

The U.S.-Israel-Iran Conflict and the Restructuring of the Middle East Security Order

Mor Sobol

*Associate Professor,
Department of Diplomacy and International Relations, Tamkang University*

Abstract

This paper examines how the U.S.-Israel-Iran War accelerated an ongoing reconfiguration of the Middle East security order. It argues that the region is moving neither toward restored American hegemony nor fragmentation, but toward a post-hegemonic order of modular co-defense: selective operational integration in air and missile defense, intelligence, maritime security, energy-route protection, and crisis coordination. The war exposed the erosion of Iran's forward-defense doctrine, as Israel's multi-front campaign damaged key elements of Tehran's "Axis of Resistance." At the same time, it deepened U.S.-Israeli operational integration and pushed Gulf states toward visible security coordination, even as they avoided formal alliance commitments and pursued hedging strategies with China and other middle powers. The paper further argues that while the Palestinian question has returned as a major legitimacy constraint, it is not the organizing principle of the emerging security architecture. Energy corridors and chokepoints, especially the Strait of Hormuz, have become central arenas of coercion and deterrence. The result is a militarized, corridor-based regional order in which U.S. power remains indispensable but increasingly shares space with Israeli security provision, Gulf strategic autonomy, Iranian disruption, Chinese strategic enabling, and competing middle-power frameworks.

Keywords: Israel, Iran, Middle East, Great Power Rivalry, Security

I. Introduction

In late April 2026, reports indicated that Israel had provided the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with a defensive package during the war with Iran, including an Iron

Dome battery, a lightweight surveillance system (Spectro), as well as a version of Israel's laser interception system, Iron Beam.¹ These systems were reportedly operated or supported by Israeli personnel.



**Figure 1. Israel's "Iron Dome" Air Defense System,
Operation Guardian of the Walls, 2021**

Source: Israel Defense Forces Spokesperson's Unit, "IDF Iron Dome," May 12, 2021, *Wikimedia Commons*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Dome#/media/File:IDF_Iron_Dome_2021.jpg>.

1. Barak Ravid, "Scoop: Israel sent 'Iron Dome' system and troops to UAE during Iran war," April 26, 2026, *Axios*, <<https://www.axios.com/2026/04/26/israel-iron-dome-uae>>.

If accurate, these reports describe an extraordinary development: Israeli detection, interception, and air-defense capabilities operating on Gulf Arab soil to help defend an Arab state during active hostilities with Tehran. Indeed, the Iron Dome alone is not a comprehensive answer to Iran's ballistic missile arsenal, while Spectro and Iron Beam are primarily designed for drones and short-range threats. The greater significance of the reported deployment is therefore political and structural, as it illustrates a shift from discreet Arab-Israeli security coordination to visible wartime co-defense.

This episode captures a broader transformation in the Middle East security order. The U.S.-Israel-Iran War did not create this transformation from scratch. Rather, it accelerated processes already underway: the *Abraham Accords*, Israel's transfer into U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), the post-October 7 multi-front war, the weakening of Iran's "Axis of Resistance," Gulf vulnerability to Iranian missiles and drones, and the securitization of regional trade and energy corridors.

Against this backdrop, the central question of this paper is not simply how the Iran War has spilled over across the region, but how it has revealed and is now accelerating the restructuring of the Middle East security order. The argument advanced here is that the emerging order is best understood as one of modular co-defense: Israel, the United States, and key Gulf states are increasingly connected through air defense, missile warning, intelligence, logistics, counter-drone systems, maritime security, and crisis coordination, but without forming a formal NATO-style alliance. This architecture reflects both deeper cooperation and persistent strategic divergence.

II. Prewar Foundations: Normalization, CENTCOM, and the Bypass Model

The foundations of the current Middle East security order were laid in the years preceding the U.S.-Israel-Iran War, beginning with the *Abraham Accords* in 2020. In August 2020, the UAE announced the normalization of relations with Israel, followed shortly by Bahrain; Sudan and Morocco joined the process in the months that followed. These agreements marked the first formal normalization between Israel

and Arab states in decades and signaled a shift in regional priorities away from the traditional Arab consensus linking normalization to the resolution of the Palestinian issue.

Importantly, the *Abraham Accords* were not only a diplomatic breakthrough but also a strategic realignment. They reduced the political barriers to cooperation between Israel and key Gulf states and created new opportunities for security coordination under U.S. auspices. By bringing Israel into a more open relationship with parts of the Arab world, the Accords enabled the gradual integration of Israel into a broader regional security framework centered on shared concerns about Iran.

Shortly afterwards, in January 2021, the U.S. Department of Defense announced that Israel would shift from the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) to CENTCOM,



Figure 2. Abraham Accords Signing Ceremony

Source: The White House, “President Trump and The First Lady Participate in an Abraham Accords Signing Ceremony,” September 15, 2020, *flickr*, <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/whitehouse45/50345629858/>>.

explicitly linking the move to the easing of tensions after the *Abraham Accords* and describing it as an opportunity to align key partners against shared threats in the Middle East.² Assaf Orion and Mark Montgomery highlighted the broader implications of this shift: Israel's integration into CENTCOM created new possibilities for joint exercises, intelligence sharing, air-defense coordination, and more coherent operational planning across the region.³

This institutional arrangement was critical. Arab states did not need to sign a NATO-like treaty with Israel to benefit from Israeli capabilities or to coordinate indirectly through U.S.-managed channels. CENTCOM functioned as the connective tissue of this emerging system, enabling practical cooperation while providing political cover for governments that remained sensitive to domestic and regional constraints.

Taken together, the *Abraham Accords* and Israel's integration into CENTCOM created the political and institutional foundations of a new regional security architecture. This architecture was driven primarily by a shared concern with Iran, but it also reflected a broader U.S. objective: to preserve regional influence by linking Israel, Gulf partners, and, increasingly, external actors such as India and Europe into overlapping security, technology, and infrastructure frameworks.

At the same time, this emerging order rested on a fragile assumption: that regional normalization and strategic alignment could proceed while the Palestinian issue remained effectively contained. The Palestinian question was not resolved, but it was increasingly treated as a secondary issue that could be managed rather than as the central organizing principle of regional politics. The events of October 7, 2023,

2. Jim Garamone, "U.S. Aligns Key Partners Against Shared Threats in the Middle East," January 15, 2021, *U.S. Department of War*, <<https://www.war.gov/News/Article/246123/u-s-aligns-key-partners-against-shared-threats-in-the-middle-east>>.

3. Assaf Orion & Mark Montgomery, "Moving Israel to CENTCOM: Another Step Into the Light," January 28, 2021, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, <<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/moving-israel-centcom-another-step-light>>.

shattered this assumption. Hamas's attack exposed the limits of the containment model and demonstrated that the Palestinian issue could not be indefinitely bypassed without consequences for regional stability.

That said, the aftermath of October 7 produced a more complex outcome than a simple return of Palestine to the center of regional politics. On the one hand, the attack re-centered the Palestinian issue as a question of legitimacy. It reinforced the reality that no durable regional order can ignore Palestinian self-determination, Arab public opinion, or the political costs of normalization. On the other hand, the subsequent expansion of the conflict displaced Palestine from the operational core of regional



Figure 3. Pro-Palestine Demonstrations

Source: Becker1999, "Rally for Gaza in Columbus," November 12, 2023, *Wikimedia Commons*, <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rally_for_Gaza_in_Columbus,_2023-11-12_\(8207\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rally_for_Gaza_in_Columbus,_2023-11-12_(8207).jpg)>.

security planning. As the war spread to Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iraq-linked militias, the Red Sea, and eventually direct confrontation with Iran, the strategic agenda shifted toward deterrence, air defense, Gulf vulnerability, maritime security, and U.S.-enabled coordination.

The result is somewhat paradoxical. The Palestinian issue has returned as a central constraint on regional diplomacy, but it has not become the organizing foundation of the emerging security architecture. It can block or delay normalization, shape public opinion, and constrain Arab-Israeli cooperation. But the security system that has developed since October 7 is structured primarily around Iran, air defense, CENTCOM coordination, and the protection of regional infrastructure and trade routes.

III. From Multi-Front War to the Erosion of Iran's Forward Defense

After October 7, Israel did not fight a single-front war. Rather, it entered a multi-front campaign against the Iranian-aligned network surrounding it, marking a major shift in Israeli strategy.

Before October 7, Israel's approach to Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah was often described as deterrence management or "mowing the grass": periodic military operations designed to reduce capabilities without fundamentally altering the strategic environment. After October 7, that approach was discredited in Israeli eyes. Israel adopted a more expansive objective: not only to defeat Hamas in Gaza, but to weaken the broader regional network through which Iran projected power.

The conflict expanded beyond Gaza to include sustained pressure on Hezbollah in Lebanon, operations across Syria following the collapse of the Assad regime, strikes against Houthi positions, and ultimately a large-scale confrontation with Iran itself. In effect, Israel moved from managing threats to attempting to degrade, dismantle, or roll back the network that Iran had constructed around it.

This network was central to Iran's long-standing strategy of "forward defense." For decades, Tehran sought to keep threats away from its own territory by cultivating

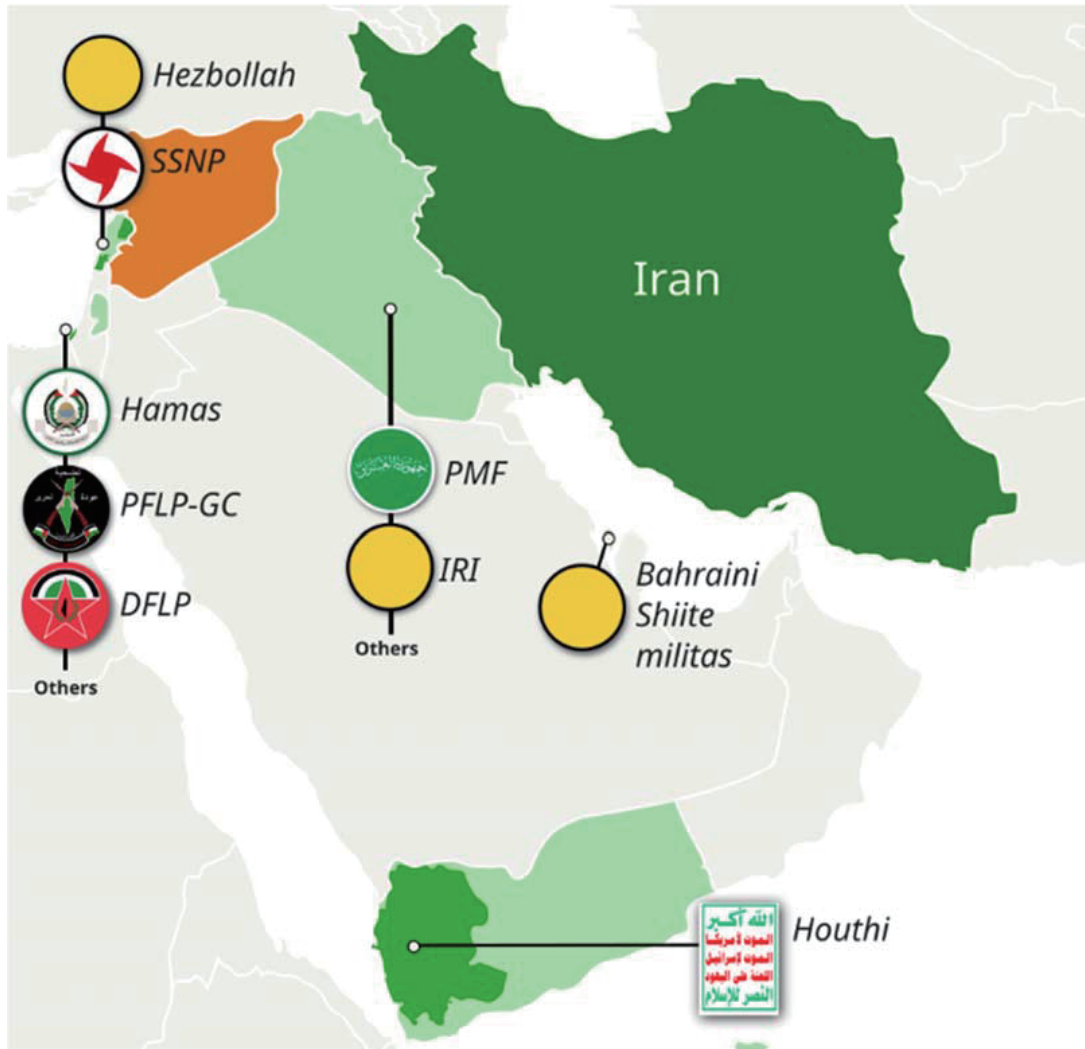


Figure 4. Iran’s Axis of Resistance

Source: Wikimedia Commons, “Axis of Resistance,” December 24, 2024, *Wikimedia Commons*, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Axis_of_Resistance.svg>.

armed partners across the region. Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Iraq and Syria, Palestinian militant groups in Gaza, and the Houthis in Yemen formed what is often described as a “ring of fire,” allowing Iran to project influence and deter adversaries without engaging in direct state-to-state conflict.

The post-October 7 campaign has significantly weakened this system. Hamas has suffered substantial losses in Gaza; Hezbollah and the Houthis have come under sustained military pressure; and the collapse of the Assad regime has disrupted the geographic corridor linking Iran to the Levant. Importantly, Syria was not merely an ally but a critical logistical and strategic link connecting Iran and Iraq to Lebanon and the Mediterranean. Its loss has therefore had outsized consequences for Iran's regional posture.⁴

The result is not the elimination of Iran's influence, but its transformation. Tehran remains capable of disruption through missiles, drones, proxy mobilization, cyber operations, and maritime pressure. However, its ability to use these actors as a coherent and integrated deterrent system has been significantly degraded.

IV. From Strategic Partnership to Regional Co-Defense

The Iran War also revealed an unprecedented level of U.S.-Israeli military integration. Previous cooperation was already rather extensive: U.S. arms transfers, intelligence sharing, missile-defense funding, joint exercises, pre-positioned equipment, emergency resupply, and air-defense deployments. But the Iran War crossed a threshold from support and coordination into combined operational practice.

Dana Stroul argues that the U.S. and Israeli campaigns (namely Operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion) were not separate in any meaningful sense and amounted to the first truly combined U.S.-Israeli military operation. The U.S. and Israel increasingly operated as co-producers of the regional security.⁵

4. Rufat Ahmadzada, "The Collapse of Iran's Proxy Strategy Exposes the Limits of Asymmetric Warfare," August 14, 2025, *Small Wars Journal*, <<https://smallwarsjournal.com/2025/08/14/the-collapse-of-iran-proxy-strategy-exposes-the-limits-of-asymmetric-warfare>>.

5. Dana Stroul, "America and Israel's War to Remake the Middle East," March 4, 2026, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, <<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/america-and-israel-war-remake-middle-east>>.



Figure 5. The U.S.-Israel Alliance at Work

Source: Emanuel Fabian, “Visiting CENTCOM chief meets top IDF generals amid US military buildup in Mideast,” January 24, 2026, *The Times of Israel*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/centcom-chief-reportedly-to-visit-israel-on-saturday-amid-us-military-buildup-in-mideast/?utm_source=chatgpt.com>.

As such, one could argue that Israel is no longer only a U.S.-backed regional power. Rather, it is increasingly a partner through which the U.S. can project military effects. The U.S., in turn, is no longer merely the external guarantor of Israel’s security. It is increasingly embedded in Israel’s warfighting architecture. This produces a new regional pattern: U.S. systems reinforce Israel, Israeli systems reinforce Gulf partners, and CENTCOM links the pieces.

The significance of this transformation extends beyond the bilateral U.S.-Israel relationship. As the conflict widened, the same operational architecture increasingly connected Israel to Gulf security. Capabilities that had previously been limited to discreet intelligence sharing and indirect coordination began evolving into visible forms of regional co-defense.

The previously mentioned UAE missile-defense package is perhaps the clearest illustration of the shift from quiet coordination to visible co-defense. For years, Israel and the Gulf states cooperated discreetly on intelligence, cyber, and Iran-related concerns. The war transformed this into overt operational support. The reported deployment of Israeli personnel and Israeli air-defense systems on Emirati soil during Iranian attacks marked a threshold moment: Israel was not only defending itself; it was reportedly helping defend a Gulf partner.⁶

This fits into a wider regional air-defense architecture. Indeed, the recent conflict might be viewed as the clearest test yet of years-long efforts to integrate Gulf air defenses. Essentially, the U.S. sits at the center of this system. It provides radar networks, missile-defense systems, intelligence, command-and-control links, and the political cover that allows Arab partners to cooperate with Israel without fully formalizing the relationship. In fact, American officials had already identified air defense as a key area where cooperation under the Abraham Accords could be operationalized; in a 2022 briefing, CENTCOM Commander General. Frank McKenzie said missile defense was one area where regional partners understood the need for cooperation against Iran's missile threat.⁷

Nonetheless, this visible co-defense should not be mistaken for a NATO-like alliance. Gulf states seek protection from Iranian missiles and drones, but they also fear retaliation, economic disruption, domestic backlash, and entrapment in Israeli escalation. The emerging architecture is therefore best understood as modular co-defense: air defense, missile warning, counter-drone systems, intelligence, maritime security, and crisis logistics are increasingly integrated, but without binding collective-defense obligations or a unified political strategy.

6. Burcu Ozelik, "Iran War Grew UAE-Israel Security Ties: Normalisation's Peril, Promise," May 7, 2026, *Royal United Services Institute*, <<https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/iran-war-grew-uae-israel-security-ties-normalisations-peril-promise>>.

7. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., "CENTCOM Commander Gen. Frank McKenzie Holds a Press Briefing," March 18, 2022, *U.S. Department of War*, <<https://www.war.gov/news/transcripts/centcom-commander-gen-frank-mckenzie-press-briefing-20220318>>.

V. Energy, Chokepoints, and the Securitization of Trade Routes

The reconfiguration of the Middle East security order is not only military and diplomatic. It is also geoeconomic. The U.S.-Israel-Iran War has turned energy corridors into central arenas of coercion and deterrence. The Strait of Hormuz, the Red Sea, and Bab al-Mandab are no longer merely commercial passages. They have become militarized chokepoints through which regional actors can impose global costs.

The Strait of Hormuz is certainly the most important case. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), approximately 20 million barrels per day of crude oil and oil products transited the Strait of Hormuz in 2025, representing roughly 25 percent of world seaborne oil trade. The IEA also notes that about 93 percent of Qatar's LNG exports and 96 percent of the UAE's LNG exports transited the Strait, representing about 19 percent of global LNG trade; roughly 80 percent of oil and oil products transiting the Strait of Hormuz in 2025 were destined for Asia.⁸

This means that Iran does not need a military victory to impose global costs. Instead, it can simply exploit its geography. If Iran's land-based "Axis of Resistance" has been damaged, its maritime-geoeconomic leverage remains rather potent.

The new energy weapon is less about formal embargoes and more about the weaponization of corridors: mines, missiles, drones, tanker seizures, port vulnerability, insurance risk, rerouting costs, LNG disruptions, and market expectations. The IEA reported in April 2026 that disruptions to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz removed close to 20 percent of global LNG supply from the market and pushed Asian and European gas prices to their highest levels since January 2023.⁹

8. International Energy Agency, "Strait of Hormuz: Factsheet," February 2026, *IEA*, <<https://www.iea.org/reports/strait-of-hormuz>>.

9. International Energy Agency, "Middle East crisis disrupts international natural gas markets and delays global LNG supply wave," April 24, 2026, *IEA*, <<https://www.iea.org/news/middle-east-crisis-disrupts-international-natural-gas-markets-and-delays-global-lng-supply-wave>>.

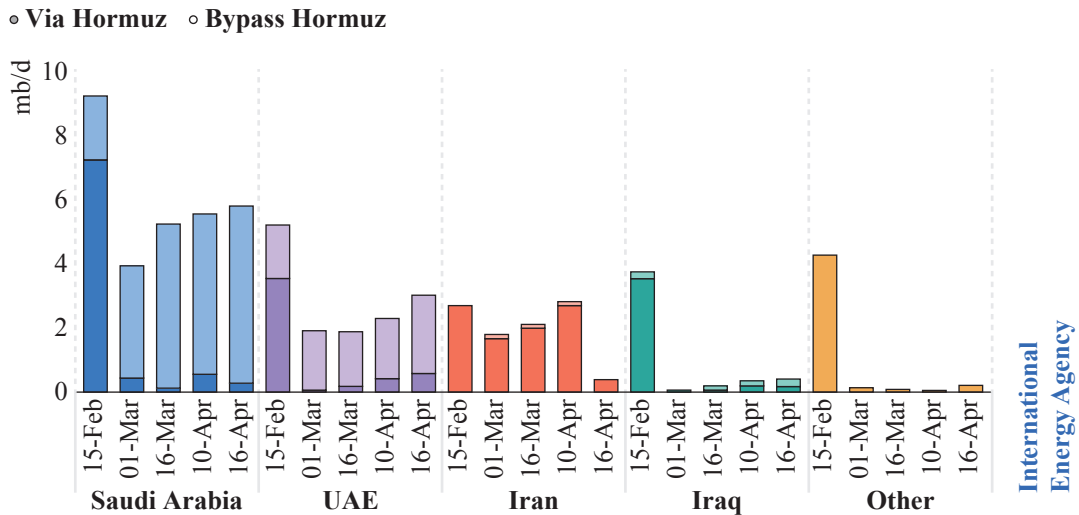


Figure 6. Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz

Source: International Energy Agency, “Oil Market Report - May 2026,” May 20, 2026, *IEA*, <<https://x.com/IEA/status/2056793514659176731/photo/1>>.

The Red Sea crisis after October 7 prefigured this shift. Houthi attacks on vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden transformed the Gaza War into a global shipping problem, threatening one of the main arteries connecting Asia and Europe.¹⁰ The crisis in the Strait of Hormuz expanded the same logic from container shipping to the core of the global energy system.

Energy security helps explain Gulf behavior. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and other Gulf states do not want to become combatants in an Israeli/American-Iranian War, but they also cannot remain indifferent when Iran or Iran-aligned actors threaten the routes, ports, airspace, and infrastructure on which their economic models depend. Their participation in U.S.-enabled defensive coordination is therefore not simply ideological alignment against Iran. It is a response to the securitization of energy and trade.

10. Noah Berman, “How Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea Threaten Global Shipping,” January 12, 2024, *Council on Foreign Relations*, <<https://www.cfr.org/articles/how-houthi-attacks-red-sea-threaten-global-shipping>>.

For Taiwan, this is arguably one of the most relevant lessons. The Middle East War shows that a maritime chokepoint can become a tool of coercion without a direct attack on the importing state. Energy security, maritime security, and national security can no longer be treated separately.

VI. China: From Economic Distance to Strategic Enabling

China's role is another reason why the emerging order should not be described simply as a U.S.-Israel-Gulf bloc. In the last couple of years, China has become a major economic, technological, energy, and diplomatic actor in the Gulf. A prominent example is Beijing's 2023 mediation of the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement that showed that China could play a more visible diplomatic role.



Figure 7. China as a Mediator in the Middle East

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, "Wang Yi Chairs Closing Meeting of Talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Beijing," March 10, 2023, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC*, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2878_663746/2880_663750/202303/t20230312_11039412.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com>.

It is worthwhile to mention, though, that its role remains different from that of the U.S., as the U.S. remains the indispensable hard-security actor. Still, China is no longer merely a passive economic actor.¹¹ Chatham House's Ahmed Aboudouh argues that Beijing has largely taken a back seat since October 7 and has shown limited leverage in the face of U.S. pressure on Tehran, but also warns that this should not be mistaken for indifference or unreliability: China is playing a longer game over Iran.¹²

The key concept is strategic enabling. China is not Iran's formal security guarantor, but it helps Iran absorb pressure. The U.S. Treasury warned in April 2026 that China purchases approximately 90 percent of Iran's oil exports, with independent "teapot" refineries accounting for the majority of these imports, and that this revenue benefits Iran's regime, weapons programs, and military.¹³ There have also been reports suggesting more direct Chinese support to Iran, including intelligence-sharing or military transfers,¹⁴ but such claims remain difficult to verify. What can be stated with confidence is that China's economic, industrial, technological, and diplomatic role helps sustain Iran's resilience and complicates the U.S.-Israeli pressure.

The result is a dual architecture. On the one hand, the U.S. leads hard-security integration: CENTCOM, missile defense, intelligence, naval protection, and interoperability. On the other hand, China provides economic and strategic enabling: oil purchases, sanctions-evasion channels, dual-use supply chains, diplomatic messaging, and a hedge for Gulf states that do not want to be dependent exclusively on Washington.

11. Yiqi Zhou, "The Power of Not Using Power: China and the Saudi-Iranian Rapprochement," May 25, 2026 accessed, *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt Blog*, <<https://blog.prif.org/the-power-of-not-using-power-china-and-the-saudi-iranian-rapprochement>>.

12. Ahmed Aboudouh, "China is playing the long game over Iran," February 27, 2026, *Chatham House*, <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/topics/china/china-playing-long-game-over-iran>>.

13. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, "Treasury Warns of Sanctions Risks Linked to China-Based Independent 'Teapot' Oil Refineries," April 28, 2026, *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, <<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0476>>.

14. Kimberly Donovan & Emily Ezratty, "From drones to rocket fuel, China and Russia are helping Iran through supply chains," March 25, 2026, *Atlantic Council*, <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/dispatches/from-drones-to-rocket-fuel-china-and-russia-are-helping-iran-through-supply-chains>>.

For the time being, Beijing remains cautious rather than neutral. It is unwilling to replace the U.S. as a hard-security provider, yet it helps Iran survive pressure, gives Gulf states a hedging option, and benefits when U.S. resources are pulled back into the Middle East.

VII. Competing Middle-Power Architectures: Post-American or Post-Hegemonic?

The Middle East is not becoming “post-American” in the sense that the U.S. has disappeared. The U.S. remains very much central to missile defense, intelligence, naval security, sanctions enforcement, arms supply, and crisis coordination. But the region is becoming somewhat post-hegemonic: regional powers are building overlapping and sometimes competing frameworks rather than relying exclusively on an American-led architecture.

One example is the Saudi-Pakistani defense pact. In September 2025, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a *Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement* stating that aggression against either country would be considered aggression against both. The Middle East Institute’s F. Gregory Gause cautions against exaggerating the pact into an automatic Pakistani nuclear umbrella or a fully operational “Islamic NATO,” but he also treats it as a significant regional development reflecting Gulf concerns about deterrence and U.S. reliability.¹⁵

This Saudi-Pakistani axis exists alongside wider discussion of a Turkey-Saudi-Egypt-Pakistan coordination track.¹⁶ Also in this case, the label “Islamic NATO” might be premature. There is no clear integrated command, treaty framework, or common strategic doctrine binding the four states. But the trend is still important: Saudi financial leverage, Turkey’s defense industry, Egypt’s geography and control

15. F. Gregory Gause III, “Don’t believe the hype: The modest reality of the Saudi-Pakistani defense pact,” October 8, 2025, *Middle East Institute*, <<https://www.mei.edu/publications/dont-believe-hype-modest-reality-saudi-pakistani-defense-pact>>.

16. Natasha Lindstaedt, “Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia emerge as a new regional power bloc amid Iran war,” April 8, 2026, *The Conversation*, <<https://doi.org/10.64628/AB.3ud4wrhtm>>.

of Suez, and Pakistan’s military capacity are being drawn into closer strategic conversation. The significance lies less in a completed bloc than in a search for strategic insurance.

A second example is the “Hexagon of Alliances” proposed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Before the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel, Netanyahu had outlined a “Hexagon” involving Israel, India, Greece, Cyprus, and other unnamed Arab, African, and Asian states, framed as a counter to radical Shia and Sunni axes.¹⁷ For the time being, no government has publicly endorsed the plan, and analysts describe it as more of a “branding exercise” for a



Figure 8. Turkey-Saudi-Egypt-Pakistan Meeting

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad, “The Consultations among the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Egypt have commenced in Islamabad on 29 March 2026,” March 29, 2026, *Facebook*, <<https://www.facebook.com/share/1E7P89Yof6/>>.

17. Government of Israel, “PM Netanyahu’s remarks at the start of today’s Government meeting,” February 22, 2026, *Government of Israel*, <<https://www.gov.il/en/pages/pm-netanyahu-remarks-government-meeting-22-02-2026>>.

patchwork of existing relationships than a NATO-style pact.¹⁸ The “Hexagon” is therefore best understood as an Israeli strategic vision rather than an established alliance. Its importance lies in what it reveals: Israel wants to embed itself in a wider Indo-Mediterranean network linking the Gulf, India, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Europe.

These competing configurations point to a broader transformation. Regional order is increasingly built through corridors as much as through alliances. The postwar Middle East is therefore not simply fragmented. It is being reorganized into overlapping blocs, corridors, and co-defense networks.

VIII. Conclusion

The U.S.-Israel-Iran War did not create a new Middle East security order from scratch. Rather, it accelerated and exposed transformations that had already been unfolding since the *Abraham Accords* and intensified after October 7. What emerged from the conflict is neither a stable alliance system nor a simple return to U.S. regional dominance. Instead, the war revealed a more integrated, militarized, and operationally connected regional architecture centered on Iran deterrence, air defense, maritime security, and the protection of strategic corridors.

The emerging order is not defined by the formation of a new, formal alliance system. Instead, it reflects a shift toward what this paper describes as modular co-defense: practical security integration without full political consolidation. Israel, the U.S., and key Gulf states are increasingly connected through air defense, intelligence, counter-drone systems, maritime security, and crisis coordination. Still, this cooperation remains selective and constrained. Gulf states rely on U.S.-enabled and, increasingly, Israeli-supported defensive capabilities, but they continue to resist binding commitments that would tie them fully to Israeli military strategy or foreclose de-escalation with Iran.

18. Elis Gjevori, “What’s Netanyahu’s planned ‘hexagon’ alliance – and can it work?” February 23, 2026, *Al Jazeera English*, <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/2/23/whats-netanyahus-planned-hexagon-alliance-and-can-it-work>>.

At the same time, the war has reshaped the regional balance in important ways. Iran's "Axis of Resistance" has been weakened but not eliminated; Tehran retains the ability to disrupt through missiles, drones, proxies, and, crucially, through its proximity to strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz. Energy and trade routes have re-emerged as central arenas of coercion, turning maritime corridors and infrastructure into core components of regional security. The U.S. remains indispensable, but it is now more deeply embedded in regional operations rather than acting solely as an external guarantor. Israel is no longer only a recipient of U.S. security support, but an increasingly active contributor to regional defense.

Beyond the immediate conflict, the broader structure of regional order is also shifting. China does not replace the U.S. as a security provider, but it does play an important role in enabling Iran's resilience and offering Gulf states economic and diplomatic alternatives. At the same time, regional powers are exploring their own frameworks of coordination, reflecting a growing desire for strategic autonomy in a more uncertain environment.

The result is not a stable or unified order, but a layered and evolving one. Cooperation is deeper and more operational than before, but it is also more conditional and politically fragile. The Middle East is not moving toward a single dominant security architecture. Instead, it is being reorganized through overlapping partnerships, contested influence, and the pressures of sustained regional conflict.

For external observers, including Taiwan, the implications are significant. Security orders may change less through formal alliances than through the gradual integration of operational capabilities such as air defense, intelligence, logistics, and the protection of critical infrastructure and trade routes. The Middle East after the U.S.-Israel-Iran War demonstrates how quickly previously informal cooperation can evolve into active, if still limited, co-defense. It is within this space between formal alliance and *ad hoc* coordination that the region's emerging system of modular co-defense is taking shape.

