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## "Dawn of a New Era" in The Middle East?

## Ceasefires, Realignments, and the New Geopolitics of Influence

By

Brunello Rosa and

Gulf State Analytics

20 November 2025

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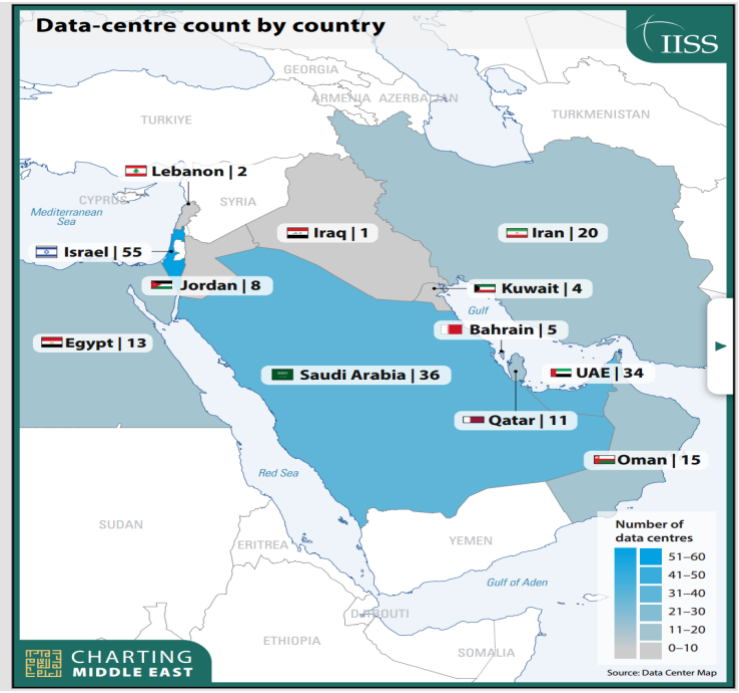
## Executive Summary


- The Middle East has been plagued by conflicts for centuries, with an escalation over the last few decades, with the state of Israel entering the picture. We discuss whether a less conflictual era may be starting.
- Trump's October 2025 Middle East visit, coinciding with the Gaza ceasefire, projected leadership but delivered little progress toward lasting peace. Trump's 20-point "peace" plan repeats past cycles of temporary calm without addressing core causes or advancing Palestinian sovereignty.
- This was mostly motivated by growing right-wing (MAGA) disillusionment with Israel, reflecting a shift in U.S. domestic politics and anti-establishment sentiment.
- Israel's 9 September 2025 air strike in Qatar exposed U.S. limits and accelerated Gulf moves toward greater strategic autonomy. Conversely, new defence ties with Pakistan, naval drills with China, and détente with Iran speak to Riyadh's increasingly multipolar security posture and geopolitical position.
- Trump's May 2025 Gulf tour prioritised deals over ideology, securing major Artificial Intelligence (AI), arms, and investment deals with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Trump seeks to maintain U.S. influence through pragmatism, burden-sharing, and avoidance of new regional wars.
- New commercial ventures in the region (AI, data centres, re-construction in Gaza, etc.) require as a pre-condition a less conflictual landscape. Clearly risks remain: for example, the U.S.–Gulf AI agenda deepens strategic ties but remains highly exposed to renewed conflict involving Israel or Iran.
- The question is: can the Middle East become what Europe was at the end of WW2, in order to rip the benefits of the "peace dividend" in the region? It's possible that countries in the Middle East decide to pause their "forever wars" and focus on the economic opportunities deriving from the new global order.


**Key Picture: Data Centres In the Middle East Are Indicative of a Less Conflictual Middle East Going Forward**




*Source: IISS*



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## 1. From Perma-Conflicts To Glimmers of Hope

Over the last few decades, conflicts have been the constant feature of the Middle East: the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 at the end of WW2, ending millennia of diaspora; the several wars that resulted from that (including that of the Yom Kippur in 1973); the Iranian revolution of 1979; the lingering conflicts between Saudi Arabia and Iran; the two American wars in 1991 and 2003, the Arab springs and the rise of ISIS, the fall of the Syrian regime led by Bashar Assad, until the recent war in Gaza that expanded to Lebanon, the West Bank and the Houthis is Yemen – only to name a few.

At the same time, new gimmers of hope are emerging for a more pacified future in the region: the Saudi Arabia-Iran détente signed in May 2023 in Beijing; the Abraham Accords signed by Israel and several Arab states; the fact that the war in Gaza, which saw the genocide of the Palestinians, didn't cause any meaningful reaction by the surrounding Arab states, neither directly (via official military intervention), nor indirectly (via proxy terrorist organisations).

More recently, following the attack by Israel on Doha, the US decided to extend a sort of "NATO Article 5" to Qatar, with an extremely consequential executive order. Finally, we should also consider the commercial agreements achieved in the last few months that to bring massive data centres in the region: given the size and visibility of these data centre, the pre-condition for their construction is that the territories where they will be built will not be subject to attacks of any sort. A less tech, but maybe more visible variant of this is the so-called "Gaza Riviera", i.e. the intention of start building in the martyr region, an indication of incoming peace.

To discuss whether the Middle East is headed for a period of reduced conflicts, in order to rip the benefits of the "peace dividend", the report discusses the following points. *First*, the ceasefire reached in Gaza, and the motivations behind it, including the shift in MAGA perception in the US. *Secondly*, the pivotal episode of the Israeli attack in Doha, Qatar. *Third*, how Saudi Arabia moved in the opposite direction, looking for a nuclear umbrella from Pakistan, a proxy of China. *Fourth*, the US investment in the AI-related data centres in the region.

## 2. Trump's Middle East Diplomacy: Ceasefires Without Complete Resolution

U.S. President Donald J. Trump's latest visit to the Middle East, which coincided with the release of the final living Israelis held captive in Gaza and a newly brokered ceasefire, was marked by symbolism and diplomatic theatre. At the Israeli Knesset, Trump received strong applause and positioned himself as a broker of peace while next to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.[1] In Sharm el-Sheikh, a regional summit of leaders echoed similar sentiments. However, the underlying realities on the ground suggest that declarations of a "historic dawn" may be premature.

The humanitarian toll of the war, with over 67,000 Palestinians killed and famine in Gaza, underscores the devastating nature of the conflict.[2] Gaza's urban and social infrastructure has been left in a state of near-total collapse. Looking ahead, the picture appears murky. On numerous occasions Israel has violated the fragile and tenuous ceasefire that took effect on 10 October 2025.[3] Moreover, the ceasefire's implementation does not resolve the structural dynamics that led to the outbreak of violence, leaving many regional experts pessimistic about Gaza's future.

Historically, Gaza has witnessed a series of cyclical escalations, each followed by short-term ceasefires that ultimately fail to address root causes. Despite diplomatic pledges made after previous ceasefires in 2009, 2012, 2014, 2019, 2021, and early 2025, there has been little substantive movement on key issues such as the blockade, political disenfranchisement, or economic recovery.[4] The current round of diplomacy risks repeating this pattern. Any sustainable resolution must go beyond symbolic gestures or externally imposed frameworks. Trump's 20-point plan, while offering a starting point for dialogue, lacks essential elements necessary for long-term conflict transformation. Most notably, it fails to centre Palestinian agency or articulate a clear pathway toward the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.



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For any plan to gain legitimacy and durability, it must include enforceable provisions for ending the occupation and dismantling apartheid structures. Furthermore, a credible mechanism for legal and political accountability is essential. Without these components, any ceasefire agreement will probably remain nothing but a tactical pause. The work ahead requires deep institutional engagement, long-term resource commitments, and political willingness to address power asymmetries rather than simply manage them. Policymakers must resist the allure of declarative diplomacy and instead focus on sustained implementation strategies that place Palestinian self-determination and sovereignty at the centre of the regional order. Only then can the conditions for genuine stability, rather than recurring ceasefire cycles, be established.



Regardless of the ceasefire's many shortcomings and highly problematic aspects, Trump demonstrated his willingness and ability to leverage U.S. influence to pressure Netanyahu's government into an action that it would not have wanted to take had it not been for such pressure. Trump doing so needs to be understood in various contexts—one of them being domestic politics in the United States and changes in how Trump's support base on the American Right is becoming increasingly critical of the U.S.-Israeli alliance.

### 3. MAGA Realignment: Growing Conservative Resentment Toward Israel

A notable shift is occurring within the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) movement, as support for Israel—long considered a given in American right-wing politics—shows signs of erosion. This trend, highlighted by statements from prominent Trump allies such as Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene and strategist Steve Bannon, signals growing disillusionment with Israel among grassroots conservatives.[5, 6] Central to this change has been the widely broadcast devastation in Gaza, which has led many MAGA supporters, particularly younger ones, to reassess their previously unwavering pro-Israel positions.

Gallup polling underscores this trend: only 32 percent of American adults support Israel's military actions in Gaza, with support falling to just 9 percent among those aged 18–34.[7] For many within the MAGA base, images of destruction and civilian suffering in Gaza have catalysed a rethinking of Israel's role in the conflict. The humanitarian cost of the war, broadcast in real time through social media, undermines the traditional framing of Israel as a democratic ally defending itself from extremism.

At a deeper level, this shift reflects the MAGA movement's broader anti-establishment ethos. Born from frustration with political elites and economic dislocation, many MAGA supporters now view the bipartisan political consensus on Israel as part of a larger system that prioritises foreign interests over domestic needs. For these voters, the billions of dollars in U.S. aid to Israel appear increasingly unjustifiable at a time of growing economic inequality and domestic infrastructure decay. This discontent is compounded by perceptions of Israel as a wealthy nation manipulating U.S. foreign policy, with neoconservatives and lobbyists driving unnecessary military entanglements abroad.

MAGA voters' concerns are less about traditional ideological divisions and more about resentment toward what they see as an elite-driven foreign policy agenda. In this view, support for Israel has become a "proxy" for broader dissatisfaction with America's role in global conflicts and the political system's responsiveness to voter concerns. The absence of meaningful campaign finance reform further entrenches this disconnect between public opinion and policymaking, as lawmakers are seen as more accountable to pro-Israel donors than to their constituents.

Whether this shift in sentiment will influence Trump's future foreign policy remains uncertain. Trump's dependence on wealthy pro-Israel donors might constrain any significant pivot. On the other hand, his transactional nature and sensitivity to public opinion could push him toward a more conditional stance on Israel. Though not ideologically opposed to Israel, Trump may reassess the U.S.–Israel relationship if doing so aligns with his personal or political interests.

Ultimately, the MAGA movement's growing scepticism represents more than a fleeting trend. It reflects a broader realignment in American politics where grassroots sentiment is increasingly shaping foreign policy debates. While institutional support for Israel remains strong, its perceived untouchability is being questioned.



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This moment may mark the beginning of a more contested and conditional U.S.–Israel relationship which is shaped as much by domestic political shifts as by geopolitics.

### 4. U.S. Credibility Tested by Israeli Strike on Doha

The 9 September 2025 Israeli airstrike targeting Hamas leaders in Qatar sent shockwaves through the Gulf and raised pressing questions about U.S. credibility in the region. The attack, which killed six individuals including a Qatari security officer, took place in Doha—the capital city of a major non-NATO U.S. ally that hosts U.S. CENTCOM's forward headquarters at al-Udeid Air Base.[8]

While Israel claimed it was targeting Hamas operatives, the strike crossed a red line for many in the region, as it violated the sovereignty of a close U.S. partner. Notably, the Hamas officials were in Qatar to discuss a U.S.-backed ceasefire initiative, making the attack even more sensitive. In response, Qatari officials condemned the strike as "treacherous," and comparisons were drawn to past escalations like Iran's 2019 drone strike on Saudi oil infrastructure.[9]

The Trump administration's reaction was at least at first muted and contradictory. Initially slow to respond, the White House eventually criticised Israel's unilateral action without fully condemning it. Trump said he felt "badly" about the attack and "wasn't thrilled," while White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt emphasised the legitimacy of eliminating Hamas, though not at the cost of violating allied sovereignty.[10] Trump later promised Qatar's leadership that such an incident would not be repeated.[11] Nevertheless, just days later, Netanyahu and his representatives threatened further action unless Qatar expelled Hamas officials, raising fears of more regional instability.[12]

In an effort to reassure Doha and salvage credibility, on 29 September 2025 Trump signed an executive order pledging U.S. military support in the event of an armed attack on Qatar.[13] This move spoke volumes about Trump's desire to restore trust in Washington-Doha relations following the unprecedented Israeli bombing of a residential neighbourhood in the Qatari capital. Netanyahu was pressured into issuing a rare apology, expressing regret for the attack and vowing not to conduct similar operations in the future.[14]

Yet for many in the Gulf, the damage was already done. The attack has prompted Gulf leaders to reevaluate their defence and diplomatic posture—not to replace the U.S. alliance, but to bolster their own regional security arrangements. It also raised concerns that Israel could become a destabilising and predatory actor in the Gulf, especially under Netanyahu's far-right government. The attack challenged assumptions that U.S. security partnerships offered protection against Israeli military actions and sparked fears that if Doha could be targeted, other Gulf capitals might not be safe either.

The U.S.'s ability to act as a neutral broker in the region has been called into question, particularly after recent Israeli strikes in both Iran and Qatar during ongoing negotiations. The muted American response risks further eroding U.S. influence and could prompt Gulf nations to pursue greater strategic autonomy.

The attack also intensified intra-Gulf coordination. The six-member GCC condemned the strike, and its Joint Defence Council agreed to strengthen intelligence-sharing, enhance early warning systems, and update defence strategies. More significantly, a strategic alignment among Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar has emerged, largely driven by shared threat perceptions of an increasingly aggressive Israel.[15]

These GCC members had already begun coordinating more closely, particularly around Trump's proposed Gaza ceasefire plan. Now, they appear to be pushing for stronger collective security frameworks, possibly even exploring a Gulf version of NATO. While it's uncertain how far this initiative will go, the trend points to a more multipolar approach to Gulf security.

The Israeli attack on Doha may have shattered illusions about Israel's restraint in the Gulf, but it has also catalysed new cooperation among key regional powers. With Gulf states seeking to diversify their partnerships and hedge against great-power unpredictability, their collective efforts, especially in coordination with the U.S., may shape a new strategic landscape for the Middle East.



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## 5. Riyadh's Diversification of Security and Strategic Ties

Signed on 17 September 2025, the Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) marks a significant shift in the Gulf's evolving security posture.[16] The pact commits both nations to respond jointly to any act of aggression against either party, formalising decades of quiet military and financial cooperation into a binding strategic alliance. While the agreement strengthens bilateral ties, it also signals a broader recalibration of regional security dynamics, particularly Saudi Arabia's growing interest in diversifying its defence partnerships beyond traditional reliance on the United States.

For Riyadh, the deal reflects deepening doubts about the long-term reliability of the U.S. security umbrella, especially after recent regional developments such as Israeli strikes on Qatar and perceived inconsistencies in American commitments. For Pakistan, it offers renewed geopolitical relevance and the opportunity to elevate its global standing, reinforcing its long-standing military footprint in the Gulf. Pakistani officials have made clear that the SMDA extends Pakistan's nuclear shield to the Kingdom. This has triggered concerns about new strategic ambiguities in an already volatile region.

Regionally, the pact complicates existing alliances. India, for example, views this development warily, given its rivalry with Pakistan and growing economic ties with Saudi Arabia. Operationally, questions remain about the depth and credibility of the pact—whether Pakistan would intervene in a Saudi conflict, or how both sides would manage overlapping security interests, including relations with China, the U.S., and Iran.

From a U.S. perspective, the pact presents a paradox. On one hand, it signals a welcome form of regional burden-sharing, with Gulf states taking more ownership of their security. On the other hand, it underscores the waning influence of Washington in a region where new power alignments are rapidly taking shape.

Ultimately, the Saudi-Pakistan defence pact is not merely symbolic. It reflects shifting strategic calculus across the Middle East and South Asia, highlighting a broader trend of emerging regional alignments driven by uncertainty, strategic hedging, and the desire for greater autonomy in a rapidly changing global order.

The launch of Blue Sword 2025 (a joint naval exercise between Saudi Arabia and China) underscores the deepening, albeit still modest, defence relationship between the two powers.[17] Held in Saudi waters during a politically sensitive moment—coinciding with Trump's Gaza ceasefire signing—the drill signals Riyadh's strategic diversification. Designed to enhance tactical interoperability and maritime security coordination, the exercise highlights China's growing role in Saudi military planning, even as U.S. systems continue to dominate the kingdom's defence infrastructure.[18]

Though China supplies only a fraction of Saudi arms, joint drills like Blue Sword reflect symbolic political alignment amid growing economic ties. China is now Saudi Arabia's top trading partner, and bilateral investments are surging, particularly in manufacturing, critical minerals, and energy. Still, significant barriers—technical, structural, and strategic—limit full integration.[19] Ultimately, Saudi Arabia's engagement with China remains a hedge, not a pivot, signalling greater autonomy in a shifting global order without abandoning its Western alliances.

More than two years after Saudi Arabia and Iran restored diplomatic ties through an agreement facilitated by China, Iraq, and Oman, bilateral relations continue to warm, marked recently by a high-level Iranian delegation's visit to Riyadh. In September, Iranian security chief Ali Larijani met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) and Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman.[20]

This rare and significant visit focused on regional security, economic cooperation, and potential defence collaboration—especially in light of recent instability, including the Israeli missile strike in Doha.

Larijani's visit, following earlier stops in Beirut and Baghdad, reflects Iran's broader strategy to shape a new regional security framework. The meeting's timing, just after an Arab-Islamic summit in Doha and amidst



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tensions from Israel's Gaza war, underscored its strategic intent. Despite deep-rooted mistrust, both nations appear committed to de-escalation, with prior gestures such as Pezeshkian's outreach to MbS during Tehran's pre-signaled strike on al-Udeid reinforcing this.

Though practical mechanisms for cooperation remain limited, including the absence of joint commissions, some progress has been made such as reviving a 2001 security agreement and increasing Iran's trade with Saudi Arabia. Defence collaboration remains possible but cautious, contingent on reduced mutual hostility.



This rapprochement could ripple beyond Saudi-Iran ties, potentially improving relations with Pakistan and reshaping regional alignments, especially with U.S. credibility in question and Israel perceived as a greater threat. While challenges remain, the ongoing Saudi-Iranian thaw presents an opportunity to build a more stable and cooperative Middle East order.

### 6. The Gulf Pivot: AI Partnerships and Strategic Realignment

Trump's Gulf tour in May 2025 brought him to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The trip, unlike his 2017 visit to Riyadh, notably excluded Israel and emphasised transactional diplomacy over ideological commitments. Trump secured billions in arms and investment deals, reaffirmed ties with Gulf monarchies, and made dramatic policy announcements, including lifting sanctions on Syria.[21]

The tour reflected Trump's pragmatism and desire to reduce U.S. military entanglements abroad, aligning with both his political base's aversion to "forever wars" and Gulf states' focus on domestic development. The president's willingness to bypass Israeli input in key decisions on Iran, Syria, and Gaza raised eyebrows at the time.

A central takeaway was Trump's effective shelving of Arab-Israeli normalisation, especially with Saudi Arabia. Riyadh now demands major concessions, including U.S. defence guarantees and meaningful movement on Palestinian statehood, before considering normalisation. The Gaza war has further reduced the appeal of aligning with an increasingly extreme Israeli government, both diplomatically and in the eyes of Arab publics.

Trump's outreach to Syria's post-Ba'athist leadership also reflects this recalibrated approach. By legitimising Syria's government led by Ahmed al-Sharaa, Trump embraced regional actors' preferences for stability and economic integration over conflict. Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have shifted from confrontation to cautious diplomacy, a trend Trump appears to support for the most part.

Ultimately, Trump's approach favours authoritarian pragmatism and strategic dealmaking, which resonates with regional actors and Trump's political instincts and may reshape America's footprint in the Middle East going forward. An extremely important aspect of Trump's May 2025 Gulf tour was the Artificial Intelligence (AI) dimension. With deals potentially worth over USD 1 trillion, the trip highlighted the strategic alignment between Washington and Gulf monarchies—Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—as they seek to become global AI hubs.[22]

Central to this effort is Humain, a Saudi AI startup backed by the Kingdom's sovereign wealth fund and chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.[23] Humain signed high-profile deals with U.S. tech giants including Nvidia, AMD, and Qualcomm to build AI data centres and cloud infrastructure across Saudi Arabia and beyond.[24] In Qatar, a USD 1 billion agreement was signed between Al Rabban Capital and U.S.-based Quantinuum to advance quantum technology.[25] In the UAE, Trump announced a joint U.S.-UAE plan to build the world's largest AI data centre in Abu Dhabi, led by G42, a UAE AI firm with ties to Chinese entities, raising scrutiny in Washington.[26]

These rapidly expanding partnerships position the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states as emerging power centres in the evolving global AI ecosystem, while simultaneously advancing U.S. strategic objectives, chief among them, countering China's accelerated progress in artificial intelligence. At the same time, the scale and ambition of recent U.S. investments in the Gulf's AI infrastructure, particularly the development of vast data centres and semiconductor pipelines, underscore the fragility of such plans in a region still prone to volatility.



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Should a major regional conflict erupt, such as a renewed escalation between Iran and Israel akin to the 12-Day War of June 2025, the Gulf's AI ambitions could be placed in jeopardy, especially if Saudi Arabia, the UAE, or Qatar are drawn into the fray either directly or as unintended collateral. In such a scenario, not only would billions of dollars in infrastructure be at risk, but the broader vision of positioning the Gulf as a global AI hub could unravel, derailing both regional development goals and American technological influence abroad.

Consequently, Trump's foreign policy calculus toward the Gulf is likely to become increasingly shaped by the imperative to safeguard these emerging AI corridors. The infrastructure now being laid down—from chip supplies to quantum partnerships—represents more than commercial opportunity; it constitutes a critical node in America's long-term technological and geopolitical strategy. As such, any future U.S. engagement with the region must factor in the dual necessity of regional stability and uninterrupted AI development, both of which are now deeply intertwined with America's national interests.

### 7. Trump's Strategic Restraint in the Middle East

Trump's recent Middle East diplomacy reflects a careful balancing act: avoiding new military entanglements while preventing the U.S. from being dragged into escalating regional conflicts. His administration has emphasised strategic restraint, even as it pressures allies and adversaries alike to de-escalate. Trump's broader strategy appears to be largely geared toward offloading security responsibilities while preserving American influence.

This approach is shaped not only by Trump's long-standing opposition to "forever wars," but also by shifting domestic politics, where growing segments of his base question the value of the United States' traditional alliance with Israel. Rather than reasserting dominance, Trump is pursuing a pragmatic, transactional model that prioritises stability, economic interests (like AI infrastructure), and minimal direct intervention.

By promoting regional burden-sharing and relying on strategic diplomacy, Trump aims to preserve American influence in the Middle East without resorting to costly military entanglements. This pragmatic approach may come to define U.S. policy in a region where power is increasingly diffuse, and priorities are shifting. Yet a central challenge remains: Israel continues to pursue policies that risk drawing the United States into its own confrontations with Iran and other regional adversaries. Trump's ability to satisfy his political base, particularly the growing anti-war sentiment within the MAGA movement, will largely depend on whether he imposes meaningful limits on Israeli actions and resists pressures that threaten to entangle Washington in new Middle Eastern conflicts.

### 8. Is This The Dawn of A New Era? The Middle East Like Western Europe Post WW2

At the end of this discussion we ask ourselves whether the Middle East is, in fact, at the dawn of a new era. After centuries of conflicts, and "forever wars" of the last decades, the countries of the region may have realised that armed conflicts don't resolve anything and barely move national borders. Even Israel, which may have the most pressing territorial ambitions, has been effectively told to stop fighting by its main sponsor, the US. At the critical juncture of the Israeli attack to Doha, the US chose Qatar over Israel[27].

In the realignment of the world deriving from the emerging new global order, the Middle East may have once in a lifetime opportunity of finally ripping the benefits of the "peace dividend" and the economic development deriving from it. The massive US investment in the region, with data centres allowed to use the latest AI-related technology, in spite of the adverse climatic conditions (the Middle East desert is one of the hottest regions on the planet, with no water to cool the massive servers of the data centres), is a strong signal that the US in betting on a pacified region, rather than a more conflictual one.

Risks exists: Israel may re-start its military campaigns. Iran may send shockwaves to throughout the region at the time of the succession of Khamenei, or – even more so – in case of an unlikely regime change. The Houthis may prove harder to defeat than currently envision. Some of the countries in the GCC (e.g. Oman) or nearby (e.g. Lebanon), may not be ready for the transition. But overall, they seem manageable.



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So, can the Middle East be on the verge of entering a period of peace the same way Europe did after World War 2, i.e. the end of endless conflicts in the continent spanning for centuries, if not millennia? We cannot rule it out, and that may be the reason why both the US and China are willing to extend further their influence on the region, which is already rich of natural and financial resources. In the context of major economic areas shrinking in relative terms, the Middle East may be one moving in the opposite direction and providing some hope for the entire global economy.



**NOTES**

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