

Middle East: Towards a New Regional (Dis)Order?

CIDOB Report Workshop

November 14, 2025

Jordi Maragall Room, CIDOB. Elisabets 12, 08001 Barcelona

Organised by: CIDOB

The pace and scale of change in the Middle East in recent months have made it nearly impossible to predict the region's future trajectory. A closer look at recent developments – such as the Abraham accords, the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement, Israel's war in Gaza and its military campaigns in Lebanon, Iran and Yemen, the weakening of the Axis of Resistance, and the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime– reveals the extent of this transformation. In addition to disrupting long-standing fault lines, these shifts also exposed the fragility of existing alliances and regional balances. In this context, Trump's 'peace plan' has further confirmed the volatility of regional dynamics. As such, these transformations call for renewed analysis to understand not only how regional and international actors are adapting but also how these dynamics are shaping and being shaped by an emerging regional order.

If we assume that a new regional order is indeed taking shape, several questions remain open. In which direction is this regional order heading? Can we truly speak of a new regional order, or are we still in a transitional phase? In this regard, will Israel's ongoing wars halt or even reverse the normalisation process with Arab countries, or could normalisation be used as a tool for regional de-escalation? What role will regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and Turkey play in shaping Syria's future, and to what extent does their competition reinforce fragmentation? Can a U.S.–Iran agreement on the nuclear programme be reached, and what would its implications be for regional security? Finally, how might the current Trump administration reshape U.S. engagement in the region and influence the emerging regional order?

These dynamics also directly influence the strategies of external actors such as China, the European Union, and Russia, each recalibrating its approach in response to these transformations. Trump's recent Gulf tour, promoting a Middle East "defined by trade, not by chaos," contrasts with its renewed military intervention against Iran, reflecting a complex posture between engagement and withdrawal. Russia seeks to preserve its influence in Syria, China continues to prioritise economic over security interests, and the EU –despite waning credibility– remains focused on regional stability. All signs point to a regional order increasingly defined from within, where local actors drive transformation while external powers adapt to a secondary role.

To address these questions, this workshop will bring together a range of experts to examine recent developments, assess their impact on regional dynamics, and debate whether a new regional order is truly emerging or whether the current shifts remain too fragmented to constitute a coherent transformation.

Programme

- 10.00 – 10.10 **Welcome**
Anna Ayuso, Senior Research Fellow & Research Coordinator, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)
- 10.10 – 11.30 **The Role, Actions, and Interests of Regional Actors**
Moderated by **Moussa Bourekba**, Research Fellow, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)
- Initial inputs* **Bader Al-Saif**, Professor, Kuwait University; Fellow, Chatham House and Arab Gulf States Institute; President, Al-Saif Consulting
Fatima Moussaoui, Senior Researcher Analyst and Lecturer, Sciences Po Paris
Yossi Mekelberg, Senior Consulting Fellow, Chatham House
Amjad Iraqi, Senior Analyst, International Crisis Group
- What are the elements driving the actions, reactions, and interests of regional powers in the current scenario? What strategies are they adopting in response to an ever-changing environment? Which scenarios do they find “desirable” or “fear”?*
- 11.30 – 12.00 **Coffee break**
- 12.00 – 13.20 **The Role, Vision, and Goals of External Actors**
Moderated by **Samuele C. Abrami**, Research Fellow, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)
- Initial inputs* **Eleonora Tafuro Ambrosetti**, Senior Research Fellow, ISPI; Non-Resident Fellow, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)
Intissar Fakir, Director and Senior Fellow, North Africa and Sahel Program, Middle East Institute
Julien Barnes-Dacey, Director of the MENA Programme, ECFR; Associate Senior Researcher, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)
- To what extent is the current positioning of external powers influenced by changes in the regional order, global dynamics, and internal constraints? What is their vision and response vis-à-vis the (im)balance that could emerge in the region?*
- 13.20 – 13.30 **Wrap-up and Final Remarks**
- 13.30 – Lunch **Farewell lunch**