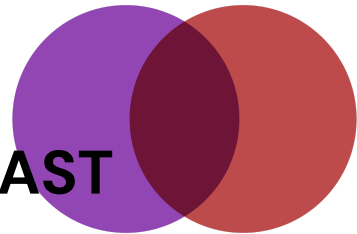




Ziad MAJED

YEAR ZERO IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Prolog

Championing the Palestinian cause used to be what one could expect from Arab governments, even when they trampled on the civil and political rights of their own citizens. After the brutal backlash that followed the uprisings of the early 2010s, however, some heads of state reckoned that the time had come to forfeit this last concession to their own public opinions.

Hence the so-called Abraham Accords brokered by the first Trump administration in 2020, whereby Morocco, Bahrein, the United Arab Emirates and Sudan recognized Israel without making any demand regarding the creation of a Palestinian state. Soon thereafter, rumor had it that more countries, including Saudi Arabia, considered following suit. Meanwhile, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose far-right coalition had returned to power in the fall of 2022, made it clear that, under his leadership, all occupied Palestinian territories would become integral part of "The Land of Israel".

Both the deadly attacks perpetrated by Hamas militants on October 7, 2023, and the ensuing genocidal campaign launched by the Israeli army occurred in that context. For the Islamist organization, the purpose of the ill-fated Operation Al-Aqsa Flood was to challenge the erasure of the Palestinian people. For the Israeli authorities, the invasion and destruction of Gaza was less a matter of retaliation and vengeance, let alone an attempt to free the hostages, than an opportunity to implement their stated agenda at a much faster pace.

In the interview he gave us, as in his most recent book, the French-Lebanese political scientist Ziad Majed explores the unfolding and the implications, regional as well as global, of this ongoing catastrophe. To shed light on the epochal crisis confronting the Middle East, his privileged vantage point is neither Israel nor Palestine but the neighboring countries – Lebanon and Syria in particular – that have been engulfed in the Israeli attempt to find a final solution to the Palestinian question.

In Lebanon, Ziad Majed recounts, Hezbollah, the Shi'ite political party and militia, initially tried to do its part as a member of the Tehran-led "axis of resistance", yet without waging a full-fledged war against Israel. For the Netanyahu government, however, containment was no longer the order of the day. Emboldened by the unconditional support of the US – under Joe Biden and Donald Trump – as well as by the acquiescence of European governments, Israel did not merely set out to crush Hezbollah's military capacities. To preempt any further threat, its army has turned large swaths of Southern Lebanon into an inhabitable buffer zone and is keeping the rest of the country under permanent aerial control.

In Syria, meanwhile, both the Israeli campaign and the war in Ukraine eventually deprived Bashar al-Assad of the support that had kept him in power – namely Iranian and Hezbollah militiamen on the ground and Russian planes in the air. While the fall of the Baathist regime, in November 2024, was greeted with elation by a vast majority of Syrians, fresh anxieties were quick to arise regarding both the fate of minorities, whether Kurdish, Druze, or Alawite, and the ambitions of foreign powers. Among the latter, Israel soon became the most ominous menace to the unity and the reconstruction of the country. Determined to subject Damascus to the same political tutelage as Beirut, its military forces not only grabbed more territories around the Golan heights but also destroyed what was left of the Syrian army's weaponry – there again with Washington's full support.

In our conversation, we asked Ziad Majed to ponder the leeway that both Nawaf Salam, the Lebanese Prime minister and Ahmed al-Sharaa, the Syrian ruler, might still have at their disposal to regain a modicum of autonomy. We also asked him to examine the agenda of powerful regional actors such as the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to assess the role of brokers assumed by Qatari officials and, to a lesser extent, by the Egyptian military leadership, and to reflect on the options still available to the Iranian regime. As our discussion illustrates, much will depend on the willingness of the United States to keep enabling Israel's hubris, but also on whether social movements, both in the Middle East and beyond, succeed in dissuading their governments from turning a blind eye to the annihilation of the Palestinian people.

Our interview with Ziad Majed took place in Paris and includes two sessions. We first talked to Ziad on May 9, 2025, when Donald Trump was about to meet Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh and seemed to be heeding the Prince's call to rein in Benyamin Netanyahu and keep negotiations going with Tehran. A month later, however, Israel launched what came to be known as the Twelve-day War against Iran, which the Trump administration seconded by bombing three nuclear sites. We thus decided to update our interview with a second exchange, which took place on August 30, 2025.


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Texts written by: Michel Feher, Thomas Gmür, and Tom Novak.

Chapter 1

Donald Trump and Iran: A time of Indecision

The China-brokered détente between Iran and Saudi Arabia

After a seven-year hiatus, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran agreed to resume diplomatic relations on March 10, 2023. In Beijing, in the presence of former Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Saudi National Security Advisor Moussaad Al-Aiban and Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamakani announced the upcoming normalization. Two months later, their countries exchanged ambassadors. The rapprochement began in 2021, thanks to the intervention of the Iraqi government and the Sultan of Oman, but it took China's involvement, much to the chagrin of authorities in Washington, for the negotiations to succeed.

Since the Shah's fall in 1979, relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia have been unstable. From the outset, Ayatollah Khomeini sought to spread his Islamic revolution far beyond the borders of his country and Shiite communities in the Muslim world. For its part, the Wahhabi monarchy did not limit itself to using American military protection to thwart the ambitions of the Supreme Leader. With the help of the Pakistani secret services, and in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the monarchy sought to promote a rival conservative revolution, but one exclusively reserved for export. Competition between the two projects intensified in 1980, when King Khaled decided to support the Iraqi invasion of Iran. The dispute reached a point of no return in 1987, when clashes with Saudi security forces left 400 Iranian pilgrims dead in Mecca during the Hajj. From then on, Tehran decided to break off diplomatic relations with Riyadh for the first time.

Four years later, however, new circumstances led to a resumption of contact, with the Gulf War placing Iran and Saudi Arabia on the same side. By invading Kuwait, Saddam Hussein had become an enemy as hated by the Saudi royal family as by the leaders of the Islamic Republic. Afterwards, although mistrust and the war of influence between the two states continued (both the development of Iran's nuclear program and the inclusion of Hamas in a "resistance axis" structured by Tehran deeply worried the Saudis), their shared aversion to the jihadists of the Islamic State tempered their mutual enmity—at least, until the turn of the 2010s.

The "Arab Spring", or more accurately its repression, prompted conflicting investments by Saudi Arabia and Iran. In Bahrain, Saudi Arabia helped the Sunni Khalifa dynasty remain in power by crushing the Shiite majority's rebellion, which was supported by Iran. In Syria, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard fought alongside the Russian air force to prevent the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, some of whose opponents were supported by the Saudi authorities. These two conflicts were soon joined by the return of civil war in Yemen, with Riyadh siding with the government in Sanaa and waging a fierce but futile war against the Houthi separatists armed by Tehran. These

proxy wars were themselves followed by direct conflict when a Saudi court sentenced Sheikh Nimr Baqr al-Nimr, a Saudi Shiite cleric and peaceful opponent of the regime, to death. His execution in 2016 sparked major protests in Iran. The Saudi embassy was ransacked and the two countries broke off diplomatic relations.

The context that led to the process of rekindling relations was paradoxical in some respects: the change in Mohammed bin Salman's attitude, the kingdom's new strongman, stemmed from the outrage caused in the United States by the brutal murder of the American-Saudi journalist Khashoggi—an act ordered by the crown prince—and then by the first Trump administration's passivity when Saudi oil infrastructure was bombed, in all likelihood by the Iranians or their proxies.

Keen to reduce his country's dependence on an American patron whose reliability he no longer considered a guarantee, Mohammed bin Salman opted for a multilateral approach, by moving closer to Russia and China. He also focused on his country's economic development beyond the sole export of hydrocarbons. However, the success of such a program depended on a policy of appeasement at the regional level: disengagement in Yemen, reintegration of Syria into the Arab League. And, ultimately, a rapprochement with Iran. The decisive moment in this process came in December 2022: it was during a summit between China, represented by Xi Jinping himself, and the Gulf Cooperation Council that the meeting of March 10, 2023, was planned. Of course, Israel's response to the attacks of October 7 and their regional consequences, namely the considerable weakening of Iran and its "axis of resistance", once again altered the situation. For the time being, however, normalization between Riyadh and Tehran is not in question.



Steve Witkoff

Steven C. Witkoff is the real estate mogul tasked by Donald Trump with “making peace” in the world. A lawyer by training, he befriended Trump in the late 1980s before entering the business world. The Witkoff Group made its fortune by converting old buildings into luxury hotels. A political advisor, golfing partner, and confidant, Witkoff is one of the US president’s closest associates. The two men share the same worldview, shaped by deal-making, personal loyalty, and distrust of institutions.

On November 12, 2024, Steve Witkoff was appointed “special envoy to the Middle East”, a position created specifically for him, and which is not subject to Senate confirmation. With no diplomatic experience, he was thrust into the international spotlight with the mission of resolving the world’s most complex crises. On the eve of the presidential inauguration, he contributed to the negotiations that led to the first ceasefire in Gaza, allowing the new administration to take credit for it. Impressed by his emissary’s success, the president then employed him as an international problem solver. In addition to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Witkoff was then tasked with negotiating peace between Russia and Ukraine and leading talks with Iran on its nuclear program.

His approach has been described as direct and aggressive, unconventional for a diplomat—he reportedly uses real estate negotiation tactics, alternating between flattery and relentlessness. Witnessing the extent of the destruction in the Gaza Strip, he returned to the United States convinced that nothing remained to be saved. He is the one who gave Trump the idea of transforming the strip into the “Côte d’Azur of the Middle East”. At the same time, Witkoff was sent to Moscow to negotiate a ceasefire with Kiev. His involvement in the Ukrainian issue has been marked by a glaring lack of neutrality—he makes no secret of his sympathy for Vladimir Putin and systematically prioritizes American interests over peace in Ukraine.

Despite his lack of experience, Steve Witkoff acts as the president’s personal envoy, at the crossroads of business and politics. Refusing to rely on the expertise offered to him, the billionaire acts alone, negotiating each alliance like a real estate deal. Ultimately, he perfectly embodies the Trumpian model of “transactional diplomacy”, which approaches geopolitics as a market to be dominated unilaterally.

Chapter 2

Israel's Three-Pronged Campaign

No Other Land

The film *No Other Land*, produced by Yuval Abraham, Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal Al-Huraini, and Rachel Szor, documents the daily lives of residents in the occupied region of Masafer Yatta, a hilly area south of Hebron. It reports on the Israeli state's relentless attacks in Palestinian territories, coupled with recurring waves of violence from settlers, and attempts to follow the local population in their various strategies for survival and resistance. In a reflective approach, the film also questions the possibilities of journalism and representation through images in the Palestinian political struggle.

In the 1980s, the area covered by the documentary had already been transformed into a military zone, known as "firing zone 918". Since the establishment of this Israeli control, residents have been constantly exposed to the risk of forced expulsion, demolition, and transfer, in clear contradiction to the principles of international law, but also to Israeli military order itself, which stipulated that restrictions on the 300-square-kilometer firing zone would not apply to populations already settled there.

Since then, through endless legal wrangling over the status of residents and other circumventions of the law, the Israeli army has attempted to reaffirm its right to expel Palestinian communities or drastically limit their access to their own land. The Ministry of Agriculture has also collaborated with occupying forces to create new military training zones in these territories. In May 2022, the Supreme Court finally ruled that there was no legal obstacle to the planned expulsion of Palestinian residents from Masafer Yatta, giving Tel Aviv carte blanche to intensify its coercive and destructive policy in the region.

These forced expulsions are a clear violation of the Geneva Convention, Article 49 of which only allows for the temporary evacuation of protected persons for their own safety or for compelling military reasons. However, Israeli firing zones are mainly used for military training, the occupied West Bank is not the scene of military conflict, and the prospect of Palestinians returning to their homes in Masafer Yatta is clearly not on the agenda.

Due to its political stance against this state of affairs, the film crew was quickly confronted with brutal attacks. During the production phase, Basel Adra's home was repeatedly ransacked and his equipment seized. Later, the film was booed by the Israeli media and public figures such as Culture Minister Miki Zohar. Various obstacles to its screening were orchestrated in Israel and the West Bank. This campaign of defamation, silencing, and aggression intensified following the film's critical success, particularly at the Berlin International Film Festival, where the directors called for a ceasefire in Gaza and demanded that the German government stop supplying weapons to Israel. In March 2025, the film's co-director, Hamdan Ballal, was lynched by settlers at his home in

Susiya, in the occupied West Bank, before being arrested by a group of IDF soldiers while an ambulance was taking him for treatment. Awdah Hathaleen, a consultant on the film, was fatally wounded by an Israeli settler's gunfire in July 2025.

Chapter 3

After the Fall of Bashar al-Assad: From Euphoria to Anguish

Ethno-religious Minorities in Syria

The approximately 2 to 2.5 million Syrian Kurds form the largest ethnic minority in the country, even though they represent only about one-tenth of a national population marked by ethnic and religious diversity. Most Kurds in Syria are Sunni, the majority sect among the Syrian population, and although they mainly speak Kurmanji, the main variant of the Kurdish language, some are also Arabic speakers. Present in the region since the 12th century and the establishment of the Ayyubid dynasty, their recent history in Syria has been marked by marginalization and repression, particularly since the 1970s under the Assad family regime. For decades, they have been prevented from using their language publicly and from keeping their culture alive and thriving. It was during the civil war that was ravaging the country since 2011 that the Kurds gradually managed to organize themselves into a de facto autonomous region on the Turkish border, in the north and northeast of the country, in the territory of "Rojava"—the Kurdish name given to the predominantly Kurdish regions of Syria. However, another part of this population lives in urban centers in the rest of the country, particularly in certain neighborhoods of Damascus and Aleppo.

According to some estimates, the Alawites are almost as numerous as the Kurds and are mainly found in western Syria, on the border with Lebanon and along the Mediterranean coast. Mostly associated with Shiite Islam, their beliefs are distinguished by certain esoteric or deviant aspects that further distance them from the most radical Sunni populations. Organized into tribal confederations, they gained significant political power when General Hafez al-Assad, son of an Alawite tribal leader, took power in the Syrian Arab Republic in 1970, thanks to the success of his "corrective movement". However, unlike in Lebanon, where a confessional system enshrines the presence of religious identities in society, the Alawites, like other religious minorities, have had no special legal status in Syria since 1953.

The Druze, another religious minority concentrated mainly in the mountainous region of southern Lebanon on the foothills of Mount Druze, as well as on the Golan Heights, which has been subject to untimely Israeli occupation since 1967 and illegal annexation since 1981, represent a population of approximately 1 million people. At present, they do not have an autonomous territory, but recent calls have been made by their main religious leader, Sheikh Hikmat El-Hijri, to create a "separate Druze region" in southern Syria, while a militia of fighters was formed under his command in the summer of 2025. Like the Alawites, their religious tradition belongs to the Shiite Islamic heritage, but its doctrine is more composite and also borrows beliefs and practices from other spiritual cultures. Their communities have traditionally been organized around very closed social structures, while maintaining a complex relationship with other Muslim traditions and their theologico-political institutions. In the summer of 2025, the Druze were victims of a particularly

atrocious wave of violence perpetrated by Syrian interim authorities, affiliated armed groups, and Bedouin militias in and around the governorate of Suwayda. These attacks served as a pretext for Israeli bombings of Damascus and the new Syrian Ministry of Defense.

Yarmouk

The Yarmouk camp occupies a central place in Palestinian and Syrian memories. Founded in 1957 to accommodate refugees from the Nakba, it covers two square kilometers (0.8 miles) south of Damascus. Until the Syrian civil war, Palestinians enjoyed better conditions there than elsewhere. They had access to civil rights, could work, and could own property. Home to up to 150,000 Palestinians in 2011, Yarmouk became the diaspora's informal capital, as well as an intellectual and militant center where Palestinians continued to keep their culture alive and fight for their right to return.

But in 2011, Yarmouk's stability was overtaken by the Syrian civil war. The scale of the clashes between the rebels and Bashar al-Assad's regime forced the camp to take sides. The majority of residents preferred to remain neutral. The regime provided safety that was too precious to lose. But the camp was torn between two opposing tendencies, with the PFLP-GC (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command) and Fatah-Intifada supporting the Assad government on one side, and, on the other, the rebels of the Free Syrian Army hoping to rally supporters.

The situation imploded in June 2011, when the PFLP-GC sent young people from Yarmouk to the Golan Heights to commemorate the Six-Day War. Nine of them were killed by the Israeli army. Many saw this as manipulation by Bashar al-Assad's regime, which was using Palestinians to divert international attention from its own abuses against the Syrian population. Tensions exploded in the camp and part of the population turned against the government.

Until then, Yarmouk had occupied a strategic position for the regime, in an area that threatened to fall into the hands of the rebels. On December 16, 2012, a Syrian fighter jet bombed a mosque where 600 civilians had taken refuge. The next day, the Free Syrian Army took control of Yarmouk. This marked the beginning of a deadly siege in which the regime deprived the population of access to water and electricity and banned humanitarian aid from entering. The situation forced 90% of the population into exile and exposed the remaining inhabitants to a dramatic famine.

In April 2015, the Islamic State seized control of the camp. Clashes resumed between IS, regime forces, and Palestinian militia. The population suffered further atrocities. In 2018, Bashar al-Assad regained full control of Yarmouk through bombing, which completely razed the camp to the ground.

Yarmouk has since become a symbol of Palestinians and Syrians' intertwined suffering. Described as a second Nakba, the destruction of the camp represented for many Palestinians the loss of a place of belonging and memory. The camp's history also bears witness to the exploitation of the Palestinian cause by the Baathist regime, which did not hesitate to turn its symbolism into bloodshed, as well as to the compromises made by the Palestinian Authority, which refused to condemn the crimes of its Syrian ally. The war also attests to the realignment of the Palestinian camp between the traditional forces loyal to the Baath Party (PFLP-GC, Fatah Intifada) and the anti-regime militias (notably Aknaf Beit al-Madness, linked to Hamas).

Yarmouk destroyed by bombing (photos by Ziad Majed)



"Life despite everything" – Yarmouk (photo by Ziad Majed)



Chapter 4

Elsewhere in the Arab World: The Waiting Game

The Abraham Accords

Signed on September 15, 2020, at the White House, the Abraham Accords represent a watershed in the geopolitical evolution of the Middle East. For the first time since 1994, Israel has normalized diplomatic relations with Arab states: first with the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Bahrain, then with Sudan and Morocco. The stated objective is to strengthen peace in the Middle East by developing diplomatic relations between the signatory states. Presented as a genuine pledge to stability and prosperity, these agreements reveal a new geopolitical order in which the Palestinian question is overshadowed by strategic and military partnerships.

By normalizing diplomatic relations between four new countries and Israel, the Abraham Accords constitute a rupture with the Arab consensus, which, since the peace initiative launched by Saudi Arabia in 2002, had made such normalization conditional on a return to the 1967 borders, the creation of a Palestinian state, and the resolution of the refugee issue. Contrary to the Emiratis' stated intention to halt plans to annex the West Bank, these agreements have not led to any progress for Palestine. This is therefore a turning point, with the Palestinian issue being sidelined in favor of pragmatic alliances. Sudan joined the Accords in the midst of a political crisis, in exchange for being removed from Washington's list of "state sponsors of terrorism" and considerable financial support. Morocco formalized its relations with Israel the following month, in exchange for U.S. recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Orchestrated by the United States, the Abraham Accords embody the convergence of economic interests between Israel and certain Arab states around a new geopolitical configuration called for by Donald Trump: "the new Middle East". After its interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan failed, the United States adopted a strategy that favors commercial and diplomatic alliances over direct military involvement. Declarations of peace with Israel allow the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to benefit from Israeli and American technologies, resulting in a series of arms contracts. The Trump administration hopes to establish a "global security architecture" anchored in Israeli leadership in order to guarantee its interests by proxy. The goal is to build "economic peace" based on technological, security, and trade cooperation. The diplomatic focus is thus shifting from the Palestinian question to the Iranian threat. The rise of the Islamic Republic, as evidenced by its nuclear program and regional influence, is a cause for concern for both Israel and the Gulf countries. Faced with the "Axis of Resistance" (Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis of Yemen), the Abraham Accords attempt to form an opposing axis based on commercial and military alliances (Israel, Gulf countries, USA).

Presented as a breakthrough in Israeli-Arab relations, the Accords reveal above all the network of strategic partnerships that has emerged in the Middle East, as well as the maneuver that has consisted in breaking Israel's isolation by obliterating the Palestinian question. Despite the suspension of the West Bank annexation project, Israeli colonization has continued unofficially after the Accords. More broadly, arms contracts have given a new twist to the militarization of the region, thereby increasing the potential for conflict. The United States' recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara has also exacerbated tensions between Morocco and Algeria. Far from resolving the region's conflicts, the Abraham Accords have thus reconfigured tensions according to a diplomatic logic that ensures the primacy of economic and military interests.

2002 Arab League summit

In February 2002, amidst the second Intifada and prospects for peace in the Middle East mired in yet another impasse, Saudi Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud came up with an unprecedented proposal for a resolution: the complete normalization of relations between the Arab world and the Jewish state in exchange for an end to the occupation of the territories annexed in 1967, notably the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights. Unveiled by New York Times star columnist Thomas Friedman, the Saudi plan was then put on the table at the 20th Arab League Summit, which opened on March 27 in Beirut, in the notable absence of ten of the twenty-two invited leaders, including Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and King Abdullah of Jordan.

The proposal echoed long-standing demands from the Arab world, which were largely shared by the international community. It incorporated the aims of Resolution 1397, adopted two weeks earlier by the Security Council, which supported the creation of a Palestinian state and a permanent end to violence. This peace offer did not imply capitulation, however, as the Arab states could not reasonably expect the Palestinians to abandon their liberation war before tangible guarantees of justice had been secured. At the same time, at the request of Lebanon and Syria in particular, a "fair" solution to the Palestinian refugee issue was demanded, even though the resolution did not really propose any innovative mechanism for resolving this crucial problem, which had also been the Achilles heel of the previous peace process launched in the summer of 2000. This requirement was also emphasized in Resolution 194 of the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, in terms of facilitating the repatriation, resettlement, and economic and social rehabilitation of refugees, as well as the payment of compensation when return was no longer possible. The proposal was accepted in its entirety by the parties involved and supported by the European Union, which attended the summit as an observer. Although Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres initially appeared to consider the Arab request, the opening quickly became a dead end, as the project was deemed an "interference" in Israeli internal affairs.

In 2007, at the Riyadh summit, this proposal was revived through a resolution called "Reactivation of the Arab Peace Initiative", which led to the first visit by an official Arab League delegation to Israel the following summer, including the Jordanian and Egyptian foreign ministers. A new version of the Arab Peace Initiative, emphasizing the need for a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, was then relaunched in 2013. A decade later, the agreements signed under the auspices of the UAE and Bahrain gave away what remained of the Arab world's hopes for united support for the Palestinian cause.

The Houthi Movement

Originating in the mountainous region of the northern part of Yemen, the revolutionary Houthi movement has been perpetuating the Zaydi tradition of resistance for three decades, having historically clashed with Ottoman and Wahhabi forces. According to the Houthis, Zaydism is the only branch of Islam with connections to both Shiism and Sunnism, and can therefore form the basis of a successful theologico-political revolution.

Opposed to the republican rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh since the 1990s, then to American regional interference during the invasion of Iraq, these revolutionaries formalized their union under the leadership of Hussein Badreddine Al-Houthi, a former member of parliament who became a dissident. The group officially named itself Ansar Allah, or “supporters of God”. Upon the death of its leader in 2004, during the Saada war with the central government, Hussein’s brother, Abdel Malek Al-Houthi—also a fighter from the early days—took over. Despite its internal contradictions and its own contribution to the humanitarian and political crisis in Yemen, the movement gradually gained popularity, reaching approximately 100,000 members in 2010.

Following mass protests in 2012, which ousted President Saleh, the Houthis pursued their efforts against the transitional government established by the Gulf Cooperation Council and supported by Saudi Arabia. They left their stronghold in the north and deployed their guerrilla forces throughout the rest of the country, particularly towards Sanaa, which they seized in 2014 thanks to an alliance of convenience with their former enemy Saleh. Their success then provoked a massive bombing campaign led by Saudi Arabia, called “Operation Decisive Storm”. This would be the first stage of a war that has ravaged the country continuously to this day, with tens of thousands of civilian deaths and millions of displaced persons.

Since 2023, Tel Aviv’s genocidal campaign in Gaza has occasioned a new wave of violence that has overwhelmed the Yemeni population, still under fire from Saudi attacks. The Houthis’ solidarity with the Palestinian cause has earned them Israeli missile strikes on Sana’a, as well as on strategic areas such as the port of Al-Hodeida. The Iranian government’s renewed support for the Yemeni rebels’ military action will obviously do nothing to appease the wave of violence perpetrated by the Israeli air force.

The Houthis retaliate with whatever means they have at their disposal, notably by intensifying their destabilization of maritime traffic in the Bab Al-Mandeb Strait through spectacular maritime attacks on commercial vessels, the most notable of which was undoubtedly their capture and hijacking of the *Galaxy Leader* in November 2023. Flying over it in a navy helicopter, the ship was hijacked after rappelling down to hoist the Yemeni and Palestinian flags. The ship in question was chartered from Ray Car Carriers, the company owned by Rami Ungar, an Israeli billionaire close to Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. Houthi activity also extends along the African coast of the Red Sea, in Somalia, where they collaborate with Al-Shabaab, a militant group affiliated with Al-Qaeda, and in Iraq, where they coordinate military operations against Israel.

The United States, for its part, continues its decade-long contribution to this humanitarian catastrophe, which began in 2015 with arms deliveries to Saudi Arabia sponsored by Antony Blinken, then Deputy Secretary of State under Barack Obama. In March 2025, they took direct

responsibility for the bombings with Operation Rough Rider. This was a vast campaign of air and naval strikes, also supported by British forces, which killed more than a hundred people, mostly civilians, without managing to bring the Houthi militia to heel, let alone destroy it.

Chapter 5

Ahmed Al-Sharaa's First Steps



Ahmed al-Sharaa

The victorious blitz campaign by Syrian rebel groups, particularly the militia known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, meaning "Organization for the Liberation of the Levant", brought to prominence a remarkable warlord: Ahmed al-Sharaa, also known by his nom de guerre, Abu Mohammad al-Julani, at the start of the offensive on Damascus. The future president of Syria had played a major role at the head of this insurgency movement for several years, but was known for his discretion, often keeping his face hidden and speaking in a hushed voice in front of cameras.

Bolstered by his recent success, al-Sharaa wants to frame the fall of al-Assad as a victory for the Muslim world, inspiring future uprisings and potentially bringing about through armed rebellion what his economist father imagined as a kind of pan-Arabism fueled by oil. Born in Riyadh into a secular family, Ahmed gradually turned to Islamism, adding a theologico-political dimension to his anti-Americanism, which was exacerbated by his involvement in Iraq in the early 2000s. It was in the militias that would become Al-Qaeda that he trained in guerrilla and asymmetric warfare techniques, until he was arrested and imprisoned for five years, notably in the infamous torture centers of Abu Ghraib and Camp Bucca. There, he met Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, emir and then caliph of the Islamic State from 2010 until his death in 2019.

Working with al-Baghdadi and surrounded by a handful of men, al-Sharaa then founded a Syrian branch of al-Qaeda called the al-Nusra Front, or "Front for the Conquest of Sham", the mythical territory of Greater Syria. He then gradually distanced himself from ISIS, and later from the parent organization al-Qaeda, whose international agenda was no longer compatible with his military objectives in Syria. Faced with coordinated bombing by the Russian air force and the Damascus army, he withdrew from what was then known as HTS to the Idlib region, in the northwest of the country. This stronghold of the opposition forces served as a base for his takeover, a project that progressed intermittently, taking advantage of local opportunities or regional ceasefires such as the one negotiated in March 2020 by Turkey and Russia.

Throughout this process, the development of administrative and political structures was not without tension. In particular, among certain international fighters and dissident troops, who viewed suspiciously the increasingly assertive, nationalist stance of the rebel movement under al-Sharaa's leadership, not to mention his autocratic tendencies. From 2023 onwards, internal protests attempted to undermine his political legitimacy, but he remained in power, initially through sometimes violent campaigns of repression, and then, thanks to the wave of enthusiasm and relief—admittedly mixed with apprehension and uncertainty—brought about by the success of his troops in December 2024.

Al-Sharaa was appointed president of the Syrian Arab Republic in January 2025. He placed his protégé, Mohammed al-Bashir, at the head of his first "transitional government". The former parliament was dissolved and the constitution suspended. A second transitional mandate then began, offering a glimpse of a modest opening of power to religious diversity. However, the adoption of the new provisional constitution on March 13, 2025, continues to be the subject of fierce criticism: al-Sharaa cannot be removed from office by parliament and retains control over the appointment of ministers and even members of the Constitutional Court. At the same time, many minorities, starting with the Kurds, see no prospect of formal recognition or guarantees of protection. The situation is even more precarious for people who, because they belong to an ethnic or religious minority, are suspected of having ties to the Assad clan, Iran, or Hezbollah.

In July 2025, Donald Trump removed HTS from the US list of foreign terrorist organizations, and a few weeks later, the Syrian president, in his new finery, made the first visit by a dignitary from his country to the United Nations General Assembly since 1967. Ahmed al-Sharaa has no plans to step down anytime soon, arguing that his presence is essential to the country's stability. In return for his renewed opposition to Iran and its proxies, he has so far enjoyed the opportunistic support of the United States and Israel.

Russian military laboratory in Syria

Following the end of the French mandate in Syria in 1944, Russia had formed a relatively stable alliance with the country—an alliance that grew stronger when Anwar Sadat's Egypt switched to the Western camp and which was renewed after the end of the Cold War, when Damascus remained Moscow's only partner in the region. However, the collusion between Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin transformed this solidarity into genuine military collaboration from 2015 onwards. As civil war raged in Syria, the Russian president intervened massively to help the Assad regime stem the rebels' progress, whom he already called "terrorists", as he would later do with the Ukrainian opposition to serve his own expansionist aims. This violent military counteroffensive was quickly coupled with a propaganda campaign and cyberattacks, particularly against the Syrian Civil Defense, the "White Helmets", when they continued to document the killings of civilians committed by Bashar's men.

The Syrian conflict provided a full-scale training ground on all fronts for Russian battalions that would later serve in Ukraine, with more than 60,000 soldiers sent to Syria over seven years of intervention. "Different contexts, but one and the same method", summarized the daily newspaper *L'Orient-le-Jour* in 2022. Provoking Western powers and assessing their willingness to respond was also on Russia's agenda in Syria. When, in 2013, the Obama administration backtracked on its "red lines" despite evidence of the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons, Putin seized the issue and took control of an international community that was fabricating its own impotence and thus giving free rein to the ongoing massacre.

Moscow has done everything it can to speed up the process, going so far as to extend bombing outside areas believed to be home to jihadist hideouts, and even targeting convoys of displaced persons that the Russian army itself had escorted to the Turkish border. At the same time, Russia has been acting as a mediator, imposing harsh conditions on the warring parties who are considering a negotiated solution with Damascus. This unwavering support has paid off in the short term, as Damascus rapidly regained ground during the 2015–2017 period. As a token of gratitude, Putin has even been offered control of two military bases in western Syria, which serve as strategic military relays in his quest towards southern Europe, Libya, and the African continent. From the infantry to the command, the majority of Russian military personnel active in Ukraine were trained in Syria, starting with pilots, for whom the 100,000 or so strikes on the Syrian people served as a particularly macabre testing ground for the campaigns in Donetsk and Luhansk. General Alexander Dvornikov, the "Butcher of Damascus", and then his successor Surovikin, the "General Armageddon", pushed the boundaries of their military strategies in Syria to the extreme, including by bombing residential areas, hospitals, and humanitarian organizations, before taking command of Russian troops in Ukraine with now-proven equipment and methods. As the Minister of Defense from 2012 to 2024, Sergei Shoigu also saw the Syrian laboratory as an opportunity to test hundreds of drones, anti-tank missiles, surface-to-air equipment, and combat aircraft, and to turn this mass grave into a commercial showcase for Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, and Saudi customers.

Chapter 6

The Limited Leeway of the Lebanese Government

Party of the Banks

The economic crisis that erupted in Lebanon in 2019, giving rise to an austerity response from the government and a wave of nationwide protests, revealed a set of long-standing, strategic entanglements between the Lebanese banking and political worlds. The protest movement popularized the expression “party of the banks” to describe this form of systemic collusion. Acting as key figures in this semi-informal network, brothers Pierre and Raymond Eddé played a pioneering role in organizing this system of institutionalized nepotism. The former co-founded and chaired the influential Association of Banks in 1959, while the latter initiated the banking secrecy law, passed three years earlier, which facilitated massive capital transfers to Lebanon by Middle Eastern elites and the Gulf oil monarchies. But it was mainly in the 1990s, at the end of the civil war, that these practices were perfected: as the Lebanese state increased its dependency on the private sector for financing, incurred massive debt in reconstruction projects led in particular by various companies owned by the Hariri family, and banks, their shareholders, and their wealthy clients benefited from preferential interest rates and outsized margins.

These practices have been tolerated and even supported by the national political class, both within the executive branch and in parliament, as well as by the various institutions supposed to supervise these political-economic relationships, such as the Lebanese Banking Control Commission (LBCC). A tax exemption regime for the banking sector was also introduced in the 1990s, and various national media outlets are also heavily dependent on the financial windfall from Lebanese banks, which ensure their popularity by sponsoring major audiovisual productions and investing heavily in advertising.

Following the 2019 crisis, and the regulatory measures that were tentatively put in place at the time, several high-ranking political figures also benefited from special privileges that allowed them to retain their benefits by transferring funds to foreign accounts. These maneuvers were made possible, in particular, by the system of financial engineering put in place by Riad Salamé, the former powerful governor of Lebanon’s Central Bank.



The Hariri Family

On February 14, 2005, near the Corniche Beirut, former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated in a spectacular truck bombing. The attack also killed 21 other people, including Hariri's former Minister of Economy, Bassel Fleihan, and injured more than 200 civilians. Rafiq Hariri was first and foremost a successful real estate magnate and businessman who became a multi-billionaire after founding Saudi Oger, a construction company through which he signed lucrative contracts with the royal family in Riyadh. He himself had held Saudi citizenship since 1978.

In the 1990s, Rafiq Hariri founded Solidere, or the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District, an untouchable mega-company tasked with restoring the capital's status as the "Paris of the Middle East" from

the ruins of civil war, but which above all contributed to a national debt of more than \$40 billion. On the political front, Hariri had become, more out of opportunism than conviction, a leading figure of the anti-Syrian opposition in Lebanon. He openly opposed the extension of the presidential term of General Émile Lahoud, who had been in office since 1998. Summoned to Damascus on August 26, 2004, a few months before his assassination, Hariri had already been violently rebuked by Bashar al-Assad, who considered Lahoud his protégé and accomplice in the Land of the Cedars.

Occurring at the heart of a very intense political period marking the end of a post-war reconfiguration era in the country, Hariri's assassination took on major geopolitical significance, triggering the so-called "Cedar Revolution" against the Syrian military presence in Lebanon. The event also prompted the Security Council to set up the United Nations' first murder investigation, as well as its first Special Tribunal to try an act of international terrorism. It was not until 2020 that the four main suspects—pro-Syrian generals initially imprisoned by the Lebanese authorities between 2005 and 2009—were brought to trial. The Special Tribunal found Salim Ayyash, an alleged member of Hezbollah, guilty of the assassination and sentenced him to life in prison. The three other suspects, Hassan Merhi, Hussein Oneissi, and Assad Sabra, were ultimately acquitted.

After Rafik Hariri's death, his children took center stage on the political scene. In particular, his second son Saad, who was a businessman and prime minister like his father between 2009 and 2011, then from 2016 to 2020, before being forced to resign under pressure from Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman, took over. In addition to buying out his siblings' shares in Saudi Oger, Saad was the majority shareholder in BankMed, one of the country's five largest banks. His mother-in-law, Nazik, and his half-brother, Ayman, were also major investors, while the board of directors was chaired successively by Mohammed Hariri, a cousin of the family, and, from 2020, by Raya al-Hassan, herself a former finance and interior minister under Saad Hariri.

Today, another of Saad's half-brothers, Fahd Hariri, remains the largest shareholder in the country's main bank, Bank Audi. Bahaa, the eldest son of the family, founded Horizon Group, a real estate company that invests mainly in Amman outside Lebanon, as well as the Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, part of the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based Atlanticist think tank.

Israeli invasions in Lebanon (1978–1982)

On March 14, 1978, Israel invaded Lebanon for the first time. "Operation Litani" sent troops as far as the river of the same name. Thousands of Lebanese and Palestinian civilians were killed during the operation. Its mission was to destroy the political and military leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which had taken refuge in Lebanon since its expulsion from Amman by the Jordanian army during "Black September" in 1970. On March 19, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolutions 425 and 426, which demanded Israel's "immediate" withdrawal from the 850 square km (328 square miles) area it occupied in southern Lebanon, as well as the restoration of Lebanese state sovereignty with peacekeepers' help. On this occasion, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was established.

Starting in 1979, the Israeli secret services led a campaign to destabilize Lebanon, which included car bombings. Their aim was to provoke an uprising by the PLO that would justify a new massive invasion of southern Lebanon. Ariel Sharon, a fervent advocate of a Greater Israel, became Minister of Defense in Menachem Begin's second Likud government in August 1981. He immediately committed to "solve the problem of Lebanon once and for all". The invasion began on June 6, 1982, following an assassination attempt on the Israeli ambassador in London and a barrage of Lebanese rockets fired at Israel. Ironically, the Israelis named this invasion, "Peace for Galilee". Such a cynical use of pacifist rhetoric coupled with the demonization of Palestinian insurgents as "terrorists" subsequently became a leitmotif of Israeli propaganda. In 1983, an international legal commission chaired by former Irish Foreign Minister Seán MacBride was tasked with investigating the crimes committed by Israel during this invasion. The conclusions were unequivocal, and they already employed the term "genocide" to describe the systematic violence perpetrated by Israel: acts of aggression contrary to international law, including deportations, forced expulsions, and acts of abuse, the use of prohibited weapons and methods, and deliberate bombing of schools, hospitals, refugee camps, and other civilian targets.

By the end of summer 1982, Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel was assassinated, and Israeli forces laid siege to Beirut, forcing PLO leaders and troops to flee to Tunis. A few days later, the Phalangists, a Lebanese Christian militia, stormed the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila and massacred around 3,000 civilians in less than 48 hours. This extermination was carried out with the consent and even the support of the Israeli state, as Seth Anziska, an American researcher at University College London, would demonstrate 30 years later. In 2012, he began delving into the Israel Defense Forces' declassified archives to shed light on Israel's true involvement. "We went from proxy bloodshed to premeditated massacre", summarized journalist René Backmann for Mediapart in 2022. These discoveries called into question the Kahane Commission's decisions, chaired by the President of the Israeli Supreme Court, which had stipulated that no Israeli could be held directly responsible for the massacres.

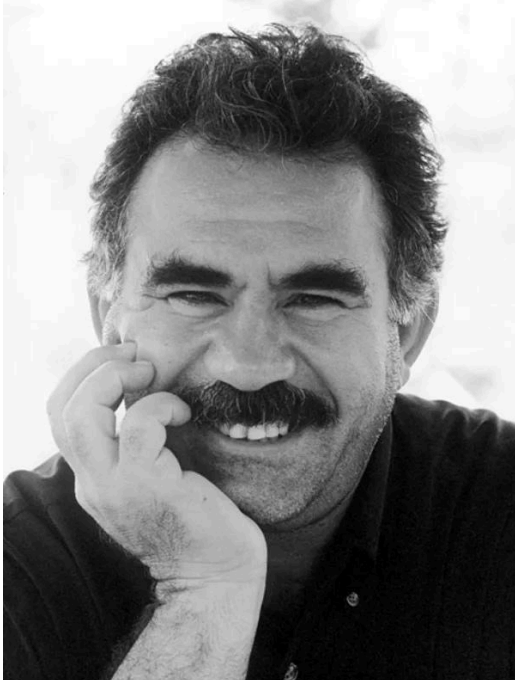
The commission had only issued a few criticisms and suggested that Ariel Sharon be relieved of his duties. However, the architect of Operation "Peace for Galilee" would remain in ministerial positions for three decades. The Israeli invasion also led to the United States' direct involvement, which sent troops to Lebanon and supported the maximalist policy of the Tel Aviv government. The US military intervention resulted in air and naval bombardments of Palestinian and Lebanese

villages and military positions, as well as significant losses among its own ranks—notably in October 1982, when a truck loaded with explosives killed 243 marines stationed at Beirut airport.

“Peace for Galilee” also proved to be a vast testing ground for military technological innovations resulting from miniature electronics and the possibility of real-time video surveillance. During its first direct confrontations with “combative Palestine”, the Israeli army also experimented with the construction of gigantic detention camps, such as Ansar. This camp held up to ten thousand prisoners and occupied a traumatic position in the collective consciousness of Palestinians for a long time. Attempts to escape via tunnels multiplied, and Israel developed its strategy of crushing these passages with tanks. The IDF’s initial victory in Lebanon quickly backfired on the Jewish state. The Peace Now movement grew stronger in Israel, and a future, fervent adversary, Hezbollah, was born among the ruins of war within the Shiite populations of southern Lebanon. The war officially ended in 1985 with an initial partial withdrawal by the IDF, but the illegal occupation of what Israel called a “security belt” on its northern border would last another 15 years.

Chapter 7

The Kurdish Question



Abdullah Öcalan

Born in southeastern Anatolia, not far from the Euphrates River, into a family of farmers, Abdullah Öcalan began his political activism at Ankara University. There, he studied political science after being refused military service, and became an activist in various radical left-wing circles. At the age of 29, he and other activists founded the Kurdish separatist party, also known as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which aims to end the policies of expulsion, repression, and assimilation of Kurdish identity that have been practiced by the Turkish Republic since its founding in 1923. In 1980, in the midst of a military coup organized by General Kenan Evren, Öcalan, nicknamed "Apo" (uncle in Kurdish), was forced to flee his country and sought

refuge in Syria, where he trained the leaders of sister organizations that would, nearly 30 years later, reach autonomous Kurdish governance in the Rojava region—the organization's most tangible success since its creation.

The party he presided over was initially organized under Marxist-Leninist principles, but proved to be deeply pragmatic in the face of the need to deal with various autonomist and revolutionary movements in the region. Its first operations against the Turkish state were launched in the spring of 1984, after its fighters received training in guerrilla warfare in the Palestine Liberation Organization's camps in Lebanon. The PKK also established bases in the mountains of northern Iraq. Gradually, numerous support groups were created in the West, where the Kurdish diaspora and various left-wing movements rallied strongly behind Öcalan's cause.

In the 1990s, the movement took a new direction. As Öcalan and his supporters worked towards the possibility of "democratic confederalism", independence ceased to be the ultimate political goal—a compromise that would guarantee a certain degree of autonomy for the Kurds. This involved democratizing Turkish political institutions and their anti-minority laws, particularly the constitutional article requiring a 10% quorum of votes at the national level to obtain seats in parliament. This period also saw the emergence of the slogan "Jin, jîyan, azadî" ("Woman, life, freedom"), which arose from a movement within the party to reflect on notions of freedom and

domination. Öcalan was led by his supporters to reflect on the need for feminist thinking in the pursuit of a coherent decolonial project, to form exclusively female brigades within the organization, and, generally, to teach and apply Jineology, Kurdish feminism, in areas controlled by Kurdish groups in Turkey and Syria.

In 1999, Öcalan was kidnapped by Mossad and the CIA in Nairobi, then handed over to Ankara, where he was sentenced to death for founding a terrorist organization, high treason, and murder. After the abolition of the death penalty in Turkey in 2002, his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, and he was placed in the İmralı prison, in the Sea of Marmara, a prison island akin to Robben Island, Nelson Mandela's prison, to which Öcalan is often compared by his supporters. It is therefore from captivity that Öcalan lead his party, through his visitors and his flagship Newroz communiqués: notably, those of 2005, when he detailed a new doctrine influenced by the American eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin; and of 2013, when he announced a ceasefire initiating a peace process with Erdogan, which hinted at negotiations before brutally resuming repression in 2015. In February 2025, a few months after unexpected overtures from nationalist government ally Devlet Bahçeli aimed at definitively assimilating the PKK in a context of great regional instability, Öcalan formally called for the dissolution of the group founded half a century earlier and the renunciation of armed struggle. "There is no path outside of democracy to build and implement a system—and there cannot be", he declared. Although the party's 12th congress endorsed its leader's wishes, the dissolution will still require a long process.

The Syrian Democratic Forces

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are a diverse alliance of Kurdish, Arab and, to a lesser extent, Assyrian and Armenian fighters, founded in 2015. It serves as the armed wing of the Autonomous Democratic Administration of northern and eastern Syria. Since 2012, these forces have controlled the region known as Rojava, an area stretching 400KM (250 miles) between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers along Turkey's southern border, representing about one-third of Syrian territory. Over the past ten years, including since the fall of Assad, the SDF has had to defend itself against repeated attacks by the Syrian National Army and Turkish troops, for whom the SDF is primarily an ally of Turkey's Kurdish guerrilla group, the PKK. In the wake of Turkish military invasions in 2018 and 2019, Ankara has also carried out targeted attacks against SDF leaders.

Tensions remain particularly high in the province of Deir ez-Zor, which is inhabited almost exclusively by Arab populations, unlike other governorates in northeastern Syria. The Euphrates River forms a border there: the new government in Damascus now controls the western part of the province, while the SDF holds the other bank, known as Jazira ("the island" in Arabic), renamed as such since the SDF drove out Islamic State soldiers in 2019, with the support of the Kurdish YPG militia and massive assistance from the United States through the International Coalition in Iraq and Syria. This river is also considered a "red line" by Turkey, even though Ankara was unable to respond when the SDF incursion on the western bank at the Tishrin Dam in December 2024 was accompanied by US and Russian air strikes on pockets of IS resistance.

In January 2024, Mazloum Abdi, who has led the SDF since 2015, after having been an active member of the PKK and a commander within the PYD, traveled to Erbil to meet with Massoud Barzani, leader of the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party since 1979 and president of the semi-autonomous region in question from 2005 to 2017. Although the two Kurdish military entities fought side by side against ISIS in Iraq and Syria between 2014 and 2019, they still had a difficult relationship, particularly due to their divergent positions vis-à-vis Ankara. This meeting therefore marked an important symbolic step towards strengthening Kurdish political unity.

Following Abdullah Öcalan's call for negotiations and military disengagement on February 27, 2025, Mazloum Abdi initially sidestepped the issue: "Öcalan's speech is addressed to the PKK and concerns an internal Turkish matter", he said on X. Later, Abdi took a more nuanced view of this "historic announcement", acknowledging that it constituted "an opportunity to build peace in the region". Abdi thus agreed to sign a historic cooperation agreement with Al-Charaa on March 10, 2025, in Damascus, a crucial strategic alliance in the political and military restructuring initiated by the Syrian transitional government. The SDF negotiated its integration into the national army through the exchange of several hundred prisoners, the establishment of joint management of certain key areas, notably two Kurdish neighborhoods in Aleppo, and the recognition of the Kurdish community as an "essential component of the state". However, these processes of cohabitation are still far from stable, both in Syria and Turkey, as promises made to various minorities are dependent on security and political issues that go far beyond national balances.

Chapter 8

Founding Moments in the Recent History of the Middle East

United Nations Security Council Resolution 242

At its 1382nd meeting on November 22, 1967, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 242, which condemned Israel's occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem during the Six-Day War that same year. It demanded Israel's withdrawal from occupied territories, thereby acknowledging the failure of Resolution 181 introduced 20 years earlier by the United Nations General Assembly. The Resolution had divided a territory then inhabited by more than 90% Palestinians into two supposedly independent entities, a decision that has since remained a pipe dream in the face of countless waves of expulsions, invasions, and destruction perpetrated by the Israeli state.

However, the final version of the Resolution contains a significant difference between the two working languages of the UN, English and French. An initial Soviet draft resolution demanded Israel's withdrawal from "all the territories it occupies", a formulation that could be interpreted as referring not only to the territories occupied in 1967, but also to those appropriated in 1948–1949. During the negotiations, the United States succeeded, on one hand, in having the resolution require only the withdrawal "from territories occupied during the recent conflict". In the French version, on the other hand, the definite article was used to refer to "the occupied territories". A new proposal by the Soviet Union to clarify the wording by specifying that Israel should withdraw to the pre-1967 war borders was rejected by the United States.

Today, both the English and French versions coexist, with Israel and the United States relying on the English version, while France, Russia, and a large majority of the 193 UN member states refer to the French version. Nevertheless, this resolution serves as a general framework for all preparatory discussions, mediation proposals, and other peace plans aimed at implementing the two-state solution adopted by the UN in 1947. This effectively confirms the limitation of a hypothetical future Palestinian state to a maximum available territory reduced to 22% of Mandatory Palestine, while the very existence of such an entity is becoming increasingly unrealistic since the acceleration of Israel's colonial and genocidal policy.

Another crucial observation is that while the "States of the region" and the "Israeli armed forces" are directly mentioned in the resolution, there is no explicit reference to the Palestinian people or their political existence, which only appear implicitly in a remark on the need to resolve "the refugee problem". This resolution is ultimately a document riddled with gaps, a flawed attempt to enforce international law that has been perverted by Israel not only to prolong the illegal occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the Golan heights indefinitely, but also to expand its borders in denial of the call for "the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State".



Hassan Nasrallah

Until his death in an Israeli bombing on September 27, 2024, Hassan Nasrallah was one of the most influential figures in the region. The three decades he spent as the head of Hezbollah made him a symbol of opposition to Israel. A warlord, political leader, and charismatic guide, he played a role in the Middle East that was as decisive as it was mythical.

The son of a grocer, Nasrallah was born in 1960 into a Shiite family in southern Lebanon. His adolescence was marked by civil war

(1975–1990) and by his discovery of theology and politics. At the age of 17, he joined Amal, the movement fighting for the political emancipation of Shiites. The course of his life changed radically with the Israeli invasion of 1982, when he decided to join the Tehran-backed Islamic Resistance movement, which took the name Hezbollah.

From 1982 onwards, he devoted his life to Hezbollah, which was still a small underground militia at the time. Until the end of the civil war in 1990, he held political and administrative positions within the party. The assassination of the party's secretary general in an Israeli raid in 1992 propelled the young Nasrallah to the top of the political hierarchy. Under his leadership, Hezbollah took on a new dimension, becoming a mass party and a pillar of Lebanese politics. On the military front, Nasrallah took a harder line against Israel and achieved a series of unprecedented victories against the occupying forces. The liberation of southern Lebanon in 2000 and the war of 2006 demonstrated Hezbollah's capabilities.

Nasrallah's successes and charisma built a legend around the man who presented himself as the defender of the interests of Lebanon and the Arab world: the figure of the sayyed both reassured the population and rallied new supporters. In recent years, however, the myth has come up against increasingly strong criticism. The party's subservience to Tehran raises the issue of Iranian interests taking precedence over those of the Lebanese, thereby limiting part of the population's confidence. Nasrallah also gave his unconditional support to Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship, leading to the deaths of thousands of Lebanese fighters in Syrian interventions. The image of the Hezbollah leader ultimately deteriorated with the party's involvement in a series of political assassinations and financial scandals, in the repression of the October 2019 uprising, and in the explosion at the port of Beirut in August 2020.

On September 27, 2024, the Israeli army launched an air raid on Hezbollah headquarters, where several leaders of the movement were located, and assassinated Nasrallah. His death disrupted the region's political scene, leaving a power vacuum within the party and weakening Iran's influence in the Middle East.

Chapter 9

Iran after the Twelve-Day War

Timeline

US sanctions against Iran

1979

Ten days after the start of the hostage crisis at the US Embassy in Tehran, President Jimmy Carter issued Executive Order 12170, which imposed the seizure of all Iranian government assets held in the US, freezing more than \$8 billion in bank deposits, gold reserves, and other assets. A trade embargo was also imposed. This measure was lifted in January 1981, as part of the Algiers Accords, which constituted a negotiated settlement in exchange for the release of the hostages. Diplomatic relations between the two countries had been formally suspended since April 1980.

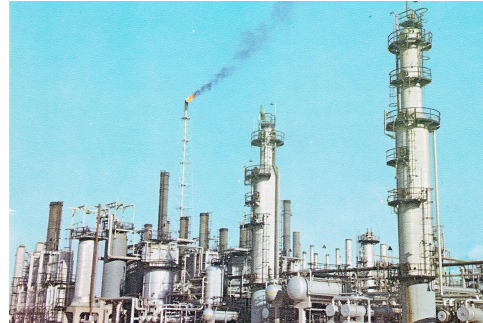


1983

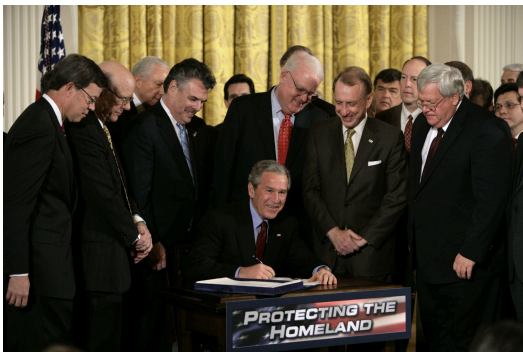
Sanctions were extended to the military sphere in the context of the Iran-Iraq War (1981-1988). Ronald Reagan launched Operation Staunch, which imposed an arms embargo, including on American-made spare parts. The Iran-Contra affair revealed that arms sales had secretly continued, via Israel, with the dual purpose of securing the release of seven American hostages held in Lebanon and generating a budget surplus to supply military equipment to the Nicaraguan Contra insurgents, who Regan supported.

1995–1996

In 1995, Bill Clinton prohibited American companies from supervising, managing, and financing the exploitation of oil resources located in Iran. His administration once again blocked all commercial activity between the two countries. The following year, the US Congress passed the Amato–Kennedy Act, which was intended to put an end to the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and support for terrorism by Iran and Libya. The various sanctions included in the law also applied to international economic operators. Two years later, following a compromise negotiated with the EU, European companies were temporarily exempted from these sanctions. Following the election of reformist Mohammad Khatami in 1997, some of these measures were also relaxed.



2004–2006



G.W. Bush imposed sanctions on Iranian scientific publications in order to hinder nuclear engineering research. A new Executive Order also froze the assets of individuals linked to Iran's nuclear program. The country's banking institutions were then denied direct access to the US financial system. A list of undesirable individuals and entities was drawn up by the Treasury. These were added to the automated filtering systems used by many international banks and may also have been subjected to sanctions under the Patriot Act.

2010–2014

Barack Obama further tightened the screws by ratifying the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, passed by Congress. This was a measure aimed at strengthening economic restrictions against Iran, notably by banning imports of various Iranian products, and through another package of financial sanctions, imposing record fines of several billion dollars on certain major European banking institutions.





2018–2019

Donald Trump imposed a series of measures with an explicit title: the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act. The sanctions, lifted under the nuclear agreement signed in Vienna in 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), were also reintroduced. Chinese, British, and Emirati investors were severely penalized for their activities in Iran. Through the Treasury, the White House blocked transactions with the Iranian iron, steel, aluminum, and copper sectors and directly targeted Supreme Leader Khamenei and his entourage, including judges and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

2021–2024

The return to power of the Democratic administration did not lead to the lifting of Trump's sanctions. On the contrary, the Biden administration used the crackdown on protests following the death of Mahsa Amini as a pretext to introduce new measures targeting the country's security organization, such as the Morality Police. Other sanctions were presented as solutions to the development of Iran's ballistic program.



ALERT: All purchases of Iranian Oil, or Petrochemical products, must stop, NOW! Any Country or person who buys ANY AMOUNT of OIL or PETROCHEMICALS from Iran will be subject to, immediately, Secondary Sanctions. They will not be allowed to do business with the United States of America in any way, shape, or form. Thank you for your attention to this matter, PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP

2025

At the dawn of his second term, Trump came back with a vengeance, promising a campaign of "maximum pressure" on Iran. He renewed a wave of sanctions against Tehran's military-industrial complex, taking shock actions against prominent figures, extending the list of undesirable institutions, and making a particular effort to torpedo Sino-Iranian trade.