

# Why Was the UAE Targeted?

## Iran's Targeting of the United Arab Emirates in the 2026 War: Causes and Strategic Logic

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### Abstract

On the evening of February 28, 2026, following joint US-Israeli airstrikes on Iranian nuclear and military facilities that resulted in the assassination of Supreme Leader Seyyed Ali Khamenei and senior IRGC commanders, the Islamic Republic of Iran launched extensive retaliatory strikes. Within forty days, Iran fired 537 ballistic missiles, 26 cruise missiles, and 2,256 drones toward the United Arab Emirates (UAE), making it the primary target of Iranian attacks—more than any other country in the region. This paper examines the strategic logic behind Iran's targeting of the UAE, arguing that it was neither accidental nor merely retaliatory but based on eight categories of tangible and documented actions by Abu Dhabi. These include: hosting US military bases (notably Al Dhafra) as launchpads for operations against Iran; active lobbying to provoke the US and Israel into military action; growing military-security cooperation with Israel under the Abraham Accords, including the deployment of Israeli air defense systems and forces on Emirati soil; providing logistical-operational support for attacks on Iranian territory (including the strike on Khark Island); blocking and seizing Iranian assets; expelling and harassing Iranian citizens; withdrawing from OPEC; and attempting to forcibly reopen the Strait of Hormuz. The paper also addresses counterarguments, including the security dilemma of small states and the limitations of Iran's strategy. It concludes that the UAE's claim of neutrality does not align with its actions, and that Iran's targeting, while risky and paradoxical, was based on defensible grounds. The 2026 War has created a permanent rupture in Iran-UAE relations and altered the geopolitical map of the Persian Gulf.

**Keywords:** Iran-UAE relations, 2026 War, Persian Gulf security, Strait of Hormuz, Abraham Accords, military targeting, OPEC withdrawal, Iranian assets seizure, Three Islands dispute, Al Dhafra Air Base

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## 1. Introduction

On the evening of February 28, 2026, when American and Israeli warplanes attacked Iranian nuclear and military facilities, assassinating Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, along with a number of senior commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), few could have imagined that the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—one of the closest neighbors across the Persian Gulf—would become Iran’s primary target for retaliation. Abu Dhabi had repeatedly declared its neutrality and stated that it would not allow its territory to be used for attacks against Iran. Nevertheless, within forty days of war, Iran fired 537 ballistic missiles, 26 cruise missiles, and 2,256 stealth drones toward the UAE. These statistics made the UAE the recipient of the largest volume of Iranian attacks throughout this war—more than any other country in the region.

Why the UAE? A question that may seem simple at first glance but, upon closer examination of the evidence, reveals deep complexities. Iran’s targeting of the UAE was neither accidental nor merely the result of unresolved historical grievances. Rather, as this document will demonstrate, it was based on a series of specific and deliberate actions taken by Abu Dhabi—actions ranging from hosting American and Israeli military bases to actively lobbying for the escalation of war, from seizing Iranian assets to expelling Iranian citizens, and from withdrawing from OPEC to attempting to forcibly reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Each of these behaviors, individually or in combination, elevated the UAE from a status of a "neutral country" to that of a "belligerent party"—at least from Tehran’s perspective.

This research document adopts a technical, evidence-based approach to analyze the reasons and roots of Iran’s targeting of the UAE in the 2026 War. Our main hypothesis is that the UAE’s behavior during the crisis went beyond passively hosting American forces and included active participation in the military-political coalition against Iran. Therefore, Iran’s attacks were not indiscriminate punishment but a strategic response to tangible threats posed by Abu Dhabi. Of course, this analysis would be incomplete without considering opposing viewpoints and Iran’s own strategic limitations; a portion of this document is devoted to these aspects as well.

## 2. Historical Background and Structural Context

### *2.1 Historical Relations between Iran and the UAE*

The relationship between Iran and the United Arab Emirates has for decades been a mixture of economic cooperation and political tension. Prior to the 2026 War, an estimated 500,000 to 800,000 Iranians resided in the UAE—equivalent to 5 to 8 percent of that country’s population. This sizable community, in addition to its cultural and social role, had accumulated considerable assets in the

UAE; estimates suggest that Iranian capital in the UAE exceeded \$300 billion. Dubai, in particular, has for decades functioned as Iran's economic gateway—a hub for re-exports, goods transit, and circumventing international sanctions. The annual trade volume between the two countries reached approximately \$27 billion before the war, with hundreds of flights and ships daily keeping the trade routes alive.

This economic interdependence, however, could not compensate for the widening political gap. The UAE consistently negotiated with Iran from a position of strength—Iran being a country under severe international sanctions with an urgent need for access to open markets. Conversely, Iran viewed this economic dependency as a tool to contain tensions but was never able to deter the UAE from allying with the United States and Israel. This structural contradiction—economic cooperation alongside security rivalry and tension—formed the foundation upon which the 2026 War took shape and ultimately erupted.

## *2.2 The Three Islands Dispute*

The dispute over the three islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb—one of the oldest and most persistent territorial disputes in the Persian Gulf—constitutes another layer of tension between Iran and the UAE. In November 1971, simultaneously with the withdrawal of British forces from east of the Suez Canal and the establishment of the UAE, Iran occupied these three islands. Tehran argues that these islands have "always been Iranian" and that Iran's historical claim to them is undeniable. In contrast, the UAE, with the support of the Arab League and the Persian Cooperation Council (GCC), claims ownership of the islands and has repeatedly raised the issue in international forums.

Although this dispute has never led to direct military confrontation, it has served as a symbol of deep mistrust between the two countries. During the 2026 War, the issue resurfaced with intensity: the UAE asked the United States to seize the islands occupied by Iran, and this proposal inflamed Tehran's anger. From Iran's perspective, the UAE's claim of ownership over these islands is not only baseless, but any attempt to change their status through foreign military power constitutes an Iranian security red line. The Three Islands dispute, while not a direct cause of the war, was an important parameter in Iran's strategic calculations and contributed to escalating tensions.

## *2.3 The 2026 Iran War and the Operational Context of the Attacks*

The 2026 Iran War began on the evening of February 28, when the armed forces of the United States and Israel, in a joint and large-scale operation, attacked dozens of targets inside Iran—including the nuclear facilities at Natanz and Fordow, IRGC command centers in Tehran, and missile production sites. In these attacks, Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was killed along with a number of senior IRGC commanders. This strike was the

largest military attack on Iran since the Iran-Iraq War and placed the Tehran regime in an unprecedented situation.

In the hours following the attack, Iran launched "Operation True Promise 3" and carried out extensive retaliatory strikes—not only against Israel and American bases in Iraq and Syria but also against the United Arab Emirates. Between February 28 and April 8, 2026—the date a ceasefire was announced—a total of 537 ballistic missiles, 26 cruise missiles, and 2,256 drones were fired toward the UAE. These attacks targeted military installations, airports, ports, oil infrastructure, and residential areas, causing immense damage. The UAE's oil production fell by 500,000 to 800,000 barrels per day during the war, severely impacting its economy. General McKenzie, former CENTCOM commander, later admitted that the volume of Iranian attacks exceeded US intelligence predictions.

### **3. Analysis of the Reasons for Targeting**

#### ***3.1 Hosting US Military Bases (Al Dhafra) as a Launchpad for Operations***

Al Dhafra Air Base, near Abu Dhabi, is one of the most important US military installations in the Middle East. The base hosts US air forces and covers intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) missions as well as the deployment of advanced fighter jets—including F-35A aircraft. Throughout numerous regional crises, Al Dhafra has served as an operational hub for the United States, playing a pivotal role in surveillance flights and airstrikes. From Iran's perspective, this base was not only a symbol of US military presence in the Persian Gulf but also functioned as a launchpad for operations against Iran.

On March 7, 2026, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps targeted Al Dhafra Air Base. According to reports, the attack was carried out with precision ballistic missiles, causing significant damage to parts of the base. Iran announced that the base was a "US air operations center against Iran" and that targeting it was a "legitimate right of self-defense." Reports by Iran International and TASS confirmed that the attack on Al Dhafra—one of the heaviest of the war—demonstrated Iran's determination to directly target US military infrastructure on Emirati soil.

Iran's argument was simple but effective: a country that places its territory at the disposal of the military forces of a hostile state and allows military operations to be launched from that soil against Iran becomes a belligerent party itself. This argument is rooted in international law, particularly the principle of international responsibility of states. Iranian officials repeatedly emphasized that the UAE's hosting of US bases went beyond simple military cooperation and included active participation in planning and executing operations against Iran.

### *3.2 UAE Lobbying to Provoke the US and Israel into Military Action Against Iran*

One of the most prominent reasons for Iran's anger toward the UAE was Abu Dhabi's extensive and active lobbying to provoke the United States and Israel into military action against Iran. This lobbying took place not only through backchannel diplomacy but also openly in international media. Yousef Al Otaiba, the UAE's ambassador to Washington, in an explicit article in the Wall Street Journal, called for a "decisive solution" to the Iranian threat and stressed that the status quo was no longer tolerable. This article—one of the most explicit public statements by Emirati officials—was read almost as an invitation for military attack.

On April 1, 2026, the Wall Street Journal reported that the UAE was preparing to assist the United States and its allies in forcibly reopening the Strait of Hormuz using military power. Abu Dhabi also lobbied for a UN Security Council resolution authorizing military action against Iran. Anwar Gargash, the diplomatic advisor to the UAE president, rejected a ceasefire without a "long-term security solution," effectively calling for the continuation of war until the fundamental overthrow or weakening of Iran's regime. The UAE even asked the United States to seize the islands occupied by Iran—including Abu Musa.

These actions, from Iran's perspective, went beyond the right to self-defense or even the right to exercise diplomatic influence. The UAE's lobbying to forcibly reopen the Strait of Hormuz—one of Iran's most vital economic arteries—and its invitation to foreign powers to seize Iranian islands were perceived as acts of war. Tehran argued that a country that openly lobbies for military attack against Iran cannot simultaneously claim neutrality. This contradiction between the claim of neutrality and the overt act of warmongering was one of Iran's strongest arguments for targeting the UAE.

### *3.3 Growing Israel-UAE Military-Security Cooperation (The Abraham Accords)*

The Abraham Accords, signed in September 2020 between Israel and the UAE (and Bahrain), marked a turning point in Middle Eastern relations. However, what appeared on the surface to be a peaceful agreement in practice led to the formation of a deep military alliance between the two countries. Israel-UAE military-security cooperation expanded at a staggering pace and, by the time of the 2026 War, had reached a level that effectively constituted a defense alliance between the two nations.

- November 2021: The first public military exercise between Israel and the UAE was held—a groundbreaking event indicating the breaking of one of the last taboos in the Arab world.
- September 2022: Israel's Elbit Systems signed a \$53 million contract with the UAE, and Israel confirmed it would supply the SPYDER air defense system to the UAE.

- October 2022: The Israeli Barak air defense system was deployed on Emirati soil—the first deployment of an Israeli air defense system in an Arab country.
- February 2023: The first bilateral Israel-UAE naval exercise was held in the Persian Gulf of Aqaba.
- April 2025: Emirati Mirage 2000-9 fighters participated in a joint exercise with the United States and Israel in Greece.
- Bilateral trade between Israel and the UAE reached \$3.24 billion in 2024.
- The UAE's EDGE Group was in the process of purchasing Hermes 900 drones from Elbit with technology transfer.

From Iran's perspective, this military cooperation—not merely the acceleration of diplomatic normalization but the formation of an active military alliance—posed a direct and tangible threat. The deployment of Israeli air defense systems in the UAE meant that Emirati skies could be defended by Israeli forces and that Israel would have direct operational access to Persian Gulf airspace. Joint exercises meant operational coordination between the two militaries. And military technology transfer meant the strengthening of the UAE's indigenous defense industry with Israeli assistance. Iran viewed this trend not merely as an outcome of the Abraham Accords but as part of a strategy to militarily encircle Iran.

### *3.4 Deployment of Israeli Air Defense Systems on Emirati Soil*

During the 2026 War, one of the most significant military developments was the deployment of Israel's Iron Dome system and Israeli forces on Emirati soil. According to an April 2026 Axios report, Israel sent Iron Dome systems and its military forces to the UAE—one of the first instances of a major deployment of Israeli forces in an Arab country. This action, in addition to the SPYDER and Barak systems already deployed in the UAE, made the UAE's air defense network "more diverse than ever before," as reported by Forbes.

The deployment of Israeli air defense systems alongside American THAAD and Patriot systems created a multi-layered and unprecedented defensive shield. But from Iran's perspective, this action went beyond defense: the presence of Israeli forces on Emirati soil meant direct military cooperation between Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv—cooperation that, under wartime conditions, effectively turned the UAE into a base for Israeli operations. The Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA), in its analysis, stressed that the deployment of Iron Dome in the UAE demonstrated the "value of the Abraham Accords" and presented it as a tool to legitimize the Israeli military presence in the Persian Gulf.

For Iran, this development was a point of no return. The last remnants of the UAE's neutrality claim were destroyed with the deployment of Israeli systems and forces on its soil. Tehran announced that the Israeli military presence in the UAE—one of Iran's primary enemies—proved that Abu Dhabi was not only not neutral but was actively participating in the military coalition against Iran. This deployment was one of the strongest reasons for Iran to continue and intensify its attacks against the UAE.

### ***3.5 Logistical-Operational Role of the UAE in Operations against Iran***

Iran viewed the UAE not only as a host for American bases but also as a launchpad for military operations against Iran. On March 13, 2026, American forces attacked Khark Island—one of Iran's most important oil and naval bases. Tehran officially announced that this attack was launched from Emirati soil and that the UAE had acted "beyond mere hosting." Iranian officials claimed that American forces had used bases in the UAE—including Al Dhafra and military ports—to plan and execute the attack on Khark Island.

Following Iran's initial attacks on military bases in the UAE, American forces expanded their presence to non-military sites—including hotels and commercial offices—in the UAE. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Iran's Foreign Minister, warned hotels hosting US military personnel, declaring that these locations were also "legitimate targets." According to reports, US soldiers had taken refuge in hotels and offices in GCC countries—including the UAE—after Iran's attacks on military bases. This development indicated an American effort to disperse its forces and reduce vulnerability, but it also demonstrated that the US military presence in the UAE extended beyond official bases and that Emirati civilian infrastructure had been placed in the service of military operations.

Iran argued that if the UAE allowed the military forces of a hostile state to be stationed in hotels and civilian offices and to conduct military operations against Iran from there, then the UAE bore direct responsibility for those operations. This argument—both legal and ethical—was one of the strongest justificatory bases for Iran's targeting of the UAE.

### ***3.6 Blocking and Seizure of Iranian National and Individual Assets***

On March 5, 2026, the Wall Street Journal reported that the UAE was exploring the freezing of billions of dollars of Iranian assets. Some reports claimed that the freezing target was up to \$530 billion of Iranian and Iranians' assets in the UAE. Although this figure may be exaggerated, the announcement of such intent was itself a clear signal of the UAE's economic stance against Iran. The UAE also arrested dozens of money exchangers linked to the IRGC and targeted Iran's shadow financial networks in Dubai's free trade zones—including Jebel Ali and internet cities.

The annual trade between Iran and the UAE, which stood at about \$27 billion before the war, was one of Iran's most vital economic lifelines. Iranian shadow companies in Dubai's free trade zones had operated for years to circumvent international sanctions, playing a key role in supplying foreign currency and strategic goods to Iran. The freezing of assets and arrest of money exchangers effectively severed this lifeline. Iran compared this action to the West's freezing of Russian central bank reserves and called it "financial warfare."

For Tehran, the seizure of Iranian and Iranians' assets—the latter being one of the wealthiest and most influential minorities in the UAE—was not merely an economic action but part of an all-out war against Iran. If the UAE blocked Iranian assets, Iran would not only lose access to foreign currency but also see the collapse of the shadow economic networks it had built over years to maintain its economy under sanctions. This action—another piece of evidence—proved that the UAE was actively participating in the war against Iran and was not neutral.

### ***3.7 Expulsion and Harassment of Iranians in the UAE***

On March 28, 2026, the UAE officially announced the revocation of residency permits of Iranian citizens. Dozens of Iranian families who had lived in the UAE for decades suddenly lost their visas, leaving many of them in a state of disarray. The UAE also revoked the licenses of five Iranian schools—an action that directly targeted the social and cultural infrastructure of the Iranian community. According to reports, some expelled Iranians were returned to Iran via Afghanistan—a dangerous and humiliating route.

In response, Iran revoked the residency permits of 1,200 Emirati citizens in Iran. The Wall Street Journal reported that Iranian families abroad—including those on business or leisure trips—were refused re-entry to the UAE and found their visas revoked. These expulsions, beyond being an administrative measure, were perceived as targeted harassment of the Iranian community—an action that Iran called a "crime against humanity" and a "blatant violation of human rights."

From Iran's perspective, the expulsion of Iranians—not only an inhumane act but also part of a psychological and social war against Iran—was significant. The Iranian community in the UAE, with its vast assets and prominent economic role, was one of Iran's most important levers of influence in the UAE. Their expulsion, simultaneous with the asset freezes, dealt a double blow to Iran and demonstrated that the UAE was willing to deploy even civilian tools against Iran.

### ***3.8 UAE Withdrawal from OPEC and Challenging the Oil Equation***

In one of the most shocking developments of the 2026 War, the UAE officially withdrew from OPEC and OPEC+—an action effective from May 1, 2026. Suhail Al Mazrouei, the UAE's Energy Minister, announced that this withdrawal would give the UAE "greater flexibility" in managing oil production. But the context of this decision went beyond technical considerations: the UAE had

criticized Arab and Persian Gulf states for not doing "enough to protect the UAE" during the war. Anwar Gargash described the GCC's reaction as the "weakest in history." The UAE felt it had been left alone and had to defend its own interests.

The UAE's withdrawal from OPEC was a heavy blow to the cartel. The UAE—one of the world's largest oil producers, with a production capacity of approximately 5 million barrels per day—was a key OPEC member, and its departure weakened the organization. This action coincided with Donald Trump's pressures on OPEC to increase production and lower oil prices, and some analysts believe that by leaving OPEC, the UAE effectively aligned with US pressures. The UAE's oil production had fallen by 500,000 to 800,000 barrels per day during the war, and leaving OPEC allowed Abu Dhabi to increase production without quota restrictions and recover lost markets.

From Iran's perspective—as an effective OPEC+ member—the UAE's withdrawal was not only a blow to the oil equation but also a clear signal of the UAE's strategic stance against Iran. Iran had used OPEC for years as a tool to manage oil prices and secure its oil revenues. The UAE's withdrawal weakened this tool and simultaneously showed that Abu Dhabi was willing to sacrifice even its long-term oil interests in confronting Iran. The Columbia Energy Policy Centre, in its analysis, stressed that the UAE's exit from OPEC represented "a paradigm shift in Middle East energy policy."

### *3.9 UAE Attempts to Forcibly Reopen the Strait of Hormuz*

On April 1, 2026, the Wall Street Journal reported that the UAE was preparing to assist the United States and its allies in forcibly reopening the Strait of Hormuz—one of the world's most important straits and a vital energy artery—using military power. This report indicated that the UAE, not only diplomatically but also operationally, was examining its capabilities to help secure the strait, including mine-sweeping operations. The UAE had also asked the United States to seize the islands occupied by Iran at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz—an action that would effectively mean the start of direct war with Iran.

This attempt by the UAE—one of the first instances of a Persian Gulf state agreeing to become a belligerent party in the Strait of Hormuz—sent an extremely dangerous signal to Iran. The Strait of Hormuz, with a daily transit of approximately 20 million barrels of oil, is one of the world's most sensitive chokepoints, and its control is one of Iran's most important strategic levers. The UAE's attempt to forcibly reopen the strait using military power would effectively mean depriving Iran of this lever and placing the strait under US and allied control. Iran called this action a "direct aggression against its sovereignty and national security" and cited it as one of the most important reasons for targeting the UAE.

## 4. Counterarguments and Limitations

Throughout the 2026 War, the United Arab Emirates insisted that it was "not a party to the war" and that it "did not allow aggressive use of its territory." Abu Dhabi summoned Iran's ambassador, downgraded diplomatic relations, and raised the issue at the United Nations. At first glance, these actions are consistent with a claim of neutrality. However, as demonstrated in this document, there is substantial and multiple evidence that the UAE's behavior went beyond passively hosting American forces: active lobbying for military attack, deployment of Israeli systems and forces, providing logistical support for operations, blocking assets, expelling Iranians, withdrawing from OPEC, and attempting to forcibly reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Each of these actions, individually, calls the neutrality claim into question; their totality effectively invalidates it.

Nevertheless, one must appreciate the complexity of the position of small states at the intersection of great powers. The UAE—a country of approximately 10 million people—neighbor to Iran and within the operational radius of the United States and Israel, has limited choices. Structural dependence on US security guarantees constrains the UAE: if Abu Dhabi refuses to host American bases, it loses its security guarantee. If it aligns with Iran, it displeases Saudi Arabia and Israel—each of which are among its main security partners. This "security dilemma" of small states is understandable, but international law cannot be used as an excuse to evade responsibility for acts of war.

On the other hand, Iran's strategy was not without limitations. Targeting the UAE—one of Iran's most important trading partners—may have pushed Abu Dhabi further toward the United States and Israel, rather than away from them. After the war, the UAE strengthened its military relations with Israel—not reduced them—and left OPEC. Furthermore, Iran's attacks on civilian infrastructure—including airports and residential areas—caused civilian casualties and undermined the moral legitimacy of Iran's claims. Moreover, targeting the UAE—a member of BRICS—also created a rift within that nascent organization and may contribute to Iran's international isolation in the long term.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that our analysis also has limitations. Access to classified documents of the involved governments could alter the picture. Furthermore, a precise distinction between "forced hosting" and "active participation" in wartime conditions is difficult. Nevertheless, the volume and diversity of publicly available evidence are sufficient to conclude that the UAE's claim of neutrality does not align with reality and that Iran's targeting, although paradoxical and risky, was based on tangible and defensible grounds.

## 5. Conclusion

This research document has demonstrated that Iran's targeting of the United Arab Emirates in the 2026 War was neither accidental nor merely retaliatory, but was based on eight categories of tangible and documented reasons. First, the hosting of US military bases—including Al Dhafra—which served as launchpads for operations against Iran. Second, the UAE's active lobbying to

provoke the United States and Israel into military action against Iran. Third, the growing Israel-UAE military-security cooperation under the Abraham Accords—including the deployment of Israeli forces and systems. Fourth, the UAE’s logistical-operational role in executing attacks—including the attack on Khark Island. Fifth, the blocking and seizure of Iranian and Iranians’ assets—a comprehensive financial war. Sixth, the expulsion and harassment of Iranian citizens—including visa revocations and school license cancellations. Seventh, the withdrawal from OPEC and the challenge to the region’s oil equation. And eighth, the attempt to forcibly reopen the Strait of Hormuz with military power.

The 2026 War created a permanent rupture in Iran-UAE relations. Before the war, tensions existed, but deep economic cooperation—not only \$27 billion in trade but also the prominent presence of Iranians and the accumulation of vast assets—prevented a complete breakdown of relations. The war destroyed this buffer. The expulsion of Iranians, the seizure of assets, and the military attacks left nothing to return to. The UAE left OPEC, strengthened ties with Israel, and effectively finalized its alliance with the anti-Iran camp. Iran, for its part, came to view the UAE—no longer as a tense neighbor but as a strategic enemy.

The consequences of this development extend beyond bilateral relations. First, a rift within BRICS: both Iran and the UAE are members of BRICS, and their conflict has confronted this nascent organization with its first serious internal crisis. Second, a security re-evaluation within the GCC: the UAE criticized the response of other members, and this may lead to a restructuring of Persian Gulf security—including the possibility of forming a new security alliance without Saudi Arabia. Third, the future of US bases in the Persian Gulf: Iran’s attacks demonstrated that hosting American bases turns host countries into targets, which may compel some countries to reconsider their basing agreements. Fourth, the possibility of regional reordering: the 2026 War may lead to the empowerment of currents that seek to reduce dependence on the United States and establish an independent regional security order.

Ultimately, the 2026 War and the targeting of the UAE offer a lesson for all small states at the intersection of great powers: genuine neutrality—not a claim of neutrality—requires refraining from any form of participation, overt or covert, in military operations against neighbors. The UAE could not—or would not—practice such refraining and paid the price. Iran, too, learned that military power, though effective in the short term, may create unintended alliances in the long term. History will be the final judge, but one thing is certain: the 2026 War changed the geopolitical map of the Persian Gulf forever.

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