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## EDITORIAL OFFICE / YAYIN İDARE ADRESİ

Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP/Çankaya, 06700 Ankara/Türkiye

Tel: +90.312.551-2100 • Fax: +90.312.551-2190

editor@insightturkey.com • www.insightturkey.com

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

MUHITTIN ATAMAN

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As the international system moves beyond the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has entered a profound phase of geopolitical chaos in which the normative values and institutional structures built after the Second World War have been shattered. The fundamental claim of the Western-centered order in the modern era, the rules-based international system, is today being dismantled by the very actors who once upheld it. Currently, the United States (U.S.) is one of the most revisionist states in the world. It no longer considers the United Nations (UN) suitable to serve its national interests. Rather, given its unilateral and coercive policies, the U.S. views the UN as an obstacle in pursuing an interventionist foreign policy. Increasing global problems and uncertainties, intensifying global rivalry, erosion of universal values and irrelevance of international institutions force all states to take measures against these challenges. In this regard, the current trajectory of U.S. foreign policy reflects a neo-imperial logic, whereby military, economic, and technological instruments are deployed to sustain hierarchical control over global and regional orders. Small states and middle powers have begun to revise their foreign policies against destructive regional and global dynamics, including accelerated global rivalries and increased uncertainties.

As one of the most penetrated regions in the world, the Middle East has been widely influenced by these global developments. In addition, two recent developments, namely Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the U.S. and Israeli attacks against Iran, have significantly changed the regional balance-of-power. The Middle East, as the bloodiest and most strategic arena of this fragmentation process, has transformed into a global conflict zone where not only borders but also human dignity, international law, and the concept of sovereignty have been destroyed. These attacks on the Middle East are the result of three fun-

damental ideologies, namely Imperialism, Zionism and Islamophobia, being activated simultaneously.

Within this new geopolitical reality, Israel has directly attacked seven separate Middle Eastern countries: Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Yemen and Qatar, since October 7. These attacks were carried out with the consent and unconditional support of the Western countries. Israel has been consistently aggressive against regional countries in order to establish its hegemony, even attacking Qatar, one of the closest American allies in the region. This expansionist posture can also be interpreted through the lens of political Zionism, which in its contemporary securitized form has evolved into a doctrine that justifies territorial expansion and permanent militarization under the pretext of existential security. In other words, the strike on Doha demonstrates that no state (friend or foe) is immune to Israeli incursion. Most notably, Israel's relentless bombardments of the Gaza Strip, carried out in complete disregard of international law, are a manifestation of a genocidal strategy aimed at fundamentally transforming the geopolitical balance of the region. This pattern of violence and impunity is further embedded within a broader discursive framework in which Islamophobia functions as a legitimizing narrative, normalizing the dehumanization of Muslim populations and facilitating the selective application of international law.

In particular, the direct strikes launched against Iran, by the U.S. and Israel since February 28, 2026, have targeted major cities as well as Iran's nuclear capacity and critical defense infrastructure without seeking any international legitimacy. These attacks have propelled the region from an era of proxy wars to a period of full-scale interstate conflicts. This aggression represents the culmination of the Washington D.C.-Tel Aviv axis's desire to reshape the Middle East in line with its geopolitical interests and eliminate all regional centers of resistance using conventional and if necessary nuclear power. This interventionist approach increasingly resembles a form of late-stage imperialism, characterized not by formal colonization but by coercive restructuring of regional orders through force and dependency mechanisms.

In fact, the U.S. did not want to launch a comprehensive attack against Iran who, in spite of its hostile rhetoric towards Washington, has never directly threatened the U.S. It is generally believed that the U.S. was dragged into the war by the Netanyahu government and the pro-Israeli lobby that extensively controls the U.S. political system. Israel has forced the Trump Administration to change its policy of indirect use of power, which it prefers in order to avoid the high costs of foreign interventions. However, it seems that the U.S. government was pulled into a trap with its latest attack against Iran. Although the U.S. and Israel supposedly attacked Iran to overthrow the regime and destroy its nuclear capability, they have suffered a major failure because Iran's resilience was stronger and retaliation harsher than expected. It not only targeted Israel

and the American military bases in the region, but also struck at strategic facilities of the Gulf countries. More importantly, Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz, thereby disrupting global economic and political balances.

Furthermore, the vast majority of the region opposed the eruption of the war, considering it would be costly for them. The strongest resistance to the destructive and destabilizing strategy pursued by the U.S.-Israel axis has come from Türkiye. Ankara, while exposing the West's double standards and unlawful policies on international platforms, is also establishing a new regional balance through its strategic autonomy initiatives on the ground. Türkiye's role in this process is not merely to maintain the status quo, but to implement a "regional ownership model" that centers the will of the regional peoples and remains closed to external interference.

This model, which offers an exit strategy for all regional states willing to participate in the project, calls for the development of regional cooperation processes and the strengthening of regional states' capacities to address real and potential threats and challenges. Regional ownership principle prioritizes the creation of complementary regional platforms, institutions, mechanisms, and networks. It provides a framework based on equal partnership. All states will contribute to building stability by sharing the burden and undertaking responsibilities. Ultimately, all states will attempt to find their own solutions to their problems within the region, to avoid external interventions of global powers.

This issue of *Insight Turkey* brings together valuable studies that examine the most recent developments in the Middle East, including the deeper layers of Israeli aggression and its regional repercussions. By providing a general framework of the conflict, Mustafa Caner analyzes the tactical details of the U.S. and Israeli attacks against Iran, while discussing the long-term strategic costs of this move and the counter-symmetry created by the region's "architecture of resistance." Caner argues that the U.S. and Israel have achieved some short-term gains but failed to attain political objectives due to the lack of a coherent strategic plan and miscalculations. Caner concludes that the U.S. and Israel's attack against Iran will considerably change the regional balances.

Ali Bakır, who focuses on a specific dimension of the war between the U.S./Israel and Iran, explores Israel's revisionist strategy to secure undisputed hegemony, arguing that its primary goal is to break the rising alignment between Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan. He suggests that Israel's ultimate strategic prize is forcing Saudi normalization to marginalize the Palestinian cause and isolate Türkiye.

Offering a critical theoretical framework, Paola Rivetti analyzes the "Iran war" as a manifestation of a post-unipolar condition where military force is deployed

beyond established legal constraints. He argues that contemporary warfare focuses on managing contested sovereignties through annihilatory tactics and asymmetrical confrontation, reflecting a decline in the need for legal or moral justification by dominant powers.

Focusing on the normative erosion of security, Martin Shaw characterizes the destruction in Gaza as the threshold of a “new age of genocide.” Shaw warns that the deliberate liquidation of civilian infrastructure is being normalized as a legitimate component of modern warfare, threatening to permanently alter the moral and legal landscape of global conflict.

Regional restructuring and strategic connectivity also constitute one of the main axes of this issue. Bilgay Duman analyzes the Development Road Project carried out under the leadership of Türkiye and Iraq, emphasizing that large-scale infrastructure initiatives have become not only instruments of economic development but also fundamental tools of geopolitical competition and strategic influence. From the perspective of the “geopolitics of connectivity,” Duman points to a new paradigm in which states derive power through control over trade routes, energy corridors, and logistics networks.

The most recent transformation process in Syria is addressed from two different perspectives. Fadıl Hancı analyzes Syria’s progress toward international recognition and territorial integrity approximately one year after the collapse of the Assad regime, focusing on internal fractures in coastal regions and Suwayda, as well as the strategic turning point created by the collapse of the SDF. Analyzing the Levant’s recalibration, Samer Bakkour examines post-Assad Syria’s relations with the U.S. and Russia through the lenses of “conditional negotiation” and “controlled engagement.” He argues that the new order is defined not by stable alliances, but by a “probationary equilibrium” driven by immediate security and reconstruction needs. This study illustrates how Washington’s strategic sanctions and Moscow’s managed relevance create a stability dependent on competing forms of external leverage.

This issue also devotes considerable attention to social and institutional transformations alongside military and strategic analyses. Nurşin Ateşoğlu Güney and Vişne Korkmaz examine the Twelve-Day War against Iran, arguing the conflict exposed the failure of Tehran’s threshold deterrence. The authors highlight a decisive U.S. shift toward preventing any enrichment-level proliferation, noting that the outcome will critically define the future credibility of the NPT regime and Washington’s global security guarantees.

Mehmet Ali Yüksel addresses the systemic chaos in the Middle East, arguing that traditional state-centric policies have failed to mitigate deepening regional crises. By identifying internal obstacles within the OIC, Yüksel proposes a new

paradigm centered on collective security through international organizations to replace the fragmented, group-based approaches currently dominating the region.

On the ideological level, Muhammad Asad Latif deconstructs Islamophobia's roots, arguing that neoliberalism perceives Islamic teachings as a systemic threat. By analyzing funding and media reports, Latif demonstrates how neoliberal ideology employs "cultural cleansing" through cultural unification and intellectual depletion. The study reveals how this "civilizing mission" categorizes and marginalizes Muslims to sustain neoliberal systemic dominance.

Two articles of this issue focus on African politics. In the context of global power dynamics, In the first article, Ali Burak Darıcılı and Saadet Oruç examine the shifting security balance in the Sahel, focusing on France's eroding dominance and Türkiye's expanding influence. Analyzing the vacuum left by Operation *Barkhane*, the authors utilize the rising middle powers framework to assess the diplomatic and military competition between the two nations. The second article written by Tirab Abbkar Tirab addresses the systemic paralysis of Sudanese institutions since 1956, attributing this stagnation to a persistent absence of national constants in political practice. The study evaluates how the lack of governing principles has compromised national security and created barriers to Sudan's social and political renaissance. Tirab proposes a roadmap to crystallize a new political culture that prioritizes national interests and unified institutional constants.

Finally, two articles focus on Eurasian politics. Mehmet Çağatay Güler explores the evolution of Vladimir Putin's grand strategy from 2000 to 2023, utilizing a thematic analysis of over 500 official speeches to conceptualize Russia's strategic logic as "Glory to the Motherland." In a similar vein of regional strategy, Mehmet Yüce and Aslı Akıllı propose a specialized environmental agency for the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) to foster collective action on the green economy and global environmental governance.

This issue records the great historical tension between the chaotic atmosphere into which the Middle East has been pushed by the U.S. and Israel and the stable system that some regional countries, such as Türkiye, seek to establish. The future of the region will be shaped by the outcome of this struggle between those who submit to hegemonic aggression and those who pursue strategic autonomy. We hope this issue will serve as a valuable and thought-provoking resource, offering diverse perspectives to help readers better understand the current dynamics in the Middle East and the possible trajectories that lie ahead. ■

# U.S./ISRAEL-IRAN WAR



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