

Unfolding Hegemony: Why Saudi Arabia Is Israel's Next Target Post-2026 Iran War

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ABSTRACT *Following the 2023 Israeli genocidal war on Gaza, Israel has pursued an expansive, revisionist strategy to establish undisputed regional hegemony. This strategy involved the occupation of additional territories in Lebanon and Syria in 2024, followed by a sustained conflict with these nations. It also included a 12-day war with Iran in 2025 that weakened Tehran's military capabilities, the annexation of the West Bank in 2026, and the initiation of a second war against Iran aimed at shifting the regional balance of power in Israel's favor amid the rising alignment of Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Egypt, and Pakistan. While prevailing Israeli security discourse identifies Türkiye as the next primary threat, this article argues that Israel's post-Iran strategic focus will actually center on Saudi Arabia. Rather than military confrontation, Israel will likely pressure Riyadh to join the Abraham Accords via several means. The article explains the Israeli rationale and concludes that securing Saudi normalization remains Israel's ultimate strategic prize, a necessary step to marginalize Palestinian national aspirations, isolate Türkiye, and legitimize its hegemonic project.*

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran, Türkiye, Regional Balance of Power, Abraham Accords

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Introduction

The geopolitical architecture of the Middle East has undergone a profound transformation since the outbreak of the Israeli war on Gaza in October 2023, culminating in the devastating U.S.-Israeli military campaigns against Iran in 2025 and 2026. In the aftermath of these conflicts, which severely degraded Iranian strategic capabilities and dismantled the so-called “Axis of Resistance,” Israel has decisively relied on an offensive, expansive, and revisionist strategy.¹ Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government has increasingly articulated a vision of a “new Middle East,” characterized by an expansionist agenda aimed at establishing undisputed Israeli hegemony over the region.² This hegemonic project, often framed within the fanatic ideological and biblical contours of a “Greater Israel,” seeks not merely to neutralize what Israel considers security threats but to fundamentally redraw the region’s borders and balance of power through occupation, genocide, constant wars, and new alliances, subordinating neighboring states to a security architecture anchored by Tel Aviv and supported by Washington.³

With Iran significantly weakened, the Israeli government under Netanyahu has repeatedly framed the regional order as divided between opposing geopolitical blocs. In recent speeches and policy discussions, Netanyahu has described an emerging alignment among Sunni powers, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Qatar, Egypt, and Pakistan, and its partners, which

Israeli strategists believe must ultimately be integrated into Israel’s security architecture rather than allowed to evolve independently or as a counter-balance bloc. Netanyahu has even proposed a “hexagon” of allied states, including India, Greece, and Greek Cyprus, designed to outflank any emerging independent Sunni axis and cement Israel’s regional hegemonic influence.⁴

Within this context of aggressive regional reordering, discussion within Israeli political, intelligence, security, and media circles has increasingly framed Türkiye as their next target following Iran. Some commentaries argue that with Iran’s regional role weakened, Israel must confront Türkiye as the next major obstacle to its regional strategy, citing Ankara’s increasingly autonomous foreign policy, rising defense industry, vocal opposition to the war in Gaza, and its growing alignment with other regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan. Israeli security experts now openly describe Türkiye as a primary regional threat.⁵ In January 2025, the Nagel Committee, an Israeli government-commissioned committee, issued a report identifying Türkiye as a “strategic threat” and calling on Israel to prepare for a potential war with Ankara.⁶ Israeli intelligence officials describe the burgeoning Türkiye-Qatar alliance as presenting a “strategic threat” to Israeli interests.⁷

Likewise, Diaspora Affairs Minister Amichai Chikli, a member of Netanyahu’s Likud party, said during a TV interview that after Iran, “[Tür-

kiye] should be next,” suggesting that Israel should launch an international media campaign against it.⁸ Prominent Israeli officials, including former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, have explicitly labeled Türkiye as a “new threat” comparable to Tehran, urging the Israeli security establishment to prepare for confrontation with Ankara.⁹ Naftali described Erdoğan as “a sophisticated and dangerous adversary who wants to surround Israel” and cautioned that the country must not “turn a blind eye again,” calling for the need to counter the axis of Türkiye, Qatar, the Muslim Brotherhood, and nuclear Pakistan, saying the alliance is attempting to incite hostility against Israel, including influencing Saudi Arabia.¹⁰

While there is no doubt that Israel would work hard to undermine Türkiye’s regional status and posture, Israel’s priority after Iran is unlikely to be a military confrontation with Türkiye. Contrary to the prevailing narrative, Israel would probably prioritize targeting Saudi Arabia following Iran. This would likely involve sustained political, diplomatic, security, and media pressure on Saudi Arabia aimed at achieving several strategic goals. First, preventing the rise of the Saudi-Pakistan-Türkiye axis and dismantling it by pulling Riyadh away from it. Second, compelling Riyadh to normalize relations and formally join the Abraham Accords framework. Third, realizing the Israeli hegemonic regional project.

The logic is straightforward. Saudi Arabia occupies a unique position in

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the political economy of the Middle East and the broader Muslim world. Its alignment with Israel would not merely add another bilateral relationship; it would fundamentally reshape regional diplomatic structures, marginalize the Palestinian issue, accelerate normalization across Muslim-majority states, and isolate Türkiye. For that reason, Israeli strategic calculations increasingly treat Saudi Arabia as the pivotal prize in the post-Iran regional order. Assuming that Israel would not get entangled in a long crisis with Iran, this commentary argues that while Israel will keep an eye on Ankara as a long-term challenge and major obstacle to its hegemonic agenda, its focus after Iran will center on Saudi Arabia rather than Türkiye.

Saudi Disruption of the Abraham Accords

Between 2020 and 2023, the Israelis and the Americans were confident that Riyadh was one step away from joining the Abraham Accords. They were bragging about it in a celebra-

The removal of Iran as an imminent threat to the Gulf did not produce the Arab-Israeli convergence that Israeli and American officials had predicted; rather, it intensified regional competition and allowed Saudi Arabia to treat Israel as a constrained outsider

tory form. However, the regional perspective was completely different. Saudi Arabia was distancing itself further from Netanyahu and the Abraham Accords. Three key events helped shape this position. First, Netanyahu used the 2020 normalization effort with the Kingdom and Mohammed bin Salman as a card in his internal elections. This not only reduced such a significant topic to an internal electoral issue in the Israeli elections, but also undermined the Saudi Crown Prince, prompting him to stop taking further steps down that road. Another key turning point in this matter was the diplomatic normalization between Saudi Arabia and Iran, brokered by China and announced in March 2023. The agreement reduced tensions between the two regional powers and created a new diplomatic environment in which Saudi Arabia could pursue a more balanced foreign policy and disrupt Israel's grand strategy. A third key event in this context is the Israeli war in Gaza launched in 2023.

The normalization generated several consequences that complicated Israeli objectives. First, it undermined Israel's security narratives that it would protect other countries against Iran, and reduced Saudi dependence on such narratives. For years, Israel promoted the argument that Iran constituted a shared existential threat requiring coordination between Israel and Arab states. The Saudi-Iran détente weakened this framing by demonstrating Riyadh's ability to manage tensions through diplomacy rather than security and military alignment.¹¹ Even during the 12-day Israeli war on Iran in 2025, Saudi Arabia maintained a studied neutrality, refusing to publicly support the operations and warning against regional escalation.

Second, the agreement increased Saudi Arabia's value in the eyes of the partners and rivals, thus raising the bargaining power of the kingdom. By improving relations with Tehran while maintaining strategic ties with Washington, Riyadh positioned itself as a pivotal intermediary rather than a subordinate partner within a regional bloc. This position granted Saudi Arabia greater autonomy on foreign policy issues, which was perceived negatively by Israel. Third, the détente allowed the Kingdom to shift focus toward domestic transformation initiatives under the Vision 2030, reducing the urgency of external security alignments and opening the door for like-minded countries' alignment, such as Türkiye.

For Israel, these developments delayed the anticipated momentum

toward Saudi normalization and shuffled the regional cards. Instead of moving closer to the Abraham Accords out of fear of Iran, Riyadh gained additional leverage to demand greater concessions from Israel, particularly regarding the Palestinian state and defense guarantees from the U.S. The removal of Iran as an imminent threat to the Gulf did not produce the Arab-Israeli convergence that Israeli and American officials had predicted; rather, it intensified regional competition and allowed Saudi Arabia to treat Israel as a constrained outsider. This was another reason why Israel was determined to take Iran out of the equation by war.

The Impact of Israel's Wars (2023-2025) on Saudi Arabia

The recent devastating Israeli genocidal war on Gaza also fundamentally reshaped Saudi political calculations. Public opinion across the Arab and Muslim worlds –just like the rest of the world– shifted sharply in response to the humanitarian consequences of the conflict and the widespread destruction of Palestinian territories. Within this environment, Saudi leaders faced increased domestic and regional pressure and expectations to maintain a firm position on Palestinian rights. The crisis, therefore, elevated the political cost of normalization with Israel without substantial concessions on the Palestinian issue. For Riyadh, maintaining distance from normalization reinforced its legitimacy as a leading voice within the Islamic world. Saudi officials have

consistently reiterated that any normalization agreement must be conditioned on a clear, irreversible pathway to an independent Palestinian state, a condition that the current Israeli government vehemently rejects.¹²

From Israel's perspective, however, this outcome had the opposite effect. The war demonstrated that without Saudi participation in the normalization process, the Palestinian issue will not change, and Israel will remain politically constrained in its broader regional ambitions and hegemonic project. The longer Saudi Arabia holds out, the more it empowers other states to resist Israeli diplomatic overtures, making the kingdom an even more critical target for Israeli strategic pressure. The Israeli genocidal war on Gaza in 2023, the war on Lebanon in 2024, and the war on Syria, alongside the targeting of Qatar, have shifted the regional threat perception from Iran to Israel, disrupting the regional balance of power in favor of Israeli interests. This situation has prompted other regional powers, including Saudi Arabia, to respond accordingly.

The diplomatic diversification pursued by Riyadh has strengthened its position across several regional theaters, making it a more formidable diplomatic target and further distancing it from Israel. First, Saudi Arabia has expanded its strategic relationships beyond traditional Western partnerships. Its engagement with emerging powers, including its inclusion in the BRICS bloc and deepening ties with China,¹³ has diversified its diplomatic options and reduced

Faisal bin Farhan, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister, speaks at the International Palestine Conference at the United Nations Trusteeship Council in New York on July 28, 2025.

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its vulnerability to external pressure from Washington or Tel Aviv. Second, Riyadh has cultivated closer ties with Türkiye and Pakistan, two influential Muslim-majority states with significant military capabilities and political influence across the Islamic world. In late 2025, following the Israeli targeting of Qatar, Saudi Arabia signed a mutual defense pact with Pakistan. By early 2026, reports indicated that Türkiye was in advanced talks to join this alliance, further advancing the alignment between the three powers.¹⁴ While the concept of an “Islamic NATO” may be overstated, these alignments contribute to the perception of a broader political and security coordination independent of Israeli frameworks. This strategy provided Saudi Arabia with alternative security architectures that not only do not rely on Israeli hegemony but also arguably counter it.

Third, Saudi Arabia has leveraged its role in energy markets and global fi-

nance to enhance its international standing. This economic influence amplified its political autonomy in negotiations with both allies and rivals. Together, these dynamics have transformed Saudi Arabia into a more independent regional actor whose decisions cannot be easily shaped by external pressure, frustrating Israeli efforts to dictate the terms of reordering the region and imposing their regional hegemony on others. Some observers claimed that the Abraham Accords have receded behind events and would emerge once the war in Gaza ends.¹⁵ Yet, such anticipation proved wrong. Saudi Arabia only cemented its position on the need for a Palestinian state and denounced attempts to kick Palestinians out of their land and efforts to annex the West Bank. Saudi Arabia's former intelligence chief, Crown Prince Turki bin Faisal, said that Riyadh would only entertain the idea once Israel starts acting like a normal state.¹⁶ Frustrated with the firm Saudi position, Israeli

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said Saudis could “keep riding camels.”¹⁷ Netanyahu said that Saudi Arabia’s pivot toward Türkiye and Qatar is being viewed as a threat to the expansion of the Abraham Accords.¹⁸

The Expanding Arena of Saudi-Israeli Competition

Despite the absence of formal diplomatic relations, Israel and Saudi Arabia increasingly encounter each other across multiple geopolitical arenas. These interactions occur in several regions, illustrating that Israeli-Saudi relations already involve indirect strategic rivalry, even in the absence of open confrontation. In Palestine, Riyadh continues to support political initiatives emphasizing Palestinian rights, directly countering Israeli efforts to marginalize the issue or end it. In Syria, Riyadh and Tel Aviv run contradictory agendas where Saudi Arabia supports a sovereign, stable, secure, and prosperous Syria under President Ahmad al-Sharaa, one that is united, free of militias and radicalism, and open to business. On the contrary, Israel has been supporting a disintegrated and divided Syria. The Israeli government openly backed militarized minorities and militias to undermine the central government in Damascus. It also invaded and annexed Syrian lands in the Golan.¹⁹

In Sudan, the two regional powers pursue a similarly contradictory agenda. Israel supports the UAE’s efforts, which focus on backing the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) armed

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militias against the Sudanese government and national army, ultimately aiming to solidify and expand the Abraham Accords further into the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, supports the Sudanese government and the national army. A similar situation exists in Somalia and the Horn of Africa, an area of increasing strategic competition among Middle Eastern powers vying for maritime security and influence. Saudi Arabia supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia, while Israel supports a disintegration agenda along with the UAE, one in which it officially recognized Somaliland as a sovereign state and is planning to create a military installation in it, along with plans to kick Palestinians out of Gaza to it.²⁰

In Yemen, which is a very critical country to Saudi national security and interests, Israel has been reportedly preparing for a scenario that the UAE-backed Southern Transi-

By breaking Saudi resistance, Israel hopes to permanently decouple Arab state interests from Palestinian national aspirations, a core objective of its post-2023 revisionist strategy

tional Council was also working on, preparing to announce its own state in Yemen.²¹ This measure triggered a swift Saudi reaction against the UAE, which had to cave and pull out of Yemen following a daring Saudi threat.²² However, shortly thereafter, Israel and the Israeli lobby in the U.S. came to the aid of the UAE by criticizing Riyadh and increasing media and political pressure against it.²³ This, in its turn, prompted a Saudi response characterizing the UAE in its media as an Israeli proxy.²⁴ These overlapping arenas demonstrate that Israel and Saudi Arabia are already engaged in a complex dance of influence. As Israel seeks to project power outward following the Iran wars and impose its hegemony over the countries of the region, it will inevitably bump up against Saudi interests in these zones, necessitating a strategy to coerce Riyadh from the Israeli perspective.

Why Would Israel Prioritize the Saudi Challenge?

Israel does not have what it takes to sustain an expansive hegemonic proj-

ect. A military confrontation with Türkiye would not help realize it. It needs the regional countries to politically endorse it with legal legitimization and economically engage with it. Israel's primary way to achieve this is through the Abraham Accords. The Kingdom has a unique combination of political, religious, and economic influence. Saudi Arabia hosts the two holiest cities in Islam and occupies a central position in global Islamic institutions. As a result, its foreign policy decisions resonate far beyond the Middle East. If Riyadh were to formally normalize relations with Israel, the impact would extend across the Muslim world. Such a shift would likely trigger a cascade effect. Several Muslim-majority countries that currently avoid normalization could reconsider their positions, following Riyadh's lead. The diplomatic isolation of Israel within international Islamic organizations would diminish significantly. Furthermore, the Palestinian issue would be highly diminished, effectively neutralizing the most potent ideological weapon against Israeli regional integration.

By breaking Saudi resistance, Israel hopes to permanently decouple Arab state interests from Palestinian national aspirations, a core objective of its post-2023 revisionist strategy.²⁵ In essence, Saudi participation in the Abraham Accords would transform the geopolitical meaning of normalization. Instead of representing a limited set of bilateral agreements, the accords would become the dominant diplomatic framework for the region, cementing Israel's status as the undis-

puted regional hegemon. This makes Saudi Arabia the ultimate strategic prize, one that Israel cannot afford to ignore in favor of a distracting confrontation with Türkiye.

In this context, if Israel does focus on Saudi Arabia after Iran, the form of pressure is unlikely to be military. Instead, Israel possesses a range of indirect tools capable of influencing Saudi decision-making. Public discourse in Western political environments can shape perceptions of Saudi policy. Criticism related to human rights, regional interventions, or domestic governance has periodically emerged in these debates, often amplified by Israel or networks sympathetic to Israeli strategic goals.

Israel maintains an exceptionally strong lobby and political networks within the U.S. These connections can influence congressional debates, defense cooperation agreements, and arms transfers affecting Saudi security policy. Historically, the pro-Israel lobby has frequently intervened in U.S.-Saudi arms deals, using them as bargaining chips to extract concessions or maintain Israel's qualitative military edge.²⁶

Israel can also contain Saudi Arabia and counter its influence through a strategy of encirclement or by altering the balance of power in the region. This could be achieved by installing a pro-Israel regime in Iran or by expanding the "Hexagon Alliance" to enhance security cooperation among its member states. Such actions would gradually increase the political, eco-

nomic, and security costs for Riyadh of remaining outside this framework, especially if no alternative architecture emerged. These methods reflect a broader strategy aimed at influencing Saudi calculations rather than confronting the Kingdom directly. The goal is to make the cost of resisting normalization higher than the cost of accepting it.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia represents the decisive piece in the normalization architecture initiated by the Abraham Accords. Its diplomatic weight, religious authority, and economic influence make it uniquely capable of reshaping the political landscape of the Middle East and the wider Muslim world. For Israel, securing Saudi participation in this framework would deliver strategic benefits far greater than confronting Türkiye. It would fatally weaken regional resistance to normalization, permanently alter the diplomatic context of the Palestinian issue, isolate Türkiye, and consolidate a new geopolitical order centered on Israeli supremacy. As a result, and assuming that Israel would remove Iran as a strategic obstacle, the post-Iran strategic environment is likely to feature intensified efforts, political, diplomatic, and informational, aimed at bringing Saudi Arabia into the normalization process. Whether it will manage to achieve this will remain to be seen. ■

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