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# **ARAB AIRSPACE BLOCKADE AFTER DOHA ATTACK**

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H A B T O O R R E S E A R C H . C O M

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This paper provides a comprehensive assessment of the potential economic, political, and security outcomes should the Arab and Islamic worlds enact a coordinated airspace blockade against Israel. The specified catalyst for this action is the Israeli airstrike on Hamas leadership in Doha, Qatar, on September 9, 2025, an event that has already precipitated a significant realignment of regional diplomatic postures.

The central thesis of this analysis is that a coordinated airspace blockade would represent a strategic shock to Israel, not merely a logistical inconvenience. It would function as a form of asymmetric economic warfare, inflicting severe, multi-sector damage on Israel's globally integrated economy by targeting its core vulnerabilities in aviation, high-value trade, and tourism. The direct economic impact is estimated to be a contraction of 4.8% to 5.7% of Israel's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a shock sufficient to trigger a deep recession.

Politically, the blockade would fundamentally re-order the regional geopolitical landscape, shattering the post-2020 status quo established by the Abraham Accords and rendering further normalization efforts untenable. It would accelerate a strategic pivot by Gulf Arab states away from a singular reliance on the United States as a security guarantor, fostering a new, region-driven security architecture. For the United States, such a development would present an acute diplomatic crisis, forcing a choice between its ironclad alliance with Israel and its vital strategic partnerships with Arab nations, thereby undermining a cornerstone of its Middle East policy.

From a security perspective, the blockade would act as a "gray zone" challenge, a highly coercive act that exists in the ambiguous space between peace and declared war. It would degrade the operational reach of the Israeli Air Force (IAF) and place the onus of military escalation squarely on Israel. A decision by Israel to forcibly challenge the blockade would create a high-probability pathway to a wider regional military conflict, potentially drawing in the Gulf states, Iran and its proxies, and the United States. The airspace blockade, therefore, represents a plausible and potent instrument of collective action that could irrevocably alter the strategic balance in the Middle East.



## 1. The Doha Summit: From Airstrike to Unified Condemnation

The political plausibility of a coordinated airspace blockade against Israel is rooted in the unprecedented and unified regional condemnation following the Israeli airstrike in Doha. This event was not a routine incident in the long history of the Arab-Israeli conflict; it was a paradigm-shifting act that violated the sovereignty of a key regional mediator and a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), creating the political capital necessary for previously unthinkable collective action.

### 1.1. An Unprecedented Attack on a Sovereign Mediator

On September 9, 2025, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) executed a complex, long-range airstrike against a residential compound in the Leqtaifiya district of Doha, Qatar.<sup>1</sup> The stated target was the senior political leadership of Hamas, who were gathered at the location—a Qatari government-provided complex—to deliberate on a ceasefire proposal presented by the United States.<sup>1</sup> This operation marked Israel's first known military attack on Qatari soil and the first direct strike on a member of the GCC, a bloc of nations with deep security and economic ties to the West.

The strike, reportedly codenamed Atzeret HaDin (Day of Judgment), was a sophisticated military undertaking. It involved a package of eight Israeli F-15 and four F-35 fighter jets launching air-launched ballistic missiles from a standoff position over the Red Sea. This attack profile was deliberately chosen to avoid entering the sovereign airspace of Arab nations, with the missiles traveling on a high-altitude trajectory over Saudi Arabia before striking their target in Doha.

Despite its technical sophistication, the operation was a definitive tactical failure. It did not succeed in killing any of the senior Hamas leaders it targeted, a fact confirmed by Hamas and later acknowledged by Israeli officials whose initial optimism waned. The strike did, however, result in the deaths of several lower-level Hamas members, including the son of chief negotiator Khalil al-Hayya, and multiple civilians. Critically, the attack also killed a member of Qatar's Internal Security Force, Corporal Badr Saad Mohammed Al-Humaidi Al-Dosari, and wounded others.



The political fallout was immediate and severe. Israel claimed the strike was a justified retaliation for a shooting at Ramot Junction in Jerusalem the previous day. However, the international perception, particularly within the region, was that Israel had attacked the very process of diplomacy. Qatar's Prime Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, labeled the strike an act of "state terror" and declared that the ongoing ceasefire negotiations were no longer "valid". The attack effectively collapsed the U.S.-backed peace track, a goal that some analysts attributed to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, which had been accused of consistently obstructing prior ceasefire talks. The strike's failure to achieve its primary objective while succeeding in killing a Qatari officer and violating the sovereignty of a key mediator created a politically disastrous outcome for Israel. It incurred the maximum diplomatic blowback with no discernible strategic gain. This asymmetry—a high political cost for zero military benefit—made it politically expedient for a broad coalition of nations, even those with no affinity for Hamas, to unify in their condemnation of Israel's "reckless" and "treacherous" actions.

## 1.2. The Emergency Arab-Islamic Summit: A Chorus of Condemnation

In direct response to the attack, Qatar moved swiftly to convene an emergency joint summit of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Doha on September 15, 2025.<sup>1</sup> The gathering was distinguished by what observers called an "unprecedented show of unity". Over 50 leaders from across the Arab and Islamic worlds attended, including heads of state who had been regional adversaries only a few years prior. The presence of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Emirati President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed—whose countries had led a diplomatic and economic blockade against Qatar from 2017 to 2021—was a powerful symbol of a profound shift in regional priorities.

The summit's rhetoric was uniformly scathing. Speaker after speaker condemned the strike not merely as an attack on Qatar, but as a threat to the sovereignty and stability of the entire region.

- **Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani**, opened the summit with a fiery speech, calling the attack "blatant, treacherous, and cowardly" and accusing the Israeli government of seeking to make Gaza "no longer liveable".
- **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi** described Israel's actions as "reckless behavior" that threatened to undo "generations of peace-building efforts".



- **Jordan's King Abdullah II** framed the strike as part of a broader pattern of Israeli aggression and "living proof" that the threat posed by Israel was "without limits".
- **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** argued that the "assault on Qatar has brought Israeli arrogance to a dangerous level" and called for coordinated economic pressure against Israel.

This shared threat perception—that Israel was acting with impunity and that any Arab or Muslim capital could be next—created a powerful consensus. This regional unity was amplified by widespread international condemnation from the United Nations Security Council (with rare U.S. backing), the United Kingdom, Russia, China, and the European Union, all of whom denounced the violation of Qatar's sovereignty.

### 1.3. Key Resolutions: The GCC Defense Pact and Threats to Normalization

While the summit's final joint communiqué was largely composed of strong condemnations and pledges of solidarity, it contained two elements with significant, actionable implications.

First, the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), meeting on the sidelines, announced its decision "to activate the mechanisms of joint defense and the Gulf deterrence capabilities". Qatari officials confirmed that the bloc's Unified Military Command would convene in Doha to build up "Gulf deterrent capabilities" and assess its "joint defence council's defence posture" in light of the aggression. This represented a pivotal institutional step toward creating a collective security framework aimed at deterring future Israeli actions. The activation of this pact provided the formal, institutional groundwork for planning and executing coordinated military and security responses, moving beyond mere rhetoric. An airspace blockade, as a non-kinetic but highly coercive measure, would fall squarely within the mandate of such a "joint defense" framework, making it a logical first test of this newly energized mechanism.

Second, the draft declaration of the broader Arab-Islamic summit contained a direct warning that Israel's hostile actions posed a serious threat to the normalization process, including both existing and future agreements. This put the 2020 Abraham Accords—which had established diplomatic ties between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain—in immediate jeopardy and effectively ended any near-term prospect of a much-anticipated normalization deal with Saudi Arabia.





**Table 1: Key Participant Positions at the Emergency Arab-Islamic Summit**

Country/Organization	Leader/Representative	Key Statement/Position
<b>Qatar</b>	Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani	Labeled the attack "cowardly and treacherous"; accused Israel of sabotaging negotiations and lying about its desire to free hostages.
<b>Egypt</b>	President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi	Warned Israel's "reckless behavior" was escalating the conflict and threatened to undo "generations of peace-building efforts."
<b>Turkey</b>	President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	Called for economic pressure on Israel; stated the attack brought Israeli "banditry" and "arrogance to a dangerous level."
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman	Called for a unified "Arab, Islamic and international response to confront the aggression" and deter Israel's "criminal practices."
<b>UAE</b>	Anwar Gargash (Diplomatic Advisor)	Stated that "the security of the Arab Gulf states is indivisible" and affirmed "full solidarity" with Qatar.



Country/Organization	Leader/Representative	Key Statement/Position
<b>Jordan</b>	King Abdullah II	Described the strike as "living proof" that the threat Israel poses is "without limits" and called for a "clear, decisive, and deterring" response.
<b>Iran</b>	President Masoud Pezeshkian	Warned that "no Arab or Muslim country is safe" and that any Arab or Muslim capital could be the next target.
<b>Arab League</b>	Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit	Stated the message of the summit was "'enough silence' to the acts of thuggery by this rogue state."
<b>OIC</b>	Secretary-General Hissein Brahim Taha	Called for "firm decisions" against Israel and for the international community to hold it accountable for its crimes.



## 2. Economic Strangulation: Quantifying the Impact of an Air Blockade

A coordinated airspace blockade by the Arab and Islamic worlds would constitute a form of economic siege, targeting the foundational pillars of Israel's modern, globalized economy. The impact would extend far beyond the aviation sector, crippling high-value exports, decimating the tourism industry, and delivering a macroeconomic shock of severe proportions. The blockade's strategic power lies in its asymmetric nature: it leverages geographic control—a low-cost, non-military asset for the blockading states—to attack the most sensitive and high-value components of Israel's economy.

### 2.1. Direct Impact on Israel's Aviation Sector

A comprehensive blockade enacted by the 22 members of the Arab League, supplemented by key OIC states such as Turkey, Pakistan, and Indonesia, would create an impassable barrier to Israel's east and south. This would sever the most direct and economically viable flight corridors to the high-growth markets of Asia and significantly complicate routes to Africa and even parts of North America.

The operational consequences for Israeli carriers would be immediate and catastrophic. Long-haul flights to destinations such as Bangkok, Mumbai, and Dubai—all listed as destinations for Israel's flag carrier, El Al—would become logistically unfeasible. These routes would require extensive and costly detours, either north over the eastern Mediterranean and Central Asia or south over Africa. Such rerouting would add several hours to flight times, dramatically increasing operational costs. Based on industry data, the hourly operating cost for a Boeing 777 is approximately \$7,400-\$9,500, while a Boeing 787 costs between \$7,200 and \$10,300 per hour. An additional four to six hours of flight time per leg would add \$30,000 to \$60,000 in direct costs for fuel, crew, and maintenance for a single flight. These costs would render ticket prices uncompetitive, erase profit margins, and make the routes commercially unsustainable.

The financial impact on Israel's aviation sector would be profound. El Al reported record annual revenue of \$3.43 billion in 2024, driven in part by a near-monopoly on lucrative North American routes after many foreign carriers suspended service during the war. A blockade would put this revenue stream at severe risk. While flights to Western Europe and some North American destinations might remain possible via a Mediterranean corridor, the loss of all Asian and African routes, combined with increased operational costs and security concerns, would be crippling. A conservative estimate projects a 60-75% reduction in El Al's revenue, resulting in annual losses exceeding





**\$2.0 billion to \$2.5 billion.** Smaller carriers like Israir and Arkia would face similar existential threats. Historical precedents, such as the temporary airspace closures during the 2025 conflict with Iran, demonstrated that even short-term restrictions force Israeli carriers to halt all operations and relocate their fleets abroad for safety.<sup>35</sup> A sustained blockade would transform this temporary paralysis into a permanent state of insolvency.

## 2.2. The Decimation of Israel's Tourism and Travel Economy

Israel's tourism sector, a vital component of its economy, is overwhelmingly dependent on air travel. In the pre-pandemic peak of 2019, the country welcomed a record 4.55 million tourist arrivals, which generated approximately \$8.46 billion (NIS 20 billion) in revenue.<sup>38</sup> Even during the post-conflict recovery of 2023, the sector contributed \$5.95 billion to the economy.<sup>38</sup> The industry, directly and indirectly, supports over 6% of total national employment.

An airspace blockade would effectively sever the lifelines of this industry. The largest source markets for Israeli tourism are the United States (19% of arrivals), France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Russia. A blockade would make travel from these countries exceptionally difficult, expensive, and perceived as unsafe. The resulting collapse in tourist arrivals would likely exceed 90%, mirroring the devastating impacts seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, when arrivals plummeted by over 80%, and the sharp downturn during the 2024 conflict.

The quantifiable economic damage would be immense. Based on 2023 figures, a 90% reduction in arrivals would translate into a direct annual loss of over \$5.3 billion in tourism receipts. This figure does not account for the cascading secondary effects on the broader economy, including the collapse of hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and transportation services, which would lead to widespread unemployment and business failures.

## 2.3. Severing the High-Tech Lifeline: Air Cargo and Supply Chain Disruption

The most severe economic impact of an airspace blockade would be on Israel's high-tech and high-value manufacturing sectors, which form the backbone of its modern export economy. Unlike bulk commodities, these industries rely almost exclusively on air freight for their "just-in-time" global supply chains. According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2022, air transport accounted for a staggering 58.2% of the total value of all exported goods, equivalent to **\$42.2 billion**.



Israel's top exports are high-value, low-volume goods for which speed and security are paramount: integrated circuits (\$9.99 billion), diamonds (\$9.13 billion), medical instruments (\$2.56 billion), and broadcasting equipment (\$3.34 billion) are prime examples. These goods are shipped by air precisely because their value depreciates quickly or their delivery is time-critical. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) estimates that while air freight is a small fraction of trade by tonnage, it accounts for approximately 35% of the total value of world trade. For Israel, this dependency is even more pronounced.

A blockade would cripple these vital supply chains. Rerouting air cargo is not merely an inconvenience; it introduces significant delays and costs that erode the core competitive advantage of Israeli firms. Previous disruptions in Middle Eastern airspace have led to freight rate hikes of 15-20% and increased transit times of several hours. A sustained, comprehensive blockade would be far more severe. The inability to guarantee rapid delivery to markets in Asia, Europe, and North America would lead to canceled contracts, loss of market share to competitors, and a potential exodus of multinational R&D operations from Israel.

A sustained blockade could place at least 50-60% of this air-dependent trade at risk, representing a potential annual economic impact of \$21 billion to \$25 billion in lost or delayed exports. This would also severely disrupt the import of critical components and raw materials needed by Israel's technology and defense industries, creating a vicious cycle of economic decline.

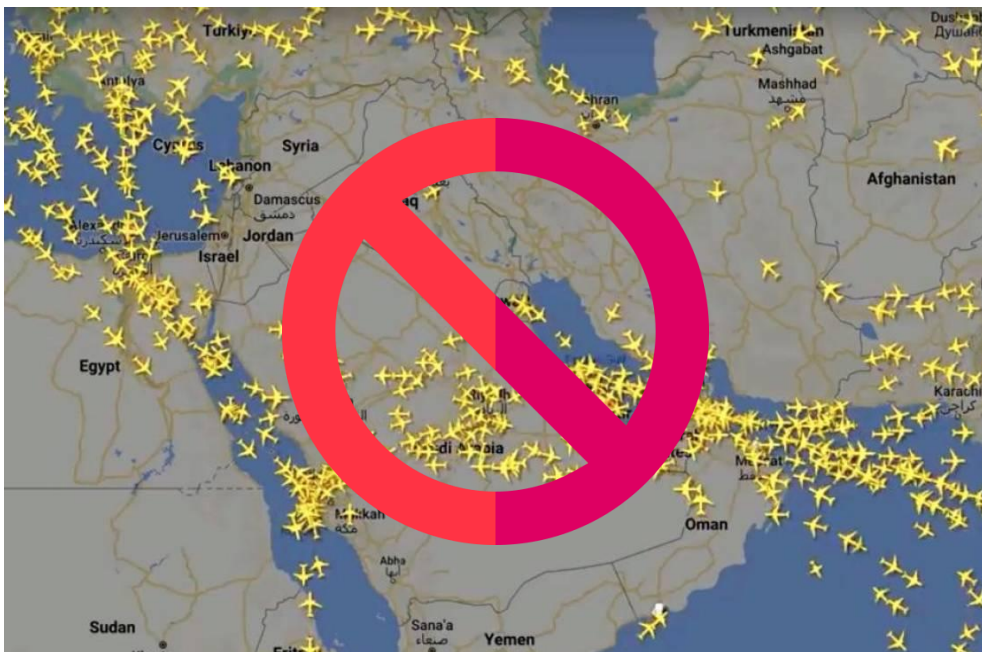
## 2.4. Macroeconomic Shock and Broader Consequences

The aggregate direct impact of the blockade would be sufficient to trigger a national economic crisis. The combined annual losses from the aviation, tourism, and air cargo sectors are estimated to be between **\$28 billion and \$33.5 billion**. Against Israel's projected 2025 nominal GDP of approximately \$583 billion, this represents a direct negative shock of **4.8% to 5.7% of GDP**. This level of economic contraction, comparable to the most severe global recessions, would lead to a surge in unemployment, a collapse in tax revenues, and a sharp decline in investor confidence.



While the primary impact is on Israel, the blockade would not be cost-free for the participating nations. Countries that sit on major East-West flight corridors, such as Iran and Iraq, derive significant revenue from overflight fees. Prior to recent conflicts, Iran earned nearly \$800 million annually from these fees, and airspace closures were estimated to cost the country \$2.2 million per day. Other nations, including Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, would also experience a loss of aviation-related revenue. However, for these states, the economic cost would be a small and manageable price to pay for the immense strategic leverage gained over Israel.

Furthermore, the blockade would not be a localized issue contained to the Middle East. By removing a critical transit region from the global aviation map, it would create systemic inefficiencies for international commerce. Airlines flying between Europe and Asia would be forced onto longer and more congested routes, either north through Central Asia or south over Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This would increase fuel consumption, raise operational costs, and lead to higher ticket prices and freight rates globally. This transforms the regional political dispute into a global economic problem, creating immense pressure on third parties, such as the United States and the European Union, to intervene not just for political reasons, but to protect their own economic interests from the inflationary and disruptive ripple effects.



**Table 2: Estimated Annual Economic Losses for Israel from Airspace Blockade (By Sector)**

<b>Economic Sector</b>	<b>Baseline Annual Value (2024/2025)</b>	<b>Estimated Impact Rate</b>	<b>Estimated Annual Loss (USD)</b>
Aviation (Carrier Revenue)	\$3.43 Billion (EI Al 2024)	60-75%	\$2.0 - \$2.5 Billion
Tourism (Inbound Receipts)	\$5.95 Billion (2023)	>90%	\$5.0 - \$6.0 Billion
Air Cargo (Value of Exports)	\$42.2 Billion (2022)	50-60%	\$21.0 - \$25.0 Billion
Total Direct Impact			\$28.0 - \$33.5 Billion
Estimated % of GDP	\$583 Billion (2025 est.)		4.8% - 5.7%



**Table 3: Rerouting Analysis for Key El Al Long-Haul Routes**

Route	Standard Flight Time	Blockaded Airspace	Feasible Detour Route	Additional Flight Time	Estimated Additional Cost (USD)
TLV - BKK (Bangkok)	~11 hours	Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Iran, Iraq, Jordan	South over Egypt/Sudan, then East across Indian Ocean	+5-7 hours	\$50,000 - \$70,000
TLV - JNB (Johannesburg)	~8 hours	Egypt, Sudan	West over Mediterranean, then South along African coast	+3-4 hours	\$30,000 - \$40,000
TLV - BOM (Mumbai)	~5.5 hours	Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman	South over Red Sea, then East (if possible)	+4-5 hours	\$40,000 - \$50,000
TLV - JFK (New York)	~12 hours	Potentially Turkey, Iraq	West over Mediterranean/Central Europe	+1-2 hours	\$10,000 - \$20,000



### 3. A New Geopolitical Order: Diplomatic and Political Fallout

The implementation of a coordinated airspace blockade would represent more than an economic or logistical challenge; it would signal a profound and likely irreversible shift in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. Such an act would mark the definitive end of the post-2020 regional integration project centered on the Abraham Accords and accelerate the emergence of a new, more confrontational security architecture in which Israel is viewed not as a partner, but as a primary source of regional instability.

#### 3.1. The Abraham Accords on Life Support

The 2020 Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco, were predicated on a shared perception of threats (primarily Iran) and a mutual interest in economic and technological cooperation. The Israeli airstrike on Doha fundamentally undermined this premise. By attacking a fellow GCC member state, Israel reframed itself in the eyes of its new Arab partners from a potential ally against a common foe to a direct and unpredictable threat to their own sovereignty and security.

The immediate reaction from the UAE, the driving force behind the Accords, was telling. It strongly condemned the "treacherous Israeli attack," summoned the Israeli diplomat in Abu Dhabi, and issued a statement affirming that aggression against any GCC member "constitutes an attack on the collective Gulf security framework". This sentiment was echoed in the draft resolution of the Doha summit, which warned that continued Israeli aggression could jeopardize all normalization agreements. The decision by organizers of the Dubai Airshow to bar Israeli firms from participating was a tangible sign of this deteriorating relationship.

A coordinated airspace blockade would force a definitive choice upon the Accords' signatories. It is politically untenable for the UAE, Bahrain, or Morocco to maintain normal aviation and diplomatic ties with Israel while the broader Arab and Islamic consensus, led by their powerful GCC partners, is actively enforcing a blockade. The pressure to join the collective action would be immense. Their participation would serve as a final verdict on the Accords, revealing them to be a transactional arrangement unable to withstand a fundamental conflict of interest with the broader Arab-Islamic world. The prospect of expanding the Accords to include Saudi Arabia, a cornerstone of U.S. regional strategy, would be extinguished indefinitely.





### 3.2. The Gulf's Strategic Pivot: From U.S. Reliance to Regional Self-Reliance

For decades, the security architecture of the Persian Gulf has been underpinned by an implicit guarantee: hosting major U.S. military installations provided a shield against external aggression. The Doha strike shattered this assumption. Qatar hosts Al-Udeid Air Base, the forward headquarters of U.S. Central Command, yet this formidable U.S. presence failed to deter—or was unable to prevent—an attack by a key U.S. ally. This event crystallized a growing perception across the Gulf that the United States is an increasingly unreliable security partner, either unwilling or unable to restrain Israel.

This perceived unreliability is set to accelerate an existing trend among Gulf states to diversify their strategic partnerships. In recent years, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have strengthened economic and diplomatic ties with China and Russia and expanded defense cooperation with other powers like Turkey, seeking to reduce their dependence on Washington. The Doha strike provides a powerful impetus to deepen these alternative relationships.

The activation of the GCC's joint defense pact is the most significant manifestation of this pivot toward regional self-reliance.<sup>13</sup> Historically focused on the threat from Iran, this collective security mechanism is now being reoriented to address the perceived threat from an aggressive and unrestrained Israel. A successful and sustained airspace blockade would serve as a powerful demonstration of collective Arab and Islamic agency, emboldening the trend toward a new, region-driven security order that is less deferential to the strategic priorities of the United States.

### 3.3. Washington's Dilemma: A Superpower Sidelined

The Doha strike and its aftermath placed the United States in an exceedingly difficult position, exposing the contradictions at the heart of its Middle East policy. The Trump administration was caught off guard, with the President expressing his displeasure with the Israeli action but proving unable to prevent it. The subsequent U.S. vote in favor of the UN Security Council statement condemning the strike was a necessary act of damage control to placate its furious Arab allies, but it did little to erase the perception that Washington lacks leverage over the Netanyahu government.<sup>1</sup>



## 4. Security and Military Ramifications: From Blockade to Battlefield

An airspace blockade is not a passive diplomatic protest; it is a strategic act of coercion with significant security and military implications. It would directly challenge Israel's operational freedom, degrade its military capabilities, and create a high-stakes environment where the potential for miscalculation and escalation to armed conflict is exceptionally high. The blockade would function as a classic "gray zone" tactic, an aggressive and damaging act that deliberately occupies the ambiguous space between peace and declared war, thereby placing the onus of military escalation squarely on Israel.

### 4.1. The Legal Battleground: The Chicago Convention

The legal basis for an airspace blockade rests on the foundational principle of national sovereignty in international aviation law. Article 1 of the 1944 Convention on International Civil Aviation (the Chicago Convention), to which nearly all nations are signatories, recognizes that every state has "complete and exclusive sovereignty over the airspace above its territory". This article provides the undisputed legal right for any country to close its airspace to foreign aircraft.

However, this right is not absolute. Article 9 of the Convention qualifies this sovereignty, stating that while a state may restrict or prohibit flights over its territory for reasons of "military necessity or public safety," such restrictions must be applied "uniformly" and "without distinction of nationality to aircraft of all other States". A blockade specifically targeting aircraft registered in Israel or any aircraft flying to or from Israel, while allowing other international traffic, would appear to be a clear violation of this non-discrimination principle.

The blockading nations would likely construct a legal justification centered on the argument that Israel's strike on Doha created an "exceptional circumstance" and a grave threat to regional "public safety," thereby necessitating the closure to prevent further Israeli aggression and a wider conflict. They would frame the blockade not as a punitive sanction, but as a necessary, temporary measure to restore regional stability. Israel and its allies, particularly the United States, would counter that the blockade is a punitive, discriminatory, and illegal unilateral measure designed to inflict economic harm, and would likely bring a formal dispute before the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The legal proceedings would be complex and protracted. The blockade's practical effects, however, would be immediate and devastating, regardless of the eventual legal outcome.



## 4.2. IAF Operational Posture: A Constrained "Long Arm"

The Israeli Air Force (IAF) has built its doctrine around the concept of a "long arm"—the ability to project power and conduct precision strikes far beyond its borders. This capability was demonstrated in the Doha strike (a distance of some 1,800 km) and in previous operations against targets in Iran, Syria, and Iraq. The success of many of these long-range missions depends on the use of regional airspace, whether through tacit permission, de-confliction with other powers, or clandestine high-altitude flight paths. The Doha strike itself reportedly involved missiles that traversed Saudi Arabian airspace after being launched from jets over the Red Sea.

A formal, declared, and enforced blockade would eliminate the strategic ambiguity that the IAF has long exploited. It would force all participating Arab and Islamic states to take a public and official stance, closing off corridors that may have been tacitly available in the past. This would severely complicate the planning and execution of future long-range missions, particularly against adversaries like Iran. While the IAF could still operate over international waters in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, its flight paths would become longer, more predictable, and require a greater number of aerial refueling assets. This would increase the mission's complexity, cost, and vulnerability to detection and potential interception. The blockade would also hamper airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) flights, degrading Israel's situational awareness and early warning capabilities against emerging threats.

## 4.3. Pathways to Escalation

Faced with a crippling economic blockade that it would view as an act of war, the Israeli government would be under immense domestic political pressure to take decisive action. This creates several clear and dangerous pathways to military escalation.

- **Scenario 1: Israeli Military Action to Break the Blockade.** Viewing the blockade as an existential economic threat, Israel could decide to use military force to reopen air corridors. This could range from limited, targeted strikes against air defense radar installations or air traffic control centers in a single, perceived "weak link" country, to a broader air campaign to assert freedom of navigation. Any such attack on the sovereign territory of a blockading nation would be a clear *casus belli*, immediately transforming the economic conflict into a hot war.



- **Scenario 2:** The GCC Joint Defense Pact is Triggered. Should Israel choose to strike a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, such as Saudi Arabia or the UAE, it would almost certainly trigger the newly activated GCC joint defense mechanism. This would obligate other GCC members to come to the defense of the attacked state, potentially leading to a coordinated military response from the combined, technologically advanced air forces of the Gulf monarchies, which operate modern fleets of F-15, Eurofighter Typhoon, and Dassault Rafale jets. This would precipitate the first-ever conventional war between Israel and the Gulf Arab powers.
- **Scenario 3:** A Multi-Front Regional Conflagration. A direct military conflict between Israel and the GCC would be unlikely to remain contained. Iran and its network of regional proxies—Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and militias in Syria and Iraq—would almost certainly see an opportunity to intervene against Israel, opening multiple new fronts. The United States would be drawn into the conflict, at a minimum to defend its numerous military bases and tens of thousands of personnel stationed in the Gulf. This would place Washington in the impossible position of potentially having to engage militarily with both sides of the conflict—its Arab partners and its Israeli ally—to protect its own forces and interests. This scenario represents the gravest risk: a full-scale regional war involving multiple state and non-state actors, with catastrophic consequences for global security and the world economy.

## 5. Strategic Outlook

The Israeli airstrike in Doha on September 9, 2025, was a profound strategic miscalculation. It failed to achieve its tactical objectives while successfully galvanizing a level of political unity and shared threat perception among Arab and Islamic nations not witnessed in decades. Consequently, the prospect of a coordinated airspace blockade has shifted from a remote contingency to a plausible and potent instrument of collective action. Such a blockade would represent a watershed moment, irrevocably altering the economic, political, and security landscape of the Middle East.



## 5.1. Long-Term Scenarios

The trajectory of the crisis following the imposition of an airspace blockade would likely follow one of three divergent paths, with the outcome largely determined by the strategic calculus in Jerusalem and the degree of intervention by external powers.

- **Scenario A:** De-escalation through Great Power Mediation (Low Probability). In this scenario, the severe economic disruption to Israel and the significant ripple effects on global trade and aviation compel the United States, likely in concert with the European Union, to engage in intensive, high-stakes diplomacy. Washington would be forced to expend immense political capital, exerting unprecedented pressure on both its Israeli and Arab allies. A resolution would require a rollback of the blockade in exchange for significant Israeli concessions, which could include a formal, binding commitment to cease extraterritorial operations against Arab states, coupled with robust, U.S.-backed security guarantees for the Gulf nations. This remains the most optimistic but least likely scenario, as the deep breach of trust caused by the Doha strike would be exceptionally difficult to repair, and the domestic political costs for both sides would be immense.
- **Scenario B:** The "Long Squeeze" - A Sustained Economic Siege (Medium Probability). The blockade is implemented and holds, with the blockading nations weathering international pressure. Israel, deterred from a direct military response by the threat of a multi-front war and pressure from Washington, is forced to absorb the economic damage. The Israeli economy enters a deep and prolonged recession. Its high-tech sector, starved of reliable global logistics, loses its competitive edge, and foreign investment plummets. Israel becomes more economically and politically isolated than at any point in its recent history. The region settles into a new, tense, and confrontational status quo, with the Arab-Islamic bloc using the ever-present threat of tightening or loosening the blockade as a powerful source of diplomatic leverage. The Abraham Accords are formally suspended or abrogated, and the Middle East re-polarizes into clear pro- and anti-Israel camps.



- **Scenario C:** Military Escalation and Regional War (High Probability). Believing the economic strangulation to be an intolerable threat to its national security, Israel's government opts for a military response to break the blockade. This action, regardless of its scale, triggers the GCC's collective defense pact and likely intervention by Iran and its proxies. The ensuing multi-front regional war would be devastating. It would involve state-on-state air and missile warfare between technologically advanced militaries, widespread disruption to global energy supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, and a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. The United States would inevitably be drawn in, at minimum to protect its forces and potentially into direct combat operations, leading to a geopolitical conflagration with unpredictable and far-reaching global consequences.

## 5.2. Concluding Assessment

The Israeli airstrike on Doha was a pivotal event that fundamentally altered the strategic calculus of key regional actors. It transformed Israel from a potential partner in a U.S.-led regional security architecture into a perceived primary source of instability, thereby providing the political impetus for unified Arab and Islamic action.

An airspace blockade is the logical and most potent expression of this newfound unity. It is an instrument of 21st-century statecraft, a form of asymmetric economic warfare that leverages sovereign rights to achieve strategic objectives without an initial resort to military force. It would target the very foundations of Israel's modern economy—its global connectivity, its high-tech export engine, and its appeal as a destination for tourism and investment.

The ultimate consequences of such a blockade would hinge on Israel's response. A decision to endure the economic strangulation would usher in a new era of isolation and economic hardship, fundamentally weakening the country. A decision to respond with military force, however, would almost certainly ignite a regional war of a scale and intensity not seen for generations. In either case, the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East would be transformed. The era of normalization, which defined the preceding years, would be definitively over, replaced by a new and dangerous period of sustained confrontation. The events of September 2025 have, therefore, set the stage for a strategic turning point, the full consequences of which will shape the future of the region for decades to come.





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