

The War That Escaped the Middle East: Iran, Israel, and the New Geography of Security

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Publication date: 29 March 2026

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The “12-Day War” (June 13–25, 2025) was a short military confrontation between Israel and Iran, involving Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear and military facilities, followed by Iranian retaliation. Despite its intensity, the conflict remained relatively contained both geographically and operationally. The current escalation differs markedly from that phase.

The ongoing confrontation between Israel, the United States, and Iran is not simply a continuation of previous tensions. Rather, it marks a transition toward a more open, multi-layered, and interconnected conflict that is reshaping both the geography and the logic of regional dynamics. The earlier model of indirect confrontation, conducted through proxies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shiite militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen, remains active, but is now embedded within a broader and more direct framework of confrontation.

Within this context, Israel is actively seeking to reshape the regional security environment, aiming to limit Iran’s strategic penetration and reinforce its deterrence posture. In contrast, Iran’s strategy, built on an extensive network of asymmetric tools and proxies, continues to function as a central driver of instability across multiple theaters. This dynamic, combined with the broader escalation, may prove strategically counterproductive for Tehran, as it accelerates the convergence of interests among Arab states, Israel, and the United States.

The widening of the conflict beyond its traditional boundaries is already evident. The March 2, 2026 drone strike against the British RAF Akrotiri base in Cyprus illustrates how the Eastern Mediterranean is becoming directly integrated into the operational environment. The response by Greece, France, and the United Kingdom underscores the region’s gradual transformation into a forward deterrence space, with Cyprus emerging as a functional platform for crisis management.

At the same time, the crisis highlights its broader geo-economic implications. The destabilization around the Strait of Hormuz, where maritime traffic has dropped from over 100 vessels per day to approximately 20 in certain periods, while around 400 ships remain concentrated in the Gulf of Oman, demonstrates that the conflict is directly affecting the functioning of the global economic system. Energy security and freedom of navigation are once again at the center of strategic analysis.

Further indications of an attempted long-range strike against targets such as the Diego Garcia base in the Indian Ocean, approximately 4,000 kilometers from Iranian territory, point to a qualitative shift in Iran's capabilities. Even though the strike was unsuccessful, the strategic implication is clear: Iran now demonstrates long-range strike capabilities extending far beyond the Middle East. This has direct consequences for Europe. Parts of the European continent fall within the potential reach of Iranian missile systems, challenging the assumption that distance provides security. Europe can no longer treat the Iranian threat as a distant or purely regional issue. At the same time, several Middle Eastern states, particularly Israel and Gulf countries, have been facing this threat for years. They have developed operational experience in missile defense, early warning systems, and resilience against saturation attacks.

The implications are strategic. A more coordinated framework between Europe and regional actors is increasingly necessary to address missile and drone threats. Such cooperation could include enhanced intelligence sharing, integrated early warning systems, joint air and missile defense architectures, and the protection of critical maritime and energy infrastructure. Geographic distance is no longer a reliable buffer. The key challenge now lies in translating this evolving reality into coherent and operational strategy.

The behavior of the Gulf states reflects the structural constraints of the regional security environment. Despite being directly targeted by Iranian attacks, they have largely avoided overt military involvement, opting instead for a cautious hedging strategy. This approach combines limited, indirect support for US and Israeli operations with the preservation of communication channels with Tehran, reflecting both their military vulnerability and uncertainty regarding the long-term trajectory of the conflict. At the same time, this strategy is increasingly under pressure. Iran's willingness to target Gulf territory, including civilian and energy infrastructure, exposes the limits of hedging as a sustainable security model. While Gulf states seek to avoid escalation, their growing exposure to missile and drone threats reinforces the importance of external security guarantees and advanced defense capabilities.

In this context, Israel's role becomes more significant. The war has highlighted its operational experience in missile defense, intelligence, and high-intensity conflict management, positioning it as a critical security actor in a region facing persistent asymmetric threats. Close coordination between Israel and the United States points to the development of a more integrated strategic framework shaping the regional balance. However, the future of Israel-Gulf relations will

depend on how the conflict evolves. While the weakening of Iran may create opportunities for deeper cooperation, Gulf states remain cautious about the costs of overt alignment. Their priority is not only the degradation of Iranian capabilities, but also the emergence of a stable regional framework that can prevent Iran from rebuilding its military and proxy networks.

Ultimately, the current conflict is testing not only military capabilities, but also the viability of existing regional strategies. The transition from hedging to more structured forms of cooperation remains uncertain, but the direction of travel is increasingly clear: as threats become more interconnected, so too must the responses.

From a Greek perspective, the current escalation reinforces the country's growing strategic role at the intersection of the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Middle Eastern security environment. Greece is no longer a peripheral observer but an active contributor to regional stability, as reflected not only in its deployments in Cyprus but also in its operational engagement in the Gulf. The recent interception of Iranian ballistic missiles by a Greek Patriot battery deployed in Saudi Arabia illustrates this shift in concrete terms, underscoring Greece's role in the protection of critical energy infrastructure, with direct consequences for global markets and economic stability. This evolving posture places Greece within a broader network of deterrence that extends beyond its immediate geographic surroundings. Through its cooperation with partners such as the United States, France, and Israel, Greece is increasingly integrated into a wider security framework linking the Eastern Mediterranean with the Gulf. In this context, strengthening interoperability, investing in air and missile defense capabilities, and deepening strategic partnerships will be essential for maintaining its role as a credible and reliable security provider in an increasingly interconnected threat environment.