



Geneva Institute of International Relations

## IRAN-ISRAEL MUTUALLY-ASSURED-DETERRENCE

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This article explains the qualitative assessment of Iran-Israel deterrence by examining the layers and theatres in which it operates. Sovereignty and territorial integrity are sacred to all countries. As the regional theatre continues to be characterized by an unending cycle of hostilities and wars' consequences, there is a long and complex deterrence campaign by both these countries. It is a complicated bilateral deterrence story with a complex history of events, and many elements: the diplomatic, military, and regional arenas, with hawks dominating deterrence and defense planning on both sides. How to read and how to interpret the **Iran-Israel** adversarial type of deterrence is not easy because each views the other as a grave threat to its security. And recently, it has shifted from a defensive to an offensive readiness posture. Both have a straightforward military strategy purpose and both belong to the opposite ends of the regional balance of power, hostile but balanced until the **Hamas** attack in October 2023 that revived the issue of Palestinian state powerfully and gradually led to the **Iran-Israel** war, June 13-25, 2025.

## Introduction

States articulate and manipulate the offensive and defensive capabilities and tactics to serve their strategic goals. So, the intention behind tactics and capabilities highlights whether it aims to weaken another country's strength, to achieve conquest, to pursue territorial ambitions, to cause an internal country's collapse, or to affect a regime change. The case of **Israel-Iran** is an antagonistic and provocative deterrence front, aiming at the defeat of the adversary. The deterrence game between these two opponents becomes mutual and existential. It involves a balance of threats, capabilities, and great power alliances, leading to a spiral of attack-counterattack, with one's right to self-defense vs. the other's offensive. **Iran** has managed the escalation thresholds with **Israel** and the **US** through different regional partners to maintain strategic depth and a defensive perimeter for the conflict not to reach its borders. However, the events of 2023-2024 created new crossroads for Iran-Israel deterrence and the whole region itself. Consequently, the nuclear deterrence has gained priority over the previous contest for strategic depth and an outer defensive perimeter. Different forms of alignments are going on between partners of **Iran** and **Israel** cooperating to their tune, even beyond **Iran's** or **Israel's** orbit. Furthermore, protests for social freedoms and economic frustration have captured **Iran**, **Israel**, and many more countries all over the world- democracies and non-democracies.

Power projection and adversarial deterrence for absolute security create a security dilemma for the other side, which is unsure whether such power aggregation is defensive or offensive. The course of events usually dictates the formation of alliances and counter-alliances, the formation of equally powerful coalitions, and an arms race. The background of alliances or partnerships depends on the alignment of interests or ideology. It determines how firmly to commit to this partnership and how to respond in their specific wars and conflicts with the adversary. Furthermore, whatever the text of the agreement, neither the alliance nor the partnership can be firm in the fluidity of international affairs because even the ally/partner may consider realignment in other fronts with

other countries. When it comes to hot crises, strong commitment, weak commitment, neutrality, or abandonment, it has to do with the choice of strategy a country prefers. According to **Glenn H. Snyder**, “*At the same time that allies deal with the adversary, they deal also with each other. The alliance and adversary games proceed simultaneously and complement each other in various ways. Strategies and tactics in alliance game will have direct effects in the game, and side-effects in the adversary game.*”<sup>1</sup> Between **Iran** and **Israel** there is the game of far-reaching expansionist aims (**Israel**) versus **Iran**’s preservation of the status quo. Both stand by a policy of firmness in their game, and the firmness policy is treated as aggressiveness toward each other because a lack of firmness produces insecurity. **Israel** looks for coercion together with the US and Europe, and **Iran** looks for resistance. Conciliation with the opponent will sound like appeasement of the adversary. The magnitude of the security dilemma in **Iran-Israel**’s deterrence is intricately linked with their arms race and alliances/alignments they create. The degree of conflict and tension determines the support and supplies they receive in times of war from the **US-Europe** to **Israel**, and from China-Russia to Iran, according to their strategic interests in this adversarial bilateral deterrence. Furthermore, such alignments and alliances include both democratic and authoritarian states for the game purposes of the **US, Russia, China, Israel, Iran**, and every other country involved in any specific security dilemma.

***Deterrence Background:*** Deterrence strategy is the cornerstone of a country’s national security. It is the country’s most important strategy for relevant analysts and military planners, with the aims of defense or offense, for belligerents near or far, and it aligns with a state’s hidden intentions. The intention guides states’ incentives to embark on policies of aggression, expansion, conquest, or status quo at the regional and the global levels, an arms race, a blitzkrieg or an escalation. Insights into the nuances and context of this strategy come from the country’s past. However, each individual deterrence situation is unique on its own.

Deterrence articulates a country’s goals for peace and war, its orientation toward allies, opponents, and countries that pose risks. The threat assessment determines the layers of peaceful or aggressive neighbouring countries; strategic bilateral and trilateral relationship with allies; alignment with great powers and global institutions; and the hostile intentions of the immediate and necessary defense perimeter. Therefore, the policymakers who lead the countries’ deterrence orientation - weaker or stronger, expansionists or merely defending the country’s territorial sovereignty, should be careful not to fall prey to intentional domestic or external political manipulation as there are emboldened dovish, hawkish and nationalist voices, puppets, and even malicious external forces. Therefore, deterrence strategy, whatever it is named, tailored, extended, forward, defensive, or offensive, remains the most important strategy for the country’s skilful policymakers.

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<sup>1</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics, *World Politics*, 36:4, 1984, pp. 461-491, p. 468.

For the defensive realists, states act aggressively when their security is threatened; for the offensive realists, states should always be aggressive to survive; for the structural realists, states are always sensitive to the constraints and environment; therefore, when they are strong, they act as they like in the international anarchy.<sup>2</sup>

In the Middle East, **Israel** had to resist provocations and fight wars from all the neighbouring countries. But as it began to establish a positively approved atmosphere for diplomatic relations in the region, it preferred to dictate its own terms for security in the creation of a new regional security architecture. In such a theatre, **Israel** competes with **Iran**, **Turkey**, **Egypt**, and **Saudi Arabia**, which are the other significant players of the Middle East. The current new organizing principle in the Middle East does not center around **Israel** or the West alone. There are other equally powerful and assertive players in the region, each with its own accord: the Russian accord, the Turkish accord, China's accord, and the US accord, not just the Abraham accords. Each has its unique irreplaceable strategic value, counteracting the other's influence without direct military involvement. **Israel** involves itself militarily due to reliance on Western support and calls for security guarantees from the **US** in every form, against **Iran** and all other Israeli opponents. In the Israeli mindset and policy planning, protection through strength rather than peace process, and no momentary agreement unless at a moment suitable to its own terms, should be accepted. Meanwhile, America wants to avoid new military entanglements abroad, as it needs to save its capabilities for its peers, **China**, **Russia**, and **India**.

There is an unsettling deterrence theatre between **Iran** and **Israel**. Military-diplomatic-ideological pressures are tools of both **Iran's** and **Israel's** deterrence. In the conceptualization of recent events, 2023 is still ongoing, and the post-**Hamas** attack brought an escalation with **Israel** on many fronts. The leadership of **Hezbollah**, **Iran**, and **Palestine** was assassinated. The critical logistical corridors of **Hezbollah** through **Syria** have been damaged. The weakening of the proxies' leadership and the war with **Israel** shifted **Iran's** attention toward nuclear self-sufficiency and careful preparation, including diplomatic maneuvering and readiness for confrontation. Axis remains a strategic necessity for **Iran's** deterrence and outer defensive perimeter. Even **Israel** aims for a defensive perimeter and strategic depth, but lacks them. Strategic and tactical shifts do not sound like weaknesses but rather new Iranian-calibrated regional dynamics. Meanwhile, **Israel** pursues maximalist containment and regime change in **Iran**.

There are two main reasons for confrontations between **Iran** and **Israel**: a state for Palestinians in the occupied territories, and the nuclear weapons/strategic parity condition. In terms of Palestinian statehood, **Iran** has been the most confrontational country to Israel. In terms of nuclear weapons, **Israel** does not want to allow an Israeli adversary to gain nuclear status in the region. In terms of influence and achieving these two goals, **Israel** has been successful in convincing the Arab countries of economic and technological cooperation with it, and military cooperation with the **US**. But **Iran** has been determined not to trust economic and financial

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<sup>2</sup> Karen Ruth Adams, "Attack and Conquer? International Anarchy and the Offense-Defense- Deterrence Balance," *International Security*, (28:2), 2003/04, pp.45-83/p.48.

collaboration with **Israel** or military cooperation with the **US**, at least not at the expense of its influence in the region, not at the expense of Palestinian statehood and not at the expense of nuclear country posture in the region. That is why **Israel** views the region as the Axis of Moderators (Arab countries that cooperate with **Israel** economically and technologically) versus the Axis of Resistance- **Iran** and its proxies in the region.

## Iran-Israel Confrontation and Deterrence

During the Israeli attack on Iranian soil, **Iran** retaliated with missile strikes on **Israel**, signaling that a direct attack will be responded to reciprocally. From indirect state deterrence through regional partners to direct state deterrence, along with a tense situation between the Foreign Ministry's 'arena of diplomats' and the **IRGC** Quds forces' 'theatre of the commanders' characterized the atmosphere of Iranian policy planning. **Israel** was also vigilant and cautious about the concern that dangerous weapons may fall into the hands of Iranian militants in the region. However, **Iran** claims that the UAVs and nuclear missile platforms are state controlled, not shared with its regional partnership network.

For **Israel**, during wartime, the defense planners have agreed on- shortening the war, shifting the war into enemy territory, removing the home front threat, simultaneous defense on all fronts and decisive victory on each turn; subordination of the military to the political echelon and the laws of the state; and economic mobilization.<sup>3</sup> Since **Israel**'s Declaration of Independence, the country's security doctrine has encompassed a majority-Jewish demographic country with recognized and defensible borders. Since the Ben Gurion administration, deterrence has been combined with early warning, military capabilities based on cutting-edge technologies, support from the **US** and **Europe** in international bodies, and a decisive battles-based offensive. Also, it accelerated military technological developments to maintain a qualitative edge over its adversaries. In a regional environment surrounded by adversarial neighbouring countries and fronts, militarily, **Israel** prefers the offensive approach to deal with its adversaries. Diplomatically, it pursues dialogue for economic interests with **Saudi Arabia** and **Gulf** countries, maintains the peace treaties with **Jordan** and **Egypt**, and maintains a special relationship with the **US**. By means of close ties with the **US** and **Europe**, **Israel** remains determined not to allow a nuclear Iran, which is strategically countered by Iran with powerful strategic partnerships that also carry weight in the international politics.

**Israel**'s expanded air superiority perimeter to ensure defense, deterrence as well as attack and conquer. **Iran** has also taken its measures along the same lines of defense and deterrence to avoid another state imposing its will on it, not even the sanctions aimed at compelling Iranian compliance with the policy directives of the **US**, **Israel**, and E3. *"Deterrence dominance depends on absolute weapons (force lethality) that can survive first strikes (force protection) and be*

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<sup>3</sup> "The State of Israel's Security, Doctrine and Security Policy Guidelines for 2025-2026," *Monograph*, INSS, 2025.

*delivered to their target (force mobility)."*<sup>4</sup> Both **Iran** and **Israel** have paid great attention to strategic, operational, tactical manoeuvres, as well as force lethality, range, rate of fire, accuracy, and radius of damage. The logistical corridors and the military capabilities of **Hamas**, **Hezbollah**, **Syria**, **Houthis**, and the Iranian militants in **Iraq** have been attacked and weakened by the Israeli and American attacks, but they remain operational. Targeted assassinations eliminated the leaders and military leadership of these militant groups, and the high-level officers who directed operations in **Iraq**, **Yemen**, **Syria**, **Lebanon** were also eliminated.

The **Israel-Iran** war caused a severe strain to both countries economically, human and material losses, and somehow the societal cohesion too. **Iran-Israel** deterrence and war came to the forefront during the **Israel-Hamas** war after the October 7, 2023, **Hamas** attack on **Israel**. For **Israel**, the Gaza War was different because *"a nation fights differently when fighting for survival than when fighting to prove a point. The Israel Defense Forces were not sent into Gaza to mow the grass. They were sent to pave it over. The mission was the total dismantlement of Hamas as a military and governing entity."*<sup>5</sup>

**Israel** opened military confrontation to eliminate threats coming from **Gaza**, **Hezbollah**, the Iranian-militants in **Syria**, and **Iraq**. **Iran** preferred to retaliate through proxies rather than an open front with Israel to prevent a direct war with the **US**. The attacks and retaliation among **Israel**, **Iran**, the Axis of Resistance, and the **US** tested the Islamic Republic's deterrence architecture and the operational value of the Axis alliance during a significant crisis.<sup>6</sup> The war between **Iran** and **Israel**, 13-25 June 2025, started with the Israeli military retaliation on the Iranian nuclear facilities aimed at forcing an open warfare between **Iran** and the **US**, to weaken and destroy the regime and the nuclear enrichment of **Iran**. As **Iran** has amassed high levels of critical raw material for atomic weapons and highly enriched uranium levels, some Iranian lawmakers have voiced support for a north Korean security model in which the **US** would not dare threaten Iran with bombing, because nuclear states enjoy a deterrence dominance. They can attack and conquer the non-nuclear states. **Israel** stands in a complex reality with hostile actors and a flow of advanced weapons. Still, its persistence in pursuing absolute security and the destruction of adversaries generates insecurity and reciprocal aggressive responses.

For **Iran**, in the views of Supreme Leader Khomeini and **IRGC**, the Axis serves as **Iran**'s defensive perimeter and as a 'strategic depth' beyond the country. In the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war (1980), **Iraq** was embraced diplomatically and with military capabilities by the **US** and Arab countries, while **Iran** followed the course of a partner-proxy strategy through the Kurdish group in **Iraq**. But the 2003 US' Iraqi war turned the power over to the Iranian supporters in **Iraq**, and **Iran** could deepen its relations with **Syria**, **Hezbollah**, and **Hamas**. The Houthi movement strengthened by 2010 when a local Zaydi Shi'a insurgency emerged to pressure the Saudi

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.51.

<sup>5</sup> Gregg Roman, "The Peace of the Victor: Israel's Transformation from Defender to Guarantor," *Middle East Forum*, July 24, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Mahsa Rouhi (2025) Iran's Strategic Crossroads: Options Beyond the Axis?, *The Washington Quarterly*, p.29.

government and gained control of Sanaa. The Arab Spring (after 2011) was another event that intensified the Iranian actions to preserve and uphold its influence and partnership with **Syria** and other proxies in the region. Iranian proxies are closely aligned with the Iranian worldview of deterring Israel and establishing a Palestinian state in the Palestinian-occupied territories. “*By tying down superior adversaries in protracted, costly conflicts—whether it was Israel in South Lebanon, the United States in Iraq, or Saudi Arabia in Yemen —Iran developed a reputation for strategic savvy in asymmetric warfare.*”<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, **Iran** claims that its partners like **Hezbollah**, **Hamas**, and **Houthis** pursue their domestic policies, which align with the Iranian principle of resistance, with their own operational freedom in their countries rather than an Iranian center-and-control command.

The **US** has termed Iran since 2003 as part of the Axis of Evil, with its Shiite militias in **Iraq**, **Syria**, **Hamas** in Palestine, and **Houthis** in **Yemen**. On the other side, **Israel** has considered **Hamas**, **Hezbollah**, the militias in Iraq and Syria not as independent actors, but as tentacles of the octopus in **Iran**.<sup>8</sup> According to Jonathan Spyer, an analyst of Middle East Forum, the Axis of Resistance has never been about resistance but about expansion, domination and the eventual destruction of **Israel**.<sup>9</sup> To counter and deter **Iran**’s ‘Axis of Evil,’ **Israel** worked on building its own ‘Axis of Cooperation’ led by **Saudi Arabia**, **Egypt**, **Jordan** and the **Gulf** countries. Furthermore, another Israeli deterrence layer was to dismantle and undermine the Iranian command-and-control of the ‘Axis of Resistance’ and turn it into a decentralized, flexible network of actors with different interests.<sup>10</sup> Yakov Lappin describes best **Israel**’s deterrence focus on **Iran** as “Month after month, week after week, night after night, the Israelis have operated across the region against the Islamic Republic of **Iran** in what the Israeli government calls as “the war-between-the-wars” (or the campaign-between-the-wars).<sup>11</sup> To counter **Iran**’s strategy of encirclement around Israeli borders with proxies, **Israel** placed its assets in crucial locations to undermine the capabilities of **Iran** and its proxies because, to Israeli planners, the use of force prevents the need for a stronger use of force later.

Regarding the **Hamas**’s October 2003 attack on **Israel**, according to the **US** and Israeli official assessments, **Iran** was not informed in advance of the operation.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the Iraqi Shia paramilitary group in **Iraq**, **Kata’ib Hizballah** attacked the US force at Tower 22, Jordan in 2024, an action that killed three soldiers. When the **US-UK** forces attacked the **Houthis**, **Iran** did not intervene to prevent escalation. Somehow, all these actors aim to pursue their interests independently, except when they align ideologically with Iran and share the same threat assessment. Each of these players has different strategic interests in the Middle East, shaped by

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<sup>7</sup> Mahsa Rouhi, 2025, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Spyer,

<sup>10</sup> Raz Zimmt, “The Need to Reexamine the Concept of ‘Shiite Axis,’” *Insight*, INSS, May 27, 2025.

<sup>11</sup> Yakov Lappin, “The War Between Wars: Israel vs Iran in Syria,” *Fathom Journal*, October 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community – 2024 (Washington, DC: ODNI, February 5, 2024), <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2024-Unclassified-Report.pdf>.

new alignments. No one can have either regional hegemony or near-complete freedom of action in regional affairs. **Israel**'s aggressive posture compels the other actors to bring forth assertiveness of their posture too. According to **Fyodor Lukyanov** (editor-in-chief of the magazine *Russia in Global Affairs*, the West made possible the **Iran-Israel** war through decades of unchecked ambitions and profound misunderstanding of the region's political fabric.<sup>13</sup> During 1994-2004 **Iran** followed the program of 'Dialogue with Civilisations' to engage with the international arena; a mixture of international sanctions and confrontational diplomacy took place during 2005-2018; the JCPOA agreement (2015-2018) served as a sign of temporary cooperation between Iran and **IAEA** on monitoring and verifying the Iranian nuclear enrichments; and lately the US has implemented a 'maximum pressure' policy.<sup>14</sup>

An unstable international system and an assertive contest of the great powers (**US**, **Russia**, **China**) shape the situation in the Middle East as well as the **Iran-Israel** deterrence. The trust and confidence in the liberal democratic model have weakened. The concept of a victorious liberal democratic front, which is rightfully to be expanded worldwide, does not convince the non-Western side of the world order. This is because the dominance does not belong to the Israeli great power patron only, it is shared with **Russia** and **China** too, which seek assertiveness and expansion of their economic interests and voice in global affairs. The interference of **Russia** and **China** challenges the **US**'s dominance in Middle Eastern affairs and in affairs across the continents. Therefore, **Iran**'s external support expands. Although to **Russia**, the crisis with **Ukraine** is a direct immediate threat and interest; to **China**, it is the Taiwan-One China policy and South China Sea; and the **US** is busy finding its place as a hegemon or as a peer in this trilateral contest, **Iran-Israel**'s deterrence presents an opportunity to curtail each other's influence, oil, energy and alliance access. Furthermore, to **Israel**, **Iran** is the only country in the region that has remained a direct confrontational form of deterrence, and towards achieving a possible nuclear parity status in the region, which means an Israeli-Iranian mutually assured destruction condition. Whether to avoid a wider war (Iran) or open a war/direct confrontation (Israel), each acts in its own preferred terms.

## The Regional Picture of the Iran-Israel Deterrence

The regional picture of any confrontational bilateral affair is part of the political maneuvering game. With the October 2023 initiated **Hamas**' Israeli aggression and the Iran-Israel direct war in June 2025, all the regional countries, **Turkey**, the **US**, **China**, and **Russia** recalibrated their stance regarding the Palestinian statehood and regarding the open stance with Iran. Previously, despite disagreements, there was a sense of trade and political dialogue between the regional countries and **Israel**. But the determined **Israel** to pursue its aggressiveness for the country's survival and **Iran**'s assertiveness to obtain the posture of not being subject to military threat by Israel or the **US**' military superiority, made **Saudi Arabia**, **Turkey**, and the great powers

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<sup>13</sup> Fyodor Lukyanov, "Here's how the West made the Israel-Iran war possible," *Russia in Global Affairs*,

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Meshkyn Ranjbar, Iran's Adaptation Strategies Under Sanction Pressures, Opinion, *Valdai*, 13.03.2025.

look at this scene differently. When a violent conflict breaks out in any corner of the world, the countries' leaders first determine their positions.

The Gulf countries rely on **US**' security guarantees, with the **US** military bases such al-Udeid in **Qatar**, Naval Support Activity in **Bahrain**, Camp Arifjan in **Kuwait**, with intelligence sharing and command-and-control infrastructure. **Pakistan** is acting as a close partner to both **Saudi Arabia** and **Iran** before and after the **Iran-Israel** war, for a stronger and strategic profile in the region, economically weak but militarily strong. **China**'s brokering role for a diplomatic rapprochement between **Saudi Arabia** and **Iran**, the defense pact of Saudi-Pakistan, and **China**'s purchase of almost 90% of Iranian oil serve somehow to balance the Abraham Accords, which deepens Israeli military-political cooperation with the Arab countries and serves thus as a strategic alliance that can lock in **Iran**'s defeat. The Saudi-Pakistan defense pact, as claimed, that an attack on one will be treated as an attack on the other, and if it means Saudi's access to Pakistan military expertise and Pakistan's access to Saudi's military equipment, and possible nuclear cooperation, then access to such sensitive information should be cautious by every country, be it in friendly or unfriendly alliance. Whether the Saudi-Pakistan defense pact means to deter an aggression without provoking escalation based on the calculations of the possible aggressor and of the deterrer, then **Pakistan** has stated that **Pakistan**'s nuclear weapons and doctrine belong to the National Command Authority with centralized command-and-security structures, and there is no arrangement with any state on such matters. **Iran** is in favor of a regional stability framework that deters Israeli-US unilateral actions and builds stability in the region and views the Saudi-Pakistan defense agreement positively as long as it is not aimed at countering Iran.

To **Iran**, both **Israel** and the **US** attacked with unilateral decisions, breaking legal justification, based on the monitoring reports of the IAEA, while the diplomatic negotiations were going on. To retaliate, **Iran** declared a suspension of cooperation with the **IAEA**, allowing no inspections or progress reports, and withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.<sup>15</sup> The **UNSC** rejected an expansion of the **JCPOA** on the Iranian nuclear program on September 26, 2025.<sup>16</sup> According to many professional views, there exist the expectations that a lack of trust and unilateral decisions of Israel, the **US**, and the EU will lead Iran to pursue a North Korean-style nuclear weapon country.

*The US interests:* the **US** alignment with **Israel** in the Middle East has intended not just the 'security of **Israel**' but even 'the dismantling of Israeli adversaries, and rival regional structures and actors politically and militarily.'<sup>17</sup> The **US** stood between the options of engaging diplomatically, using the **IAEA** for the purpose of preventing nuclear enrichment of Iran, engaging

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<sup>15</sup> \*A 1968 Treaty signed by US, Soviet Union, China, France and UK not to pass nuclear materials or weapons to other states, or to commit to disarm themselves. Israel did not join, North Korea withdrew in 2003, India and Pakistan didn't sign it.

<sup>16</sup> \*China and Russia were in favor of the JCPOA extension, US, France and UK voted against it. JCPOA (2015) was a signed Iranian compromise P5+1, according to which a lift of EU-US sanctions and economic restrictions exchanged for Iran's nuclear program to be monitored and observed by verifiable mechanisms of IAEA observers.

<sup>17</sup> Alireza Noori, "Israel's War Against Iran: Dangerous Ambition for Remapping the Middle East," *Russia in Global Affairs*, 16 September, 2025.

in a long-protracted war, or a war with limited means and time. **Israel's** attack named 'Operation Rising Lion' and the US 'Operation Midnight Hammer' in the Iranian nuclear facilities of Natanz, Fordow and Esfahan, damaged but did not destroy the nuclear program of **Iran**- an operation in which the US struck with 'massive ordnance bombs' 30,000-pound GBU 57,<sup>18</sup> were operations with limited means fought for a limited period of time, according to **Raphael S. Cohen** (RAND analyst). **Iran** countered **Israel** by direct confrontation, killing more than two dozen Israeli citizens, wounding more than 3,000, and causing \$3 billion in damage.<sup>19</sup> Israel conducted preventive attacks even on **Iraq's** Osirak reactor in 1981, and **Syria's** al-Kibar reactor in 2007, gradually pursuing the course of the geopolitical events that kept **Iraq** and **Syria** away from obtaining nuclear programs. And **Israel** aims the same in Iran. Through the limited 12-day war, it delayed the nuclear enrichment of Iran and wished for further geopolitical unfolding to prevent a nuclear **Iran**. A new package of sanctions by the US-EU attempts to divert and divide the attention of Iranian decision-makers, despite the Iranian government's declarations that it rightfully pursues a nuclear program for civilian purposes and nuclear enrichment for military purposes. *Nevertheless, "US is Israel's backstop of last resort, if the Jewish state would ever be seriously endangered by a foreign actor, America would rush to its defense no matter the cost"*<sup>20</sup>

**The Chinese Interests:** **China** looks at the **Iran-Israel** situation through the lenses of great power competition and its geostrategic interests for manoeuvring space and a degree in world influence. It interfered to prevent **Iran** from blocking the Strait of Hormuz in June-July 2025; in July 2024, it hosted a Palestinian faction for reconciliation under a Beijing Declaration, adopting a pro-Palestinian state stance. **China** even acts as an arms exporter to **Iran**, equipping it with advanced weaponry. **China** brokered a peace process to ease tensions between **Saudi Arabia** and **Iran**, and has signed strategic agreements with both. Its non-involvement militarily during the US-Israeli offensive on **Iran** was because **China** wanted to avoid a regional conflagration and escalation of the war due to its economic interests with **Qatar**, **Saudi Arabia**, and **Iran**. It even wanted to avoid a repetition of the US' Iraqi invasion.

Not that **China-Russia** did not stand by **Iran** as forcefully as the US-EU stood by **Israel**, but because **China-Russia** were cautious to undertake forceful measures that could inflame the situation and make it more difficult to resolve the matters, and continue their support for Iran with weapons, oil trade, and business activities. In the region, it is deeply involved in military, economic, and diplomatic cooperation. But during the war, it seemed limited, because **China** remained more cautious than the US about becoming involved directly in the Iran-Israel war. Meanwhile, Chinese cargo planes continued to arrive in **Iran** with unknown cargo. It expressed opposition to Israel's use of force, claiming it as a violation of international law; it protested the infringement of Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity; and called for de-escalation and the use of dialogue. On the other hand, more explicit and sharper condemnations were voiced, mainly in

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<sup>18</sup> Raphael S. Cohen, Iran and the Logic of Limited Wars, Commentary, RAND, July 17, 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>20</sup> Trevor Filseth, Xi Jinping's Iran Dilemma, The National Interest, June 21, 2025.

international forums such as the **UN Security Council** and during a conversation between the Chinese and Iranian foreign ministers.<sup>21</sup>

**China** and **Russia** continue to buy Iranian oil and do not recognize the Western sanctions. The **US** and **Israel** look for aggressive enforcement measures to cut off Iran's oil exports; they targeted the **Shandong Shougang Luqing Petrochemical Company** and other measures to prevent countries' trade ties with the oil industries of **Iran**. **China** and **Russia** are not passive in the **Iran-Israel** conflict and the regional matters; they support **Iran** with the necessary tools for weapons, diplomatic legitimacy in forums, and UN resolutions, and offer assistance to avoid sanctions' consequences. The pressure on states that trade and invest with Iran intensified by the **US**, **Israel**, and the **EU**. This discussion shows that what the **US** means to **Israel**, **China** means to Iran in terms of trade, oil business, weapons procurement and diplomatic support in important global decision-making votes and vetoes.

***Saudia Arabia and Gulf countries:*** The Hamas-Israel (October 2023) straightforward escalation, which lasted for two years, and is still unsettled, with ceasefire violations and disagreements about the post-Gaza recovery International Stabilization Force, put **Saudi Arabia** and all **Gulf** countries in a delicate position, putting them on the spot side with the **US**, **Israel**, **Turkey**, and **Iran**. By declaration, they condemn the Israeli disproportionate use of force and genocide on the Palestinians, the Israeli attack on **Iran**, and claim the establishment of a Palestinian state as a precondition for normalisation with **Israel**. Naturally, they always act according to the weighing of perceived threats to their regimes and how their rivals are involved in any conflict.

**Iran** has used cooperation and pressure to convince them not to align with **Israel** on an air defense system against **Iran**. Constant high-level delegations and negotiations before and after the **Iran-Israel** war to reassure the **Gulf** countries that Iran is not a threat to their countries' interests and defense. And for this purpose, they cannot proceed with enhanced military integration with **Israel** as it risks the domestic public disapproval in their countries. Whereas **Israel** has preferred and pursued a silent security cooperation with the Gulf countries to establish a regional defense framework against missiles and drones coming from **Iran** and its proxies.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the Combined Task Force 153 is to maintain control on Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea. Also, the cooperation between the Saudi fleet and Task Force 153 means a regional cooperation framework headquartered in the US Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, according to the **US** terms.<sup>23</sup> The initiation of joint Gulf-US military measures to gain an advantage over Iran increased the military assertiveness of **Iran** because **Israel**'s deterrence is inextricably interlinked to a military partnership with the **US** and its Western allies.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, **Iran** has refocused its deterrent capacity towards **China**, **Russia**, and non-Western countries. According to **US**

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<sup>21</sup> Galia Lavi, Ori Sela, Committed to Itself: China and the Israel-Iran War, Insight, INSS, July 14, 2025.

<sup>22</sup> Tamir Hayman and Sima Shine, "Tehran Heightens the Pressure as it Strives to Thwart Regional Air Defense System," *Insight*, INSS, July 20, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Brumberg, "Iran's Risky Bid to Redefine Deterrence with Israel," *Responsible Statecraft*, April 15, 2024.

statements/declarations, it will not be a partner to any direct military retaliation against **Iran**, but the Iranian military offensiveness to counter the Israeli attack created hard choices for Israel as well as for the other regional countries. The **US** even sent Mediterranean and Persian Gulf aircraft carriers to strengthen **Israel**'s deterrence against **Iran**. Each claimed to have weakened the other's sophisticated aerial defense capabilities. According to the **US** reports, **Iran** possesses more than 3000 missiles, the largest number of ballistic missiles in the Middle East.<sup>25</sup>

In April 2025, Saudi Defense Minister **Khalid bin Salman** visited **Iran** as a sign of improving Saudi-Iranian relations, renewing diplomatic relations, confirming the commitment to the 2023 memorandum, and informing **Iran** of possible incoming US-Israeli strikes.<sup>26</sup> The last visit had been in 2006. In 2016, there was a Gulf boycott of **Iran**, but the **UAE** and **Saudi Arabia** were the first to restart their diplomatic ties with **Iran**. **Iran** even signed a maritime strategic agreement with the Caspian states, **Russia**, **Azerbaijan**, and **Kazakhstan**, according to which no foreign country will be allowed to interfere in the Caspian waters. The Saudi Defense Minister's visit to Iran was a significant step, marking a mutual Saudi-Iranian assessment that they do not view each other as rivals or enemies.

**US** and **Israel** worked with the Gulf countries around the pretext to stop Iranian interference in the Arab affairs. **Iran**, on the other side, voiced criticism that Gulf countries have allowed US access to military bases in their countries, which can facilitate a **US** attack on Iran. Yet, the Gulf countries claim they want to be out of the firing line in case of an attack between **Iran** and the **US** or **Israel**. **Saudi Arabia** and the whole Gulf want to look as a supporter of neither the **US**, **Israel**, nor **Iran**. Numerous reciprocal visits of high-level officials and calls by both sides. For **Israel**, it seeks to isolate **Iran** geopolitically by building a block of moderate states with the Gulf countries and normalisation with **Saudi Arabia**. Instead, relations between Iran and the Gulf countries have grown closer.

**Capabilities:** Iranian ballistic missiles can follow long trajectories beyond the atmosphere, carrying manoeuvrable re-entry vehicles with warheads exceeding 500kg. **Israel**'s Iron Dome, David Sling, Arrow 2, Arrow 3, THAAD for medium-range missiles, Magen Or (Light Shield) for UAV interceptions, and **C-Dome**, a naval interception system.<sup>27</sup> **Iran**'s **Khoramshar-5**, an intercontinental ballistic missile of 12000 km, with a hypersonic glide vehicle- a breakthrough or a strategic messaging. From reports of **Dryad Global Maritime**, **Iran** has received **China**'s **HQ-9** Air Secret Defense System in exchange for Iranian oil, drones, and surface-to-surface missiles to serve as anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD). According to a Washington Post report, **Israel** only had missiles for a 10–12-day war; beyond that, it would need to rely on the **US** to fill its launchers.<sup>28</sup> **Iran**'s air strike on **Israel** in April 2024 was a sign of deterrence for **Israel**'s attack on the Iranian

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<sup>25</sup> Arman Mahmoudian, Tehran's Retaliation Logic, *The National Interest*, April 16, 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Yoel Guzanski and Danny Citrinowitz, "Saudi-Iranian Relations, Where Hedging is Essential," *Insight*, Israeli National Security Studies (INSS), May 15, 2025.

<sup>27</sup> Yehoshua Kalisky, "The Israel-Iran War: Air Defense Performance," *Posts*, INSS, 15 June, 2025.

<sup>28</sup> Trevor Filseth, "Xi Jinping's Iran Dilemma," *The National Interest*, 2025.

embassy in Damascus. It included 170 drones, 120 ballistic missiles, and 30 cruise missiles with the purpose of undermining the aerial defense layers of the **US** in **Iraq** and **Syria**, the **UK** in **Cyprus**, the Jordanian military, and the IDF.<sup>29</sup> These attacks, as claimed by **Israel**, were successfully thwarted by its superior air defense system of **David Slings**, **Iron Dome**, and Arrow Missile System. Meanwhile, **Iran** looks for a new generation aircraft to narrow its gap with Israel's air force through strengthening its military-economic ties with **China**, a pact to receive **J-10CE** Chinese aircraft; the agreement with **Russia** for SU35 has been a delayed delivery so far; and looking into a joint **China-Pakistan** fighter **JF-17 Block III**, as a fifth-generation technology.<sup>30</sup>

Regarding the course of the battle, still none dominates, none has the geopolitical prominence, both have strong air defense systems equipped with early warning systems and cutting-edge technology, though surely Israel has the advantage (Iron Dome, Arrow missile defense, and the recently installed US' Terminal High Altitude Area Defense. Both possess retaliatory and counter-retaliatory capabilities, want to appear invulnerable to the adversary's first strike, and are capable of penetrating the attacker's active and civil defenses. A decisive military victory in such an adversarial type of deterrence would mean the destruction of the fighting force with airstrikes and ground manoeuvres, freedom to operate, and targeted assassinations against important figures of the resistance axis. The fall of the regimes in **Iraq**, **Libya**, **Afghanistan**, **Syria**, and **Yemen** forced the Iranian leadership to reconsider its effective deterrence doctrine against adversaries who may aim to topple the regime and weaken the country. The pursuit of nuclear deterrence for the purpose of deterring an attack, not attacking any other country, may become Iran's strategic peace-through-strength. Furthermore, **Israel** too, possesses a secretive nuclear weapon program, about 90 warheads and material to produce another hundred for its security.<sup>31</sup>

*The Russian interests:* **Russia** is another great power with an important relationship to both **Iran** and **Israel**. For **Iran**, it represents another strategic partnership rather than an ad-hoc tactical alliance. The **Iran-Iraq** War (1980) produced security concerns that became the starting point for **Iran**'s pursuit of a nuclear weapons program to protect the country from the schemes of its enemies, especially the **US** and **Israel**.<sup>32</sup> Since the Cold War, **Russia** and **Iran** have reciprocated with each other in terms of arms suppliers, civilian nuclear programs, drones, and common assessments regarding regional and global conflicts. Whereas, since the Cold War, **Israel** has aligned itself with the democratic camp, and always conducted policies to prove it is an asset of the Western bloc in the Middle East and Europe. Therefore, the confrontation with the West, has shifted **Iran** and **Russia** towards a deeper cooperation. Given the recent events, both Russia and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>30</sup> Umud Shokri, Will Iran Choose China over Russia to Upgrade its Airforce, Middle East Forum, June 27, 2025.

<sup>31</sup> Lara Jakes, As Israel Targets Iran's Nuclear Program, It Has a Secret Of Its Own," *The New York Times*, June 17, 2025.

<sup>32</sup> Arkady Mil-Man and Dmitry Kovchegin, "Iran-Russia Nuclear Cooperation," Policy Paper, (*Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom: INSS*), March 2025.

Iran are involved in crucial military escalations, **Russia** with **Ukraine**, **Iran** with **Israel**, and the US-led West supports **Ukraine** and **Israel**.

Consequently, the **Russia-Iran** partnership and affinity of interests grew stronger and deeper after the escalation with Ukraine in 2022, not as an official military alliance but a comprehensive strategic partnership. **Russia**'s deployment of S-500 Prometheus advanced air defense system in **Syria** with the approval of Al-Sharaa government, capable of intercepting stealth jets, hypersonic capabilities, and satellites, as such bringing aerial dominance in **Syria** against both **US** and **Israel**; and **Russia**'s approval of covertly granting Iran S-400 components with a Russian **An-124**, and **Su-35** Mig fighter jets strengthens Iran air missile defense system. **Iran**'s Russian S-400 has been installed and is operational in Isfahan, with engagement radars of 91N6E "Big Bird" and 92N6E "Grave Stone," together with the multiple mobile surface-to-air missile launchers. **Su-24 MK** tactical bombers, MiG-29A/UB fighter aircraft, and Il-76 transport planes are among other acquisitions from **Iran**. **Israel** and the **US** are worried that the procurement of such powerful weapons may complicate Israel's plans for potential and surgical strikes on Iran. Since both **Iran** and **Russia** have recently been among the two countries most sanctioned by the Western side and the **US**, due to the Russia-Ukraine escalation and Iran-Israel adversarial postures, from a security point of view, **Iran** and **Russia** support each other strategically. **Robert Czulda** terms such cooperation as the "Axis of renegade states."<sup>33</sup> The **US**, **Israel**, and the Gulf countries use the EASA radar (Active Electronically Scanned Array) with a longer range and greater resistance to air jamming than the Su-35's PESA (Passive Electronically Scanned Array) radar.

The aftermath of the war in **Ukraine** and the Western persistence in undermining **Russia**'s influence over the CIS countries have brought **Russia-Iran** relations to a new level of cooperation and partnership. Russian presence in Middle Eastern conflicts, concretely in Syria, and partnership with **Iran** limit **Israel**'s freedom of action against these countries. To **Israel**, **Russia** has served as a channel of communication with **Syria**'s Assad and Iran (especially during the post-2023 events). Israeli determination not to allow either the **US** or Russia permission to conduct their targeted airstrikes has created tension between Israel and both the **US** and Russia. While **Russia** is not pleased with the Israeli preference for American presence in **Libya**, **Iraq**, **Syria**'s Assad/post-Assad, or Iran, Israel also has expressed its criticism of **Russia**'s lack of will to limit **Hezbollah**, **Syria**'s Assad, or the Iranian option in the **Syria-Iran** border.

**Turkey:** Turkey's defense planning also seeks to keep war out of its borders. **Turkey** has tried to balance its relationship with **Israel**, neither a friend nor an adversary. But the fact that **Turkey** remains a supporter of the Palestinian cause/statehood and a critic of Israeli aggressions on Palestinian territories, according to Israeli assessments, is viewed as threatening. Even against **Turkey**, **Israel** is pursuing deep cooperation with **Greece**, **Cyprus**, and **Serbia**, growing ties with the Kurdish groups in the Middle East to encircle **Turkey**'s rise and assertiveness, whether in the Mediterranean front (for natural gas reserves or energy transport corridors) or in the Middle

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Czulda, "What Iran's Purchase of Russian Jets Means for Regional Security," *Henry L. Stimson Center*, February 2023.

Eastern front. The issue of a Palestinian state in the occupied Palestinian territories has been at the forefront of regional and bilateral and multilateral relations. **Turkey** suspended bilateral trade, restricted the airspace, and led the international denunciation of the disproportionate Israeli violence in Gaza. As a **NATO** member, to the Western major countries and the **US**, **Turkey's** trade boycott and diplomatic engagement in support of the Palestinian statehood are perceived as threatening to the Israeli decision makers. **Turkey** also has concerns in the Eastern Mediterranean to counterbalance the emerging alignments and economic engagements.

**Turkey** worked hard with **Egypt**, **Qatar**, **Israel**,  **Hamas** factions and **US** to reach a mutually agreed international task force and flow of humanitarian aid in Gaza, it worked hard diplomatically to obtain a ceasefire with Gaza based on exchange of hostages, prisoners, withdrawal of IDF from Gaza and a cease of Israeli offensives, leading the international voice to refrain Israel's attempts to annex West Bank. A violation of the Gaza ceasefire, and as rumours state, US-Israeli ongoing preparations for another round of military challenge towards Iran, would bring a fragile turning point for all actors involved in such a sensitive regional landscape. The **Iran-Israel** crisis represents challenges and opportunities regarding future military agreements with the regional actors. With the fall of Assad's regime, Syria is again threatened with fragmentation, but both **Turkey**, as a closer ally to the current al-Sharaa regime, and Iran want the territorial integrity of **Syria** to be preserved. With **Iran**, **Turkey** shares the same threat assessment regarding the Israeli aggressions towards **Syria's** Golan Heights, **Lebanon's** Hezbollah, Palestinian territories in Gaza/West Bank, and a two-state solution.

With the fall of the Assad regime, **Israel** targeted the military airbases near Israeli positions where Turkey wanted to place its **F-16s**. **Turkey** is focused on strengthening its air missile defense to prevent an Iranian situation. It seeks **F-35** from the **US**. The **US** has so far refused to grant **F-35s** to **Turkey** based on the pretext of its choice of Russian **S-400s**. Furthermore, it threatens **Israel's** and **Greece's** qualitative military superiority. Then, **Turkey** successfully approved the Eurofighter consortium of the **UK**, **Germany**, **Spain**, and **France** to purchase 40 Eurofighters. Meanwhile, even the S-400 remains inactive as Russia refuses to share its operational details with a **NATO** country. Both the **US** and **Russia** remain concerned that sensitive stealth information would be collected by the adversary and by the Turkish defense engineers.

In terms of **Iran-Turkey** bilateral relations, each has its threats, ambitions and pursuit for self-reliant state-owned military capabilities and establishing alignments based on different investments and assessments of mutual interests with the GCC countries. As long as their main interests in the region overlap and do not clash, **Turkey** and **Iran** can maintain a cooperative, positive bilateral atmosphere. The expectation exists that **Iran** will not abandon its many years of investments in the Syrian infrastructure, policies, and militants- billions of money and many Qods forces lives that have been sacrificed in the Syrian arena for the political-economic benefits of **Syria**. So, even though **Iran**, **Israel**, and **Turkey** have entered in this scene through the Kurdish, Druze, Alawite and the current regime in power, Syria remains an actor where the Iranian influence cannot be curbed.

## The Consequences of Iran-Israel Deterrence

In the competition, conflict, and arms race between Iran and **Israel**, a shift in the balance of power and a security dilemma affects the deterrence equation between these two countries. **Israel** wants to prevent such a shift in the balance of power, even by force, with the support of the **US** and **Europe**. Nevertheless, among **Iran**, **Israel**, **Saudi Arabia**, **Turkey**, and **Egypt**, none can be the hegemon of the region; each can only seek a region shaped to its advantage and military parity. **Turkey** is a powerful **NATO** member, Iran is supported by **China** and **Russia**, **Israel** is closely associated and supported by the **US** and **Europe**, and **Saudi Arabia** is still looking for a frame of alignment that suits its position. With the other countries, **Israel** has maintained a combination of common, diverging, and clashing interests, but **Iran** represents a threat to its posture as the strongest military country in the region, not just security, but possibly moving towards regional dominance or parity with **Israel**. In this sense, **Israel** does not want its ambitions to be constrained. Therefore, it seeks to eliminate all threats, whatever front they may come from, whether from neighbouring or distant borders. And keep pushing the Western side for sanctions that curtail Iran's financial support for its proxies and its nuclear enrichment activities. Also, gradually targeting the high-level officers, commanders, and nuclear scientists, then initiate a direct offensive military operation – the 12-day war with Iran- to test Iran's resilience, military capabilities, and the regional-global circumstances in such a war case.

Regional hegemony seems to be a priority for Israel's defense and deterrence-notwithstanding the cost (even against the Hamas negotiations in Doha, September 2025). When Israel attacks regional countries and proxies, the **US** is passive in statements and actions; when another country does the same, the **US** immediately interferes to determine if the situation is in favour of **Israel** or not. A spiral of actions and reactions, even towards **Syria**, **Israel** is uncomfortable with a government that tends to be Islamist and an ally of **Turkey**, as **Turkey** is another crucial rival for power and hegemony to challenge Israel's hegemonic position until now. Though the Syrian Interim Government has offered dialogue and a possible peace process with Israel in return for Israeli non-violation of the Golan Heights, **Israel** has continued attacks and closer coordination with the Druze to prevent the establishment of **Turkey's** proxies in **Syria**.

**Israel's** violations of the Gaza ceasefire has shifted the regional major players towards renewed cooperation rather than strategic competition. Support in international bodies for **Israel** and Iran stands between the **US-EU** and **China-Russia**. There is even the front of Israel's national self-determination on the right to exist vs. the Palestinians' right to self-determination and the right to exist. The status of hegemon in the Middle East or any other region, cannot be achieved by one country alone, as there are other peer states that are significant, strong, and ambitious. In the Middle East, **Iran**, **Turkey**, Gulf countries, and Israel are players mutually determined to eliminate or prevent a threat before it matures and reaches their borders.

There is a security architecture to weaken **Iran**, **Turkey**, the Axis of Resistance, and to integrate the Arab countries in an alignment with **Israel** through Abraham accords with the purpose

of redrawing the Middle East map according to the structure intended by **Israel**. But the trust of the war-torn countries (**Syria, Libya, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine**) has shifted on the side of **Russia, China**, and the non-Western side, simultaneously with the fact that **China** and **Russia** want to be more assertive in the global affairs and the Middle East. During two years of Israeli open warfare, **Israel** had to tackle many tasks simultaneously- offensive military campaigns on its fronts with Palestinian territories, **Lebanon's** Hezbollah, **Syria's** Golan Heights, defense from the possible risk of terrorist cells from fragile torn countries, and politically keeping in check the relations with the GCC countries and normalization with these countries through a possible Abraham Accords. Yet, the disproportionate use of force against Palestinians in Gaza and the is West Bank has turned public opinion all over the world against Israeli aggressive policies towards the Palestinians.

**Israel's** intention not to allow the adversary (Iran) narrow the gap of deterrence, and **Iran** is almost at the point of nuclear weapon possession, something that prevents Israel from having the posture of a nuclear hegemon in the regional affairs and a unilateral say in the regional affairs. A new regional architecture according to the Israeli terms (no Palestinian state and expanded territory of Israeli strategic depth) or according to the Iranian terms- a two-state solution, a proper independent Palestinian state not under Israeli attack and control, is the expected outcome of this deterrence. Through better relations with the Gulf countries, Israel kept under control to some extent the solidarity the Arab countries' establishments for the Palestinian cause and statehood. But with the Iranian resistance and its proxies, the Palestinian statehood became the centre of international opinion and the condition for improved relations between **Israel** and the Arab countries.

According to **Jonathan Spyer**, there are three power blocs in the moment's region: the **Israel's** West aligned bloc pursuing the policy of extending further the Abraham Accords, the Iranian -led Axis alignment, weakened but pursuing the path of revival towards the same regional ambition, and the **Turkey-Qatar** Sunni bloc influencing the terms of the ceasefire in Gaza and looking for own regional posture.<sup>34</sup> The voices for a new **US** military base in **Syria** serve as a deterrence by punishment and by denial to **Iran, Turkey, Russia, and China**, so how **Syria** will respond to this depends on the new government. It is a reassurance to **Israel's** security and a sign of the **US's** extended deterrence in relation to **Russia** and **China**. In the view of the **US** and **Israel**, it is primarily a direct threat to **Iran** and its proxies' aggressive acts, which means the **US** and **Israel** can have the upper hand in warfighting preparations. So, any **Iran-Israel** open confrontation goes beyond a bilateral level, into a regional and international front, bringing in the direct **US** military involvement, the **China-Russia** support for **Iran**, and the long-term strategic objectives shared between **US-Israel** and **China-Russia-Iran**. It is not yet clear whether what is happening an adjustment or a transformation

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<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Spyer, "The Mideast Ceasefire is Both a Defeat and a Victory for the Islamists," *Wall Street Journal*, October 27, 2025, at: [The Mideast Cease-Fire Is Both a Defeat and a Victory for Islamists - WSJ](#).

## Conclusion

In international relations, deep trust between states does not exist, whether between allies, rivals, or adversaries. The perceived trustworthiness of a rival, adversary or ally affects deeply the complexities of their interactions. Every country reexamines its deterrence priorities in response to changing geopolitical realities, including border dynamics, relations with major powers, and the stance of friendly, unfriendly, or adversarial states.

In elaborating the explanation of this article on such a topic, there are many significant episodes at the **Iran-Israel**, regional, and international levels. It is an aggressive deterrence in which both aim to challenge each-other's regional policies, strategic calculus and deterrence posture. Furthermore, **Iran** has proven to be an actor, and probably the only actor in Middle East that reciprocates both pressure and concessions with reciprocal steps. Since every country follows with great caution the threats to its survival and national interests, Iranian nuclear deterrence may follow a North Korean defense style with a nuclear weapons program that will enable it to prevent either further aggressions or adversary's freedom of action.

Assertiveness has become a posture of **Iran, Turkey, Israel**, as well as the **US, Russia, China** as the great power-patronages involved in this regional triangle. Of importance is the fact that the **US** aggressions in other war-torn Middle-Eastern countries, including its attack on Iran, and lack of proper solution to the Gaza ceasefire enable **Russia** and **China** to undermine the **US** credibility at the UNSC and anywhere in the global affairs' hotspots.

**Iran** and **Israel**, each claims the bloodshed will not be forgotten, and therefore escalation or de-escalation takes place according to the moment's demands. Attempts to move this chaotic situation towards a stable peace process and balanced deterrence between these two countries will be made through force or diplomacy. Israel's settled behind-the-scenes relations with **Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar**, and the **US-European** support vs. **Iran's** diplomatic support by **Pakistan, Turkey, Russia, China**, and the BRICS countries. Militarily, **Iran** will keep playing this deterrence and resistance game with the support of proxies – such as **Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis**, the Iraqi Shia militias, and **Syria**. Whereas **Israel** will continue this fight with the support of the **US** and Europe militarily, their diplomatic backup in the UNSC resolutions, and with the passive stance of Arab countries like **Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Qatar**. The entrance of **Russia** and **China** into this picture creates a balance of deterrence between **Iran** and **Israel**. Both **Russia** and **China** strongly support the establishment of a Palestinian state for a two-state solution, and the **Iran-Israel** adversarial posture not to escalate conflict further into **Lebanon, Syria**, and certainly not to **Iran**.

Finally, with all the political-diplomatic manoeuvres involved in adversarial relationships to block each other's external support, there is no geopolitical isolation for either **Iran** or **Israel**. Each already has its own network of partners and proxies towards a recalibration of strategic thinking after the events of 2023-2025. **Saudi Arabia** aims a military parity with other strong regional players through the support of **Israel** and **US**; **Qatar** is part of the **US**' military umbrella

protection; **China** seeks to utilize its involvement in the oil refineries of **Iraq, Iran, Libya** to its interests; **Russia** seeks to maintain Khmeim and Tartus and a voice in regional affairs same as since the Cold War; **Iran** wants to maintain strategic parity with **Israel** whose primary goal is to keep down the Palestinian state establishment and destroy Iran's possible nuclear parity in the region. According to **Israel** its actions are rightfully self-defence, fo **Iran** and the other regional actors **Israel** must be held accountable for its war actions. Regional powers such as **Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel**, or great powers such as the **US, Russia, China**, are watching each other's reactions and responses very closely in the new ongoing turbulences in the Middle East and elsewhere, considering the expectations that the current crises in **Ukraine, Israel-Iran, Taiwan**, etc can grow worse. A reconfiguration for the region and major power involvement in this region is not yet clear.

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