

# Trump 2.0: Foreign Policy Continuity with Destabilising Implications for MENA

## Executive Summary

*A second Trump administration is positioned to reshape existing geopolitical alignments in MENA rather than stabilise them. His policies are likely to reinforce Israeli actions, exacerbate US-Iran hostilities, and complicate engagements with Arab partners. The Palestinian issue will remain central to regional and international discourse as shifting diplomatic dynamics introduce new challenges for both US policy and broader geopolitical calculations. If past patterns persist, Trump 2.0 will not usher in stability but rather reinforce the conditions that perpetuate political and security challenges across the region.*

As President Donald Trump begins his second term, his administration's early signals suggest a return to the disruptive, transactional approach that defined his first presidency. His proposal to relocate the population of Gaza to neighbouring countries – swiftly rejected by Egypt and Jordan – highlights a broader trend of policy decisions that prioritise immediate US interests while disregarding the perspectives and concerns of others. If Trump's past trajectory is any indication, his second term is poised to deepen volatility across the MENA region, amplifying geopolitical fault lines rather than resolving them.

Trump's unwavering support for Israel, evident in his first-term policies on Jerusalem and the Abraham Accords, will likely embolden the Israeli government to continue its aggressive measures in Gaza and the West Bank. The absence of meaningful US pressure to restrain Israeli military actions could provoke a stronger reaction, including intensified Palestinian resistance and regional spillover effects, further entrenching cycles of violence. Simultaneously, his administration's known hardline policy toward Iran suggests a renewed push for "maximum pressure" tactics, raising the risk of military confrontations. Iranian-backed groups in Iraq and Yemen could renew hostilities against US assets and allies in response, widening the scope of conflict.

The transactional nature of Trump's foreign policy introduces further unpredictability for regional allies such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. If US support is conditioned on financial contributions or political concessions, it may strain longstanding alliances and encourage independent security strategies that do not align with the US's goals. This dynamic could lead to more fragmented regional cooperation as states prioritise their strategic autonomy over alignment with an erratic US agenda.

A permanent ceasefire in Gaza remains unlikely under these conditions. The fundamental asymmetry between Israel's objective to dismantle Hamas and Hamas' need to maintain armed resistance as leverage makes any long-term resolution improbable. Temporary truces may continue to facilitate humanitarian relief, but they will not address the core grievances driving the conflict. The political landscape in Israel further complicates matters, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing coalition unlikely to tolerate any settlement that leaves Hamas in power. Meanwhile, Hamas, by surviving the current war, can claim a strategic victory, reinforcing its position among Palestinian factions.

Expanding the Abraham Accords under a second Trump term will also prove more challenging than during his first. The political climate has shifted since the initial agreements, with the Gaza war hardening public opinion across the Arab world against Israel. Saudi Arabia, once considered the next candidate for normalisation, now faces substantial domestic and regional opposition that makes such a move untenable without Israeli concessions – concessions Netanyahu's government is unlikely to offer. The political cost of engaging with Israel has risen considerably, and no leader in the Arab world can justify normalisation while Gaza remains a battleground. Trump's ability to leverage economic and military incentives for diplomatic gains remains, but the conditions that enabled the first round of accords no longer exist.

The Palestinian issue, though historically subject to shifting global attention, has re-emerged as a defining factor in international affairs. Israel's military actions have provoked widespread condemnation, with accusations of war crimes, mass protests, and legal challenges threatening to erode its diplomatic standing. While global focus fluctuates based on competing geopolitical crises, the scale of the current backlash suggests a lasting impact. Western governments that have traditionally shielded Israel from scrutiny are now facing internal political pressure to reassess their positions. Meanwhile, the Global South – through forums like BRICS and the UN – is increasingly asserting itself as a counterweight to Western diplomatic narratives, ensuring that the Palestinian issue remains at the forefront of international discourse.

Trump's suggestion to "clean Gaza out" by relocating its population has met with immediate and categorical rejection from both Egypt and Jordan. Egypt and Jordan view this as a direct threat to regional stability, their own national security, and the Palestinian cause. Their responses signal not only defiance but also an understanding that any acquiescence would fundamentally alter the political landscape of the region and undermine their own legitimacy. While external pressures, particularly from the US or Gulf allies, could test their resolve, both countries have substantial leverage to resist and block such a move.

Looking ahead, the region is likely to experience a period of heightened diplomatic manoeuvring as states adjust to the US's shifting posture. Key regional actors, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, may seek alternative security arrangements, either through strengthened intra-regional alliances or by deepening engagements with global powers such as China and Russia. Meanwhile, US policy will continue to prioritise short-term strategic advantages over long-term stability, exacerbating existing flashpoints rather than resolving them. As Middle East countries recalibrate their approaches, the likelihood of new alignments, contested influence, and protracted conflicts will shape the next phase of geopolitical developments in MENA.