

■ **CREED PUTS ON HIS CRYSTAL BALL GAZING HAT.** This edition is speculative. It is long. It is opinionated. It is about the shape of the world five, ten, fifteen years from now — a world the 2026 Iran war has just reconfigured in ways its participants do not yet understand. Crystal balls have a poor forecasting record. Crystal balls owned by defence correspondents have an even poorer one. Creed asks that this be read with that caveat, and with the further understanding that the most interesting predictions are the ones most likely to be wrong.

### INTO THE FOG — CREED LOOKS AHEAD

## WHAT COMES NEXT: A CRYSTAL BALL EDITION ON THE POST-WAR ORDER OF THE MIDDLE EAST

*April 21, 2026. The Iran war has paused, for now, under a ceasefire that everyone agrees is not really a ceasefire. The strait is closed. The Islamabad talks are stalled. The markets are at all-time highs on hope, not evidence. Creed has spent the last forty editions describing what has happened. This edition is about what happens next. The war has set several things in motion that cannot now be stopped. This is an attempt to describe those things — some obvious, some hidden, some uncomfortable, and one that involves an acronym Creed is rather pleased with.*

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### I. THE PREMISE — WHAT THE DUST REVEALS WHEN IT SETTLES

**Every war ends with a period of stunned silence during which the participants, still holding their weapons, slowly realise what they have just spent.**

The 2026 Iran war is still officially underway — the ceasefire is a fiction, the strait is closed, the negotiations are theatrical. But the real war, the one that was fought over who gets to set the terms of regional order, ended some weeks ago. What remains is the long tail of discovery. Participants now beginning to count what they paid, in currencies they did not know they were spending.

Creed's premise for this edition is simple. When the dust settles — and dust eventually settles, even this dust — the Middle East will discover that it got screwed both ways. It got screwed on the Iran relationship, which is now poisoned for a generation. It got screwed on the American security guarantee, which was tested under fire and found to contain a great deal of small print. Neither of those losses is recoverable through the tools that produced them. Both require something new. This edition is about what the 'something new' is going to look like.

Creed also proposes to take a long view of the consequences for other parties — for Pakistan, whose seventy-year investment in Arab-world credibility has just been vaporised; for India, whose patient positioning is about to pay off at rates that Indian planners themselves are quietly astonished by; and for Trump himself, whose Middle East policy will be remembered, in the end, for the one thing it absolutely did not intend to achieve. Crystal balls are unreliable. Crystal balls of defence correspondents are especially so. Creed offers what follows with that caveat, and with the reminder that the most interesting forecasts are the ones most likely to be wrong.

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*"The real war ended some weeks ago. What remains is the long tail of discovery. Participants now beginning to count what they paid, in currencies they did not know they were spending."*

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## II. THE DOUBLE SCREW — HOW THE MIDDLE EAST LOST BOTH WAYS

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The Gulf states now find themselves in the specific, painful position of having chosen sides, paid the price, and received less than they expected from both directions.

### The Iran Side

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain — every Gulf state either permitted US basing during the war, silently acquiesced, or actively coordinated. They did so on the calculation that an American-Israeli strike campaign would decisively neutralise Iran as a regional threat, and that the subsequent regional order would be one they could shape. Iran was not neutralised. Iran was degraded, then recalibrated. The IRGC has emerged stronger relative to Iran's civilian government. The revolutionary narrative inside Iran has been resharpener, not broken. And Iran now has a long memory, a long list, and a two-million-dollar toll road through the single strait on which every Gulf economy depends.

The careful hedging that the Gulf had maintained with Tehran for decades — the back-channels, the commercial workarounds, the Hajj co-operation, the quiet Omani mediation — all of it has been set on fire. Riyadh and Tehran, who had been moving toward rapprochement as recently as 2023, are now estranged in ways that will take a generation to repair, if ever. Iran will not forget which bases the cruise missiles flew from. Iran will not forget which airspaces were opened. Iran will not forget who stood where.

### The American Side

On the other side, the Gulf discovered something more disturbing. The American security umbrella, purchased at enormous cost over decades, turned out to have visible holes. THAAD batteries,

Patriot PAC-3 systems, CENTCOM's layered air defence, the embedded US Air Force presence — all of it existed, ostensibly, to prevent exactly the kind of attack the Gulf then suffered. 2,469 projectiles were aimed at the UAE alone during the war. Khor Fakkan port was hit. Abu Dhabi airspace was closed repeatedly. Bahrain intercepted several waves but also missed some. Saudi Arabia's infrastructure took genuine damage.

The umbrella worked. Mostly. Imperfectly. And 'mostly, imperfectly' is a very different product from what the Gulf thought it was paying for. What it thought it was buying, across four decades of arms sales and basing agreements, was the guarantee of absolute interception. What it received was a best-efforts service level that admitted a meaningful fraction of incoming munitions to target. This is the kind of product one negotiates with one's insurance company, not the kind on which one stakes one's national infrastructure. The Gulf has now learned the difference.

### **The Realisation**

**These two losses together produce a diagnostic realisation that will, in Creed's view, reshape Gulf strategic thinking for a generation. The Gulf backed the American horse because the American horse was supposed to provide what the region needed most: absolute protection from Iranian retaliation. The American horse did not provide that. And in the course of not providing it, the Gulf has also burned its alternative — accommodation with Iran. So the Gulf finds itself with neither full protection nor a safety valve. It has paid twice, with different currencies, for two products, neither of which it now fully possesses. This is what Creed will call, with apologies for the directness, the Double Screw.**

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***"The Gulf backed the American horse because it was supposed to deliver absolute protection. The American horse did not deliver. And in the course of not delivering, the Gulf also burned the alternative: accommodation with Iran. Neither product. Both prices."***

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### **III. THE PIVOT — CREED'S WAGER ON WHERE THE GULF TURNS NEXT**

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**Creed's central wager for the post-war era is the following, delivered with the appropriate humility of a correspondent whose last ceasefire prediction required retraction within fourteen days.**

**The Gulf states, having been screwed both ways, will now turn — quietly at first, deliberately soon after — toward two new principal partners: Israel and India. Neither partnership is without complication. Both partnerships are already in motion. Neither partnership has fully internalised how transformative it is about to become.**

#### **Why Israel**

The Israeli argument is no longer ideological. It is operational. Iron Dome, David's Sling, and the Arrow system worked under thirty-nine days of sustained pressure. Not perfectly — nothing works perfectly — but demonstrably and at scale. The Abraham Accords architecture, already established with the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco, now has a compelling new argument behind it. Saudi Arabia, which had paused its normalisation track before the war, will resume it with different urgency. Israeli air defence technology, Israeli intelligence networks, Israeli missile co-development programmes — these are no longer political risks. They are practical necessities. Ideology is what states can afford in peacetime. What the war has demonstrated is that peacetime has become expensive.

### **Why India**

The Indian argument is structural. India has what the Gulf now needs in quantities that no other non-American, non-Chinese power can provide. A credible, independent defence industrial base that is already producing BrahMos cruise missiles with Russia and Barak-8 air defence systems with Israel. A naval reach into the Arabian Sea that is no longer notional. A labour pipeline already embedded in every Gulf country — remittances from Gulf-based Indian workers are among the largest such flows in the world. A defence relationship with Israel that provides a convenient bridge. And, most importantly, an absence of the Iranian problem and the American unreliability problem simultaneously. India is not interested in policing the Gulf. India is interested in being useful to the Gulf. The distinction is the entire product offering.

**Taken together, the Israeli technology and the Indian scale answer two of the three questions the Gulf now needs to answer. The third question — the money — the Gulf can answer itself. And this is where Creed's wager acquires its specific form.**

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***"The Gulf has what it has always had: money. Israel has what the war demonstrated: technology that works. India has what neither of the others has: production at scale. Together, they have everything."***

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## **IV. THE THREE PILLARS OF DEFENCE SOVEREIGNTY**

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**There are three things a country or a coalition needs to defend itself. This is not a new observation. It is an old one, frequently forgotten, and now dramatically relevant again.**

PILLAR	WHAT IT MEANS	THE HISTORIC HOLDER
<b>TECHNOLOGY</b>	You must be able to design the weapon. To imagine it, to engineer it, to integrate it with everything else you field. Without technology, you are a customer. Customers have no veto.	The United States (and a handful of allies) for seventy years. DARPA. MIT. Skunk Works. The national labs.
<b>MONEY</b>	You must be able to pay for the weapon. Development is expensive. Procurement is expensive. Sustainment is expensive. Without money, you have technology on a shelf.	The United States, for most of the post-war era. Now increasingly the sovereign wealth funds of the Gulf, the reserves of Beijing, and the patient capital of Riyadh.
<b>PRODUCTION AT SCALE</b>	You must be able to produce the weapon — in the quantities, at the rates, and at the cost points the fight actually requires. Without production, you have designs in a safe.	<b>Once the United States. No longer. The Iran war exposed this with brutal clarity. 850 Tomahawks fired. Nine years of peacetime production consumed.</b>

The United States held all three pillars for seventy years. This is the entire reason the post-war American security architecture functioned. It is also the reason that architecture has quietly cracked. The technology pillar is mostly intact, though with ageing foundations. The money pillar is under pressure from deficits and competing claims. The production pillar has collapsed. Not dramatically — decades of offshoring, consolidation, and just-in-time manufacturing have hollowed out the industrial base that won the Second World War. The Iran war did not reveal this collapse. It merely made it impossible to ignore. When one of the three pillars breaks, the edifice does not fall immediately. It becomes unstable. That is where the US is now.

**And here is where the arithmetic becomes interesting. The Middle East has one of the three pillars in abundance: money. It does not have the other two. It never did. Israel has one of the other two in spectacular quantity: technology. But Israel is small. Israel cannot produce at scale. India has one of the two remaining: production at scale. India has decent, improving technology. India has a labour base, an industrial base, and a cost structure that no Western economy can match. Individually, none of these three can replicate what the United States did alone. Collectively, they can produce something better — because the resulting coalition has no single point of political failure.**

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***"The United States held all three pillars for seventy years. That is why the architecture worked. Two of the three pillars are now cracking. The world must now reassemble them, in a new configuration, and it must do so with three partners none of whom can do it alone."***

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## **V. ARISHA — THE COALITION WITH THE LOGIC IN THE NAME**

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◆ PROPOSITION ◆

# ARISHA

**ARab capital ◆ Indian production ◆ SHAlom technology**

*A proposed tri-nation defence coalition.*

*The industrial logic is in the name.*

**Creed proposes this as a concrete concept, not an abstraction. The Iran war has produced the exact conditions that make such a coalition not merely plausible but, in Creed's view, inevitable. The architecture is as follows.**

### **The Gulf brings the money.**

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. Abu Dhabi's sovereign wealth entities. Qatar's foreign investment vehicles. Kuwait's KIA. Together, approximately \$4 trillion in patient capital that does not need to answer to quarterly earnings calls or congressional budget authorisations. This is the advantage no Western government can replicate. Democracies cannot commit capital on thirty-year horizons. The Gulf can.

### **Israel brings the technology.**

Rafael, Elbit, Israel Aerospace Industries, the Ministry of Defence's Directorate of Defence R&D.; Thirty years of operational experience with air defence, missile defence, drone warfare, electronic warfare, and layered integration. Intellectual property that was expensively developed under existential conditions and tested, most recently, over thirty-nine days of the Iran war. Israeli defence technology is — for the first time in the region's history — something the Gulf states will actively want to license rather than quietly buy from somewhere else and pretend it was never Israeli.

### **India brings the production.**

The world's third-largest defence manufacturing ecosystem outside China, and the only such ecosystem that is not constrained by American export controls or Chinese political conditions. Labour costs a fraction of Western equivalents. Factory capacity that can absorb new lines within eighteen months. Already-functioning joint production with Russia (BrahMos) and Israel (Barak-8). A missile technology base that is mature enough to take Israeli IP and scale it to volumes that Israel alone could never achieve — and at cost points that would make Lockheed blush.

### **The ARISHA Thought Experiment**

Consider the construction of a regional air defence system — call it, for illustrative purposes, the Iron Dome equivalent for the Gulf. Under the ARISHA model, Emirati and Saudi capital funds the programme. Israeli engineers provide the interceptor technology, the radar integration, the battle management software. Indian factories produce the missiles, the launchers, the command vehicles, the spare parts, the maintenance infrastructure — at volumes that one American

production line cannot match in a decade. The resulting system costs a third of what the equivalent American procurement would cost. It is delivered in a fraction of the time. And the Gulf, the Israeli engineers, and the Indian producers each retain sovereign decision rights over their own contribution.

**That is the prototype. But what works for air defence can be replicated for naval surveillance systems, for cyber-defence architectures, for anti-drone systems, for counter-missile radar networks, for space-based situational awareness. Each new domain deepens the coalition. Each success makes the next domain easier. Each cycle further reduces the Gulf's dependence on Washington for the product the Gulf ultimately wants: sovereign security.**

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***"ARISHA: Arab capital, Indian production, Shalom technology. The industrial logic is in the name. One-third the cost. A fraction of the time. No Congressional authorisation required."***

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## **VI. THE DECOUPLING SEQUENCE — HOW THE YOKE COMES OFF**

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**ARISHA is not an end-state. It is a beginning. The real question is what ARISHA enables. Creed's wager is that it enables a multi-stage departure from the American security architecture that has defined the Gulf since 1945. This departure will not be announced. It will not be dramatic. It will happen in the following rough sequence, over the next ten to fifteen years.**

<b>ST EP</b>	<b>WHAT HAPPENS</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>The arithmetic of bases changes.</b> Once the Gulf has its own regional air defence that actually works, the justification for US bases at Al Udeid (Qatar), the Fifth Fleet (Bahrain), Al Dhafra (UAE), and Ali Al Salem (Kuwait) begins to shrink. These existed because the Gulf needed American protection. Once that protection can be produced locally, the bases become a favour to Washington, not a necessity for Riyadh. The rent changes direction.
<b>2.</b>	<b>The arms-purchase dependency collapses.</b> The Gulf has been the largest purchaser of American weapons for forty years — F-35s, Patriots, THAAD, Apaches. Every purchase came with Congressional approval, end-use restrictions, Israel-exception clauses, and the implicit threat of a parts-and-software freeze. ARISHA production through India at Indian cost points makes the alternative cheaper, faster, and free of the political strings. The Gulf gradually stops being a captive customer.

STEP	WHAT HAPPENS
3.	<b>The dollar chokehold weakens.</b> The petrodollar arrangement has held for fifty years partly because security and currency were bundled. As security diversifies, the currency arrangement gets rethought. Rupee settlement with India. Yuan for Chinese oil. Bilateral riyal-shekel swaps with Israel. The dollar does not collapse. Its chokehold on Gulf trade loosens.
4.	<b>The veto over Gulf foreign policy ends.</b> Currently, when the Gulf wants to deal with Russia, China, or indeed a reconstituted Iran, it has to calculate the Washington reaction. Once security, arms supply, and deterrence are decoupled from US patronage, the Gulf recovers autonomy over its own neighbourhood. Saudi Arabia hosts BRICS summits without phoning Washington. The UAE signs AI and quantum deals with Beijing without fearing CAATSA.
5.	<b>Intelligence sharing becomes transactional.</b> Currently, Gulf intelligence services operate largely as junior partners to the CIA and NSA. With independent technical capability built through ARISHA channels, they become peers who choose when to share. This changes everything about decisions in a crisis.
6.	<b>The basing footprint begins to shrink.</b> First the lease terms get renegotiated — ‘modernisation’ is the polite word. Then personnel numbers get reduced. Then specific facilities get handed back. Never announced as a break. Always framed as ‘efficiency.’ Al Udeid downsizes. Fifth Fleet quietly moves assets. Al Dhafra loses its F-22 rotation. In ten years the footprint is a third of what it was in 2026. In fifteen years the language has shifted from ‘US military presence in the Gulf’ to ‘US military access arrangements.’ The difference is sovereignty.
7.	<b>The ARISHA model spreads across domains.</b> Naval surveillance. Cyber-defence. Counter-drone systems. Space situational awareness. Each new domain weakens a separate American monopoly. By the mid-2030s the Gulf has a multi-domain security architecture that does not require Washington’s permission to operate.
8.	<b>The final piece: strategic independence on Iran. With indigenous defence through ARISHA, the Gulf can finally do what it has wanted to do for decades: manage its own relationship with Iran without American approval or interference. Rebuild Tehran back-channels. Negotiate oil arrangements directly. Reduce American leverage over the single most consequential regional question. The yoke comes off — not in one dramatic moment, but in a thousand small acts of diplomatic and industrial self-assertion.</b>

Picture the moment this sequence has reached maturity. Ten years from now. An Iranian drone crosses into UAE airspace. It is intercepted not by a US Patriot battery but by an ARISHA-lineage interceptor built in Bengaluru, using Israeli guidance technology, paid for by Emirati capital. The launch order comes from Abu Dhabi. CENTCOM is notified out of courtesy, not necessity. That single intercept, almost invisible in its execution, marks the quiet end of an era — and it happens without a single headline, because nobody on any side has any interest in drawing attention to what has just changed.

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***"An Iranian drone is intercepted by an ARISHA missile built in Bengaluru, guided by Israeli technology, paid for in Emirati dirhams. CENTCOM is notified out of courtesy. That single intercept is the end of an era. It happens without a single headline."***



## VII. THE HISTORIC IRONY — WHAT TRUMP'S LEGACY WILL BE

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**The eventual summary of Donald Trump's Middle East policy, once the historians have had their say, will read as follows.**

He was the American president who tried to secure US dominance in the Middle East through force, and in the attempt, accelerated the region's departure from that dominance by fifteen years. He launched a war that depleted his own industrial base, exposed the limits of his security umbrella, humiliated his own military leadership, and drove his regional partners into the arms of alternatives he had neither anticipated nor authorised.

His future memoirs, Creed confidently predicts, will present this as strategic genius. They will argue that the Iran war forced regional partners to take responsibility for their own defence, reduced America's costly overseas commitments, and ended the era of free-riding by wealthy allies. These claims will not be fully wrong. But they will not be what Trump actually intended. What Trump actually intended was the classic American imperial goal: crushing victory, grateful allies, submissive adversaries, enduring dominance. What he produced was exhausted allies, recalibrated adversaries, and a trans-regional coalition that reads 'American dominance' as a historical curiosity to be hedged against. That coalition's name, quietly, will have three letters from Arab, India, and Shalom.

**Serious historians, when they finally arrive at the story, will reach the unavoidable conclusion: Trump was the proximate cause of a shift he did not understand, could not control, and never intended. This is, Creed notes with some weariness, the most American way for an American president's Middle East policy to end. The empire, when it ends, is always ended by someone who thought they were defending it most aggressively.**

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***"Trump will be remembered as the American president who tried to secure US dominance in the Middle East by force, and in the attempt, accelerated the region's departure from that dominance by fifteen years. His memoirs will call this strategic genius. History will call it something else."***

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## VIII. PAKISTAN — SEVENTY YEARS DEMOLISHED IN FOURTEEN DAYS

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**Creed has returned to Pakistan repeatedly in these editions. He returns to it one more time, in this crystal-ball edition, because Pakistan is the one**

**party to this war whose losses are the largest, the most permanent, and the least understood by the losers themselves.**

### **The Foundational Contradiction**

Pakistan cannot be Saudi Arabia's nuclear shield against Iran AND Iran's favoured diplomatic courier to Washington simultaneously. These are mutually exclusive roles. Pakistan has attempted to perform both in the same fortnight. The Arab world has watched this performance. The Arab world is not stupid. The Arab world has drawn conclusions.

### **The September 2025 Fiction**

The Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan was signed in September 2025 with great ceremony. It was presented as Pakistan's deepest regional commitment — a nuclear umbrella over Saudi infrastructure, guaranteed by Islamabad. The first test came five months later when Iran attacked Saudi oil infrastructure, Emirati ports, and Kuwaiti refineries. Pakistan did nothing. Not a statement. Not a warning. Not a signal. The agreement, it turned out, was theatre dressed as treaty. Riyadh has now learned — at zero cost to Pakistan and considerable cost to Saudi critical infrastructure — exactly what that piece of paper is worth.

Every serious Arab capital knew this even as they signed it. But the war forced the polite fiction into daylight. Pakistan's nuclear arsenal exists for India. It exists because of India. Its targeting, its command architecture, its doctrinal purpose — all oriented eastward. Using it for Saudi Arabia would require Pakistan to accept Iranian retaliation on Pakistani soil for a quarrel Pakistan has no interest in. No Pakistani army chief would ever make that calculation. Asim Munir certainly did not.

### **The Mediation That Was a Betrayal in Formal Clothing**

Here is the point that will sit longest with the Arab world. Pakistan mediated between Iran and the United States over thirty-nine days of war. At no point in those negotiations did Pakistan represent Arab interests. At no point did it insist on Arab compensation, Arab security guarantees, Arab reconstruction contributions, or Arab input into the nuclear terms. Pakistan negotiated a deal that served Iran, served Trump, and served Asim Munir's own ambition. The Arab states whose territory had been attacked were treated as context, not constituency. They noticed.

### **The Kingdom Paid for the Seat. Pakistan Sold It to the Other Side.**

Saudi Arabia has bankrolled Pakistan's economy for fifty years. IMF supplementation. Oil on concessional terms. Remittance corridors. Bailouts at crisis moments. Discounted Hajj logistics. Direct central bank deposits. All of it premised on the idea that Pakistan was Saudi Arabia's reliable Muslim-world junior partner. That premise has been revealed as commercial rather than strategic. Pakistan is, it turns out, a very expensive rental with no loyalty clause.

### **The UAE Sees It Most Clearly**

The Emiratis have watched Pakistan's performance with the specific analytical coldness that comes from having had their airspace closed repeatedly during the war. 2,469 projectiles aimed at UAE territory. Pakistan's response throughout: polite concern, offers of mediation, silence on

attribution. Mohammed bin Zayed has a long memory and an excellent intelligence service. When Pakistan comes back in eighteen months asking for investment commitments, the Emirati answer will be warm, vague, and empty. Pakistan will not quite understand why. Until it does.

#### ■ EARLY SIGNAL OF THE RECKONING ■ THE CLEANSING HAS BEGUN

Word has reached Creed, and has been reported in multiple travel and immigration outlets with varying degrees of official confirmation, that as of March 31, 2026, the UAE has begun rejecting visa applications from Pakistani nationals — across tourist, business, visit, and in some cases employment categories. The UAE has not formally announced a policy change. It has not needed to. Rejections are simply happening, at rising rates, without explanation.

**This is not an isolated administrative matter. This is the first visible, measurable, consequential signal that the Arab-world reckoning with Pakistan has already begun — quietly, deniably, and effectively. The cleansing has started. It will not be announced. It will be extended. And Pakistan's diaspora, on which Pakistan's remittance economy depends, will be one of the first casualties.**

### The Wider Economic Vulnerability

Pakistan runs a current account deficit funded almost entirely by Arab patience. Remittances from Gulf workers — seven million Pakistanis in Saudi Arabia and the UAE alone — are the largest source of foreign exchange. Gulf deposits in the State Bank of Pakistan have kept the rupee functional through three separate crises in the last decade. Gulf investment in Pakistani infrastructure, energy, and refining is the single largest source of FDI. All of these flows will now be subtly recalibrated. Not stopped. Slowed. Made more conditional. Priced differently. The compound effect, over five years, is the difference between a Pakistan that can borrow its way forward and a Pakistan that cannot.

### The Hajj Calculation

A less remarked but structurally important shift. Pakistan's Hajj quota, its logistical privileges, the diplomatic courtesies extended to Pakistani pilgrims and pilgrim operators — all are at the discretion of the Kingdom. They have always been used, gently, as instruments of relationship management. Creed predicts that over the next decade, the quota will be recalibrated in ways that will feel administrative but will signal strategic. Each recalibration will remind Islamabad that there is a price for transactional diplomacy. The price will be paid in small coin, but the small coin will accumulate.

### The India Comparison — The Knife That Cuts Deepest

The Arab world watched Pakistan mediate the Iran war with the same eye with which it was concurrently negotiating with India on energy, infrastructure, technology, and defence. The comparison was not flattering. India delivered on its commitments. India produced at scale. India signed no agreements it could not honour. Pakistan signed agreements it could never honour and called it regional stabilisation. The contrast — visible in every data point, in every diplomatic encounter, in every investment flow — is producing a generational pivot. Arab strategic attention is migrating eastward. The east it is migrating toward is Delhi, not Islamabad.

## **The Saudi Pivot to India on Nuclear Matters**

The Saudi-Pakistan nuclear umbrella was revealed during the war as precisely what serious analysts had always known it to be: a ceremony. On paper, the September 2025 agreement was supposed to deter Iran from hitting Saudi territory. In practice, when the missiles came, Iran hit Saudi territory anyway. Pakistan did not threaten retaliation. Pakistan did not signal escalation. Pakistan did not even clear its throat in a meaningful way. Iran noticed. Iran attacked. The shield held nothing. The shield had never been a shield. It had been a talking point.

India, by contrast, has what Pakistan merely pretends to have. A credible, fully developed, command-and-control verified nuclear deterrent. A second-strike capability. A space programme that is genuine. A missile programme that is not denied export markets. A defence industrial base that does not depend on IMF tranches. Saudi Arabia, looking at this clearly, now has a choice: continue leaning on a fictional Pakistani umbrella, or quietly begin cultivating an Indian strategic relationship that actually delivers what Pakistan only promises.

The Indian nuclear relationship with Saudi Arabia will not be formal. It will be structural. Saudi Arabia is not going to sign a public treaty saying 'India will defend us with nuclear weapons.' India is not going to offer one. What will happen instead is quieter and more durable: deepened military exercises, shared intelligence arrangements, co-developed missile technology through the ARISHA framework, a growing understanding that an attack on Saudi infrastructure triggers Indian economic and strategic consequences the adversary must account for. No document. No press conference. Just a web of relationships that, collectively, accomplish what the Pakistan document pretended to accomplish — and did not.

## **The One Honest Sentence the Saudis Will Never Say Publicly**

***“We spent thirty years paying Pakistan to be our shield. When the missiles finally came, Pakistan shielded nothing. Iran attacked anyway. The shield was a ceremony. We are not paying for ceremonies any more.”***

The Saudis will never say this sentence. They do not need to. They will simply stop picking up the phone as quickly, respond to Pakistani requests with slightly more calibrated enthusiasm, and quietly redirect the relationship that used to go through Islamabad to a capital approximately 3,000 kilometres to the east.

## **Seventy Years, Demolished in Fourteen Days**

**Pakistan spent from 1955 to 2025 building its Arab-world credentials. Soldiers sent to defend Saudi Arabia in the 1960s. Pilots trained. Officers embedded. Mosques funded. Scholarships awarded. The entire laborious architecture of Muslim-world solidarity. All of it, across seventy years. Between April 7 and April 21, 2026, Asim Munir demolished the essential premise of that architecture by performing, on live television, exactly what the Arab states had always suspected but politely declined to accept: that Pakistan's loyalties are for hire. Seventy years. Fourteen days. No recovery plan on offer. No recovery even**

being discussed internally. Because internally, Pakistan is still celebrating its diplomatic triumph.

### **The Eventual Quiet Reckoning**

Five to seven years from now, when a new Pakistani government approaches Riyadh for a fresh financial package with the assumption that the historical relationship will hold, it will be met with an unfamiliar kind of response. Polite. Measured. Non-committal. Conditional in ways that previous Pakistani governments did not have to accept. The Pakistani side will not immediately understand what has changed. The Saudi side will not immediately explain. The only people in the room who will understand are the ones taking minutes. And even they will not write it down.

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*"The UAE has begun rejecting Pakistani visa applications without explanation. The cleansing has started. Seventy years of Arab-world credibility, demolished in fourteen days of performance diplomacy on behalf of Iran and Trump. Pakistan is still celebrating. The Gulf has already moved on."*

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## **IX. TEN OTHER PREDICTIONS, OFFERED WITH STANDARD DISCLAIMERS**

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**Beyond the central story — ARISHA, the Saudi pivot, the Pakistan reckoning — Creed offers ten additional predictions on the shape of the post-war world. Each is confident in direction and uncertain in timing. Each is more likely to be wrong about specifics than about essence.**

### **Prediction 1 ♦ Iran's Reconstruction Becomes a Chinese-Russian-Indian Project**

With US sanctions still in place on paper but increasingly ignored in practice, Iranian reconstruction contracts flow to Beijing, Moscow, and Delhi. Iranian oil is priced in yuan and rupees. The Hormuz toll road is formalised into a regional revenue-sharing arrangement. The West discovers it has sanctioned itself out of the room. The Iranian economy, against every expectation, begins to stabilise within eighteen months. The Obama-era doctrine that economic pressure produces political change is quietly retired.

### **Prediction 2 ♦ The Dollar Loses Its Absolute Chokehold on Oil, Slowly**

Not collapse. Erosion. Saudi Arabia starts accepting yuan for a meaningful fraction of its oil sales to China. The UAE settles some trade in dirham directly. India and Saudi Arabia formalise rupee-riyal settlement mechanisms. Nothing dramatic happens on any single day. Over five years, the dollar share of global oil trade quietly drops from 90 percent to 75 percent. The US Treasury notices. The Federal Reserve notices. Nobody announces anything. Interest rates structurally rise.

### **Prediction 3 ♦ Turkey Tries to Muscle In. Is Politely Ignored.**

Erdogan or his successor will attempt to position Turkey as the natural Muslim-world leader in the post-war order. The attempt will fail for the same reason it has failed for twenty years: the Arab states do not want an Ottoman revival, and the Israelis are not going to partner with Ankara while the Turkish government performs the Palestinian cause for domestic audiences. Turkey ends up watching the ARISHA architecture from the outside, occasionally sending drones to Libya as a reminder that Turkey still exists.

#### **Prediction 4 ♦ The US Industrial Base Becomes the Next American Crisis**

Washington discovers, in the course of the Iran war post-mortem, that it cannot replace the Tomahawks it fired at anything approaching the rate it needs. Rebuilding the defence industrial base becomes a ten-year, trillion-dollar project. It will be politicised, underfunded, and partially completed. The US will emerge from it as the world's second defence industrial power — behind China in absolute terms and behind the ARISHA coalition in export competitiveness. This will not be announced. It will be reflected in order books.

#### **Prediction 5 ♦ The Next Gulf Conflict Is Cyber, Not Kinetic**

With physical deterrence upgraded through ARISHA, the next round of Iranian pressure on the Gulf arrives through cyberattacks on refineries, ports, desalination plants, and sovereign wealth IT systems. This exposes a new weakness. ARISHA version 2.0 is therefore about cyber-defence. The Israelis have significant capability here. India provides scale. The Gulf provides funding. Creed notes that each crisis produces the opportunity for a new industrial coalition, and the coalitions tend to outlast the crises that produced them.

#### **Prediction 6 ♦ Trump's Middle East Legacy Is Transformational — Not the Way He Intended**

This is worth repeating from Section VII because it is the overarching irony of the period. Trump will be remembered as the American president who tried to cement US dominance in the Middle East through force, and in the attempt, accelerated its departure by fifteen years. His memoirs will present this as genius. The record will present it otherwise. This is, Creed notes, the most American way for an American Middle East policy to end. Empires, when they end, are always ended by the people who thought they were defending them most aggressively.

#### **Prediction 7 ♦ IMEC Delivers. Becomes the New Silk Road.**

The India-Middle East-Europe Corridor, announced at the 2023 G20 in Delhi with much fanfare and limited follow-through, finally gets the strategic push it needs in the post-war period. With Gulf capital, Indian logistics, Israeli port and customs technology, and European demand, the corridor finally delivers what it promised. Shipping through Hormuz becomes less strategically critical because a parallel overland-plus-sea corridor now exists from Mumbai through Jebel Ali through Haifa to Piraeus. The Suez Canal notices. China's Belt and Road notices. History moves on.

#### **Prediction 8 ♦ Saudi Vision 2030 Looks Different in Retrospect**

Neom, the Red Sea projects, the diversification agenda — these suddenly look less like vanity projects and more like rational hedging. The Kingdom is building itself a post-oil, post-American

economy. The war revealed why. Mohammed bin Salman looks, in retrospect, not like a reckless young prince but like a ruler who saw the exit signs fifteen years before anyone else. This is a revision Creed does not personally endorse — there are still human rights concerns, many of them — but the economic-strategic argument for Vision 2030 has just been dramatically reinforced.

### **Prediction 9 ♦ The 2028 US Election Is Dominated by ‘Who Lost the Middle East’**

Republicans blame Biden-era weakness. Democrats blame Trump’s incompetence. Serious analysts blame both, and also structural factors neither party wishes to discuss. The election produces a new president whose foreign policy platform commits to ‘re-engaging allies’ and ‘restoring American leadership.’ The Gulf, by then, has already moved on. The new president’s Gulf trip in early 2029 produces polite photo opportunities and no strategic movement. The Gulf has learned, from this war, that American presidents come and go. Indian foreign secretaries, Israeli prime ministers, Saudi crown princes — these are durable. The lesson, once learned, is not unlearned.

### **Prediction 10 ♦ Saudi Arabia and the UAE Reconcile — Through the India Door**

The strained patch in Saudi-Emirati relations that developed between 2023 and 2025 — OPEC+ quota disputes, overlapping logistics ambitions between NEOM and Jebel Ali, competing tourism strategies, Yemen policy divergence, and the quiet rivalry between two crown princes who each wished to be the face of the region — ends rather quickly in the post-war period. Not because the underlying disputes are resolved. They are not. But because both kingdoms arrive at the same diagnostic realisation simultaneously, and because the shared pivot to India provides the natural architecture within which their reconciliation can take place.

The underlying fundamentals have always favoured reconciliation. Two monarchical systems that understand each other. Two economies that complement rather than compete at scale. Two sovereign wealth apparatuses whose investment theses overlap in 80 percent of cases. Two foreign policies that are far closer on Iran, on Israel, on Yemen, and on the Muslim Brotherhood question than their public squabbles ever suggested. Two leaderships that watched the same thirty-nine days of war and drew the same three conclusions: the American umbrella is leaky, the Pakistani shield is theatre, and the Indian relationship is the one worth building.

The mechanics of reconciliation will be elegant because they are not really reconciliation. They are a realignment around a shared third partner. The moment Riyadh moves away from its Pakistan pivot and visibly toward India — through defence co-production, through missile technology transfer, through nuclear-adjacent strategic dialogue, through Indian naval exercises in Saudi waters — the UAE, which is already ahead of the Kingdom on the Indian relationship, finds itself with no further reason to sustain the rivalry. Both kingdoms are now in the same room, with the same partner, building the same kind of architecture. The rivalries that seemed so important in 2024 become difficult to even remember by 2028. Joint ARISHA financing. Joint Indian Navy exercise hosting between Jebel Ali and Jeddah. Joint positions at OPEC meetings that Saudi Arabia used to take alone while the UAE watched from a distance. Each joint act makes the next one easier.

The historical pattern matters here. Gulf monarchies have always reconciled most durably when a shared external partner provided the framework. For fifty years, that framework was the American relationship. When Riyadh and Abu Dhabi needed to work together, they did so because Washington expected it. That architecture is now fraying. A new framework is required — and India, by virtue of its non-threatening scale, its absence of regional ambition, its commercial rather than imperial logic, its diaspora depth in both kingdoms, and its demonstrated willingness to deliver — offers the only realistic replacement on the geopolitical menu. Within three years, Creed predicts, the phrase ‘Saudi-Emirati joint position’ will be heard more often than at any point since the early 2010s. Within five years, it will be a standing feature of regional diplomacy.

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*"Two kingdoms that drew the same three conclusions from thirty-nine days of war: the American umbrella is leaky, the Pakistani shield is theatre, and the Indian relationship is the one worth building. Reconciliation is not really reconciliation. It is a realignment around a shared third partner."*

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*"Each prediction is confident in direction and uncertain in timing. Each is more likely to be wrong about specifics than about essence. The point of a crystal ball is not precision. The point is to see the shape of what is coming."*

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## **X. A NOTE FROM CREED — ON LOOKING FORWARD WHEN LOOKING BACK IS EASIER**

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Forty editions ago, I started writing about a war that had just begun. I described it as it unfolded. I did not predict where it would end. That turned out to be wise, because the war ended in places none of us expected. In a Truth Social post at 6:13pm on April 7. In a human chain around a gas-fired power plant in Fars province. In a Pakistani army chief on a phone at 3am with three foreign ministers from three parties that were at war with each other.

Today's edition is different. Today I have attempted to look forward. I have described a world five, ten, fifteen years from now — a world I will probably not be covering in this form, a world whose specific events I cannot know, a world whose shape I nevertheless think I can see. ARISHA is not inevitable. The decoupling of the Gulf from Washington is not certain. The Pakistani reckoning may be partially softened by new money from unexpected quarters. The Saudi pivot to India may be

slower than I think. The Trump legacy may be rescued by a successor with more imagination than expected.

But the direction of travel is, I believe, correct. The war has set things in motion that cannot now be stopped. The Gulf has been screwed both ways and it knows. Israel has demonstrated, whatever else can be said about its other choices, that its defensive technology works. India has positioned itself, without announcing it, as the indispensable third pillar of any post-American security architecture the region builds for itself. Pakistan has performed its way out of seventy years of Arab-world trust. The UAE has stopped renewing Pakistani visas. The cleansing has begun.

**Creed will continue to report on this world as it emerges. Not daily — there is no need for that kind of volume in what comes next. Crystal ball editions will appear periodically. Analysis editions will appear when events warrant. The Geopolitical Intelligence Review will continue to publish at a pace appropriate to what is happening, not to what is convenient. I thank readers who have stayed with these editions for forty consecutive efforts. Those who have written in. Those who have corrected me. Those who have pushed back with better arguments. You know who you are.**

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***"The war set things in motion that cannot now be stopped. ARISHA is not inevitable. The shape of its arrival is. Pakistan is still celebrating. The Arab world has already moved on. The crystal ball is clouded. But not empty."***

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## CONNECT WITH CREED

A PERSONAL INVITATION FROM THE CORRESPONDENT



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<p><b>1</b> ■■■</p> <p><b>PHONE CONVERSATIONS</b></p> <p><i>The highest form of human communication. Increasingly rare.</i></p>	<p><b>2</b> ■■■</p> <p><b>PHYSICALLY WRITTEN LETTERS</b></p> <p><i>The second-highest. Brief, considered, beautifully dated.</i></p>	<p><b>3</b> ■■■</p> <p><b>WRITTEN EMAIL</b></p> <p><i>The third-best. You are here. (That is fine.)</i></p>
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No WhatsApp channels. No websites. No apps. No algorithmic feeds. Readers who wish to send feedback, take issue with an argument, propose a correction, offer a tip from inside a chancery or a

barracks, submit questions for future editions, or simply be added to the quiet distribution list through which these editions travel — are warmly invited to write to the address above.

**Feedback is welcome. Criticism is welcome. Disagreement is welcome. Reader questions shape the agenda.**

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— **JASPER CREED** —

*Defence & Strategic Affairs Correspondent ♦ Geopolitical Intelligence Review*

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### ♦ FINAL WORD ♦

**The Iran war is officially still underway. The ceasefire is nominally holding. The Islamabad talks continue, slowly, and with diminishing purpose. The markets are at all-time highs. The Strait of Hormuz is still largely closed. Pakistani visa applications to the UAE are being quietly rejected. Saudi officials are taking Indian calls faster than Pakistani ones. Israeli air defence engineers are being privately asked to brief Gulf sovereign wealth funds. ARISHA does not yet exist. But everything required for it to exist is now in place. The dust has not settled. But Creed has peered through it, and has attempted to describe what he saw.**

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Sources: Historical context from the last forty editions of this newsletter. Travel and Tour World (UAE visa rejections for Pakistani nationals beginning March 31, 2026). Flyingcolour and UAE Visa Online (stricter screening, elevated refusal rates). Economic data per State Bank of Pakistan, IMF, and Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority. Defence production data per SIPRI, US Department of Defense FY2026 reports. Abraham Accords context per Haaretz, JINSA, and prior published analysis. IMEC framework per the G20 Delhi Declaration (September 2023). ARISHA is a proposed construct of the author's own making, not a confirmed policy of any government. If it later emerges under a different name, Creed claims no credit but reserves the right to feel smug.

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