

## The Israeli Strategy for Expansion in the Arab Gulf Region in Light of Current Variables □

### الاستراتيجية التوسعية الإسرائيلية تجاه منطقة الخليج العربي في ضوء المتغيرات الراهنة

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#### Abstract:

This study monitors the current Israeli expansion strategy towards the Arabian Gulf region from a geopolitical perspective, as Israel seeks to impose its influence in Regional Transformation Spaces, and the Gulf is one of them, as it is directly related to Israeli geostrategic interests at all levels. Through this strategy, Israel seeks to subjugate its Arab neighborhood in order to test its interactions, and then adjust a plan to contain any potential regional adversaries. This strategy relied on the American project represented by the Abraham Agreement for Israeli-Gulf normalization, as a tool for a tripartite Israeli-American-Gulf alliance to confirm the expansion of Israel's influence throughout the Arab region, and to consolidate its influence in the greater Middle East. Finally, the study addressed the most prominent obstacles to this strategy, in light of regional changes, most notably the current Israeli war on Gaza.

**Keywords:** Expansion Strategy; Geopolitics; Israel; Arabian Gulf; Abraham Agreement.

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**ملخص:**

ترصد هذه الدراسة إستراتيجية التمدد الإسرائيلية تجاه منطقة الخليج العربي في الوقت الراهن من منظور جيوبوليتيكي، وذلك باعتبار المنطقة من أهم فضاءات التحول الإقليمي الإسرائيلي. وتسعى إسرائيل عبر إستراتيجية تمدها إلى محاولة تطويع تخومها الجغرافية، من أجل اختبار تفاعلاتها، ومن ثم ضبط خطة لاحتواء أي خصوم إقليميين محتملين. وقد اعتمدت هذه الإستراتيجية على المشروع الأمريكي المتمثل في اتفاقية أبراهام للتطبيع الإسرائيلي- الخليجي، كأداة لتحالف ثلاثي إسرائيلي - أمريكي - خليجي لتأكيد توسع نفوذ إسرائيل في كل المنطقة العربية، وتثبيت نفوذها في الشرق الأوسط الكبير. وقد عرجت الدراسة في الأخير على أبرز معيقات تلك الإستراتيجية في ظل المتغيرات الإقليمية، وفي مقدمتها الحرب الإسرائيلية الراهنة على غزة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** إستراتيجية التمدد، جيوبوليتيك، إسرائيل، الخليج العربي، اتفاقية أبراهام.

**Introduction**

When examining the nature of Israeli-Arab relations, it becomes clear that the prevailing characteristic since the establishment of the State of Israel on Palestinian territories in 1948 has been essentially conflictual, whether directly or indirectly. The Israelis are therefore aware that their entity is a foreign body planted in a hostile environment. Breaking the geographical and regional isolation imposed on this entity requires strategic thinking that exploits all regional and international variables in order to establish natural relations with most Arab countries, including the Arab Gulf region. The Gulf region is considered a vital area which, in geopolitical thinking, constitutes a geographical frontier extending into Israel's strategic depth due to its strategic location and the resources it possesses, especially natural resources. In addition, any interactions or non-state actors involved in this area are of interest to strategic planning circles because of their connection to the Palestinian issue as a central issue in the Middle East. Israel will never forget that King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was one of the key actors in the decision to cut off energy supplies from the Arab region to Western countries supporting Israel in its war against the Arabs in 1973, using it as a strategic weapon of pressure and negotiation to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Based on this, Israel views the Arab Gulf region from a geostrategic perspective that includes its political,

military and economic presence in order to reaffirm its regional status. This is achieved by exploiting the geographical factor of the region, considering its countries as an Arab environment that needs to be expanded or relied upon in so-called vital areas of attraction.

This is due to the relationship between the interactions that take place in the region and Israel's security in particular. Therefore, positioning itself in these areas would allow Israel to use the border regions as a strategy for testing interactions in the region in order to achieve a geopolitical objective related to the containment and encirclement of existing and potential adversaries in order to counter any anticipated threats to Israel. This is achieved by relying on the Israeli-Gulf normalisation process to complete its circle of expansion in most of the Arab region, especially after securing direct neighbours in the Middle East, with the exception of Syria.

On this basis, the Abraham Accords, which were concluded between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in 2020 under American auspices, are seen as one of the most prominent Zionist-American projects to advance and expand the normalisation process towards the Gulf region in the future. This geostrategic perspective is primarily aimed at positioning itself in the region and then using the surrounding Arab Gulf countries to achieve its broader strategic objectives in the region. It aims to demonstrate its geopolitical influence beyond the scope of its geographical sphere, to become directly involved in the dynamics of the region, and to become the strategic balance against any power seeking to expand its influence in the Arab Gulf, especially Iran, under these new Israeli orientations, driven by the American desire to make Israel the guardian of the important geographical spheres in the Arab region.

### **1- The Research question of the study**

The Israeli inclination towards the Arab Gulf region as a vital area at the present time, in light of the geostrategic exploitation by Israeli strategic planning circles of the nature of international and regional variables, including the current war on Gaza, raises several questions. The main question that can be asked in this regard is: **How can Israel's expansion into the Arab Gulf region be explained from a geopolitical perspective?**

And we can ask subsidiary questions that reflect the essence of this approach as follows:

1. What is the place of the Arab Gulf region in Israel's strategy of positioning itself in vital areas?

2. What is Israel's strategy for using neighbouring countries to test interactions and contain adversaries in light of the Abraham Accords for normalization with the countries of the region?
3. What are the obstacles or challenges facing Israel's geopolitics in expanding towards the Arab Gulf region in light of regional variables, including the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza?

## **2- Hypothesis of the study:**

The study assumes that the cognitive shift in Israeli geopolitical thinking towards vital spaces reflects the changes at the regional and international levels. This has led to an Israeli inclination towards the Arab Gulf region as a geographical space in which Israel seeks to position itself in order to exploit the surrounding Arab countries. This is done in order to test regional interactions and dynamics within this area, with the aim of arranging geopolitical arrangements that serve its geostrategic interests. This is being achieved through the process of Israeli-Gulf normalization, with American support.

## **3- The plan of the study:**

In accordance with the above, the study is divided into three main parts. In the first part, we highlight the position of the Arab Gulf region in the Israeli strategy of positioning in the area as a geographical space for vital interactions. The second part is devoted to presenting the strategy of using neighbouring countries as a strategic target to test regional interactions related to Israeli interests, and subsequently to attempt to contain and encircle forces and actors hostile to Israel in the region. This is done by exploiting the Abraham Accords for Israeli-Gulf normalization. As for the third part, it addresses the obstacles or challenges facing the current Israeli geopolitical orientation towards the Arab Gulf region in light of regional variables, including the ongoing Israeli war on the Gaza Strip in Palestine.

## **Firstly: The Arabian Gulf's Place for Israeli Expansion in Regional Transformation Spaces**

Regional factors play a fundamental role in shaping Israel's strategic orientations. They constitute the most influential arena for its positions and decisions in these circumstances. This can mean that Israel is very concerned about the possibility of a shift in the power dynamics in the region in favour of other regional parties. Such a situation creates pressure and leads to numerous problems for Israel. Therefore, Israel

has sought to maintain the status quo in its favour and prioritise its national interests.

Moreover, any change in the strategic environment would disrupt the balance of power, leading to a state of insecurity and instability in Israel's neighbourhood, accompanied by the emergence of non-state actors in the region. It is worth noting here that the overlapping geographical environment may provide an opportunity to penetrate the basic structure of the traditional conflict equation. This development could potentially affect the core of the Israeli project in the geopolitical interaction zones of the Middle East region (Saleh, 2011, p. 471).

Based on the preceding analysis, it can be said that the regional and international role map in the region is undergoing significant changes. This exposes it to future crises in the context of competition and conflict between emerging powers. Such transformations partly manifest themselves in what are called "out-of-the-box" scenarios, according to the "black swan" theory, and the initial strategies in such cases are simple, following the logic of expanding influence. This requires an understanding of the shifts in conceptual representations under the heading of "avoiding destruction". This directly raises the question of survival as a fundamental and intuitive issue that currently arises in security-related issues. An immense amount of current interactions are related to and can directly affect security, to the extent that it has become an active element in shaping the Middle East region (Taleb, 2009, p. 25).

Therefore, some researchers and specialists in strategic affairs argue that through the theoretical model of the Black Swan theory presented by "Naseem Taleb" regarding the impact of unexpected events, it represents an important basis for understanding the gradual rapprochement between the Arab Gulf states and Israel in light of the events that have erupted in the region. Especially since there are other events that stimulate the extension of this rapprochement to other unexpected countries in the region, based on new initiatives that are in line with the new regional changes.

Amidst the turbulent strategic landscape, especially after the diminished effectiveness of some central powers in the region and the evolving bargaining and competition based on interests among key actors, the Arab Gulf region is considered the most dynamic in the broader Middle East region. It has become a driving force and a window of opportunity in the geopolitics of the actors' strategies, representing a significant turning point in the strengthening of the positions of key conflicts, which may be aligned with the emergence of new regional

balances or a new global system. This trajectory, which disrupts the strategic balance of power in the region, is the result of major shifts in the form of regional alliances, all built in this region on the basis of two strategic objectives: first, the mutual security concerns of the allies, and second, the pursuit of common interests in all their forms. Finally, it can be said that the restoration of the strategic balance in favour of the Arab parties lies in two options: the first is the resumption of a strong and influential presence of the United States in the region, while the second option lies in the formation of an Arab security system, whether through alliances or other means, that takes on the responsibility of restoring the strategic balance in the region. In addition, the five Gulf states need to move beyond the "regional power" strategy to a stronger regional strategy (Hashem, 2019a, p. 74).

As a result, the dramatic interactions in the Middle East have led to Israel's growing role and centrality in the region. This has been confirmed by events following the wave of change in the region. Israel's geographical location has enabled it to quickly assume a regional role, enhancing its ability to influence the orientations and aspirations of other strategic actors in the region. Moreover, Israel possesses influential tools that enable it to fulfil this role, suggesting its growing influence and penetration in the geopolitical landscape of the region. Despite the lack of certain supporting factors such as size or geographical expanse, Israel is aware that restoring the level of cooperation with the United States will be instrumental in finding means to enhance its ability to alter the existing geopolitical status quo in a way that affects the interests of its competitors, particularly Iran. Israel emphasises its historical enmity with Iran since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 (Hashem, 2019b, p. 96).

The gradual shifts and changes within the historical context of the wave of change confirm that the power dynamics in the Middle East are moving towards proxy wars due to geopolitical variables. In addition to the nature of ill-considered alliances resulting from the collapse of the regional balance system, some geographically peripheral states have been forced to play a significant geostrategic role at the expense of their strategic depth. This has a negative impact on the stability of the national security equation in the region, including speculative scenarios about the decline and weakness of the regional Arab system, represented by the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council, and their ineffectiveness in fulfilling their previous roles in the region (Hashem, 2019b, p. 99).

From an Israeli perspective, it is worth mentioning the mistakes made by the previous administration of President "Barack Obama" in vital

areas within the region. The administration of President “Donald Trump”, on the other hand has tried to impose a new reality in favour of the United States.

The vision of Israel's ruling elite is based on political, economic and military openness to the Gulf. This is accompanied by a revival of geopolitical principles that call for control over vital areas. Thus, Israel is forced to deal with the wave of change as a regional power with ambitions to demonstrate its influence in the region. This means that Israel's main strategic objectives are based on two key factors: firstly, the existence of a common enemy represented by the Iranian threat, and secondly, Arab concerns about Israel's growing influence in the region. In this context, the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies published the results of a survey purportedly conducted on Arab social media networks, according to which hostility towards Iran outweighs hostility towards Israel among the Arab public. These concerns among individuals in the Gulf reflect security reactions stemming from regional political developments and attempts by some countries to move towards normalization with Israel, aligning themselves with the anti-Iranian axis due to its perceived growing influence in the region (Anabtawi, 2020, p. 110).

In this respect, there is always a common ground in Israeli thinking, which falls within the framework of cultural cooperation, on which one can build. The essence of this idea is based on the notion that if political geography fails to provide a common basis for cooperation, history provides Israel with a wealth of cooperative experiences that can serve the same purpose. Moreover, if ideological contradictions fail to provide this common ground for cultural exchange, there is a practical pragmatic basis for interaction (Awad, 1998, p. 49).

Returning to the previous discussion, the growth of Israel's regional role has coincided with increasing evidence of the erosion of the notion of a systemic core and periphery, both within the system and in relation to neighbouring countries outside it. Peripheral countries like Israel have succeeded in penetrating the Middle East region, exploiting the strategic depth of the Arab Gulf and the Arab Levant , and becoming influential actors in their political dynamics. This has allowed Israel to develop strategic relations with certain Arab countries that serve its multidimensional interests (Hashem, 2019b, p. 96).

When former Prime Minister “Ariel Sharon” speaks of spaces or domains, characterised by a dense network of interactions that can influence regional power dynamics, he is referring to the circle of vital domains that encompasses Israel's strategic interests. He defined this

circle as the region encompassing all of Israel's Arab neighbours, plus Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and North Africa, extending south to Zimbabwe and South Africa. This circle was then extended to include the western Atlantic coast and the Islamic republics of Central Asia to the north (Hashem, 2019b, p. 101).

In summary, Israel's strategic position at the regional level is being strengthened on the basis of perceptions that stem primarily from the close relationship between the United States and Israel. Israel's growing needs and national interests have come to determine its relations with the United States, with the common goal of establishing a central presence in the region. This is manifested in the alignment of its interests with those of the Gulf states, leading to the formation of new alliances in the region. Conversely, we are witnessing an unprecedented vitality in the Arab Gulf, where Israel is seeking to counter Iran's growing influence, particularly in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. For the sake of its interests and in order to assert its presence in the entire Gulf region, Israel is formulating an equation that includes political, economic and security dimensions that could potentially push for a higher level of normalization with the countries of the region (Nahas, 2019, p. 124).

Thus, the process of rehabilitation of the Middle East region, has led to the expectation expressed by the former Israeli Minister of Defence “Benny Gantz” in October 2020. He anticipated joint cooperation with his counterpart, former US Secretary of Defense “Mark Esper”, and reaffirmed the strategic commitment of the United States to maintaining Israel's military superiority in the Middle East. “Gantz” said : “We had important discussions that included Israel's commitment to maintaining its security superiority”. He added : “We are entering an era of normalization in the Middle East, that can help us confront Iranian influence in the region, and we will work with the United States and our serious friendship to strengthen cooperation in achieving these efforts” (Majadla, <https://2u.pw/2JHgeAT>).

Based on the above information, we can conclude that these Israeli-American moves come in the context of developments imposed by the phenomenon of political instability, which has deepened the contradictions between the interests of the influential powers in the region. Many countries, including those in the Arab Gulf, want to break the cycle of confrontation and escape the impasse in which they have found themselves as a result of their involvement in the region's hot issues, which have failed to achieve their objectives. Therefore, they have begun to seek rapprochement and establish relations with Israel as



a means of weakening potential emerging regional powers that could pose a threat to their interests in the future.

**Secondly : the strategy of adapting the geographical border areas to test interaction, and contain opponents through the Abraham Agreement for Israeli-Gulf normalization**

The development of the history of international relations, has been driven by crises and sudden developments, that can be seen as windows of opportunity to overcome the static status quo, and lay serious foundations for interactions between international parties within the framework of a new reality (Yunus, 2020, <https://cutt.us/T4G7p>). This falls within the classic categories for understanding and interpreting the process of shaping international interactions, which is why political geographers use the concept of strategy to express conflicts, that involve geographical considerations. Geopolitics also describes competitive relations between countries, and geopolitical thinking is based on a set of procedural actors and principles, which consist of a set of political-geographical assumptions, on which the state proceeds in its foreign policy. These principles include, in particular the interests of the state, and the sources of threats that impede its interests, and then plans to respond to and confront them threats along with realistic justifications for responding (Yunus, 2020, <https://cutt.us/T4G7p>).

From this perspective, we can say that as a result of the changes in Israel's strategy, particularly in the Middle East region, its growing needs and national interests have come to shape its foreign relations. As a result, Israel is focusing on assessing the consequences of the diminished American presence in the region, due to the policies pursued by the previous administration of President “Obama”, which Israel does not consider to serve its security interests. Israel believes that its security depends not only on the financial support of the United States in the region, but also on an effective American policy and a permanent American presence alongside it. Based on this, Israeli strategic thinkers have seen an opportunity that regional actors, especially Iran with potential support from international actors such as China and Russia, could exploit to form a vague alliance against Israel's regional interests. This alliance would be formed with a hostile state that opposes Israel's orientations in the region, while its allies tend to be more neutral. This situation would lead to the strategic power vacuum in the region being filled by uncertain actors following the noticeable decline of the American role. Consequently, a political, security and economic assessment that responds to these threats is needed in order to redirect Israel's strategic thinking towards a vital area that achieves its national

objectives (Tawazon Center for Research and Studies, 2020, <https://cutt.us/RA3CI>).

In the same context, Israeli strategic planning circles have recognised the need to adopt a new approach that gives importance to the Middle East region, and the variables related to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This approach is based on the need to engage with countries that fall within the sphere of Israel's vital interests. It is based on a realistic understanding of the new regional and international environment, which requires the pursuit of alternative paths. This approach led to the normalization of relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain under American auspices, known as the 'Abraham Accords', signed in 2020. According to Israeli national security doctrine, this development is seen as a dynamic or kinetic rhythm leading to the growth of Israeli strategic capabilities in response to the Iranian threat.

According to Israeli strategic experts, Iran has positioned itself in Israel's backyard through, its ally Hezbollah in Lebanon. In Syria, Iran has formed an alliance with the anti-Israeli Syrian regime, while in Palestine it supports factions of the Islamic Jihad movement in the West Bank that are aligned with Iran. In Iraq, Iran supports Shia militias that carry out its plans to expand its influence in the country. In Yemen, Iran supports the Houthi rebels through the Ansar Allah movement. Iran has effectively turned these vital areas into permanent threat fronts that pose an explicit threat to Israel's security.

On this basis, Israel's actual presence in the neighbouring Emirati territories, as stipulated in the Abraham Accords, will enable it to closely monitor and track Iran's movements. In addition, intelligence coordination and cooperation between the UAE and Israel will enhance their ability to counter Iranian threats. Therefore, Israel seeks to use the heightened Iranian threat to the Arab Gulf states, as a pretext to enhance and improve its own image by highlighting its unique role as a supporter of peace, stability and security. This pretext has facilitated a broader dialogue with various regional parties, in line with Israel's vision as an attractive force to win sympathy in the Middle East region (Arab48, <https://cutt.us/5TZHK>).

From here, Israel realises the geostrategic value of normalising its relations with some Arab Gulf states, in the context of its external balance with Iran. This is based on their geographical value, with the aim of maintaining the balance of power or forming new alliances in the region. Some strategic analyses have shown this in the Israeli-Emirati Abraham Accords, which include an Israeli strength that positions the UAE as an advanced geographical area compared to the Iranian coast. This allows Israel to meet its military needs if necessary,

and thus to enhance its regional status in the entire Arabian Gulf region, in political and economic contexts. It also paves the way for the possibility of extending the normalization process with other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait (Al Jazeera Center for Strategic Studies, <https://cutt.us/n51NP>). This is evident in Israel's attempt to strengthen its relations with these countries, in order to play a key role in reordering the situation in the region, especially in light of the role played by former US President "Donald Trump" in brokering the deal. This has given hope to the ruling elite in Israel to reaffirm the compatibility of Israeli policy with its American counterpart. Former US Secretary of State "Mike Pompeo", emphasised the positive relationship between the UAE and Israel, saying : "The UAE and Israel have agreed to form an alliance against Iran to protect American soil and the Middle East through the known Abraham Accord" . He added, "Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv see Tehran as a major threat", confirming that the agreement between the UAE and Israel, to establish a strategic relationship would enable them to form an alliance in the Arabian Gulf in the future to ensure that the Iranian threat, does not reach American soil or harm anyone in the Middle East (Al Jazeera Center for Strategic Studies, <https://cutt.us/n51NP>).

It is clear from the above that, in light of these variables, Israel is focusing on creating incentives, that will encourage the Gulf states to voluntarily engage in the normalization process. The goal is to establish a Gulf-Israeli strategic understanding, that consolidates political, security and economic interests. Therefore, Israel seeks to create regional partners to regulate the pace of regional interactions, with the hope that this strategic partnership will expand to form an American-Israeli-Gulf geopolitical axis, that can be used to achieve the following objectives (Arab Center for Advanced Research and Studies, 2020, <https://cutt.us/VWYc8>).

- Redefine the sources of threat in the region, focusing on Iran, Turkey and the Islamic resistance movements in Palestine, South Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen.
- Expanding the Alliance's sphere of influence in the Mediterranean, and the Arabian Gulf.
- Cooperate to make special efforts, to influence the determinants that form the basis of the American strategy in the Middle East, in order to avoid a situation similar to the decline of American influence in the region during the Obama administration.
- Coordination against the threat of any democratic transformation in the region, under the pretext of maintaining security and stability. This

containment approach aims to prevent alternative systems that do not serve Israel's interests, and pose an explicit threat to its security, as well as the security and interests of allied hereditary regimes in the Gulf.

Based on the above, it is clear that there has been a shift in American strategy under the leadership of former President “Donald Trump” towards supporting Israel's orientation towards the Arab Gulf. This is done, in order to establish a Middle Eastern system in which Israel plays a regional role, that serves the interests of the United States and its interests, with the aim of not disrupting the balance of power that has been constructed in the region. Therefore, the American-Israeli approach is in line with the geostrategic equation, that shapes the confrontation between Israel and Iran, and is based on the principle of reciprocity. Israel accuses Iran of posing a geographical threat on its borders, and this is confirmed by Iran's intervention in Syria, which Israel sees as Iranian military and security influence in the region. As a result of these factors, the United States following the Abraham Accords, seeks to strengthen Israel's position in the Arab Gulf through a comprehensive containment strategy. This strategy is part of the reconfiguration of equations and balances, represented by the new Middle East paradigm. Thus, Israel's presence on Iran's borders, in the form of the normalization of relations with the United Arab Emirates, is in line with Israel's basic principle of confronting Iran and its potential sources of threat (Centre for Palestinian and Strategic Studies, 2020, p. 206).

Against this background, Israeli Prime Minister “Benjamin Netanyahu” sees, the Israeli-Emirati agreement as an extremely important turning point in the history of Israel and the Middle East. He emphasises that, it contributes to strengthening strategic cooperation and opens up serious prospects for relations. Moreover, it inherently provides Israel with a greater and broader presence. In the same context, it is in line with the approach of the Trump administration, which since 2018 has sought to establish what it calls the Strategic Middle East Alliance project, which includes the Gulf Arab states as well as Egypt and Jordan, in order to confront Iran. On this basis, the United States has offered these countries integration into a missile defence umbrella, and assistance in supplying them with modern equipment and weapons, as well as developing their intelligence military, and training capabilities (Al-Musfer, 2018, p. 113).

In reality, with the prolongation of the Qatar-Saudi crisis, and Qatar's differences with the UAE due to events in the Arab region, such as those in Egypt and Libya, it is likely that the formation of new alliances in the region between the Arab Gulf states and Israel, could serve as an

important gateway for future Qatari involvement in such alliances. This could potentially be a way of resolving Gulf-Gulf disputes, paving the way for a broader Israeli-Gulf rapprochement and its spread. From this perspective, the benefits of this rapprochement for Israel are no less significant than those for the Arab Gulf states, meaning that the entry of Israeli companies into the large Gulf market would yield substantial economic returns. The political implications will also be significant. In light of this, the United States has accelerated the adoption of a strategy that is in line with Israeli geopolitical thinking, which emphasises the need to shift towards the East, in order to consolidate Israel's integration approach within its regional environment and make it a regional actor, capable of filling the strategic void that could result from the US withdrawal from the region. This strategy aims to prevent any rising power from threatening Israeli and American interests in this vital arena, with Iran at the forefront.

### **Thirdly: Obstacles to the Israeli expansion strategy towards the Arab Gulf in the light of current regional dynamics**

The multidimensional Israeli geostrategic orientation, which primarily reflects expansionist geopolitical thinking towards vital areas in the Arab region as a whole is fundamentally linked to the arenas of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus, this conflict and its nature cannot be isolated from the ongoing power dynamics, regional polarization, and international phenomenon in the broader Middle East. Consequently, Israeli foreign policy towards the Arab Gulf, may face challenges in the form of opposition or rejection of the outcomes of Israeli-Gulf interactions amidst emerging regional variables. One of the most prominent challenges is the ongoing Israeli war on the Gaza Strip in Palestine, and the potential future regional and global ramifications it may generate. These ramifications could alter the dynamics of international balances in the Middle East, where its issues are central to international politics. This in turn, could potentially lead to a change in the structure of the international system and its unipolar nature, which is based on American strategic dominance in support of Israel in the region, considering it as a functional state that complements American projects in the wider Middle East.

Therefore in our assessment, the Israeli war on Gaza and its developments have revealed a series of regional and international interactions, that confirm that the entire Arab region is experiencing an unstable situation. This exposes Israeli policy towards the region to expected shocks or setbacks, that could undermine the normalization process and hinder its extension to all the Gulf countries. If we look at

the positions of some of these countries towards the war, despite their lukewarm response, we find that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which advocates de-escalation in Gaza, has put itself in an awkward position regarding the issue of normalization with Israel. It has made normalization conditional on the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, through peace negotiations as a two-state solution. In addition, Saudi Arabia has put pressure on the United States by refusing to join the Abraham Accords, due to the lukewarm Saudi-American relations resulting from the Saudi stance on the Ukrainian-Russian war. This is particularly evident in the Saudi rejection of the US request to increase Saudi oil production. In addition, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia wants to obtain advanced arms deals from the United States, which may even include the development of Saudi nuclear capabilities. This could be of concern to Israel, which fears that Saudi Arabia could become a pivotal state in the Arab Gulf region with strategic weapons to match Israel's nuclear superiority in the Middle East. This would upset the balance of power in the region, which currently favours Israel.

On the other hand, Qatar's position against the war on Gaza, and its active support for the Palestinian resistance, which Israel recognizes could be an obstacle to Israeli orientations in the Arab Gulf. Qatar's significant soft power influence in the Arab region is evident in its support for Islamist political movements linked to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Syria and Libya. Qatar is also an ally of Hamas in Gaza. Given its interactions with the Arab region, Qatar has formed a regional alliance, that includes Islamist political movements in addition to Turkey. This alliance is a Qatari response to Israel's policy towards the Arab region, and a clear challenge to the Gulf's soft power, which provides political, media and material support to the Palestinian resistance. Qatar's role differs significantly from the positions of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, both of which are concerned about Qatar's support for the Islamist current, seeking to change the ruling regimes in the Arab region. Qatar openly opposes Israel by adopting armed resistance as a strategy. This poses a major challenge to Israel and hinders its expansionist projects in the wider Middle East.

Based on the above, it can be argued that the declared Israeli war on Gaza, may change several dynamics and cast doubts and interpretations on the Abraham agreement between Israel and the UAE. It is suggested that this agreement is primarily aimed at undermining the Arab Peace Initiative, which called for Israel's complete withdrawal from the occupied territories in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967, and a just solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees as a prerequisite for normalization with Israel. Therefore, the current actions

of the resistance movement, especially its sudden military attack on Israel, can be seen as an attempt to thwart this project, which seeks to deprive the Palestinian people of their historic rights, and weaken the historic Arab and international stance in support of the Palestinian cause.

As for the other regional variable, it is represented by Iran as a non-Arab pivotal state in the Arab Gulf region. This state has interacted with events in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, from the point of view of conflict with the West and Israel since the Shiite Islamic revolution of 1979. This revolution completed the circle of Iranian expansion towards the so-called Shia crescent, which extends through Lebanon and Syria into the strategic depth of Israel. In addition to its obvious influence in the Arab Gulf region, Iran supports armed factions, and Shiite political currents in Iraq. Consequently, Iran's dealings with its proxies in southern Lebanon, such as Hezbollah, and various Shia militias in Iraq, as well as its support for the Houthi movement in Yemen, and the Islamic Jihad movement in Palestine, will constrain Israel's movements towards the Arab Gulf region. This is especially true given the possibility of resistance attacks against Israeli and American interests in the region, particularly in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Bab El-Mandeb Strait by the Houthis, as well as attacks on US military bases in western and northern Iraq by Iranian-backed Iraqi militias. Consequently, the lack of stability in Yemen, which rejects normalization, and the tentative authority in Iraq will create more problems for Israel in an insecure region, and could pose a threat to Israeli interests from Iran's allies. This could diminish the importance of Emirati-Israeli normalization.

Therefore, Iran views the Israeli-Gulf rapprochement as an existential threat directed primarily against it, driven by the American will to contain and encircle Iran as a rising power in the region. Based on this perception, Iran sees the Israeli orientation as an attempt to create a new conflict dynamic and change the balance of power, with the aim of consolidating an additional equation resulting from the normalization process, and highlighting Israel as a key actor in the Arab Gulf (Research Centre for Palestinian and Strategic Studies, 2020, p. 25).

It is clear from the above statement, that Iran presents itself as the proponent of a project rooted in its historical context and centred on its geopolitical position in the Arab Gulf region. This project is in line with the ideological principles of Iran's revolutionary Islamic system, which rejects Israel's presence in the region, and opposes the policies of the United States. This in itself is a challenge to Israel. Iran has made no secret of its concern about Israel's entry into the Arab Gulf region,

which it regards as a vital area for itself, especially in light of its heightened perception of the Israeli threat. Iran fears that any Israeli-Gulf rapprochement and expansion, will inevitably lead to its regional marginalization, in all geographical areas of the region. Consequently, Iran is actively working on the need to reposition itself, and enhance its capabilities to meet the challenges posed by the imbalance of power in the region.

In general, it can be said that the Abraham Accords for normalization, could potentially shape a trajectory of conflict in the Arab Gulf region, and it would be costly for the parties involved, especially considering that stability in the region depends on settlements that include some form of stability and security. On the other hand, it has become clear that the axis of resistance in Palestine, South Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen can rely on the role of Iran. This is due to the fact that the Gulf Arab regimes have stopped supporting the cause as a result of the ways of normalization, with Israel and their possible future developments.

From here, Iran will seek to exploit the Israeli-Arab conflict by mobilising its allies within the Axis of Resistance. The aim is to thwart Israeli actions and break the regional isolation that the United States, in line with Israeli and Gulf strategies, is trying to extend to Iran's neighbours. In addition, Iran is working to improve its military and nuclear capabilities in order to assert its influential regional role in the dynamics of the Middle East, where conflicting axes are forming in the region. Iran is seen as a key player in its alliance with Syria, Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, the Islamic Jihad movement in the West Bank, Shia militias in Iraq and the Ansar Allah (Houthi) movement in Yemen. Thus, Israel will face six fronts of the Iranian-backed resistance axis, three of which are related to Israel's strategic depth, represented by the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance, in addition to the Syrian Golan Heights, and two fronts in the Arab Gulf region. To this axis is added the Qatar-Turkey-Hamas camp, highlighting a Sunni jihadist axis in Iraq, Syria and Egyptian Sinai, which poses a significant challenge in the region's volatile security environment, due to the hostile policies of Israel and its ally, the United States, in the wider Middle East. There is also the possibility of the formation of an international alliance in favour of Iran, closely aligned with Russia and China. Russia's role in Syria and its support for Iran's nuclear programme cannot be ignored. In addition, China's role in the Arab Gulf region, through its Belt and Road Initiative and the importance of the region to this project should not be overlooked. This could lead to further escalation throughout the region, as Iran seeks to forge international alliances, aimed at reducing



the role of Israel, supported by the United States and some Gulf states, notably the United Arab Emirates.

**Conclusion:**

Based on our presentation of the geopolitical approach to Israel's current strategic orientations in the Arab Gulf region, we can draw the following conclusions:

- The Arab Gulf region is considered a vital area in Israel's geopolitical perception that must be penetrated, as it offers Israel various geostrategic advantages, including geographical, political, military-security, and economic benefits. Throughout its history, Israel has felt a sense of geographic isolation, and thus expansion into the Arab Gulf as a neighbouring region would help to alleviate this isolation.

-Israel has historically felt regional isolation, due to the wars it fought with the Arab states as part of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the expansion of the Palestinian issue, which led to border disputes with neighbouring countries, such as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. However, the resolution of these issues through the Camp David Accords, the Oslo Accords, and the Wadi Araba Agreement, was not enough to break the political, diplomatic and economic boycott against Israel. Israel realised the need to expand the normalization process with the Arab Gulf states, as part of its strategy to isolate the Palestinian issue from its Arab and Gulf environment.

-Regional and international dynamics play a prominent role in Israel's orientation towards normalization with the Arab Gulf states. Israeli policy towards the region is influenced by regional interactions and factors, as well as the policies of successive US administrations in the region. After the relative decline of the US role in the region during the Obama administration President "Donald Trump", revived the Zionist expansionist project by promoting the Israel-Gulf normalization agreement, known as the Abraham Accord. The aim was to make Israel a regional power, and reaffirm its functional role in safeguarding US interests in the region.

-From a geopolitical perspective, the agreement aims to use neighbouring countries as a strategy, to test the dynamics of the region and the influential powers within it, especially those that Israel and the United States have classified as part of the axis of evil and terrorism. Therefore, Israel's presence and direct involvement through this agreement on Emirati soil, facilitated by their security and intelligence coordination, is an attempt to contain and monitor Iran's movements close to its borders.

-Israel faces obstacles or challenges, in completing the normalization project in the Arab Gulf region, especially in the midst of its conflict with Gaza, which has disrupted relations with some countries in the region. Saudi Arabia for example, conditions peace negotiations on a solution based on the two-state solution, and presses the United States for access to strategic weapons and the development of nuclear capabilities, which Israel fears and opposes the emergence of a military and nuclear state that could potentially balance its military power in the Arab region.

-Qatar as a Gulf state representing soft power in the region, opposes Israel's policies, especially on the Palestinian issue, as it is an ally of Hamas, which leads the resistance in Palestine. This has led to prominent political disputes between Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar and Saudi Arabia over Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood group in the Arab region, and its ability to influence regimes. The Gulf-Gulf dispute and Israel's inability to engage Qatar in the normalization process, could pose a significant challenge to the overall development of the process in the entire region.

-Israel's war on Gaza has put the Abraham Accords for normalization at risk, as it has become clear that Israel can't even protect its own security from within. It therefore raises concerns about how it can provide a security umbrella to protect its allies in the Gulf, especially considering that the region is vulnerable to various security shocks, due to the activities of armed groups hostile to Israel and the Gulf ruling regimes, especially those ideologically and politically aligned with Iran, especially in Iraq and Yemen.

-In the light of current developments in the Middle East, international alliances such as the Iranian-Russian-Chinese axis, may form to counter US-Israeli influence, especially in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the resulting energy crisis. It is clear that Russia has become an active player in the region, through its involvement in Syria and its alliance with Iran. Similarly, China has entered into a strategic partnership with the Arab Gulf states through its Belt and Road Initiative, which complements the New Silk Road.

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