



SPECIAL ISSUE: THE MIDDLE EAST AFTER THE WAR IN GAZA AND LEBANON

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1993-2024 THIRTY-ONE YEARS OF POLICY FORMULATION AND ANALYSIS

ISRAEL'S 'TERRIBLE SWIFT SWORD' FAILS TO GUARANTEE A PEACEFUL FUTURE



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Writing in the *Buenos Aires Times* in September 2024 under the title 'Israel's terrible swift sword', [James Neilson](#) notes that Israel is using military power for political ends in its current Gaza-Lebanon war because its survival depends on military prowess. This observation reminds one of the verse in [Judges 21:10](#) (Old Testament) written thousands of years ago: "[And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children](#)". [Marcus Walker's](#) article in the *Wall Street Journal* on October 3, 2024 was headed: 'Israel's invasion gamble risks a quagmire in Lebanon', with the subtitle: 'Hezbollah is reeling, but Israel's strategy for restoring its own security *remains murky.*' (author's italics). Is Israel now engaged in yet another gamble with an uncertain long-term outcome?

Faced with existential threats, Israel continues to rely on the sword that in the past has failed to yield the desired results. [Mat Nashed's](#) article in *Aljazeera* on 11 July, 2024, headlined 'Israel's attacks on Gaza: A guide', talks of a tragic history repeating itself, with the current conflict in the Middle East looking like a continuation of the violent conflicts of the past hundred years. The exception this time is that strong non-Arab players, such as Iran, are bracing themselves for a broader conflict, while Turkey sabre rattles from the sidelines. All these conflicts have led to the loss of land (e.g., Golan Heights), ruined lives, destruction, hostage-taking, orphans, widows, prisoners, homelessness, refugees and so on, and yet *the underlying problem that dates back to the Balfour Declaration (1917) remains unsolved.*

Wars and military engagements come at great expense to Arabs and Jews. Mat Nashed notes: "Nearly all 2,3 million Gazans have been internally displaced and *250.000 to 500.000 Israelis have been internally displaced*". (author's italics). Israel is paying a heavy price despite its military advantage and apparent gains. Similar tactics, though not so violent perhaps, have been used against Gaza before. After Hamas won the 2006 elections (organised by the Palestinian Authority), a disappointed Israel used strong-arm tactics,

while the equally disappointed America cut off its funding to Gaza and began arming Hamas's competitor, Fatah, to reverse the Gaza election results. Israel then labelled Gaza 'hostile territory' and imposed a land, sea and air blockade on this narrow strip of land (a mere 400 km²). "Five Israeli wars have been launched on Gaza since it disengaged from the enclave in 2005, aside from smaller incursions and bombing raids", writes Mat Nashed.

Threats against Israel coming from Lebanon have also been dealt with by the sword, but again to no avail. Palestinian attacks from Lebanon led to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1978, followed by another invasion in 1982, with Israel occupying Lebanese territory until 2000. Hezbollah attacks against Israel sparked the Lebanese War of 2006. Now we see yet another Gaza-Lebanon war just as violent as before, but of longer duration. By comparison, the 1967 war against an alliance of Arab countries lasted 7 days and the 1973 Yom Kippur war ended with a ceasefire declaration 18 days after it started. At time of writing, the current conflict has lasted more than 12 months.

The fact that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are now 'doing well' (understandable given their superiority in arms, technology, intelligence gathering and American material support) is leading some to believe that this time around the elusive long-term peace could indeed be achieved with the sword. Writing in *The Jerusalem Post* (October 29, 2024), [Avi Ashkenazi](#) sounded upbeat: "Despite the high number of casualties in recent days, Israel is currently experiencing positive momentum with tactical gains. Within about two months, Israel has eliminated Hassan Nasrallah, dismantled two-thirds of Hezbollah's force, killed Yahya Sinwar, and disrupted Hamas's military rebuilding attempts. Quietly, along the way, Israel has expanded the corridor in Gaza to the north, now stretching 6.5 kilometers wide – about 2 kilometers more than when Israel first secured it".

[In the Lebanese War of 2006](#) (July 12-August 14), Israel again had the momentum and talked of having made tactical gains. That war was triggered by Hezbollah fighters kidnapping two Israeli soldiers and killing eight others in a cross-border attack. As a result: "Israel launched a massive air operation, bombing Hezbollah headquarters and rocket stockpiles in Beirut and militia positions and rocket launchers in the south as well as strategic targets, such as the Beirut airport, roads, and bridges..." Eighteen years later we are back to where we were in 2006 – more killing, more destruction and no viable solution.

In his 1896 pamphlet, *Der Judenstaat* [The Jewish State] [Theodore Herzl](#) wrote of his dream of an "ever-memorable historic home for the Jews" that would become "an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism". This now seems unrealistic, with Israeli Jews and Palestinians having failed so badly to live harmoniously in an independent country. His statement that "no-one can

doubt that the well-being of the entire country would be the happy result [of a Jewish state]" now rings hollow.

What next

In early October 2024, the [BBC](#) asked 10 experts to share their views on "What might happen next with conflict in the Middle East?" One respondent said: "Certainly, a larger war will spread Israel thin, especially when it has yet to achieve the eradication of Hamas in Gaza. However, Israel continues to have the military support of the United States". Another introduced the critical factor of Arab alienation, saying: "Israel's widening campaign is sowing increasing anger among the populations in the Middle East who are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. This makes achieving peace in the future harder". Disappointingly, many observers and analysts of all backgrounds have too often placed excessive importance on the short-term outcome of each Palestinian/Israeli conflict, neglecting to take account of Arab feelings that will, undoubtedly and increasingly, play a significant role in determining the 'war vs peace' agenda of the future.

Israel's long-term security and survival

In his momentous work, *On War*, published after the Napoleonic Wars, [Carl Von Clausewitz](#) emphasized the centrality of *violence, hatred and enmity* between belligerents and concluded that war is the continuation of politics by other means. This suggests that unless a political solution to the Palestinian problem is reached, conflict is likely to recur.

The way things have moved in the past year or so should be a disappointment to Israelis. At the start of the conflict, [Reuters](#) reported on the enthusiasm amongst Israeli youth under the headline: 'Israel's reservists drop everything and rush home' and went on to note that 360.000 reservists had been called up after the Hamas attack. Eleven months later, [The Times of Israel](#) reported that: "Amid troop shortages, IDF begins calling up 15.000 previously released reservists". In the following month, [CNN](#) reported that: "More than 130 Israeli reservists sign letter refusing to fight in Gaza and Lebanon".

This is indicative of a gradual deterioration of the IDF manpower situation, with the hostage drama continuing, deaths mounting and widows and orphans grieving. As support for 'unending war' wanes, fewer Israelis are paying attention to the government's reassuring messages that the military successes in Gaza, Lebanon and Iran are proof that the current strategy is the right one. In October 2024, this headline appeared in the [Middle East Eye](#): 'Israeli forces in Lebanon and Gaza suffer deadliest month of 2024.' Another factor to consider is the number of Israeli Jews who might ultimately decide to emigrate because of the uncertainty this war has created.

Immigration figures may fall for the same reason. The financial cost of the war is staggering and will probably lead to increased taxation, government loans and a drop in living standards.

America supports Israel's war effort unwaveringly and provides much-needed military supplies. Will this support continue, given the changes in America's demographics? The findings from a recent [Pew Research](#) project, reported by Laura Silver (April 2024), do not auger well for Israel: "Younger Americans stand out in their views of the Israel-Hamas war....[they] are more likely to sympathize with the Palestinian people than the Israeli [Jewish] people. A third of adults under 30 say their sympathies lie either entirely or mostly with the Palestinian people, while 14% say their sympathies lie entirely or mostly with the Israeli [Jewish] people. The rest say their sympathies lie equally with both, with neither or that they are not sure". Israel should take note: America's future leadership will come from the ranks of today's youth.

Things are not looking good on the international front either, with support for Israel noticeably waning. Data shared with [TIME](#) from the business intelligence company Moring Consult show that: "Support for Israel around the world has dropped significantly since the war in Gaza began... Net favorability – the percentage of people viewing Israel positively after subtracting the percentage viewing it negatively – dropped globally by an average of 18,5 percentage points between September and December, *decreasing in 42 out of the 43 countries polled*". (author's italics).

Looking to the future and the need to win hearts and minds

Much will depend on the degree of Arab (and Moslem) alienation that engenders the violence, hatred and enmity Clausewitz wrote about. Being the most powerful party in the conflict, Israel needs to win the hearts and minds of the Palestinians, as well as that of the 'man in the street' in neighbouring Arab countries. Palestinians now live a hard, poor and frustrating life and are unable to develop their potential. *This needs to be acknowledged by Israel – in practice.*

For centuries, Jews have experienced terrible and harrowing violence, discrimination and threats in many of the countries in which they lived. They need a home where they can live in peace and enjoy the certainty of a bright future. *This needs to be acknowledged by Palestinians.*

In conclusion, it is clear that endless war will not guarantee Israel's future; it can buy only superficial and transient peace. The demographics, and the staying power of all the parties involved, weigh heavily against Israel. Israeli Jews, a demographically small group of people, can ill afford to live with unending military call-ups, war, grief and uncertainty. A fair and equitable

political solution that will transform Israel/Palestine into the place of harmonious living envisaged by Herzl needs to be found.

SYRIA: THE ROAD AHEAD

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Over the past decade, the obstacles to the overthrow of the Assad regime in Syria were primarily shaped by the external intervention of two key players: Russia and Hezbollah. Moscow provided critical air support to the Syrian government, while Hezbollah, backed by Iran, offered ground forces that helped maintain Assad's grip on power. On the other hand, Israel and Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia had their own reservations about who or what might succeed Assad. For Israel, the prospect of the Muslim Brotherhood, supported by Turkey, taking over Syria was more concerning than Assad's continued rule. In this context, Israel's preference was for the devil they knew—Assad—rather than an uncertain future with the Muslim Brotherhood. However, today, these obstacles seem to have been effectively removed. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah, all facing their own existential crises, are now in no position to offer substantial support to the Assad regime. As one Iranian analyst noted, his country is unable to save a regime whose army is defecting en masse.

Assad's ability to secure military victories over the past decade did not translate into long-term political success. Although he technically won the war, the broader peace remained elusive. He failed to reunify Syria under his rule, and key regions of the country have remained beyond his control. The Idlib region, in particular, is still largely under the influence of jihadist groups, many of which are supported by Turkey. Meanwhile, in the northeast of Syria, the Kurdish-led autonomous region of Rojava emerged, protected by U.S. forces, while Turkey occupied the Afrin region, further complicating Assad's ambitions for territorial reunification.

Economically, Syria is in ruins. Assad has been unable to rebuild the country's shattered infrastructure or alleviate the suffering of the Syrian population, many of whom continue to live in fear of poverty. The healthcare and education systems, already in disarray before the war, have continued to collapse. Despite receiving support from Russia and Iran, neither of these powers has been able or willing to provide the financial resources necessary for Syria's reconstruction. The country is in desperate need of over \$300 billion to rebuild, but both Moscow and Tehran are struggling with their own

financial challenges and have not been able to offer significant portions of this sum. Additionally, Syria has increasingly transformed into a narco-state, with the government relying on the production and trafficking of captagon, a potent amphetamine, to fund its operations. Large swaths of the military and security forces have become involved in drug cartels, further exacerbating the decline of the state.

This transformation of the state has led to the collapse of the social contract that had underpinned the Assad regime since Hafez al-Assad's time. Under Hafez, the regime ensured a certain level of prosperity and stability in exchange for unwavering loyalty to the government. Those who opposed the regime faced brutal repression. However, this contract has broken down under Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian military, once a proud and loyal institution, has seen thousands of soldiers and officers abandon their posts and weapons. This widespread defection is indicative of a government that no longer commands loyalty, and in many ways, there is no state left to defend.

Meanwhile, Turkey has expanded its influence in Syria, becoming a central player in shaping events in the region. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, despite his harsh rhetoric toward Israel and his support for the Palestinians, has ultimately contributed to Israel's security. This paradoxical outcome came about because Turkey allowed jihadist groups to seize control of large parts of Syria, including Damascus, undermining Assad's rule. In the medium term, Turkey may receive rewards from the United States, which could include a military intervention in Rojava.

Russia, while still maintaining two critical military bases in Syria, is facing a significant decline in its influence in the region. These bases are vital for the repair of Russian military equipment and serve as logistical hubs for the Russian presence in the Mediterranean and Africa. However, despite its continued military presence, Russia's prestige in the Middle East has been severely damaged. Assad, like Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi before him, is another leader who, despite close ties to Russia, was ultimately abandoned by Moscow when it became clear that his regime could no longer hold onto power. This betrayal has far-reaching consequences for Russia's future role in the region, making it difficult for any state or regime to trust Moscow with their security.

The future of Syria remains highly uncertain. One of the most prominent rebel forces in the country, the Organization for the Liberation of Greater Syria (HTS), led by Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, has expressed support for a decentralized form of governance that respects the rights of various religious communities. However, it remains unclear whether al-Jolani will pursue democratic processes such as elections or allow for the establishment of free political organizations, especially if such elections result in the Muslim Brotherhood emerging as the dominant political force. This uncertainty

suggests that low-intensity conflicts between various militias and organizations in Syria are likely to continue, potentially leading to a prolonged period of instability.

For Israel and other regional players, managing the chaos in Syria may become more feasible in the absence of Assad's regime. Lebanon, which has long been heavily influenced by events in Syria, will likely feel the impact of a weakened Hezbollah. The complete disintegration of Hezbollah's power would shift the political balance in Lebanon, potentially leading to greater influence for Sunni Muslim factions. It is also important to remember that since 2008, Lebanon has been home to various jihadist organizations, such as Fatah al-Islam, which were dealt with by Hezbollah and the Lebanese army.

A further weakening of Hezbollah in Lebanon could shift the regional balance of power significantly. For Israel, one of the key benefits of Assad's collapse would be the dismantling of the strategic route connecting Tehran to the Mediterranean via Damascus. This route has been crucial for Iran's support of Hezbollah and its broader regional ambitions. Right-wing Israeli think tanks are increasingly arguing that the current geopolitical climate is favorable for neutralizing threats from Iran and Hezbollah. The possibility of a new Israeli military operation against Iran has therefore become a growing concern, particularly given the rapidly changing dynamics in the region. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan are also deeply worried about the potential for an uncontrollable conflict in the Middle East.

In Iran, the defeat of the Assad regime represents a strategic blow to the country's ambitions in the region. For years, the Iranian leadership, particularly the Revolutionary Guards and the conservative clergy, has argued that the best way to defend the Islamic Revolution was through offensive strategies that sought to expand Iranian influence beyond its borders. As Ayatollah Khamenei once put it, "If the revolution remains within Iran's borders, it will be vulnerable." Radical Islam was seen as the means to project Iranian power across the region, much in the same way that pan-Arabism served Egypt under Nasser. However, the collapse of the "axis of resistance," which Iran has heavily invested in, is a significant blow to Iran's regional power and influence.

Some analysts argue that Iran's defeat in Syria could be compared to the Soviet Union's defeat in Afghanistan, marking a major turning point in the broader regional balance of power. With Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah facing internal and external challenges, the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East is undergoing profound changes. The potential for new conflicts and realignments remains high, and the future of Syria, along with its neighboring countries, remains deeply uncertain.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE DAY AFTER



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The Middle East has been in the last decades perhaps the most volatile region in the world. What we have been witnessing since October 7, 2023 is another tragic cycle of heightened violence. What is even more unfortunate is that we do not see the light at the end of the tunnel yet. Moreover, the policy of the Abraham Accords, aiming at the normalization of the relations of Israel with Arab states, has been negatively affected.

The terrorist attack of Hamas against Israel on October 7, 2023 signaled the beginning of the current crisis. Not surprisingly Israel responded militarily. At the same time the Israeli government declared that its objective was to eliminate Hamas.

At the beginning of the crisis Israel enjoyed great support throughout the world, including moderate and conservative Arabs in the Middle East. With the passage of time, the continuation of violence and the deepening of the humanitarian crisis, this support has decreased considerably. Many analysts believe that Israel has lost its moral high ground. In this respect it is essential to underline that the issue of arrest warrants for Prime Minister Netanyahu and the former Minister of Defense of Israel, Yoav Gallant, by the International Criminal Court, is indicative. And this despite the fact that for the leader of Hamas, Mohammed Deif (who according to Israel, he was killed), an arrest warrant was issued too.

Critics in many countries consider that there should have already been a ceasefire and a process for a political solution of this thorny problem. These critics also indicate that what is taking place is a humanitarian crisis of great proportions that cannot be accepted. After all most of the casualties are not Hamas fighters.

Furthermore, Palestinian sympathizers suggest that Israel's actions constitute state terrorism. They also accuse Israel that its political objectives include ethnic cleansing and the acquisition of more territories.

Fighting and violence has not been limited to Gaza. Terrorism and violence have spread to the occupied West Bank. In addition, Hezbollah and Lebanon have been also involved and there have also been exchanges with Syria and, moreover, with Iran.

There is no doubt that the military capabilities of Hamas and Hezbollah have been drastically reduced by Israel. But not their ideology and its influence. On the contrary, the greater the number of casualties and the suffering, the stronger the ideologies become.

On July 18, 2024 the Israeli Knesset passed a resolution stating that it will not accept the creation of a Palestinian state. On the other side there are voices for “the destruction of the Zionist State” and many Palestinians as well as many of their supporters chant in demonstrations “From the river to the sea Palestine will be free”.

There is no doubt that today most Israelis and many Palestinians are against a two-state solution for different reasons. It is important though to explore the possibilities for a future settlement. If both sides persist on a policy of “total victory” the casualties and the human suffering will be higher. In other words, the pursuit of the maximalist objectives on both sides would lead to more bloodshed and violence. Ethnic cleansing in Gaza and more settlements in the West Bank will enhance a climate of total confrontation. Likewise, efforts to destabilize and undermine Israel will have a similar outcome.

Inevitably there are only two options to pacify the broader area through the resolution of the Palestinian question. First, the orthodox perspective – which is a two-state solution; unfortunately, though, the Oslo process that could lead to this outcome in the 1990’s was not successfully completed. Second, a form of federation between Israelis and Palestinians that will include Gaza and the West Bank into one state. Already such ideas have been put forward by various analysts.

The US is close to the options of Israel. There is no official talk from the circles of President elect Donald Trump about a two-state solution anymore. The EU though, as well as most member states, continue to support a two-state solution.

Israel, which has the upper hand in the conflict, should decide whether it prefers to give land for a two-state solution or political rights to the Palestinians within the framework of a federal democratic state to achieve peace and stability. For many years Israelis thought they could avoid making a choice by living with the *status quo*. The recent crisis which started on October 7, 2023 is indicative of the fact that the *status quo* is neither static nor stable.

THE NORMALIZATION IN TURKEY-ISRAEL TIES AFTER THE WAR IN GAZA AND LEBANON. NOT HOW, BUT WHEN?



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The normalization of Turkish-Israeli relations was the main topic of the Turkish news in the days leading up to Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel. The Turkish president and his ministers were prepared to travel to Israel to rekindle their multifaceted collaboration. However, after the Hamas attack, Turkey's anti-Israeli rhetoric was significantly intensified. Turkish politicians, including President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, strongly denounced Israel's military action in Gaza and denounced what they saw as an excessive use of force against Palestinians. Ankara went so far as to call Israel a "terrorist state" in its condemnations.

One year after the October 7 attacks, commentators are pessimistic about the future of Turkish-Israeli relations. Many people believe that normalization is now unattainable because nationalist administrations still rule both nations. Our goal in this brief piece is to discuss why this viewpoint may be premature. After all, despite the official comments implying a severance of ties, the continuing economic and geopolitical contacts between Turkey and Israel reveal a more nuanced connection that exists beyond public discourse. At the same time, Turkey's close ally Azerbaijan continues to maintain a partnership with Israel that serves as an example of cooperation following the end of the conflicts in Palestine and Lebanon.

Continuing Relations Behind Official Statements

Despite anti-Israeli rhetoric and government assertions of broken ties, Turkey and Israel retain continued multifaceted interactions. Turkish MP Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu recently revealed this fact in a parliamentary session. According to official statistics, Azerbaijan's Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline permitted the transit of 2,37 million tons of oil from Turkey to Israel in 2024. For instance, as DEM Party's MP explained the vessels and trucks of Israeli shipping business ZIM continue to operate in Turkish ports such as Kocaeli Derince, therefore commercial links still exist.

Stressing that Turkey receives a fee of \$1,27 per barrel for this passage, Gergerlioğlu accused the Turkish government of hiding these transactions while openly criticizing Israel. According to the Turkish opposition MP these dealings highlighted the discrepancy between their harsh rhetoric and continued lucrative commercial deals. Contrary to the anti-Israeli rhetoric and governmental claims of severed ties, Turkey and Israel maintain ongoing multidimensional relations.

Undoubtedly, Gergerlioğlu's disclosure underscores the complexity of Turkey-Israel relations, revealing that economic interests and geopolitical strategies often operate beneath the surface of public political discourse.

Azerbaijan-Israel Ties: A Model for Cooperation

The relationship between Azerbaijan and Israel offers a pertinent example of cooperation against all odds, which could gradually open the door for the normalization of Turkey-Israel ties. Despite being a Muslim-majority country and maintaining close ties with Turkey, Azerbaijan has cultivated a strategic partnership with Israel.

The recent Gaza conflict put Azerbaijan in a difficult position between its solidarity with the Muslim world and its strong ties with Israel. Baku denounced violence against people and backed UN resolutions. The Azeri government called for an immediate truce but did not publicly denounce Israel. This nuanced stance is based on substantial mutual interests: Israel is a significant buyer of Azerbaijani oil, and in exchange, Azerbaijan receives Israeli military technology and intelligence support, which is critical for its security concerns, particularly about Iran and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The Azerbaijan-Israel strategic collaboration has persisted despite regional tensions and challenges, demonstrating how pragmatic factors may enable cooperation. Azerbaijan's ability to preserve and strengthen ties with Israel while handling regional concerns reveals a route that Turkey may follow. Turkey can restore its relationship with Israel by emphasizing strategic objectives alongside diplomatic engagement and capitalizing on shared economic and security concerns.

Prospects for Normalization: Conditions and Challenges

The end of the wars in Palestine and Lebanon will determine whether or not ties between Israel and Turkey can return to their pre-conflict condition. According to Goudsouzian and Aslan, normalization may be possible if Israel returns to centrist policies and distances itself from neo-colonial and expansionist goals pushed by ultra-orthodox and ethno-nationalist parties.

The fresh commitment must be to a workable two-state solution that honors Palestinian ambitions. A change in policy of this kind will resolve one of Turkey's main complaints and rebuild confidence between the two countries. Ankara must simultaneously stop its harsh anti-Israeli rhetoric and try to diplomatically curb the militarization of Palestinian groups if it hopes to make normalization a reality. According to this viewpoint, one significant development we will need to monitor in the coming future is the potential transfer of Hamas leadership to Turkey.

It is crucial to remember that historically, Israel and Turkey have been able to keep their relationship practical by keeping political differences apart from strategic and economic collaboration. Cooperation in trade, regional security, and energy exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean benefits both countries. Additionally, we must not forget the Iran factor, which, despite everything, unites the two nations behind closed doors. In the end, Israel's earnest attempt to hold substantive talks with the Palestinians would reduce tensions with Turkey and promote regional stability. For all these reasons, and in light of the conclusion of the wars and the evolving positions of the Israeli and Turkish governments, we assert that the critical question in the new phase of Turkish-Israeli relations will no longer be, "Can the two countries restore their ties?" but rather, "When will this restoration occur?"

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THE TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP: THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE AS A FOREIGN POLICY DRIVER



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October 7 is widely considered as a turning point both for the Palestinian issue and concerning the relations between Israel and its neighbouring countries. In the aftermath of October 7, Turkish-Israeli relations were not unscathed, at least diplomatically. The analysis will focus on the tumultuous history of the Turkish-Israeli relationship through the lens of the various developments with regard to the Palestinian issue and Gaza.

Turkish-Israeli relations can be split into four distinct phases throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The first phase began in 1949 when Turkey became the first predominantly Muslim country to recognize Israel, following up to full diplomatic relations in 1952. 1958 stands as a key moment when a secret cooperation agreement between both countries' secret services was signed. Intelligence exchange and security priorities were at the core of the relationship: Turkey allowed Mossad to operate within its territory, while Israel shared information on PKK activities. The phase ended after the 1970s when Ankara began pursuing a rapprochement policy with the Middle East, seeking Arab support on the Cyprus issue, and focusing its economic policy towards eastern markets in the wake of the energy crises. Moreover, Israel moved towards normalising relations with Egypt and Jordan and strengthening ties with other Arab states after 1973. Hence, the Palestinian issue was side-lined during this period, with Turkey maintaining a mostly neutral stance, keeping with the approach of the international community.

The 'golden decade' or second phase of Turkish-Israeli relations came to the forefront following the end of the Cold War with a series of agreements during 1996 covering cultural, political, and economic cooperation, a free trade zone, intelligence-sharing, upgrading Turkish military equipment, and joint military production. Both states were able to forge ahead due to the developments regarding the Palestinian issue and the Oslo roadmap, without facing harsh criticism from the Arab world. The PKK threat and potential leverage of the Israeli lobby in American politics constituted driving factors for Turkey. Israel was able to meet Turkey's military and technological needs to boost economic relations and expand its regional presence. For Turkey and most of Arab

leading countries, the Palestinian issue was headed towards its resolution with the PLO acknowledged as the Palestinians' official representative.

The third phase saw its starting point in the late 2000s with the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident, which was followed by diplomatic ties' downgrading. At the core of their deterioration were the Israeli Gaza blockade, the Palestinian issue deadlock, and the humanitarian situation. Erdoğan's Turkey aimed at obtaining special status in Gaza, providing mediation bons offices and cultivating its Hamas relationship in line with its regional policy geared towards Political Islam. While arms trade and joint military exercises were suspended, bilateral trade rose throughout the decade. Notwithstanding relationship normalisation in 2016, tensions remained over Turkey's support for Hamas, the US recognising Jerusalem as capital and the Israeli operations in Gaza. This phase is distinctive in the Palestinian issue being instrumentalised for domestic and foreign policy priorities. Nonetheless, the Turkish financial crisis and Ankara's recalibrated regional policy with the Gulf, eventually downgraded the importance of the Palestinian issue.

The current and fourth phase starts on October 7, with Hamas' attack and Israel's subsequent response. While Erdoğan immediately condemned Israel's Gaza operations, its West Bank policy, and dubbed Netanyahu the 'butcher of Gaza', he refrained from severing diplomatic relations. Instead, Turkey maintained support for the Palestinians, offered mediation, and promoted a two-state solution. In retrospect, Erdoğan meticulously avoided endangering the recently renewed Turkish-Israeli relationship, singling out the Netanyahu administration rather than Israel itself. Nonetheless, Erdoğan reaffirmed support towards Hamas as a liberation movement. However, the humanitarian crisis, the year-spanning Gaza war, and the Turkish 2024 local elections, forced Erdoğan to gradually adopt a harsher stance. The economy, Gaza and ongoing Turkish-Israeli ties were at the heart of the debate from the opposition. For damage control, Erdoğan embargoed construction material exports to Israel. Eventually, a month following the one-year anniversary of the October 7 attack, Erdoğan severed all ties with Israel.

While Turkish-Israeli ties – and especially trade – were resilient throughout the first three phases to the developments concerning the Palestinian issue, the 2023-2024 period showcased a radical shift. The Gaza war and its ramifications took a toll on Erdoğan's domestic priorities and hurt the very bastion of the relationship: bilateral trade. It remains to be seen whether history will repeat itself with the relationship enduring economically, given that both states are forever bound in each other's spheres of interests.

DR. STRANGELOVE IN UKRAINE AND THE MIDDLE EAST: CROSSROADS FOR MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY AND GLOBAL SECURITY



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Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film, *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, brilliantly satirized Cold War paranoia and its catastrophic potential. Filmed two years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, it captured how fear and irrational decision-making could spiral into nuclear Armageddon. While paranoia breeds irrationality, the hallmark of Cold War decision-making was rationality—a critical factor in preventing catastrophe.

Nearly 60 years later, *Dr. Strangelove* resonates as the world faces interconnected crises in Ukraine and in the Middle East. Both conflicts, fuelled by perilous and often irrational decision-making, threaten to destabilize global peace and security, with some suggesting humanity may be on the threshold of World War III.

Are we witnessing a breakdown in decision-making in Ukraine and the Middle East? Is Armageddon ante portas? One hopes not. But hope is not a policy—it neither mitigates risks nor provides solutions.

Ukraine: The Perils of Escalation

The war in Ukraine has reached a critical juncture. The Biden administration recently authorized the use of long-range U.S. weapons (ATACMS), enabling Ukrainian forces to strike deep into Russian territory. This marks a significant escalation and comes as President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office. Notably, this decision was announced after a White House meeting between Biden and Trump, with Trump remaining silent, as of this writing, about the use of these weapons—raising questions of tacit approval.

In response, Putin publicized changes to Russia's nuclear doctrine, lowering the threshold for what constitutes an “existential threat” warranting a nuclear response. Russian officials have also hinted at disabling U.S. satellites, with “accidents” in space potentially escalating the conflict further. To underscore

these threats and as a signal especially to NATO's European members, Moscow launched a hypersonic intermediate-range ballistic missile (codenamed Oreshnik -- "hazel" or "hazel grove") at the Ukrainian city of Dnipro for the first time in the war. The purpose of these intermediate missiles is for war in Europe and they can easily be modified to carry multiple tactical nuclear weapons.

The U.S. appears to be following a strategy of "escalate to de-escalate," where military escalation aims to strengthen bargaining power for peace negotiations. Yet this approach is fraught with danger. The Cold War remained cold due to sustained communication and rational decision-making. Without high-level dialogue today, the risk of uncontrollable escalation looms large, echoing Kubrick's grim warnings.

The Middle East: From "Manageable" Conflict to Conflagration

In the Middle East, conflicts in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon have spiralled beyond containment. What began as a "localized" war between Israel and Hamas, namely between a state actor and a non-state actor, has expanded to involve Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Iran—a state actor on the threshold of nuclear capability. While Iran does not yet have nuclear weapons, it stands at the brink and could resort to deploying "dirty" weapons in an emergency.

Iran's ambitious policies, coupled with hardened Israeli rhetoric calling for "total victory" over Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Palestinian Authority, undermine prospects for a two-state solution and risk igniting a wider regional conflict.

The U.S. role is pivotal. Prime Minister Netanyahu views Trump's presidency as an opportunity to neutralize Iran's nuclear program. However, an overly aggressive strategy risks escalating the conflict into a broader war with global repercussions. To avoid this, Trump must use his influence to address deeper regional challenges, including the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians and the provocations of Israeli hardliners, while leveraging tools like the Abraham Accords to promote peace.

Interconnected Risks

Although the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East differ in nature, they share common dynamics: both test the limits of rational decision-making and expose the fragility of global security frameworks.

In Ukraine, unchecked escalation risks direct confrontation between nuclear powers, raising the prospect of nuclear weapons being used for the first time

since World War II. In the Middle East, escalation threatens to create an unending cycle of violence. While only Israel possesses nuclear weapons, the involvement of nuclear-capable Iran raises the danger of crossing the nuclear threshold.

Tailored approaches are essential for both conflicts. In Ukraine, peace is conceivable if high-level dialogue between Washington and Moscow is restored. In the Middle East, the U.S. must prioritize diplomacy to restrain provocations by Israeli hardliners, address Palestinian statehood, and prevent Iran from advancing its nuclear ambitions.

A Clarion Call for Diplomacy

The world stands at a crossroads. Decision-making in Ukraine and the Middle East has brought us closer to the brink of catastrophic escalation than at any time in recent history. Yet history offers hope. The Cold War remained cold because rationality prevailed. The same must happen now.

Avoiding Armageddon requires rejecting escalation and committing to hard, tireless, and sustained diplomacy. Global peace and security depend on it.

THE MIDDLE EAST AFTER THE TOTAL WAR OF ISRAEL



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The question we are called upon to answer concerns not only the Middle East/West Asia region but the entire planet. The picture of this region after the war in Gaza, Lebanon and as everything indicates at the time of writing, in Iran will be different from the one that existed on October 6, 2023. Or to put it another way: if the picture is not different, the war will not be over, it will simply be temporarily stopped. In fact, the region has already changed sweepingly and continues to change.

Assessing the post-war picture involves determining the nature of the war in Gaza, Lebanon and gradually Iran, or to put it in other terms, the nature of the war centered on Israel. It should be emphasized at the outset that the most accurate historical assessment should highlight the thread that has followed the different wars in which Israel has been involved since its inception. For reasons of ease of analysis and substance, however, we can approach the events after 7 October in a distinct way, not forgetting that they are part of a wider conflict that begins in 1948. After all, October 7 would not have happened, nor could it have been explained without what took place before it.

In response to October 7, Israel launched both an all-out existential war for Israel itself against Gaza and every other enemy, as well as genocide. The statements of Israeli officials at all levels are now well known and characteristic in both respects. The Prime Minister of Israel invoked the biblical episode of Amalek, while the defense minister called for "complete siege on Gaza. No electricity, no food, no water, no fuel. Everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly". He also stated that "Gaza won't return to what it was before. We will eliminate everything. If it doesn't take one day, it will take a week. It will take weeks or even months, we will reach all places".¹ The statements are too many and concern

¹ Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister, Formal Government Press Office televised address, (28 October 2023), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIPkoDk6isc>, access. 25-10-2024.

the entire hierarchy of the Israeli state. Their message is clear: the war after October 7 is existential and totalitarian for Israel. Israel's own prime minister has repeatedly spoken of the new "Middle East" that Israel wants to shape through its expanding war with the resistance, especially Iran.² The Israeli actions, indeed did not fall short of the afore- mentioned statements.

Therefore, we know that we are talking about an existential, total war. But who exactly are the warring parties? What is this war? The war we are talking about has both an endogenous, regional dynamic and is also the second hot front of a "modular" world war. At its core is the war of the "axis of resistance" and Israel. It has already expanded into a war between Hezbollah, Yemen, Iraq's Shiite forces and Israel and now a direct "war choreography" with Iran. But in addition to its regional dimension, it is clearly part of the US-led bloc conflict on the one hand, against the Eurasian bloc under formation, at the center of which Russia, Iran and China are found. The strategic depth of Israel reaches Washington, whereas the strategic depth of the Palestinian resistance and Hezbollah can potentially reach Moscow and Beijing, although not in the linear and self- obvious manner of the Israeli- US relation.

In a way there is a total war going on of regional causes within a wider total war of global significance, which may not have taken a "cataclysmic turn", but is still a total war given that it is a war of global domination. Total wars may be paused (still right now this seems to be quite unlikely) but cannot be stopped in the long- term unless there is a clear new equation on the field and in international relations, meaning a clear winner and a clear loser. Israel in particular seems to be too deeply in the conflict to be able or willing to stop it.

Although the vast and tragic majority of victims is in the Palestinian and gradually Lebanese side, the shock of this war for Israel has been unprecedented. Its image of a regional super- power has been shattered which means that its deterrence is crumbling. Israel has demonstrated since October 7, 2023, that it can cause unprecedented distraction, that it maintains air superiority, technological and intelligence services' capabilities but on the other hand it is failing to achieve any of its goals on the field. It has failed to destroy Hamas, Hezbollah and even more Iran. Any breach of Israel deterrence destabilizes not only Israeli image of force internationally but also and potentially its most crucial regional allies: Egypt and Jordan predominantly. If Israel is not that strong and if the US is not the sole leader

Yoav Gallant, Minister of Defence, Speech to soldiers released by Israeli Defence Ministry, (10 October 2023), Kipa News, 10 October 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9wx7e4u-xM>, access. 25-10-2024.

² Toi Staff, Full text of Netanyahu's UN speech: 'Enough is enough,' he says of Hezbollah, also warns Iran, The Times of Israel, (2024, September 27), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-netanyahus-un-speech-enough-is-enough-he-says-of-hezbollah-also-warns-iran/>>, access. 27-10-2024.

of the world, then why should they continue to align almost unconditionally with Israel?

In addition, Israel suffers increasingly from this intensive war of attrition. Although the military censorship is “draconian” in Israel, we know that among Israeli forces, there are almost 1.000 dead and 12.000 wounded. Almost 2.5% of its initial reserves of 500.000 has been up to some extent victims of this ongoing war, without the front with Iran evolving with full force. In addition, the Israeli economy is also suffering. Even before the invasion in Lebanon and the intensification of hostilities with Iran, the Israeli economy was downgraded regarding its credit rating, the cost of war was expected in May of 2024 to reach \$66 billion (it will most likely be much more than this given the latest developments) and the growth of Israeli economy is expected to be seriously harmed.³ In a recent report, even under less negative scenarios it is highlighted that “[T]he anticipated decline in growth rates in all scenarios compared to pre-war economic forecasts and the increase in defense expenditures could exacerbate the risk of a recession reminiscent of the lost decade following the Yom Kippur War.”⁴ In the same report, even without the escalation in the North which eventually happened, the forecast referred to a significant decrease in GDP per capita. As events continue to escalate, the bleakest predictions seem more realistic.

Although these elements could push for a truce and then a new peace initiative, in reality they are pushing in the opposite direction, that of intensifying the war in order to “clean” the landscape in the Middle East. Total wars have their own logic, which may otherwise seem irrational, but in their context becomes dominant. We must not forget that total wars do not arise simply because some people want to (without underestimating the human factor). They condense and culminate tectonic changes that “mature” for relatively long periods of time and explode due to catalysts. In addition, they accumulate a heavy ideological burden which very often exerts enormous or absolutely binding pressure on decision-makers. To all the above we must add the serious degradation of communication channels between the US, Russia and China, which does not facilitate the “freezing” of the conflict first and peace initiatives afterwards.

The Middle East, therefore, after the end of Israel's war with the “axis of resistance” will certainly hardly resemble the picture it had on October 6, 2023. Schematically speaking, it may have roughly one of two forms (with many intermediate nuances and versions, obviously): the first possible form

³ Hanna Ziady, Israel’s economy is paying a high price for its widening war, CNN, (October 4, 2024), <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/10/04/economy/israel-economy-war-impact/index.html>>, access. 29-10-2024.

⁴ Tomer Fadlon et al., Implications of Continuing the War on Israel’s Economy—Three Scenarios, The Institute for National Security Studies, (2024, August 19), <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/economy-war/>>, access. 29-10-2024.

will focus not merely on the emergence (this has already happened) but on the global recognition of Iran as the major actor in West Asia. Israel will not be able to respond to the possibility of war with Iran, and the United States will take part reluctantly and not in full force. The result will be a clear, albeit probably not cataclysmic, defeat for Israel. Iran's centrality will benefit Russia and China at least in the medium term. Saudi Arabia will be under too much pressure and will likely pursue a pragmatic policy of further normalizing relations with Tehran, therefore causing tensions with the US. Egypt and Jordan will also normalize relations with Iran but will be tested internally for stability. They will probably shift toward even closer cooperation with Russia and China. Türkiye will be chosen by the US as the main rivalry of Iran, while Greece and Cyprus will suffer serious pressure to align with the new central role of Türkiye. The "axis of resistance" will not dominate absolutely for the rest, but will enjoy great prestige, relative calm and stabilization. Israel will face an acute existential question, not so much because of its military defeat itself (in the sense of seizing territory it controls, for example, without excluding such a development) but mainly because of the flight of part of its population due to generalized insecurity. Israel's decline in power will weaken the U.S. position in the region and eventually force Israel to enter into a new peace process with the Palestinians.

The second possible form passes through a major US-Iran war and is structured around a simultaneous strategic defeat of Iran in West Asia and a great weakening of Russia and China, leaving Iran without strategic depth. In this case, at least in the medium term, we will have a temporary domination of the USA and Israel in the region. The "axis of resistance" will take critical blows and endure as a force of lower intensity. Gaza, or at least a large part of it, will be ethnically cleansed. Israel will de facto expand its territory. If Russia and China are not weakened to a crucial degree, in such an eventuality they will logically intervene to prevent a strategic defeat of Iran, and there we will probably see an even bigger war, directly between Russia, China and the US.

Of course, as already mentioned, there are many intermediate versions, while the development is "open". However, today the first scenario seems more likely for reasons both regional (demographic, geographical, economic, military) and global (relative but clear decline of US power). The immediate future will tell. Unfortunately, it will be bloody and torturous either way.

ON JUSTICE, PEACE AND STABILITY IN AN ANARCHIC WORLD LESSONS FROM GAZA AND CYPRUS



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Hamas' unprecedented terrorist attack on Israeli civilians on October 7, 2023, and the ensuing massive casualties among Palestinians in Gaza have led to one of the most perilous episodes of regional instability in the Middle East. The public debate on accountability for this crisis tends to reflect ideological beliefs and preconceived notions regarding responsibility for the broader Palestinian issue. Much of the discourse centers on various readings of justice, and how peace might be achieved. While justice and peace are crucial components of international relations, in this situation, they often come at the expense of another significant principle: stability. This article briefly examines the role of stability in volatile international environments, where the pursuit of justice (often flawed by misperceptions and heavily biased inferences) can undermine peace and contribute to conflict and disaster.

In a broader historical context, it can be argued that Israel has contributed to turning the Middle East to an intrinsically volatile region through actions that contravene general international and humanitarian law in its pursuit of statehood and security. For instance, although Israel attained statehood based on pre-existing legal norms and in accordance with a United Nations plan rejected by the Arab population of Palestine, the forcible displacement of Arabs from their homes cannot be deemed lawful. Additionally, Israel violated general international law in 1967 by annexing parts of the territory of other states in its pursuit of security. As for the ongoing operations in Gaza and Lebanon, they also involve potential serious violations of international humanitarian law. This is suggested by the International Court of Justice in its Order of January 26, 2024, and supported by the International Criminal Court's decision to issue warrants against Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Minister Gallant. Despite accepting Israel's right to self-defence, the international community is concerned for the humanitarian disaster in Gaza. Military success against Hamas comes at a significant cost, as the scale of the humanitarian disaster is likely to foster future generations of radicalized Arabs. These individuals may be inclined to engage in terrorist activities against those they perceive as their enemies.

Many analysts contend that Hamas' attack on October 7, 2023, which ignited the current violence, was not something new but rather a symptom of Israel's ongoing violations of Palestinian human rights and their right to statehood, as outlined by the Oslo Accords. Although this argument has a reasonable basis, it overlooks certain fundamental realities: if we isolate the current chain of events, there is no doubt that before October 7, 2023 the area was relatively stable. Not sustainably peaceful, but stable. Most likely, this war would not have started without Hamas's strike on October 7 and the subsequent involvement of more actors, like Houthis and Hezbollah. At this point, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of international justice and international stability. International justice, which is grounded in safeguarding states' rights to territorial integrity, peoples' rights to self-determination, and human rights globally, should be the primary objective of the international community. However, despite the clear provisions of the UN Charter and various international conventions that have codified international customary law since World War II, the realization of a rules-based international society largely depends on the willingness of sovereign states, particularly major powers. In other words, international norms are not strong enough to remedy the symptoms of international anarchy.

In the absence of feasible prospects for a sustainably rules-based international society, and considering that a chaotic "war of all against all" is the least desirable scenario, stability serves as the next best alternative. In the context of Israeli-Palestinian relations, justice cannot be achieved as long as Israel rejects a two-state solution. However, in the interim, involved parties can work to maintain stability and pursue noble objectives through peaceful means. Stability amidst injustice cannot allow everybody to live as they wish. However, it can keep hostilities and the death tolls to a minimal. Pursuing prolonged wars in the name of achieving justice—or a flawed perception of it—means that many individuals may not live to witness its realization, if it is realized at all.

Cyprus provides a good example of how stability without justice can serve human and state objectives. Cyprus had been unstable since 1963 and the eruption of inter-communal clashes between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. In 1974, Turkey invaded and forcibly partitioned the island, creating two ethnically distinct areas by militarily occupying the northern part, where it settled the Turkish Cypriot population and deliberately transferred settlers from Anatolia in the south. This action resulted in widespread violations of international law, including the ethnic cleansing of the Greek Cypriot majority in the northern part through their forcible displacement from their homes. Despite this unfortunate situation, and the loss of a significant portion of its territory and resources, Cyprus managed to achieve significant economic growth and stabilize its political institutions in the years following the crisis. Furthermore, despite the self-declaration of the so called "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus", the Republic of Cyprus remained the only internationally

recognized state on the island, even though it controls only the southern part of its territory. Today, despite challenges and sensitive balances, Cyprus is a full member of the European Union and serves as a valuable partner to major powers and neighboring states in the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Middle East. This achievement would not have been possible without the prior marginalization of extremist Greek Cypriot elements that contributed to instability before July 1974, and confining the struggle for justice to exclusively diplomatic means thereafter. 50 years after the invasion justice has not prevailed in Cyprus, as its northern part is still under Turkish occupation. Actually, by making painful concessions in negotiations that legitimize some of the original violations, the Greek Cypriot leadership has effectively accepted that absolute justice may never be fully realized. Nonetheless, Greek Cypriots have maintained a decent standard of living over the years, despite shortcomings in their political system and economic model. After the end of hostilities in August 1974, the Greek Cypriot community suffered only a handful of losses in sporadic incidents along the buffer zone. This situation is difficult to compare with the ongoing crisis in Gaza, where 44.000 Palestinians have been killed only since October 2023.

The case of Cyprus illustrates that stability and peaceful efforts can more effectively achieve a people's objectives than attempting to overcome a militarily powerful opponent through force. Of course the two situations are not identical, and the Palestinian people can hardly be blamed for their challenges. Indicatively, Cyprus after 1974 retained its pre-existing statehood, while the Palestinians have never enjoyed their own. True, the Israeli leadership rejects a two-state solution for security reasons, despite the provisions outlined in the Oslo Accords. However, the radical and terrorist actions by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, and similar organizations further undermine this prospect. Actually, considering the asymmetric nature of their actions and the support they receive from the Iranian regime, which openly denies Israel's right to exist, Israel's violations might be viewed as the only feasible course of action from a realpolitik perspective. Violent actions, especially acts of terrorism, often provoke state force, thereby creating vicious cycles of instability. On the other hand, the absence of such cycles of violence equates to stability and provides a fertile ground for diplomatic initiatives. While such initiatives may not fully align with the concept of international justice, they are more conducive to peace than revolutionary attempts to achieve justice by force, which only strengthen the uncontrollable forces of international anarchy. States, who enjoy the monopoly of legitimate use of force and, therefore, the monopoly of sovereignty, often de-prioritize international norms when vital interests are at stake. Unfortunately, whether we like it or not, this is a "golden rule" in international politics, which can be mitigated through the advancement of the international norms but not entirely abolished. In this context, stability is often the best we can have in volatile regions like the Middle East. Therefore, any effort that undermines

stability in the name of justice ultimately diminishes the attainable form of peace that is possible.

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