**Israel and CENTCOM**

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The US policy for the Greater Middle East Region (GMER) seems to be closing in on its desired end state. Today, Israel is unambiguously the sole nuclear power and unchallengeable hegemon of the GMER. The US-led West has literally destroyed/neutralised all tangible and latent threats to Israel in the region. The Gulf Arab States, which were once openly antagonistic to Israel, now stand comprehensively neutralised through the Abraham Accords and are increasingly aligning themselves with the US-Israel Combine. The Palestinians, unceremoniously dumped by their so-called Arab brethren, remain consigned to an indeterminate fate.

Iran, Syria and some militant organisations still remain defiant. A physically destroyed Syria holds out politically and militarily courtesy unequivocal Russian support. Iran however, remains stoic, unyielding, unbending, uncompromising despite debilitating sanctions and relentless coercion by the US-led West and its Arab neighbours across the Persian Gulf.

[WHO issues mental health warning stemming from COVID-19](https://nation.com.pk/06-Mar-2021/who-issues-mental-health-warning-stemming-from-covid-19)

The US move to shift Israel from its European Command (EUCOM) to CENTCOM appears to be a part of the same overall plan to reinforce and stamp Israel’s inviolable hegemony in the region while simultaneously enhancing CENTCOM’s own operational capacities. CENTCOM will henceforth not be distracted by the pervasive Arab-Israel hostility of yore. It can now fully concentrate on creating a cohesive regional coalition to implement a regional strategy for a unified regional response for all possible contingencies.

Israel and all Gulf Arab states will thus be part of its forthcoming operational strategies and contingency plans. In the given circumstances, the emergence of a regional anti-Iran front, from the Mediterranean Sea—Red Sea to the Persian Gulf, is the most immediate and logical conclusion that can be drawn.

The strategic balance in the region will thus get more skewed against Iran. The political, diplomatic and economic normalisations between the Arabs and Israelis will be further strengthened now by military normalisation as well. Israeli military will logically now join the US and Arab militaries on the Persian Gulf and be arrayed against Iran.

[EU: ‘Real opportunity’ to seize settlement in Cyprus](https://nation.com.pk/06-Mar-2021/eu-real-opportunity-to-seize-settlement-in-cyprus)

This will bring Iran further under its oversight from the western coast of the Persian Gulf as well. Israel can be expected to establish all sorts of military and intelligence gathering facilities to monitor Iran, the Persian Gulf and beyond. Its own perimeter of security, sphere of influence and strategic reach will increase and crystallise massively. Israeli military will reinforce and boost CENTCOM’s overall operational capacities and capabilities as well. This will place Iran even more squarely in the crosshairs of its antagonists.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the nuclear deal with Iran, will be the first test case for the emerging US-Israel-GCC Arab grouping. President Biden is most likely to re-engage Iran. He will come under unrelenting pressure of the GCC-Israel Combine to press on with President Trump’s coercive tactics and keep Iran under relentless sanctions and embargoes of all types.

President Biden will talk to Iran, however without prejudice to the US’ avowed national interest to not allow any other nation in the GMER, much less Iran, to become a nuclear power. There is massive convergence of interest between the US, Israel and the GCC Arab states on this score. However, there are other critical factors that the US-Israel-GCC Arab Combine must also consider.

[Ballistic missile strike kills one in northern Syria](https://nation.com.pk/06-Mar-2021/ballistic-missile-strike-kills-one-in-northern-syria)

It is the evolving presence of China in the region and the well-established Russo-Iran relationship. If Russia has gone out on a limb for Syria, it can be expected to support Iran as well. China is already well established in Pakistan through the CPEC-BRI, is engaging Afghanistan and is expected to sign a $400 billion deal with Iran very soon. That will entail a $120 billion investment in Iran’s infrastructure and another $280 billion in its oil and gas industry. This will cause a vicious clash of interest between the US-Israel-GCC Arabs and China. Any hostilities or war against Iran will threaten Chinese interests and it will be expected to move to secure them.

If the Chinese establish themselves militarily in Iran, ostensibly to secure their colossal investments, then it will make for an even more complex and complicated strategic environment. CENTCOM’s worries and problems will grow exponentially. Its operational strategies and contingency plans will undergo extensive reviews. China’s presence and Russia’s support will be the biggest equalisers for Iran against daunting, insurmountable odds. Could it possibly trigger a competing grouping of China-Russia-Iran-Pakistan-Turkey (CRIPT) to emerge?

[UK variant behind up to 90% of cases in parts of Spain](https://nation.com.pk/06-Mar-2021/uk-variant-behind-up-to-90-percent-of-cases-in-parts-of-spain)

That might restore and maintain strategic balance in the GMER. Furthermore, any hostilities in the GMER-Persian Gulf will send global oil prices through the stratosphere. The pandemic-stricken economies of the world can ill afford such a setback to a stuttering global economic recovery. Therefore, the higher the stakes, the more convoluted the strategic environment becomes the better will the chances be for Iran to ride through it peacefully. Will Iran and China then formalise the $400 billion deal first or will the US-Israel-GCC Arab Combine pre-empt it?

Furthermore, will Israel’s strategic insecurities be satiated by a hypothetically neutralised Iran or does it aspire to extend its perimeter of security across the River Indus, too? Its bases or military facilities available to it at the southern end of the Persian Gulf will clearly put South Asia within its strategic reach. That might tie in splendidly with US foreign policy objectives and CENTCOM’s contingency plans for the region. Of late, the GCC Arabs have started distancing themselves from Pakistan. India, joining in to make a US-Israel-GCC(?)-India grouping against Pakistan, will be an obvious convergence of interests and not too far-fetched a geopolitical and geostrategic hypothesis.

[Davis Cup: Japan prevails over Pakistan on day first](https://nation.com.pk/05-Mar-2021/davis-cup-japan-prevails-over-pakistan-on-day-first)

It could generate a simultaneous multidirectional-multidimensional threat for Pakistan. However, the world knows well that Pakistan is an entirely different kettle of fish. It is a very formidable combat hardened, military, nuclear and missile power and is far from being isolated in the region and the world. Unlike some in the GMER, it will not just roll over and die; ever!

Israel’s assimilation in the CENTCOM and the emerging Sino-Russo ingress in the GMER throw up fascinating challenges at the geopolitical and geostrategic levels. An intriguing new great game is in the offing.