

Features of the New Middle East: Has “Israel” Become Closer to the UAE Than to Saudi Arabia?



The UAE’s announcement of withdrawing from OPEC and the “OPEC+” alliance came as one aspect of the fallout from the US-Israeli war on Iran and the profound geopolitical and economic shifts it has produced. The war has revealed a new Middle East, reflected in the divergence between Abu Dhabi and Riyadh’s strategic visions on how to manage a number of security files and the energy crisis resulting from the conflict. The Emirati withdrawal is also being viewed in the context of the current war as a sign of greater alignment with US interests, which have long criticized OPEC’s ability to control prices.

Saudi Arabia preferred to preserve the cohesion of the oil organization it leads as the largest oil producer, while the UAE saw its national interests as requiring freedom from restrictions in order to maximize revenues and capitalize on its massive investments in expanding production capacity, which has reached nearly 5 million barrels per day. The repercussions of this move were not limited to global oil markets; they extended to broader dimensions, as it is seen as the latest indication that the close decades-long partnership between the UAE and Saudi Arabia has turned into direct confrontation.

Does the UAE’s withdrawal from “OPEC” mark a new phase in the global balance

of power?

Read more details at the link: <https://t.co/oYeI19U7gRpic.twitter.com/6E4neJz6fo>

– NoonPost (@NoonPost) April 29, 2026

It also goes without saying that the recent crises have led to the formation of two Gulf poles. Gulf alignment is no longer based on the traditional umbrella of the Gulf Cooperation Council; it has become a purely functional alignment. Looking at the regional organization, we find its members split between two conflicting visions, driven by existential security and economic interests:

The first is the stability axis led by Saudi Arabia, which includes states that believe their survival depends on cooling regional conflicts in order to protect massive development projects. For example, Oman’s vision fully aligns with Riyadh’s on the need to “keep the Gulf neutral” in the US-Iran war.

Muscat also plays, alongside Riyadh, a role complementary to Saudi diplomacy, coordinating with it on complex mediation files to ensure the stability of the Strait of Hormuz. This is in harmony with Riyadh’s desire to “zero out problems” and reject turning the Gulf into a US-Israeli war zone against Tehran, a path in which Abu Dhabi has become deeply involved.

Several media outlets, including The Wall Street Journal and Middle East Eye, reported that Iran informed both Saudi Arabia and Oman of its plan to “heavily target” the UAE in response to the US-Israeli war. This is indeed what happened over the past two days, as attacks despite the declared truce targeted several sites, including facilities in the city of Fujairah on the UAE’s eastern coast.

Iran told Saudi Arabia and Oman that it planned to “heavily target” the UAE in response to the US-Israeli war on the Islamic Republic, in an apparent move to drive a wedge between Abu Dhabi and its Gulf neighbours, a report says <https://t.co/FOTjacCBNe>

– Middle East Eye (@MiddleEastEye) May 2, 2026

Alongside Oman, Qatar has taken a position closer to Saudi Arabia. It agrees with Riyadh on the need for dialogue with Tehran (to protect shared gas fields) and to avoid escalation, which disrupted LNG supply chains last March. Doha also has an economic vision similar to Saudi Arabia’s and believes achieving it depends on staying away from conflicts and avoiding entanglement in alliances with entities such as the Israeli occupation state.

Kuwait likewise finds itself closer to the Saudi vision, as it remains committed to unity under Riyadh’s leadership and to preserving the “OPEC+” organization. Kuwait fears unilateral Emirati actions such as leaving OPEC because it sees the

fragmentation of oil and political blocs as a direct threat to the stability of oil prices, on which its budget depends almost entirely, unlike the UAE, which diversified its economy before the war.

Second: the axis of alliance with a new security architecture that includes Western countries and “Israel.” This axis brings together states that believe security can only be achieved through full integration into a new regional security system that includes Western powers and Israel. Despite its historically close political and security ties with Riyadh, Bahrain has, in the years following the normalization agreements, become almost fully integrated with the Emirati vision.

“Israel” Sent a Defense System to the UAE

Bahrain believes that the Abraham Accords and the defense alliance with Washington and Tel Aviv (led by Abu Dhabi) constitute a more effective shield against direct threats, making it closer to the deterrence policy pursued by the UAE rather than the quiet containment and stability policy led by Saudi Arabia.

Recently, the Financial Times revealed in an investigation that “Israel” sent advanced weapons systems, including an advanced laser system, to the UAE to help it counter Iranian missiles and drones, considering this one aspect of defense cooperation between the two sides following the normalization agreement signed in 2020 under the sponsorship of US President Donald Trump.

– Reports revealed that “Israel” sent advanced air defense systems to the UAE, including the laser-based “Iron Beam” system, with the aim of confronting growing Iranian missile and drone threats.

– The information also explained that “Israel” deployed the “Spectro” early warning system, which contributes to monitoring... pic.twitter.com/OZFa3ZkmaB

– NoonPost (@NoonPost) May 1, 2026

By contrast, Riyadh has adopted a policy of “strategic hedging,” fearing that any public security alliance with “Israel” would make its territory and oil facilities a direct target for Iranian retaliation, especially given its lack of full confidence in absolute American protection. This is in addition to Saudi Arabia’s adherence to the Arab Peace Initiative (no normalization without a Palestinian state) as a basic condition for any official relationship, considering that its status as leader of the Islamic world obliges it not to follow the UAE’s “unilateral” model.

From Competition to Escalation

After the UAE announced its exit from OPEC and OPEC Plus, Saudi-Emirati competition is shifting from a muted disagreement to a clash across geopolitical axes, with each side seeking to draw an independent map of influence linking the

three continents — Asia, Africa, and Europe — according to its own vision.

Abu Dhabi is pursuing an escalatory approach marked by unilateral initiative. Its withdrawal from OPEC in May 2026 represents the peak of economic escalation, and politically the UAE has not hesitated to break regional consensus in pursuit of rapid strategic gains, such as its support for separatist entities in Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya.

By contrast, Saudi Arabia has adopted an approach based on centrality, with Riyadh seeking to impose its weight as the reference point for Arab and regional decision-making, preferring tools such as diplomatic and institutional pressure and working to isolate unilateral Emirati moves by strengthening alliances with large and influential states such as Egypt, Turkey, and Pakistan.

The competition between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi has also been evident in a fierce race to control ports. While the UAE is working to consolidate the investments of its arm, DP World, to entrench its foothold in the Horn of Africa as a gateway to the continent, Saudi Arabia is pursuing a rival project. In 2025, it signed an agreement to develop and operate Tadjourah Port in Djibouti for 30 years, and it is also leading a Red Sea states bloc to ensure maritime security and secure the trade route from Bab el-Mandeb to the Suez Canal.

By deciding to withdraw from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, “OPEC,” and the “OPEC+” alliance, the UAE did not leave the oil market; it left the room that used to determine how many barrels it was allowed to sell.. Who are the biggest winners and losers from this move?

pic.twitter.com/7hWjwtf1s

— NoonPost (@NoonPost) May 5, 2026

On regional security, the divergence is evident in Sudan, Yemen, and Somalia, where Riyadh tends to support official state institutions to preserve Red Sea stability, while Abu Dhabi backs irregular separatist forces to secure logistical interests.

On another front, Riyadh has succeeded in building a triangle of stability outside the GCC as well, with Egypt and Turkey, to coordinate positions on Gaza, Libya, and Sudan, using its financial weight to support the economies of Egypt and Pakistan in exchange for strategic and military depth in confronting regional threats.

But the UAE is still trying to penetrate these alliances through massive investments, especially in Egypt and Turkey, to ensure these countries do not fall completely behind the Saudi agenda, while Abu Dhabi maintains its partnership with “Israel” to secure technological and security superiority in confronting

Tehran.

The Intersection of the Conflict With US and Israeli Policies

The Saudi-Emirati conflict intersects with US and Israeli policies, as Washington tries to maneuver between Riyadh’s leadership ambitions and Abu Dhabi’s strategic moves.

Although Washington has publicly welcomed the UAE’s withdrawal from OPEC as a prelude to increasing its oil production and thus lowering global prices, it also fears that the collapse of Saudi-Emirati cohesion could lead to a loss of control over energy market stability as a tool of pressure against Russia and Iran.

Washington also finds itself conflicted: it supports the axis led by “Israel” and the UAE, which includes India and part of the Middle East and Europe, but it realizes that the success of any sustainable regional security arrangement requires Saudi weight, its leadership of the broader Islamic world, and its alliances with Turkey and Egypt to secure the Red Sea.

For its part, “Israel” considers the UAE its closest strategic ally amid the current war on Iran, as the two sides seek to establish an ambitious defensive security system that goes beyond the UAE’s national borders (radars and interception technologies), something Saudi Arabia rejects in order to protect its sovereignty.

In light of the US-Israeli war on Iran, securing the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb has become a flashpoint. The UAE aligns with “Israel” in seeking direct technological and maritime control, while Saudi Arabia agrees with Egypt on the need to keep Red Sea security purely Arab, away from direct Israeli intervention — something that irritates Tel Aviv.

The Clash Reflected in the Language of Discourse

The language of diplomatic and media discourse between Saudi Arabia and the UAE has undergone a radical transformation since the beginning of the crisis at the end of 2025, shifting from the language of brotherhood and shared destiny to the language of sovereign interests, with signs of hostile rhetoric managed through soft-power tools and digital platforms, fading at times and intensifying at others.

Terms such as “in the same trench” and “strategic partnership” have receded from final communiqués, replaced by formal protocol language focused on “good neighborliness” and “bilateral cooperation.” Participation in summits hosted by the other side has also come to take place at a lower level of representation.

At the recent Jeddah Gulf Summit, the absence of the UAE president was notable; the country merely sent a high-level delegation led by the foreign minister, while the Saudi crown prince personally received the leaders of Qatar,

Bahrain, and Kuwait upon their arrival. In a sharp diplomatic irony, the UAE announced its withdrawal from the “OPEC” organization on the very same day the summit was held (April 28), which analysts considered a clear message of political and economic confrontation at a time when the kingdom was trying to project a unified Gulf front.

It was also noted that the final statement and side remarks included phrases such as “coordination of positions” and “mutual respect for states’ choices,” wording usually used to cover up the absence of consensus on thorny issues such as how to deal with Iranian threats or manage energy markets.

Saudi media (including prominent social media accounts) has also emphasized that the kingdom is the natural and sole leader of the region, portraying Emirati moves such as the withdrawal from OPEC as a departure from the ranks and from Arab consensus.

The most important thing that distinguishes #SaudiArabia from others, in short:

☐☐ Global religious weight: home to Mecca and Medina, the qibla of Muslims and the destination of their hearts.

☐☐ Economic power: a member of the G20 and one of the world’s largest economies.

☐☐ Energy and oil: one of the world’s largest oil producers and exporters, with direct influence on energy markets.

☐☐... pic.twitter.com/PhInKstSyi

— Dr. Abdulhadi Al-Shahri ☐☐☐☐ (@Alshehri_dr1) May 3, 2026

On the other side, Emirati media promotes the narrative of the “model state” that does not want to be beholden to decisions that hinder its growth, with hints that the Saudi approach is “bureaucratic and restrictive,” in contrast to Abu Dhabi’s “dynamism.” Files such as Sudan and Yemen are also used in directed media to make implicit accusations: Saudi media stresses the need to support legitimate state institutions, while Emirati media revolves around “combating terrorism and ideological groups” (in reference to rejecting Saudi rapprochement with the legitimate Yemeni government and with the Sudanese government led by the army).

Dr. #Abdulkhaleq_Abdullah: explains the big brother complex. #SaudiArabia ☐☐☐☐ suffers from the big brother complex.

There is a big brother who wants his opinion not to be rejected, and we feel it and sometimes resent it.

The brother complex is that #the_UAE ☐☐☐☐ is rising and has this momentum,

presence, and influence so the big brother sees that it should be me, I should be the one who says... <https://t.co/BZlt7hzp2N> pic.twitter.com/rcTzL8NPtk

– UAE Sciences (@olumuae) March 30, 2026

The two countries are also investing in English-language channels and platforms, such as think tanks in Washington and London, to export their narratives to Western decision-makers. Saudi Arabia markets itself as a guarantor of global energy stability, while the UAE markets itself as a “more reliable technological and security partner” for the West and “Israel.”

Finally, it can be said that we are indeed facing a “new Middle East” born from the heart of the Gulf split, where intra-Gulf disputes are no longer just a passing summer cloud but have become a major driver of reshaping alliances from the Atlantic to the Gulf. For the first time in modern history, the Middle East is being reshaped around two Gulf poles, each with a vision that is almost the opposite of the other:

The Saudi axis, or the “axis of stability and zeroing out problems,” seeks to build a bloc of stability that includes major states in the region, such as Egypt, Turkey, and Pakistan, with the aim of turning the Middle East into a vast market for military industries and nuclear technology led by Riyadh, while keeping a distance from “Israel” and trying to contain Iran to avoid sliding into wars.

As for the Emirati axis, or what can be described as the “functional alliance,” it seeks to break traditional rules by building an organic alliance with “Israel” and India. Its goal is to become the region’s technological and logistical operator, and it does not mind escalation with Iran if that serves its maritime security and technological superiority. In this context, Abu Dhabi is betting on the India–“Israel”–Europe corridor, in cooperation with the United States, to bypass Saudi and Turkish geography.

Accordingly, the UAE today appears closer to Tel Aviv than to Riyadh. Abu Dhabi no longer views Saudi Arabia as the “big brother” or strategic ally, but rather as a fierce regional competitor at best. By contrast, the relationship between the UAE and “Israel” has moved from the level of diplomatic normalization to that of a direct security and military alliance, as Abu Dhabi sees integration with “Israel” as granting it technological and intelligence superiority that cements its status as a major regional power despite its limited geographic size.