



Joining the dots and making sense of the key geopolitical developments in Europe, Eurasia and MENA

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Key points:

- 1) The war in Ukraine has brought the Black Sea in the spotlight. How much does this matter?
 - 2) After the demise of Nagorno-Karabakh, could Azerbaijan and Armenia find a way to peace?
 - 3) How the Israel-Hamas War Is Upending the Geopolitics of the Middle East.
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Source: <https://wsj.com>

1) The war in Ukraine has brought the Black Sea in the spotlight. How much does this matter?

The war in Ukraine has brought again in the spotlight the strategic importance of the Black Sea for the future of European security. Historically, the Black Sea has played an important economic and political role across the neighbouring territories, and into a broader region. At present, “[...] it is still, just as in the Nineteenth Century, the door to the heartland of Eurasia, the domination of which has eternally played a role in the struggle for global hegemony [...] while the status of the Black Sea Straits was tightly linked to the balance of power in Europe.” (M. Terterov, A. Kreutz, G. Niculescu, (<http://gpf-europe.com>)).

This geopolitical trend has been highlighted in the aftermath of the Black Sea Grain Deal, since July 18, 2023. On that date, Russia terminated its agreement with the UN and Türkiye which had allowed Ukraine to export its grain by sea despite a wartime blockade, a deal seen as essential to keeping global food prices stable. Moscow has complained that Western sanctions had continued to restrict the sale of its own agricultural products and fertilizers, which had been the core of its interest for the deal.

Ukrainian president, V. Zelensky, reacted to the termination of the agreement: “Even without the

Federation, everything must be done so that we can use this Black Sea corridor”, adding that Ukraine was ready to restart shipments if the UN and Türkiye agreed. (<https://nytimes.com>)

The termination of the Grain Deal has had a ripple effect on the global food market, triggering a surge in wheat prices due to the disruption of Ukrainian grain exports. This has not only strained the global food supply chain but also amplified the economic burden on countries heavily reliant on wheat imports. The impact of the deal's termination extended beyond the global food market and has had a significant bearing on Ukraine's economy. From a geopolitical perspective, Russian decision has been widely interpreted as an attempt to exert pressure on the West and constrain Ukraine's economic options. This has further strained Russia's already tenuous relations with the West and has escalated tensions in the Black Sea region. (<https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/>) Moreover, it tested the resilience of the Russia-Türkiye strategic partnership (read “condominium”) over the Black Sea, and exposed Ukraine's grain export facilities to Russian military attacks, while exacerbating Kyiv's shortage of capable air defences across large swathes of territory. Indeed, after withdrawing from the deal, Russia pounded Ukrainian Black Sea ports to stymie grain shipments and had even struck sites on the Danube River a few

hundred yards from Romania, a NATO member, raising fears of war escalation to Allied territory. Ukraine retaliated with maritime drones and high-precision missiles strikes on Russian ships and maritime infrastructure, including the Kerch bridge, and the Boyko oil and gas rigs next to Crimea. Meanwhile, NATO and its member states have been flying air surveillance and air policing missions over NATO territory, territorial waters, and the international waters of the Black Sea, but have been careful not to stray into the war zone. *“The Black Sea is now a zone of conflict — a war zone as relevant to NATO as western Ukraine”* said Ivo Daalder, a former American ambassador to NATO and President of Chicago Council on Global Affairs (<https://nytimes.com>).

Western proposals for freedom-of-navigation and humanitarian maritime operations to unblock at least the Ukrainian agricultural exports have fallen flat as the US has been reticent, and Türkiye has been unwilling to participate for fear that they would only increase tensions and the potential for conflict between the West and Russia. (<https://www.jamestown.org>)

Since the outbreak of the Ukraine war in February 2022, NATO’s naval presence in the Black Sea has been curtailed by Ankara’s closure of the Black Sea straits to all military ships, allegedly in application of the 1936 Montreux Convention. Given that this closure has been also applied to Russian ships, the US and NATO didn’t put pressure on Türkiye to change this decision.

On September 19, addressing the United Nations, Ukrainian president V. Zelensky strongly emphasized Ukraine’s goal to regain all of its Russian-occupied territories, including Ukraine’s territorial waters in the Black Sea. He framed the de-occupation of Ukraine’s territorial waters and exclusive economic zones as a global interest, pointing to Russia’s blockade of Ukraine’s maritime ports and air strikes on river ports to paralyze grain exports: *“This is Russia’s obvious attempt at*

weaponizing food shortages on the world market so as to extort recognition, in full or in part, of its occupation of [Ukrainian] territories” (<https://president.gov.ua>).

President Zelensky’s claims in front of a global audience were backed by Ukrainian subsequent success in forcing Russian navy to relocate the majority of its ships from Sevastopol (Crimea) to Novorossiysk (Russia). The key trigger for this retreat was a precision-guided Storm Shadow missile strike against the fleet’s headquarters building in Sevastopol, on September 22, rendering it irreparably damaged. (<https://intellinews.com>)

The withdrawal of the Russian ships to North-Eastern Black Sea essentially signalled a weakening of Russian dominance in the Western Black Sea, allowing Ukraine greater freedom for both trade and military movements. Indeed, in the last week of September, Ukraine has stepped up its use of a new shipping route that has allowed it to begin reviving grain exports to circumvent the *de facto* Russian blockade of its Black Sea ports. Consequently, Kyiv successfully tested a new sea route, as two cargo vessels loaded with wheat sailed along the territorial waters of Romania and Bulgaria reaching Türkiye via the Black Sea.

Some experts have drawn the conclusion that the Black Sea Grain Deal was no longer needed. However, the heavy price paid by Ukraine’s grain exports infrastructure for making that deal unnecessary might be questionable against the value added to meeting Ukrainian war objectives, including the effective constraints placed on the Russian war budget. Nevertheless, from a purely strategic point of view, the relocation from Crimea of most of the Russian navy could be counted as a Ukrainian success.

In light of the meagre overall progress of the 2023 Ukrainian counter-offensive, the escalation of the war in the Black Sea might prove itself a Pyrrhic victory, which has actually moved the risk of territorial expansion of the war towards NATO

territory a notch higher. Indeed, this risk has been farther raised by the Russian deployment of Kinzhal hypersonic missiles on MIG 31's tasked *"to patrol the neutral zone of airspace over the Black Sea"*, as reported on October 19 (<https://intellinews.com>). Although it is not clear that those sophisticated weapons would be used to reinforce the Russian naval blockade against Ukraine, the risk of mutual harassment and accidental engagement with NATO aircraft patrolling over the Black Sea has definitely risen.

From this perspective, the sluggish pace of the ongoing Ukrainian counter-offensive, the dwindling Western enthusiasm to unconditionally support Kyiv's war efforts, and the reignition of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict with a significant potential to expand beyond Gaza, are making the armistice/protracted conflict scenario likelier over the next winter. In that vein, in an op-ed issued on October 3, G. Fridman thought we were almost there: *"We have seen a sort of frozen war, in which the need to hold positions makes it impossible to commit enough force to achieve the initial goals. These types of wars become primarily political morasses, where both sides fear that any movement would have political consequences for the opening of peace talks."* ("The War Is Over, but No One Knows How to Stop Fighting", <https://geopoliticalfutures.com>)

In conclusion, while the demise of the Grain Deal has brought the Black Sea closer to a major flashpoint, as long as the Russo-Turkish strategic partnership endured the strategic value of the Black Sea for the outcome of the war in Ukraine would remain limited, while raising the risk of accidental military clashes between NATO and Russia. Consequently, while the relocation of the Russian fleet away from Crimea might be deemed as a strategic success for Kyiv, its impact on the situation on the front lines would likely remain minimal.

2) After the demise of Nagorno-Karabakh, could Azerbaijan and Armenia find a way to peace?

Since the outbreak of their first war in 1992, Armenia and Azerbaijan have remained trapped into a protracted conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, a breakaway Armenian enclave situated on the internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan. In fall 2020, Azerbaijan won the 44-day war concluding 25+ years of ineffective conflict resolution by the OSCE. Baku recovered seven districts surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh from the Armenian forces, but it stopped short of taking most of the Armenian enclave, after Russia mediated a ceasefire in November 2020.

In an epilogue to the 44-day war, Azerbaijani forces launched on September 19, 2023, a brief "antiterrorist operation" which has given the final blow to the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). Ten days later, local authorities announced a "presidential decree" had been signed to dissolve the NKR and all of its institutions, as of January 1, 2024, while its defence forces have been disbanded and their armament handed over to Russian "peacekeepers". The territorial integrity of Azerbaijan has been fully restored within its internationally recognized borders, while many Armenians condemned prime-minister N. Pashinyan's government for letting down their brothers in Artsakh after almost 35 years of struggle for "national self-determination". The ensuing massive exodus of Armenians fleeing to neighbouring Armenia for fear of Azerbaijani retribution for 35 years of *de facto* independence has triggered a humanitarian crisis.

In the wake of this latest episode of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the November 2020 Trilateral Statement of Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian leaders lost much of its relevance, while many are hoping that the dissolution of the NKR would pave the way for Baku and Yerevan to sign a Peace Agreement. However, others are fearing that

Azerbaijan might take advantage of its military superiority to establish what it calls the “Zangezur Corridor” connecting through Southern Armenia its mainland to Nakhichevan, an Azerbaijani exclave sandwiched between Turkey, Iran, and Armenia (see picture). (B. Poghosyan on <https://www.commonspace.eu/>)



Source: <https://www.researchgate.net/> from Anadolu Agency.

In June 2023, a seasoned Chatham House South Caucasus expert had noted that *“the conflict has reverted to its roots - an asymmetric majority-minority struggle traditionally levelled by the drawing in of outside actors.”* (L. Broers on <https://chathamhouse.org>) The demise of Nagorno-Karabakh and the ensuing massive exodus of its Armenian inhabitants (according to Armenian sources, about 100,000 people) removed a key stumbling block in the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process: an agreement on a special status for Armenians living in Azerbaijan. Consequently, bilateral negotiations shifted towards the right to return of war refugees from both sides, i.e. Armenians to Karabakh and Azerbaijanis to Armenia (according to Azerbaijani sources, about 250,000 would have left Armenia in the late 1980's): *“Baku believes that the Azerbaijani people should have the same right to return to their homes in Armenia as the Armenians of the Karabakh region.”* This has been perceived by many Armenians *“as an attempt of Azerbaijan to assert territorial claims over Armenian lands”*, despite the *“Azerbaijani*

government has been explicit in clarifying that the issue concerning Azerbaijani refugees is not a matter of territorial conflict between Baku and Yerevan.” (V. Huseynov on <https://commonspace.eu>) Concluding a peace agreement stating the mutual recognition of the territorial integrity of both Armenia and Azerbaijan in line with the 1991 Alma-Ata Protocols would expectedly soothe such fears. As it might also alleviate Armenian fears about Azerbaijani-Turkish claims for the opening of the “Zangezur Corridor”, another sticking point in the ongoing peace process (for details see [issue 21, November 2022- February 2023](#)).

In the wake of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process has been further complicated by the new regional balance of power, and by the opposite strategic choices of Yerevan and Baku in the ongoing Russia-West geopolitical confrontation: Azerbaijan has apparently put its eggs in the Russo-Turkish “basket”, while striving to soothe Iranian concerns; meanwhile, the Armenian government has put its bet on playing Russia against the West and on pulling Iran closer to the South Caucasian balance of power.

In past EGF GT issues, we have already referred the Russo-Turkish strategic partnership/condominium over the South Caucasus, creating, in essence, a new balance of power. In a recent article, L. Broers has described it as *“regionalization”*, seen as *“a process [thereby] a conflict is ejected from a multilateral mediation process guided by principles of international law, and embedded instead within a conflict management process brokered by regional powers in accordance with their interests”*. Broers has further conceptualized it as *“a corollary of multipolarity, as previously 'globalized' space is [...] regionalized into 'spheres of influence', 'near abroad' or the 'strategic depth' of great powers - in this case, Russia”* [and Türkiye, AN] (<https://chathamhouse.org>). The Russo-Turkish strategic partnership has undercut Armenian tactics

to play Russia against the US, and the EU, by pulling together Russian, Turkish, and Azerbaijani interests to finish the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Baku's decisive victory and NKR's *de facto* capitulation and dissolution. Apparently, besides boasting its military superiority, this geopolitical shift has put Baku in a position of force whereby it could impose its will on any divergent issues negotiated with Yerevan, including the conditions for peace. However, few might have understood so far that, in practice, Azerbaijan's relations with Armenia are heavily constrained by preserving Russian and Turkish major regional interests, including their current interest to maintain their strategic partnership over the South Caucasus. Consequently, beyond attempts at practising coercive diplomacy, Baku could not force Yerevan to accept anything which would conflict with Russian and Turkish interests. This includes the ability to impose an extra-territoriality on the "Zangezur Corridor", which Baku has in fact abandoned after establishing, in April 2023, a checkpoint on the "Lachin Corridor". Moreover, L. Broers has recently noted that *"Russia has abandoned a familiar policy- 'frozen conflict' as a wedge against pro-Western development and liberal political order - for a new policy of 'stake building' in an alternative regional order dominated by similarly illiberal states."* (L. Broers on <https://chathamhouse.org>). He alluded to Russian prospective ability to control transport communication through Southern Armenia (between Western regions of Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan), provided in para 9 of the November 2020 Trilateral Statement. If this para was implemented by Baku and Yerevan with Ankara's and Moscow's nods, then it might prove that Russian influence in the South Caucasus is hardly declining, but it is rather adapting to a new pattern of regional power sharing. It would also question the effectiveness of Western strategy to isolate Russia by seeking an alternative Eurasian transport route over the Caspian Sea, Black Sea, and Turkiye

(known as the "Middle Corridor").

In fact, recent tensions within the Russian-Armenian alliance have emerged from Russian failure to maintain the complex equilibrium Moscow had struggled to maintain between Baku and Yerevan, which has tilted in favour of the former, over the last few years. This has raised serious concerns in Yerevan, while creating favourable geopolitical conditions for the demise of the Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh project. From this perspective, prime-minister N. Pashinyan's interview with the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, on September 2, in which he deplored Armenia's security and defence reliance on Russia as a *"strategic mistake"* reflected Armenian government's deep disappointment with the way Moscow defended the interests of its CSTO ally. In turn, it has triggered a *"battle of words"* with Russia leading to president V. Putin's remarks at the annual Economic Forum in Vladivostok (September 05-08): *"If Armenia recognized that Nagorno-Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan...then what are we talking about? This is the key component of the whole problem. The status of Karabakh was decided by Armenia itself."* (Y. Tashjian on <https://armenianweekly.com/>)

In conclusion, there is still hope for Armenia and Azerbaijan could overcome the hurdles on their way to peace. Those are stemming from the positioning of the key actors against the ongoing negotiations process, as well as from the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the West, and the Turkish manoeuvring around it. However, the possible escalation of the Israeli- Hamas war is likely to impact on geopolitical and strategic calculations and on the overall balance of power in the South Caucasus. It remains to be seen if the effects of war in the Middle East would strengthen or weaken the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process. Rational geopolitical thinking should favour the former, but one couldn't underestimate the latter.



3) How the Israel-Hamas War Is Upending the Geopolitics of the Middle East.

In a surprise attack on October 7, Hamas -the leading Palestinian Islamist militant group ruling the Gaza strip- staged multiple raids into Israeli villages in the South, and launched thousands of rockets against Israel. Israeli security and defence forces have been slow in responding the ensuing security crisis citing serious intelligence failures and defence and deterrence operational management issues. Consequently, more than 1400 Israeli civilians have been killed, while the assailants captured over 220 Israelis and took them as hostages into Gaza. Israeli prime-minister B. Netanyahu was quick in declaring war against Hamas and in issuing a mobilization order for over 300,000 reservists. His freshly appointed national unity government subsequently imposed a "total blockade" on Gaza's access to food, water, medicine, fuel, and electricity, and started massive airstrikes against it. The aim is to terminate Hamas rule in Gaza and weaken its military capabilities, amounting to its total defeat. The 2.3 million Gazans and foreigners have become

collateral victims in a huge humanitarian crisis, while over 7,000 people (according to data released on October 26) have been killed, many more wounded, and still counting. *"Israel has not, after all, moved beyond the conflict that has haunted it since the creation of the modern state in 1948: the claims of two peoples, Jewish and Palestinian, to the same narrow strip of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River"* read an Editorial the next day after the terrorist attacks. (<https://nytimes.com>)

It is unclear what have been the primary goals of the Hamas terrorist attacks, but they have resurrected the almost forgotten Palestinian question and have been upending the geopolitics of the Middle East. Our issue [No 14/ April- May 2021](#) outlined how the demise of two out of three pillars of former President's D. Trump "heritage" to the Middle East had reshaped geopolitics. Meanwhile, the Abraham Accords, providing for the normalization of diplomatic ties between Israel and a number of Arab states, have been assumed and promoted with a limited amount of attention by the President's J. Biden Administration with a special

focus on Saudi Arabia. Due to a disproportionate, indiscriminate Israeli reaction to the 10/7 terrorist attacks and the ensuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the Abraham Accords have been put on ice.

The growing regional influence of Iran, and military strength of its proxies in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, the prospects of an US ever less prominent geopolitical role in the MENA region, the structural weakness of the EU as a geopolitical actor, the missing political will and military capabilities of the European powers, the increasingly assertive and influential new regional actors, such as Türkiye, Russia, and China, and the weakening of Israeli governance in the wake of prime-minister's B. Netanyahu pursuit of controversial Constitutional changes might have created a favourable context to the latest Hamas terrorist attacks.

At the time of writing, any direct involvement of Iran in staging the attacks hasn't been proved. However, U.S. national security adviser J. Sullivan told reporters on October 10 that *"Iran is complicit in this attack in a broad sense"* for providing funding, military training, and equipment to Hamas, while the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) spokesperson said to journalists that: *"Just because you don't have that evidence doesn't necessarily mean Iran isn't behind it."* However, Teheran has had a serious interest in having US-sponsored Israeli-Saudi negotiations on resuming diplomatic ties torpedoed by the resurrection of the Palestinian question, and in reversing the perception that the Islamic regime was on defensive because of recent successful US and Israeli strikes against senior Iranian officials. (<https://geopoliticalfutures.com>) On the other hand, a senior Hamas leader denied any direct involvement of Teheran in planning and executing the terrorist attacks in Israel, which he described as a *"limited operation aiming to trade Israeli hostages for Hamas prisoners"*. He further admitted that Hamas had not anticipated the scale and speed of the collapse of Israel's defences.

(<https://washingtonpost.com>)

Where might be this war going and what might be its geopolitical implications?

Given the tense geopolitical context defined by the older Iran vs. Israel and US confrontation, and the newer Russia-West war in Ukraine, fears are high that it might spread beyond Gaza. If the invasion of Gaza by the IDF materialized, the so-called Iranian "axis of resistance", based in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, might enter into the fray. The largest and strongest pro-Iranian force is Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shia Islamist political party and militant group, which could pose a major military threat to the IDF by opening a second front in Northern Israel. The Syrian regime, an older enemy of Israel, has been seriously hammered by the IDF over the last 12 years of civil war. Smaller, but not less dangerous, Iranian-sponsored militias in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen could widen and strengthen the Iranian likely response to an extensively publicized Israeli intention to occupy Gaza. In an interview with Al Jazeera, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian publicly warned Israel against invading Gaza, with Iranian state media quoting him as saying that *"Iran cannot remain a spectator"* if Israeli troops go into the strip and that the United States would also face *"significant damages"* in the wake of such an incursion. (<https://ranenetwork.com>)

Taking the current regional and global context into account, R. Haas recommended that *"Washington should restrain Israeli military action in Gaza and preserve a path to peace"*. He argued that, on the one hand, *"Israel's apparent strategy is flawed in both ends and means. Hamas is as much a network, a movement, and an ideology as it is an organization. Its leadership can be killed, but the entity or something like it will survive."* On the other hand, *"The US has interests in the Middle East and beyond that would not be well served by an Israeli*

invasion and occupation of Gaza nor by longer-term Israeli policies that offer no hope to Palestinians who reject violence.” Third, he warned that employing massive force against Gaza (as opposed to more targeted action against Hamas) would trigger international condemnation from many including from the Arab neighbours. Meanwhile, he claimed, a large, prolonged military undertaking could also lead to a wider regional war. Consequently, the US should deter any widening of war by using all diplomatic and military means at hand. (“What Friends Owe Friends”, on <https://foreignaffairs.com>)

Most international experts would agree that Israel, Iran, and the US would not have a particular interest in seeing this war expanding. *“Israel has its hands full with its military response in Gaza, Iran likely wants to avert a potential clash with the United States, and Washington is not interested in a destabilizing regional conflict that would disrupt oil markets, fuel extremism, and draw attention from the war in Ukraine.”* However, some also contend that *“the situation on the ground is fluid, and changes to the strategic calculus in Israel, Iran, or both countries may lead their leaders to believe that avoiding wider conflict poses a greater danger to their survival than does confronting one another in war.”* (Dalia Dassa Kaye on <https://foreignaffairs.com>).

Israel’s Arab neighbours have also any interest to see this war escalating. For example, Jordan and Egypt are already facing acute socio-economic problems, which would be exacerbated by the arrival of new refugees. For the Gulf monarchies, an expanded war would disrupt their ambitious economic development plans, hinder their efforts to repair frayed regional relationships and end ongoing conflicts in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Nevertheless, the US and Israeli allegations that the October 17 explosion at the al-Ahli hospital in Gaza City, which killed hundreds of Gazan refugees, wasn’t caused by Israeli air strikes but by a

Palestinian rocket malfunctioning have been distrusted by the Arab countries across the region, including Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Under intense domestic political pressure from protests broken out in cities throughout the MENA region, they all blamed Israel on the blast.

The 10/7 attacks have also deepened the global polarization with the US and Russia at the forefront of vetoing each other’s draft UN Security Council Resolutions. The possible Israeli invasion of Gaza would exacerbate differences, as it would most likely draw US military intervention in favour of Israel, despite both the US and Russia having displayed so far vested interests and a certain level of political willingness to curtail violence and contain the expansion of war. For now, *“Russia is too deeply involved in Ukraine, and in the revitalization of economic growth in the face of labour shortages and crippling sanctions, to aid or abet either side of the Israel- Hamas war. And even if it weren’t, Russia has an interest in maintaining good relations with both parties.”* Therefore, in addition to calling for a cease-fire, President V. Putin emphasized the importance of diplomacy to establish a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in the Middle East, noting that a ground operation in Gaza *“would lead to dire consequences and the death of civilians”* (sic, vis-a-vis Russian war in Ukraine). However, if the war broadened to include Iran or even Syria, it would be much more difficult for Moscow to balance its powers in the Middle East, and to avoid taking sides. (E. Zolotova on <https://geopoliticalfutures.com>)

China has so far been cautious on taking bolder positions against the 10/7 terrorist attacks and the subsequent Israel-Gaza war. Beijing has shared economic and geopolitical interests not only with Iran, and the Gulf monarchies, but also with Israel. However, in case the US or Israel would take military or economic action hindering Iranian oil exports, China, as a major importer of Iranian oil,

should be expected to react harshly, which might take a possible Israeli- Iranian war at the next higher level.

In conclusion, the 10/7 terrorist attacks against Israel and the ensuing massive Israeli retaliation against Gaza increasingly look like a turning point in Middle Eastern geopolitics. It is still not clear at this time to what extent this war could be contained or how much of the wider region could it encroach on. Its potential security, political, economic, and geopolitical implications might become something between huge and catastrophic for the whole region, while its reverberations might be harshly felt at the global level.

Very much like the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US (and also like the Pearl Harbour, December 7, 1941, Japanese attacks on the US Navy), the Israel-Gaza war is likely to upend more than a decade old US security strategy. Likes it or not, Washington might be forced to make a forceful military comeback to the Middle East while having to reverse plans to rely on the regional powers to do the bulk of the military strife for restoring or maintaining the balance of power. Such a US return to the region would be seen with fear and maybe with anger by a few regional actors, including Iran, Russia, and possibly China. As suggested in [Issue 19/ May-July 2022](#), a regional footprint of the great powers' global competition might be in the making, and drawing the Middle East towards renewed intra-regional confrontation. The new balance of power might feature US and Israel, on the one hand, Iran and its proxies, and possibly Syria, on the other hand. How would Russia, the EU/European states, UK, Türkiye, China, and the Arab states position themselves against the emerging new balance of power is still to be seen, although several hints might be already there.



About EGF

The European Geopolitical Forum (EGF) was established in early 2010 by several independently minded practitioners of European geopolitics, who saw a certain vacuum in the information flow leading into the European geopolitical discussion. EGF is dedicated, therefore, towards the promotion of an objective, Pan-European geopolitical debate incorporating the views of Wider-European opinion shapers rather than simply those from the mainstream European Union (EU) member states. EGF seeks to elaborate upon European decision makers' and other relevant stakeholders' appreciation of European geopolitics by encouraging and effectively expanding the information flow from east to west, from south to north. In order to achieve these objectives, the European Geopolitical Forum was established as an independent internet-based resource, a web-portal which aims to serve as a knowledge hub on Pan-European geopolitics. EGF's strength is in its unique ability to gather a wide range of affiliated experts, the majority of whom originate from the countries in the EU's external neighbourhood, to examine and debate core issues in the Wider-European geopolitical context. Exchange of positions and interactivity between east and west, south and north, is at the heart of the EGF project. Please visit our website for further information at www.gpf-europe.com.

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