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The Gulf Regional Implication of the Gaza War

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Introduction

In September 2020, the Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE were hailed as a diplomatic win for Donald Trump's Republican administration. However, the agreement overlooked Palestinian interests, potentially accelerating Israeli colonization. The following normalization deals with Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and the imminent with Saudi Arabia -announced by Mohammad bin Salman in an interview with [Fox News on September 23](#), intensified Palestinian feelings of betrayal. Biden's administration, while initially more critical of Israel, largely continued Trump's regional approach, endorsing Israel's security and Arab state normalization. Brussels, too, has lacked an alternative solution for the long-standing Middle East conflict.

Washington's diplomatic efforts aimed to strengthen ties between its primary allies in the Middle East, presenting a hopeful outlook for reduced regional tensions. Notably, the Gulf Cooperation Council mended its internal rifts, especially the significant one between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, via the [Al Ula agreement of 2021](#). This marked the end of a three-year blockade imposed on Qatar. Simultaneously, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which initiated a thaw in 2020, was officially cemented with the [Beijing accords in March 2023](#), after being strained for years. Initially, Saudi Arabia's move

towards Israel appeared at odds with these reconciliations, given the potential unease it might spark in Tehran and Doha, who are known supporters of Hamas. Yet, whispers in diplomatic corridors hinted at Iran's potential leniency towards Israel. Such speculations were fueled by Iran's earlier normalization steps with the United Arab Emirates, preliminary discussions with Bahrain, and potential détente with Egypt. These diplomatic maneuvers, including Syria's re-admission into the Arab League after a decade-long suspension, hint at a budding regional equilibrium. This balance appears to placate key players, namely Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and other secondary powers, suggesting a promising resolution after years of discord.

The End of a Fragile Status Quo

Amid rising hopes for lasting peace in the Middle East, recent events in Gaza have significantly dampened optimism. Many had foreseen this tension, influenced by the Israeli coalition where the ultra-orthodox right holds significant sway, particularly in colonization decisions. The Abraham Accords further intensified the sense of marginalization felt by Palestinians, leading to an assertive stance by various Palestinian factions. The large-scale assault led by Hamas, in collaboration with other regional factions, although somewhat predictable, astounded in its scale and

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accuracy, catching global observers by surprise. One must wonder how such a meticulously coordinated operation took shape in Gaza, given its history of stringent monitoring and seclusion. And the pressing question remains: How could one of the globe's most advanced security frameworks fail to anticipate or thwart such a significant and calculated threat?

The main accusations after the surprise attack were quick to point at Iran, in principle the main financial and moral support of Hamas. The American newspaper [Wall Street Journal](#) reported that the Iranian Foreign Minister, Amir Abdollahian, had held meetings in Gaza and Lebanon to coordinate these operations with operatives from various groups. However, the Iranian leader himself, [Ali Khamenei](#), emphatically rejected these accusations, ensuring that, although Iran has maintained its permanent support for the group, it neither dictates orders nor establishes its political or programmatic agenda, completely disassociating itself from the attack. Nevertheless, Iranian media celebrated the attacks, and various Iranian authorities warned about Israel's vulnerability and the Palestinians' endless determination to end the Zionist regime, with the support of the "axis of resistance" led by Iran and the [mistake it represented for Arab states to normalize](#) relations with Israel.

Iran's denial of its direct involvement in the attacks has been further confirmed, at least initially, by statements from the US Secretary of State, [Antony Blinken](#), that there was no direct evidence of Iran's involvement in recent events. Similarly, the spokesperson for the Israel Defense Forces, [Daniel Hagari](#), acknowledged

that they couldn't assert, for now, that Iran had any role in planning or training the involved parties, beyond the already known support and supply over the years.

Winners and Losers of the Conflict

Amidst the stark images of attacks targeting both Israeli and Palestinian civilians, and the undergoing massive retaliation by the Israeli military, the current conflict is presenting distinct winners and losers. It is unmistakable that, in the midst of this upheaval, Iran emerges as a major beneficiary, even while being a chief accused party, following Hamas. Leading the "axis of resistance", which comprises Hezbollah, Syria, and Hamas, Tehran's historical trajectory is evident. They have vehemently opposed a series of key agreements related to Israel, spanning from the Camp David Accords in 1979, the Madrid and Oslo Accords in the early 90s, right up to the Abraham Accords in 2020. This unwavering stance against Israel has always been a valuable asset for Iran's political strategy, especially resonating with the "Arab street," which tends to have deeper sympathies for the Palestinian cause than their own governments. As evidenced by recent regional shifts, Iran's persistent support for entities like Hamas has bolstered its political stature across the Middle East. This is not just among the Muslim community but also reaches the anti-imperialist fringes of the "Global South". Bypassing the usual diplomatic courtesies, Iran's unabashed support of these attacks clearly targets those feeling alienated by their own governments' growing affiliations with Israel.

In a current context where Iran has seemingly made peace with one of its fiercest regional enemies, Saudi Arabia, and amidst a slew of [diplomatic successes for President Raisi](#), stemming from the strategies of his predecessors, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani, which includes Iran's addition to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the recent invitation to join the BRICS group, Iran appears to be strengthened in the short term from this Hamas action without having invested many resources in it.

The most harmed, undoubtedly, is Israel, and its prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, especially if he fails to transform the growing internal opposition to his judicial reform and corruption allegations into unwavering support for the announced retaliation against Gaza. But this transformation seems unlikely. The government is being criticized for not preventing a massacre, either due to incompetence or lack of political will (without delving into conspiracy theories about possible prior knowledge of the attack), and for the delayed military response which not only resulted in many civilian deaths but allowed Hamas militants to capture dozens of Israelis who will later be used in future negotiations. Moreover, sharp critics within Israel directly blame Netanyahu for the Hamas attack, as evidenced by the scathing article by [Gideon Levy in Haaretz](#). On the other hand, the attack has tainted Israel's image of security and invulnerability in a regional context that seemed to be becoming friendlier after the signing of the recent Abraham Accords, and if retaliation is prolonged and results in a predictable massacre in Gaza, it might render the continuation of the already

signed accords untenable. Besides, considering the long term and its internal impact, a bloody and extended offensive, with the evident impact on a Palestinian population that has already suffered immensely, is not sustainable in the long term, neither in the eyes of the international community nor in the face of [Israeli public opinion](#), which is already deeply polarized regarding its own government. Anything that affects Israel's long-term relationship with the Palestinians will be detrimental to the Abraham Accords.

What Lies Ahead

It is an open secret that Arab public opinion is not inclined to recognize Israel, and the countries that have done so have either silenced or negotiated concessions with internal opponents. Hamas and Iran's strategy would prove accurate if the war drags on, putting pressure on states that have recently normalized relations and discouraging other Arab states from doing the same in the short to medium term. This would certainly reduce maneuverability in an already turbulent context, given the various ongoing regional conflicts and the pressure from the still ongoing war in Ukraine on governments that, while prioritizing their strategic-military and political relations with Washington, nonetheless need lasting stability to tighten economic ties with Beijing, Moscow, and other Asian countries.

Predicting the trajectory of the coming weeks, months, or even years poses a significant challenge, as any geographical or temporal extension of the conflict could have profound implications for the entire region. Hezbollah already showed its support

for Hamas and the possibility of opening a second front to weaken the Israeli offensive in the south, although so far this has not been the case.

Numerous diplomatic efforts in the region appear to be effectively curbing the conflict's geographic expansion. The groundbreaking first even [phone conversation](#) between Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, addressing the ongoing Gaza conflict, is widely viewed as a positive indicator of regional diplomacy's intent. Additionally, recent statements from the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning South Korea's [unfrozen assets belonging to Iran, now held in Qatari banks](#) and not re-frozen by the US until now, are seen as strategic moves to alleviate mounting pressures on Iran.

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About the Gulf Insights series:

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