Policy Paper

Arab Options in Responding to the Shifts in Israel's Regional Security Conduct

'Atef al-Joulani

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Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

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Abstract

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Significant shifts have occurred in Israel's security outlook, most notably the transition from traditional deterrence to proactive offensive deterrence, the strengthening of early-warning strategies, and the enhancement of the military's capacity to operate simultaneously on multiple fronts. Additionally, there is a focus on mobilizing society and increasing its resilience to the consequences of war, penetrating Arab states and destabilizing the fabric of their societies, resolving the conflict geographically and demographically in the WB and GS, and achieving political, military and security dominance while establishing a regional compliance system.

Three options exist for Arab and Muslim countries to address the ongoing Israeli threats, which persist despite the signing of the ceasefire in GS. The first relies on the ceasefire and on Trump's promises and assurances, a losing option that carries significant risks and offers no serious guarantees. The second involves achieving consensus on a coordinated policy vision among Arab and Muslim states to confront Israeli threats within a joint executive framework; however, the objective conditions for its success are currently lacking. The third, by contrast, entails several Arab and Muslim states agreeing on a shared vision to counter Israeli threats and represents the most realistic option under present circumstances. Under this approach, each party would implement what is feasible within the agreed-upon areas, constituting a flexible strategy capable of producing a qualitative improvement in coordination, thereby deterring Israel and containing its expansionist policies. The paper also proposes a number of practical measures for addressing Israeli threats.

Keywords

Israeli security	proactive deterrence	regional dominance
Arab options	collective coordination	Israeli expansion

Arab Options in Responding to the Shifts in Israel's Regional Security Conduct

'Atef al-Joulani*

Introduction

In recent years, Israel's traditional security doctrine, adhered to since its establishment, has undergone significant transformations. Under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu and the radical religious right, the Israeli government has sought to reassess its security and military priorities, redefine its political positioning, and recalibrate its relations with regional and global actors.

Operation al-Aqsa Flood constituted a profound rupture in the long-standing security paradigm built upon deterrence, rapid military resolution, early warning, defensive depth, warfare on enemy territory, military superiority, the notion of a "people's army," and reliance on the support of major powers, etc. In its wake, new features have emerged, shaping a security doctrine that is more proactive, overtly "aggressive," and increasingly reliant on hard-power instruments. It also reflects a growing determination to neutralize threats at their source and to assert direct, unambiguous dominance over the surrounding strategic environment. Such developments entail substantial potential risks to the national security and vital interests of Arab states, thereby calling for a serious and effective response to these evolving threats and challenges.

First: Features of the Emerging Security and Political Vision

A number of key features define Israel's evolving security and political vision, one that has shaped its conduct over the past two years and is likely to guide its orientation in the period ahead. The most salient among these are:

1. A shift from traditional deterrence to permanent offensive and preemptive deterrence posture, entailing a move from "deterrence through threat" to "deterrence through destruction." This transformation has been accompanied by a growing willingness to commit massacres and acts of genocide to achieve strategic objectives, as witnessed in Gaza Strip (GS) and southern Lebanon during Operation al-Aqsa Flood.

2. The consolidation of political, military, and security hegemony across the region, reflecting a transition from "soft dominance" to "hard dominance," and from "conflict management" to "coercive management through force." In doing so, Israel seeks to entrench its role as the region's self-appointed enforcer.

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* A Jordanian journalist and author of Palestinian descent. An expert in political and strategic affairs, he has authored hundreds of articles, analyses, situation assessments and working papers, and is a regular contributor to broadcast media.

3. The intensification of preemptive strikes and the broadening of targeted assassinations, accompanied by a relaxation of the political and security constraints traditionally associated with such operations. This approach effectively grants Israel unrestricted latitude to launch military strikes against any target perceived as a potential threat.

4. The reinforcement of an early-warning strategy that seeks balance between technological intelligence and cybersecurity capabilities, on the one hand, and human performance and field-based intelligence, on the other.

5. The enhancement of the army's capacity for wide-scale deployment and multi-front engagement, alongside increased preparedness for protracted conflicts, reflecting a departure from the long-standing reliance on rapid and decisive military outcomes.

6. The mobilization of society and the strengthening of civilian endurance, aimed at fostering adaptability to the human and economic costs of warfare, often justified under the narrative of "existential battles" to safeguard Israel's future.

7. The alignment between self-reliance and external support in the security and defense industries.

8. Encircling Israel with Three Defensive Belts:

    a. Constructing separation walls and security fences along the borders with the surrounding frontline states.

    b. Occupying new adjacent border zones and transforming them into security buffer areas, as has occurred in Syria and Lebanon.

    c. Forcibly disarming extensive areas within the frontline states and restricting the deployment of their national forces in those regions, as exemplified in southern Syria and Lebanon.

9. Pursuing the disarmament of resistance movements across the region, including Hamas and other Palestinian factions, Hizbullah in Lebanon, Ansar Allah (the Houthi movement) in Yemen, and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq.

10. Exploiting religious, sectarian, and ethnic minority dynamics to expand Israeli influence, penetrate Arab states, destabilize their societal fabric, and exert political pressure on their governments.

11. Seeking to settle the conflict geographically and demographically in the West Bank (WB) and GS, through incremental annexation in the WB and persistent efforts to displace Palestinians.

12. Transforming military power into an instrument for establishing a regional order of subjugation that ensures the absence of threats over decades; intensifying incursions into state sovereignty and the occupation of territory; forcibly redrawing the region's maps and imposing a fait accompli; and pursuing initiatives such as "reconfiguring the Middle East," "establishing Greater Israel," and "redefining the Sykes–Picot boundaries."

The new security doctrine is reflected in Israel's conduct toward areas of escalation, manifesting in the following security orientations and policies:

- **In GS:** Strict logistical and economic control, coupled with freedom of incursion, aimed at thwarting rearmament and strategic repositioning.
- **In the WB and Jerusalem:** Consolidation of control and de facto annexation through legislation and practical measures; prioritization of settlement, road and contact-zone protection; repeated operations in tension hotspots; lax enforcement against settler violence; and deepening friction alongside entrenched control.
- **In Lebanon:** Institutionalization of engagement rules permitting continued precision strikes against leadership and capabilities in the Lebanese interior when necessary, while maintaining a low-intensity friction that preserves the potential for escalation.
- **In Syria:** Planned strikes targeting transportation, storage and Iranian positioning networks to prevent the entrenchment of advanced capabilities near the border.
- **In Yemen and the Red Sea:** Direct Israeli strikes and maritime and aerial interceptions to safeguard navigation.

Second: Drivers of the Shift in Israel's Security Doctrine

A number of factors underpin the shift in Israel's traditional security doctrine toward a more stringent and aggressive posture, the most significant of which are:

1. The consolidation of power by Israel's most extreme right-wing factions, which translated their vision and agenda for managing the conflict from theory and rhetoric into practical implementation.
2. The radical and impulsive approaches of the Trump administration toward the Arab–Israel conflict, coupled with the support of its numerous prominent figures for the agenda of Israel's extreme right.
3. The shock triggered by the 7 October 2023 attack and the effective breach of the security barrier by the al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, which overcame Israel's defensive precautions.
4. The growing sense of insecurity in Israel and the perception of escalating military threats resulting from the increasing capabilities of resistance movements in the region, particularly in terms of missile and drone capacities.
5. The instability of political, military and security conditions in certain neighboring countries surrounding occupied Palestine, coupled with the absence of robust responses to Israel's expansionist policies and the continued violations of the sovereignty of neighboring states.

Third: Will the threats to halt the ceasefire in the GS subside?

The potential impact of a ceasefire agreement in the GS on regional calm and stability is significant. At the same time, there are preliminary indications that the Trump administration is inclined to return to a policy of de-escalating regional conflicts and reducing US involvement. This approach aims to safeguard US economic, military and security interests in the region, manage strategic competition with China, and launch a new wave of Abraham Accords. Despite these factors, the likelihood that Israel will proceed with implementing its new security vision, with all the attendant threats and risks to Arab states, remains strong for the following reasons:

1. The current ceasefire in the GS is temporary and has not translated into a state of war termination or sustainable calm. Many important details and issues remain unresolved and are subject to difficult negotiations, particularly those concerning the future of the resistance's weapons and the governance of the GS.

2. The GS front is only one arena of confrontation and Israeli escalation. Its relative calm does not necessarily restrain the drive of Israel's right-wing or its relentless desire to implement its security vision in other arenas of conflict. On the contrary, the temporary calm on the GS front may provide an incentive for escalation and the transfer of military and security efforts to other fronts, such as the WB, Syria, Lebanon and possibly Iran.

3. Regardless of the future of Benjamin Netanyahu's government after the ceasefire, Israel's extreme right is likely to continue dominating power within the state, given the prevailing political balance and the steady rightward shift of Israeli society. Consequently, any change in the leadership hierarchy would remain largely symbolic. It would neither alter the core of the extreme right's vision for managing the conflict, nor end the threat of annexation and displacement in the Palestinian arena, nor halt Israel's aggressive policies and expansionist tendencies in neighboring countries.

4. The unpredictable policies of Donald Trump, along with his readiness to make sudden and sharp shifts in his positions and approaches, keep the threat level high and preclude relying on his administration to pursue de-escalation or regional calm.

In light of these considerations, Arab and Muslim countries are therefore required to adopt realistic and practical strategies to confront potential Israeli threats and contain its expansionist and aggressive tendencies.

Fourth: Arab Options in Response to Shifts in Israel's Security Vision

Arab actors face three main options to address changes in Israel's security vision and to curb its aggressive, expansionist behavior, which threatens regional states and stability:

1. Relying on the assurances of the Trump administration and the GS ceasefire agreement to contain Israeli threats.
2. Reaching a collective vision to confront Israeli threats through joint institutional mechanisms.
3. Achieving consensus among a number of Arab and Muslim countries on a shared vision to counter Israeli threats.

The following provides an analysis of the main factors that enhance the prospects of each option, the obstacles they face, and the consequences of adopting any of them:

First Option: Relying on Trump's promises and assurances, and on a ceasefire agreement in the GS, to contain Israeli threats.

The key factors that increase the likelihood of success for this option include:

1. Trump's greater willingness to exert pressure on the Israeli government following his success in enforcing the ceasefire, contrary to the wishes of Netanyahu and his extreme right-wing coalition.
2. Preliminary indications that Trump seeks to calm the situation in the region and return to a policy of reducing US involvement in regional conflicts, in order to focus on addressing the domestic economic crisis and managing intense competition with China.
3. The growing possibility of shifts in the Israeli political landscape that could sideline Netanyahu, due to his subjection to legal proceedings and the likely acceleration of judicial actions against him after the ceasefire, as well as the increasing likelihood of internal accountability for the failure to handle the 7/10/2023 attack.
4. The amplified influence of engagement with the US administration, reinforced by the success of the eight Arab and Muslim leaders who met with Trump on 24/9/2025, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, in persuading him to advance his plan for a ceasefire in the GS.

In light of the current circumstances, the following obstacles emerge, reducing the likelihood of this option's success:

1. The strong bias of key influential figures within the Trump administration toward Israeli interests and the vision of Israel's right wing, particularly regarding expansionist policies, plans to annex the WB, and the displacement of Palestinians.
2. The volatility of Trump's policies, choices and positions, which makes it difficult to rely on his promises, assurances or seriousness in restraining Israeli conduct and halting its aggressions against states in the region.

3. The persistent division among Arab and Muslim countries, and the failure of many of them to perceive the magnitude of the threat facing the region as a result of Israel's aggressive and expansionist behavior.

4. The binding nature of the peace process treaties and Abraham Accords between Israel and several Arab states, which entail political, economic and security obligations that limit their ability to influence Israeli policies or affect the orientations and positions of the US administration.

If Arab states align themselves with this option and continue to place their bets on Trump's promises and reassurances, the main potential repercussions would include the following:

1. The continuation, and possible expansion, of Israel's aggressive policies in the region.

2. The consolidation of Israel's new occupations in parts of Syria and Lebanon, along with the imposition of occupied buffer zones as a fait accompli.

3. An heightened threat to Arab interests, enabling Israel to continue unilaterally targeting Arab states in the absence of any collective deterrence by Arab or Muslim countries.

4. The persistence of regional tension and escalation as a result of Israel's unchecked conduct and expansionist security outlook.

5. Allowing Israel to continue acting unilaterally against the Palestinian people and to advance its plans for settlement expansion and the gradual annexation of large areas of the WB.

6. The intensification of Israeli incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the adoption of further measures to consolidate sovereignty over the holy sites, with little regard for Arab and Muslim countries' reactions.

Second Option: Reaching a collective vision to confront Israeli threats through joint institutional action.

The main factors that enhance the likelihood of this option's success include the following:

1. A growing recognition among several Arab and Muslim countries of the seriousness of the potential risks arising from the shifts in Israel's security doctrine toward more aggressive orientations.

2. The convening of numerous Arab and Islamic summits in the two years following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, culminating in a strong stance issued by the most recent summit held in Doha on 15/9/2025, which condemned the Israeli violation of Qatari sovereignty and affirmed solidarity with Qatar.

3. The increasing Arab awareness of the limited effectiveness of relying on treaties and agreements concluded with Israel to restrain its aggressive behavior or safeguard the interests of the contracting states when these conflict with its expansionist policies and ambitions.

However, the prospects for the success of this option face numerous obstacles, the most notable of which are:

1. The difficulty of reaching a shared Arab vision, given the divergence of positions among Arab and Muslim countries, the preference of many to continue pursuing unilateral policies, and the declining conviction among some of the importance of articulating such a vision following the signing of the ceasefire agreement in the GS.
2. The failure of many Arab and Muslim countries to perceive Israel's security and military policies as posing direct threats to their own security and interests, due to their geographical distance from the center of the conflict, and their preference for neutrality over positive engagement with shared regional concerns.
3. The insistence of many Arab parties on continuing normalization with Israel, even amid its acts of genocide against the Palestinian people during Operation al-Aqsa Flood, and their desire to remain committed to the obligations arising from those agreements.
4. The anticipated pressure by the Trump administration on Arab states that have not joined the Abraham Accords, particularly Saudi Arabia, to do so.
5. The limited effectiveness of the Arab League's institutions, the marginalization of their role in addressing Arab issues, and their failure over the past two years to play an active role in mobilizing a unified Arab position capable of halting Israel's war crimes and acts of genocide, and ensuring the delivery of aid to the GS.

If the Arab parties were able to reach a collective vision to confront Israeli threats, the most significant potential outcomes would include:

1. Enhancing Arab and Islamic cooperation and solidarity, and activating the role of joint institutional frameworks.
2. Establishing a strong opportunity to build a collective Arab and Islamic deterrence posture that would prevent Israel from continuing its aggressive policies in the region.
3. Exerting substantial pressure on the US administration to adopt balanced positions and to persuade its Israeli ally to reconsider the continuation of aggressive policies that harm US interests in the region.
4. Strengthening regional stability and safeguarding the security of Arab and Muslim countries from potential threats.
5. Encouraging regional and international actors to support the collective Arab stance in confronting Israel's escalating policies in the region.

Third Option: Consensus among several Arab and Muslim countries on a shared vision to confront Israeli threats.

This option is based on the recognition by several influential Arab and Muslim countries in the region of the level of danger and threat arising from the shift in Israel's security doctrine and the escalation of its aggressive expansionist behavior. These states would agree on a shared vision to confront Israeli threats to their security, interests and regional stability. The key factors encouraging the realization of this option include:

1. The existence of preliminary readiness among several Arab and Muslim countries to formulate a joint position and practical measures to confront Israel's aggressive expansionist behavior, particularly following the Israeli attack on Qatari territory on 9/9/2025.

2. The awareness among many Arab and Muslim countries of the political and societal trends within Israel, and the expectation that the Israeli right will continue to dominate power, whether Netanyahu remains in office or early elections are held.

3. The lack of confidence among many Arab countries in Trump's promises and assurances that Israeli violations of their territorial sovereignty will not be repeated, coupled with the recognition of the volatility of the Trump administration's policies and approaches in the region.

4. The steps taken by some Arab and Muslim countries to enhance their security, as exemplified by the signing of the strategic agreement on joint defense between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan on 17/9/2025, following Israel's attack on the Qatari capital, Doha.

5. The continued occupation by Israeli forces of Syrian and Lebanese territories seized in recent months, coupled with Israel's refusal to withdraw from these areas. This is accompanied by ongoing aggressive Israeli behavior in Syria and Lebanon, including continued military operations against targets within both countries.

6. The encouraging practical experience of joint Arab–Islamic action following the attack on Qatar, where the collective meeting of officials from eight states with Trump on 24/9/2025 successfully pressured the US administration to exert greater influence on Israel, ultimately contributing to the ceasefire in the GS.

The main obstacles undermining the success of this option include:

1. The political and ideological divergences, as well as the pre-existing tensions in the relations between some states expected to join a prospective framework of shared consensus, in addition to their competition over regional influence and their respective roles in the Palestine issue.

2. The differing assessments among Arab and Muslim countries regarding the gravity and seriousness of the Israeli threat to their security and interests, which may in turn affect their willingness to engage in collective understandings to confront such threats.

3. The US opposition and the potential pressure that the Trump administration may exert on certain Arab and Muslim countries to obstruct this course.

4. The possibility that some Arab and Muslim countries may join the Abraham Accords following the signing of the GS ceasefire agreement, encouraged by Trump's promises to pave the way for a political settlement of the Palestine issue.

The anticipated outcomes of this option include:

1. Strengthening Arab and Islamic cooperation and coordination in advancing shared causes and interests, and in defending the stability of the region.

2. Establishing a collective protection framework and strong deterrence to counter Israel's increasingly reckless and dangerous threats, while undermining its policy of isolating Arab and Muslim actors.

3. Enhancing the influence of Arab and Muslim countries internationally and applying coordinated pressure on the US administration and other actors to foster more balanced positions on Arab and Islamic issues, particularly the Palestine issue.

4. Providing an opportunity to form a flexible, evolving alliance with fewer constraints than collective arrangements within the Arab League or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Fifth: Key Features of the Proposed Vision for Confronting Israeli Threats

By reviewing the encouraging factors, obstacles and expected outcomes of the three options, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Option One: Relying on Trump's promises and reassurances, together with the ceasefire agreement in the GS, offers no serious guarantees of halting Israeli threats. It is likely to be a losing bet that carries tangible risks to the interests of Arab and Muslim countries and undermines regional stability. Moreover, it would inflict severe damage on the Palestine issue.

2. Option Two: Reaching consensus on a collective vision to confront Israeli threats through joint institutions is, in theory, the most promising option. It offers the highest political ceiling and the greatest potential for effectiveness and influence, provided that the necessary conditions for its success are met. However, numerous obstacles still impede its implementation, and overcoming them in the short term is difficult. Therefore, this option remains an ambitious yet legitimate goal for the future. It requires the development of effective transitional mechanisms to strengthen cooperation and coordination, thereby paving the way for its eventual realization. At the same time, it must be recognized that this option is currently impractical and cannot be relied upon in the present context.

3. Option Three: Reaching a common vision among several Arab and Muslim countries to confront Israeli threats, appears the most realistic under the current circumstances. It represents a qualitative step forward in enhancing coordination and cooperation. Moreover, it is a flexible option that, if successful, could help build a regional framework capable of evolving into a sustainable alliance. In the longer term, it may also pave the way for strengthening the institutions of joint action and advancing toward a collective Arab and Islamic vision to address the threats facing the region and its states.

In light of this assessment, the second option appears to be the preferred one. However, when considering the realistic prospects for success, the third option seems more attainable. It centers on achieving a consensus among several Arab and Muslim countries to confront Israeli threats through a shared strategic vision. The main features of this vision, intended to build regional cohesion and establish an effective stance against Israel's new security doctrine, are as follows:

1. Adopting the objective of deterring Israel, containing its expansionist policies, and countering its continued acts of aggression and violations of Arab and Muslim countries' sovereignty as a central goal of the shared vision.

2. Pursuing a strategy of diversifying defensive options and avoiding exclusive reliance on security agreements with the US. Experience has shown that such agreements have been ineffective in addressing Israeli aggression and threats.

3. Reorienting the regional compass by reaffirming Israel as a shared threat to Arab and Muslim countries, and as a primary source of danger to their interests and regional stability.

4. Ending reliance on treaties and agreements with Israel, while resisting Trump's efforts and pressures to draw Arab and Muslim countries into the Abraham Accords. The continuation of existing treaties should depend on Israel's abandonment of its aggressive policies, the end of the occupation, and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

5. Developing a joint Arab–Islamic strategic defense pact among states that share a common vision, similar to the strategic defense agreement signed between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

6. Strengthening collective action mechanisms to mobilize international support for the establishment of a Palestinian state. This also involves exerting coordinated pressure within international institutions to secure resolutions advancing that goal.

7. Seeking to establish an Arab and Islamic umbrella of support for the Palestinian resistance. More than two years after Operation al-Aqsa Flood, the resistance has demonstrated sustained military capacity in confronting Israel and constraining its expansionist tendencies. It has also exhibited a notable degree of organizational discipline and political maturity.

8. Mobilizing broad international support, including from Europe, China and Russia, for the shared Arab and Islamic positions aimed at confronting Israeli threats, enhancing regional stability and establishing the Palestinian state.

9. Addressing obstacles and concerns, while building confidence among the parties expected to participate in any emerging consensus. This approach would help overcome challenges and create a solid foundation for coordination and cooperation.

10. Reaffirming Jerusalem and the Palestine issue as central Arab and Islamic causes, and warning of the grave risks posed by annexation and displacement plans, as well as by Israel's policies to erase the identity of occupied Jerusalem, Judaize it, and assert control over its holy sites.