

The Quiet Crisis: How Do Arab States Currently View Israel?

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During Israel's ongoing war, the Arab peace states—especially Egypt, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates—have expressed deep mistrust, frustration, and even bewilderment over Israel's conduct. These sentiments have recently intensified and appear to have reached a peak. While these countries acknowledge Israel's military achievements and recognize that they could have a positive impact on the Middle East, they are also profoundly disturbed by what they perceive as Israel's rigid, one-dimensional militaristic approach—namely, the persistent and exclusive use of military force. According to prevailing views in Arab diplomatic and policy circles, Israel's current strategy overlooks the opportunity to end the war and fails to translate military gains into diplomatic initiatives. This failure undermines the prospect of advancing a political process aimed at resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and shaping a new reality of peace and prosperity in the region.

A related criticism from the Arab peace states focuses on the sheer magnitude of force Israel has used against the Gaza Strip and its civilian population. Images circulated in Arab media showing the suffering of women and children in Gaza—accompanied by accusations of genocide—are likely to weigh heavily on any future efforts to restore normal relations with Israel.

Despite this, the Arab peace states remain committed to their peace agreements with Israel and to the broader vision of normalization and regional integration—publicly as well. They have even proposed flexible frameworks for establishing a political horizon in the post-war period. However, there is growing concern that Israel's current policy may cause multidimensional harm to bilateral relations: eroding trust between official leaderships, fueling anti-Israel sentiment among the Arab public, and strengthening radical Islamist factions. This evolving reality not only undermines the potential for normalization but also impairs the actual progress made thus far, while reinforcing Arab tendencies to pursue regional strategies that deliberately exclude Israel.

Over the past two decades—and especially since the signing of the Abraham Accords—Israel has cultivated constructive relationships with a number of Arab states with which it has normalized ties. These relationships have been grounded in shared strategic interests, including countering Iran's regional ambitions, combating Salafi-jihadist terrorist groups, and promoting cooperation in the fields of economy, technology, and energy. During this period, the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) and the Negev Forum were established, and regional leaders began discussing a new Middle Eastern architecture based on mutual geostrategic interests.

The war that erupted on October 7—initiated by Hamas in part to derail the normalization processes between Israel and Saudi Arabia as well as other Arab states—has indeed succeeded, at least for now, in halting these positive developments. A clear illustration of this shift was President Trump’s recent visit to the region, during which he promoted the vision of regional integration through a series of diplomatic meetings and trade agreements—some historic, such as his meeting with Syria’s new president, Ahmed al-Sharaa—while Israel was conspicuously absent. During the visit, Trump also acknowledged that normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia is likely to be delayed due to the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip.

At the same time, the war has accelerated the growing erosion of Israel’s image among both Arab governments and publics. Across broad segments of Arab society, Israel is increasingly viewed as rigidly committed to a force-based approach while abandoning a more balanced strategy that would incorporate diplomatic, civil, and economic tools. This conduct is perceived as detrimental to both Arab and Israeli strategic interests, prompting the Arab peace states to reassess the core assumptions they had adopted regarding their ties with Israel.

Moderate Arab states’ criticism of Israel centers on several key issues. First is the perception of victory over Hamas. Many in the Arab world believe that Israel seeks to continue the war in pursuit of a so-called “total victory” over Hamas, even though the organization is widely seen as already defeated. It has suffered military losses; it has lost the support of much of the Palestinian public; it is fragmented internally; and, more broadly, it is in a state of strategic distress due to the destruction it has brought upon itself, the Gaza Strip, and Palestinian society. Under these circumstances, Israel’s insistence on portraying Hamas as an ongoing existential threat is seen as reinforcing a distorted narrative—one that leads Israel deeper into the “Gazan quagmire” and reflects badly on both Israel and the region as a whole.

Second, Israel’s aspiration to conquer the Gaza Strip and eliminate Hamas “down to the last operative,” without advancing a parallel political process to establish an alternative Palestinian governance in Gaza, is viewed as unrealistic and counterproductive. For the Arab peace states, continued reliance on military pressure is unlikely to achieve Israel’s strategic objectives. Military pressure will neither lead to Hamas’s disarmament, nor help secure the return of the Israeli hostages held by Hamas, nor enable the stabilization of Gaza in Hamas’s absence. This Israeli approach will also fail to gain support from partners in the moderate Arab states.

Third, Israel’s policy—relying solely on military means—threatens a broad range of shared Arab–Israeli strategic interests. It erodes existing peace agreements and obstructs efforts to expand normalization to additional countries. At the same time, it fuels hatred and a desire for revenge toward Israel. It undermines the sustainability of the current normalization ties, let alone their public visibility, and it diverts both Israel and the moderate Arab axis from addressing the region’s truly pressing challenges, including those posed by Iran, Qatar, Turkey, the “new” Syria, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Fourth, Israel’s exclusive focus on military solutions fuels extremism in the region. It serves the logic of radical Islamist forces seeking to destabilize Israel, strengthens their position, and

ultimately plays into their hands. The Arab peace states fear that this reality allows Hamas to recruit new operatives from among Gaza's younger generation—particularly in the absence of a viable alternative to Hamas and its ideology—and strengthens the so-called “axis of resistance.” It also increases the appeal of Islamist actors in Arab countries, particularly in Jordan and Egypt, and hinders Lebanon's efforts to move toward a new stable reality free of Hezbollah's dominance. Although the moderate Arab states were impressed by the IDF's achievements in Lebanon and Syria, they view Israel's continued military presence in Lebanese and Syrian territories as aggressive and illegitimate.

Fifth, Israel's adherence to “conflict management” without aspiring to conflict resolution will not provide Israel with lasting security. Instead, it perpetuates a state of unresolved crisis, perpetuating and deepening the underlying problems. The Arab peace states see Israel as prioritizing force over diplomacy, thereby sustaining a reality of violence, destruction, and hopelessness. Under such conditions, it will be impossible to achieve stable security for Israel, advance deradicalization processes in the Gaza Strip, or expand normalization.

Lastly, the Arab states believe that there is a need to strengthen the Palestinian Authority (PA). According to the Arab peace states, the events of October 7 should have served as a “wake-up call” for Israel to abandon the view of “Hamas as an asset and the PA as a burden.” Although they acknowledge the PA's many flaws and weaknesses, in their view, the PA is committed to a negotiated approach with Israel—but currently lacks an Israeli partner.

The Consequences for the Future of Peace Relations

Among the Arab peace states, there is growing concern over the long-term negative impact of the war on their relations with Israel. The most severe crisis scenarios involve Israeli actions that are perceived as direct threats to these states' national security—crossing what they see as “red lines.” These include, for example, direct or indirect encouragement of mass Palestinian emigration from Gaza or the West Bank to Egypt and/or Jordan. Such steps could be considered violations of peace agreements and might result in their suspension or termination. Additional developments that could jeopardize relations include the annexation of Palestinian territories by Israel, the collapse of the PA, or the outbreak of a third intifada in the West Bank.

It is evident that the war has undermined the trust that had developed over the years between Israel and the Arab peace states—both at official levels and in terms of Israel's standing in Arab public opinion. The relentless images of death and starvation coming from Gaza not only fuel global condemnation of Israel but also embarrass Arab regimes and generate public pressure to adopt protest measures against Israel. These images have also stirred Arab solidarity with the humanitarian plight of Gaza's residents, including among many who reject Hamas's ideology.

Despite the continued basic commitment to the peace agreements, the current developments may lead to their erosion and the loss of the historic opportunity for their expansion. As demonstrated during President Trump's recent visit to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's growing frustration with Israel's current policies and the ongoing war in Gaza is already pushing it to pursue bilateral agreements with the United States while bypassing Israel.

Arab Solutions to the Gaza Crisis

Alongside their criticism of Israel, Arab states are calling for a change in Israeli policy and the adoption of alternative approaches—chiefly those based on the Egyptian proposal endorsed by the Arab League in March 2025, which Israel quickly rejected without substantive discussion.

According to the Egyptian–Arab plan, the first stage—lasting six months—would involve the declaration of a permanent ceasefire. A Palestinian civilian technocratic government would be established to replace Hamas’s rule, and Palestinian police forces, trained in Egypt and Jordan, would be deployed in the Gaza Strip. The second and third stages—lasting a total of four and a half years—would focus on the reconstruction of housing, agriculture, public services, and infrastructure. This stabilization and recovery effort would be funded by Arab and international actors, with total costs estimated at over \$50 billion.

From the perspective of the Arab peace states, the Egyptian–Arab proposal is guided by a number of principles that diverge from Israel’s current policy:

1. A swift end to the war, in order to halt its damage to both Arab and Israeli interests. This would be accompanied by the delivery of humanitarian aid and the beginning of reconstruction—without making these actions conditional on the immediate demilitarization of Gaza or the full disarmament of Hamas.
2. The establishment of a civilian Palestinian governing alternative, initially loosely affiliated with the PA, with the goal of paving the way for the PA’s full return to Gaza. This alternative is intended to remove Hamas from the management of civilian life in the Strip, dismantle its control over the population through food, social services, education, and indoctrination, and—ideally—create conditions for the gradual dismantling of Hamas as a military entity.
3. Creating a political horizon for resolving the Palestinian issue, while rejecting partial arrangements focused solely on Gaza, which risk future rounds of violence and could render stabilization and reconstruction efforts futile. Advancing such a political horizon is also intended to lead eventually to regional integration processes in which Israel would be incorporated into the region and live in peace and security alongside a Palestinian state.

Even if not stated publicly, the Arab states may be willing to take into account Israel’s security concerns beyond the current official language of the Arab League’s proposal. Additional security guarantees that Israel could receive might include full Israeli control of the security perimeter along the Israel–Gaza border; the creation of rigorous security mechanisms for monitoring Gaza’s border and oversight of its crossings to prevent weapons smuggling; involvement of international and possibly Arab forces in enforcing the agreement; and potentially tacit approval for Israeli counterterrorism operations against concrete threats from within Gaza.

Conclusion

Despite its military achievements since October 7, Israel is perceived by its Arab peace partners as a traumatized state—acting in ways that appear disconnected from regional realities and strategically misguided, disregarding both its own security needs and those of the Arab states at a time when their national security interests are deeply intertwined.

Israel's patterns of action have driven its relations with the Arab peace states into a deep crisis of trust, undermining its status as a strategic partner and fueling anger and frustration among Arab decision-makers and publics. Continuing the war in its current form—without presenting an Israeli political vision to complement the military campaign—empowers radical forces, weakens the moderate regional coalition, and risks forfeiting the opportunity for normalization with Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, the historic window for advancing regional integration has not yet closed. The moderate Arab states remain interested in continuing their partnerships with Israel and seek to promote, jointly with it, a responsible, gradual plan for the rehabilitation and stabilization of Gaza and the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. They are even willing, within this framework, to accommodate Israel's security needs. The decisions Israel will make—or avoid making—in the near future will have fateful consequences not only for the outcome of the war in Gaza but also for the future of its relations with the Arab world.

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