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# The Middle East amidst the Gaza War

Regional Tensions and the Resurgence of the  
Palestinian Question

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## AIES FOCUS



## The Middle East amidst the Gaza War: Regional Tensions and the Resurgence of the Palestinian Question

### Abstract

The armed attack on 7<sup>th</sup> October led to great insecurity in Israel, whereas the subsequent military operation in the Gaza Strip revitalised the discussion about the unresolved Palestinian question. In addition, the brutal conflict interrupted the regional peace trend and demonstrated the ineffectiveness of both, the closure of Gaza and the Abraham Accords without taking Palestinian claims into account. Tensions in Lebanon and with Iran have also increased markedly, highlighting the geopolitical dividing lines across the Middle East as well as the human and material toll of unresolved conflicts. Regional actors are now faced with the challenge of pursuing their interests in this changed environment – especially regarding their relations with Israel and meeting the Iranian challenge. The need for diplomatic solutions is more obvious than ever.

### Introduction

The pogrom-like attack by the Izzed-Din Qassam Brigades and allied militant groups on Israeli territory on 7<sup>th</sup> October, as well as the subsequent military operation Tsahal in the Gaza Strip, have had three main effects. The re-traumatization and deep insecurity of Israelis in view of the scale of the armed attack,<sup>1</sup> as well as the political revival of the Palestinian question, which has been unresolved for decades<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the regional trend towards the peaceful settlement

of conflicts, which has been evident in several developments over the past few years, has been suspended for the time being.

Furthermore, Hamas's military operation led to the realization that neither the hermetic sealing off of the Gaza Strip since Hamas's violent takeover in 2007 contributes to Israel's security, nor does the diplomatic rapprochement of selected Arab states while completely ignoring the Palestinian issue – as is the case in the so-called 'Abraham Accords' - represent a viable solution for establishing lasting regional peace. Saudi Arabia, in particular, is therefore faced with the question of the conditions under which its relationship with Israel will develop and how it could use the negotiations on the agreement, which are currently officially on hold, to support the Palestinians on their path to statehood and thereby contribute to the long-term mutual security of both parties to the conflict, and to regional stability.

In the short term, the armed attack on Israel – instead of initiating political processes to resolve the conflict – has primarily led to a military escalation, although the negotiations on the release of the Israeli hostages and the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip could theoretically also form a starting point for confidence-building measures with regard to future peace negotiations between Is-

rael and the Palestinian Authority (PA). This escalation – probably intended or at least accepted by Hamas – can now be traced to three regional flashpoints, all of which have enormous potential for escalation.

Firstly, the Gaza Strip which has become largely uninhabitable due to the Israeli strategy of „moving the lawn“, and is acutely threatened by a humanitarian catastrophe due to large-scale displacement.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the tensions in the border region between Israel and Lebanon, where Hezbollah, which is allied with Iran, has been exchanging blows for months at a – still – low level of escalation.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, the tense relationship between Israel and Iran, which is primarily being discharged militarily on the new „Red Sea front“ through the Houthi's attacks on international shipping, but which even led to a direct armed attack by Iran on Israeli territory in April.<sup>5</sup>

### Conflict management versus conflict resolution: The costs of a quasi-order

Thus, the events and acts of war have not only brought the geopolitical dividing lines of the Middle East back into the spotlight, but have also highlighted the terrible human and material costs caused by unresolved conflicts. In this tense situation, some actors outside the immediate Israeli-Palestinian arena have also gained visibility. On the one hand, Iran has emerged as one of Israel's most serious armed op-

ponents, including through its proxy Hezbollah in Lebanon. On the other hand, the Gulf emirate of Qatar and Egypt have been able to demonstrate their profiles as mediators in connection with the hostage and ceasefire negotiations.<sup>6</sup>

The further development of the regional situation, even after more than 200 days of Israeli warfare in the Gaza Strip, now depends on a number of factors. Firstly, on Israel's determination of when the declared war aims are to be achieved and how to get there. Secondly, on the future attitudes of the regional players involved to the unfolding war; and thirdly, on how much influence Israel's protecting power, the United States, will be prepared to exert on the development of the war and on the question of a political solution to the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in an election year. As has become increasingly apparent in recent months, presidential candidate and incumbent President Joe Biden must also take into account demographic shifts among voters, and increasingly critical opinions of Israel among certain groups of voters in order to maintain his chances of re-election.<sup>7</sup>

### **From reset to regional escalation?**

Prior to the attack on 7<sup>th</sup> October, which had the effect of a hiatus, two striking, albeit contradictory, trends could be observed in the Middle East region. On the one hand, the reshuffling of the cards in the regional power

game, which has entered the debate under the term 'reset'.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, there is the ongoing domestic political crisis in Israel and the negotiation process with the increasingly dysfunctional Palestinian Authority, which has been frozen for years. In order to better understand further regional developments, potential military escalation and security risks, as well as the possibility of a diplomatic détente, it is helpful to take a look back at the situation in the Middle East before 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

### **Israeli occupation policy and the normative power of the factual**

Throughout 2023 Israel was confronted with a severe domestic political crisis, which led to hundreds of thousands regularly taking to the streets in protest against the planned undermining of the judiciary by Netanyahu's far-right governing coalition. The mass demonstrations were primarily directed against planned legislative changes aimed at giving parliament more decision-making power over the judiciary, and thus weakening the established separation of powers. On the Palestinian side, on the other hand, the geographical division between the Gaza Strip under the thumb of the radical Islamist Hamas and the ailing, legitimacy-less Palestinian Authority under the leadership of Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) in the West Bank has been cemented since 2007, leading to a domestic political stalemate.<sup>9</sup> The PA also gradually lost authority due to its internal hostility as a stooge of the Israeli state –

as a result of the security cooperation in the West Bank.

From the Israeli perspective, on the other hand, the ongoing intra-Palestinian division in the sense of a useful divide et impera enabled the desired freezing of any negotiations to realize the two-state solution. The systematic colonization of the West Bank by Jewish settlers is not only taking place in complete disregard of international law, but due to its dynamics has also increasingly led researchers to question the two-state solution.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Prime Minister Netanyahu's right-wing nationalist coalition and diplomatic representatives of the State of Israel have repeatedly expressed their complete rejection of this idea, also from an ideological perspective.<sup>11</sup>

### **Regional détente between arch-enemies**

At the regional level, however, in contrast to these internal Israeli tensions, the perpetuation of the internal Palestinian divide and the negotiation deadlock between Israel and the Palestinians, an unusual trend towards diplomacy and détente had established itself in the last two years, which appeared to represent a departure from the usual zero-sum games. The following events took centre stage: In October 2022, under the aegis of the USA – the then chief negotiator Amos Hochstein also negotiated the territorial border until recently – a demarcation of the maritime border between Israel and Lebanon was successfully

concluded after years of negotiations, with Hezbollah behaving constructively towards the process without, of course, being a signatory to the bilateral agreement. This not only provided a key to sharing the hypothetical revenues of a natural gas deposit shared by the new border, but also paved the way for the independent exploration and extraction of natural gas reserves in Lebanese territorial waters.<sup>12</sup>

In March 2023, the regional giants Iran and Saudi Arabia signed an entente to resume diplomatic relations – remarkably with the mediation of China, which thus took a first, albeit bold, step onto the tense political stage of the Persian Gulf. Nevertheless, this process of rapprochement progressed only tentatively and had little concrete impact to show by 7<sup>th</sup> October.

Quite a few observers saw this Chinese mediation as a counter-project to the Abraham Accords mediated under Trump since 2020, which have so far been signed by four Arab states.<sup>13</sup> Most recently, the question arose as to the conditions under which relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel could develop and whether the conclusion of a similar normalization agreement that completely excludes the Palestinian issue is still a realistic option for Riyadh.

Since April 2021, President Biden has also made renewed attempts to revive the JCPOA agreement, which was concluded under his Democratic predecessor Obama in 2015 and

terminated by President Trump in 2018, through negotiations.<sup>14</sup> However, these attempts were not crowned with success, as a result of which the issue of uncontrolled nuclear proliferation has once again gained strategic importance for the security and stability of the region. As a result, in the absence of a political process, the IAEA has a central role to play in monitoring Iranian enrichment activities. In addition, the question of how the USA will respond to Saudi demands for control of the entire nuclear cycle and whether the informal steps taken towards Iran, such as the partial lifting of frozen Iranian assets under President Joe Biden, are suitable as a confidence-building measure for a possible negotiation, has once again come to the fore.

Within the Middle East, Syria's return to the Arab League in May 2023 under the Assad regime, which by and large succeeded in crushing the nationwide uprising, also attracted attention. And after the signing of the Abraham Accords originally led to tensions between Ankara and Abu Dhabi, Turkey decided to mend bilateral relations in 2022 with a visit by Erdoğan to the Emirates.

### **Enter the spoiler: The tragedy of 7<sup>th</sup> October**

Strong signals of regional détente could, therefore, be perceived well into 2023, but where there would have been room for negotiations in this regard, this was at the expense of the political demands of the Palestinians, who were less and less able to look forward to a positive future

perspective.<sup>15</sup> However, although the Abraham Accords and the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement did not necessarily follow a complementary logic, an unusually conciliatory approach has been established in the region, which is characterized by tensions and wars and whose future appears uncertain again since the 7<sup>th</sup> October, which has also brought the manifold intertwining of interests and the potential upheavals within the region to the fore again.<sup>16</sup>

Against the backdrop of these regional signals of détente, while systematically ignoring the dispute between the State of Israel on the one hand and the Palestinians, who continue to live under a proto-state autonomous authority and the threat posed by expanding, violent Jewish settlers on the other<sup>17</sup>, the events of 7<sup>th</sup> October hit like a bombshell. In a long-planned military operation, the armed wing of Hamas, in cooperation with Islamic Jihad and other militant Islamist factions, succeeded in breaking through the Israeli barrier around the Gaza Strip and, in a pogrom-like attack, killed over 1100 Israelis, including almost 400 soldiers, and kidnapped 240 as they retreated to Gaza. During the attack, weak points in the barrier were deliberately exploited and overpowered by several hundred attackers at the same time (*Operation Al-Aqsa Flood*).<sup>18</sup>

Israel, which for years has relied on military deterrence instead of working on a political solution to the Palestinian question, has been massively shaken in its security perception by this attack,

which was completely unexpected in terms of its scale and execution. The result is an ongoing campaign in the Gaza Strip (*Operation Iron Swords*), which is being waged primarily at the expense of infrastructure and civilian lives – including those of journalists and humanitarian workers – without, after well over 200 days, having come any closer to the declared goal of „defeating Hamas“. Moreover, the fate of the remaining almost 100 Israeli hostages remains uncertain, as Hamas' demands (ceasefire, release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails) cannot be reconciled with Israeli ideas.<sup>19</sup>

However, in view of the military attack on 7<sup>th</sup> October, the question of re-establishing deterrence is central to the state of Israel.<sup>20</sup> The evacuation of the areas around the Gaza Strip and in the north of the country along the Lebanese border is also unacceptable in the long term, if only because of the enormous economic costs involved. In any case, the capacities of non-state actors, especially as they originate from the radical Islamic environment, pose a particular challenge for conventional armed forces. In the conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon, the militant group has so far always emerged stronger from confrontations with Israel.<sup>21</sup> Even the application of the so-called Dahiya strategy did nothing to change this.<sup>22</sup>

The tragedy of October certainly marks a turning point, both in the relationship between the warring

parties Hamas and Israel, as well as in further regional developments. Not only is Israel still trying to bring the armed arm of Hamas in Gaza to its knees. The regional trend towards a „reset“ has also been deeply shaken by events and could – for the time being – give way to considerable tensions and military confrontations.

Israel ... has been massively shaken in its security perception ...

### Escalation risk and increasing uncertainties

However, in addition to these two fundamental shifts, the revival of the Palestinian issue has come to the fore. This is less evident in the start of negotiations to resolve the two-state question<sup>23</sup>. However, this is particularly evident in the Saudi dilemma regarding the Abraham Accord negotiations. Although the four previous signatories were still able to easily break the old Arab consensus (no political rapprochement with Israel without a viable solution to the Palestinian issue), a more complex landscape is emerging for Riyadh, which is throwing a linear continuation of the previous negotiating and even treaty logic overboard.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the shaping of the Saudi-Israeli relationship is, therefore, also subject to a new dynamic. Remarkably, although not a single Arab signatory has withdrawn from the agreement, a return to the

agenda of so-called „normalization“ seems out of the question for the time being in view of Israel's conduct of the war in the Gaza Strip.

In addition, the Saudi-Iranian relationship is also facing a new stress test. This is because the most recent armed conflict between Iran and Israel in April, the result of Iran's abandonment of its previous restraint, is making bilateral rapprochement more difficult<sup>25</sup>; also because it has made the Saudis aware of Iran's capabilities – and thus their relative inferiority. Above all, however, it brings the nuclear issue back to the fore. If Iran were to decide on nuclear armament under the current conditions, Saudi Arabia, which has so far shown no willingness to follow the Emirati model, and has instead insisted on negotiations with the USA on mastering the entire nuclear cycle, would pursue this path even more rigorously.

As a result of the increase in tensions between Israel and Iran, skirmishes on Israel's northern border have also increased. Since October last year, there have been regular armed clashes. The conflict with Hezbollah has once again turned the border into a hot one and harbours enormous potential for escalation.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, efforts by Amos Hochstein (Energy Security Advisor under President Biden) to demarcate the Lebanese-Israeli land border are currently on hold. In addition, the constant attacks by Hezbollah are tying down Israeli forces in



the north, which can therefore contribute neither to the war in the Gaza Strip nor to the occupation in the West Bank.

Another victim of the Gaza war is the relationship between Egypt and Israel, which has had a peace agreement since 1979, but which has basically remained at the political level and has not deepened through the establishment of social relations. As a result of 7<sup>th</sup> October, mutual accusations arose, which on the one hand referred to the accusation of Egyptian-tolerated arms smuggling to Gaza, and on the other hand expressed Egyptian concern – and rejection – of the transfer of Palestinian refugees from Gaza.<sup>27</sup> Egypt also appears to be so frustrated by the lack of progress in the negotiations on the release of hostages and the ceasefire that the possibility of joining the South African path of an indictment for genocide in Gaza at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is now on the table.

Last but not least, on a global level, the Israeli campaign in Gaza and the so-called Israeli „colonial project“ at the expense of Palestinian rights is meeting with widespread rejection in the „Global South“. This is leading to a considerable crunch in the fabric of North-South relations, as illustrated by South Africa's genocide indictment before the ICJ in The Hague.<sup>28</sup> Russia also knows how to use these tensions to fuel its anti-Western discourse and justify its revisionist narrative. Russia has also attempted to act as a mediator by

offering a platform in Moscow in February to negotiate the integration of militant groups such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas into the PLO, and thus their subordination to the Palestinian Authority in several rounds of negotiations.<sup>29</sup>

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### **The situation after 14 April: Main risks and potential for de-escalation**

In view of the manifold regional upheavals and the numerous uncertainties triggered by the Gaza war and the attack on Israel, it would appear to be necessary not only to manage the resulting geopolitical risks on an ad hoc basis, but also to make a serious attempt to resolve the underlying conflicts. Simply subjecting them to permanent crisis management that is not conducive to Israel's security, the integrity of the Palestinians or regional stability in the long-term is proving to be far too short-sighted.

As the unfolding dynamics since 7<sup>th</sup> October have made clear, even Israel's military superiority is not capable of guaranteeing comprehensive deterrence, nor can it actually ensure the security of Israel's inhabitants. Furthermore, the human cost on the Palestinian side due to Israel's ruthless warfare in the densely built-up, urban area of Gaza cannot even begin to be reconciled

with international humanitarian law.<sup>30</sup> The conventional logic of deterrence is particularly ineffective in interactions with non-state actors, all the more so as Israel's military opponents are radical Islamic groups that have no regard for civilian casualties

and, as in the case of the Lebanese Hezbollah, are not only a para-state actor but also part of the Iranian vanguard.

Against this backdrop and the associated escalation risks, three areas of activity for de-escalation come to the fore. Efforts should focus on a return to diplomacy, negotiations and international law, especially as external actors can also play a central role in conflict resolution and can contribute to this by providing security guarantees or a venue for negotiations.

First and foremost is the cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip, and the unconditional release of all Israeli hostages still in the custody of militant Palestinian groups. Subsequently, a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip must lead seamlessly to serious negotiations to resolve the Palestinian question. This must be a comprehensive process that encompasses both a political and an economic dimension alongside the issue of reconstruction in Gaza.<sup>31</sup> This is where the USA, which has the greatest influence as Israel's protecting power, is in particular demand. However, this will not be possible either during the US election campaign or under the current far-right Israeli government. But without a

short-term reconstruction perspective in Gaza and a medium-term political and economic horizon for the Palestinians and their proto-state autonomous authority, there will still be no peace.

The logic of deterrence and containment obviously does not provide security for Israel either, because following the logic of divide and rule also has its downsides. This also presents an opportunity for Saudi Arabia, which should strictly insist on resolving the Palestinian issue in return for so-called normalisation with Israel. The EU can also play a practical role here by re-establishing the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) Rafah on the border between Gaza and Egypt in order to temporarily control the strategically important border as a neutral, external third party. In the absence of a political solution, the militant special path of Hamas and its ilk will remain an attractive alternative to the increasingly dysfunctional PA for the foreseeable future.<sup>32</sup> A tangible reform process of the Palestinian Authority must, therefore, take place at the Palestinian level, transforming it back into a legitimate political actor. At the same time, however, this can only work if the PA can offer its voters the prospect of a realistic peace dividend. With the current government under Netanyahu, however, this does not seem plausible, nor does the practical action of the USA appear promising.

The second priority is ending the fighting between Hezbollah and Israel and transforming it into a

productive process of de-escalation. In addition to the escalation currently underway in the southern Gaza Strip, the border area between Lebanon and Israel harbours the highest risk for the time being. Moreover, in the event of fighting between Hezbollah and the Israeli armed forces, not only would a non-state militant actor be involved, but the sovereign state of Lebanon itself would also be affected.<sup>33</sup> Firstly, to avoid such a disaster, lessons must be learnt from previous clashes between Israel's army and Hezbollah, particularly from the 33-day war in 2006.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, the successful diplomatic negotiations conducted by US envoy Amos Hochstein provide an excellent starting point for negotiating the course of the national border.

Finally, it is reasonable to assume that Hezbollah will cease its posturing as soon as the fighting in Gaza has ended. A key question, therefore, remains whether Netanyahu will be prepared to put his own political career on hold and face Israeli justice once the war in Gaza is over, or whether he would prefer to prolong the state of emergency by taking up arms again in the north and thus continue to avoid certain charges. In any case, the resumption of border demarcation negotiations should be a clear priority that should be promoted by all actors involved, including regional and international actors (USA, France, Saudi Arabia).

Thirdly, diplomatic negotiations must be resumed to resolve the

nuclear issue in the region in order to prevent uncontrolled nuclear proliferation. Otherwise, a spiral of escalation threatens to be set in motion that will sooner or later lead to a devastating war between Iran and Israel<sup>35</sup>, which would by no means spare the Gulf states, or at least lead to a chaotic race for military nuclear capabilities in the short-term. During a second hypothetical term of office for Joe Biden, such negotiations could regain momentum. Priority should be given to reviving the JCPOA, which was cancelled by President Trump in 2018 and represented a milestone in averting nuclear proliferation.

The military escalation between Iran and Israel in April showed that the shadow war between the two states has been temporarily suspended. Two lessons can be learnt from these events. Firstly, it became clear that Israel was dependent on regional and international partners for missile defence. This also gives external actors a certain amount of room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis Israel. Secondly, Iran is now faced with the question of whether the nuclear option for regime defence does not appear desirable after all. This makes negotiations to prevent Iran from breaking out all the more urgent.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

The attack on Israeli territory on 7<sup>th</sup> October not only set a spiral of violence in motion, but also put a stop to the previous trend towards diplomatic conflict resolution that has been evident

across the Middle East since 2020. In particular, the negotiations on rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Israel can no longer continue under the same premises, as the Palestinian issue has returned to the political stage with a bang.

Even though US shuttle diplomacy has been in place since the outbreak of the Gaza war, in order to avoid an uncontrolled regional escalation of the conflict and negotiations on a ceasefire and the release of hostages are also being conducted, it is the weapons that are doing the talking. Especially in the Gaza Strip, where the war has been going on for well over 200 days and there seems to be no end in sight, as evidenced by Tsahal's recent advance on Rafah. The tensions on the Lebanese-Israeli border also show that armed non-state actors pose a threat to regional stability. In addition, the first direct

military exchange between Iran and Israel in mid-April clearly demonstrated the dormant risks here. All actors concerned are, therefore, called upon to prioritise a cooperative security logic over military solutions to political problems in order to prevent a further slide into uncontrollable scenarios.

Not least for Europe, the fighting in the Gaza Strip poses an increased risk potential in the form of jihadist-Islamist radicalisation. It is, therefore, in the best interests of Europe, the EU and its Member States to contribute to the settlement of the Middle East conflict through diplomatic means and to support the option of sovereign statehood that has been denied to the Palestinians for far too long, as Norway, Belgium and Ireland have recently done as a logical consequence with regard to a two-state solu-

tion. After all, the implementation of a two-state solution remains the ultimate strategy of denial against militant actors on both sides of the conflict.

### About the Author

Wolfgang Mühlberger is an independent consultant working on projects in the MENA region at the interface between fragility, security and peacebuilding. He is a trained Arabist, scholar of Islamic science and economist. Among his 55 specialised publications are several on militant (Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic State) and Islamist (En-Nahdha) movements in the Middle East, as well as on the numerous intra- and inter-state conflicts in the region. He was a visiting researcher at the INSS (Institute of National Security Studies) in Tel Aviv and worked as a Middle East expert for the FMEIA on post in Ramallah. Since 2020, he has been working as Senior Advisor for the MENA region for the Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation/CMI in Helsinki.

<sup>1</sup> Concerning the trauma of both conflict parties: Daniel Bar-Tal, et al, *A sense of self-perceived victimhood in intractable conflicts*, International Review of the Red Cross, 91 (874), June 2009. Regarding the attack: Mounir Rabih, *How Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran carefully planned an unprecedented offensive in Israel*, L'Orient-Le Jour, 9 Octobre 2023

<sup>2</sup> Fatiha Dazi-Heni, *La guerre à Gaza et le retour de la question palestinienne*, IRSEM, Note de Recherche no142, Mars 2024

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Fabrizio Carboni, Head Middle East at the ICRC in Le Monde. Siehe Hélène Sallon, *Gaza: "on ne peut pas nourrir deux millions de personnes avec des largages"*, Le Monde, 5 mars 2024

<sup>4</sup> Hussein Ibish, *The Siren Call of an Israeli Invasion of Lebanon*, The Atlantic, 27 April 2024

<sup>5</sup> For the situation in the Red Sea: Louise Lüdke, *Robust im Roten Meer? Die neue*

*maritime Mission der EU*, ZIF Kompakt, Zentrum für Internationale Friedenssätze, 19. Februar 2024. For the development of the shadow war: Maha Yahya, *The Israeli-Iranian Shadow War is Over*, Diwan, Carnegie Middle East, 15 April 2024.

<sup>6</sup> The relationship between Qatar and Egypt with regard to the Gaza Strip, Hamas and their respective roles as mediators is also characterised by competition. While Qatar maintains close diplomatic relations with Iran and also harbours the Hamas politburo, which has been in exile since 2007 and has been led by Ismail Haniyeh since 2017, Egypt is a relevant player due to its geographical proximity to the Gaza Strip, its former direct administration of the Strip (1948-1967) and its political rejection of Hamas.

<sup>7</sup> See Vali Nasr's comments in the webinar "The Middle East Reset Amid the War on Gaza" des Middle East Council on Global Affairs

<https://www.youtube.com/@mecouncil2912/streams>

<sup>8</sup> Raffaella del Sarto, *A Region in Transition: the Fluid Nature of Middle East Politics*, in: G. Dalay/T. Yousef, *The Middle East's Fragile Reset: Actors, Battlegrounds, and (Dis)Order*, Middle East Council on Global Affairs, November 2023.

<sup>9</sup> The last reconciliation attempts between the PA and Hamas date back six years. See: Wolfgang Mühlberger/Olli Ruohomäki, *Gaza Reconciliation: Burying the Hatchet or Changing Stripes?*, FIIA Comment 24/2027, November 2017. In 2021, there was also an internal Palestinian agreement to hold elections, but this was torpedoed by the United States and Israel. Siehe: Menachem Klein, *Hamas's Narrative of Ignoring It*, IAI Commentaries 24, Istituto Affari Internazionali, 5 February 2024.



<sup>10</sup> Michael Barnett, et al, *Israel's One-State Reality – It's time to give up on the two-state solution*, Foreign Affairs, 14. April 2023

<sup>11</sup> Michael Young, *The Forever Allon Plan*, Diwan, Carnegie Middle East Center, 8 January 2024

<sup>12</sup> Adrien Sémon, *The Lebanese Gas: Exploration and Exploitation*, Lebanese Citizen Foundation/Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, August 2022

<sup>13</sup> Signatories are the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan.

<sup>14</sup> Dalia Dassa Kaye/Sanam Vakil, *Only the Middle East Can Fix the Middle East: The Path to a Post-American Order*, Foreign Affairs, 1. February 2024

<sup>15</sup> Muriel Asseburg, *State of Palestine: No Sustainable Development in a Divided Polity under Occupation*, in: Marianne Beisheim (Hg.), *Country-level Politics around the SDGs*, Research Paper 07, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, July 2023

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Bahout, *Sous les décombres de Gaza: un Moyen-Orient en recomposition?*, Esprit, Décembre 2023

<sup>17</sup> Gilbert Achkar, *Israeli far right's plans for expulsion and expansion*, Le Monde Diplomatique, December 2023

<sup>18</sup> Oliver Passot, *Une barrière trop intelligente? Comment le Hamas s'est joué d'un système de protection très élaboré*, Brève stratégique 67, IRSEM, 8 novembre 2023

<sup>19</sup> In the early phase of the conflict, a ceasefire agreement was successfully negotiated, enabling the release of a limited number of hostages.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Loup Saaman, *Après Gaza: repenser la sécurité d'Israël*, Institut Montaigne, 5 Mars 2024

<sup>21</sup> Oren Barak, *The Case for Averting War between Israel and Hizballah*, Commentary, War on the Rocks, 2 May 2024

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Loup Saaman, op.cit. (FN 20)

<sup>23</sup> However, the question of Palestinian statehood and sovereignty was only recently negotiated again in a vote at the United Nations, and three European states have recognized it meanwhile.

<sup>24</sup> Fatiha Dazi-Heni, op. cit. (FN 2)

<sup>25</sup> Fatima Alsmadi, *Opportunities and challenges along the path of Saudi-Iran relations*, Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 19 April 2024

<sup>26</sup> Maha Yahya, *Israel's Next Front? Iran, Hezbollah, and the Coming War in Lebanon*, Foreign Affairs, 24 April 2024

<sup>27</sup> Stephan Roll, *Eiszeit für den „Kalten Frieden“ zwischen Ägypten und Israel*, SWP-Aktuell Nr.13, SWP, März 2024

<sup>28</sup> Although the indictment did not lead to a corresponding condemnation of Israel, the ICJ called on Israel to comply with international law and allow humanitarian aid. See: Agnès Callamard, *Gaza and the End of the Rules-Based Order*, Foreign Affairs, 15 February 2024

<sup>29</sup> Reinhard Schulze, *Moskaus Rückkehr in den Nahen Osten*, Journal21, <https://www.journal21.ch/artikel/moskaus-schritte-den-nahen-osten>.

<sup>30</sup> Due to the scope of it, this analysis does not go into the systematic use of AI for target acquisition in the Gaza Strip (keyword "Lavender") and the associated debate. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that, depending on the program-

ming, 15 to one hundred civilians are being killed in addition to the actual target, as so-called "collateral damage".

<sup>31</sup> Muriel Asseburg, *Shaping the Future of Gaza: How Europe Could Contribute to Sustainable Stabilisation*, SWP Comment No4, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, February 2024

<sup>32</sup> Loveday Morris et al., *As Hamas returns to the north, Israel's Gaza endgame is nowhere in sight*, Washington Post, 15 May 2024

<sup>33</sup> Hussein Ibish, op.cit. (FN 4)

<sup>34</sup> Oren Barak, a recognized Israeli expert on Hezbollah, believes that the best 'strategy of denial' against Hezbollah is not a military one, but a negotiating one, op.cit. (FN 21).

<sup>35</sup> International Crisis Group, *The Israel-Iran Crisis: A Chance to Step Back from the Brink*, Statement, 17 April 2024

<sup>36</sup> Ali Alfoneh, *Iran's Lessons Learned from Direct Confrontation with Israel*, AGSIW, 26 April 2024.

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