



From Third Temple to Third World War: Crisis, Collapse, and Global Complicity

Abstract

This bulletin explores the intersection of Israeli messianic ideology, settler-colonial expansion, and geopolitical destabilisation in the wake of the now supposedly-concluded Israeli-Iranian war. It draws on political theology, settler-colonial analysis, and international security frameworks to analyse the transformation of Israeli political discourse from deterrence to sacred militarism. The analysis situates the symbolic significance of the “Third Temple” within broader regional and global trends, notably the erosion of international legal structures, the militarisation of governance, and the silencing of popular resistance. Drawing on recent reports from MADAR Center and media outlets’ reports, the bulletin interrogates the question: whose war is being fought, for what ends, and at what cost to people, sovereignty, and regional stability?

Section I: From Zionist Theology to Strategic Catastrophe

The evolution of Zionist ideology from a secular nationalist movement to one increasingly infused with religious messianism has long underpinned the settler-colonial project in Palestine; leading to critical implications for regional and global security. The idea of rebuilding the Third Temple, while historically marginal, has been revitalised within the Israeli political mainstream with the rise of the Israeli right-wing, particularly after the successive electoral victories of religious-nationalist coalitions.

This trend intensified significantly following the ongoing genocide in Gaza since 2023, along with the escalation in the West Bank. When settler-aligned parties and religious-nationalist leaders have openly championed their desire for sovereignty over the Al-Aqsa compound. The ambition to rebuild the Third Temple – once merely an aspiration – has now been vocally portrayed within Israeli mainstream politics as not only as a matter of faith but of national survival (MADAR, 2024).

This theology-politics fusion has deepened internal contradictions. While secular Israelis protest judicial overhauls and democratic backsliding, religious parties have accelerated annexationist and messianic projects. The occupation state [of Israel] now balances between secular crisis management and divine destiny politics; an unstable formula that drives both internal paralysis and external aggression (Shulman, 2018).

What makes this discourse uniquely dangerous is its capacity to erase the distinction between spiritual redemption and military conquest. This theological underpinning has played a catalytic role in reshaping Israeli policies in Palestinian territory, where land grabs and settler violence are increasingly framed as fulfilment of prophecy (Salamanca et al., 2012).

Recent statements by senior coalition members have drastically escalated these tensions. Religious Zionist Party members have openly linked military campaigns in Gaza and Lebanon to divine entitlement. Ergo, these theological invocations are not fringe, as they inform spatial, legal, and military strategies on the ground (Zonszein, 2023).



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Such transformations signal a structural shift. Israeli expansionism no longer merely defends settler interests; it seeks eschatological fulfilment. In other words, it now pursues what religious-nationalist actors perceive as: the realisation of divine prophecy concerning the “End of Time” and all life on Earth. The belief that territorial expansion, particularly including East Jerusalem and the West Bank, is not just a political project but a sacred mission to precipitate or prepare for an ultimate, divinely-ordained redemption. The region is thus confronted not only by a settler-colonial state, but a state animated by messianic ambitions; where war is sacralised as a necessary step toward religious redemption.

Section II: Israel’s Internal Collapse and its Global Reverberations

The term collapse in the context of Israeli internal politics is used here not to signify total institutional disintegration, but rather the fragmentation of political consensus, the erosion of secular-nationalist governance structures, and the substitution of civic stability with religious-nationalist governance. While Israeli officials and segments of the international community continue to portray the Israeli state as a robust democracy under strain, the convergence of systemic crises – judicial overhaul, military disobedience, social fragmentation, and economic pressures – signals a profound destabilisation of the Zionist project’s foundational structures (MADAR, 2024). The occupying state of Israel retains functional governance capacities, yet its ideological cohesion and social contract have markedly deteriorated, particularly as religious-nationalist forces redefine its political trajectory.

The Israeli 2024–2025 internal political crisis – compounded by the ongoing genocide in Gaza – revealed structural fractures that long predated the war with Iran. Protests over judicial reform, civil-military ruptures, and economic stagnation weakened the liberal-Zionist bloc, while emboldening theocratic hardliners (Barak, 2023). In other words, the breakdown of Israeli consensus facilitated a turn toward theological governance, with religious-nationalist figures consolidating power.

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This internal collapse intersected with an increasingly aggressive external posture. The Israeli occupying power’s military aggression in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, eventually culminating in open warfare with Iran, served as external pressure valves serving crisis displacement. In externalising threat narratives, the Israeli state diverted attention from internal fractures and delayed a necessary reckoning with its own domestic political dysfunction (MADAR, 2024).

The Israeli-Iranian war, now considered-concluded – or yet to be concluded –, left behind scorched landscapes and altered regional power dynamics. News reports confirm that while neither achieved a decisive long-term military victory, the war served as a pretext for expansive Israeli securitisation measures and enabled the global projection of its religious-nationalist agenda in an internationalised manner; a transformation underpinned by the operational and symbolic scale of its campaign (Froman, 2025).

Meanwhile, Western powers continued to shield the Israeli occupying state from accountability; embodied in constant fluxes of military aid and diplomatic immunity and impunity. Even during the Israeli targeting of civilian infrastructure in Gaza and South Lebanon. International legal institutions, particularly the UN and ICC, faced systematic obstruction, revealing the extent of structural impunity and institutional dysfunction (ICJ, 2024).

In the end, this global paralysis is not accidental. It is the product of a global systemic alignment that privileges strategic allies over international law, and deterrence over justice. Thus, Israeli internal collapse – defined here as the fracturing of its secular-liberal democratic facade – intersects with a broader collapse of the International legal order. This dual collapse constitutes a world-making failure: a moral erosion where the language of democracy is weaponised to mask complicity, and where global governance becomes an accessory to impunity.



Palestinian Organisations Welcome Landmark ICJ Provisional Measures Order Finding That Israel's Actions in Gaza Are Plausibly Genocidal.
<https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/22548.html>



Section III: Patterns and Shifts in Policy and Discourse

This bulletin identifies four primary patterns that have redefined the Israeli occupying state behaviour in the post-2023 period, each of which reflects a deeper transformation of ideology, strategy, and international alignment. These patterns signal a shift from occupation as a securitised project to one grounded in religious mythology policies, enforced through global complicity.

1- Messianic Militarism:

The Israeli military establishment has increasingly adopted theological narratives to legitimise its campaigns, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank. What was once cloaked in national security discourse now draws explicitly on scriptural and messianic imagery, particularly around the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa compound, known to Palestinians as Al-Haram Al-Sharif (the Noble sanctuary). The use of the term “Temple Mount” in this context reflects its significance within Zionist theological-military narratives, where the site is mythologised as the location of the ancient Jewish temples and the prophesied Third Temple. While the term is politically charged and reflects a settler-colonial appropriation of space, its use here is necessary to accurately depict the Israeli religious-nationalist lexicon that underpins policy and military strategy.

These religious frames are not merely rhetorical, they are embedded in the strategic calculations of the Israeli state, influencing military doctrine, settler expansion policies, and public diplomacy. This development marks a significant break from earlier secular Zionist frameworks; Aligning military action with divine entitlement and normalising violence as prophetic fulfilment. The sacralisation of military objectives around Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount underscores how religious mythology is deployed to reconfigure sovereignty, law, and resistance in the occupied city of Jerusalem.

This sacralisation of military doctrine is also visually and symbolically reinforced through material culture, most notably in military uniforms, insignia, and slogans. In recent years, units operating in the West Bank have adopted patches bearing phrases such as “Gibor Yisrael” (“Hero of Israel”) and imagery referencing the biblical Joshua or the Maccabees, explicitly linking contemporary military campaigns to ancient theological narratives. According to MADAR Center’s 2024 report, elite units have been permitted to incorporate religious phrases into their regimental insignia, with some soldiers reportedly wearing items referencing the Third Temple during operations in East Jerusalem. This fusion of biblical symbolism with combat gear is not incidental; it reflects a growing alignment between state military practice and religious-messianic identity.

Additionally, the 'Map of Eretz Israel' depicts a biblical vision of Greater Israel that extends beyond current borders that include occupied territory in 1967, has also been appropriated in military and settler contexts as both a pedagogical and motivational tool. Its presence in military installations, settler outposts, and educational materials embeds expansionist aspirations within everyday spatial consciousness. This cartographic imaginary not only erases Palestinian geography but reconfigures the entire region as a divine inheritance, preordained and awaiting reclamation through force. Moreover, these visual cues help normalise violence as divinely sanctioned and frame the occupation not as a political imposition, but as a sacred duty.



'Greater Israel' map display; "Israeli" soldier's uniform patch raises alarm. ROYA NEWS, 17-06-2024, <https://en.royanews.tv/news/52123>



A soldier wears a T-shirt that says 'every Arab mother should know that her son's fate is in my hands'. Credit: Shachar Atwan, <https://palestinetoday.quora.com/Sexism-and-Aggression-What-We-Learn-From-Israeli-Army-T-shirts-Racy-sexually-explicit-items-have-become-part-of-Israeli>



2- Regional Provocation as Crisis Governance:

The Israeli military operations against Iranian proxies and neighbouring states have served a dual purpose. Ostensibly defensive, these operations have also helped consolidate domestic support for the ruling coalition, distract from internal dissent, and perpetuate a state of emergency that justifies exceptional governance measures, including the ongoing genocide in Gaza. For instance, the 2025 Israeli-Iranian 12-day war offered an opportunity for the Israeli leadership to silence critics, bypass judicial norms, and accelerate annexationist policies under the banner of national survival. As a result, military aggression is no longer a tool of last resort, but rather a recurring strategy for regime consolidation.

3-Normalisation Without Justice:

While hailed by the international community as diplomatic breakthroughs, the Abraham Accords and their successors have functioned less as peace deals and more as regional security pacts that exclude Palestinians and Palestinian security entirely. These agreements have enabled the Israeli state to deepen its occupation while presenting an image of regional integration. Crucially, the accords institutionalise a vision of peace that requires no justice or sovereignty for Palestinians. Instead, economic partnerships, arms deals, and cyber cooperation have taken precedence, effectively transforming the normalisation agenda into a mechanism for solidifying colonial control (RO'A, 2025).

4-Erosion of International Accountability:

The collapse of international accountability mechanisms has emboldened Israeli religious-imperial trajectory. From the US Congress's attempt to sanction the International Criminal Court to European complicity in arms trade and technology transfers, the international legal order appears increasingly hollow. Institutions like the UN and ICC are selectively enforced, creating a system where Israeli actions are shielded from scrutiny while Palestinian resistance and global solidarity are criminalised. As UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese warns, Impunity is the key word to understand the reduction of the Palestinian “fight for self-determination, [...] to a humanitarian crisis, and accept quietly the loss of their land, their ‘failure’ to confront the imperialistic capitalistic force of settler colonialism” (Albanese, 2024).This erosion is not merely a failure of enforcement; it reflects a broader restructuring of the international order in favour of imperial impunity.

These patterns, taken together, demonstrate the transformation of the Israeli occupation that is illegal according to international law from a securitised, nationalist enterprise to a religious-imperial project rooted in divine exceptionalism. In this emerging paradigm, civil law is subordinated to messianic vision, diplomacy is replaced by myth, and violence is rebranded as fulfillment of destiny.



Map of Eretz Yisrael. A map which shows Eretz Yisroel as it was divided during Biblical times. This map shows the portion of each Shevet as well as the nations who lived in the surrounding lands. <https://waldereducation.org/product/map-of-eretz-yisrael/>



Section IV: Power Dynamics Analysis

The Israeli-Iranian war marked a climactic episode in a broader ideological confrontation that far exceeds the conventional boundaries of “state conflict.” While the war may have ended or at least considered ended, its aftershocks continue to reverberate across the region, crystallising new power arrangements and exposing deep fractures in global governance. The war was less a contest between two militaries and more a symbolic clash between competing visions of sovereignty, identity, and survival.

Among the most influential key players in this regional shift in paradigm include:

• *The Israeli religious-nationalist bloc*

Comprising the Religious Zionism Party (HaTzionut HaDatit), Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power), and Noam – seeks to redefine Israeli sovereignty through the lens of biblical entitlement. This coalition, anchored in ultranationalist and messianic ideologies, has grown increasingly influential within state institutions, embedding theological principles into military strategy, legal policy, and educational curricula (Zonszein, 2024; MADAR Center, 2024). The bloc’s leaders, such as Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir, openly advocate for policies that sanctify territorial expansion and entrench Jewish supremacy within the framework of state governance.

• *Palestinian resistance movements*

Who remain the most directly affected yet structurally marginalised actors, encompass a diverse range of political, military, and grassroots organisations. Prominent among them are the resistance movement of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), each representing distinct ideological frameworks and tactical approaches to anti-colonial struggle (Sayigh, 1997; Baconi, 2018). Additionally, elements within the Fatah movement, though formally tied to the Palestinian Authority, maintain factions engaged in armed resistance, particularly in the occupied West Bank. In recent years, decentralised formations such as the Lions’ Den in Nablus have emerged, reflecting a generational and tactical evolution in Palestinian resistance (Al Jazeera, 2023).

• *Iranian-led regional alliances*

Including Hezbollah and other non-state actors, which have become the primary military counterweights to the Israeli occupation state. While ideologically diverse, they are unified in opposition to the Israeli religious-imperial project and its Western enablers.

• *Western powers, primarily the United States*

Which continue to bankroll Israeli militarism while rhetorically supporting a “two-state solution.” This contradiction lies at the heart of the current impasse, where diplomacy is weaponised to maintain the status quo.

Their struggle is simultaneously local – focused on defending land, life, and sovereignty –, and global, as they confront an international system designed to suppress and delegitimise their resistance through legal, diplomatic, and military channels. Under international law, particularly Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, armed resistance by peoples under colonial domination, alien occupation, or racist regimes is recognised as a legitimate exercise of the right to self-determination (ICRC, 1977). The persistent framing of Palestinian resistance as terrorism by the occupying state of Israel and its allies further entrenches this marginalisation, criminalising the Palestinian pursuit of self-determination as recognised under international law (United Nations, 1974). Despite this, civil society networks within Palestine and the diaspora continue to link their struggle to global movements against racial, imperial, and settler-colonial oppression, articulating Palestine as a critical node in broader decolonial and justice-oriented movements (Abunimah, 2014; Erakat, 2019).



- *Jordan and Egypt*

The two Arab states with formal peace treaties with the occupying state of Israel, occupy a complex and often precarious position with the regional landscape of power dynamics. Both regimes maintain the relationship with the Israeli state. Both states maintain diplomatic and security relations with the Israeli state – anchored in the Wadi Arabah Treaty (1994) for Jordan and the Camp David Accords (1979) for Egypt – motivated by border security concerns economic interdependencies, and alignment with US strategic interests (Lynch, 2016).

Jordan, which as custodian of Christian and Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem, has frequently clashed rhetorically with the Israeli state over assaults at Al-Haram Al-Sharif. These tensions have escalated in parallel with the Israeli religious-nationalist bloc's growing assault on Jerusalem's status and the intensification of settler violence across the West Bank, particularly since 2023. Jordan's position is further undermined by its structural dependencies on the occupation state of Israel for water, energy arrangements, and US financial aid (KAS Regional Programme, 2022). Internally, Jordan grapples with growing public discontent and protest movements, particularly as the Israeli religious-nationalist project advances, threatening both the status of Jerusalem and the stability in the region (RO'A, 2025; Abu Rish, 2012).

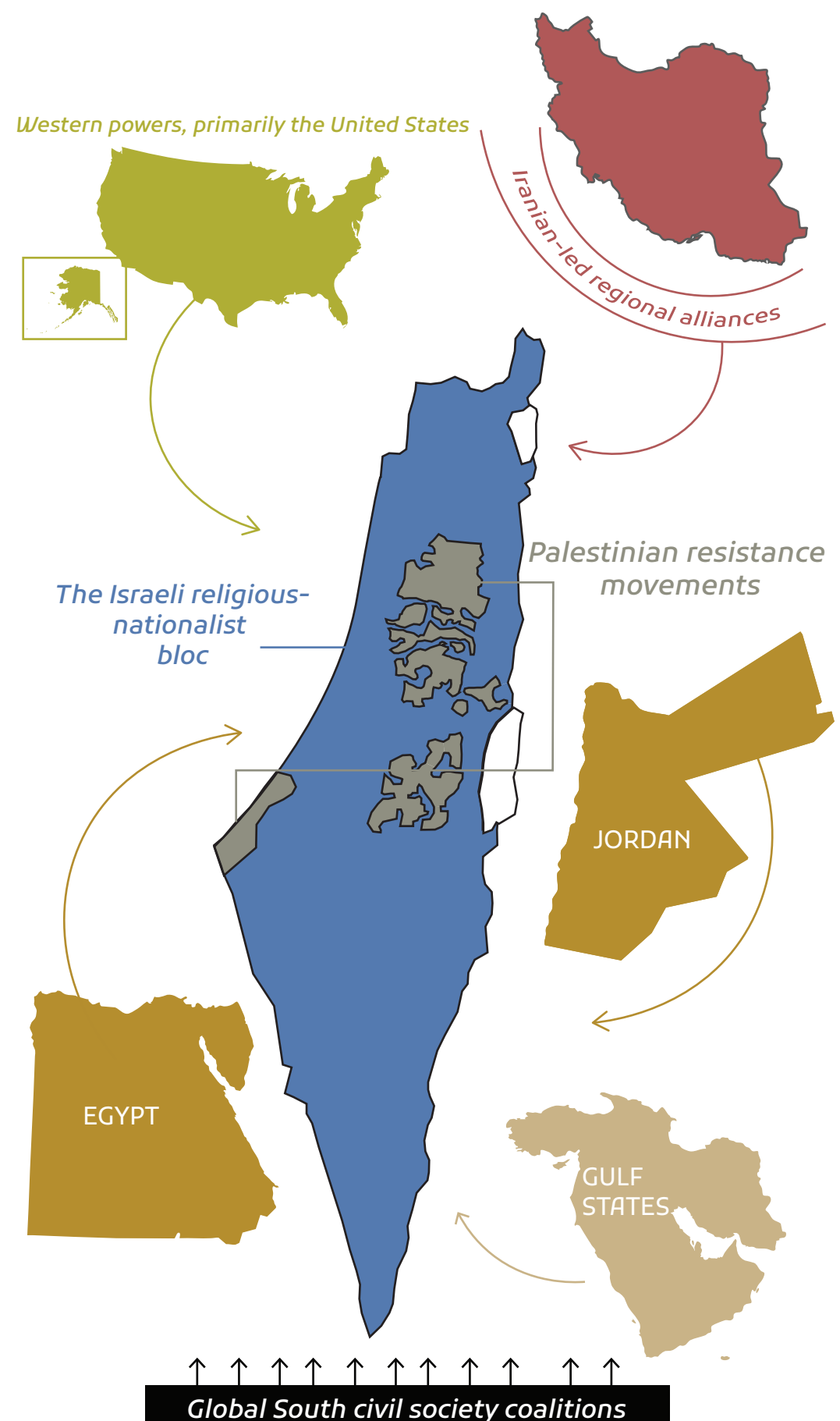
Egypt similarly treads a delicate balance between preserving the Camp David Accords and entrenched popular hostility towards the occupying state of Israel. Despite widespread Egyptian public support for the Palestinian cause, Egypt has upheld the peace agreement with the Israeli state. Yet, Egypt particularly along the Philadelphia Corridor, where Israeli forces have recently reoccupied territory under the alleged pretext of controlling arms smuggling; a move that violates previous agreements and international law (Reuters, 2024). Concurrently, Egypt also positions itself as a mediator in Gaza, leveraging its role to maintain regional relevance while engaging in reconstruction diplomacy, notably through the Egypt-proposed Gaza Reconstruction Plan. Despite public sentiment in favour of the Palestinian cause, both Jordan and Egypt function as stabilising agents in the regional order.

- *Gulf states*

Navigating a delicate balance between domestic legitimacy and regional strategic interests. Their normalisation with Israel has exposed internal contradictions, generating new tensions between ruling elites and popular sentiment (RO'A, 2025).

- *Global South civil society coalitions*

Who have emerged as key actors in pushing back against both settler colonialism and international complicity. From Latin America to South Africa, solidarity movements are reframing Palestine as a global justice issue.



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These actors operate within a fractured temporal landscape. The collapse of the Oslo paradigm, the abandonment of “peace process” diplomacy, and the reassertion of prophetic history over pragmatic policy have created what can be termed a temporal rupture. In this rupture, the future is no longer negotiated, it is foretold. Policies are justified not through evidence or legality, but through divine inevitability.

This rupture is also spatial. For example, the city of Jerusalem has become the epicenter of competing sovereignties: Israeli (colonial settlers), Palestinian (indigenous), religious, and international. Its status reflects the broader collapse of multilateral diplomacy, replaced by unilateralism cloaked in spiritual necessity. Borders throughout the region have become sites of contestation not only over territory but over meaning; zones where law is suspended, and war is sacralised.

Such ruptures are not momentary aberrations, as they reflect a deeper structural transformation, in which crises are no longer to be resolved but perpetuated. Theological politics, permanent war, and international silence are not responses to instability; they pose its governing logic.

In this new paradigm, time itself becomes a battleground. Political decisions are increasingly made not with reference to civic consensus or legal precedent, but to eschatological timelines. This reconfiguration of temporality underpins a broader crisis of governance, in which the very idea of peace is displaced by a prophecy of endless conflict.

Section V: Limitations and Research Considerations

While this bulletin integrates political theology and security studies, several limitations remain. First, theological frameworks do not always translate cleanly into policy analysis. Much of the Third Temple discourse remains symbolic or aspirational, complicating empirical measurement.

Second, real-time conflicts, such as the Israeli-Iranian war, evolve rapidly. Thus, conclusions are provisional and context-dependent. The post-war period may yet produce new alignments that alter the current trajectory.

Third, interdisciplinary analysis risks losing focus or precision. This bulletin does not quantify military shifts or economic impacts, which would require a different methodological toolkit. Additionally, it is challenging to keep focus of the study in light of the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine and the urgency of academically highlighting the drastic violence imposed on Palestinians today.

Lastly, source limitations persist. Official Israeli documents rarely acknowledge religious motivations. Much of the evidence comes from third-party monitoring groups, journalistic investigations, and policy analyses from institutions like MADAR – The Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies.

Nonetheless, the patterns, ruptures, and policy shifts identified here are corroborated across multiple sources and disciplines. They form a coherent narrative of ideological collapse, regional escalation, and global complicity.

Section VI: Conclusion

This bulletin has traced the deepening entanglement of Israeli religious-nationalist ideology with state policy and militarised expansionism, revealing a paradigm shift from traditional settler-colonial occupation to a theological-imperial project. The invocation of Zionist mythology – most visibly expressed through military symbolism, sacred cartography, and strategic discourse – has transformed the conflict from one of territorial control to a messianic struggle, with profound implications for regional and global stability. The recently considered-concluded Israeli-Iranian war, rather than resolving tensions, has entrenched patterns of crisis governance and accelerated the erosion of international legal accountability, further marginalising Palestinian resistance and destabilising the broader Middle Eastern Region.

The multipolar and fragmented landscape of stakeholders, from religious-nationalist coalitions within Israel, diverse Palestinian resistance movements, regional alliances, to global powers, reflects a temporal and spatial rupture where old frameworks of diplomacy have given way to eschatological imperatives and permanent emergency. This rupture challenges the very foundations of the international “rules-based order,” exposing it as a selective regime that protects settler-colonial interests at the expense of human rights and justice.

While the theological militarism that animates Israeli policy currently dominates the discourse, the persistence of Palestinian resilience and global solidarity movements underscores the ongoing contestation over sovereignty, justice, and historical narrative. The future of the region hinges on whether international actors choose complicity in this sacred militarism or commit to a genuine reconfiguration of peace built on accountability, inclusion, and decolonisation.

In closing, the trajectory outlined here demands urgent scholarly attention and robust policy interventions that recognise the ideological dimensions of this conflict. Understanding how religious mythologies intertwine with geopolitical strategies is crucial for breaking cycles of violence and envisioning alternative futures that centre human dignity over divine entitlement.



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