their ties with countries in the area and consolidate their relationships with allies. Iran, another strong adversary to the US in the region, has taken many hits, especially through Israel's aggression and Hezbollah's downfall, especially in the last year. Moreover, Iran has been signaling to reach an accord with the US not to pursue nuclear weapons in exchange for sanctions relief and meeting with the US envoys for nuclear talks in Oman.³

To take an informed look into how the situation on the ground unfolded since Trump's reelection in the US, it will be necessary to take stock of the developments unfolding in the region.

Normalization Before October 7th

The Middle East has never been an easy region to understand and navigate to an outsider since its cultures, government styles, histories, and imaginations of power are diverse. Yet, the 2011 events, which are sometimes defined as Spring and sometimes as Winter, brought about a shift in the regional status-quo, and resulted in many conflicts, making the distinctions among different Middle Eastern states apparent.

Yet, right before the October 7 attacks of Hamas and the unprecedentedly vicious attacks of Israel, a broad wave of normalization was unfolding across the region. The broader Middle East was witnessing a thaw in long-standing rivalries, evidenced by the Saudi-Houthi dialogue⁴, and the China-mediated rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran⁵. The Western observers were also seeing the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords between Arab states and Israel⁶ as a positive development.

² TRENDS Research & Advisory, "An Analytical Reading of the Topics and Outcomes of President Trump's Gulf Visit," May 16, 2025, <https://trendsresearch.org/insight/an-analytical-reading-of-the-topics-and-outcomes-of-president-trumps-gulf-visit/>.

³ Ali Alfoneh, "Iran Backs Diplomacy With Threats of Disruption," Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, May 16, 2025, <https://agsi.org/analysis/iran-backs-diplomacy-with-threats-of-disruption/>.

⁴ Saudi Officials Visit Yemen's Capital for Talks with Houthis," Gulf Today, April 9, 2023, <https://www.gulftoday.ae/News/2023/04/09/Saudi-officials-visit-Yemens-capital-for-talks-with-Houthis>.

⁵ Wang Yi, "The Facilitation of the Reconciliation Between Saudi Arabia and Iran Sets a New Example of Political Settlement of Hotspot Issues," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, January 9, 2024, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjzbhd/202403/t20240319_11262331.html

⁶ U.S. Department of State, "The Abraham Accords," accessed May 23, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords>.

Saudi-Houthi dialogue, marked a significant de-escalation in the nearly decade-long war in Yemen. Since 2015, Saudi Arabia had led a military coalition against the Iran-aligned Houthi rebels, aiming to restore the internationally recognized Yemeni government. However, beginning in 2022 and continuing into 2023, backchannel negotiations and direct talks—facilitated in part by Oman—saw considerable progress. By April 2023, a Saudi delegation visited Sanaa for direct talks with Houthi leaders, the first such visit since the war began, raising hopes for a sustainable ceasefire and a political resolution to the conflict.⁷

Simultaneously, the Abraham Accords, initiated in 2020 under US sponsorship, had brought about the normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states, including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. These agreements represented a dramatic shift in the regional order, as countries historically aligned with the Arab League consensus of conditioning normalization on the resolution of the Palestinian issue opted instead to pursue direct ties with Israel. Yet, it is also necessary to remember that Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been staunch supporters of a two-state solution for Palestine.

In another significant development, China brokered a rapprochement between regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran in March 2023. After years of hostility marked by proxy conflicts and diplomatic severance, the two countries agreed to restore diplomatic relations and reopen embassies.

At the 2023 G20 Summit in India, US President Biden unveiled plans for the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which would build connectivity and infrastructure across geographies, including Israel, Jordan and the Gulf states. The inclusion of Israel in the corridor was particularly notable, as it highlighted how normalization agreements—such as the Abraham Accords—had begun to translate into multilateral economic projects.

However, the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks and the subsequent escalation in Gaza demolished the cooperation efforts. The disproportionate Israeli military response against the Palestinians turned into a human catastrophe and has shaken the entire region. Middle Eastern states' threat perception after the Gaza War was heightened by Israeli aggression and strong Western support behind it, especially from the United States. Normalization in the region and regional integration through economic connectivity does not seem possible in the short term.

Hopes for a New Normalization: Trump's Gulf Trip

Yet, Trump's recent trip to the Gulf Countries, along with his announcements about cooperation and Syrian sanctions, while distancing himself from Netanyahu, creates new opportunities in the region. The rising criticism of Netanyahu and Israel's actions in Gaza by Western countries is a notable development. Trump made his first official overseas visit to the Gulf, visiting Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab

⁷ International Crisis Group, "Catching Up on the Back-Channel Peace Talks in Yemen," International Crisis Group, accessed May 23, 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/catching-back-channel-peace-talks-yemen>

Emirates, signaling the geopolitical significance of the region and the evolving dynamics of US-Gulf relations. The visit signaled that Gulf states transition from historical proxy conflicts to more constructive foreign policies aimed at economic development. The trip produced important outcomes in terms of military cooperation, arms sales, and economic investments.

The visit's historicity also rests on the fact that it did not include Israel, US presidents' regular stopover in the Middle East. The trip also revealed Trump's apparent desire to leverage US-Gulf relationships in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East. He even announced before the trip that the US will adopt the term "Arabian Gulf" or "Gulf of the Arabs" instead of "Persian Gulf," signaling strong "symbolic" support for the Arab Gulf states.⁸ The announced outcomes of the trip also illustrates the transactionality of the US administration and its economic goals. The agreements signed with the UAE and Saudi Arabia focus on technology, artificial intelligence, and Gulf investment in future-oriented sectors of the US economy. The Qatar Investment Authority's plans to invest an additional \$500 billion in the United States over the next decade, targeting sectors such as AI, data centers, and healthcare also align with the US 'reindustrialization agenda.⁹ The fact that these investments are directed toward high growth sectors connected to global technological transformations, Trump seems to have reached his aim in selective engagement with countries according to economic and financial gains. Other issues covered at length during Trump's trip included Iran nuclear talks, advanced defense deals, war in Gaza and the situation in Syria.

The military agreements between the US and Gulf countries involved Gulf's procurement of advanced military systems—ranging from next-generation fighter jets and missile defense systems to drones and space-based capabilities. Yet the most symbolic visit was his trip to the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the largest U.S. military base in the region. Trump emphasized American commitment to Gulf security, criticizing Biden's policies by saying, "We nearly lost the Middle East." He assured that the U.S. would continue to provide protection, stating, "We will protect the Middle East."¹⁰

Trump's trip concluded with a commitment to align with Gulf leaders' preferences for regional peace. By calling for a ceasefire with Yemen's Houthis, negotiating with Iran, meeting with Ahmad al Sharaa in person in Riyadh¹¹ and lifting sanctions on Syria, Trump aims to avoid further entanglement in prolonged conflicts.

⁸ Associated Press, "Trump to Say US Will Call the Persian Gulf the Arabian Gulf, Officials Say," AP News, accessed May 23, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-persian-gulf-saudi-arabia-ce30874c27bc01426d93ad3c65a18844>.

⁹ TRENDS Research Department, "An Analytical Reading of the Topics and Outcomes of President Trump's Gulf Visit," TRENDS Research & Advisory, May 16, 2025, <https://trendsresearch.org/insight/an-analytical-reading-of-the-topics-and-outcomes-of-president-trumps-gulf-visit/>.

¹⁰ TRENDS Research Department, "An Analytical Reading of the Topics and Outcomes of President Trump's Gulf Visit," TRENDS Research & Advisory, May 16, 2025, <https://trendsresearch.org/insight/an-analytical-reading-of-the-topics-and-outcomes-of-president-trumps-gulf-visit/>.

¹¹ Al Jazeera, "Trump meets Syria's al-Sharaa, eyes normalisation of ties with Damascus," accessed May 23, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/14/trump-meets-syrias-al-sharaa-eyes-normalisation-of-ties-with-damascus>

US-Israeli Relations: Fallout with Netanyahu?

Since returning to office in January 2025, Trump has lifted Biden-era restrictions on arms sales to Israel and largely ignored the conflict in Gaza, leaving the field open for Netanyahu to operate as he sees fit,¹² On the other hand, his later moves also showed that the Trump administration can sidestep the Israeli government in ways the Biden administration never attempted or even considered, as evidenced by direct talks with Hamas.¹³

The release of the US-Israeli hostage, direct talks with Hamas and direct discussions with Houthis and the deal with them, all are significant developments.

Trump's special representative Steve Witkoff's direct talk with Hamas ensured that only a day before Trump arrived in the Middle East, Hamas freed a US- Israeli hostage who was taken captive during the Oct. 7th, 2023 attack on Israel. Hamas announced that they agreed to the release for immediate entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza, a call for a permanent ceasefire and negotiations to end the war. The release raised hopes that the United States could push forward a ceasefire. Moreover, during his Gulf trip, Trump acknowledged that Israel had starved Gaza. Yet, Israeli aggression continued during Trump's trip.¹⁴

Trump, during his first term, recognized Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights and moved the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Additionally, he lifted restrictions on the sale of heavy weapons to Israel at the beginning of his second term. Yet, when Netanyahu visited the White House, Trump revealed that the US was in "direct talks" with Iran over its nuclear program, later on, he sent his envoy to engage in direct talks with Hamas. These moves are certainly a sign of a shift in relations between Trump and Netanyahu, Trump trying to divorce American interests from those of Israel and not allowing the former to be a hostage of the latter.

On the other hand, U.S.-Israeli relations are deep, and recent media coverage during the Gulf trip highlighted a growing rift between Washington and Tel Aviv over several issues that have traditionally required extensive coordination between the two allies. These issues include ending the war in Gaza, pursuing a new nuclear deal with Iran, normalizing Israel's relations with the Arab world, arms sales to Arab allies, and recognizing the new government in Syria. However, President Trump downplayed the controversy by telling Fox News that he is "not frustrated" with Netanyahu, insisting that he understands

¹² Charles W. Dunne et al., "President Trump's Gulf Trip: Post-Visit Observations," Arab Center Washington DC, May 20, 2025, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/president-trumps-gulf-trip-post-visit-observations/>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Aya Batrawy and Franco Ordoñez, "Trump Touts 'Freedom Zone' Plan for Gaza While in Qatar," NPR, May 15, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/05/15/nx-s1-5399080/trump-gaza-qatar>.

his "anger over Hamas." An upcoming vice-presidential trip to Israel casts doubts about the severity of these tensions.¹⁵

Western criticism against Netanyahu and Israel's siege on Gaza

Although the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu for war crimes in November 2024, the Western criticism of the Gaza War has not been consistent, especially until Trump's turnaround. Britain, France and Canada's latest statement threatening punitive action, including sanctions as well as the EU's statement of support from the highest representative saying that they will review a pact governing its political and economic ties with Israel due to the "catastrophic" situation in Gaza raises hopes about a firmer stance against Netanyahu.¹⁶

War in Gaza and prospects of a future

The future of Palestine will continue to rely on numerous factors, even beyond a ceasefire. The leadership of the Palestinian people and the role of Hamas remain critical. The international community is closely observing the situation.

While Donald Trump seems to have set aside his shocking plans of a Middle East Riviera in Gaza, and doubled down from his plans to displace Palestinians, during the Gulf trip, he proposed to make Gaza a freedom zone, saying that "Gaza has been a territory of death and destruction for many years," and that he has concepts for Gaza that he thinks are very good.¹⁷

Trump's previous proposed initiatives for Gaza included an AI-generated video to turn Gaza into a Middle Eastern Riviera, and the relocation of Palestinian residents to neighboring countries. Both plans were met with significant backlash. Surely, the second plan was heavily criticized by Egypt and Jordan due to concerns over forced displacement and regional destabilization.

At the current juncture, as of May 23rd, the war in Gaza is normalized and historical Israeli interests in the West Bank raise additional concerns. The West Bank occupies a special place in the nationalist-religious imaginations of the extreme Israeli right-wing conservatives and is considered alongside the Israel's evolving doctrine—focused on long-term regional deterrence and military dominance— whether and how the West Bank will be mentioned in the future of the region is important.

¹⁵ Charles W. Dunne et al., "President Trump's Gulf Trip: Post-Visit Observations," Arab Center Washington DC, May 20, 2025, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/president-trumps-gulf-trip-post-visit-observations/>.

¹⁶ EU Will Review Trade Deal with Israel, Kallas Says," Reuters, May 20, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/eu-will-review-trade-deal-with-israel-kallas-says-2025-05-20/>

¹⁷ Aya Batrawy and Franco Ordoñez, "Trump Touts 'Freedom Zone' Plan for Gaza While in Qatar," NPR, May 15, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/05/15/nx-s1-5399080/trump-gaza-qatar>.

Israel's aggression also affects countries beyond Palestine, including Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Egypt and Jordan face significant security concerns and have increased border measures due to potential spillover effects.

Assad's fall and future of Syria

Asad's fall in early December 2024 was a surprise for many, and it constitutes a major shift for the entire Middle East. The former jihadist Ahmad al Sharaa reformed himself with great international support as the new legitimate leader of Syria, and during Trump's Gulf visit, the US president announced plans to lift the sanctions on Syria. This is a radical change from American foreign policy toward Syria since even before the start of its civil war in 2011. Gulf States' efforts and US's decision on lifting the sanctions would allow Syria not only to reestablish long-severed relations with Arab and other countries but also to seek new economic ties essential for its recovery and reconstruction, especially with international lending institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.¹⁸

As for Ahmad al Sharaa's ability to secure Syria's borders and help build a stable regime within the country, it is too early to comment. Israel's shift toward more proactive and expansionist security policies may pose threats in the region.

Historically, Israel-Syria relations have been characterized by tension. Following the 1973 war, the United Nations brokered the 1974 Disengagement Agreement, which established a buffer zone between Israeli and Syrian forces monitored by the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). Although there is no formal peace treaty, this arrangement has maintained a relatively stable status quo for nearly five decades. Israeli security analysts considered the Assad regime, which came to power in 2000, as a known entity—a consistent adversary who, despite his opposition, maintained a level of stability along the border. Assad supported anti-Israel groups, particularly Hezbollah in Lebanon, and allowed Iran to establish a significant presence in Syria. With Assad's fall, and Ahmad al Sharaa's rise to power, Hezbollah lost an important power base and key political support system. Moreover, Ahmad al Sharaa is careful in not expressing hostility against Israel, and there have even been mediated talks between the two countries, to ease the growing tensions.¹⁹

Considering Syria's future involves focusing on the national reconciliation effort in Syria itself. Experts warn about the revival of ISIS, or at least some disintegrated parts of it, having the potential to be a very dangerous spoiler with a few well-chosen attacks. Given that Ahmad al Sharaa's Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham is

¹⁸ Charles W. Dunne, Dana El Kurd, Imad K. Harb, Khalil E. Jahshan, Assal Rad, and Annelie Sheline, "President Trump's Gulf Trip: Post-Visit Observations," Arab Center Washington DC, May 20, 2025, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/president-trumps-gulf-trip-post-visit-observations/>.

¹⁹ Al-Jazeera, "Syria's al-Sharaa confirms indirect talks with Israel amid soaring tensions," accessed May 23, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/7/syrias-al-sharaa-confirms-indirect-talks-with-israel-amid-soaring-tensions>

a broad coalition itself, there may be tensions within the group, which may prove to be disastrous for the region.

One common trend in the Gaza War and the establishment of the new Syrian government is that they're not humanitarian disasters. They are conflicts with very political causes that cannot be resolved only by additional aid. The accumulated energy from rivalries and the festering disputes exploded. Today, conflict spots are more interdependent, and the pace of change is faster than ever. In order to have regional ownership of the future, regional forces should come together.

On the other hand, through the lifting of sanctions in Syria, as Trump announced in his Gulf trip, if Syria becomes a hub of economic activity, and Syrians who are currently refugees in neighboring countries can return to participate in the reconstruction of their country, this will positively affect many countries in the region, including Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey²⁰.

International Actors in the Middle East

The Middle East has never been outside international actors' interest frames. While Trump was adamant about stopping conflicts and claiming that he was a man of peace during his election campaign, his first 100 days in office, proved his ambitions wrong.

As his administration began to take shape, it became evident that rhetoric alone could not untangle the complex web of conflicts embedded in the region. The Gaza War spiraled out of control, inflaming tensions across neighboring states and pushing regional powers to the brink of strategic recalibration. Trump's Gulf visit, alongside his controversial proposals, underscored the need for more effective diplomacy. Moreover, other international actors, mainly Russia and China, as well as the regional heavyweights, Iran, Turkey and Israel, recalibrated their foreign policies not only to change the situation on the ground but also to benefit from the changing conditions, shifting alliances and the uncertain balances. The search for autonomous foreign policies and economic interests in the shrinking global economy became a priority.

Given the genocidal Gaza War, Trump's outrageous proposals and Western disinterest until very late, regional actors made attempts at producing local solutions, during the emergency Arab League Summit in Cairo in March 2025²¹ and most recently in Baghdad in May 2025.²²

²⁰ Charles W. Dunne, Dana El Kurd, Imad K. Harb, Khalil E. Jahshan, Assal Rad, and Annette Sheline, "President Trump's Gulf Trip: Post-Visit Observations," Arab Center Washington DC, May 20, 2025, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/president-trumps-gulf-trip-post-visit-observations/>.

²¹ Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), "The GCC's Participation in the Emergency Arab Summit Affirms the Steadfast Positions of the GCC Countries in Supporting the Palestinian Cause, Especially in Light of the Rapid & Dangerous Developments the Palestinian Cause is Currently Undergoing," GCC Media Center, March 4, 2025, <https://www.gcc-sg.org/en/MediaCenter/News/Pages/news2025-3-4-2.aspx>.

²² Gaza Likely to Dominate Agenda as Arab League Meets in Baghdad," Al Jazeera, May 17, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/17/gaza-likely-to-dominate-agenda-as-arab-league-meets-in-baghdad>.

The March 2025 Summit, also referred to as the Palestine Summit, demonstrated a clear strategic decision by Arab leaders focusing on peace, security, and conflict resolution. The summit highlighted the collective political and diplomatic maturation among the Arab countries. The leaders issued a declaration showing support for the Palestinian people while addressing many of Israel's and the United States' concerns. Following nearly two years of conflict in the Middle East, they renewed their peace proposal to Israel through normalization and security agreements in exchange for an independent Palestinian state.²³

The summit declaration urged Israel to cease military actions in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, and Lebanon, tying this to peace and security talks with Palestinians. It suggested that normalization talks could start once the two-state solution is in place and the land-for-peace principle is applied. This Arab Peace Plan received support from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as well.²⁴ On March 7th, the OIC adopted a resolution supporting the plan.

Some European capitals, starting with France, Germany, Italy and the UK²⁵ as well as the main European Union institutions also supported the plan. European support for the plan came with a message from the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.²⁶ European Council President Antonio Costa attended the March meeting in Cairo, underlining Europe's support for local mediation efforts, mainly of Egypt and Qatar.²⁷

While the European response to developments in the Middle East since the beginning of the Trump administration's second term has been weak, this weakness resulted in a positive outcome for the region.. With its attention diverted by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the EU's ability to serve as a robust international voice is being tested. Nevertheless, the EU's mostly reactive measures and support for various peace-making and conflict resolution mechanisms could empower Middle Eastern states to take greater ownership of regional issues.

On the other hand, regional international organizations suffer from internal power balances as well. Egypt's position within the Arab League, and Saudi Arabia's role in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are contested by other regional powers. Moreover, historical alliances still looming amongst Western powers

²³ Amr Hamzawy, "The Arab States' Remarkable Moves to Push Peace in Gaza," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 6, 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2025/03/gaza-ceasefire-egypt-reconstruction-palestine-summit?lang=en>.

²⁴ Ibrahim Khazen, Ali Semerci, and Gizem Nisa Cebi, "Muslim Group Rejects Forced Displacement of Palestinians, Backs Gaza Reconstruction Plan," Anadolu Agency, March 8, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/muslim-group-rejects-forced-displacement-of-palestinians-backs-gaza-reconstruction-plan/3503585>.

²⁵ Federal Foreign Office, "Foreign Ministers' Statement: Arab Plan for Reconstruction of Gaza," Federal Foreign Office, March 8, 2025, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/arab-plan-2704386>.

²⁶ European External Action Service (EEAS), "Statement by the High Representative on the Arab Plan for Gaza," March 9, 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/statement-high-representative-arab-plan-gaza_en.

²⁷ António Costa, "Speech by President António Costa at the Emergency Summit of the League of Arab States on Gaza," Council of the European Union, March 4, 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/03/04/speech-by-president-antonio-costa-at-the-emergency-summit-of-the-league-of-arab-states-on-gaza/>.

and Middle Eastern states, European powers have different economic, political and diplomatic links with different powers in the Middle East. This White Paper looks into the non-Arab actors in the region.

Russia: Stretched Resources, Persistent Ambitions

Russia's vision of its regional and global power rests on the imagination that it is a global great power in a post-Western, multipolar world. Its elites used to point to Western policies, values and interventions as the drivers of regional instability and international non-cooperation, especially in cases like Hamas-Israeli war.²⁸ Thus, Russia had a balanced approach to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, approaching the Palestinian side, positioning itself alongside Arab governments and popular sentiments. Yet, while preoccupied with Ukraine, another war front where Trump was adamant about bringing peace to, seems to have left the Middle Eastern space for the Americans. Its traditional influence in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, Libya, and parts of the Gulf, is under severe strain, primarily due to its protracted war in Ukraine, which has diverted military, diplomatic, and economic bandwidth away from the region.

In Syria, the fall of the Assad regime and the rise of Ahmad al Sharaa represent a strategic setback for Moscow. While Russian troops and military infrastructure remain on the ground, their political leverage has weakened as the new leadership seeks to broaden international partnerships and reduce reliance on Moscow and Tehran. Russia was attempting to preserve a foothold in Syria through continued presence at Hmeimim Air Base and the Tartus naval facility, support for security sector restructuring, and limited post-conflict reconstruction support where politically advantageous. Yet, in late January, the new government in Syria terminated the Tartus port agreement with the Russians and signed a new \$800 million deal with the UAE for the strategic Tartus port, marking a significant geopolitical shift in the Eastern Mediterranean.²⁹ Russia's failure to fulfill its commitments—exacerbated by the Ukraine war—pushed Syria toward a more lucrative and reliable Emirati offer.

The Tartus port, once central to Russia's Mediterranean naval presence, will now be modernized and commercially managed by the UAE, signaling a decline in Moscow's regional leverage. This move reflects a broader realignment: Russia loses a considerable amount of influence, the UAE gains soft power and logistical dominance, and Syria opens up to new partners and vital economic support, even at the expense of distancing from Moscow.

In the broader region, Moscow, much like the US, is repositioning itself as a transactional power rather than a security guarantor. Its outreach includes arms deals with Algeria, Egypt, and Iran, though deliveries are delayed due to defense industry strain, energy diplomacy with Gulf producers, particularly within the

²⁸ Alexander Cooley, "Russia Stakes Global Ambitions on Regional Dominance," in *Competing Visions of International Order: Responses to US Power in a Fracturing World*, ed. Leslie Vinjamuri (London: Chatham House, 2025), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/03/competing-visions-international-order/03-russia-stakes-global-ambitions-regional-dominance>.

²⁹ "Syria Signs \$800 Million Deal with UAE to Develop Tartus Port," Al Mayadeen English, May 16, 2025, <https://english.almayadeen.net/news/Economy/syria-signs--800-million-deal-with-uae-to-develop-tartus-por>.

OPEC+ framework, as well as, although limited, engagement with non-state actors in the Sahel region,³⁰ as the Wagner Group's influence has diminished post-Prigozhin.

Russia also seeks to exploit gaps left by Western retrenchment, presenting itself as a pragmatic alternative. However, the loss of credibility, economic decline, and growing international isolation limit its capacity for sustained influence.

China: Strategic Patience Amid Shifting Sands

China imports significant oil from the Middle East, especially from Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Chinese state-owned enterprises have invested in the region as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which promotes infrastructure development and connectivity.

Yet China's assertive foreign policy is based on three initiatives: Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Cultural Initiative. Through these initiatives China has been challenging the US power especially in the Middle East during the past decade. The Saudi Vision 2030, which seeks to reduce economic reliance on oil, diversify income sources, and enhance the role of human capital, aligns well with Chinese initiatives. As a result, the relationship between the two parties has strengthened. Moreover, during the China- Arab States Cooperation Forum in 2024 many cooperation areas materialized through joint China-Arab facilities on artificial intelligence, green transitions, agriculture, information technologies, as well as setting financial and energy cooperation schemes. Some of these include, (i) Cooperation on BeiDou satellite navigation system, which China has positioned as alternative to America's GPS (ii) Financial cooperation on Crossborder Interbank Payment System (CIPS) launched to promote international use of renminbi in trade settlements, (ii) Energy cooperation: Joint development of renewables technologies with Chinese energy companies and financial institutions in participating in renewable energy ventures in Arab nations.³¹

In line with its Global Security Initiative, China has also been fostering military partnerships with Middle Eastern nations, including joint exercises and drone production cooperation with Iran, joint training and arms sales to the United Arab Emirates, as well as potentially dual-use port facilities.³² These security ties enhance China's influence in the region, but they also illustrate China's role in the region as a balancer, not a security guarantor in the face of the significant US military presence in the region.

China is also playing the role of a peace broker, following up on the 2018 proposal of President Xi Jinping to create a new "common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security" architecture in the

³⁰ Christopher M. Faulkner and Raphael Parens, "Russia in Africa: Private Military Proxies in the Sahel," Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, March 24, 2025, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2025/03/24/russia-in-africa-private-military-proxies-in-the-sahel/>.

³¹ Kalpit A. Mankikar, "China's Role in the Middle East: Perspective from India," online panel discussion, April 8, 2025.

³² Yun Sun, "Forecasting China's Strategy in the Middle East Over the Next Four Years," Brookings Institution, December 19, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/forecasting-chinas-strategy-in-the-middle-east-over-the-next-four-years/>.

Middle East during the 8th China-Arab States Cooperation Forum.³³ China played a role in brokering a deal in March 2023 between Saudi Arabia and Iran, two longstanding regional rivals. China achieved another mediation success in July 2024, when 14 Palestinian factions signed the Beijing Declaration on Ending Division and Strengthening National Unity.³⁴

China's role in these on regional peace initiatives show that China's goal is not to replace the United States as the security guarantor in the region, but to displace the United States' regional dominance by facilitating the creation of a new security structure in the Middle East.

Lastly, in line with the China's cultural initiative, 'China-Arab Center of Global Civilisation Initiative' aims to promote political dialogue between political elites, as well as increase tourism between West Asian nations and Beijing.³⁵

Diplomatically, China played a role in brokering a deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran, two longstanding regional rivals. Beijing has also been instrumental in expanding the BRICS multilateral mechanism to include four Middle East countries, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). While through these initiatives, China is positioning itself as a vital player within the security landscape of the Middle East at a time when nations seek alternatives to traditional Western partnerships, it stills maintains a pragmatic and non-interventionist posture. China's broader vision to act as a quiet balancer, offering capital and connectivity, not security guarantees, while promoting a multipolar order grounded in sovereignty and stability.

China has sided with the Palestinians in the Gaza War, denouncing the call to refer to Hamas as a terrorist organisation. Yet its close relations with Iran, and Trump's renewed deep interest in the Gulf countries may jeopardize its desired balancing role in the region.

The regime change in Syria is viewed as an opportunity for Beijing to expand influence through reconstruction contracts, without becoming politically entangled. Beijing's goal is to be a reliable partner to all, offering connectivity and capital, not security guarantees. Its long-term strategy emphasizes multipolarity, sovereignty, and stability, allowing China to act as a quiet balancer without overt dominance.

³³ Meia Nouwens, Henry Boyd, Erik Green, Wolf-Christian Paes, and Albert Vidal, The Evolving Dynamics of China's Middle East and North Africa Strategy: Future Scenarios (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, May 2025), https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content-migration/files/research-papers/2025/05/chinas-middle-east-and-north-africa-strategy/the-evolving-dynamics-of-china-middle-east-and-north-africa-strategy_future-scenarios.pdf.

³⁴ Yun Sun, "Forecasting China's Strategy in the Middle East Over the Next Four Years," Brookings Institution, December 19, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/forecasting-chinas-strategy-in-the-middle-east-over-the-next-four-years/>.

³⁵ Xi Urges Greater Efforts to Build China-Arab Community with Shared Future," State Council of the People's Republic of China, May 30, 2024, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202405/30/content_WS665889d7c6d0868f4e8e7acb.html#:~:text=China%20is%20ready%20to%20establish%20with%20the%20Arab%20side%20the,in%20the%20next%20five%20years

Iran: Ancient Powerful Force

Iran is a significant power in the Middle East with considerable global influence. Its network of allies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, known as the so-called Axis of Resistance, has altered the regional balance of power and contributed to conflicts. Additionally, its military collaboration with Russia and economic trade with China have impacted global alliances.

Iran's defence strategy has been based on fighting proxy wars in other states, and to counter the United States, Israel and its regional competitors through those. Iran's Shia-Muslim identity contrasts with other influential regimes in the region that are governed by Sunni Muslim rulers, such as Saudi Arabia. Iran asserts that its actions are aimed at protecting Shia Muslims in the region from Sunni-led regimes.

Iran's influence in the Middle East is largely derived from its support of Hezbollah since the early 1980s, primarily in Lebanon, as well as in Iraq and Syria.³⁶ Additionally, Iran backs the Yemen-based Houthis, that has disrupted Red Sea trade since 2023 and opposes the internationally recognized government supported by a Saudi-led military coalition.³⁷ In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Iran has been supporting Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad since 1980s.³⁸ Iran provided significant military and economic support to Bashar Assad's regime from 2011 to Assad's last day.

Yet, the Israeli- Iranian skirmishes, Israel's attacks on Lebanon and Bashar Assad's end seriously hurt Iran's foreign policy in the region in 2024. Despite the hits Iran's proxies received during the past year, Iran improved its relations with important powers, such as China, Russia and even Saudi Arabia. In the quest for a multi-polar world order, alliances between old adversaries occur more often. Iran joined the BRICS in 2024, Iran's foreign minister visited China and Russia, and Saudi Arabia's Defence Minister visited Tehran in 2025 before the second round of US-Iran nuclear talks.³⁹

The nuclear talks that restarted after Trump's second term through the support of regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE, are on their fifth round. While meetings in Rome and Muscat make a lot of headlines because of both sides' fiery statements, negotiations continue. Iran has also struck a sensitive chord with the US President when for the first time, hardline Iranian factions started speaking of economic normalization with the US. Iran's hardliner Ali Shamkhani, political advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader, former Minister of Defense, tweeted on Platform X that Iran comes for consensus and balance, not

³⁶ What Is Hezbollah?" Council on Foreign Relations, October 29, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hezbollah>.

³⁷ UK and International Response to Houthis in the Red Sea 2024/25," House of Commons Library, February 4, 2025, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9930/>

³⁸ Erik Skare, "Iran, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad: A Marriage of Convenience," European Council on Foreign Relations, December 18, 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/article/iran-hamas-and-islamic-jihad-a-marriage-of-convenience/>.

³⁹ Saudi Defence Minister Visits Tehran Before Iran-US Talks," Al Jazeera, April 17, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/4/17/saudi-defence-minister-visits-tehran-before-iran-us-talks>.

surrender, and he outlined principles including facilitating investment.⁴⁰ Crossing this red line for Iranian hardliners who usually feared US economic influence would empower moderates within the regime and undermine conservative control of the country was pivotal. Moreover, Iranian officials started openly expressing a desire to normalize trade relations with the US beyond merely lifting sanctions and resuming trade with Europe and Asia. Some circles even promoted the possibility of using frozen Iranian financial assets in the US to purchase American equipment, attempting to entice Washington with the enormity of this sum. In a Washington Post article, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stressed that US sanctions, not Iran's refusal, have deprived American companies of billion-dollar opportunities in Iran's economy.⁴¹

Iran is banking on President Trump's need for investment to soften the US stance on its nuclear program. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's Defence Minister's meeting with Iran's top leader, highlighted a continuing relative improvement in their relationship. This rare visit by such a senior Saudi royal, coming just ahead of the resumption of U. S. Iran nuclear talks is more than symbolic.

Signs of dialogue and normalization amongst long-time rivals in the region are positive developments, signaling the start of an unprecedented era in the region.

Turkey: Careful Balancer of Moral Imperatives and Economic Desires

Turkey plays a multi-dimensional role in the Middle East. It acts as a security actor in Syria and Iraq, maintaining territorial control in northern Syria to contain offshoots of the PKK and manage refugee flows. It is a diplomatic mediator in regional crises, from the Gulf dispute to the Ukraine grain deal. It is an economic partner for Gulf states, North Africa, and post-conflict Syria.

Turkey closely monitors the new Syrian leadership under President Ahmad al Sharaa. Ankara will weigh engagement opportunities against security imperatives, particularly regarding Kurdish autonomy, migration dynamics, and cross-border counterterrorism.

Prior to October 7, Turkey's foreign policy was guided by a three-pronged strategy to secure its place in a transforming regional order. First, Ankara embraced the regional trend toward normalization. Turkey

⁴⁰ Ali Alfoneh, "Final Signaling From Tehran," Arab Gulf States Institute, April 11, 2025, <https://agsi.org/analysis/final-signaling-from-tehran/>

⁴¹ Seyed Abbas Araghchi, "Iran's Foreign Minister: The Ball Is in America's Court," The Washington Post, April 8, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/04/08/iran-indirect-negotiations-united-states/>.

pursued parallel normalization tracks—with Israel⁴², with regional rivals such as the UAE⁴³, Egypt⁴⁴, and Saudi Arabia⁴⁵, and with its Western partners. These efforts aimed to maximize Turkey's strategic flexibility, reduce tensions, expand trade and energy cooperation, and strengthen its position within a more cooperative and economically integrated regional framework.

Second, Turkey sought to integrate itself into emerging visions of regional connectivity and economic order. The announcement of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) by the U.S. and its partners was perceived in Ankara as a direct bypassing of Turkey in the new regional order.⁴⁶ In response, Turkey advanced its own alternative vision—promoting the Iraq-based Development Road initiative—as a competing corridor that would secure its geoeconomic relevance.⁴⁷ This project, framed as a geoeconomic corridor linking the Gulf to Europe via Turkey, marked a decisive shift from Ankara's earlier ideological order-building toward a more pragmatic focus on infrastructure, trade routes, and regional economic integration.

Third, Turkey was undertaking a strategic adaptation to intensifying global competition. Ankara sought to enhance its role in global supply chains, energy corridors, and multilateral platforms.⁴⁸ This geoeconomic turn was designed to increase Turkey's strategic autonomy and resilience in an era of multipolarity, while

⁴² Kemal Kirişçi and Dan Arbell, "President Herzog's Visit to Ankara: A First Step in Normalizing Turkey-Israel Relations?", Brookings, March 7, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/03/07/president-herzogs-visit-to-ankara-a-first-step-in-normalizing-turkey-israel-relations/>.

⁴³ Turkey Moves to Normalize Ties with Saudi Arabia, UAE," Amwaj Media, accessed May 23, 2025, <https://amwaj.media/en/data/country/saudi-arabia/politics/accords-diplomacy/turkey-moves-to-normalize-ties-with-saudi-arabia-uae>

⁴⁴ Ali Bakir, "Egypt-Turkey Normalization: Ankara's Perspective," Atlantic Council, April 12, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/egypt-turkey-normalization-ankaras-perspective/>.

⁴⁵ Sinem Cengiz, "Time for Saudi Arabia and Turkey to Reset the Clock," The Arab News, April 29, 2022, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2073371/>.

⁴⁶ Ragip Soylu, "Turkey's Erdogan Opposes India-Middle East Transport Project," Middle East Eye, September 11, 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-erdogan-opposes-india-middle-east-corridor>

⁴⁷ Iraq, Türkiye, Qatar, UAE Sign Quadripartite Agreement for Development Road Project," Shafaq News, April 22, 2024, <https://shafaq.com/en/Iraq/Iraq-Turkiye-Qatar-UAE-sign-quadripartite-agreement-for-Development-Road-project>

⁴⁸ James M. Dorsey, "Hedging Bets: Turkey Positions Itself as Supply Chain Alternative to China," Responsible Statecraft, June 22, 2020, <https://responsibletatecraft.org/2020/06/22/hedging-bets-turkey-positions-itself-as-supply-chain-alternative-to-china/>, Turkey Lauds Improvement in Relations with China after Long Stagnation," Nikkei Asia, accessed May 23, 2025, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Turkey-lauds-improvement-in-relations-with-china-after-long-stagnation>, Turkey Wants to Join the BRICS Bloc of Developing Economies, Official Confirms," AP News, September 3, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/turkey-brics-developing-economies-erdogan-foreign-policy-15a2428e73e804732085f78b9c5c3c50>.

positioning itself as a key interlocutor between Western and non-Western blocs.⁴⁹ The overall aim was to maintain strategic relevance in a fragmented international system.

The war has diverted Ankara's focus from long-term regional integration and normalization efforts toward the immediate management of crises and instability. It has also exposed the limits of Turkey's cooperation-based, geoeconomic-oriented approach—particularly in a context where hard power dynamics and regional rivalries are resurging.⁵⁰

While Ankara remains committed to its broader foreign policy ambitions, it now confronts a more polarized and unpredictable regional landscape. The Gaza war has intensified the hegemonic rivalry between Israel and Iran, disrupted key diplomatic tracks, and revealed the fragility of emerging regional orders. In response, Turkey is recalibrating its posture: deepening strategic partnerships with Gulf states, expanding defense diplomacy, and reaffirming its normative stance on Palestinian rights. Through these adjustments, Ankara aims to preserve its regional relevance and retain a central role in shaping the contours of the post-crisis Middle East.

The Gaza conflict also reignited pro-Palestinian rhetoric in Turkish politics, putting a stop to the normalization efforts with Israel. The war also elevated the strategic significance of Turkey's relationships with the Gulf states and other former regional rivals. The recalibration of ties with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt has gained urgency, with cooperation now extending beyond trade and investment to encompass defence industry partnerships. Moreover, President Erdoğan envisions Türkiye as a regional power broker, balancing relations with Iran, Israel, Russia, the Gulf, and the West. The country leverages its NATO membership, strategic geography, and pragmatic diplomacy to remain central in regional recalibrations.

Ankara has signed major defence cooperation agreements with both the UAE and Saudi Arabia, including the co-production and sale of Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones and other military technologies.⁵¹ In 2023, Saudi Arabia signed a contract with Turkish drone company Baykar, marking a significant milestone in bilateral defence ties.⁵² In March 2024, Turkey and the GCC initiated negotiations for a Free Trade

⁴⁹ United States Respects Turkish Plan to Join BRICS," Daily Sabah, accessed May 23, 2025, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/united-states-respects-turkish-plan-to-join-brics>.

⁵⁰ Gazze ve Türkiye'nin Bölgesel Diplomasisi," Kriter Dergi, erişim tarihi Mayıs 23, 2025, <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/gazze-ve-turkiyenin-bolgesel-diplomasisi>

⁵¹ Burak Ege Bekdil, "Turkey, UAE Strengthen Defense Industry Ties with Dozens of Deals," Defense News, October 13, 2023, <https://www.defensenews.com/industry/2023/10/13/turkey-uae-strengthen-defense-industry-ties-with-dozens-of-deals/>; Orhan Coskun, "Exclusive: Turkey Sells Battle-Tested Drones to UAE as Regional Rivals Mend Ties," Reuters, September 21, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/exclusive-turkey-sells-battle-tested-drones-uae-regional-rivals-mend-ties-2022-09-21/> ; Pramod Kumar, "Saudi Arabia in Talks for \$6bn Turkish Arms Deal," AGBI, January 28, 2025, <https://www.agbi.com/economy/2025/01/saudi-arabia-in-talks-for-6bn-turkish-arms-deal/>.

⁵² "Saudi Arabia in Pact with Turkey's Baykar Tech to Localise Drone Manufacturing," Baykar Technology, August 7, 2023, <https://www.baykartech.com/en/press/saudi-arabia-in-pact-with-turkeys-baykar-tech-to-localise-drone-manufacturing/>.

Agreement (FTA), aiming to liberalize trade in goods and services and facilitate investments.⁵³ In September 2024, Turkey's Foreign Minister attended an Arab League ministerial meeting in Cairo for the first time in 13 years.⁵⁴ For Ankara, strengthening these relationships is vital for maintaining regional relevance and mitigating the risk of strategic marginalization in an increasingly polarized environment.

Turkey has increasingly shown its interest in minilateralism in the region, forming flexible, issue-specific partnerships that align with its strategic interests. This approach may allow Ankara to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape by engaging in targeted collaborations without the constraints of broader multilateral frameworks. In March 2025, foreign ministers and senior officials from Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon convened in Amman for the “Syria and Neighbouring Countries Meeting.”⁵⁵ The summit focused on enhancing regional security cooperation, particularly in combating terrorism and organized crime. Participants emphasized the importance of a unified approach to counter the threats posed by extremist groups like ISIS, highlighting the necessity of collaborative efforts to ensure the security and sovereignty of Syria and its neighbours.

Israel: The Aggressive Disruptor

Netanyahu, since coming to power in late 2022 through a coalition with hard-liners, has been conducting an increasingly aggressive policy in the region. Netanyahu is facing opposition within Israel as well, and Israel’s war on Gaza has led to a shift in political and military calculations for Israel on two levels. Domestically, the conflict has deepened the divisions within the Israeli society and exposed cracks in the governing coalition, raising questions about the sustainability of this government. Externally, Israel finds itself facing increasing diplomatic isolation around the world despite the wide support from the US administration. It is only very lately, since Trump’s Gulf trip, that Israel has been receiving criticism from its most powerful ally.

The ongoing genocidal Gaza War would have long-term effects in the region. In the long run, Palestinian citizens of Israel and generations of Palestinians with no real future prospect will be more likely to join whatever resistance movements there are. Given the historicity of the latest war, Israel’s ability to live with its neighbors in the region is seriously under strain.

While all these non-Arab actors have their own interest and threat frames and strategic calculations, their economic and political relations with each other as well as positionings towards how the rest will behave

⁵³ Tuvan Gumrukcu and Alexander Cornwell, “Turkey and Gulf States to Launch Talks for Free Trade Pact,” Reuters, March 21, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-gulf-states-launch-talks-free-trade-pact-2024-03-21/>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Iraq to Discuss Security Cooperation in Amman,” Turkish Minute, March 8, 2025, <https://www.turkishminute.com/2025/03/08/turkey-jordan-syria-iraq-to-discuss-security-cooperation-in-amman-report6/>.

surely affect the developments in the region. There are many tables for all players, and each time a table turns, there is a new positionality that each actor has to take.

Best- and Worst-Case Scenarios

Under the constantly changing situation on the ground, Middle East is faced with multiple risks. Conventional military escalation, as well as asymmetric and hybrid warfare as the outcome of the worst-case scenario is possible. In both outcomes, the regional spill-over is inevitable given the historical rivalry and competing positions of actors.

A military escalation amongst any group of states will bring about not only humanitarian destruction, water and food scarcity, but also further economic and political strains on the region. Some in the Trump administration who would like to see war with Iran or Israelis who are emboldened by their war in Gaza and would be willing to make some strikes on some of the nuclear facilities, this would have implications for all coastal regions of the Gulf, including Kuwait, Saudi, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE. Any contamination of those waters by hitting nuclear sites would have serious consequences for all of these actors since their sole source of water stems from there. Food trade disruption through the Strait of Hormuz would have significant and immediate impact on Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait.

In terms of hybrid and asymmetric warfare, the risk of a wider war involving Hezbollah is growing. Iranian and Israeli calculations are being tested in real time, with direct strikes already altering the unwritten rules of deterrence. The Red Sea remains a pressure point, despite the recent direct cease-fire agreement between the US and the Houthis right before Trump's Gulf Trip.⁵⁶

The wider Gulf could become a flashpoint depending on how the Iran-Israel dynamic unfolds.

At the same time, Syria is once again at risk of being pulled back into instability. The de facto fragmentation of the country continues. While the interim Ahmad al Sharaa regime is gradually gaining political recognition with expected normalization in the Arab world, governance remains weak. Syria will be testing its Islamist limits because now that the competition is not between the incumbent and the Islamist, but a totally collapsed typical Arab single-party state and the unleashed popular sentiment which is increasingly brought into the political arena by different players in Syria. So, the Syrian interim government might find itself in a position that it has little chance, if any, to establish a power monopoly over the country. We shall see a reactive United States using its military muscle as an organizing power. On the other hand, Iran continues to seek opportunities to deepen its presence on the ground. Israel is accelerating its strikes on Islamic revolution regarding the targets. Russia retains military footprints that exist in an uneasy equilibrium, especially with its fading power because of the war in Ukraine. Meanwhile,

⁵⁶ Giorgio Cafiero, "How Trump's Pact with the Houthis Left Israel in the Cold," The New Arab, May 13, 2025, <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/how-trumps-pact-houthis-left-israel-cold>

Turkish forces in the north are navigating complex dynamics vis-à-vis PKK affiliated groups and local actors. The potential for flare-ups is always present in the medium term.

The Palestinian question, and how it is affected by all these risks after the war in Gaza and possible conflict involving West Bank, will be a liability for all Arab states before their peoples, and no longer a rallying point for the rulers, as it has been until now. Jordan and later on Egypt will be affected most. Given Jordan-Saudi relations will also be important to watch, given how the sectarian relations play in the region.

The potential ramifications of instability in Syria and Palestine will significantly affect Turkey, Lebanon, and Egypt due to cross-border population movements. Additionally, assessing the impact of conventional and hybrid warfare on the Gulf States necessitates close monitoring of Russia's activities in the Sahel region.

Moreover, falling oil prices, inflationary pressures and a decline in overall trade would also affect the region. In the event of a larger economic crisis, we might see the US and China pushing for a bifurcation a la Cold War style, pushing the countries in the region away from a multipolarity.

While multipolarity comes with its own uncertainties, the best-case scenario entails an inclusive regional dialogue framework derived by some level of economic integration and shared risk perception and regional ownership. For Gaza, need for a durable ceasefire, structured humanitarian access and political dialogue that addresses both reconstruction and governance of the territory are urgent.

Recommendations for the region's governments

Recommendations to regional actors and governments rest on two complementary pillars. The first is a regional-development and interconnectivity agenda built around shared common economic and other vital interests. The second pillar is a standing regional platform for dialogue and cooperation that includes conflict-prevention, conflict-management, and conflict-resolution mechanisms. These pillars must be rooted in genuine regional ownership.

For regional ownership to take hold, common norms and principles must be (re)negotiated and codified amongst the actors in the region.

Norms and principles:

1. When human values and laws of human decency call for action—as is unmistakably the case with the ongoing catastrophe in Gaza, widely described by leading jurists as genocidal—countries must look beyond narrow self-interest and confront aggression, even when the aggressor is a militarily powerful state such as Israel.
2. To avoid over-reliance on the goodwill of any single nation or leader, governments should prioritize strategic self-reliance, in critical domains tied to national security and sovereign decision-making. Where external dependence is unavoidable, they must diversify trade and security partnerships, recognising the realities of a multipolar international system and avoiding entanglement in great-power rivalries.

3. All countries desire peace, but their respective definitions of peace often diverge. A shared vision of “positive peace” (absence of violence and the presence of justice and human security) needs to be articulated through an inclusive regional process. For example, establishing a credible transitional justice system in Syria- combining accountability, reconciliation, and reconstruction- is essential to prevent renewed conflict.
4. The normative leadership required to advance mediation efforts should reside within the region. The facilitation roles of Qatar and Oman with Iran, and Türkiye’s broader shuttle diplomacy- from the Black Sea grain corridor to prisoner exchanges- are noteworthy.

Possible Areas of cooperation

A cooperative regional framework should blend innovative, economy-driven collaboration, inclusive security arrangements, and the phased reintegration of conflict zones (such as Syria, Yemen, and, eventually, Gaza) into a wider regional architecture.

Areas for economic collaboration:

The Gulf Cooperation Council can assume a central role, deepening internal integration and partnering with neighbours. Past rifts- notably the 2017-21 Qatar blockade- must not recur. By forging consensus within the GCC, states can strengthen economic security for regional trade and collective representation.

To boost regional trade and bolster food, water and energy security, the GCC could:

- Create Gulf Emergency Food-Security Reserve, modelled on ASEAN’s rice-reserve mechanism, through pooled procurement and shared strategic stocks.
- Expand joint desalination, aquifer-recharge, and water-grid projects by leveraging academic institutions and private-sector partnerships to cut energy costs and build resilience.
- Pursue co-ownership of new multimodal transit corridors- linking Gulf ports to East Africa, the Caucasus, and Central Asia- through public-private consortia.
- Coordinate positions inside OPEC+ so that collective action, rather than unilateral moves, cushions oil-price shocks.
- Accelerate the long-discussed GCC Railway and integrate digital-finance platforms to streamline customs, logistics, and cross-border payments.
- Pool sovereign-wealth-fund capital to incubate tech “unicorns” and channel venture funding into knowledge-economy clusters- from AI and biotech to green hydrogen.

- Launch a GCC-Plus Cyber-Security Task Force (bringing in Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq) to share threat intelligence and set regional data-protection standards.
- Found a Gulf Strategic Investment Fund (GSIF) that shifts from ad-hoc humanitarian aid to structured development finance; Qatar's Development Laboratory could form the nucleus of a GSIF.

Areas for security collaboration:

Two issues require urgent, region-led solutions: (a) the Palestinian question and (b) the future security order with Iran. A binding regional security compact that re-affirms the two-state formula for Palestine and rejects a military strike on Iran's territory could deter extra-regional intervention and signal the region's determination to shape its destiny.

- Draw on regional expertise to create an OSCE-style Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Middle East (CSCME). This could evolve from incremental reforms of the Arab League, GCC, and the Baghdad Conference process, filling long-standing gaps in conflict prevention, peace-building, and post-conflict reconstruction.
- Institutionalize regular Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues (governments plus experts and civil society) to embed habits of cooperation and produce confidence-building measures (CBMs) on maritime security, missile transparency, and de-escalation hotlines.
- Regional ownership will become reality only through sustained cooperation and tangible success stories across a spectrum of issues- from climate adaptation to digital connectivity.

Risk Areas to Monitor (for Think Tanks):

1. Escalation risks in flash-points such as the Red Sea, Gaza-Lebanon-Jordan spillover, north-east Syria, and Iraqi theatres involving Iran-aligned groups.
2. Emerging tactical partnerships among former rivals: Turkish-Egyptian and Saudi-Iranian rapproachments, plus Turkish-Gulf cooperation in Iraq and the Horn of Africa. Track non-state actors in Somalia, Sudan, and throughout the Red Sea basin.
3. Assist in transforming ad-hoc defence cooperation into a rules-based, transparent regional-security architecture with shared early warning, ISR, and crisis-management mechanisms.
4. Work with Western partners to reframe Middle East conflicts in nuanced terms, moving beyond binary sectarian or great-power lenses and emphasising socio-economic root causes and governance deficits.

Appendix

Online Panel Discussion 1

Theme: Shifting Dynamics in the Middle East Under the New US Administration, with a specific focus on the situation in Gaza and the future of the Palestinian issue

Date and Time: 17 March 2025, 12:30 to 14:00 (Turkey-Qatar time)

Participants (in alphabetical order):

1. Ambassador Mohamed Ali Chihi (R.), Executive Director of GISR
2. Ambassador Şafak Göktürk (R.)
3. Ambassador Tacan İldem (R.), Chairman of EDAM, Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies
4. Prof. Dr. Zeynep Alemdar, Professor of International Relations and Political Science and Director of the Foreign Policy Program at EDAM
5. Fadel Abdulghany, founder and executive director of the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)
6. Dr. Abdullah Aqrabawai, Founding Director of the African Center for Research and Policy Studies (Afropolicy), Istanbul
7. Mudassar Ali Baig, Research Fellow at GISR
8. Dr. Chris Doyle, Director of Caabu and its lead spokesperson
9. Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar, independent researcher

Online Panel Discussion 2

Theme: Influence and interests of external superpowers on the geopolitics in the Middle East region, focusing on the superpowers Russia, China, and the United States.

Date and Time: 8 April 2025, 12:00 to 14:00 (Turkey-Qatar time)

Participants (in alphabetical order):

1. Ambassador Mohamed Ali Chihi (R.), Executive Director of GISR
2. Ambassador Tacan İldem (R.), Chairman of EDAM, Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies
3. Prof. Dr. Zeynep Alemdar, Professor of International Relations and Political Science and Director of the Foreign Policy Program at EDAM
4. Mudassar Ali Baig, Research Fellow at GISR
5. Dr. Logan Cochrane, Associate Professor in the College of Public Policy at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU)
6. Dr. Mitat Çelikpala, Professor of International Relations and the Vice-Rector at Kadir Has University, Istanbul
7. Dr. Kalpit A. Mankikar, Fellow with the Strategic Studies Program at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi
8. Prof. Dr. Çağdaş Üngör, a fellow at the Center for Turkey Studies of Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) in Berlin
9. Dr. Ka Lok Yip, Assistant Professor at the College of Law, Hamad Bin Khalifa University

Online Panel Discussion 3

Theme: Possible Policy Recommendations for Gulf States and Regional Powers in the New Middle East
(Dis)Order

Date and Time: 21 April 2025, 16:00 to 18:00 (Turkey-Qatar time)

Participants (in alphabetical order):

1. Ambassador Mohamed Ali Chihi (R.), Executive Director of GISR
2. Ambassador Şafak Göktürk (R.)
3. Ambassador Tacan İldem (R.), Chairman of EDAM, Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies
4. Prof. Dr. Zeynep Alemdar, Professor of International Relations and Political Science and Director of the Foreign Policy Program at EDAM
5. Mudassar Ali Baig, Research Fellow at GISR
6. Dr. Logan Cochrane, Associate Professor in the College of Public Policy at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU)
7. Dr Khalid Abdulaziz Al Khulaifi, Research Associate at GISR
8. Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar, independent researcher

MIDDLE EAST OVERVIEW - KEY DEVELOPMENTS SINCE TRUMP'S ELECTION⁵⁷

2024

5 Nov. | Israel

Nationwide protests erupt after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fires Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

11 Nov. | Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia to Host Arab-Islamic Summit to Halt Israeli Aggression on Palestinian, Lebanese Territories

19 Nov. | Saudi Arabia

China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran meet to reaffirm their commitment to normalization of Saudi-Iranian relations.

21 Nov. | Netherlands

The International Criminal Court issues arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant for alleged war crimes.

26 Nov. | Lebanon

Israel and Hezbollah reach a ceasefire agreement after 14 months of fighting

⁵⁷ The timeline is prepared by EDAM Researcher Alina İltutmuş, compiled from the following resources:

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), "Middle East Overview – February 2025," February 7, 2025, [https://acleddata.com/2025/02/07/middle-east-overview-february-2025/.*:contentReference\[oaicite:2\]{index=2}](https://acleddata.com/2025/02/07/middle-east-overview-february-2025/.*:contentReference[oaicite:2]{index=2})

Tracking Trump – Everything That's Happened in the President's First 100 Days,"The Guardian, April 29, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/29/donald-trump-first-100-days-tracker>.

Tracking Trump – Everything That's Happened in the President's First 100 Days,"The Guardian, April 29, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/29/donald-trump-first-100-days-tracker>

"Middle East Crisis Live,"The Guardian, accessed May 23, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/series/middle-east-crisis?page=3>.

27 Nov. | **Syria**

HTS-led rebels launch a major offensive against the Syrian regime and gain control of large parts of the north.

8 Dec. | **Syria**

The Assad regime collapses after HTS-led rebels take control of Damascus.

9 Dec. | **West Bank**

Israeli authorities seize a large amount of Palestinian-owned land in East Jerusalem.

14 Dec. | **Red Sea**

The USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier enters CENTCOM's area of command.

16 Dec. | **Syria**

US airstrikes kill 12 ISIL members in the desert of Homs province.

16 Dec. | **Syria**

Russian military has begun large-scale withdrawal from Syria, US and Western officials say

21 Dec. | **Israel**

A Houthi ballistic missile hits Jaffa and causes light injuries to 37 civilians.

22 Dec. | **Yemen**

US launches airstrikes against Houthi targets in Yemen

26 Dec. | **Yemen**

Israeli warplanes bomb airports and power stations in Sanaa and al-Hudadaya areas, killing six civilians.

28 Dec. | **Israel**

Nationwide demonstrations call for a deal to secure the release of hostages in Gaza.

30 Dec. | **Yemen**

US forces bomb multiple Houthi drone and missile production facilities and other military sites in Sanaa.

31 Dec. | **Yemen**

STC forces forcibly take over an IRG checkpoint near the presidential palace in Aden.

2025

10 Jan. | **Yemen**

Israeli warplanes launch multiple strikes on Houthi targets in Sanaa, al-Hudayda, and Amanat al-Asima.

13 Jan. | **West Bank**

Israeli forces raze agricultural, residential, and commercial properties in 11 locations across the West Bank.

18 Jan. | **Israel**

The government approves a ceasefire and hostage release deal with Hamas.

18 Jan. | **U.S.**

Trump was sworn in as the 47th commander in chief under the dome of the US Capitol

27 Jan. | **Lebanon**

The ceasefire deadline for Israel to withdraw is extended until 14 February.

30 Jan. | **Syria**

Russia withdraws military equipment from the Syrian port.

18 Feb. | **Lebanon**

The IDF largely completes its withdrawal from southern Lebanon, with troops remaining at five outposts.

5 Feb. | **U.S.**

Trump says US will 'take over' Gaza Strip in shock announcement during Netanyahu visit.

5 Feb. | **U.S.**

Trump reimposes 'maximum pressure' on Iran, aims to drive oil exports to zero.

24 Feb. | **Israel**

The IDF deploys tanks to Jenin city and refugee camp for the first time in 20 years.

27 Feb. | **Turkey**

The Kurdistan Workers Party's jailed leader Abdullah Öcalan calls on his movement to disarm.

4 Mar. | **Yemen**

The US State Department designates the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organization.

4 Mar. | **Egypt**

Arab summit convened in Cairo adopts an Egyptian plan for the reconstruction of Gaza.

7 Mar. | **U.S.**

President Donald Trump sends a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei about negotiating a nuclear deal.

7 Mar. | **Jordan**

Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Iraq to discuss security cooperation.

7 Mar. | **Jordan**

Jordan hosts summit to address Syria's transition, regional stability.

8 Mar. | **France, Germany, Italy and the UK**

Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, Italy, and the UK issue a joint statement endorsing an Arab-led plan for the reconstruction of Gaza, emphasizing coordinated international support for sustainable recovery.

8 Mar. | **Saudi Arabia**

Organization of Islamic Cooperation urges global financial support for Gaza reconstruction at Jeddah summit.

9 Mar. | **European Union**

The European Union welcomes the Arab Recovery and Reconstruction Plan presented at the Cairo Summit on 4 March that was also adopted by the OIC in its statement.

16 Mar. | **Yemen**

US launches wave of air strikes on Yemen's Houthis.

21 Mar. | **U.S.**

UAE commits to a 10-year, \$1.4 trillion US investment, White House says.

28 Mar. | **Saudi Arabia**

Syria and Lebanon signs an agreement on border demarcation.

29 Mar. | **Syria**

President Ahmad al-Sharaa announces the formation of a new transitional government.

12 Apr. | **Oman**

The United States and Iran commence indirect nuclear negotiations in Muscat.

12 Apr. | **Syria**

Syria's new leader makes his first visit to the United Arab Emirates.

15 Apr. | **Qatar**

Syria, Lebanon leaders in Qatar for first official visits

16 Apr. | **Iran**

IAEA director, starting visit to Tehran, says Iran not far from creating nuclear weapons

17 Apr. | **Iran**

Saudi Arabia's defense minister visits Tehran to meet Supreme Leader Khamenei

17 Apr. | **Russia**

Russia's Putin, Qatar's emir discuss Syria and Gaza at Moscow talks.

19 Apr. | **Italy**

2nd round of indirect US-Iran nuclear talks begins in Rome.

26 Apr. | **Italy**

After wrapping up the third round of nuclear talks, the US and Iran convey cautious positivity.

27 Apr. | **Qatar**

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan met with Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Doha.

27 Apr. | **Qatar**

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan meets with Hamas Shura Council Chairman Mohammed Ismail Darwish and his accompanying delegation in Doha.

27 Apr. | **Syria**

Israeli military strikes near Syria's presidential palace after warning over sectarian attack.

30 Apr. | **Yemen**

UK joins US air strikes on Houthi rebel sites in Yemen

4 May | **UAE**

Turkish Foreign Minister Fidan heads to UAE to tackle Gaza, Syria issues.

5 May | **Israel**

Israel security cabinet approves plan to capture; Gaza, official says.

5 May | **Turkey**

U.S. President Donald Trump and Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan hold a telephone call on Monday that both leaders describe as "very productive" and say they discuss everything from how to end Russia's war in Ukraine to Syria and the Gaza war.

5 May | **U.S.**

Trump announces deal to stop bombing Houthis, end shipping attacks

8 May | **Syria**

Syrian president says his government is holding indirect talks with Israel.

9 May | **Azerbaijan**

Israeli and Turkish officials meet in Azerbaijan on for talks aimed at establishing a deconfliction mechanism amid growing tensions between the two countries as they extend their military influence in Syria.

11 May | **Oman**

Iran and US begin 4th round of negotiations over Tehran's nuclear program in Oman.

11 May | **Iran**

Iran calls latest nuclear talks with US 'difficult' but both sides agree negotiations will continue

12 May | **Turkey**

The Foreign Ministers of Türkiye, Jordan, and Syria came together as part of a trilateral meeting.

12 May | **Qatar**

Israel sending negotiators to Doha for hostage talks, after US-Israeli captive freed.

13 May | **Israel**

Freed Israeli-American hostage leaves Gaza, Israel says no ceasefire

13 May | **Saudi Arabia**

Trump starts Gulf visit in Saudi Arabia, focus on mega economic deals.

13 May | **Saudi Arabia**

Trump meets with interim Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharra, a first between the nations' leaders in 25 years.

13 May | **Saudi Arabia**

President Donald Trump attends the Saudi-US Investment Forum in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

13 May | **Saudi Arabia**

Trump announces plan to lift punishing sanctions on Syria.

13 May | **Qatar**

Trump visits Qatar, the second stop on his Middle East tour, where he receives a lavish welcome and announces a deal for Qatar to purchase up to 210 jets from Boeing.

15 May | **Qatar**

Qatari PM criticizes Israel for "bad signal" over Gaza ceasefire talks.

15 May | **U.S.**

Trump says US should 'take' Gaza and turn it into 'freedom zone'

16 May | **UAE**

Trump announces \$200 billion in deals during UAE visit, AI agreement signed.

17 May | **Hamas**

Hamas confirms new Gaza ceasefire talks with Israel in Qatar on May 24.

17 May | **Iraq**

34th Arab League Summit held in Iraq with focus on Palestinian issue.

17 May | **Iraq**

At the Arab League summit in Baghdad, Arab leaders called for a ceasefire in Gaza as Israel escalated its attacks on the besieged strip.

17 May | **Iraq**

Arab League calls for funds to rebuild Gaza at summit in Baghdad.

18 May | **Palestine**

Israel decides on Sunday to resume the entry of a “basic quantity” of food into Gaza, Benjamin Netanyahu’s office says.

18 May | **Iran**

Iran warns US nuclear talks will fail if enrichment demand stands