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**Israel and the Persian Gulf:  
Impact of US Offshore Balancing Strategy  
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## **Israel and the Persian Gulf: Impact of US Offshore Balancing Strategy<sup>1</sup> Javad Heiran-Nia**

### *Introduction*

The normalization of relations between Israel and certain Arab countries on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf and Washington's support of this move means that the United States has also defined the Abraham Accords in line with its security order in the region. Accordingly, with the normalization of relations, the siege against Iran will be tightened and the "balance of threats" against it will be intensified. This approach is also in line with Washington's "offshore balancing" in the region, as it currently reduces Israel's "practical action" against the country in the region and does not increase America's military presence in the region. It also will not make the country take a distance from its strategy of containing China in line with its "Pivot to Asia" policy.

There is a significant relationship between structural changes in the international system and the dynamics of alliances in the changing geopolitics of the region. Historically, after the Cold War, the conditions of the unipolar system and the undisputed power of America shaped alliances between friends and foes in the region. However, in recent years, with the decline in American hegemony or at least its declining reluctance to shape the regional order, such a function has been weakened and, at the same time, no rival power has replaced it.

### *"Offshore Balancing", Absent without Leaving*

The White House's approach to the East and its focus on China has changed the security equations in the Persian Gulf region. Under such circumstances, the geopolitics of the region seems to be transitioning from a post-Cold War American order to an offshore balancing order. Based on this strategy, the U.S. White House must delegate its responsibility to others in order to succeed in its role as an offshore balancer. In other words, the U.S. should try to put others at risk of conflict and control the situation from a distance. Accordingly, diplomacy and interaction between regional actors on the one hand and the inclusion of others, including Israel, in the equations of the region on the other are being pursued.

Therefore, Washington's diminishing interest in direct military engagement in the region not only means reducing its physical presence in the Persian Gulf, it also includes restraint in the diplomatic arena and calling on its allies to take more responsibility for their own security. Limitations in structural power and lack of capacity to exercise hegemonic order by each of the regional actors have led them to recruit and form regional alliances to expand influence and shape equations in the region.

<sup>1</sup> All articles published under "Gulf Insight" series have been discussed internally but they reflect the opinion and views of the authors, and do not reflect the views of the Center, the College of Arts and Sciences or Qatar University, including the terms and terminology used in this publication.

### *Extensive Israeli security presence in the Persian Gulf*

A greater Israeli presence in this region could alleviate security concerns stemming from a lesser US focus on the region. Based on this, this country is seeking to expand its diplomatic presence in the region by promoting a “[defense alliance](#)” to include itself, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. The would-be Arab members of the alliance appear wary of getting that deeply in bed with Tel Aviv, but the move puts into perspective the recent upgrading of relations with several Arab states.

At the same time, Israel will be able to get closer to Iran's borders by its cooperation with other countries and has taken a more serious step into the security order of the region and its security architecture framework. These include the normalization of relations with countries such as the UAE and Bahrain, and informally with Saudi Arabia, and its [participation in CENTCOM](#).

Israel's Chief of General Staff, Aviv Kochavi, believes that moderate Arab countries such as the UAE and Bahrain, and even countries that have not yet signed a normalization treaty with Tel Aviv, can deepen their ties with Israel, especially within the [framework of regional security agreements](#). By joining CENTCOM, the [U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet](#) also expanded the use of artificial intelligence to accelerate its naval operations.

According to a statement by CENTCOM, with Israel joining the command and using artificial intelligence, two goals will be achieved: first, to strengthen the command's maritime information, and second, to

increase deterrence. The Task Force 59 will be a major force in naval maneuvers and exercises. In this way, Tel Aviv will be responsible for organizing and equipping a strategic security unit in Bahrain. Based on this, Defense Minister [Benny Gantz went to Manama](#) and signed a security agreement and made the necessary arrangements for a maneuver. Accordingly, Bahrain will also be a base for the Israeli navy.

Israel has advanced submarine power that are even sailing in the Persian Gulf waters, according to [David Ben-Besht](#), a former general in the IDF. In the event of a deadly military attack from abroad, its navy and submarines have a responsibility to maintain a nuclear strike capability to prepare for a counterattack. In this way, the desired order of Washington in the region is pursued. And as its normalization with the Arabs is proceeding, the prospect for a “two-state solution” is diminished in the eyes of Washington. In fact, the Abraham Accords is the US model for establishing a new regional order after the reduction of Washington's commitments in the region. The Abraham Accords means ignoring the [Arab Peace Initiative \(2002\)](#), in which Arab nations offered normal ties with Israel in return for a statehood deal with the Palestinians and full withdrawal from the territory it captured in 1967.

In addition to increasing its military presence in the region, the rulers in Israel have said the revival of JCPOA will not impose any obligations on them, and that they will keep the right to directly oppose the nuclear program. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said that the revival of the JCPOA would not necessarily be approved by his government and that they would be

ready to independently take action against the Islamic Republic's nuclear activities if necessary. This means that in the post-JCPOA period, Tel Aviv will continue its subversive actions against the Islamic Republic in the form of "[death by a thousand cuts](#)." This strategy does not contradict Biden's "offshore balancing" strategy in the region either, as it does not escalate tensions to a level that would threaten Washington's interests or lead to its large military presence in the region.

### *Changing Iran's Doctrines Vs. Israel*

Tel Aviv's presence in the region means that the "front line" of a possible Israeli-Iranian military confrontation has been transferred from its borders to the region, which will change Tehran's military doctrine and this country will try to compensate the deterrence deficit by equipping proxy forces with strategic weapons and intensifying their activities in the region. Converting rockets into precision missiles, producing drones by [Lebanon's Hezbollah](#), and arming Houthis in Yemen with advanced missiles could be a part of Tehran's military doctrine to counter the changing situation in the region. Given Iran's restrictions to take direct military action against Israel in the Persian Gulf region, it will try to intensify its activities in Syria independent of Russia and respond more seriously to Israeli attacks on its positions in Syria. The Islamic Republic will go on with its ongoing efforts to build a military power base in Syria and make other Israeli borders insecure.

Tehran's military doctrine toward Tel Aviv has so far focused on keeping this country away from its borders, resorting to deterrent military operations in the border areas of the

target country, as well as building preventive military capabilities designed to counter a possible invasion.

Lebanon's Hezbollah, Hamas, and proxy forces in Syria are working to achieve the first set of goals; building ballistic missile capabilities form the [second part of the Islamic Republic's military doctrine](#).

Accordingly, normalization of relations with Arabs and the country's military presence in the region in the form of CENTCOM coupled with its bilateral security and military agreements with these countries with a U.S. support, are part of Tel Aviv's actions to confront and contain the Islamic Republic. These moves also meet Washington's favorable order in the region. On the other hand, through the nuclear deal, the White House controls the risk of Iran becoming a nuclear power through a multilateral mechanism. If necessary, Israel will continue its destructive actions against the Islamic Republic without endangering the interests of Washington and itself in the region.

At present, the threats by Iran and Israel in the region have not entered the phase of "practical threat" and can be explained on the basis of "[balance of threat](#)", according to Stephen Walt, one of the founders of the School of Defensive Realism. Based on this notion, the alliance with the regional Arab states are to respond and counter Iran's threat.

Iran's direct response to Israel's presence in the Persian Gulf is limited. It did not even respond to the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel with practical measures and contented itself with [verbal condemnations](#).

On the other hand, pro-Iranian armed actors will escalate asymmetrical attacks against the GCC region from Yemen, Iraq and the Red Sea.

### *Conclusion*

Israel's widespread presence in the Persian Gulf is intended to narrow the Islamic Republic's scope of activity on the one hand and fill the gap caused by the reduction of the US military presence in the region on the other. Normalization of its relations with Arabs along with its presence in the form of CENTCOM and bilateral security agreements with them can be explained in line with Washington's "offshore balancing" strategy. Not only will this help Washington focus on China and Europe, which now entails more serious attention following the Ukraine crisis, it also secures its interests in the region and does not provide a power vacuum for maneuvers by countries like Iran.

Threats against Iran in the region, though currently explainable on the basis of the "balance of threats", will lead to further instability if threats enter the practical phase. On the other hand, there is a chance that its presence in the region will make Arab states in the region part of Tel Aviv's threat against the Islamic Republic. This means that these countries should also enter into Israel's security equations against Tehran. The Islamic Republic's problem with Israel is existential, ideological and geopolitical, while it has no existential problem with the Arab states on its southern shores.

In other words, any security and intelligence cooperation between these states and Israel is considered a short-

term or long-term threat by Tehran, and it will look for new ways to create a balance that will complicate the security order in the region.

### **About the author**

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### **About the Gulf Insights series:**

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