



78/2023

15/11/2023

Javier Fernández Aparicio

**Connected: The Indo-Pacific and
the crisis in the Middle East**

[Visit the WEBSITE](#)[Receive the E-NEWSLETTER](#)

Connected: The Indo-Pacific and the crisis in the Middle East

Abstract:

The Indo-Pacific is the immense scenario where the struggle for global hegemony will be settled in the coming years. Therefore, how different regions and their States react to crises arising anywhere on the planet is relevant and can be read both internally and in terms of external relations. Different positions regarding the Hamas attacks of 7 October and the subsequent Israeli reaction have highlighted two paths taken by Indo-Pacific countries: condemnation of one or the other side of the dispute or attempting a difficult balance in the face of current polarisation. India, Japan, South Korea, Australia and the countries of Southeast Asia have shown different visions that depend, firstly, on the state of their own relationship with Israel, and then respond to policy on the bloc struggle around United States and China in the Indo-Pacific region itself.

Keywords:

Israel, Palestine, Indo-Pacific, China, United States, Multilateralism, Southeast Asia, East Asia, India

***NOTE:** The ideas contained in the **Analysis Papers** are the responsibility of their authors. They do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defence.

Conectados: el Indo-Pacífico y la crisis en Oriente Próximo

Resumen:

El Indo-Pacífico es el inmenso escenario donde se dirimirá la pugna por la hegemonía global en los próximos años. Por ello, la reacción a las crisis que se abren en cualquier lugar del planeta, por parte de las diferentes subregiones y Estados que lo conforman, es relevante y se puede leer tanto en clave interna como de relaciones externas. Así, las diferentes posiciones ante los ataques de Hamás del 7 de octubre y la consiguiente reacción israelí han mostrado dos vías al respecto para los países del Indo-Pacífico: la condena a uno u otro bando en litigio o intentar un equilibrio difícil ante la polarización actual. La India, Japón, Corea del Sur, Australia o los países del Sudeste Asiático han mostrado diferentes visiones que dependen, en primer lugar, del estado de su propia relación con Israel, para después responder a la política de lucha de bloques en torno a Estados Unidos y China en la propia región del Indo-Pacífico.

Palabras clave:

Israel, Palestina, Indo-Pacífico, China, Estados Unidos, Multilateralismo, Sudeste Asiático, Asia Oriental, India

How to cite this document:

FERNÁNDEZ APARICIO, Javier. *Connected: The Indo-Pacific and the crisis in the Middle East*. IEEE Analysis Paper 78/2023.

https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2023/DIEEEA78_2023_JAVFER_IndoPacifico_ENG.pdf and/or [bie³ link](#) (accessed on day/month/year)

Introduction

The Hamas attack on 7 October and subsequent Israeli reaction have brought the Middle East conflict back to the forefront of global geopolitics and reopened the struggle in the heart of the Holy Land between Palestinians and Israelis¹. One of the areas where reactions to these dramatic events have been polarised in support or detriment of the Palestinian situation and the Israeli reaction has been the Indo-Pacific. Beyond the response of one of the key players, the United States, which is stepping up its presence in the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific region has seen different sensitivities and responses from the different states in the region. The main defining characteristic of the Indo-Pacific has once again been put in display with respect to the current crisis: a common space of connectivity from the Pacific and Indian Oceans to the Middle East region via the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea².

On 27 October, at Jordan's proposal, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the Protection of Civilians and the implementation of legal and humanitarian obligations to alleviate the situation of Palestinians in Gaza. It was adopted with a resounding support of 121 countries against 14. In favour, China, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia or New Zealand, while Indo-Pacific middle powers such as Japan, South Korea or Australia, plus the Philippines or a giant like India abstained, and quite a few Pacific islands even voted against, showing greater support for Israel³.

From a historical perspective, since the Abraham Accords of August 2020, which led to some Muslim countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain recognising the State of Israel, its relationship with some relevant actors in the Indo-Pacific has also

¹ CASTRO TORRES, José Ignacio: 'Tierra Santa se estremece de nuevo'. In *IEEE Briefing Paper* 01/2023. Available at https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_informativos/2023/DIEEEI01_2023_JOSCAS_Tierra_Santa.pdf (Accessed on 02/11/2023).

² MIGUEL CALABIA, Emilio de: 'El Indo-pacífico. Lo que hay detrás del nombre'. In *Bukubuku* (ABC blogs, 14 June 2021). Available at [El Indo-pacífico. Lo que hay detrás del nombre \(1\) \(abc.es\)](https://www.abc.es/2021/06/14/analisis/20210614-el-indo-pacifico-lo-que-hay-detras-del-nombre-1_20210614_abc.es) (Accessed on 02/11/2023).

³ TIEZZI, Shannon: 'How Asia-Pacific States Voted on the UN's Israel-Palestine Resolution'. In *The Diplomat* (2 November 2023). Available at [How Asia-Pacific States Voted on the UN's Israel-Palestine Resolution - The Diplomat](https://www.diplomat.com/2023/11/02/how-asia-pacific-states-voted-on-the-un-israel-palestine-resolution/) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

shifted towards greater proximity, including some economic and trade agreements⁴. However, not all Indo-Pacific countries share this openness. Some are Muslim-majority —Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia— or have a large Muslim community, such as India. The events that have unfolded in the Gaza Strip since 7 October have had an impact on these states and explain their reactions.

To analyse reactions to the crisis in the Middle East in relation to the Indo-Pacific, we defined the geographical framework, which includes the most relevant countries in the vast region. The Indo-Pacific is divided into five major sub-regions:

- The western Indian Ocean connecting to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.
- Central Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal, with India as a major power.
- Southeast Asia with five large peninsular and two island states.
- East Asia comprising China, Japan and the Korean peninsula.
- Pacific Island States and Australia, a hub in this sub-region⁵.

Following this geographical structuring, we observe how the position of the Indo-Pacific countries with regard to events in the Gaza Strip also follows the balance of power within the region, where their responses are motivated by those of other nearby countries. Thus, connectivity as the main axiom in Indo-Pacific geopolitics is followed by hand-in-hand by a second key factor: perception of defence and security.

Stepping up the importance of security

Almost two weeks after the Hamas attack, President Biden announced a request to Congress for an extraordinary spending package of 105 billion dollars (100 billion euros)

⁴ GERING, Tuvia: 'The Indo-Pacific is calling Israel'. In *9Dashline* (27 September 2021). Available at [9DASHLINE — ¿The Indo-Pacific is calling Israel?](#) (Accessed on 02/11/2023).

⁵ Division established by MIGUEL CALABIA, Emilio de: '¿Por qué el concepto de Indo-Pacífico?' In *Asia Oriental: La interdependencia como causa de conflicto*. IEEE Strategy Papers, 219, pp. 13-14. Available at [Asia Oriental, la interdependencia como causa de conflicto \(ieee.es\)](#) (Accessed on 02/11/2023).

for US defence priorities. These of course involved Ukraine and Israel, but thirdly included the Indo-Pacific region⁶. Specifically, around three billion would go to the nuclear-powered submarine factory under the AUKUS agreements with the UK and Australia. A further two billion will go towards increasing Taiwan's military capabilities, a deterrent to China in the Indo-Pacific scenario⁷.

Nor is China oblivious to movements within the Indo-Pacific or to the aftershocks of the Hamas attack in the Middle East. China's position on reunification with Taiwan enters a new period of uncertainty given the uncertainty of facing the combined forces of the United States, Japan and South Korea and the risks of defeat for both Xi Jinping's prestige and that of the Chinese Communist Party. Conversely, the opening of another front for the United States after Ukraine could lead to resources being diverted from the defence of Taiwan, making it an ideal moment for Chinese claims⁸.

Beyond US-China rivalry, developments in the Middle East could have consequences for Israel's relationship with various countries in the Indo-Pacific arena. A recent study indicated that in 2022, Israeli defence exports in the region increased by 10% to reach record annual sales of more than \$12 billion, 30% of the total for Asia as a whole, although there is growing competition from other countries such as India, Japan and South Korea. The Israeli market feeds Asian countries sometimes lacking their traditional sources of imports, such as Russia, due to sanctions⁹.

⁶ ANSORENA, Javier: 'La Administración Biden pelea en el Congreso por no separar la ayuda militar de Israel y de la de Ucrania'. In *ABC* (31 October 2023). Available at [La Administración Biden pelea en el Congreso por no separar la ayuda militar de Israel y de la de Ucrania \(abc.es\)](https://www.abc.es/2023/10/31/actualidad/abci-biden-pelea-congreso-no-separar-ayuda-militar-israel-ucrania-20231031.html) (Accessed on 02/11/2023).

⁷ MEGERIAN, Chris & MIN KIM, Seung: 'Biden to Ask Congress for \$105 Billion to Bolster Israel and Ukraine, the U.S.-Mexico Border, and the Indo-Pacific'. In *Time* (19 October 2023). Available at [Biden to Ask Congress for \\$105 Billion to Bolster Israel and Ukraine, the Southern Border and the Indo-Pacific | TIME](https://www.time.com/2023/10/19/biden-ask-congress-105-billion-israel-ukraine-southern-border-indo-pacific/) (Accessed on 02/11/2023).

⁸ TAKE, Sayumi: 'China watches how Israel-Hamas war affects U.S. 'posture' in Indo-Pacific'. In *Nikkei Asia* (25 October 2023). Available at [China watches how Israel-Hamas war affects U.S. 'posture' in Indo-Pacific - Nikkei Asia](https://asia.nikkei.com/News/China/China-watches-how-Israel-Hamas-war-affects-U.S.-posture-in-Indo-Pacific) (Accessed on 02/11/2023).

⁹ 'Israel's defence exports will rise, boosting diplomacy'. In *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief* (4 October 2023). Available at [Israel's defence exports will rise, boosting diplomacy - Oxford Analytica Daily Brief \(oxan.com\)](https://www.oxan.com/analysis/israel-defence-exports-will-rise-boosting-diplomacy) (Accessed on 30/20/23).

The Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal

In the immediate aftermath of the 7 October attacks, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his support for Israel and condemned Hamas on X. Decades ago, India was a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause, although within its traditional policy of non-alignment it did not disdain relations with Israel either. In 1992, India opened its embassy in Tel Aviv and, since then, trade between the two countries and collaboration in various sectors began. For example, with one of Haifa's two ports belonging to the Adani group, while between 2000 and 2022 Israeli investment reached a value of more than \$270 billion, making it one of India's main trading partners in the defence sector. Good relations with Middle Eastern countries are of paramount importance to the Modi government because of economic interests and the large Indian diaspora in the region¹⁰.

However, the current rapprochement between India and Israel can also be seen in the affinities between Modi's government and Netanyahu's, bridging the gap between two different religions and cultures —Hindu and Hebrew— but sharing two characteristics common to both countries. On the one hand, the clearly 'ethno-nationalist' character of the political projects of their current leaders, in addition to an exponentially hostile stance and rejecting the Muslim minorities established within their own borders¹¹.

From Pakistan, India's traditional enemy and with which some border frictions are reopening in Jamnu and Kashmir¹², the position on Palestine continues to condemn Israeli attacks and calling on the international community to establish an unconditional ceasefire, while mass demonstrations are taking place in different cities chanting slogans against the United States and Israel¹³.

Other countries in the region, for example in Nepal, reacted similar to India and expressed solidarity with Israel, as ten Nepalese students were also killed in Hamas attacks. Sri

¹⁰ DE POLI, Alessandra: 'Del apoyo a Palestina a los acuerdos con Israel: el reposicionamiento de la India en Oriente Medio'. In *Asianews* (13 October 2023). Available at [INDIAN MANDALA Del apoyo a Palestina a los acuerdos con Israel: el reposicionamiento de la India en Oriente Medio \(asianews.it\)](https://www.asianews.it/news-story/indian-mandala-del-apoyo-a-palestina-a-los-acuerdos-con-israel-el-reposicionamiento-de-la-india-en-oriente-medio) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

¹¹ See ESSA, Azad: *Hostile homelands. The new alliance between India and Israel*. Pluto Press, London, Las Vegas, 2023, 232 p. ISBN 978-0-7453-4505-5

¹² 'Pakistán denuncia la muerte de dos civiles por disparos "no provocados" de India en la región de Cachemira'. In *Europa Press* (25 October 2023). Available at [Pakistán denuncia la muerte de dos civiles por disparos "no provocados" de India en la región de Cachemira \(europapress.es\)](https://www.europapress.es/pakistan-denuncia-la-muerte-de-dos-civiles-por-disparos-no-provocados-de-india-en-la-region-de-cachemira) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

¹³ 'Miles protestan en Pakistán por bombardeos israelíes en Franja de Gaza'. In *Los Angeles Times* (30 October 2023). Available at [Miles protestan en Pakistán por bombardeos israelíes en Franja de Gaza - Los Angeles Times \(latimes.com\)](https://www.latimes.com/pakistan-protest-israeli-bombing-gaza) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

Lanka's position is more moderate as a result of its complicated internal situation, condemning the deaths caused by both Hamas and Israel in Gaza. Another actor in the region, Bhutan, which has formal relations with Israel, has also been lukewarm on the open conflict¹⁴.

Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia, the restraint with which the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has treated the outbreak of violence in the Middle East is striking. ASEAN is the main supranational body in the sub-region and groups Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Singapore and Myanmar. A summit with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCG) was taking place at the time the events unfolded, which explains their reaction in addition to their traditional neutrality in open conflict, with a joint call for an immediate ceasefire, the release of hostages and the urgent entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip¹⁵.

There is evidence of disunity in the response to the crisis within ASEAN itself, oscillating between the position of the Philippines in total support of Israel, and that of Indonesia, which is more belligerent with respect to the Israeli reaction and has been involved in the construction of infrastructures in the Gaza Strip for years¹⁶. Indonesia, the country with the world's largest Muslim population, does not recognise Israel as a state. Last March, the country was stripped of hosting the U20 World Cup because of massive anti-Semitic demonstrations, especially in Jakarta, as Israel was to take part in the competition¹⁷. Another state that does not recognise Israel is Malaysia, also Muslim-majority and which,

¹⁴ KUGELMAN, Michael: 'Will India Draw Closer to Israel?' In *Foreign Policy* (11 October 2023). Available at [Israel-Hamás War: Will India Draw Closer to Israel? \(foreignpolicy.com\)](https://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2023/10/11/india_draw_closer_to_israel) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

¹⁵ 'El Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo y la ASEAN llaman al alto el fuego inmediato entre Hamás e Israel'. In *Europa Press* (20 October 2023). Available at [El Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo y la ASEAN llaman al alto el fuego inmediato entre Hamás e Israel \(europapress.es\)](https://www.europapress.es/) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

¹⁶ STRANGIO, Sebastian: 'How Southeast Asia Has Responded to the Israel-Hamas Conflict'. In *The Diplomat* (10 October 2023). Available at [How Southeast Asia Has Responded to the Israel-Hamas Conflict - The Diplomat](https://www.diplomat.com/article/how-southeast-asia-has-responded-to-the-israel-hamas-conflict) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

¹⁷ REGAN, Helen & JAMALUDDIN, Masrur: 'La FIFA quita a Indonesia la sede de la Copa Mundial Sub-20 tras comentarios sobre la participación de Israel'. In *CNN Español* (30 March 2023). Available at [La FIFA quita a Indonesia la sede de la Copa Mundial Sub-20 \(cnn.com\)](https://www.cnn.com/espanol/sport/fifa-indonesia-copa-mundial-sub-20) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

like its Indonesian neighbour, has criticised the Israeli reaction and mass demonstrations have been held to condemn it¹⁸.

But some ASEAN countries have excellent relations with Israel, such as the Philippines or Singapore, where in 2020 an Israeli embassy was opened and previously non-existent trade relations were initiated, although due to social polarisation, public demonstrations in support of either Israel or the Palestinians have been banned¹⁹. The same is true of Vietnam, a country with which Israel has fluid trade, which is very sensitive, especially as it affects the defence sector, where Israel is a major supplier. The Vietnamese government appealed for calm and restraint on the Middle East, calling for negotiations between the parties²⁰. Like Cambodia, which issued a communiqué expressing its condemnation of all forms of violence and calling on the international community to work towards a humanitarian ceasefire.

East Asia

The main Indo-Pacific region, including China, Japan and South Korea, has been characterised by caution and institutional statements calling for conciliation. Chinese diplomacy was a major architect of the historic return to relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran last May, presenting itself as a power of consensus and dialogue in the Middle East even vis-à-vis Israel, as China is neither a strategic competitor nor a threat. Since 7 October, beyond some reports highlighting the presence of Chinese vessels in seas adjacent to the conflict zone, but in response to pre-scheduled naval exercises with Oman²¹, China has presented itself as a mediator in a possible de-escalation of Israeli-Palestinian violence, including criticism of the Israeli government's response to Hamas

¹⁸ AIZA, Mohamad: 'The Growing Significance of Malaysia and Indonesia's Non-Recognition of Israel'. In *The Diplomat* (23 October 2023). Available at [The Growing Significance of Malaysia and Indonesia's Non-Recognition of Israel - The Diplomat](#) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

¹⁹ 'Singapur prohíbe las protestas vinculadas a Israel y Palestina por motivos de seguridad'. In *SWI swissinfo* (18 October 2023). At [Singapur prohíbe las protestas vinculadas a Israel y Palestina por motivos de seguridad - SWI swissinfo.ch](#) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

²⁰ 'Vietnam condena todos los ataques contra civiles e infraestructuras civiles'. In *Revista Vietnam* (25 October 2023). Available at [Vietnam condena todos los ataques contra civiles e infraestructuras civiles \(vnanet.vn\)](#) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

²¹ DANG, Yuanyue: 'China PLA stationed up to 6 warships in Middle East over past week amid rising tensions from Israel-Gaza war: reports'. In *South China Morning Post* (19 October 2023). Available at [China PLA stationed up to 6 warships in Middle East over past week amid rising tensions from Israel-Gaza war: reports | South China Morning Post \(scmp.com\)](#) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

attacks and the US position of vetoing a UN Security Council resolution calling for an interim ceasefire. Finally, China has announced humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip²².

China is now one of Israel's main trading partners and prefers to operate in safe, non-conflictive environments, so it stepped up its mediation efforts between Israelis and Palestinians by proposing an international peace conference and dispatching its special envoy for the Middle East, Zhai Jun, to Israel to work towards ending hostilities, while not side-lining the Palestinian side. Last summer, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas signed a strategic partnership with Xi Jinping and, in a show of complete harmony, even declared that the repression of China's Uighur Muslims was a matter of extremism and not human rights²³.

Meanwhile, it was the Taiwanese government that reached out to Israel in May, announcing future defence and security agreements and even comparing Taiwan's difficult relationship with China to that of Israel and its Arab neighbours. In the midst of the election campaign, the current government of Tsai Ing-wen categorically condemned the Hamas attack and aligned itself with 'like-minded countries to fight threats and violence and to safeguard freedom', a clear reference to Israel²⁴.

Japan condemned Hamas for its attacks and also pledged \$10 million in humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip. Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa met with Mahmoud Abbas on 14 October while attending an international conference in Egypt to discuss solutions to the conflict²⁵. This raised the misgivings of the Netanyahu government, which declared that Japan should not provide such aid because it was used by Hamas. As in the case of other countries, we are faced with a state that must play the tricky balancing act. Japan

²² CAL, Lucas de la: 'China mueve ficha en su ambición de convertirse en mediadora en la guerra entre Israel y Hamás'. In *El Mundo* (16 October 2023). Available at [China mueve ficha en su ambición de convertirse en mediadora en la guerra entre Israel y Hamás | Internacional \(elmundo.es\)](#) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

²³ SHEPHERD, Christian & LI, Lyric: 'Where China stands on the Israel-Gaza war and what it stands to gain'. In *The Washington Post* (3 November 2023). Available at [Where China stands on the Israel-Gaza war and what it stands to gain - The Washington Post](#) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

²⁴ HAIME, Jordyn: 'Taiwan Hoping for Closer Defense Ties With Israel, Minister Says'. In *Haaretz* (17 May 2023). Available at [Taiwan Hoping for Closer Defense Ties With Israel, Minister Says - Israel News - Haaretz.com](#) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

²⁵ 'Foreign minister considers Israel visit as conflict escalates'. In *The Japan Times* (25 October 2023). Available at [Foreign minister considers Israel visit as conflict escalates - The Japan Times](#) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

advocates a two-state solution that allows Israelis and Palestinians to coexist, while in the last decade it has provided millions in aid to the Palestinians²⁶.

However, global geopolitics and the interplay of alliances in the Indo-Pacific mean that Japan is more closely aligned with the United States and its allies, such as Israel, with whom it shares some common interests. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida condemned the Hamas attack but refrained from using the word 'terrorism' to define it and is fighting for Japan to have its own Middle East policy beyond its dependence on the US. The Middle East oil market is vital to Japan's survival: 80 per cent of the crude oil needed for its economy comes from there. Its response to the current crisis must therefore also calibrate the response of countries such as Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates²⁷.

Different is the case with the Republic of Korea or South Korea which is, like Japan, a strong US ally in the Indo-Pacific but a competitor to Israel in the region's defence markets. President Yoon Suk-yeol called an emergency cabinet in response to the events of 7 October. The Hamas attacks were initially condemned and South Korea was nominated to work with the US to stop the escalation of violence, although no explicit support for Israel was shown. This apparent hesitancy or restraint in conveying the South Korean position on the crisis is shifting towards an understanding of the Israeli reaction, also in the light of the demonstrations of support for Israel on the streets of some cities²⁸.

For its part, the threatening neighbour to the north, the People's Republic of Korea or North Korea, showed its firm support for Hamas and the Palestinian cause in general, accusing the international community of collusion with Israel's policy towards the Palestinian people and advocating the solution of an independent Palestinian state, without mentioning the conditions Israel, dubbed a 'criminal country', would be left in. Shortly afterwards, some South Korean media reported that the Hamas attack may have been aided by North Korea either with equipment in the form of rockets and shells or by cooperating in intelligence work through cyberspace. Kim Jong Un's government rejected

²⁶ GEDDIE, John & TAKENAKA, Kiyoshi: 'Palestinian envoy pleas for Japan to maintain aid and neutrality'. In *Reuters* (13 October 2023). Available at [Palestinian envoy pleas for Japan to maintain aid and neutrality | Reuters](#) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

²⁷ TAN, Angeline: 'El equilibrio económico y diplomático de Tokio en la guerra entre Israel y Hamás'. In *Asianews* (11 October 2023). Available at [JAPAN - ISRAEL - PALESTINE El equilibrio económico y diplomático de Tokio en la guerra entre Israel y Hamás \(asianews.it\)](#) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

²⁸ 'Hundreds rally in Seoul to support Israel as ground war looms'. In *Korea JoongAng Daily* (17 October 2023). Available at [Hundreds rally in Seoul to support Israel as ground war looms \(joins.com\)](#) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

the accusations, but the Middle East crisis has become another matter of disunity on the Korean peninsula²⁹.

Australia and the Pacific States

In the Pacific Islands, only the states of Australia and Papua New Guinea have diplomatic representation in Israel, although in the case of Australia, business relations especially in the security sector were growing, symbolised for example by the annual Be'er Sheva Dialogue, which since 2015 has brought together senior Australian and Israeli officials and analysts³⁰; as in other countries, there is a strong polarisation in Australian society regarding developments in the Gaza Strip³¹. In fact, after the Abraham Accords and following the American example, Australia was one of the countries that officially recognised the Israeli capital of Jerusalem, although in August 2023 Australian diplomacy backed up and re-established the previous policy that defined the West Bank and East Jerusalem as 'occupied Palestinian territories' and denounced the illegality of Israeli settlements, again supporting the two-state solution³².

In the aftermath of the 7 October attacks, the Australian government is moving between defending Israel's legitimate right to defend itself against Hamas attacks and calling on the Netanyahu government to respect international law and the laws of war by avoiding civilian deaths. With regard to other island countries in the region, Israel has already participated in a number of joint summits with the Pacific Islands Forum, most recently in September 2023, focusing on the fight against climate change and even considering the possibility of Fiji and Nauru opening their own embassies in Israel or establishing

²⁹ YOON, Dasl: 'South Korea Says Hamas Attack May Have Relied on North Korean Help'. In *The Wall Street Journal* (18 October 2023). Available at [South Korea Says Hamas Attack May Have Relied on North Korean Help \(wsj.com\)](https://www.wsj.com/news/asia/south-korea-says-hamas-attack-may-have-relied-on-north-korean-help) (Accessed on 03/11/2023).

³⁰ 'Be'er Sheva Dialogue 2022 - Proceedings and Outcomes'. In *Australian Strategic Policy Institute* (22 February 2023). Available at [Be'er Sheva Dialogue 2022 - Proceedings and Outcomes | Australian Strategic Policy Institute | ASPI](https://www.aspi.org.au/beer-sheva-dialogue-2022-proceedings-and-outcomes) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

³¹ 'Miles de personas se manifiestan en Australia por el conflicto palestino-israelí'. In *Infobae* (29 October 2023). Available at [Miles de personas se manifiestan en Australia por el conflicto palestino-israelí - Infobae](https://www.infobae.com/2023/10/29/miles-de-personas-se-manifiestan-en-australia-por-el-conflicto-palestino-israeli/) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

³² HURST, Daniel & BUTLER, Josh: 'Australia to officially resume use of term 'Occupied Palestinian Territories', reversing Coalition stance'. In *The Guardian* (8 August 2023) Available at [Australia to officially resume use of term 'Occupied Palestinian Territories', reversing Coalition stance | Australia news | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/08/australia-to-officially-resume-use-of-term-occupied-palestinian-territories-reversing-coalition-stance) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

diplomatic relations for the first time with other countries such as Niue³³. But, as in other Indo-Pacific scenarios, Hamas attacks and the Israeli reaction seem to jeopardise this rapprochement. Nor does it help that some five hundred islanders from diverse backgrounds such as Australia, Samoa, Vanuatu, Cook Islands, Tonga, Fiji or Solomon Islands have been trapped in Gaza and Israel in the midst of the conflict and at certain risk to their lives³⁴.

Conclusions: The Indo-Pacific connects with Israel

Following the publication of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2019, renewed in February 2022³⁵, Israel, which until then referred to the scenario as Asia-Pacific, was one of the first countries to adopt the new strategic concept of the term based on connectivity and security, expanding its interest in strengthening its relations with countries hitherto far removed from its interests such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and ASEAN members, most notably Indonesia, perhaps the country more hostile to Israel than the Indo-Pacific framework. Nor did this mean that relations with China declined; on the contrary, by 2020 bilateral trade was estimated to have increased by 45% in a decade and China overtook the United States as Israel's largest source of imports³⁶.

For the United States, Israel is also an exceptional ally in the Indo-Pacific, an ally that can also benefit from the economic opportunities offered by the Indo-Pacific market. Tellingly, then Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu visited Jerusalem in August 2021 to present Japan's concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) as a strategic imperative, taking advantage of the new friendship between Israel and the moderate Sunni Gulf States, as Japan could also see Israel as a first-rate ally against threats such

³³ 'Netanyahu talks climate change with Pacific region leaders'. In *Jewish News Syndicate* (23 September 2023). Available at [Netanyahu talks climate change with Pacific region leaders - JNS.org](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

³⁴ ROVOI, Christine: 'Pacific governments monitoring Israel-Hamas conflict'. In *Stuff* (11 October 2023). Available at [Pacific governments monitoring Israel-Hamas conflict | Stuff.co.nz](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

³⁵ 'Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States'. In *The White House* (11 February 2022). Available at [FACT SHEET: Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States | The White House](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

³⁶ KEINON, Herb: 'Israel is clearly pivoting to Asia, Netanyahu announces in Singapore'. In *The Jerusalem Post* (21 February 2017). Available at [Israel is clearly pivoting to Asia, Netanyahu announces in Singapore - Israel Politics - The Jerusalem Post \(jpost.com\)](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

as China, North Korea or Russia³⁷. As we have seen, security cooperation with Southeast Asia —particularly Vietnam and Taiwan— has not been negligible in recent years either, something that is not likely to change in the future despite the severity of the crisis that erupted on 7 October³⁸.

Israel is still a major supplier of weapons and disruptive military technologies to the Indo-Pacific region, such as the *Pegasus* spying system. Between 2016 and 2020, it was the eighth largest arms exporter and, for example, India accounted for 43 per cent of its total sales, almost half. Currently, apart from India, which continues to be the main recipient country with purchases of around five billion dollars a year, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and Vietnam emerge as relevant partners, followed by Australia and the Philippines³⁹.

Besides industry and defence markets, other issues connect Israel and the Indo-Pacific also within the scope of security, such as concerns about cyberspace —with common initiatives by Israel and several countries such as the Counter Ransomware International Initiative (CRI)⁴⁰— or the security of maritime routes, closely linked to the export of hydrocarbons including the important gas fields off Israel's Mediterranean coast. In short, the Indo-Pacific middle powers look to Israel as an ally or at least a force multiplier to counterbalance China's presence. Since the Abraham Accords in 2020, Israel has been integrated into bilateral or multi-state agreements, such as the Arab-Mediterranean Corridor⁴¹, the Indo-Arab alliance with India as the lead country for Israeli interests⁴², the security partnership with Australia and the United Arab Emirates projected in the Be'er

³⁷ 'Japan seeks efforts by Israel to ease tensions in the Middle East'. In *The Japan Times* (19 August 2021). Available at [Japan seeks efforts by Israel to ease tensions in the Middle East - The Japan Times](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

³⁸ SINGH NINGTHOUJAM, Alvite: 'The Military-Security Dimension of Israel-Southeast Asia Relations'. In *Middle East Institute* (7 January 2020). Available at [The Military-Security Dimension of Israel-Southeast Asia Relations | Middle East Institute \(mei.edu\)](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

³⁹ MARÍN, José Luis: 'El negocio de la guerra: el comercio de armas de Israel en el mundo'. In *El Orden Mundial* (5 November 2023). Available at [El negocio de la guerra: el comercio de armas de Israel en el mundo - Mapas de El Orden Mundial - EOM](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

⁴⁰ KOSOGOWSKI, Mandi: 'Israel participates in 2nd International White House Counter Ransomware Initiative Summit'. In *Israel Defense* (2 November 2022). Available at [Israel participates in 2nd International White House Counter Ransomware Initiative Summit | Israel Defense](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

⁴¹ TANCHUM, Michaël: *India's Arab-Mediterranean Corridor: A paradigm shift in strategic connectivity to Europe*. In 'South Asian Scan', National University of Singapore & Institute of South Asian Studies (August 2021, no. 14). Available at [South-Asia-Scan-Aug-2021-V4.pdf \(nus.edu.sg\)](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

⁴² SPYER, Jonathan: 'La 'Alianza Indo-Abrahámica' de India e Israel continúa con gran ímpetu'. In *Aurora* (27 November 2022). Available at [La 'Alianza Indo-Abrahámica' de India e Israel continúa con gran ímpetu - Aurora \(aurora-israel.co.il\)](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

Sheva Dialogue 2020⁴³ or more recently the India-Europe infrastructure linkage project via Saudi Arabia and Israel, unveiled at the G20 summit in New Delhi in September 2023⁴⁴.

In perspective, the situation in the Gaza Strip and a possible extension of the conflict to other parts of the Middle East could hinder this Israeli projection into the Indo-Pacific, with perhaps the main stumbling block being the normalisation of relations with some currently very hostile countries, such as Indonesia, the de facto leader of ASEAN. Moreover, as in the case of Ukraine, there are conclusions to be drawn from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On 10 October, Taiwan's defence ministry announced the creation of a working group to study the open war with Hamas, analysing the role of intelligence in preventing conflict or countering external military threats, as well as the need to invest even more in defence. Israel invests proportionally much more than Taiwan in this respect, 4.5% of GDP compared to 2.5% in the case of Taiwan. A figure that the island's advocates of deterring China want to raise⁴⁵.

Javier Fernández Aparicio

IEEE Analyst

@jafeap

⁴³ 'Australia – Israel Sixth Annual Be'er Sheva Dialogue'. In *Australian Strategic Policy Institute* (November 2020). Available at [2020 Be'er Sheva Dialogue - Proceedings & Outcomes .pdf](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

⁴⁴ ABOUDOUH, Ahmed: 'An India-Middle East-Europe corridor is unlikely to boost Saudi-Israel normalisation'. In *Chatham House* (15 September 2023). Available at [An India-Middle East-Europe corridor is unlikely to boost Saudi-Israel normalisation | Chatham House - International Affairs Think Tank](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).

⁴⁵ LEE, Yimou & BLANCHARD, Ben: 'Taiwan Sets up Task Force to Study Israel-Hamas War'. In *U.S. News & Reuters* (11 October 2023). Available at [Taiwan Sets up Task Force to Study Israel-Hamas War \(usnews.com\)](#) (Accessed on 06/11/2023).