

BEYOND PROXY WARFARE: STRATEGIC COMPETITION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND IRAN IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The strategic competition between Israel and Iran has become one of the defining geopolitical rivalries of the twenty-first century. While the relationship has historically been interpreted through the framework of proxy warfare, recent developments indicate a significant transformation in the nature and scope of the conflict. The rivalry now extends beyond indirect military engagements to encompass nuclear deterrence, cyber operations, intelligence competition, economic sanctions, maritime security, technological innovation, diplomatic realignments, and regional power projection. These evolving dimensions reflect broader changes in the international security environment, where states increasingly employ a combination of conventional and non-conventional instruments to advance national interests while avoiding large-scale interstate war. This paper examines the evolution of Israel–Iran strategic competition from its historical origins to its contemporary manifestations, arguing that proxy warfare alone is insufficient to explain the complexity of the bilateral relationship. Drawing upon qualitative analysis of scholarly literature, policy reports, and official documents, the study explores the principal strategic drivers sustaining the rivalry and evaluates their implications for regional stability and global security. The paper concludes that Israel–Iran competition has evolved into a multidimensional strategic contest whose consequences extend beyond the Middle East, influencing global energy security, international diplomacy, technological competition, and the emerging multipolar international order.

KEYWORDS: Israel, Iran, Strategic Competition, Middle East Security, Regional Geopolitics, Cyber Warfare, Nuclear Diplomacy, International Relations, Maritime Security, Multipolarity.

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