



## THE MIDDLE-EAST CONFLICT: PROBLEM AND PROSPECTS

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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#### Abstract

The Middle East conflict is a complex and enduring series of wars, power struggles, and humanitarian crises driven by historical, political, ethnic, and religious factors, with ongoing repercussions for global security and international relations. Since 2023, the region has witnessed intensified warfare, notably the Gaza war that began with a surprise attack by Hamas on Israel and resulted in catastrophic loss of life, mass displacement, and severe humanitarian hardship. This conflict has drawn in regional actors like Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis in Yemen, contributing to further instability and international military responses. The roots of these conflicts trace back to a legacy of colonial influence, arbitrary borders, and persistent ethnic and religious divisions reinforced by external interventions. The emergence of non-state actors such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, supported primarily by Iran, has shifted the nature of conflict from traditional interstate wars to complex battles involving militias and proxy warfare.

Continued violence in the Middle East has resulted in significant civilian casualties, refugee crises, and disruption to global commerce, such as shipping routes through the Red Sea. Ceasefires have been intermittent and rarely lead to lasting peace, as underlying grievances and rivalry between major powers especially the United States and Iran fuel ongoing tensions. These events have had direct effects on international politics, humanitarian law, and security worldwide. Understanding the Middle East conflict requires a multidisciplinary approach focusing on history, geopolitics, religion, and foreign interventions. Its impact continues to shape the global landscape, demanding constant attention and critical analysis for any hope of resolving the region's long-standing issues. The Middle East conflict is a multifaceted and enduring geopolitical issue with deep historical, religious, and political roots. Spanning over a century, it encompasses a range of disputes involving territorial claims, religious tensions, and international interventions. This essay provides an overview of the conflict's origins, key events, major players, and ongoing challenges.

**Keywords:** Middle East, Conflict, War, Iran, Israel, Power, Security, USA intervention

#### Introduction

The Middle East conflict refers to a series of interconnected political, territorial, and religious disputes that have plagued the region for over a century. At the heart of the conflict lies the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, which emerged from competing national movements and was intensified by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, colonial intervention, and the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. However, the conflict extends beyond Israel and Palestine, encompassing broader regional tensions such as sectarian divides between Sunni and Shia Muslims, civil wars in countries like Syria and Yemen, and the involvement of global powers pursuing strategic and economic interests. This ongoing turmoil has resulted in devastating humanitarian crises, mass displacement, and widespread instability, affecting not only the Middle East but also global peace and security. Understanding the roots and dimensions of the Middle East conflict is essential to grasping the challenges of peace-building and the prospects for lasting resolution in the region. The Middle East has long been a focal point of global conflict, marked by deep-rooted political, religious, and territorial disputes. This region, rich in history, culture, and natural resources—particularly oil—has experienced numerous wars, uprisings, and political upheavals over the past century.

At the heart of many Middle Eastern conflicts lies the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a struggle over land, identity, and sovereignty that began in the early 20th century and remains unresolved. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 led to several Arab-Israeli wars and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Beyond this central conflict, the Middle East has witnessed numerous other wars and tensions, including the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf Wars, the Syrian Civil War, and the rise of extremist groups like ISIS. These conflicts often involve complex dynamics between ethnic groups (such as Arabs, Kurds,

Persians, and Jews), sectarian divisions (mainly between Sunni and Shia Muslims), and the strategic interests of foreign powers like the United States, Russia, and European nations. The region's instability has led to humanitarian crises, mass displacement, and long-standing political deadlocks. While some efforts have been made to negotiate peace, the road to stability in the Middle East remains challenging due to deeply entrenched divisions and competing national interests.

### **Origins and Historical Background**

#### **Pre-20th Century Context:**

The Middle East has been a crossroads of civilizations for millennia, home to the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Persia. The region's strategic location at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and Africa has made it a focal point for trade, culture, and conflict.

*The Rise of Zionism and Arab Nationalism:* In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, two significant movements emerged: Zionism and Arab nationalism. Zionism, founded by Theodor Herzl, advocated for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire. Concurrently, Arab nationalism sought independence from Ottoman and later European colonial rule, emphasizing the unity and sovereignty of Arab peoples.

*British Mandate and the Balfour Declaration:* Following World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain took control of Palestine under a League of Nations mandate. In 1917, the British issued the Balfour Declaration, expressing support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. This policy fueled tensions between Jewish and Arab communities, who both laid claim to the land.

#### **Key Conflicts and Wars:**

*1948 Arab-Israeli War:* In 1947, the United Nations proposed partitioning Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. The Jewish community accepted the plan, but Arab leaders rejected it. Upon Israel's declaration of independence in 1948, neighboring Arab states invaded, leading to the first Arab-Israeli war. The conflict resulted in an Israeli victory and the displacement of a large number of Palestinians, an event known as the Nakba ("catastrophe").

*The Six-Day War (1967):* In 1967, escalating tensions led to the Six-Day War, during which Israel launched preemptive strikes against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Israel captured significant territories, including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. The war dramatically altered the region's political landscape and intensified the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

*The Yom Kippur War (1973):* In 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel during the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, aiming to reclaim lost territories. The war ended in a ceasefire, with no significant territorial changes but leading to shifts in regional alliances and the eventual Camp David Accords.

#### **The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:**

*The Oslo Accords:* Efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have included various negotiations and agreements. The Oslo Accords, signed in the 1990s, established the Palestinian Authority and outlined a framework for a two-state solution. However, disagreements over key issues such as the status of Jerusalem, refugees, and borders have hindered lasting peace.

*Recent Developments:* In recent years, violence has escalated, particularly in Gaza, where Hamas controls the territory. Periodic clashes between Hamas and Israel have resulted in significant casualties and humanitarian crises. The international community remains divided on how to address the conflict, with some advocating for a two-state solution and others supporting a one-state approach.

*Iran and Hezbollah:* Iran plays a significant role in the Middle East, supporting various groups and governments that align with its interests. Hezbollah, a Shiite militant group based in Lebanon, receives backing from Iran and has engaged in multiple conflicts with Israel. The group's involvement in regional conflicts, including in Syria, has further complicated the geopolitical landscape.

*The Syrian Civil War:* Since 2011, Syria has been embroiled in a devastating civil war involving multiple factions, including the Syrian government, opposition groups, and Kurdish forces. The conflict has drawn in regional powers such as Iran, Russia, and Turkey, each pursuing their own interests. The war has resulted in a humanitarian disaster and has had far-reaching implications for regional stability.

*The Yemen Conflict:* The war in Yemen, beginning in 2014, involves a Saudi-led coalition supporting the internationally recognized government against Houthi rebels, who are backed by Iran. The conflict has led to widespread famine, disease, and displacement, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the region.

#### **International Involvement and Peace Efforts:**

*United States and Western Powers:* The United States has been a key ally of Israel, providing military aid and diplomatic support. Western nations have also been involved in various peace initiatives, including the Camp David Accords and the Quartet on the Middle East. However, their involvement has often been viewed with skepticism by some regional actors.

*United Nations:* The United Nations has played a role in peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts in the Middle East. UN peacekeeping forces have been deployed in areas such as Lebanon and the Golan Heights. The UN has also passed numerous resolutions addressing various aspects of the conflict, though enforcement has been inconsistent.

*Ongoing Challenges and Prospects for Peace:* Religious and sectarian divisions, particularly between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, have fueled conflicts in countries like Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon. These divisions are often exacerbated by external actors and have complicated efforts to achieve regional stability.

*Refugees and Displacement:* The Middle East hosts millions of refugees and internally displaced persons due to ongoing conflicts. The Palestinian refugee issue remains one of the most contentious aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with debates over the right of return and compensation.

*Economic and Social Issues:* Economic disparities, unemployment, and lack of access to basic services contribute to instability in the region. Youth unemployment and lack of opportunities have led to widespread disillusionment and have been factors in uprisings such as the Arab Spring.

### **Current Middle East Conflict Overview**

*Escalation Between Israel and Iran:* The conflict has sharply intensified, moving from covert rivalry to open warfare. Israel launched major airstrikes on Iran's nuclear and military sites—including the Natanz enrichment facility—aiming to dismantle Iran's nuclear and missile programs. Iran retaliated by striking key Israeli cities, resulting in at least 60 deaths and raising fears of a broader regional war. The US is attempting to balance diplomacy and deterrence, but the risk of escalation remains high, especially with nuclear concerns at the forefront.

*Broader Regional Crisis:* The current crisis is part of a larger pattern of instability since 2023, triggered by the October 7 attacks on Israel by Hamas, which led to Israel's war in Gaza and subsequent regional involvement by Iran-backed groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. The Gaza conflict has been especially deadly, with over 55,000 Palestinians killed and ongoing humanitarian concerns.

*International Response:* G7 leaders have condemned Iran as the main source of regional instability and reiterated support for Israel's right to self-defense. They are calling for de-escalation, a ceasefire in Gaza, and preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The conflict has caused volatility in global markets, with sharp drops in cryptocurrencies and initial declines in equities, though some recovery has followed as hopes for de-escalation rise.

*Support for Israel: Influence on the Middle East Conflict:* The G7's strong support for Israel affirming its right to self-defense and security bolsters Israel's international legitimacy and may embolden it to continue or escalate military action, particularly against Iran. By labeling Iran as the "principal source of regional instability and terror" and insisting that "Iran can never have a nuclear weapon," the G7 increases diplomatic and economic pressure on Tehran, potentially isolating it further and raising the stakes of its nuclear ambitions.

The G7 also calls for broader de-escalation and a ceasefire in Gaza, reflecting concern for civilian protection and regional stability. This dual message seeks to balance support for Israel with efforts to prevent wider conflict. However, internal differences exist within the G7—some leaders urge restraint or criticize Israeli actions, which could limit the group's unified impact and complicate diplomatic efforts. The G7's stance may deter some regional actors from escalating further but could provoke Iran or its allies, risking broader confrontation. The group's warnings about energy market stability also highlight global economic concerns tied to the conflict. In summary, G7 support strengthens Israel's position diplomatically and strategically, increases pressure on Iran, and seeks to steer the conflict toward de-escalation, though internal divisions may limit its effectiveness.

*Will G7 unity on support for Israel impact future diplomatic negotiations:* Strengthened Diplomatic Backing for Israel: The G7's firm affirmation of Israel's right to self-defense and security consolidates international support, giving Israel a stronger negotiating position in any future talks. Pressure on Iran and Its Proxies: By consistently identifying Iran as the principal source of regional instability and opposing its nuclear ambitions, the G7 increases diplomatic isolation on Tehran, which may influence Iran's willingness to engage in negotiations or escalate tensions further. Support for Ceasefire and Humanitarian Efforts: The G7 has endorsed ceasefire agreements between Israel and Hamas and called for humanitarian aid and civilian protection, signaling a commitment to de-escalation and conditions conducive to negotiation. Promotion of a Two-State Solution: The G7 reiterates support for a credible pathway towards peace leading to a two-state solution, which frames the diplomatic agenda and encourages parties to work towards a negotiated settlement. Potential Challenges from Internal Differences: While the G7 is largely united, some members have expressed calls for restraint or concerns over Israeli actions, which could affect the consistency and effectiveness of their diplomatic influence. In summary, the G7's unified support for Israel, combined with calls for ceasefire and humanitarian access, is likely to shape future diplomatic negotiations by reinforcing Israel's position, pressuring Iran, and promoting a framework for peace, though internal differences may moderate this impact.

*Iran's Power in the Middle East:* Iran has historically projected significant power in the Middle East through a network of allied groups and proxy forces, known as the "Axis of Resistance." This network has included Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Assad regime in Syria, Shi'ite militias in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, and Palestinian groups like Hamas. Iran's strategy has relied on supporting non-state actors and exploiting instability in weak states to expand its influence, while maintaining a long-standing alliance with Syria's government.

*Recent Developments:* As of June 2025, Iran's regional power has been severely challenged. Israeli airstrikes have inflicted major damage on Iran's military infrastructure, command centers, and nuclear facilities, reportedly crippling its ability to project

military power for years. Key Iranian commanders and nuclear experts have been killed in targeted operations, and Israel claims air superiority over Tehran, with Iran's air defenses and response capabilities significantly degraded. Iran's network of regional allies has also weakened. Hezbollah has been targeted by Israel, Assad's position in Syria is less secure, and internal and external pressures have eroded Tehran's ability to coordinate its regional bloc.

*Geopolitical Impact:* Iran remains a major geopolitical player, but its ability to deter adversaries and orchestrate regional responses is diminished compared to previous years. The G7 and Western powers continue to view Iran as a principal source of instability in the region, particularly due to its support for proxy groups and its nuclear ambitions. Ongoing sanctions, economic mismanagement, and military setbacks have further reduced Iran's regional leverage.

Iran's Potential Military and Strategic Responses to Israel's Attacks:

*Direct Military Retaliation:* Iran has already launched missile and drone attacks against Israel, but these have inflicted limited damage due to Israel's advanced air defenses and support from allies. Iran may attempt further "firepower strikes"—salvos of cruise and ballistic missiles, and waves of drones—targeting Israeli military or infrastructure, but its capacity is diminished and unlikely to overwhelm Israeli defenses in the near term.

*Proxy and Asymmetric Warfare:* While Iran's proxy network is weakened, it may still activate remaining groups like the Houthis or attempt to coordinate attacks via surviving partners in the region. Iran could resort to asymmetric tactics, such as terrorist attacks on Israeli and Jewish interests abroad, sabotage, and targeting energy infrastructure tied to US partners. Cyberattacks against Israeli or allied critical infrastructure remain a likely tool, aiming to disrupt rather than cause direct physical damage.

*Strategic Escalation:* If Iran perceives an existential threat, it may escalate beyond conventional responses, potentially reconsidering its nuclear posture or withdrawing from the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The risk of a broader regional conflict increases if Iran intensifies its response or if attacks persist, with potential for higher civilian casualties and expanded proxy involvement. Iran's responses are constrained by military losses and weakened proxies, so it will likely rely on a mix of limited missile/drone strikes, asymmetric attacks, cyber operations, and possibly nuclear brinkmanship if regime survival feels threatened.

*Influence of Iran's Nuclear Ambitions on Strategic Responses:* Iran's nuclear program acts as a strategic deterrent, especially when its conventional and proxy-based deterrence is weakened by Israeli attacks. As a "threshold nuclear state"—possessing the materials and expertise for a weapon but not having weaponized—Iran can use nuclear ambiguity to signal strength and caution adversaries, without crossing the line into open weaponization. Hardline voices in Iran increasingly debate shifting nuclear doctrine, hinting at a willingness to reconsider weaponization if existential threats persist or escalate. Openly leveraging its nuclear threshold status, or even threatening to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, could serve as a strategic warning to Israel and the West, aiming to deter further attacks<sup>46</sup>. Iran is unlikely to rush to weaponization due to the risks of detection and preemptive strikes by Israel or the US, but it may use nuclear rhetoric and ambiguity as bargaining chips in the face of military setbacks. The more Iran's conventional options are constrained, the more its nuclear potential becomes central to its security strategy, both as a deterrent and a tool for regional influence. Iran's nuclear ambitions increasingly shape its strategic responses by providing leverage, deterring adversaries, and serving as a last-resort option if conventional means fail. This nuclear ambiguity is likely to become more pronounced as Iran faces mounting military pressure.

*Signals from Iran's Recent Nuclear Doctrine Debates:* Iranian officials and lawmakers are openly debating a shift in nuclear doctrine, including the potential development of nuclear weapons if Iran faces an existential threat. Senior advisers have stated Iran has the technical capacity to build nuclear weapons and could reconsider its policy if national survival is at stake, referencing the Supreme Leader's fatwa as the current restraint. These debates and public statements serve as a warning to adversaries: if conventional deterrence fails, Iran may move closer to weaponization, using its nuclear threshold status as leverage. Parliamentary calls to revise defense doctrine and discussions of withdrawing from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) further signal that Iran is keeping all options open as bargaining tools. Despite nuclear rhetoric, Iran is also sending de-escalatory signals, indicating willingness to resume talks over its nuclear program—provided the US does not directly join Israeli military actions. Iran's conditional openness to negotiations highlights its intent to use nuclear ambiguity both as deterrence and diplomatic leverage. Iran's recent nuclear doctrine debates are intended to warn adversaries, maximize deterrence, and strengthen its hand in negotiations—signaling that, if pushed too far, it may seriously consider weaponization or exiting the NPT.

### **How Iran's Mention of Changing Its Nuclear Doctrine Signals a Shift in Security Posture**

Iran's public debate about altering its nuclear doctrine signals a major shift in its security posture from traditional reliance on conventional and proxy deterrence toward openly considering nuclear deterrence as a response to existential threats. This shift is driven by heightened threat perceptions, especially after repeated Israeli strikes on Iranian assets and allies, which have exposed the limits of Iran's current deterrent strategies and increased calls within Iran for a more robust, possibly nuclear, deterrent. Senior Iranian officials and advisers now explicitly warn that if Iran's existence is threatened, it may abandon its previous religious and policy prohibitions against nuclear weapons and reconsider weaponization. The rhetoric is both a bargaining tactic to raise the stakes in negotiations and a genuine warning that Iran's nuclear threshold status could be leveraged more aggressively if current pressures persist. The increased prominence of hardliners and the IRGC in decision-making further supports a more assertive and risk-tolerant security posture, indicating Iran is prepared to escalate if it believes its regime survival

is at stake. In summary, Iran's mention of changing its nuclear doctrine marks a clear warning that it may shift from strategic ambiguity to overt nuclear deterrence if existential threats continue, fundamentally altering the region's security dynamics.

### **Role of USA in Israel-Iran war**

The United States has played a direct and decisive role in the recent Israel-Iran conflict, marked by both military action and strategic support. The U.S. conducted precision airstrikes against Iranian nuclear facilities—specifically targeting sites at Fordow, Isfahan, and Natanz—following a week of hostilities between Israel and Iran. These strikes aimed to set back Iran's nuclear program and were described by the White House as having “obliterated” Tehran's nuclear capabilities, though intelligence assessments remain mixed.

*Support for Israel:* The U.S. has long been Israel's closest military ally, providing extensive political backing and military supplies. In this conflict, U.S. forces increased their presence in the region, deploying additional aircraft carriers and repositioning naval assets to offer air defense and operational support to Israel. The Pentagon approved significant changes to U.S. military positioning in the Middle East, including large deployments of aerial refueling tankers and extended carrier strike group deployments. This gave the U.S. flexible options for both offensive and defensive operations, reinforcing deterrence and support for Israel's operational tempo.

*Political and Strategic Objectives:* U.S. officials, including President Trump, have openly supported Israel's objectives and, at times, called for regime change in Iran. The U.S. aims to curb Iran's regional influence and prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons, while also protecting its own interests and alliances in the region. U.S. involvement risks further destabilizing the region, drawing Washington deeper into Middle Eastern conflicts, and provoking Iranian retaliation against American bases and interests. However, recent actions have also demonstrated U.S. military superiority and a willingness to act decisively, which may reshape regional calculations and deterrence dynamics.

### **What military actions has the US taken in the Iran-Israel conflict**

The United States has taken direct military action in the Iran-Israel conflict by launching airstrikes on three key Iranian nuclear facilities: Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan. This operation, known as Operation Midnight Hammer, was conducted on June 22, 2025, using advanced munitions such as the 30,000-pound bunker-buster bombs, which were deployed by U.S. B-2 stealth bombers to penetrate heavily fortified underground sites. President Trump announced that the strikes had “obliterated” the targeted facilities and that all U.S. aircraft had safely exited Iranian airspace. These actions marked the first instance of direct U.S. military involvement in the conflict and represented a significant escalation from prior U.S. support for Israel, which had previously included missile defense and deterrence operations.

In response, Iran attacked U.S. bases in Iraq and Qatar as retaliation, but the U.S. did not report casualties from these strikes. U.S. military strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities are likely to have significant and lasting impacts on future negotiations with Iran. *Undermining Diplomatic Efforts:* Direct U.S. military action risks undoing years of diplomatic work, making Iran less likely to trust future negotiations with the United States. It signals to Tehran and the global community that negotiations may be a prelude to war rather than a genuine effort toward peaceful resolution. *Erosion of Trust and Credibility:* The strikes could seriously damage U.S. credibility in future bilateral and multilateral negotiations, not just with Iran but across the region. Iran and other actors may see the U.S. as unreliable and unpredictable, complicating efforts to reach agreements or de-escalate tensions.

*Escalation and Retaliation:* Iranian leaders have warned that military action could provoke further regional conflict. Retaliation against U.S. interests is possible, and the cycle of escalation could make diplomatic off-ramps harder to find. *Incentivizing Nuclear Proliferation:* The experience of being targeted militarily may increase Iran's—and other states'—incentive to pursue nuclear weapons as a deterrent, further destabilizing the region and complicating non-proliferation goals.

### **Conclusion**

The Middle East conflict is a deeply rooted and complex issue shaped by historical, political, religious, and socio-economic factors. At its core, the conflict includes longstanding tensions between Israel and Palestine, sectarian rivalries (particularly between Sunni and Shia Muslims), and the influence of foreign powers pursuing strategic interests in the region. Despite numerous peace initiatives, the region remains volatile due to unresolved territorial disputes, displacement of populations, ideological extremism, and competing nationalist narratives. The persistence of violence has resulted in widespread human suffering, economic instability, and disrupted development. A sustainable resolution will require comprehensive diplomacy, respect for international law, regional cooperation, and grassroots reconciliation efforts. While peace may not be immediate, progress can be made through mutual recognition, justice, and commitment to coexistence.

The Middle East remains volatile due to mutual distrust, cyclical violence, and unresolved territorial disputes, notably involving Gaza and the West Bank. Without meaningful engagement and compromise from both Israeli and Palestinian leaders, the region faces the prospect of deeper divisions and humanitarian crises. The Path Forward Long-term peace depends on reviving the principles of the Two-State Solution, where Israel and Palestine coexist peacefully within secure, recognized borders. This solution, established under the spirit of the Oslo Accords, is still viewed as the most viable framework for lasting resolution. The Role of the International Community Effective peacebuilding requires coordinated international involvement from the United States, Arab states, the European Union, and the United Nations to mediate renewed negotiations. A cooperative framework

emphasizing mutual security guarantees, reconstruction support, and economic revitalization is essential to foster trust and stability. In essence, the Middle East conflict cannot be solved militarily—it demands moral courage, diplomatic persistence, and political compromise.

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