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Prospects of escalation and full-scale war with Israel in the Middle East

Benjamin Netanyahu visited the US and addressed the combined session of the US Congress on July 24th, 2024, against the backdrop of the unprecedented geopolitical situation for Israel and the Middle East. The situation is unprecedented for four reasons.

1. Historical Defeat of Hasbara

Firstly, the Israeli propaganda in the West, the Hasbara, has disastrously failed to control the narrative. The alternative media that has broken the monopoly of the mainstream media over narrative-building largely gets the credit for this. The statements against Israel that were taboo before the war are now common occurrences, even among Israel's staunchest allies. The defeat of Israel on various multinational platforms such as the UN, ICJ and ICC provided legitimacy of international law to the critics of Israel. Israel has never been so isolated diplomatically as it is today, ever before. While the strength of the Israeli lobbies ensures that Israel continues to get the support of the West, both diplomatically and militarily, the actions of these lobby groups are increasingly becoming overt and obvious and facing increasing resistance – a situation that is unfavorable for Israel and unsustainable to be continued for much longer. The collective West is finding it more and more difficult to reconcile the narrative of their adherence to international law and liberal and democratic values while supporting a regime that their constituents increasingly see as perpetrating genocide and apartheid. The dismay of their constituents on the streets and in universities over the perceived complicity of their respective governments and countries in perpetuating acts of immorality and injustice on a helpless people is translating into potential loss at the ballot box, despite every effort of the Israeli lobby machinery that enjoys enormous influence in the mainstream media, university administrations, security and military establishment and government institutions. The Democrats in the US realize that they cannot afford to fight the upcoming elections while isolating the Progressives in their party who are extremely unhappy with the pro-Israel stance of Biden and his team until now. The current trajectory is a straightforward recipe for disaster for Democrats in the election, likely to cost some swing states such as Michigan. The duplicity and double standards of the West have been laid bare, and the Global South has been calling them out on this. This has also adversely affected their war effort in Ukraine, where they have failed to win over the Global South. It has also contributed to the enormous success of the emerging BRICS+ alliance. The collective West realizes this and increasingly sees their unquestioned support for Israel's brutality in Gaza as being detrimental to their global standing.

2. Israel's loss of deterrence

The Oct 7th attack by Hamas shattered the myth of Israeli military dominance, and if any doubts were languishing, the subsequent military disaster for Israel in Gaza laid it all to rest. The established formula of Israel to re-establish deterrence by coming hard on the enemy and ensuring a swift victory failed with the result that after nearly ten months of brutal Israeli campaign, Hamas/ command structure and military capability are largely intact and contrary to the stated goals of Benjamin Netanyahu to decimate the organization, Hamas has never been stronger than it is now. The US and its allies have failed to establish deterrence at sea and end the naval blockade instituted by the Houthis in Yemen. Hezbollah has driven more than 80k

Israeli settlers from the North that the Israeli army is unable to resettle while Hezbollah continues to bomb these areas. The Iranian response to the Israeli attack on the Iranian embassy in Syria was able to establish deterrence for any future attack on Iranian territory while demonstrating to Israel and its allies that Iran has acquired the capability to penetrate their combined defences, revealing only a sample of the technology that they have acquired (not their most sophisticated) while avoiding a major escalation, that would invariably have played into the hands of Benjamin Netanyahu.

3. Precarious situation of Arab regimes

Some of the Arab regimes in the Gulf feel that they have dodged a bullet in the wake of the Arab uprising and are paying increasing attention to the public sentiments among their people. The strong anti-Iran and anti-Hezbollah feelings among the Sunni Arab masses following the uprising and subsequent armed conflict in Syria have been replaced by a feeling of appreciation and solidarity towards these groups, especially the Houthis, who they see as defenders of their Muslim brothers in Palestine. The dire economic situation in these countries, high prices, and increasing unemployment among the youth further add to their dismay, making these countries effectively tinderboxes on the verge of exploding out of control.

4. US Hegemony at Crossroads

The United States and the collective West are on the cusp of a catastrophic defeat in Ukraine at the hands of Russia despite every conceivable financial, diplomatic and financial support, short of actual troops on the ground that the collective West provided to Ukraine. Apart from draining the military stockpiles in the collective West and adversely impacting their economies (especially in Western Europe), this failure has emboldened the ascendant Global South, which has China and Russia at the vanguard while destroying the myth of Western military might and unlimited resources that allow the West to fight wars on multiple fronts simultaneously. The Zeit Geist in the West is to avoid wars and focus on increasingly desperate domestic issues – something that was clearly visible in the EU and the other local elections in European countries. Even if the neocons can prevail and work against the wishes of their populations to push their war agenda, they will need to prioritize. The current debate among the neocons is whether they need to prioritize threats from Russia or China. Israel is a distant third and is increasingly seen as a distraction from the more urgent threats of China and Russia. The West and the US cannot afford to be bogged down by a major war in the Middle East at this time.

It is for these reasons that it is not in the interest of Israel, the Arab countries, the United States and the Collective West to start a full-scale war with Iran in the Middle East. Donald Trump has been warning of a World war in the Middle East if the situation is allowed to go out of hand (that he clearly intends to avoid). At the same time, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris speak of ending the Gaza conflict soon and bringing peace and security to the Middle East. Iran, too, has only recently started improving its economic situation and made remarkable diplomatic inroads with its accession to BRICS+, rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and normalization efforts of its neighbors with its staunch ally, Syria. It is poised to make enormous diplomatic and economic gains from the impending rise of BRICS that will break the suffocating effects of the decades-old Western-led sanctions against it. It is also poised to consolidate its position in the Middle East from the significant victory in the ongoing conflict with Israel that it expects to have if it continues to tread on its current course of managed escalation. We conclude, therefore, that the **odds of a full-scale war with Iran in the Middle East in the short to medium term are extremely low.**

Having said this, it is also true that Israel and the United States need to create a plausible narrative that denies Hezbollah to claim outright victory. If Israel enters into a peace agreement with Hamas, Hezbollah will simultaneously end the hostilities in the North and claim victory, leaving Israel with no

counter-narrative against Hezbollah. It is for this reason that Israel, with express permission from the United States, which certainly comprehends Israel's situation, will follow through on its rhetoric of waging war with Hezbollah, albeit a limited one, before it signs a peace deal that will involve ending hostilities with all parties including Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthis. Israel will thereby claim victory by bringing all hostages home and returning its settlers to the North. We thus conclude that **there will be an escalation in the war against Hezbollah, but it will be very limited in its scale and scope**, just sufficient to allow Israel and the US to create a victory narrative.

It then also follows that **Netanyahu has no interest in an immediate ceasefire in Gaza**, a point that Netanyahu made clear in his speech at the US Congress too, and, we believe, was rightly assessed and called out by the Hamas leaders. Another reason to prolong the conflict for the time being is to counter the diplomatic offensive that is currently being led by the Russia-China duo. The recent diplomatic breakthrough for China through the **Beijing Declaration** (July 23rd 2024) in bringing all 14 Palestinian factions (including Hamas and Fatah) together and agreeing to create a common front must have raised alarm bells in Israel and the United States. According to the Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi, the deal lays the groundwork for an "interim national reconciliation government" to rule post-war Gaza. Although the earlier bids to unite the warring factions in Palestine, primarily Fatah and Hamas, have largely failed, the difference this time around is that China, a superpower with its astute diplomacy and remarkable success in its diplomatic initiatives thus far in the region (Saudi-Iran rapprochement) and globally (enviable success of BRICS+), has thrown its weight behind this deal. The Declaration emphasizes that the basic principle for the post-conflict governance of Gaza should be "Palestinians governing Palestine". In contrast with the unilateral approach towards Palestine, the Declaration called for convening a "broad-based, more authoritative, and more effective international peace conference" to implement the two-state solution and make Palestine a full member state of the United Nations.

The United States enjoyed a monopoly over the affairs in the decades-old Palestine-Israel conflict, and allowing China to lead the peace efforts in the conflict would be tantamount to capitulating in the diplomatic war and conceding control and influence in a crucial geopolitical region. Among the regional players, this will be seen as a significant victory for Iran and a relative setback for the other Arab countries. Netanyahu's response to this is 'the Abraham Alliance' that he touted as a security alliance to counter the threat of Iran, just as NATO was conceived to counter the threat of Soviet Russia. He described this alliance as a "natural expansion of the Abraham Accords", clearly indicating a continuation of rapprochement efforts between Israel and its Arab neighbors while adding the military/security angle to these efforts. This comes on the backdrop of an offer by UAE (one of the four Abraham Accord countries) on the eve of the second meeting of the Palestinian factions in Beijing that resulted in the Beijing Declaration to lead a multinational force to help restore security in post-conflict Gaza. Notably, the UAE did not have any representation in the closing ceremony of the Beijing Declaration, which had representations from its Arab neighbours, including Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Russia, and Türkiye. UAE Assistant Minister for Political Affairs and Special Envoy of the UAE Minister for Foreign Affairs Lana Nusseibeh later clarified that it was willing to undertake this role assuming that the US would continue to lead and there is a "reformed and legitimate Palestinian Authority, led by an empowered Palestinian prime minister". This is in direct contradiction to the Beijing Declaration, which rejects the unilateral approach (US leadership) and states that all the 14 factions have affirmed that the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which is likely to have representations from all the factions (including Hamas), is the sole legitimate representative of all Palestinian people. We also know that Netanyahu's proposal on the alliance was likely discussed and agreed upon with the Biden administration, too, since, according to Axios, a day after Nusseibeh made his statement, the UAE

Foreign Minister hosted the Biden administration's Middle East envoy and Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs to discuss details of plans of the day after.

While UAE is certainly one of the potentials 'Arab partners' that Netanyahu alluded to for the Abraham Alliance, the choice of the alliance's name suggests Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan; the other three Abraham Accord countries would also be on this list. Netanyahu alluded to the success of April 14th success, in which more than half a dozen countries worked together to counter Iran's missile attack on Israel, as a glimpse of the success of this potential alliance. This might provide further hints as to the potential other Arab partners that Netanyahu has on his mind. In the wake of the April 14th event, the US officials had cited cooperation from various Arab countries in intelligence gathering and the active participation of Jordan and Saudi Arabia in countering the attack. We also have reports from Axios that refer to a secret meeting between Israel's top general and his counterparts from Bahrain, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt to discuss regional security cooperation in early Jun 2024.

The idea of an Arab NATO is not new either. As the geopolitical competition and security concerns against Iran's aggressiveness in the Gulf region began taking precedence over the Palestinian issue, whose importance started waning gradually in the 2000s, the Sunni countries began to gravitate towards Israel against a common Iranian threat. The de facto alliance that emerged in 2017 and received greater attention in February 2019 at the US-led Middle East conference in Warsaw, which Benjamin Netanyahu, in a then deleted tweet, described as a meeting with Arab leaders to reach a common interest of war with Iran and Mike Pompeo described as a global coalition against Iran, only to later backtrack under pressure from European peers. In fact, Netanyahu's alliance is basically a rehash of the 'Middle East Strategic Alliance' that was announced by the then US President Donald Trump during his visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2017 as a security alliance of GCC states along with Egypt, Jordan and led by the United States against Iran. From the United States perspective, this was a mechanism that allowed the US to partly disengage from the region and focus on other geopolitical priorities while not leaving a vacuum for Russia and China to fill in.

The choice of words used by Netanyahu was not coincidental either – given NATO's open hostility towards Russia and, recently, China, Israel was clearly alluding to the side to which he pledges his allegiance in the upcoming global power competition and aligning his security interests with the macro interests of the collective west. In a nutshell, we believe that **there will be a fierce war in the Middle East, but the nature of this war will be diplomatic and not a military one** – a war for which Netanyahu has expressed his desire for the United States to lead using him and countries that he referred to as, "Arab friends" as American proxies against the diplomatic offensive led by China and Russia. Israel and the United States enjoy additional leverage on the future course of events (compared to China) as long as the war continues. Hence, they will do their utmost to include this "Abraham Alliance" as part of the peace deal.

The only factor that can throw a wrench in the works is the conflict of interest between the interests of Netanyahu and the state of Israel. On July 22nd 2024, senior officials of Israel's security establishment, including prominent ex-high-ranking members of IDF and Mossad, sent a [letter](#) to the US Congress speaker and other leaders, complaining that Netanyahu is "an existential threat to the state of Israel", citing among other reasons, Netanyahu's actions that are "dragging Israel and the USA into an endless war with Hamas, Hezbollah and potentially with other enemies in the region". Three primary motivations for these belligerent actions of Netanyahu mentioned in the letter were Netanyahu's selfish desire to prolong his political life, delay his prosecution for crimes that the letter claims amount to "unprecedented legal conflicts of interest within the State of Israel" and pandering to the wishes of his "messianic partners" alluding, of course to the likes of Ben Gvir and Smotrich. In light of this, we believe that Netanyahu is rooting for a protracted war in the Middle East that he

hopes at some point could escalate into a full-scale war into which the United States and other “Arab allies” will be eventually dragged. Netanyahu has been itching for a war with Iran, which he would like the United States to fight on his behalf. The attack on the Iranian Consulate in Syria that was followed by a tense standoff between Iran and Israel was the earlier failed attempt. The collective West, on the other hand, understands this situation and knows that the only way to end this is to oust Netanyahu from power. The collective West is driving a wedge between their support for Israel and for Benjamin Netanyahu, and while the former is as solid as ever, the latter is not. Benjamin Netanyahu has been too toxic politically, and the West has decided to throw him under the bus. Nearly half of the Democrats, notably Kamala Harris and Nancy Pelosi, shunned his Congressional address. One of the most ardent Democrat Israeli supporters, Chuck Schumer, openly called for Benjamin Netanyahu to be replaced. The UK has withdrawn its opposition to his prosecution in the ICC, and Germany has expressed willingness to comply with the ICC rulings even if it is against Netanyahu. If the globalists in the West have their way, the events will play out as have been described in this paper, ending with a peace deal, an Abrahams Alliance with the post-war mandate for Palestine and Netanyahu gone. The scarier scenario is that Netanyahu prevails in his machinations, in which case there is a possibility for a full-scale war in the region or, as Donald Trump pointed out in his meeting with Netanyahu, World War III.

Latest update: As of the time of this writing, a rocket struck the Israel-occupied Golan heights, killing 12 civilians from the Druze community that Israel blames on Hezbollah and the latter denies. Odds are that this is either a false flag attack by Israel or an incidence of Iron Dome defence gone wrong, purportedly a common occurrence in the area. Either way, this has given the pretext to Israel to launch its offensive against Hezbollah, for which it has now got the green light from the United States and European countries, albeit with urgings to avoid a significant escalation. According to the Times of Israel, Israel’s Security Cabinet has granted Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defence Minister Gallant the authority to decide the “scale and timing” of the response.