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# *Middle East Analysis Report*

In 2025, the Middle East experienced various political upheavals and conflicts, which have had a significant impact on the region, both internally and externally. The Middle East Institute of Japan reviewed the year 2025 and compiled an overview of the basic picture of the Middle East region.

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## **Review of the Situation in the Middle East in 2025 and Future Outlook**

**Middle East Institute of Japan**

### **1. General Overview**

The Gaza crisis, which began in October 2023, has with U.S. intervention, finally concluded in a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in October 2025, albeit conditional on the release of hostages. However, agreements concerning “postwar Gaza,” such as the treatment of Hamas, security in Gaza, and reconstruction, remain unfulfilled. Furthermore, factors that could worsen the situation are accumulating, including the continued presence of Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip, the deterioration of security in the West Bank, and the potential spread of hostilities to Iran and neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. Consequently, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is intensifying, and ‘pro-Israel’ and ‘pro-Palestine’ divisions within the international community are deepening.

The Netanyahu government in Israel is determined to continue military operations until Hamas and pro-Iranian forces in Gaza and neighboring countries are destroyed. Meanwhile, Israeli public opinion is far from uniformly supportive of Netanyahu. The majority of the population is exhausted by the

prolonged conflict, the morale of reserve soldiers is low, and the response rate to mobilization calls is reportedly poor. While Israeli society is deeply divided over whether to prioritize a ceasefire to secure the release of hostages or continue the war, there is consensus on the second phase after a ceasefire, such as disarming Hamas.

A ceasefire agreement was reached between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon in November 2024; however, Israeli forces remain stationed in the south of the country. Regarding Hezbollah's disarmament, the Lebanese Army created a plan at the request of the United States with the aim of achieving this by 2025. However, in response to the ongoing Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon, Hezbollah clarified its policy of not complying with disarmament in September 2025. Consequently, implementing the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire has become even more challenging, with no clear path to stabilizing the situation in Lebanon.

In Yemen, following the Houthi attack in May, in which missiles were fired at Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport, causing injuries, Israel intensified its retaliatory strikes in coordination with the United States. These include airstrikes on Hodeidah Port and Sana'a International Airport, with escalation in response to each Houthi attack. Meanwhile, the Houthis continue to target merchant ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden despite attacks from Israel and the United States, causing severe disruption to the logistics network connecting Europe and Asia.

In September 2025, the U.S. State Department designated four organizations belonging to the Shiite militia group "Popular Mobilization Forces," formed in 2014, as "terrorist organisations." This was a response to the situation in Iraq regarding pro-Iranian militias. These militias belong to the pro-Iranian "Axis of Resistance" network, which supports an Iranian-style state ideology and governance system and strongly opposes Israel and the United States. During the Gaza crisis, they repeatedly launched drone attacks against US military bases in Iraq and Syria, as well as against Israel. While the US and Israel have increased pressure on the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), political forces linked to the PMF gained more seats in the Iraqi parliamentary elections in November than in the previous election. Disarming the PMF is a critical issue that is closely tied to relations with the United States and Iran. If these forces grow in influence after parliamentary elections, discussions on disarmament will likely become even more difficult.

Regarding the development of relations between the Gulf Arab states and the

second Trump administration, the two countries have enjoyed a positive relationship since the latter took office in January 2025. In May 2025, President Trump made his first foreign trip after taking office, visiting Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar, and securing large-scale investment agreements from each country. The Gulf Arab states have high expectations of US technological capabilities in many fields, including defense, energy, advanced technology, and mining, and are aiming to strengthen their ties with the Trump administration. Meanwhile, amid a persistently unstable regional security environment, the United States is increasing its security engagement in the Gulf region. In September, President Trump signed an executive order guaranteeing Qatar's security. Furthermore, during Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to the United States in November, Saudi Arabia and the United States signed a Strategic Defense Agreement (SDA).

In the Maghreb region, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2797 in October by a majority vote, supporting Morocco's proposal for autonomy in Western Sahara—a disputed territory in southern Morocco contested by Morocco and Algeria (China and Russia abstained, not exercising their veto). This resolution established the autonomy plan as the primary basis for the UN-led settlement process, effectively stalling the 1991 referendum plan agreed upon by Morocco and the local organization, the Polisario Front, which was intended to determine whether Western Sahara would become independent or remain part of Morocco. In response, Algeria, which supports the Polisario Front, might intensify its confrontational stance against Morocco.

In Libya, domestic forces have been divided and have been in conflict between the eastern and western factions since the outbreak of the conflict in 2014. However, since the October 2020 Geneva Ceasefire Agreement, no large-scale clashes have occurred between the two camps. Nevertheless, fighting between militias based in the capital, Tripoli, occurred in both 2022 and 2023, and remains a security concern. In May 2025, large-scale clashes erupted again between militias over control of Tripoli, exposing the instability of the situation..

## **2. Noteworthy Developments**

### **(1) Iran**

A notable trend for 2025 was the escalation of the conflict between Iran and Israel. In the early hours of June 13, 2025, Israel launched an attack against Iran. This strike occurred just two days before the sixth round of indirect talks

between Iran and the US on the nuclear issue, scheduled for the 15th in Oman, catching Iran completely off-guard. Israel's initial strikes targeted residences of Iranian military officials and nuclear scientists. Numerous high-ranking military figures were killed, including General Bagheri, Chief of the Joint Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces; General Salami, Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC); and General Hajizadeh, Commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force. Thirteen nuclear scientists, including former Atomic Energy Organization head Abbas, were also killed.

On the 22nd of the same month, the U.S. military bombed three Iranian nuclear facilities (Fordo, Natanz, and Isfahan), including underground facilities that would have been difficult for Israel to destroy on its own. Assessments of the attack's effectiveness vary, but U.S. President Trump announced that the Fordo underground nuclear facility had been completely destroyed.

In response to the U.S. attack, Iran carried out a “symbolic” retaliatory strike on the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, where U.S. forces are stationed, the following day, the 23rd. Then, the day after that attack, U.S. President Trump announced that a “complete ceasefire” had been agreed upon between Israel and Iran. According to reports, the United States and Qatar persuaded Israel and Iran to accept the ceasefire. The 12-day fighting resulted in over 1,000 Iranian deaths and approximately 30 Israeli casualties.

Iran has suggested that this series of attacks was carried out with U.S. approval, arguing that Israel launched its attack on Iran while indirect negotiations with the U.S. over the nuclear issue were ongoing and that the U.S. also participated in the attack on Iranian nuclear facilities. Consequently, Iran has shown no willingness to resume nuclear negotiations with the United States. Iran views no room for compromise with the U.S., which demands a complete halt to uranium enrichment activities within Iran. Supreme Leader Khamenei also completely ruled out the possibility of negotiations with the U.S. in a speech.

Iran, believing that the June IAEA report on its nuclear activities provoked the Israeli attack, has intensified its opposition to the IAEA, particularly against Director General Grossi's “pro-Israel stance.” In response to this strong Iranian backlash, the Iranian Parliament swiftly passed the “Law on Ceasing Cooperation with the IAEA” immediately after the ceasefire with Israel, and the Guardian Council promptly approved it. This law stipulates that Iran will not cooperate with the IAEA unless two conditions are met: (1) Iran's national

sovereignty, territorial integrity, and safety of its nuclear facilities and scientists are fully guaranteed; and (2) full protection of the rights stipulated in the NPT, particularly the right to enrich uranium within Iran. Consequently, IAEA inspections of Iran's nuclear activities have become extremely difficult.

With IAEA inspections not yet resumed, the whereabouts of the highly enriched uranium reportedly buried underground following the U.S. attack remain unknown, and the prospects for restarting nuclear negotiations with the U.S. are also unclear. Against this backdrop, the E3 (UK, France, Germany) initiated procedures in late August 2025 to trigger a snapback of UN Security Council sanctions against Iran. Although Iran signed a new agreement with the IAEA on September 9 regarding inspection procedures, the UN Security Council rejected the “Resolution to Continue the Suspension of UN Security Council Sanctions Against Iran” on September 19. Consequently, the UN Security Council sanctions against Iran were fully reinstated on September 28. Following this development, on October 5, Foreign Minister Araghchi stated that the agreement with the IAEA had lost its validity, effectively halting IAEA inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities. Consequently, concerns over Iran's nuclear activities have resurfaced among Western nations and Israel, with the risk of renewed Israeli and U.S. attacks on Iran simmering.

Meanwhile, Iran is intensifying its diplomacy through non-Western international frameworks such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Beyond the IAEA, Iran is becoming increasingly distrustful of European nations that triggered the snapback without condemning Israeli attacks against Iran. It is seeking a way forward by strengthening ties with Russia, China, and neighboring countries. As long as Iran prioritizes its relations with these countries, the likelihood of extreme actions, such as withdrawing from the NPT, appears limited. Indeed, calls for NPT withdrawal in Iran are currently confined to discussions within the Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee and have not gained significant traction within the regime. However, if Israel and the US launch another attack against Iran, the possibility that Iran might pursue nuclear weapons in the future as a last resort for national defense cannot be ruled out..

## **(2) Turkey**

One of the most consequential factors shaping Turkey's political landscape in

2025 was the protracted Gaza crisis. In response to Israel's continued military operations since October 2023, Turkey further intensified its criticism of Israel, and bilateral relations effectively fell into a state of rupture. While the “complete suspension” in trade in May 2024 was largely symbolic, reports also pointed to ongoing transactions routed through third countries. Domestically, criticism of the government flared again over the gap between its “hardline rhetoric” and its pursuit of “practical interests.” This gap once more underscored that the Gaza issue is not merely a foreign-policy challenge for Turkey but a symbolic contest that strongly shapes domestic politics.

In 2025, the Gaza crisis remained Turkey’s top diplomatic priority. Working in coordination with Egypt and Qatar, Turkey highlighted its involvement in ceasefire efforts, humanitarian assistance, and discussions over a “post-Gaza” framework. Particularly noteworthy was the Gaza Peace Conference held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on October 13, 2025. At the conference, the United States, Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey—positioned as the principal mediators—signed a joint document (joint statement), making visible a coordinated framework to support and facilitate the implementation of a ceasefire agreement.

More significantly, Turkey refused Prime Minister Netanyahu's planned attendance at the last minute, and the United States accepted this decision. While the U.S. has historically avoided situations where Israel's absence from international Middle East peace conferences becomes a political issue, this time, it appears to have prioritized maintaining the framework of “unity among key mediators.” This suggests that Turkey is being reevaluated as a practical partner in designing the “post-Gaza” order, and that Turkey's strategic importance has relatively increased under the Trump administration's transactional diplomacy.

Meanwhile, Turkey's stance on Gaza is characterized by a “coexistence of confrontation and cooperation,” simultaneously sharpening its criticism of Israel while collaborating with the US, Egypt, and Qatar. Externally, while maintaining a hardline stance, Turkey has exhibited a strong realist dimension. This involves participation in mediation frameworks to secure influence and enhance its international role. It also includes supporting ceasefire implementation and monitoring mechanisms.

Alongside the Gaza issue, another major pillar of Turkey's foreign policy is the rapid shift in the Syrian situation. The collapse of the Assad regime in December

2024 marked a significant security turning point for Turkey in the year 2025. Since then, Syria has seen the Sharar Interim Government and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) reach a political agreement, advancing the formation of a new governance framework. This brings a new phase of instability in northern Syria and the rise of Kurdish forces that Turkey has long guarded against.

Since 2016, Turkey has secured influence in northern Syria through cross-border operations and maintained its “safe zone” concept. However, an agreement between the new regime and SDF may force Turkey to readjust its security policies. Particularly, the focus will be on how the relationship with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is redefined as the SDF becomes integrated into the political process.

In the spring of 2025, the PKK announced the “end” of its armed struggle and the dissolution of the organization, drawing significant attention both inside and outside Turkey. This shift stems from changes in the geopolitical environment accompanying the establishment of Syria's new regime and strategic recalculations within the PKK. Furthermore, the existence of “technical communication” with Abdullah Öcalan, who is currently imprisoned, has become a subject of debate in political circles, with the possibility of restarting the peace process being discussed.

However, these developments do not immediately imply an improvement in Turkey's security environment. Numerous challenges remain, including the stability and governance capacity of the new Syrian regime, activities of armed groups such as the Sham Liberation Organization, and policies regarding the return of approximately 3.2 million Syrian refugees. Turkey is now navigating a phase in which it must maintain its military and diplomatic presence, while exploring avenues for cooperation with the new regime and addressing these challenges.

Regarding U.S. involvement and Turkey's strategic positioning, U.S. engagement in 2025 has significantly redefined Turkey's diplomatic stance in its responses to the dual crises in Gaza and Syria. As mentioned earlier, the Trump administration respected Turkey's position on Gaza and placed it at the core of its peace format. This demonstrates Turkey's recognition as a practical partner in U.S. Middle East policy. Similarly, in Syria, while supporting the SDF's political participation, the U.S. has consistently coordinated with Turkey to

stabilize the new Syrian regime. Moves concerning the PKK's disarmament are also seen as impossible without the U.S. tacit approval or indirect involvement, with the U.S. maintaining contact with both Turkey and the SDF.

Thus, Turkey's situation in 2025 was shaped by the convergence of major regional shifts—the Gaza crisis and the new Syrian regime—with increased U.S. engagement. Turkey is expanding its influence within the process of restructuring the regional order by leveraging both confrontation and cooperation; yet, its actions remain strongly defined by its interaction with U.S. policy choices. The trajectory of the Gaza ceasefire, the consolidation of the new Syrian order, and developments regarding the PKK will remain key factors shaping Turkey's foreign and security strategy.

### **(3) Israeli-Arab relations**

A notable development in Israeli Arab relations was the ceasefire agreement reached in October 2025 between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas, brokered by the United States, Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey. Unlike previous agreements, this ceasefire was marked by the United States playing a leading role.

This ceasefire was made possible by the strong commitment of U.S. President Trump. Some observers have suggested that President Trump's active intervention was motivated by his aspirations for the Nobel Peace Prize. Meanwhile, members of the Trump administration have indicated that the U.S. aims to achieve peace in the Gaza Strip, stabilize the region by expanding the Abraham Accords, and gradually reduce U.S. involvement in the Middle East. The U.S. aims to add Saudi Arabia to the Abraham Accords—the agreements signed in 2020 between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain. If Saudi Arabia, which has a significant influence in the region, joins the Abraham Accords alongside Egypt and Jordan—which already have peace treaties with Israel—Israel's surrounding security environment will greatly improve. This would allow the U.S. to reduce its annual aid exceeding billions of dollars currently provided to Israel, Egypt, and Jordan. This is considered one of the reasons for the U.S.'s active involvement in the Gaza situation.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to achieve peace in the Gaza Strip. Therefore, President Trump is acting to achieve this peace based on the “20-point Gaza peace plan” announced at the end of September. The recent ceasefire

agreement represents the first step toward realizing this plan and achieving one of Israel's primary objectives: the return of hostages.

However, the three points outlined in Trump's vision are perceived as obstacles to achieving peace: the disarmament of Hamas and its removal from governing Gaza, the establishment of a non-political Palestinian committee for the interim governance of Gaza, and the deployment of an International Stabilization Force (ISF) in the Gaza Strip. Regarding disarmament, some ministers in Israel's Netanyahu-led government insisted on the complete annihilation of Hamas and the total destruction of its underground tunnel network, which led to sporadic gunfire incidents. Hamas's disarmament will be difficult unless Israel strictly adheres to a ceasefire.

Regarding the Palestinian Authority's (PA) interim governance of the Gaza Strip, while the PA asserts its legitimate right to do so, President Trump's plan does not envision immediate PA rule. Israel has also stated that it will not recognize the PA's interim governance. According to the thinking of the United States and Israel, if an institution that does not reflect the will of the Palestinian people assumes governance in Gaza, there is concern that chaos could ensue in the Gaza Strip.

Regarding the ISF, Palestinian factions view a force composed of foreigners as merely an "occupation" army replacing the Israeli military. If the ISF is stationed in the Gaza Strip, clashes with armed groups could occur. Furthermore, Arab countries that share the same language as Palestinians are reluctant to participate in the ISF due to the risk of engaging in combat with Palestinians, a situation that could ultimately further accentuate the ISF's "foreign" nature.

Additionally, as peace plans progress in the Gaza Strip, violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians is escalating in the West Bank. Such attacks in October 2025 reached a record monthly high, and by November, violence had escalated to the point where the Israeli government was compelled to condemn it.

As mentioned above, the United States aims to include Saudi Arabia in the Abraham Accord. However, Saudi Arabia has conditioned normalization with Israel on the establishment of a Palestinian state. While President Trump has stated that Saudi Arabia does not seriously consider Palestinian statehood a condition, some form of Palestinian self-governance acceptable to Saudi Arabia

is essential. The situation in the West Bank is pushing Palestinian self-governance further out of reach.

At this time, it remains unclear to what extent the United States will intervene in the Gaza Strip to address obstacles to the peace plan, and how the escalating violence in the West Bank will develop. If the United States determines that continuing support for Israel, Egypt, and Jordan is more economically advantageous than direct intervention, it cannot be denied that the U.S. may become less proactive in achieving peace. In this scenario, there is a risk that fighting in Gaza could reignite.

#### **(4) Energy situation**

In the 2025 energy outlook, concerns arose that energy supplies from Middle Eastern oil-producing nations could be disrupted because of instability in the region. In particular, the military conflict between Iran and Israel in June 2025 temporarily heightened the risk of a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which is a vital maritime transport route. Large volumes of oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) pass through the Strait daily. Against this backdrop, following the U.S. attack on Iran on June 22, 2025, the Iranian parliament expressed support for blocking the Strait of Hormuz. While implementation would require a decision by Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Iran began considering the blockade as a deterrent against the U.S., which was perceived as siding with Israel. As there are no alternative shipping routes for the Strait of Hormuz, disrupting logistics by rendering them impassable would severely impact energy procurement in countries worldwide, including Japan.

Another point to note is that even if Iran does not completely block the Strait of Hormuz, situations could arise in which the Strait becomes impassable. Against the backdrop of military clashes or threats/use of force against vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, it is conceivable that marine insurance companies could suspend coverage for merchant ships transiting the Strait or demand exorbitant war-risk premiums. In this scenario, many vessels are likely to abandon their passage because of navigation risks and profitability concerns. A similar example is the attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea by Yemen-based Houthi forces, which forced affected vessels to avoid Red Sea routes and divert to the Cape of Good Hope route.

Another noteworthy development in the energy landscape is the shift in policy

by Middle Eastern oil-producing nations toward increasing oil production. OPEC+, comprising OPEC member countries and 10 non-member nations, including Russia, decided to gradually lift oil production cuts starting in April 2025 and proceed with production increases. Since its inception in 2016, OPEC+ has aimed to stabilize international crude oil prices through coordinated production adjustments among its members. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, playing leading roles within OPEC, have deepened their cooperation with Russia through these production cuts, signaling a stance to counter the United States in the international oil market.

In the United States, President Trump declared a “national energy emergency” in his January 2025 inaugural address, signaling a policy to further expand domestic oil and natural gas production. He also demanded that OPEC increase its production and cooperate in lowering crude oil prices. This approach reveals President Trump's view that OPEC's cooperation is indispensable as an inflation countermeasure for suppressing energy prices.

The shift from production cuts to increased output by Middle Eastern oil producers likely stems from prioritizing market share over oil price maintenance, given the U.S. production expansion policy and sluggish Chinese fuel demand. However, crude prices remain depressed, compounded by concerns over a recession triggered by the Trump administration's mutual tariff impositions and the lifting of production cuts. While the oil price decline fulfills President Trump's request for Middle Eastern producers, it also reduces their primary revenue source: resource income. Consequently, they will likely need to draw upon accumulated surplus funds to offset the widening fiscal deficit caused by the revenue shortfall.

## **(5) Syria**

On January 29, 2025, Ahmad Shara, who led the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), assumed the presidency of the Syrian Interim Government. The Shara administration was tasked with rebuilding administrative operations, including drafting a provisional constitution, establishing an institution equivalent to a provisional parliament (People's Council), creating a framework for dialogue centered on reconciliation, and designing transitional measures concerning the treatment of civil servants and military personnel from the former regime. Furthermore, while progress has been reported in restoring basic infrastructure

such as electricity, water, and healthcare, and in reopening educational institutions, significant disparities in service provision levels persist across regions.

One of the most critical challenges in security and military affairs is the integration of armed groups and administrative actors across the country into the state's command and governance system. A key step toward this goal was the agreement reached on March 10, 2025, between the interim government and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a coalition primarily composed of Kurdish forces. This agreement outlined the integration of civil and military institutions controlled by the SDF into the state, explicitly including the handling of key facilities such as border checkpoints, resource hubs, and airports.

However, even after the agreement was reached, the SDF continued to maintain effective control in the Northeast, limiting progress in integration. Furthermore, while the interim government aims to incorporate armed groups across the country into the state, each faction retains its own command structure even after integration, limiting the state apparatus's ability to exercise unified control. The issue of how to treat former Syrian Army officers and soldiers, linked to distrust and fear of reprisals among supporters of the old regime, including the Alawite community, has left social tensions unresolved. Governance conditions vary by region: Kurdish forces maintain effective control in the northeast, while political and security developments centered on the Druze community have become a focus in the south. Along the coast, the growing unease within the Alawite community has contributed to the ongoing security instability.

Intercommunal violence also remained a major concern in 2025. In March, clashes involving multiple actors—security forces, affiliated armed groups, former regime figures, and local armed factions—occurred in Alawite-populated areas of the coastal region, resulting in numerous casualties. In July, clashes between Druze and Bedouin in southern Suwayda province intensified. The deployment of government forces led to a fight against Druze militias. During this phase, Israel conducted airstrikes that caused significant damage to defense-related facilities in Damascus. A ceasefire was established following diplomatic efforts led by the United States. However, the situation remains unstable with ongoing civilian evacuations and the emergence of internally displaced persons, suggesting that stabilization will take considerable time.

## **(6) Islamic extremism trends**

Throughout 2025, Islamic extremist activities in the Middle East remained subdued. Within this context, a development emerged that marked a critical turning point in the international counter-Islamic extremism effort, once positioned as the “ideological war that would define the 21st century.” Both the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan and the Syrian Liberation Organization's seizure of power in Syria carry significant flaws, particularly regarding human rights and the treatment of internationally active Islamic extremists. However, they are also gaining international recognition. The latter case is particularly concerning, where individuals sanctioned or wanted Islamic extremist activists have been appointed to high-ranking government positions and military command posts. The United States and EU nations have effectively turned a blind eye to this. In November, reports emerged that the Syrian government had joined the “International Coalition against the Islamic State.” However, developments thus far have been: (1) a significant shift in counter-Islamic extremism strategy, where certain Islamic extremist factions are permitted to seize power within defined territories in exchange for pledging not to antagonize Western nations or Israel, and (2) the use of Islamic extremist groups cooperative with Western nations as vanguards to eliminate other Islamic extremist groups, such as the Islamic State, which continues to be viewed as harmful. The Taliban is aligning its activities with this shift in counter-extremism strategy as well. While gaining de facto international recognition through rapprochement with Russia, China, India, and others, it continues its conflict with the Islamic State Khorasan Province. However, this shift in approach risks condoning human rights abuses and persecution of “minorities” by Islamist extremists. Therefore, it cannot resolve issues such as the outbreak or escalation of conflicts, the cross-border movement of refugees and displaced persons, or international terrorist acts and their incitement.

Meanwhile, the Islamic State's activities in Africa have intensified. Its operational reports now predominantly feature African victories, whereas activities in Khorasan and Syria—regions where the group had previously signaled a resurgence and amplified threat—have dwindled to a mere handful. Amidst this, the Islamic State's targets have clearly shifted from the traditional “apostates” (enemies of Sunni Muslims) to militias and Christian civilians. The

rising proportion of militias among ISIL's adversaries and targets reflects a recent trend in conflicts: nations deploying subordinate non-state armed actors instead of their own regular forces to manage conflicts and counter Islamic extremism. Furthermore, attacks on Christian civilians are frequent in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique, indicating that ISIS is shifting its operational focus and targets from Western nations, Israel, and Arab countries to weaker states and adversaries.

In addition to ISIS, groups affiliated with al-Qaeda (such as the Movement for Support of Islam and Muslims) have also become more active in the Sahel countries. This faction appears to be conducting activities in Burkina Faso and Mali, which could lead to territorial control and the seizure of power. However, the group's reported military success and political messaging are disseminated through a wide variety of languages, channels, and media. Furthermore, there have been repeated instances in which such information does not appear to be official, organization-wide communication. This situation is not limited to ISIS or al-Qaeda; it is also observed in Pakistan, India, and among the Uyghurs. Consequently, responding to the diversification of languages, channels, and media used by Islamic extremists in their communications will likely become a critical challenge for future counter-Islamic extremism strategies.

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