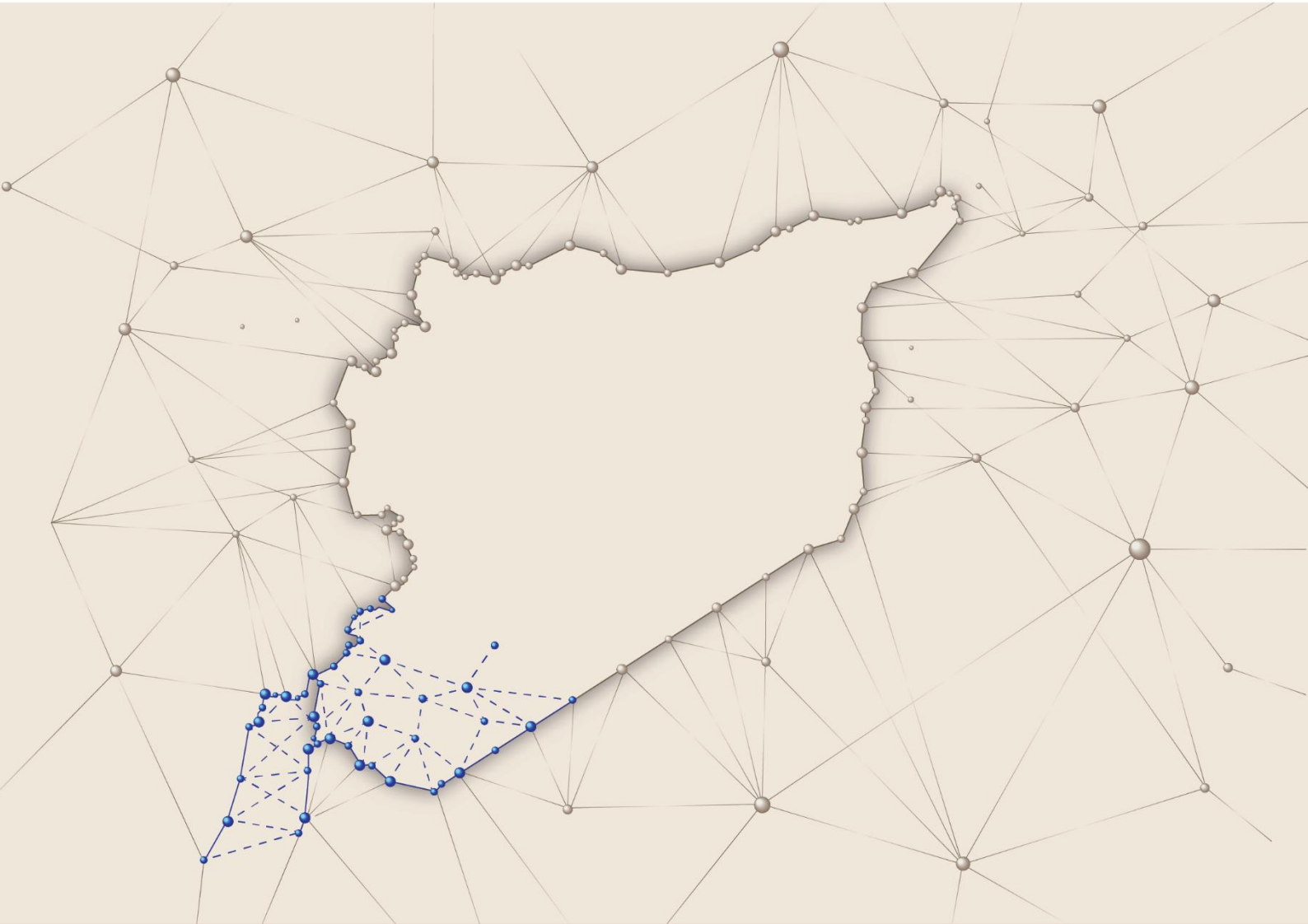




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The Limits of Israel's Approach in Syria:

The Web of Regional and International
Interests as a Strategic Constraint

Sasha Al Alou
Analytical Paper

Omran for Strategic Studies

Omran Center for Strategic Studies is an independent think tank and public policy research center established in 2013 and headquartered in Damascus, serving as the policy research program of the Syrian Forum.

Its work goes beyond producing research to actively designing practical, actionable policy solutions that support decision-makers in addressing complex security, societal, development, and political challenges.

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Website: www.OmranStudies.org

Email: info@OmranDirasat.org

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Executive Summary

- This paper represents the second phase of an Omran Center research project that began with a quantitative and qualitative study of 416 Israeli operations targeting Syria in 2025. That study sought to unpack Israel's evolving approach after the fall of the Assad regime. Building on its findings, this paper examines the limits of Israel's ability to translate that approach into durable political and security arrangements. It proceeds from the premise that having a clear approach does not necessarily mean being able to impose it, and that understanding its limits requires moving from the analysis of Israeli behavior to the regional and international environment that shapes the prospects for its realization.
- The paper argues that the limits of Israel's approach in Syria are no longer determined by the military balance alone, but by a complex web of regional and international interests. Despite Israel's military and operational gains after Assad's fall, it faces a broad set of overlapping interests tied to Syria's stability. These interests constrain Israel's ability to convert its gains into durable political and security arrangements.
- To test this hypothesis, the paper examines the positions and interests of regional and international actors engaged in Syria across three levels: Syria's neighboring states, the broader regional environment, and major international powers. It argues that the constraints facing Israel's approach do not stem from an anti-Israel alliance, but from a convergence of interests among actors with different motives and priorities. To varying degrees, these actors share an interest in preventing Israeli military superiority from becoming political and security arrangements that reshape the future of Syria and the region according to Israel's vision.
- Syria's neighboring states — Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon — have redefined Syria's position and function after Assad's fall. Despite differences in their national priorities, their interests converge around stability and the rejection of renewed security vacuums and fragmentation. This makes them the first circle of direct and indirect constraints shaping the limits of Israel's approach in Syria.
- These constraints also extend to the broader regional environment, including the Gulf states, Egypt, and Iran. Following the decline of Iranian influence, no vacuum emerged that would allow Israel to capitalize on its military superiority and shape the region according to its post-October 7 security outlook. Instead, a web of interests and coordination frameworks concerned with Syria's stability and reintegration has emerged — both as part of filling the vacuum and reshaping regional balances, and as a condition for protecting those interests.
- This transformation also extends to international powers, particularly the United States, Europe, and Russia. Despite their differing priorities, their positions show that Israel's room for maneuver is shaped not only by balances of power, but also by Syria's place within a broader web of interests in which security, economic, energy, and strategic competition considerations overlap. The wider this web becomes, the more the ability of any single actor to shape the Syrian landscape unilaterally declines.
- The future of Israel's approach in Syria will not be determined by military superiority alone, but by Israel's ability to adapt to a changing regional and international environment. This gives the new Syrian authorities an opportunity to strengthen their negotiating position vis-à-vis that approach. However, the success of this opportunity depends on their ability to

position themselves within the emerging web of regional and international interests, and to consolidate internal stability and legitimacy in ways that can turn external convergences into sustainable political and security gains.

Introduction

The fall of the Assad regime on **December 8, 2024**, marked a strategic turning point in Israel's approach to Syria. For decades, Israeli priorities had largely centered on managing the **1974 Disengagement Agreement** and, later, containing threats linked to the Iranian and Hezbollah presence, especially after 2011. The political and military transformations that followed Assad's fall created a new environment in which Israel saw an opportunity to formulate a more ambitious and expansive approach.

This shift was not isolated from the regional context that emerged after **October 7, 2023**, when Israel's confrontation expanded from the Gaza Strip to Lebanon, Yemen, and Syria, and eventually into direct confrontation with Iran. These developments reshaped the strategic environment in the Levant and widened Israel's room for maneuver. They reached their peak with the fall of the Assad regime, a moment in which Israel moved from managing change along its borders to attempting to create a new security and political reality inside Syria.

This new reality was reflected in qualitative shifts that went beyond traditional patterns of Israeli intervention. Military operations were no longer limited to targeting arms shipments along the border or military infrastructure linked to Iran. They expanded to include the systematic destruction of the Syrian army's capabilities after Assad's fall, repeated ground incursions, the occupation of strategic positions inside and beyond the buffer zone, and the disruption of the operational framework that had governed disengagement arrangements since 1974. Israel also began including the new Syrian authorities within its target set, while developing a political discourse that linked Israeli intervention to the protection of certain ethnic and religious communities inside Syria.

As a result, Israel's approach no longer aims merely to manage existing threats. It has increasingly shifted toward influencing the conditions under which Syria's security environment is being rebuilt, and toward steering the outcomes of the transitional phase in line with Israeli perceptions of security, borders, and stability.

To understand this transformation, the paper builds on the findings of a previous study published by the Omran Center for Strategic Studies. That study relied on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of **416 Israeli operations** carried out in Syria during 2025, with the aim of unpacking Israel's new approach and measuring its shifts. It concluded that Israel did not merely develop its instruments of intervention, but also redefined the function of military force itself.

The **temporal analysis** showed that Israeli operations evolved not only in intensity, but also in function. They escalated gradually throughout the year and became concentrated in the final quarter, which accounted for **61.2%** of total activity. This reflected a clear shift in Israeli activity from testing and pressure to using force as a tool for shaping negotiations and imposing new realities, and ultimately toward consolidating outcomes. The **geographic analysis** showed

that **95.9%** of operations were concentrated in southern Syria, with **78.6%** in Quneitra Governorate alone. This confirms the transformation of southern Syria from a border periphery into a central arena for reshaping the security environment, testing the limits of intervention, and exploring the possibility of consolidating presence. It also indicates that Israel's approach redistributed the roles of intervention geographically: a south to be managed directly on the ground, and an interior to be strategically disrupted.

At the level of **target analysis**, **79.9%** of Israeli operations targeted civilian sites or areas, compared with only **20.1%** directed at military targets. At the same time, **security-oriented field activities** accounted for **68%** of activity, compared with **32%** for direct military activities. This confirms a shift in the function of intervention from targeting military capabilities to managing the environment that may produce threats. Ground incursions accounted for **77.7%** of operational patterns, compared with **18.6%** for air operations and **3.7%** for artillery shelling, reflecting a shift in the Israeli operational model from aerial deterrence toward ground-based management of the operational environment. Taken together, these indicators suggest that Israel's approach has moved from managing threats toward attempting to reshape Syria's security environment, with the aim of translating military realities into more durable political and security arrangements.⁽¹⁾

However, the previous study's finding that Israel's new approach has emerged does not necessarily mean that it will succeed in achieving its objectives. The real challenge lies not in Israel's ability to impose military facts on the ground, but in its capacity to translate those facts into durable political and security arrangements inside Syria. Building on this, the present paper, as a second phase of the earlier study, argues that despite the military and operational superiority Israel has achieved since the fall of the Assad regime, its new approach faces a complex intersection of regional and international interests. This intersection limits Israel's ability to convert its superiority into durable political and security arrangements in Syria, while also constraining its ability to use this approach to reshape the regional order unilaterally in accordance with its own vision and interests.

To test this hypothesis, the paper examines the positions and interests of the main regional and international actors involved in Syria across three progressively broader levels of analysis: **Syria's neighboring states, the wider regional environment, and major international powers**. It proceeds from the premise that the constraints facing Israel's approach do not stem from an anti-Israel alliance, but from a convergence of interests among actors whose motives and priorities differ, yet who align, to varying degrees, around preventing Israeli military superiority from being translated into durable political and security arrangements that reshape the future of Syria and the region according to Israel's vision.

Accordingly, the paper does not assess the limits of Israel's approach solely through the military balance of power. Rather, it analyzes the interaction between that approach and the emerging web of regional and international interests following Assad's fall, and the extent to which this web defines the boundaries of Israel's room for maneuver. The central question,

⁽¹⁾ Sasha Al Alo, Seba Abdullatif, and Muhsen AlMustafa, Beyond the Axis: Israel's Approach in Syria from Threat Management to Reshaping the Security Environment, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, May 12, 2026, available at: <https://bit.ly/430W1ZV>

therefore, is not whether Israel can impose military facts on the ground, but whether it can convert them into stable outcomes within an environment shaped by the overlapping interests of a growing number of actors.

Syria's Immediate Neighbors: Constraints of Intersecting Interests

This section begins with Syria's immediate neighbors as the first level of constraint in testing the limits of Israel's new approach. Their significance stems not only from geographic proximity, but also from the close connection between their security, political, and economic interests and the transformations underway in Syria. They are also among the actors most directly affected by the restructuring of the Syrian state and political authority after Assad's fall. Accordingly, the analysis of **Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon** seeks to unpack the constraints imposed by Syria's immediate regional environment on Israel's ability to translate its military superiority into durable political and security arrangements inside Syria.

Turkey: Competition over the Model and Role

Turkey represents one of the most significant regional constraints on Israel's ability to consolidate its new approach in Syria, not only because of its military weight and regional influence, but also because it advances a different vision of the nature and function of the Syrian state after the fall of the Assad regime. While Israel appears to favor a security environment in Syria that remains sufficiently weak and fragmented to preserve its freedom of action and prevent the emergence of future threats, Ankara supports an opposing trajectory centered on rebuilding the Syrian state, strengthening its institutions, and gradually integrating it into a broader regional security and economic framework.

Accordingly, the disagreement between the two sides is not merely a competition for influence, but a clash between two different visions of Syria's function itself: whether it remains an open arena for threat management and multiple centers of power, or regains its role as a centralized state capable of integration into new regional arrangements.

From this perspective, Ankara has treated the new Syrian authorities as a partner in rebuilding the state, rather than merely as a transitional administration. This is reflected in its political and security support, its contribution to rehabilitating key sectors, and its role in strengthening state institutions, particularly the military, through training, advisory support, logistics, and the connection of the emerging Syrian army to Turkish military expertise.

From Ankara's perspective, building a new Syrian army is not simply a matter of bilateral cooperation with Damascus, but a means of reunifying security decision-making, controlling the borders, confronting extremist organizations, and addressing the SDF issue within the framework of the Syrian state. For Israel, however, a Turkish-backed Syrian army would represent more than an emerging Syrian military capability. It could constitute a strategic shift that may eventually constrain Israel's freedom of action and limit its ability to impose unilateral security arrangements inside Syria.

This context is also reflected in Turkey's approach to restructuring the Syrian army and integrating local armed formations, particularly the SDF in northeastern Syria. Ankara views the integration of local forces into the army and state institutions as a prerequisite for ending fragmentation and preventing the emergence of an autonomous security entity along its borders. Israel, by contrast, appears more inclined to preserve local security margins that constrain Damascus's ability to restore full sovereignty and offset Turkey's growing influence.

Progress in integrating the SDF into Syrian state institutions has reduced the prospects for consolidating such a model in the northeast, thereby increasing the importance of southern Syria in Israeli calculations as the arena most conducive to reproducing a system of multiple centers of influence. The divergence between the two sides therefore extends beyond the northeast to a broader Israeli vision based on managing Syria through multiple power centers that prevent the emergence of a capable central state, or a broad Syrian-Turkish partnership capable of reshaping the security environment beyond Israeli preferences.

The latest Israeli-Iranian war further clarified this divergence. On the one hand, the decline of Iranian influence weakened some of the previous constraints on Turkey's presence in Syria. On the other, the war demonstrated Israel's willingness to use force not merely to contain a specific threat, but to reshape regional balances. These developments appear to have prompted Ankara to reassess its national security in light of the expansion of Israeli behavior since October 7, culminating in direct war with Iran near its borders.

Within this framework, Syria has become a central component of Turkey's strategic depth, alongside growing attention to Lebanon and the Eastern Mediterranean as interconnected arenas within the same equation. The war also gave Turkey an opportunity to assess the scale, limits, and patterns of Israeli power, an experience likely to shape its defense calculations and security networks in the coming phase. Against this backdrop, Israeli political, security, and media discourse has increasingly placed Turkey high on the list of potential threats, viewing it as the leading regional power likely to fill part of the vacuum left by Iran's decline.

This competition cannot be understood apart from the U.S. role, which represents the most influential variable in managing relations between the two sides. As Israel's closest security ally and Turkey's most important military partner, the United States not only influences the future of Syria's security and political arrangements, but also helps define the limits of each side's room for maneuver. Ankara therefore seeks to shape U.S. policy in ways that support its vision for the future of the Syrian state and its functions, while Israel recognizes that converting its military gains into stable arrangements remains, to a large extent, contingent on the parameters set by Washington in managing this balance.

The divergence between the two sides is not limited to security and military dimensions, but also extends to Syria's place within the region. Turkey views Syria as a geopolitical hub for trade, energy connectivity, and regional economic integration, reflected in proposals such as reviving the **Hejaz Railway**, as well as in Syria's role as a link between the Gulf, Turkey, and Europe. This makes the unity and stability of the Syrian state a prerequisite for interests that go beyond border security. Within this framework, Ankara has increasingly managed this track in coordination with Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, especially after the experience

of the past decade demonstrated the limits of managing regional issues through zero-sum competition. This reflects Ankara's recognition that Syria's reintegration cannot be a Turkish project alone, but must form part of a broader web of interests converging around the stability of the Syrian state, the containment of extremist organizations, and the opening of economic connectivity corridors.

In this context, the contours of a growing political and security coordination framework involving Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, and Egypt have emerged, with the potential for this framework to expand further. This framework does not present itself as an alliance directed against Israel. Rather, it has developed from a series of shifts that prompted several regional powers to reassess their security and political approaches, particularly after the Israeli-Iranian war. At the same time, these states share an interest in containing the repercussions of that war, preventing the decline of Iranian influence from enabling Israel to unilaterally reshape regional balances, managing the security vacuums that may result from this transition, and addressing potential threats to their interests and security.

This convergence also extends to supporting the stability of the nation-state and advancing economic integration and regional connectivity. Syria's stability therefore becomes one of the pillars of this emerging vision, not as an isolated issue, but as part of a broader equation for reshaping the region while preventing either the return of Iranian influence or the consolidation of unchecked Israeli influence. This vision gains additional significance in light of statements by Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, who linked "any future Israeli participation in this framework to acceptance of the two-state solution and a return to the 1967 borders,"⁽²⁾ suggesting that the dispute concerns less Israel's presence in the region than the rules on which a new regional order should be built. Part of this process later moved to a more practical and institutional level with the signing by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan of the "Mecca Agreement for Joint Defense" in August 2026, while Egypt has so far remained outside the defense arrangement despite its participation in the broader coordination framework.

Iraq: State Unity and the Interconnected Security Environment

Although Iraq is not a direct party to the Syrian-Israeli conflict equation, it is among the regional actors most affected by its outcomes because of the close interconnection between the two countries' security and political environments. Since Assad's fall, Baghdad has developed a growing interest in the success of the new Syrian state and in restoring its ability to exercise authority, driven by overlapping priorities in border control, combating extremist organizations — foremost among them ISIS — preventing the return of fragile cross-border security environments, and securing commercial movement. Iraq's early pragmatic engagement with the new authorities in Damascus, including the meeting between President Ahmad al-Sharaa and Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani in Doha under the patronage of the Emir of Qatar, followed by the visit of the head of Iraqi intelligence to Damascus at the head of a

(2) "Turkey Proposes a 'New Regional Deal' and Links Israel's Participation to a Political Condition," i24NEWS, May 31, 2026, available at: <https://2u.pw/kDd0eN>

government delegation,⁽³⁾ reflected a growing Iraqi recognition that Syria's stability is no longer merely a foreign policy issue, but a direct extension of Iraqi national security.

Iraq's interest extends beyond the stability of the Syrian state to preserving its unity and preventing the emergence of fragmentation models within it. Given Iraq's own federal experience and the sensitivity of the Kurdish issue within its domestic balance, Baghdad does not view local political or security arrangements outside the authority of the Syrian state as a purely Syrian matter, but as a precedent that could reverberate internally.

This sensitivity is particularly acute in northeastern Syria, where the consolidation of an independent or semi-independent "Kurdish entity" along Iraq's western border could effectively leave Iraq situated between two Kurdish entities, with direct implications for its national balance and security. From this perspective, Iraqi concern is not limited to the SDF itself, but extends to the political and security model it could establish: a fragmented state, multiple local power centers, and security arrangements beyond central authority. Likewise, any fragmentation in southern Syria would not, from Baghdad's perspective, remain confined to the south, but could affect the structure of the Syrian state as a whole and reinforce a logic of fragmentation whose spillover Iraq fears.

From this perspective, Israel's approach — based on consolidating zones of influence or localized security arrangements, whether in the south or elsewhere — appears to conflict with Iraq's interest in a unified and capable Syrian state. The wider the margins available to local actors and the weaker the authority of the Syrian state, the greater the likelihood of a return to fragile cross-border environments, the same type of environment Iraq experienced during the rise of extremist organizations. Accordingly, Baghdad does not view Israel's approach merely as a policy toward Syria, but as a trajectory that could threaten the cohesion of a neighboring state and reproduce patterns of security vacuum and political fragmentation with direct implications for Iraqi security.

The Israeli-Iranian war deepened this perception, as Iraq was no longer merely an observer of Israeli escalation in the region, but became part of the environment affected by it. The latest war heightened Iraqi sensitivity to any violation of its sovereignty or use of its territory as a platform in the regional confrontation, particularly amid recent reports of secret Israeli sites or bases operating inside Iraq. The expansion of this pattern of confrontation also risks reactivating armed factions and weakening the Iraqi state's ability to control its security decision-making, making Baghdad more inclined to contain the repercussions of regional escalation.

In this context, pressure on the central government in Baghdad has increased to rein in Iran-aligned armed factions and prevent Iraqi territory from being used to widen the regional confrontation. Attacks launched from Iraq against Saudi facilities were followed by Saudi military responses on **July 28, 2026**, after which official Syrian and Jordanian positions affirmed support for Saudi Arabia's right to protect its security and rejected the use of Iraqi territory as a launching point for attacks. This further increased the political and security costs

(3) "Head of Iraqi Intelligence Leads Government Delegation to Syria," Al Jazeera Net, April 25, 2025, available at: <https://2u.pw/LrleVz>

of the state's inability to contain armed actors. The central government has therefore found itself managing simultaneous pressures from its regional environment and from Iran-aligned Iraqi militias, reinforcing Baghdad's inclination to contain escalation and avoid being drawn into an open regional confrontation.

Israel, meanwhile, does not view Iraq as a separate arena, but as part of a broader security environment extending from Iran through Syria to Lebanon. Its interest is therefore closely tied to the channels of Iranian influence inside Iraq. This complexity is further intensified by the overlapping roles of the United States, Turkey, and Iran in both Iraq and Syria. The United States remains a major actor in both countries, and this overlap has deepened with its recent efforts to consolidate a broader strategic partnership with Iraq. This was reflected in the Trump administration's reaffirmation of its alliance with the government of **Ali al-Zaidi**, as well as the announcement of several agreements in the oil, gas, and energy sectors. These developments indicate a shift in U.S. attention from managing its military presence toward strengthening Iraq's economic and strategic integration, linking its stability to the broader Arab and regional environment, including Syria, within a single regional framework that extends beyond Iraq's domestic politics. This direction was further affirmed by the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad on **July 17, 2026**, when it announced support for regional connectivity and integration among Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and the Gulf, aimed at developing strategic corridors that diversify trade and energy routes and reduce dependence on the **Strait of Hormuz**.

On the other hand, Turkey is directly involved in the Kurdish issue and Iraq's border security, while Iran, despite the decline of its influence in Syria, retains a political and security presence in Iraq that cannot be overlooked. This overlap means that any Israeli attempt to reshape Syria's security environment according to its own preferences would have consequences extending beyond Syrian borders and affecting Iraqi and regional balances. Iraq's position, moreover, is shaped not only by security considerations, but also by broader regional-economic trajectories. Baghdad is seeking to expand trade and energy connectivity with Syria, including the reactivation of the Kirkuk–Baniyas oil pipeline, while also investing in regional connectivity projects, foremost among them the **Development Road**. The Iraqi prime minister's recent visit to Ankara reinforced this trajectory, with both sides reaffirming the priority of advancing the project and expanding cooperation in energy and related infrastructure.

The Baghdad government also views growing Gulf engagement with Iraq as an opportunity to reposition the country economically and reduce its dependence on the Iranian sphere. Yet the success of Iraq's vision for regional reconnection requires a stable, unified Syria capable of fulfilling its geographic role, rather than a state fragmented into competing security zones of influence. Accordingly, Iraq's approach toward Israel is driven less by a logic of confrontation than by the protection of its regional interests tied to the stability and unity of the Syrian state. Iraq therefore constitutes one of the constraints imposed by Syria's immediate neighborhood on Israel's ability to reshape the Syrian arena according to its own security vision.

Jordan: Security Depth and the Geopolitical Function of Southern Syria

If Iraq views Syria through the lens of shared interests in state unity and the interconnected security environment between the two countries, Jordan's approach begins from the place of southern Syria within its own national security equation. From this perspective, Jordan represents one of the most significant geopolitical constraints on Israel's approach in Syria, because its national security is tied to the function of southern Syria and the role it plays in border security more than to the internal balance of influence there. While Israel focuses on the south as the area most conducive to consolidating new security arrangements, Jordan views it as strategic depth rather than merely a shared border zone.

Accordingly, Israel's approach, based on expanding its military presence, managing the south through local arrangements, and redefining it as a security environment extending beyond its administrative boundaries toward Damascus, does not merely pose a political challenge to Amman; it directly intersects with Jordanian national security considerations and its geopolitical role. For Jordan, southern Syria is not a passive border area, but a security, social, and commercial space in which crossings, smuggling networks, and local balances are closely intertwined with Jordan's internal security. Thus, the weakening of Syrian state institutions or the proliferation of centers of power would mean not only reduced control by Damascus, but also higher security costs for Jordan and wider operating environments for drug-trafficking networks, organized crime, and extremist groups. These pressures increase further as regional threats to Jordan's borders grow, particularly amid the expansion of the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran and the possibility that Tehran may use its proxies to destabilize states across the region.

From this perspective, Amman treated the new Syrian authorities immediately after Assad's fall as the natural partner for restructuring bilateral relations and regulating the border environment. Jordan reopened channels with Damascus and activated security, political, and economic coordination, based on the conviction that a Syrian state capable of extending its authority offers the most sustainable and effective path forward. For Jordan, stability in the south cannot be achieved through competing local security arrangements, but through a central state capable of managing borders, threats, and shared interests. Israel, by contrast, moved to expand its military and security presence in the south and establish direct channels with some local actors, reflecting a different vision for the future of the area. While Amman seeks to reintegrate it under state authority, Israel appears inclined to preserve relatively autonomous local security arrangements that constrain Damascus's ability to restore full sovereignty.

Jordanian concern, however, extends beyond immediate security considerations to the nature of the model Israel is attempting to consolidate in the south. Israeli expansion under the stated rationale of "protecting the Druze," together with direct relationships with some local Druze actors, is viewed in Amman not merely as a temporary arrangement, but as a potential foundation for new forms of border management that redefine the political and security reference points of local actors outside the framework of the state. This could reproduce fragility and instability along Jordan's northern border and potentially generate spillover effects inside Jordan itself. From this perspective, the disagreement is not only over how the

south should be managed, but over a deeper question: which authority should ultimately govern this space — the state or local actors?

Jordanian strikes against drug- and arms-smuggling networks inside southern Syria, particularly in Suwayda,⁽⁴⁾ demonstrated Amman's willingness to use force when threats exceed the Syrian side's ability to contain them. Yet these strikes did not represent an alternative to the state or an attempt to create a Jordanian sphere of influence. Rather, they were exceptional measures driven by national security considerations pending Damascus's restoration of effective authority. The logic of the state, rather than the management of borders through local actors, therefore remained the governing framework of Jordan's approach.

This vision is also closely tied to Jordan's economic and geopolitical interests. Syria represents Jordan's natural gateway to Turkey and Europe and a key link in regional trade and energy connectivity projects. The stability of southern Syria and its reintegration under state authority are therefore prerequisites for reviving overland trade and advancing the regional connectivity projects on which Amman relies to diversify its economy and recover part of its geopolitical function. From this perspective, Jordanian interests intersect with those of Turkey and the Gulf in prioritizing Syria's reintegration into a stable regional environment, even if the motives of each actor differ. For Jordan, Syria's stability is tied not only to regional balances, but also to its ability to translate that stability into practical arrangements affecting border security, crossings, and transport networks. Southern Syria's stability thus becomes a condition for strengthening Jordan's geopolitical function, making any approach based on perpetuating local arrangements or weakening Syrian state authority directly at odds with its strategic interests.

Lebanon: The Limits of Translating Military Gains into Political Stability

The Lebanese case represents one of the most complex constraints on Israel's ability to translate its military gains into a sustainable regional arrangement, because it demonstrates that weakening a non-state actor does not necessarily mean being able to produce a viable political or institutional alternative. The latest war weakened Hezbollah and reduced its regional room for maneuver, but at the same time raised a more important question: who fills the vacuum left by the party's decline?

From this perspective, that vacuum does not appear likely to be filled by Israel or through externally imposed security arrangements, but rather through a gradual process led by the Lebanese state and its institutions, with Arab and international support. This process would center on strengthening the Lebanese Armed Forces, gradually restoring the state's monopoly over arms, and reasserting state authority over border management and security decision-making, within a regional environment in which Syria's stability occupies a central position.

This trajectory is closely linked to the transformation underway in Syria. The stability of the Lebanese state is no longer a purely Lebanese matter, just as any renewed collapse there would not remain confined within its borders, but would directly affect Syria through cross-border

(4) "Jordan's Deterrence Operation: Why Did Jordan Strike Sites in Suwayda, Syria?" Al Jazeera Net, May 3, 2026, available at: <https://2u.pw/gyZIEt>

dynamics, smuggling networks, arms flows, economic ties, and social linkages. The new authorities in Damascus therefore have no interest in Hezbollah retaining its previous regional role, but neither do they have an interest in becoming a military instrument for dismantling it according to a U.S.-preferred approach. Their interest lies instead in the emergence of a Lebanese state capable of controlling its borders, allowing Hezbollah's role within Lebanon to be recalibrated and relations between the two countries to be reorganized on the basis of state sovereignty rather than the influence of cross-border actors.

This interest is not confined to Damascus. It converges, to varying degrees, with the interests of Lebanese political forces and influential regional and international actors, foremost among them Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United States, France, and Turkey. Despite differences in motives and priorities, these actors share an interest in supporting the stability of the Lebanese state, strengthening its institutions, and redefining Hezbollah's role within the Lebanese political order in ways that limit its cross-border security and regional reach without pushing Lebanon toward state collapse or a new security vacuum. This was also reflected in Lebanese President Joseph Aoun's visits to Washington and Ankara, which pointed to a degree of U.S.-Turkish convergence around the priority of supporting the Lebanese state and its institutions as the principal framework for managing the post-war phase.

However, this convergence of interests does not necessarily imply convergence in the tools used or in the paths toward achieving them. In this context, Damascus's reservations toward direct U.S. pressure or proposals can be understood, particularly those seeking to push it into playing a role against Hezbollah along the border or inside eastern Lebanon.⁽⁵⁾ This was reflected in a statement by President Donald Trump on July 17, 2026, in which he expressed "confidence that President Ahmad al-Sharaa could deal with Hezbollah better than Israel, without destroying buildings or killing civilians." From Washington's perspective, such an approach may appear to offer an opportunity to capitalize on Syria's transformation to close one of the remaining fronts against Hezbollah. From Damascus's perspective, however, it could carry strategic consequences extending well beyond the group itself, potentially opening a Syrian-Lebanese confrontation that would drain the emerging Syrian state, destabilize a fragile border environment, and turn Syria into an implementer of policies that do not align with its own priorities.

In this context, the Syrian leadership appears more inclined to manage this issue as part of its regional security calculations rather than as an entry point into direct military confrontation. This does not mean foregoing the opportunity created by Hezbollah's current position. Damascus is likely to seek to leverage these conditions to pressure the group politically, economically, and in security terms by tightening border control and reorganizing its presence on both sides of the border and across the Syrian and Lebanese arenas. Such an approach would align with Syria's security priorities, the restoration of state sovereignty, and the interests of its regional partners, while remaining under an Arab and regional umbrella and avoiding a role

⁽⁵⁾ "Trump says Syria would do a better job than Israel of 'taking care of Hezbollah' – video," The Guardian, June 16, 2026. Link: <https://2u.pw/fFWDPA>

that serves security priorities detached from Syrian national interests or draws the country into open confrontation.

This caution is reinforced by Damascus's recognition that the issue of Hezbollah's weapons appears solvable only through a limited set of pathways: either a broader understanding with Iran or a fundamental shift in Tehran's regional position that would affect the group; an internal Lebanese process that risks sliding into civil conflict; or pushing Syria into direct confrontation with Hezbollah, which could threaten the stability of both countries. Damascus therefore seeks to avoid becoming the vehicle for this last scenario.

By contrast, Hezbollah's decline does not mean its disappearance from the Lebanese equation. Despite the attrition it has suffered and the erosion of its military and political capabilities, the group still retains an organizational and social structure that allows it to influence domestic balances. However, the environment in which it once operated has changed fundamentally. The decline of Iranian influence, the loss of its traditional Syrian strategic depth, and the new Syrian state's changed posture toward its role are all factors pushing Hezbollah toward a gradual repositioning. Its future trajectory may increasingly involve a shift from a cross-border regional actor to a Lebanese actor operating primarily within domestic rather than regional balances. This, however, will depend on several objective factors, including the outcome of the war with Iran and Hezbollah's ability to assess those outcomes realistically in light of broader moves toward a new regional security order.

The limits of Israel's approach are further reinforced by additional domestic and regional sensitivities. The Druze leadership in Lebanon, unlike some trends that have emerged within the Druze community in Syria, has shown clear caution toward any Israeli attempt to present itself as a reference point or protector of the Druze in the region. This position intersects with those of a number of Lebanese political actors, as well as with Jordanian and Syrian concerns over the possible transfer of Druze political and religious reference toward Israel through the position of Sheikh Mowafaq Tarif.

In this context, the fragility of Lebanon's internal balances constitutes an additional constraint on any attempt to translate Israeli military superiority into more sustainable political and security arrangements, as such efforts would confront the absence of a unified Lebanese domestic actor capable of supporting them. Yet this constraint is not limited to Lebanon's internal political structure; it reflects a broader reality in which Lebanon cannot redefine its security and regional position independently of Syria and the wider Arab environment. It therefore cannot move unilaterally toward final settlements, security arrangements, or stable normalization tracks with Israel outside that framework. This interdependence also extends beyond politics and security into the economic sphere, as Lebanon requires a stable Syria to revive trade and transit, address border and demarcation issues, and benefit from proposed regional connectivity projects.

Accordingly, the significance of the Lebanese case lies less in testing Israel's ability to weaken its adversaries militarily than in revealing the limits of its ability to translate that superiority into a stable political arrangement. Filling the vacuum created by Hezbollah's decline through a sustainable settlement remains contingent on rebuilding the Lebanese state, stabilizing Syria,

and integrating both within a supportive Arab and regional environment — variables that Israel cannot shape or control on its own. Thus, the Lebanese constraint lies in the fact that the outcomes of military superiority remain dependent on institutional, domestic, and regional conditions that exceed Israel's direct capacity.

Despite differences in their national priorities and regional trajectories, Syria's neighboring states reveal a pattern of objective convergence around a set of shared interests: **stabilizing the Syrian state, strengthening its central authority and monopoly over the functions of security and sovereignty, limiting the influence of non-state actors, controlling borders, preventing the return of extremist organizations — foremost among them ISIS — and creating a stable environment conducive to reviving regional economic and connectivity projects. This convergence does not amount to a unified political alignment, but rather reflects a shared recognition that any renewed deterioration in Syria's stability or return to fragmentation would impose direct costs on the security, stability, and national and regional interests of these states.**

This convergence did not remain confined to the recognition of shared interests, but quickly began to translate into **bilateral and multilateral coordination with Damascus**, particularly on border security, counter-ISIS efforts, and organized crime. One of the most notable examples was the Amman meeting on March 9, 2025, which brought together Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon and announced the establishment of a joint operations center to combat ISIS. **In this sense, Syria's neighboring states constitute the first circle of structural constraints limiting Israel's ability to translate its military gains into durable political and security arrangements in Syria — not because they form a unified front, but because their interests conflict with Israel's preferred vision for Syria's future, and because Israel's ability to consolidate that vision is shaped not only by military balances, but also by a regional web of interests that makes the stability of the Syrian state a prerequisite for safeguarding these countries' security and national interests.**

The Broader Regional Environment: Limits on Shaping the Regional Security Order

The constraints on Israel's approach in Syria are not limited to its immediate neighbors. They also extend to the broader regional environment, which has reassessed Syria's position after Assad's fall and the decline of Iranian influence through the lens of strategic interests. For key Arab powers, Syria is no longer merely an arena of conflict, but part of the wider reshaping of regional balances. Its stability and reintegration into its regional surroundings are therefore increasingly viewed as essential to protecting interests and consolidating new regional security arrangements. This, in turn, creates direct and indirect constraints on any approach that seeks to keep Syria as an open security environment vulnerable to fragmentation and reshaping.

The Gulf States: Syria at the Core of the New Regional Equation

The Gulf approach toward the new Syria has been driven by the conviction that rebuilding the state, restoring its effectiveness, and reintegrating it into its regional

environment form part of a broader strategic shift aimed at reshaping regional security balances following the decline of Iranian influence. From this perspective, Gulf states — foremost among them Saudi Arabia and Qatar — have been among the most active Arab actors in supporting the transition of the new authorities and investing in their success after Assad's fall.

This orientation was not merely a response to the collapse of a regime whose policies and projects had harmed Gulf interests over the previous decade. Rather, it reflected a deeper assessment of the requirements of regional stability and balance: leaving Syria outside the Arab regional order, or allowing the strategic vacuum that had enabled Iran to expand its influence across the region to re-emerge, was no longer an acceptable option.

This orientation did not remain at the level of strategic thinking. It was quickly translated into a political, economic, and diplomatic project aimed at reintegrating Syria into the Arab and international systems, empowering the current authorities, and supporting the new Syrian state in restoring its core functions. In this context, Saudi Arabia and Qatar led multi-level efforts, including persuading the U.S. administration to give the Syrian authorities a genuine opportunity, advancing the lifting of sanctions and designations, and creating the political and economic conditions necessary for a transition from conflict to stability. These steps were particularly significant because they came at a time when Israel was seeking to preserve some sanctions as a source of leverage.⁽⁶⁾ Israel recognized that ending Damascus's political and economic isolation would strengthen the state's ability to restore its sovereignty and reinforce its domestic and international legitimacy, thereby further empowering the current authorities without securing a corresponding benefit that Israel might later exploit.

While Gulf efforts focused on supporting Syria's political transition and stability, rapid changes in the regional environment were simultaneously pushing Gulf states to undertake a broader reassessment of domestic and regional security arrangements. Roughly one week after the Israeli attack on a Hamas delegation in Doha on September 9, 2025, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a mutual defense agreement on September 17. Although the agreement was the product of a longstanding trajectory of cooperation, its timing carried implications beyond the agreement itself, reflecting a growing recognition that the extension of Israeli security operations into the Gulf arena required a reassessment of existing security and defense approaches.

The U.S.-Israeli war against Iran pushed this Gulf reassessment to a deeper level, particularly as it confronted Gulf states with an unprecedented strategic challenge. On the one hand, it tested the limits of the U.S. security umbrella; on the other, it underscored the ability of Iran and its proxies to carry conflict into the Gulf arena, while Israel also demonstrated that its operations were no longer confined to traditional theaters of confrontation. These developments appear to have reinforced the Gulf states' conviction that their defense strategies must be reassessed within a broader regional security framework.

⁽⁶⁾ "Trump Signs Executive Order Lifting Most Sanctions on Syria," Axios, June 30, 2025. Link: <https://2u.pw/GW49uI>

This reassessment has not been limited to redefining threats. It has also extended to the tools used to address them, as reflected in recent Saudi strikes against Iran-aligned militias inside Iraqi territory, which represented a practical expression of the Gulf's willingness to protect its security beyond its borders. In this context, Syria is no longer viewed by the Gulf primarily as an arena for managing conflicts, but as one of the region's key frontline states, a potential early-warning front, and a strategic space for consolidating the break with Iran's regional project. Syria thus becomes part of a broader Arab security sphere whose stability, or instability, directly affects Gulf security and regional standing.

This process of reassessment did not stop with the Gulf states. It also extended, to varying degrees, to a number of regional powers that found themselves facing a new security environment produced by the war and the expansion of its repercussions. This encouraged growing patterns of political and security coordination among Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, and Egypt, later culminating in the signing of the "Mecca Agreement for Joint Defense" without Egypt. These arrangements were not presented as an alliance against Israel, nor did they emerge in response to a single event. Rather, they resulted from the accumulation of regional transformations that pushed states affected, to varying degrees, by both Israeli and Iranian policies to reassess their security approaches. Within this framework, a broader vision began to emerge, centered on regional security coordination, support for the nation-state, and greater economic integration as foundations for stability. Syria, in Gulf calculations, is therefore no longer viewed merely as a country in need of reconstruction, but as a key hub for regional trade and energy connectivity, a link between the Gulf, the Levant, and Turkey, and a promising space for investment.

This gradual emergence of a more coordinated regional environment appears to have challenged one of the central assumptions of Israeli strategy in the region: that weakening the Iranian axis and expanding Arab normalization would automatically lead to the consolidation of a new regional order in which Israel would become one of its principal pillars. Saudi Arabia, as the most influential Arab state in this process, appears to have repurposed the normalization card. Rather than treating normalization as a political inevitability or an end in itself, Riyadh has turned it into an instrument for reshaping the regional order on different terms. It therefore continues to link any move toward comprehensive normalization to the establishment of a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders, making normalization a tool for recalibrating the rules of the region rather than an entry point into the Israeli vision. This logic may also extend, to varying degrees, to the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, meaning that any sustainable regional settlement would remain tied to Syria's stability and to constraining Israeli behavior in Lebanon.

In the same context, Israeli attempts have also emerged to link any U.S. approval of a Saudi nuclear program to progress on normalization, reflecting how the issue itself has become a reciprocal bargaining tool rather than a one-way process. In this sense, normalization can no longer be treated as an almost guaranteed Israeli gain, as it appeared in the period following the Abraham Accords. Instead, it has become one of the principal instruments for negotiating the rules of the regional order taking shape in the post-war period. This logic does not appear limited to Saudi policy alone. It is increasingly reflected, to varying degrees, in the positions

of regional powers involved in the new coordination frameworks, foremost among them Turkey, which has begun to frame Israel's integration into such arrangements in terms of similar political and regional conditions, particularly the establishment of a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders. This points to a growing tendency to treat comprehensive normalization as a tool for recalibrating the rules of the region rather than as an independent political objective.

The United Arab Emirates, despite the distinct nature of its relationship with Israel, also appears to be part of the ongoing regional shift toward Syria, albeit through different instruments. Abu Dhabi has sought to develop relations with the new Syrian authorities, engage in investment, and revive economic ties, while also playing mediation roles between Syria and Israel within a track that may evolve depending on the outcome of broader regional arrangements. Available indicators suggest that the UAE has become more aligned with the regional trend supporting Syria's stability and less inclined toward policies that could encourage parallel entities or deepen internal fragmentation. This shift appears linked not only to its own policy choices, but also to a recognition that the regional environment has become less receptive to projects of fragmentation and more supportive of the stability of nation-states.

Despite differences in the tools adopted by Gulf states, their approaches converge around a shared vision of Syria's stability. From this perspective, the Gulf vision objectively diverges from Israel's approach, reflecting a structural contradiction between two different conceptions of the future of the Syrian state and the region. While the Gulf approach is based on consolidating state institutions, strengthening central authority, and reintegrating Syria into its Arab and regional environment as a pathway to stability, Israel's approach seeks to preserve freedom of military action, weaken sovereign capabilities, and prevent the emergence of a Syrian state capable of fully restoring its functions. The divergence between the two sides therefore extends beyond the transitional phase to the nature of the regional order each seeks to consolidate.

The significance of the Gulf role lies not simply in political opposition to Israel's approach, nor solely in considerations of Arab solidarity, but in the nature of its strategic interests, which increasingly generate objective constraints on that approach. The deeper the Gulf becomes involved in linking Syria to networks of security, trade, investment, and regional integration, the narrower the space becomes for policies aimed at weakening the state, entrenching zones of influence, or perpetuating instability. Accordingly, the Gulf is not merely a supporter of Syria, but one of the most important actors whose policies constrain Israel's ability to reshape the Syrian security environment according to its own vision.

Egypt: From Caution to Regional Repositioning

Egypt's position on Syria differed from that of most regional actors that moved quickly to engage with the new authorities after Assad's fall. From the outset, Cairo approached this transition with considerable caution, driven by several considerations, foremost among them the ideological background of the new leadership and Egypt's longstanding concerns over the rise of an Islamist model to power, particularly if accompanied by broad Arab and international acceptance. Given the nature of the Egyptian state and its long experience with political Islam,

this factor was not secondary, but one of the main determinants shaping Cairo's reading of the Syrian transition.

This caution was not directed at Damascus alone. It was also connected to the broader reshaping of the regional environment after Assad's fall and the decline of Iranian influence. The rise of the new Syrian authorities coincided with rapid engagement by the Gulf states, Turkey, Jordan, and the United States in supporting and reintegrating them, at a time when Cairo was reassessing its own position within these emerging balances and its relations with some Gulf capitals were experiencing a period of relative coolness. Egypt's position, therefore, was not merely a reservation about the nature of the authorities in Damascus. It also carried messages in several directions, reflecting Cairo's desire to reassert its regional role and avoid simply adapting to regional arrangements being shaped without its participation, foremost among them the emerging arrangements surrounding Syria.

Damascus, for its part, understood that the success of its Arab reintegration would remain incomplete without Egypt, given the legitimacy that Cairo's participation would lend to any broader Arab effort to reintegrate Syria and anchor it within its regional environment. This understanding created the political space and flexibility needed to begin a gradual rapprochement, during which signs of Egyptian caution relatively receded and bilateral diplomatic channels became more active. The economic dimension also emerged as an important instrument of rapprochement. Visits by Egyptian economic delegations and businesspeople carried significance beyond investment alone, particularly because they took place in a context that could hardly be separated from the Egyptian state's broader political calculations. This reflected Cairo's growing willingness to engage gradually in economic activity and investment opportunities. The economy thus became one of the main tools for rebuilding relations between Cairo and Damascus, rather than merely a consequence of improved ties.

This gradual rapprochement coincided with wider regional transformations, as the Israeli-Iranian war accelerated Cairo's reassessment of the regional environment. On the one hand, Iran's decline and the resulting shifts in regional balances created greater room for Egypt to reinforce its regional role. On the other, the war exposed both the scale and the limits of Israeli power, an assessment of particular importance for Egypt as the largest country bordering Israel. The conclusions drawn from this experience will necessarily shape Cairo's long-term defense strategies and security calculations, while intersecting with its interest in preventing Israeli military superiority from being converted into regional political dominance on its borders. This concern has gained further importance as Egypt, alongside Turkey, has appeared increasingly in Israeli political, security, and media discourse as one of the principal regional challenges following Iran's decline, indicating that the reassessment has not been confined to Cairo but has also extended to Israel's strategic calculations regarding the emerging regional environment.

In light of these assessments, Cairo's willingness to engage in emerging regional and security arrangements with several key actors — foremost among them Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan — has become increasingly evident, reflecting a broader move toward building new coordination frameworks to manage the war with Iran and its repercussions. These

repercussions later expanded to affect Egypt's energy and maritime sphere, including a drone attack on the port of Damietta. If these arrangements continue to broaden and incorporate Syria more explicitly, they are likely to accelerate Egyptian-Syrian rapprochement and reinforce a wider regional web capable of imposing an additional constraint on Israel's ability to unilaterally shape political and security arrangements in Syria and the broader region.

Although Egypt has participated in the broader coordination framework, it has so far remained outside the "Mecca Agreement for Joint Defense" later signed by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan. This may reflect several Egypt-specific considerations, including its peace agreement with Israel and its sensitivity to the potential implications of the Mecca Agreement for Yemen and the Red Sea.

Egypt's participation also reflects broader calculations regarding its place in the emerging regional environment. Cairo recognizes that the new coordination frameworks — which may gradually expand to include Syria — are no longer confined to security issues, but increasingly encompass transport, trade, energy, and economic integration networks, giving Syria a central position within them. Yet Cairo assesses these arrangements not only in terms of their economic value, but also through the lens of its own position within them. Egypt does not oppose regional integration as such; rather, it is cautious about the possibility that it could be reshaped within a competitive framework that strengthens other regional powers, particularly Turkey, at the expense of Egypt's room for maneuver. If, however, this process develops within a more integrated framework based on shared roles and interests, it could become an opportunity to reinforce Egypt's position within the emerging regional balance.

In this context, Cairo's participation in these emerging arrangements, and the avenues of cooperation they may open with Damascus, does not mean that its reservations toward the Syrian authorities have disappeared entirely. Political and media engagement with Damascus remains shaped by domestic considerations related to the nature of the Egyptian political system and its sensitivity toward political Islam. These reservations, however, do not prevent the expansion of coordination with Damascus on strategic issues that directly affect Egyptian national security, particularly Israeli policies and their repercussions in Syria, the threat of transnational extremist groups, and other shared security concerns.

Accordingly, the constraint Egypt places on Israel's approach does not stem from a shift toward confrontation with Israel, nor from abandoning its reservations toward the Syrian authorities, but from a redefinition of its regional position and interests, and the gradual engagement with Damascus that this requires on strategic issues. The deeper this process becomes, the more difficult it will be for Israel to translate its approach into arrangements that keep Syria an open arena or a weak state, even if political rapprochement between Cairo and Damascus continues to advance cautiously.

Iran: Syria's Stability as a Constraint on the Return of the Iranian Project

The reduction of Iranian influence in Syria and the broader region, both before and after the fall of the Assad regime, represented a rare point of convergence among most regional and

international actors, despite differences in their motives and objectives. Containing that influence was a shared interest for Turkey, the Gulf states, Jordan, the United States, Europe, and Israel, while it did not conflict with Russian interests in Syria, as Moscow likewise sought to regulate the expansion of its Iranian partner according to its own calculations. The decline of the Iranian project thus became one of the principal foundations for reshaping the regional environment after Assad's fall.

The Israeli-U.S. war against Iran further consolidated this trajectory by weakening Iran's military, technological, and nuclear capabilities and undermining a significant part of its regional network of influence, particularly after the loss of the Syrian land corridor and the reduced effectiveness of some of its proxies. These developments, however, did not alter the fact that most regional powers, unlike Israel, did not seek the collapse of the Iranian regime, but rather aimed to contain its capabilities and prevent it from restoring its former position. For Turkey, the Gulf states, and Pakistan, the collapse of the Iranian state carried risks of regional disorder, civil conflict, refugee and displacement flows, and security vacuums that could prove more dangerous than the persistence of a weakened regime preoccupied with its domestic crises.

From this perspective, the survival of the regime in Tehran, despite its weakening, has kept open the possibility of renewed Iranian influence, albeit in a different form than before, particularly given the continuing divergence between Israeli and U.S. objectives and the uncertainty surrounding the eventual settlement of the war and its aftermath. Tehran still retains instruments of influence in Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon, and has not entirely lost its capacity to inflict harm or attempt to rebuild some of its networks inside Syria if favorable conditions emerge. Yet the loss of the land corridor, the decline of its direct military presence, and its preoccupation with post-war economic, political, and security crises at home make any attempt to reproduce its previous model of influence more difficult and costly.

In this context, Syria and its new authorities have acquired additional importance in regional and international calculations. With Syria becoming the most decisive link in preventing the return of the Iranian project, strengthening state stability and institutions has become a shared interest among a broad range of actors, including those that still retain reservations toward some components of the new authorities. Weakening the Syrian state or allowing its fragility to persist could once again create space for the reactivation of Iranian networks or the use of its remaining instruments, whereas Syria's stabilization would help consolidate the strategic break with Iran's project in the Levant brought about by the fall of the Assad regime.

Iran is therefore no longer a player capable of imposing regional equations as it once did, but it remains a latent threat that cannot be ignored. This paradox creates an additional constraint on Israel's approach in Syria: any policy aimed at weakening the Syrian state or prolonging its fragility conflicts with the interests of most regional and international actors in preventing the return of Iranian influence, thereby limiting the regional and international viability of such an approach. Supporting the stability of the new Syrian state thus becomes one of the most important regional safeguards against the return of the Iranian project, rather than merely a matter of Syria's internal affairs.

Taken together, the regional constraints on Israel's approach in Syria do not stem from political consensus among regional actors or from a unified position against Israel. Rather, they emerge from the convergence of interests in preventing Syria from becoming an open arena for generating regional threats or reshaping the balance of power in ways that undermine those interests. Syria's stability and reintegration have therefore become necessary for protecting the security and interests of these actors. Accordingly, any approach based on keeping Syria an open arena of conflict or a weak state runs counter not only to Syrian interests, but also to the broader trajectory of rebuilding regional balances. This places an additional constraint on Israel's ability to translate its military superiority into durable political and security arrangements inside Syria.

International Powers: Regional Balances and the Limits of Israel's Approach

If Syria's neighboring states and regional powers constrain Israel's approach through their direct interest in Syria's stability, the international environment adds another layer of constraints shaped by major powers' calculations regarding regional balance management, alliance networks, and the prevention of renewed security vacuums. From this perspective, the limits of Israel's approach are determined not only by what Israel seeks to achieve, but also by what the international environment is willing to accommodate as it works to reshape the region according to priorities that extend beyond the Syrian arena alone.

The United States: Strategic Interests and the Alliance Network

The United States is the international actor with the greatest influence over Syria's post-Assad transition and the surrounding regional environment, not only because of its military presence and strategic weight, but also because it is **the only actor capable of simultaneously influencing the interests and policies of most parties involved in Syria and the broader region**. This breadth of influence also reflects an expanded definition of U.S. interests. Washington's policy toward Syria therefore cannot be understood solely through its bilateral relationship with Israel; it must also be viewed in light of how U.S. interests have been redefined following the decline of Iranian influence and the regional shifts in power and alliances produced by the war against Iran.

In this context, **U.S. interests are no longer defined solely by protecting Israel or containing Iran, but by managing a broader network of allies and interests**. Following the weakening of the Iranian axis, Washington now operates within a network of allies and partners that includes Israel, Turkey, Iraq, the Gulf states, Jordan, Egypt, Pakistan, as well as Syria and Lebanon. This network is no longer merely an instrument for implementing U.S. policy; it has become a central element in defining U.S. interests themselves and shaping Washington's regional decision-making. U.S. strategic success in the Middle East increasingly depends on balancing the interests and concerns of these partners while preserving the cohesion of the regional system on which Washington relies to manage its interests in the post-Iran-decline environment.

From this perspective, **the United States views Syria as more than an internal file or an arena tied primarily to Israel's security.** In U.S. calculations, the new Syria has become a strategic node where multiple interests and issues intersect, including Iranian influence, Israeli security, Turkey's role, Gulf and Jordanian interests, Lebanon's stability, regional economic and trade connectivity, energy security, and international competition over trade corridors. Accordingly, the success of the new Syrian authorities is no longer merely a Syrian matter, but part of a broader U.S. vision for reshaping the region, consolidating the disruption of Iran's land corridor, and preventing the return of security vacuums that could enable the resurgence of Iranian influence or extremist organizations, foremost among them ISIS.

In line with this vision, **the United States has invested politically in the Syrian authorities** through diplomatic engagement, the lifting of sanctions and designations, and providing Damascus with an opportunity to reintegrate into the regional and international systems. This shift was not merely technical or economic; it reflected a growing conviction in Washington that the success of the Syrian authorities represents the most realistic available option, and that their failure would recreate the kind of vacuum from which Iran and other non-state actors could benefit. U.S. Special Envoy for Syria Tom Barrack articulated this logic clearly when he stated that **"with this Syrian regime, there is no Plan B,"** while linking U.S. support to preserving state unity, strengthening institutions, and broadening stability and political participation in ways that would prevent Syria from sliding back into conflict.⁽⁷⁾

The lifting of sanctions was one of the clearest indicators of the shift in U.S. policy toward Syria. It followed diplomatic efforts led by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar to give the Syrian authorities an opportunity to succeed, at a time when Israel sought to preserve sanctions as leverage over Damascus to secure strategic gains. The U.S. response should not be understood merely as a temporary accommodation of its allies, but as reflecting Washington's recognition that maintaining its alliance network and addressing its partners' concerns have themselves become part of the U.S. national interest. For this network, Syria's stability is no longer a peripheral issue, but one directly tied to its interests.

The divergence between the U.S. and Israel's approaches extends beyond sanctions to two different visions for Syria's future under the current authorities. While Israel's approach seeks to manage the Syrian border through military pressure, weakened capabilities, and local arrangements beyond central state authority, Washington has adopted an approach centered on consolidating the Syrian state, supporting its central authority and monopoly over the use of force, and integrating armed formations, including the SDF, into a unified national army. This has been reflected in several U.S. statements, particularly those of Tom Barrack, emphasizing Syria's territorial unity, rejecting parallel entities and fragmentation, and criticizing Israeli interventions for obstructing stabilization efforts.

This divergence has become even clearer in the U.S. approach to a potential Syrian-Israeli security agreement. After Israel effectively set aside the legal framework established by the 1974 Disengagement Agreement, it began to view any new agreement as a means of

(7) "With this Syrian regime, there is no plan B." See: US envoy urges Syria's Sharaa to revise policy or risk fragmentation, Reuters, July 22, 2025. Link: <https://2u.pw/iLmWI9>

legitimizing the facts it imposed after Assad's fall. Damascus, by contrast, seeks a return to the 1974 framework, allowing it to restore military control, secure the border, and focus on domestic state-building. Washington, meanwhile, appears to view such an agreement as an interim framework for managing the existing imbalance, reducing escalation, and preventing friction, rather than as a final settlement of the conflict or a full endorsement of Israel's vision.

This divergence was reflected in U.S. President Donald Trump's call on July 14, 2026, for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to begin redeploying Israeli forces out of Syria and to pursue a similar withdrawal from Lebanon. This suggests that Washington does not view Israel's military presence in either country as a sustainable arrangement or an acceptable end state for the post-war period.

Indicators of this divergence extend beyond the Syrian arena. Across several regional issues, Washington has shown a willingness to pursue independent tracks when its interests require it, whether by opening direct negotiating channels with **Hamas** over the hostage issue, containing the repercussions of Israeli operations inside the territory of its **Gulf allies**, or reaching separate understandings to protect navigation and U.S. interests in the **Red Sea**. These cases demonstrate that the strategic alliance with Israel does not necessarily imply identical definitions of national interest, nor does it prevent Washington from distinguishing between its own immediate priorities and those of Israel when the two diverge.

The same logic is evident in Washington's relationship with Turkey. Israel views Turkey's expanding role in Syria and the broader region as a strategic challenge, but Washington cannot fully adopt this perspective given Turkey's status as a key ally, a major NATO member, and a central actor in regional and security issues directly tied to U.S. interests. This divergence was reflected in remarks by U.S. President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the latest NATO summit, when he announced his intention to lift the remaining sanctions on Turkey and reconsider the sale of F-35 fighter jets, stressing that the United States **"does not want to impose sanctions on its friends."**⁽⁸⁾ This prompted clear Israeli objections from Benjamin Netanyahu, who argued that supplying Turkey with these aircraft would undermine Israel's military superiority in the Middle East. Trump's recent remarks are also consistent with earlier statements suggesting that Washington could work to contain any dispute between Turkey and Israel. This indicates that the United States does not assess Turkey's role solely through the lens of Israeli concerns, but rather in terms of Turkey's position within the broader network of U.S. interests.

The U.S.-Israeli war against Iran provided another arena in which this divergence became evident. While the Israeli government sought to expand the scope of the war toward fundamentally altering the structure of the Iranian regime, Washington focused on disabling Iran's nuclear program, safeguarding its own interests, and preventing the confrontation from escalating into an open regional conflict. Its position was also shaped by concerns among regional allies over the potential consequences of the collapse of the Iranian state. This difference became even clearer as the contours of an initial agreement to end the war began to

⁽⁸⁾ Trump says U.S. will lift Turkey sanctions, decide on selling F-35s. Reuters, July 7, 2026. Link: <https://2u.pw/QRiY92>

emerge, prompting Israeli objections and sharp U.S. responses defending the agreement's scope and direction. U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance reflected this position when he defended the U.S. decision and rebuked Israeli officials for criticizing the agreement, describing their reaction as **“a panic”** and urging Israeli ministers to stop attacking **“the only strong ally they have.”**⁽⁹⁾

This divergence was also reflected in Lebanon, where Washington remained committed to preserving the ceasefire framework between Hezbollah and Israel, while Israel moved toward using military escalation to press for its preferred terms. This reportedly frustrated U.S. President Donald Trump, who later described Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as **“crazy”** and accused him of being **“ungrateful,”** arguing that Israeli escalation was undermining U.S. efforts to consolidate the ceasefire in Lebanon.⁽¹⁰⁾

These episodes do not suggest that the United States is redefining its alliance with Israel or moving toward an adversarial policy. **Israel remains a central ally in U.S. strategy. Yet they demonstrate that Israel is no longer the only actor shaping Washington's policy in the Middle East**, and that the United States is increasingly managing a broader system of interests and allies. As Turkey, Iraq, the Gulf states, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon become more integral to Washington's approach to managing regional balances, the cost of adopting Israel's unilateral approach based on weakening the Syrian state or undermining regional stability becomes increasingly high.

From this perspective, **Syria's stability is not an end in itself, but part of a broader U.S. vision for managing the regional order** and preserving American influence amid wider international shifts, foremost among them the growing **Chinese presence**, which is supported by expanding relations with most countries in the region. In this context, Washington's alliance network is acquiring greater political, security, and economic importance, as it provides the framework for regional connectivity projects and for the stability of trade and energy corridors. Although the United States and China share an objective interest in regional stability to protect trade and energy routes, Washington remains more intent on ensuring that such stability develops through arrangements aligned with its own vision and anchored in its network of allies, thereby safeguarding its strategic interests and limiting the expansion of Chinese influence.

The U.S. case demonstrates that the constraints Washington places on Israel's approach in Syria do not reflect a strategic disagreement with Israel so much as a shift in the definition of U.S. interests themselves. Those interests increasingly require managing a broader network of allies, taking their concerns and interests into account, and preserving the balances on which Washington's regional strategy depends. These constraints therefore no longer arise merely from accommodating allied preferences, but from the growing incompatibility of Israel's approach with U.S. interests themselves.

⁽⁹⁾ “Vance warns Israeli critics over Iran deal: Trump is your only ally,” Reuters, June 18, 2026. Link: <https://2u.pw/kd8en1>

⁽¹⁰⁾ “Trump confirms he called Netanyahu ‘crazy’ in phone call,” Reuters, June 3, 2026. Link: <https://2u.pw/btVO6p>

This divergence is also not occurring in a vacuum within the United States. Recent opinion polls, foremost among them surveys by the Pew Research Center, indicate increasingly negative attitudes toward the current Israeli government. This suggests that the widening gap between Washington and the current Netanyahu government is developing within a domestic environment more receptive to distinguishing between support for Israel and endorsement of its government's policies, thereby giving the U.S. administration greater room to exercise this distinction.

Europe: Syria's Stability as a European Interest

The European approach toward post-Assad Syria is increasingly centered on supporting state stability and rebuilding institutions, based on a **growing recognition that Syria's future is no longer merely a Middle Eastern issue**, but one that directly affects European security and stability through issues such as migration, security, counterterrorism, foreign fighters, reconstruction, and investment. European capitals therefore view Syria's stability not simply as a Syrian objective, but as part of a broader conception of regional stability closely tied to their own security and interests. From this perspective, Europe moved toward direct engagement with the new government in Damascus and supported it as the central authority capable of restoring stability and rebuilding state institutions.

In line with this vision, it was natural for European and Israeli approaches to Syria to diverge, particularly over their positions toward the new authorities, continued incursions into Syrian territory, and support for local arrangements that weaken central authority and perpetuate fragility. This divergence, however, did not begin with Syria. It had already widened after October 7, amid the escalation of the Israeli war on Gaza and a broader European reassessment of Israeli policies in the region, shaped by growing public, media, and parliamentary pressure. This was reflected in an expanding gap with the policies of Benjamin Netanyahu's government, without amounting to a complete retreat from Europe's commitment to its relationship with Israel. In this context, the recognition of the Palestinian state by several European countries reflected a significant trend that views regional stability as unattainable through a security-based approach alone and requiring political pathways that address the roots of the conflict.

This logic was also reflected in the policies of major European states toward Syria, **foremost among them France**. President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Damascus — the first by a European head of state since Assad's fall — was one of the clearest indications of this shift in the European approach. The visit extended beyond its political and security dimensions to include senior investors and executives from major French companies, notably TotalEnergies and CMA CGM, alongside the signing of economic and logistical understandings.⁽¹¹⁾ This reflected a transition in European engagement from political support toward practical involvement in reconstruction and Syria's economic reintegration.

Within this framework, **Germany and the United Kingdom** also moved to encourage Syria's political transition, engage with the new government, and support its central authority, as

⁽¹¹⁾ France's Macron visits Syria in first trip by an EU head of state since Assad's fall, Reuters, July 6, 2026. Link: <https://2u.pw/AzcWjy>

reflected in President al-Sharaa's official visits to Berlin and London. Major European capitals have also assumed growing diplomatic roles in de-escalation efforts between Damascus and Tel Aviv: Paris and London hosted rounds of talks between the two sides, while Berlin offered to contribute to mediation efforts. This indicates that major European states are no longer shaping their Syria policies around Israel's approach, but increasingly on the basis of independent European assessments that view the stability of the Syrian state as directly linked to their own interests and to broader regional stability.

By contrast, other European countries, particularly **Spain and Ireland**, have adopted more critical positions toward Benjamin Netanyahu's government and shown greater support for political approaches to both the Palestinian and Syrian issues. This has widened the gap within Europe vis-à-vis current Israeli policies, without producing a fundamental division over the broader European view that the stability of the Syrian state constitutes a shared European interest, even if European capitals differ over the means of achieving it.

Europe's position toward Syria is shaped not only by its relationship with Israel, but also by broader geopolitical considerations, foremost among them the war in Ukraine and the prolonged confrontation with Russia that it has produced. After years of seeking to reduce Russian influence in its neighborhood and in other areas of strategic presence, Europe increasingly views Syria as one arena in which that influence can be constrained. Yet it does not see this objective as requiring the weakening of the Syrian state, but rather support for its institutions, greater stability, and the creation of conditions conducive to reconstruction and investment, thereby expanding the scope for European engagement. In this context, renewed European political and economic involvement, particularly by major European powers, carries significance beyond Syria itself, reflecting an effort to gradually reduce Russia's room for influence in Syria while diversifying energy supply routes away from Russia.

Europe's constraints on certain aspects of Israel's approach in Syria do not stem from a desire to confront Israel or undermine its interests, but from a fundamental difference in how European interests are defined and pursued. While Israel's approach relies on expanding military presence and managing the security environment, Europe sees its strategic interests — whether strengthening its own security or expanding opportunities for investment and economic and energy connectivity — as best served by a stable Syrian state capable of exercising authority and reintegrating into its regional environment. Accordingly, any approach that perpetuates state fragility or obstructs Syria's stabilization increasingly runs counter to Europe's own strategic interests.

Russia: From Protecting the Regime to Protecting Its Interests

Russia was the geopolitical actor most affected by the fall of the Assad regime, losing the ally that had for decades served as the principal foundation of its influence in the Levant and its gateway to the eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, however, Moscow was among the quickest international powers to absorb and adapt to the new reality. **Rather than confronting the new Syrian authorities, Russia moved rapidly toward a political repositioning** aimed at limiting its losses and preserving as much of its interests in Syria as possible. Russian policy thus shifted from protecting the regime to protecting its interests, foremost among them

maintaining a minimum strategic presence on the Syrian coast and avoiding complete exclusion from post-Assad arrangements.

In return, the new Syrian authorities did not close the door on Moscow, despite the heavy legacy left by Russia's military alliance with the Assad regime during the years of the Syrian revolution. Damascus recognized that its relationship with Russia could not be reduced to the legacy of the former regime, but also involved **considerations related to balancing its foreign relations and preserving room for maneuver** should Western positions shift. It also saw potential diplomatic value in Russia's presence within international institutions, alongside continued possibilities for cooperation in certain economic sectors, such as wheat and energy, and in selected aspects of rebuilding the military establishment, within the limits permitted by the regional and international environment.

This approach was reflected in continued political engagement between the two sides, most notably President Ahmad al-Sharaa's visit to Moscow in October 2025 and his meeting with President Vladimir Putin. The visit demonstrated a mutual willingness to redefine the relationship on the basis of shared interests rather than the political legacy that had shaped it during the previous period.

As Israeli incursions expanded across southern Syria and Tel Aviv's approach toward the new Syria became clearer, a view emerged in Damascus that continued engagement with Moscow could allow Syria to draw on Russia's previous experience in managing tensions, particularly in the south, where Russia had played a role during the final years of Assad's rule in regulating interactions and reducing escalation between Iranian and Israeli actors. However, this option remained limited as the center of gravity in Syria shifted toward the United States, while Washington and its Western allies appeared reluctant to grant Moscow a significant security role in post-Assad arrangements.

From Israel's perspective, **the continued Russian presence also figured in visions for Syria's future, with Tel Aviv viewing it through two overlapping lenses.** On the one hand, Israel saw the presence of multiple foreign powers inside Syria, including Russia, as potentially reinforcing parallel spheres of influence and impeding the emergence of a strong central authority capable of extending sovereignty across the entire country. This aligned with its broader approach of keeping the Syrian arena less cohesive and more susceptible to external control and intervention. On the other hand, Israel viewed the Russian presence as a potential counterweight to expanding Turkish influence in Syria and pressed Washington in that direction. This did not mean that Israel sought to empower Russia or expand its influence, but rather that it saw a continued, limited Russian presence as part of an external balance that could serve its approach and prevent rival regional powers from dominating the reshaping of the Syrian arena.⁽¹²⁾

Between these competing visions, and amid shifts in the balance of power and the alliance network surrounding post-Assad Syria, Russia repositioned itself within the new landscape. It no longer possesses the ability to shape post-Assad arrangements as it did before 2024, but it

⁽¹²⁾ Maya Gebeily and Humeyra Pamuk, "Exclusive: Israel Lobbies U.S. to Keep Russian Bases in a 'Weak' Syria, Sources Say," Reuters, February 28, 2025. Link: <https://2u.pw/ou05nQ>

remains an actor Damascus is reluctant to lose, given the room for maneuver it provides, the opportunity to diversify foreign relations, and the diplomatic value of its presence in international forums. For other actors as well, Russia's continued presence remains one element in the broader international and regional balance surrounding Syria.

Accordingly, the Russian presence does not constitute a decisive constraint on Israel's approach in Syria so much as it contributes to preserving a degree of balance within the international environment surrounding post-Assad Syria. Despite its decline, the significance of Russia's role lies less in its ability to impose new arrangements than in helping prevent the consolidation of unilateral arrangements that would enable Israel to reshape the Syrian and regional landscape according to its own preferences.

Despite their differing priorities, the positions of international powers demonstrate that Israel's room for maneuver in Syria is shaped not only by the military balance of power, but also by Syria's place within a broader network of interests and alliances seeking to produce a more stable regional environment aligned with their own interests. As the range of interests tied to Syria's stability expands, the ability of any single actor to reshape the landscape unilaterally diminishes. Syria is no longer merely an arena of local or regional conflict, but part of broader international arrangements in which security, economic, energy, and great-power competition increasingly intersect. Accordingly, the more Israel's approach and policies diverge from this broader trajectory, the greater the potential for them to be contained or constrained, and the more complex and costly their implementation becomes.

Conclusions: The Web of Interests and Syria's Strategic Positioning

An assessment of the transformations that followed October 7, 2023, suggests that Israel's ability to wage war and expand the scope of its military operations does not necessarily translate into an ability to convert military superiority into stable political outcomes. Israel has been able to employ force across multiple arenas, weaken its adversaries, and alter existing balances of power. Yet it has so far failed to produce a political settlement commensurate with the scale of force employed. This paradox is not limited to Syria, but appears to characterize the broader trajectory of the current Israeli government: military gains continue to accumulate without producing a sustainable political framework, while the costs of war rise and Israel's surrounding environment becomes more complex rather than more receptive to its preferred vision.

This does not mean that Israel has lost its military superiority or that its allies are preparing to abandon it. Rather, **that superiority is no longer sufficient to determine the regional balance on its own.** As the web of interests tied to the stability of Syria and the wider region expands, it becomes increasingly difficult to rely on military power as the sole foundation for shaping the regional order. If the gap persists between Israel's capacity to wage war and its inability to translate military gains into political outcomes, Israel will sooner or later have to confront the reality that it is part of the region, and that meaningful integration can only be achieved by adapting to shared rules and settlements that take the interests of other actors into

account. Until then, policies based on expanding conflict and imposing facts on the ground may deepen Israel's political, economic, and security isolation within a region whose increasingly interconnected interests run counter to its preferred vision.

This conclusion also reveals a notable strategic paradox. Before the fall of the Assad regime, Iran was the actor whose regional expansion generated a convergence of interests among most powers involved in Syria. **Israel, through its regional policies, has now begun, in one form or another, to occupy the position left by the decline of the Iranian project.** This does not imply that the two projects or their instruments are equivalent. Rather, Israel's vision for the future of Syria and the region increasingly conflicts, to varying degrees, with the interests of a growing number of actors. While regional states have sought to fill the vacuum left by Iran through supporting the state, rebuilding security and economic networks, and expanding regional connectivity, Israel has moved to fill that vacuum by widening its freedom of military action and perpetuating the fragility of its surrounding environments.

From this perspective, **the current right-wing Israeli government may increasingly become a liability even for circles supportive of Israel as its failure to achieve political outcomes accumulates,** without implying the collapse of existing alliances. If this trajectory continues, it is likely to gradually affect Israeli domestic politics and the political future of Benjamin Netanyahu's government, potentially opening the way for political reassessments more willing to shift from managing the region through force toward negotiating Israel's place within it.

At the same time, the expanding web of interests and their growing convergence reflect an equally significant regional transformation. Over the past decade, the region experienced **competition among regional and international interests, which contributed to prolonging conflicts, fragmenting states, and deepening crises in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and other Arab Spring countries. The current phase, however, represents a different moment.** It is not defined by the absence of competition, but by a broader convergence among multiple regional and international priorities, foremost among them preventing security vacuums, strengthening the nation-state, containing transnational threats, and expanding networks of security, defense, trade, energy, and investment. This convergence is no longer hypothetical. It has begun to take institutional form through coordination frameworks extending from the Gulf to Turkey, Egypt, and Pakistan, with the potential to expand further to include Syria and other states. Part of this process has also begun to crystallize into defense arrangements with a multidirectional deterrent function, most clearly reflected in the **"Mecca Agreement for Joint Defense."**

This convergence is not based on hostility toward Israel, but on filling the vacuum left by Iran's decline and reshaping the region around interests increasingly tied to stability. **These frameworks may not, in the near term, be capable of producing a direct military-security deterrence policy toward Israel, but their longer-term effects may prove more significant than direct deterrence itself,** because they are gradually establishing security, economic, energy, and trade networks that will help define the rules of integration into the emerging regional order. The issue, therefore, is not the rejection of Israel's existence, but the terms of its integration — foremost among them respect for sovereignty, restraint in the use of force, and acceptance of fair political settlements, including the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Accordingly, the prospect of Israeli isolation may emerge not through an explicit policy of containment, but through the development of a regional environment that advances coordination without Israel and subsequently conditions its inclusion on changes in its behavior.

This reading also calls for reconsidering the assumption that weakening Iran would automatically lead to Israeli dominance in the region. Recent developments suggest that the decline of one regional center of power does not necessarily leave the field open for another to dominate. Instead, it may encourage other actors to reorganize their interests in order to prevent the emergence of a new hegemon. Likewise, the assumption that Israel has emerged from its recent wars “stronger” overlooks the economic, military, and political costs it has incurred, as well as the limits these wars have exposed in its security and defense systems and the difficulty of sustaining open-ended superiority in both cost and duration. The post-Iran phase therefore appears less likely to produce uncontested Israeli dominance than a broader reconfiguration of regional balances, in which military power increasingly competes with the expanding web of interests, economic integration, and regional connectivity.

Syria lies at the heart of this transformation, not as the region's sole center, but as one of its most sensitive geopolitical arenas and a point of intersection among security, energy, trade, and the reconstruction of regional balances. **The expanding range of interests tied to the success of the new Syrian authorities has created conditions that may grant them a relatively longer political lifespan than the fragility of the transitional phase might suggest. Yet this longevity is not a permanent guarantee, but a conditional opportunity,** dependent on the authorities' ability to understand Syria's position within this web, position themselves effectively, and translate external convergence into tangible political, security, and economic outcomes. This includes the terms of any potential security agreement with Israel, the future of Israel's military presence inside Syrian territory, the restoration of state control over security and sovereign functions in the south, and Syria's role in stabilizing Lebanon. The web of interests constraining Israel's approach can give Damascus greater negotiating space, but it will not automatically translate into political protection unless the Syrian authorities manage it effectively and convert it into practical instruments.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that **the expansion of this web does not constrain Israel alone; it also places growing constraints on the Syrian authorities themselves.** The more Syria becomes tied to the interests of a wider range of actors, the greater their capacity to influence Damascus's choices and priorities. Maintaining good relations with multiple parties also does not mean that Syria can become a strategic ally of all of them. At a certain point, determining the direction of Syria's strategic alignment becomes less a choice that can be postponed than an unavoidable course.

Capitalizing on this moment requires more than effective management of foreign relations. Fulfilling the security, economic, and geopolitical roles increasingly expected of Syria, while absorbing major connectivity, energy, and investment projects, **requires a functioning state:** capable institutions, a disciplined bureaucracy, effective governance, a secure investment environment, and legal and logistical infrastructure able to sustain this scale of interests and projects. **The legitimacy generated by international engagement is also**

insufficient to consolidate the authorities unless it is translated into tangible domestic legitimacy through security, services, reconstruction, employment opportunities, and improved economic and political conditions. Syrian society should not remain a distant recipient of these developments, but become a direct partner and beneficiary; otherwise, the gap between external success and domestic underperformance may itself become a source of fragility.

In this context, it is essential to recognize that **this opportunity is neither exclusive nor open-ended**. Most countries in the region are competing to attract investment and benefit from energy and trade integration projects, which can shift toward alternative routes when the original environments prove difficult. If Syria fails to provide an effective state and an attractive environment, some of these interests may migrate elsewhere. Geography alone, therefore, does not create strategic relevance; it requires political and institutional capacity to convert location into strategic value.

Ultimately, the future of Israel's approach in Syria will not be determined by the military balance alone, but by Israel's ability to adapt to a region increasingly reshaped through a complex web of interests, as well as by the new Syrian authorities' ability to leverage Syria's position within that web. The convergence of interests has given Damascus a historic opportunity to rebuild the state and restore its role, but success is not automatic. It depends on consolidating stability and domestic legitimacy, and on positioning Syria effectively within the regional and international web of interests. Only then can the constraints on Israel's approach become a sustainable political reality rather than temporary limits on military superiority.

