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NEW ARAB WORLD
Foreword by Daniel Kawczynski

No long-standing member of the Westminster political class has a greater understanding of the Arab world than Dr Wafik Moustafa. His focus on educating the British political establishment on key issues across the region affecting British strategic interests has been enlightening.

There is no region in the world where we are more interdependent than our immediate Arab neighbours. Only through bilateral engagement and understanding with our neighbouring Arab partners can we resolve so many of today's key priorities.

*Professionals like Dr Wafik are essential for a better understanding of the Arab world culturally and politically.
He is a treasure for the United Kingdom.*

He has been a signpost for Britain despite ever-changing fads and popular thinking; he has consistently signposted the intrinsic nature of Arab priorities with a view to supporting British strategic interests across the region.

Daniel Kawczynski

Conservative MP (2005-2024), former Member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, House of Commons, London, UK.

I

ARAB WORLD REALIGNMENT

“Well, as we’ve said, and it’s important, Israel has the right and the obligation to defend itself and, again, to try to make sure that what happened never happens again. No country—no country, not the United States, not anyone else that I can think of—would tolerate the slaughter of its civilians. So we stand behind that, and we stand behind the proposition. But as democracies, the United States, Israel, and other democracies have a responsibility to do everything possible to protect civilians who may be caught in harm’s way.”

— *Anthony Blinken, Secretary of State of the United States*

AN OVERVIEW

A vast geography, comprising more than 22 million sq. km, five times that of India, home for 450 million inhabitants, includes some of the wealthiest countries and some of the poorest countries on the planet.

Corrupt, politicised education curricula, tailored to promote dictatorships, violent regimes, and schoolbooks obliterate any information about the factual history of the Ottoman Empire or Israel; maps are rarely display historical changes, in textbook, very little or no historical dating sequence, statistics, little biographical details, history books and newspapers articles awash with generalities and without references, even

religious doctrines are set within a narrow narrative, thus stunting critical thinking, blurring the understanding of the surrounding world.

Many people are fed political stories that Jerusalem is a Muslim Arab city, despite changing hands of different Persian, Roman and Turkic empires over many centuries.

During the war that led to the defeat of five Arab armies, in 1948, the Arab armies encouraged thousands to temporarily flee their villages, into camps in the north and South, soon to become UN-sponsored administrative refugee zones, setting up a massively funded aid program administered by UNRWA.

Within a few decades, these people grew into the biggest U.N. dependent status in the world. Some of these people became prosperous in a string of new towns and a metropolitan neighbourhood with modern shopping centres, skyscrapers, and expensive cars.

Gaza enjoyed a well-equipped twenty-six hospitals, more than the number of medical facilities in the whole of Egypt. Gaza housed one of the best education facilities in the Middle East. Roads network has a better traffic system than Cairo or Baghdad.

Over the span of seventy-five years, out of a colonial guilt-though the Levant was under the Turkish control till 1922 and was not a European colony. Western powers undertook elaborate humanitarian operations by funding a multi-billion infrastructure that, with the passage of time, acquired a dark side of dependency corruption, where many billions of dollars were stolen or misappropriated into terror activities and money laundering.

Hamas, in particular, infiltrated and controlled huge facilities, hospitals and schools, which became hubs, where medical staff and teachers were co-opted with financial incentives. These public institutions became a training ground for ideological hatred and were exploited as military camps, connected to an elaborate network of tunnels for smuggling and storing weapons.

The extensive and secretive labyrinth of tunnels used for terror also acted as a conduit for transferring thousands of tonnes of heavy military equipment, smuggling hashish, attracting gangs and money laundering on a huge scale.

A substantial section of inhabitants shared the proceeds, with huge cash disposals, travelling abroad was not uncommon, and standards of living have risen severalfold higher than those of their cousins in neighbouring Egypt or Sudan. There were

persistent worldwide campaigns for more money and donations from the UN, Europe, China, and the Arab Gulf States; even poorer nations in North Africa contributed to the maintenance of the status quo. Despite being a non-tax-paying economy and having free public services, the strip's unemployment figures were kept artificially high. Most young Arabs from Gaza and the West Bank seek work on the black economy inside and outside Israel, meanwhile collecting handouts from several UN-sponsored schemes.

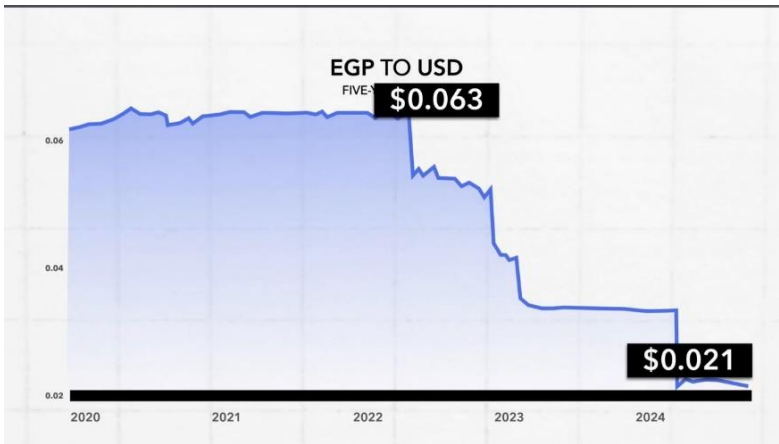
Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians hold lucrative jobs and own businesses in wealthy oil states and Western countries. Many Palestinian entrepreneurs and businessmen own some of the most expensive real estate in London and other major Western cities.

Many of these men and women work in administration, publishing, banking, interpreting, security systems, and the arms trade. They sport the levant trait of widespread involvement in media and public opinion-making in regional broadcasting, like the BBC, Sky Arabia, and France 24 Arabic. Aljazeera TV is in Arabic and English languages.

Aljazeera Arabic openly promote a Hamas narrative with a tightly controlled editorial line, as it found during searches of six Palestinian correspondents' offices by Israeli police during October 2024, whose liaisons with Hamas were uncovered in several documentations.

Gaza Strip was taken over by Egypt during 1948. However, it was given a special administrative status, which was enhanced by the military junta following the 1952 coup in Cairo, which meant putting up barriers between the mainland Egypt and Gaza, the appointment of a military governor supported by military administration, blocking movement, thus ring-fencing its unregulated economy made it to safe Haven for espionage, smuggling and lawbreakers.

Following the Israeli takeover in 1967 of Gaza and Sinai, Gazans opted out of the Egyptian currency, preferring trade using the US dollar and Israeli shekel. Inhabitants benefited from free treatment in Israeli hospitals and also seized the opportunities of free scholarships provided by dozens of countries across the world. Gaza and the West Bank, within decades, acquired the cosmopolitan lifestyle of hundreds of millionaires, including three billionaires.



The meltdown of the Egyptian Currency.

THE LANDSCAPE

A vast geographical Arab multicultural, multiethnic landscape, comprising a 14 million sq. km, inhabited by some 450 million, represents 10% of the world's population. The region is troubled by civil wars, endemic corruption, illegal migration, and violent rule. The Arab League, a mere tool for dictators, failed to produce any tangible benefit for its people, having a negative impact on regional stability and world peace.

The cultural and trade exchanges between Arab states are low, with many antagonising blocks and frequent disputes. Some of the Arab League States enjoy extreme wealth. However, the majority suffers from absolute poverty. No transportation network infrastructure exists, and each country runs as a police state.

Paradoxically, since the 1967 war, the Palestinians have benefited from the largesse of Arab regimes in providing them with jobs and financial support. Israel, meanwhile has become the largest trading partner for Palestinians, both for imports (53.1% of the total in 2021) and exports (86.1%). The Arabs in Gaza and the West Bank under Israeli administration have enjoyed strong economic performance, becoming main commercial partners for imports and exports and overtaking trade links with neighbouring states like Egypt and Syria. Israel transferred 107 billion shekels, more

than 28.7 billion dollars, to Gaza and the West Bank since 2010 through a complex fiscal arrangement between Israel and PA, according to the Jerusalem Centre for Security and Foreign Affairs - JCFA.

Hamas set up itself as the Palestinian Islamist in Gaza, winning the 2005 elections and expanding, morphing from a small organisation within the Gaza neighbourhood to a multibillion-dollar outfit, using a multitude of professional Honours money laundering techniques for military equipment procurement. Hamas's economic activities stretch the Arab world and Africa by sitting up layers of shell companies. It owns mining companies in Sudan and Algeria, as well as real estate in Egypt, Qatar, the Emirates, and main European cities.

Two years later, a mini-civil war in Gaza erupted, overthrowing the corrupt Palestinian Authority PA led by Mahmoud Abbas. Since then, Hamas has acted as the Gaza Strip's de facto administration.

GAZA STRIP A BRIEF HISTORY

An ancient east Mediterranean string of small towns, 41 kilometres (25 miles) long, 6 to 12 kilometres (3.7 to 7.5 mi) wide, with a total landmass of 365 sq kilometres. The population is around 2 million, and it is relatively prosperous and has a lower population density than Cairo or Alexandria. Pop. density in the Gaza Strip is 12,000 sq. k, in comparison to Amman, Jordan, which is 2000 sq. k; the density in Alexandria is 22,000 sq. k. The Strip receives a multibillion-dollar aid through UN funding programs. The debate about population density is more favourable when compared to overpopulation in cities like Cairo, where 20 million are cramped into just 453 sq. km. Gaza towns are administered by a municipal council consisting of 14 Hamas members.

Many centuries ago, the strip formed an ancient Mediterranean trading and Caravan route, conquered by several empires (see map section). For a period, around 730 BC, east of the Mediterranean was part of the Assyrian Empire. Alexander the Great captured Gaza in 332 BC. Then, it was taken by the Seleucids of Syria and the Ptolemies of Egypt until it was besieged by the Hasmoneans in 96 BC.

The arrival of Islam in the mid-7th century was considered a turning point. However, the province in the later period of the mid-15th century was conquered by another competing Islamic power, the Ottomans. It remained part of the Ottoman Empire from the 16th century until it was occupied by British troops in 1922 and added to the post-WWI administrative British Mandate Palestine (see map).

Turkic steppe horsemen, the Mamelukes, stationed in Egypt and the Levant from the 9th century in service of their master, the caliph based in Baghdad, continued to control the medieval towns for centuries. However, following the Mongols' invasion from East Persia in 1250, which fragmented an already weak Abbasid Empire and ransacked its capital, the city of Baghdad lost its importance. This effectively decapitated the last Arab-based Islamic empire and gave rise to the Mamelukes. The Mongolian army reached the outskirts of Gaza, but for reasons beyond the scope of this book, withdrew northward and into Central Asia. The Mamelukes took advantage of the political vacuum by taking control of the Levant and North African provinces. Under Mameluke rule, during 1277 AD, the remnants of the Arab Empire disintegrated further, reducing the Gaza stretch of small towns to a semi-autonomous province, the Kingdom of Gaza (or Principality of Gaza). During their offensive operations against the Crusaders in 1290, the Mamelukes occupied Gaza, turning it into a medieval garrison outpost. The province was further wrecked by a major earthquake in 1294, which the Mamelukes subsequently rebuilt.

Post-WWI dismemberment of the defeated Ottoman Empire and further changes in boundaries by Britain and France led to the creation of the Arab Palestinian principality in the East Bank, which was given a biblical name, Transjordan, forming the future Kingdom of Jordan. West of the River Jordan was named the British Palestine Mandate. The British ended their UN mandate in May 1948. Israel promptly declared its independence. Egypt also took the Gaza Strip, which was then captured by Israel during the 1967 war. As part of the terms of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty, Gaza was administered by the Palestinian Authority (PA). A final Israeli military disengagement from Gaza took place in 2005. One year later, Hamas won the Gaza local elections. The union between Gaza and Ramallah led to civil war and the breakdown of law and order, eventually expelling the PA administration. Hamas militants soon acted as a proxy militia, conducting incursions and rocket attacks on Israel's borders, which triggered Israeli counterattacks. Israel mounted a blockade of Gaza by sea and air, restricting access except through the Egyptian border. Realizing

the leverage of a continued proxy conflict in Israel-Arab politics, the Palestinian sense of victimization became an ideal bargaining tool for Arab regimes justifying huge security and military expenditures, including smuggling. Yasser Arafat, the then-Palestinian leader (b. 1925 in Cairo), famously said, “The Palestinian cause is the cement that holds the Arab world together and the explosive that blows it apart.”

Apart from the British and French arrangements for the Middle East, as well as UNRWA-sponsored public services, there is no direct link between Ramallah and Gaza. A study of the background of leaders over the past hundred years and the accumulation of wealth indicates how many people made millions and billions playing the Palestinian cause. For instance, President Sisi of Egypt reportedly allocated over \$500 million to help prevent 500 homes from being destroyed during a conflict with Israel, while failing to spend the same amount to repair an old and outdated drainage system in Alexandria, a city with a population of 15 million.

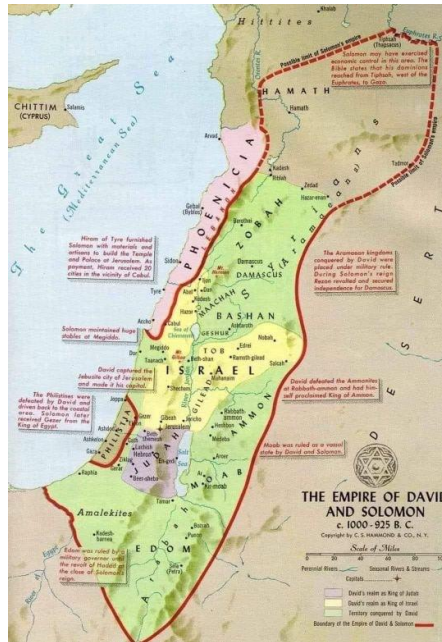
The nearest comparison to the Gaza and West Bank situation is that of Pakistan and Bangladesh 50 years ago.

Many leaders consume huge amounts of time, information, and money promoting the reconquest of Jerusalem, even as people in East Jerusalem reportedly turn their backs on Arab rhetoric. The Arab media often deliberately blocks alternative perspectives. For instance, Egyptian Copts have been barred by their church leadership from pilgrimage to the Holy Land despite a peace treaty being in place for over 50 years.



Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman, A Leading Reformer.

A NEW ARAB WORLD



Historical Holy Land.

Hamas, established as an Islamic political arm in Gaza in December 1987 by Sheik Yassin with tacit support from Israeli security forces, emerged following the outbreak of the First Intifada—a Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza. At the time, the main purpose of supporting Hamas was to counter Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), another radical group committed to violently destroying Israel, and to counterbalance PA activities.

RAFAH - A PERPLEXING ENTITY

An eastern Mediterranean divided city of 150 sq km, Rafah is located 30 km (19 mi) southwest of Gaza City. In 2017, it had a population of about 200,000 and was administered as separate entities by Gaza and Egyptian authorities. The city has plentiful sources of water for agriculture, producing fruits and crops in abundance, such as peaches, olives, apples, citrus fruits, dates, grapes, vegetables, strawberries, and peppers.

A divided town since 1982, it has become a convenient hub for both Egypt's military and Hamas proxies' militant activities, facilitating the movement of weapons and militants. It has also become a money spinner for Hamas and Bedouin tribesmen alike, who collaborate with Egyptian security services by using large secret tunnels to smuggle food, hashish, weapons, and other goods into and out of Gaza.

RAFAH EGYPTIAN LINK

Like many towns and cities in the region, Rafah presents a geopolitical anomaly, comprising a divided population of some 200,000 straddling the 1949 border with Egypt. It serves an important function as Asia's gateway into and out of Egypt.

An Egyptian traveler would face a stymied bureaucracy when traveling from Cairo to Sinai, enduring intrusive security checkpoints. However, Gaza individuals, including Hamas operatives, reportedly move with impunity across the border. Many of them have contacts or enough cash to bribe their way through multiple intimidating checkpoints manned by the Egyptian military, demanding the purpose of travel and searching for possessions and documents. Sinai roads are frequently blocked by security forces without warning or reason.

LEBANON HASHISH POOR MAN'S COCAINE

Drugs have become a central source of income for the Assad regime and Hezbollah. Massive amounts of drugs, primarily Captagon—known as “poor man's cocaine”—are smuggled throughout the Middle East. Drug exports from Syria yielded an estimated \$25–30 billion in 2022, dwarfing annual legal exports of less than \$1 billion. One Captagon pill costs just 3 cents to produce but is sold in Arab capitals for more than \$20, making the profits considerable.

The economic and political upheaval in Lebanon and Syria has driven Hezbollah operatives to intensify their drug economy. It is estimated that Lebanon alone produces over 4 million pounds of hashish and 20,000 pounds of heroin annually,

generating profits exceeding US\$4 billion. Lebanon's drug industry, *The Washington Post* reported, contributes to over half of its foreign-exchange earnings.

Beqaa Valley, a region located approximately 30 km from the capital Beirut and near the Syrian border, is the epicenter of the narcotic industry. Lebanon has grown marijuana for generations, even before its independence declaration in 1943. U.S. agencies assert that Lebanon is one of the key centers for the production and trafficking of hashish and opium globally.

Against the background of the economic crisis, drug production and smuggling have developed on an unprecedented industrial scale in Syria and Lebanon. Chief among those involved is Hezbollah, and to a lesser extent, Palestinian Hamas, both using it as a principal source of cash. The main drug traded is Captagon, an addictive amphetamine-like substance that induces delusions, psychosis, impulsive behavior, and a false sense of courage. It is widely known as the "jihad drug" used by ISIS fighters.

The production of narcotics in Syria and Lebanon dates back centuries; British troops attempted to block the hashish route across Sinai during the 1880s.

Since the 1990s, Hezbollah has partnered with drug cartels in Central and South America, establishing networks to smuggle and distribute cocaine in the United States through Mexico and in Europe through Africa. A drug cartel in Colombia could ship cocaine to mafias in Europe, who laundered money through Middle Eastern banks, funneling cash to rogue regimes. Drug trade revenues potentially contribute up to a third or more of Lebanon's gross domestic product.

Since the Syrian civil war, the country's drug industry has been managed by military and security apparatuses, including Hezbollah. Division 4 Unit—headed by Maher el-Assad, Bashar's younger brother—is responsible for the security of drug production and supply chains. This operation incorporates food and packaging companies. Former army factories, once used to make chemical products, located in Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Tartus, and Latakia near the coast, now produce Captagon, which is smuggled through the Mediterranean port of Latakia to Lebanon and worldwide destinations. In 2023, drug smugglers using drones to transport narcotics across borders, including over prison walls. Lebanon's largest prison, Roumieh, near Beirut, houses about 5,500 inmates. Due to its size and testimonies of pervasive drug networks, this prison has become a contributor to Lebanon's struggle with drug

addiction. Drug gangs enjoy protection from officers and gendarmerie, who share in the proceeds they collect from prisoners. Some guards are dealers themselves.

Three-quarters of hashish produced is smuggled to Egypt, Israel, Europe, and North America. U.S. law enforcement believes that nearly 2,500 pounds of Lebanese heroin reach American streets each year, constituting nearly a fifth of the total heroin entering the country. Much of the remaining heroin is smuggled into Western Europe, where it contributes to over half of the continent's heroin consumption. The marijuana harvest, processed into hashish, represents 75 percent of global consumption. A portion of the hashish harvest remains in Lebanon to supply around 40,000 local drug users. Saudi Ambassador to Lebanon, Mr. Bukhari, stated that drug traffickers attempted to smuggle 600 million narcotic pills from Lebanon to Saudi Arabia between 2015 and 2021—enough, he said, “to drown the entire Arab region.”

THE POLITICAL GRAND SHEIKH OF EGYPT

In the immediate aftermath of the October 7 massacre, President el-Sisi of Egypt was reluctant to condemn Hamas's act of barbarism. President Sisi let the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, do his bidding in a highly politicised statement.

The “honourable Al-Azhar salutes with utmost pride the resistance efforts of the proud Palestinian people. Al-Azhar conveys its heartfelt condolences for our martyrs, the martyrs of the Islamic and Arab nations, the martyrs of proud Palestine, who attained martyrdom for the sake of defending their homeland, their nation, and their cause, which is also our cause and the cause of all honourable people in the world: the Palestinian cause. Al-Azhar prays to Allah almighty to grant the Palestinian people steadfastness in the face of the Zionist tyranny and terror.”

“Al-Azhar salutes with utmost pride the resistance efforts of the proud Palestinian people and demands that the civilised world and the international community examine in a spirit of rationality and wisdom the Zionist occupation of Palestine, which is the most prolonged occupation in modern history. This occupation is a stain on the forehead of humanity and the international community, which practices discrimination and knows only a double standard when it comes to the Palestinian issue. Al-Azhar supports the hearts and hands of the proud Palestinian people who

have imbued us with spirit and faith and restored us to life after we thought that would never happen and prays that Allah grants them steadfastness, peace of mind, and strength. It stresses that every occupation disappears sooner or later, whether this takes a long time or a short time.”

A politically loaded and somehow misguided statement, however, it reflects aspects of the dangerous manipulation of religious institutions by the military regime. The Grand Sheikh omitted any reference to the massacre, nor did he mention the ordeal of Israeli children and women killed by Hamas terror or remember hostages. He obliquely referred to Jews as enemies of Islam. The statement, from its content and timing, was certainly written by the Egyptian military authorities.

In another angry, antisemitic statement aired during a television broadcast in the Muslim month of Ramadan, Al-Azhar declared:

“Al-Azhar Al-Sharif mourns the martyrs of the heroic Palestinian resistance, who were targeted by a criminal Zionist hand. The Zionist hand has wreaked havoc and corruption on our Arab land, killing, destroying, occupying, seizing, and annihilating before the eyes and ears of countries paralysed by their will, ability, and thinking. An international community as silent as the dead in their graves, and an international law whose value is not worth the ink with which it was written.”

“The martyrs of the Palestinian resistance were true resistance fighters who terrified their enemy and put fear and terror in their hearts. They were not terrorists, as the enemy tries to falsely and deceitfully portray them. Rather, they were steadfast resistance fighters committed to the soil of their homeland until God granted them martyrdom while they thwarted the enemy’s plots and aggression. They defended their land, their cause, and our cause—the cause of the Arabs and Muslims in the East and West.”

Meanwhile, the people in Gaza rejected leaving their homeland despite the genocidal war, starvation, and the devastating situation in the besieged strip. Al-Azhar did not play any meaningful role or make any effort to free the hostages and the children from Hamas captivity.

Following the killing of Sinwar, the architect of the October 7 atrocity, Al-Azhar mourned him as a “martyr of the Palestinian resistance.”

The Coptic Church took comfort in a grey political position with a watered-down statement. Pope Tawadros II and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar “agreed on establishing a joint committee that acts in a combined voice against the Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip. The committee will be in charge of generating a unified Egyptian voice rejecting the Israeli crimes in Gaza and defending the rights of the Palestinian people.”

John Gabriel, an Egyptian Dominican priest, speaking to The Media Line from a Franciscan monastery in Leuven, Belgium, followed the government’s line, condemning violence on both sides.

Many Copts looked with nostalgia to the late Pope Shenouda III's antisemitic posturing during his tenure from 1971 until his death in 2012. He forbade Copts from visiting Israel, reflecting the pan-Arab stance against the peace treaty. His successor, Pope Tawadros II, has taken a cautious approach, aligning the Church’s position with Egypt’s official diplomatic policies.

POLITICAL COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Looking back, Egypt claimed in a statement that it flooded the tunnels in the border area in 2015 during fighting with ISIS in Sinai. However, there was no independent verification. The tunnel traffic remained operational as a major smuggling route, with goods, steel girders, cement, and large amounts of narcotics passing through seemingly with ease under the eyes of the Egyptian military beneath the Philadelphia Corridor.

During the first months of the war, tens of thousands of Hamas militiamen, wealthy merchants, and their families were the first to flee Gaza, buying expensive dwellings and occupying luxury hotels in Cairo. To cross the Rafah border, they bribed their way out; middlemen and the Egyptian military were reportedly charging tens of thousands of dollars in cash from fleeing families.

II

SWORD OF IRON CAMPAIGN

As Jews were celebrating the Festival of Simchat Torah, which fell on Shabbat, Saturday, 7 October 2023, one of the central tenets of Judaism, Hamas terrorists broke through the fences into southern Israel and committed a massive massacre, killing more than 1,200 civilians, including children and women, and kidnapping hundreds of children, women, and men in an extraordinary act of barbarity. The magnitude and suddenness of the massacre stunned the world, posing an existential threat to the Jewish state. Moreover, the heinous act challenged the Israeli security apparatus's reliance on its intelligence and military alertness.

The IDF launched "Operation Swords of Iron," a massive intelligence and military strategy aimed at eradicating Hamas and Hezbollah terror sources and their financial backers. This operation involved coordinated actions in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Iran, marking the largest military operation in Israel's history. The Shia militia of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Houthi forces in Yemen, supported by Iran, opened additional fronts with extensive use of drones and the firing of rockets and missiles onto Israel.

This chapter sheds light on a conflict involving how Hamas and Hezbollah mutated from small militant groups into regional military and political powers, controlling significant military assets. Acting as proxy forces for regimes and regional powers like Iran, they have become major threats in an already precarious region. The Israeli public, Jews worldwide, and their allies were deeply grieved, reminded of the Holocaust eight decades earlier.

Conversely, the Arab public, influenced by Arab media disinformation, reacted with elation and jubilation, proclaiming what was framed as a "Palestinian stunning victory." Networks like Al Jazeera and Egyptian, Syrian, and Palestinian outlets fueled this narrative. Europe-based Arabic broadcasters, many operated by Palestinian and Syrian journalists, acted as mouthpieces for Hamas's narrative, compounding the issue.

The United States, Britain, Canada, and Western nations—from Japan and France to Australia—responded to the Nova Festival massacre by backing the Jewish state morally, politically, and militarily. The USS Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group, accompanied by a robust U.S. naval presence, was deployed to support Israel's military efforts under "Operation Swords of Iron." Furthermore, the United States reassigned additional forces to the Middle East, including a second carrier strike group. The massacre was a wake-up call; President Biden's visit to Israel marked a paradigm shift in the U.S.-Israel relationship. British Prime Minister Sunak, French President Macron, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also visited Israel to express solid support for the country.

Arab states supporting and funding terror were exposed, particularly Qatar, which served as a safe haven for many Palestinian leaders, funneling billions of dollars to Islamic radicals. Meanwhile, the Arab Gulf is home to the large American military facility at al-Udeid Air Base, maintained by 10,000 military personnel and serving as the U.S. strategic hub for military activities in the region.

In September 2024, "Operation Northern Arrows" saw Israel launch a ground operation against Hezbollah, nearly one year after the commencement of the Gaza campaign.

Within weeks, numerous leaders were eliminated, including Hassan Nasrallah and his successor. Israel's initial targets were Hezbollah commanders, with the IDF relying on air force precision strikes. In early November 2024, 20 Israeli special forces operatives, disguised in Lebanese security uniforms, captured senior Hezbollah official Emad Fadel Amhaz. The operation, completed in just four minutes, was guided by a Lebanese civilian and yielded substantial intelligence from Amhaz, including ten SIM cards, a phone, and a foreign passport.

DETONATING PAGERS

In an effort to evade Israeli intelligence tracking, Hezbollah militants began using low-tech means of communication. Around 170 fighters were tracked and killed in targeted Israeli strikes in Lebanon, including a senior commander and a top Hamas official in Beirut.

Speculation arose that Mossad agents had added explosive material to small devices that detonated upon receiving a signal. Approximately 3,000 to 4,000 pagers exploded when coded signals were activated simultaneously. This demoralized Hezbollah fighters, causing injuries and sudden incapacitation among thousands of young men. The pagers, manufactured by Gold Apollo, based in Taipei, played a central role. The Iranian ambassador to Lebanon sustained eye injuries and had to be flown back to Tehran.

A second wave of electronically targeted mini-explosions occurred in walkie-talkies in Beirut and other parts of Lebanon and Syria. At least 20 people were killed and more than 450 wounded in the second wave, according to the Health Ministry. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant stated, “We are at the start of a new phase in the war.” The abandonment of electronic devices severely impeded communications within the militia and its commanders.

Hezbollah lost most of its leaders and thousands of fighters within a matter of weeks.

ISRAELI STRATEGY

Hamas, on October 7, made a grave miscalculation, similar to Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser’s error during the 1967 war. The terror act was sudden and shocking to the Israeli government and public alike, prompting Israel to undertake a mission to dismantle the Hamas and Hezbollah terror infrastructure. These organizations, embedded in populated areas, necessitated displacing hundreds of thousands out of harm’s way during military operations. Throughout the 2023–24 war, the IDF developed a new level of integration between intelligence units, and sea,

air, and land forces. Tactical military support from the West and certain Arab states was a valuable addition.

Since the beginning of the war, Jerusalem Post journalists were permitted to visit several IDF locations, including air force bases and a navy fast boat off the coast of Gaza during real-time military actions against Hamas terrorists. These visits showcased the success and professionalism of the military's integrated operations. Prime Minister Netanyahu stated that Israel must retain general control over the territory, particularly concerning security matters, while internal governance would be left to a new Palestinian local governing entity.

The Arab League declined a request to provide a multinational force to police the region where neither Hamas nor the Palestinian Authority (PA) would be involved. Netanyahu remarked, "The PA doesn't fight terror; it supports it. It doesn't educate for peace; it educates for the destruction of Israel. We have to build something different once the war is over." His vision included implementing a reformed Palestinian administration, similar to the wide ideological reforms undertaken in Germany and Japan after World War II. Israel also focused on combating terror funding sources and rogue financial networks.

Israel, having suffered a massacre of unimaginable proportions at the hands of some of the vilest antisemites, mounted a military response that extended beyond Lebanon and Gaza. Supported by major powers, Israel redrew the balance of global security, not only in the Middle East but across the wider world. Over the course of a long and multifront campaign, Israel succeeded in dismantling some of the most powerful and well-funded proxy militias in the world.

Tactical strikes on Iran's military infrastructure reversed the military power of the Islamic Republic, one of the most autocratic and religiously driven regimes. In response to Iran's missile attacks on Israel in April and October, provoked by the killing of a Hezbollah leader, Israel launched retaliatory strikes against key Iranian military installations, including disabling essential components of its nuclear program.

The United States, mindful of potential military intervention, deployed B-52 Stratofortress strategic bombers to the Middle East. The bombers, sent from the Minot Air Force Base's 5th Bomb Wing, were assigned to the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility, signaling robust American support and readiness.

UNRWA

The UN-funded multibillion-dollar organisation provides relief and human development assistance to Palestinian refugees, offering education and healthcare to about 600,000 displaced Palestinian Arabs during the 1948–49 Arab-Israeli War. The programme ran unchecked, becoming a bonanza for all, without means-testing. Over time, it expanded to include future generations and their dependents, multiplying to ten times the original number, reaching six million dollars in entitlement. Donors are primarily major European nations, while rich Arab states do not contribute.

The main headquarters are located in Gaza and Amman, the two places with the highest concentrations of individuals and families. The average UNRWA executive compensation is \$237,168 a year, more than the salary of the British Prime Minister. The median estimated compensation for executives at UNRWA, including base salary and bonuses, is \$239,672. The highest-paid executive earns over \$700,000 annually, while the lowest-paid earns \$50,000 tax-free. A teacher at an infant school receives \$24,000 a year—30 times the pay for a similar job in Egypt. Of its 13,000 employees in Gaza, 99% are Palestinian, with only a small number of international employees. UNRWA offers services without means-testing. Israeli authorities have found levels of welfare in Gaza unmatched in most Arab nations.

What began as a temporary arrangement in 1949 has become a permanent feature, taken for granted and not seriously scrutinised. Its mandate has been automatically renewed every three years for the last 75 years. Comparisons have been drawn with the India-Pakistan partition, a major humanitarian tragedy at the same time, which resulted in refugees numbering 15 times that of the Palestinians, yet no comparable arrangements were implemented despite the suffering of millions. Exploiting a loosely defined refugee status loophole, over 2 million Jordanian citizens (20% of the population and their descendants) draw entitlement from the scheme; many hold Jordanian and European citizenship yet remain classified as refugees. The organisation's schools and hospitals have been found to be openly anti-Semitic, with officials gloating about the murder of Jews. Facebook pages are infused with jihadist material and anti-Semitic sentiment. Thousands of employees are active Hamas members; hundreds have been arrested with documented evidence of their involvement in terror acts, caught on camera, and directly implicated in the October

7 massacre. Hamas operational headquarters, military equipment, and fighters have been sheltered within UNRWA facilities, including hospitals and schools. A UNRWA ethics report in 2019 revealed serious abuses of authority by senior officials, including nepotism and sexual misconduct. During the same period, UN Watch published a report citing staff social media posts glorifying terrorism, with some praising Hamas bomb-maker Abdullah Barghouti, responsible for killing 67 Israelis and injuring hundreds more during the Second Intifada. In schools, teachers have been found praising Nazi actions and encouraging violence against Jews. One Facebook post by a UNRWA Deputy Director showed a child wearing a jihadi headband and holding a rifle, with text urging parents to "teach your children to pull out their guns and rifles" because "what has been taken by force can only be won back by force."

During the 2023–24 war, Hamas rockets were launched from UNRWA-run hospitals, schools, and apartment complexes, risking civilian lives. Gaza's large Al-Shifa Hospital and Nasser Hospital Complex were used as terrorist command hubs. The IDF arrested a hospital director who confessed to being a Hamas military operative. The IDF killed hundreds and captured over 1,000 Hamas militants hiding in the Nasser Hospital.

Hillel Neuer, Executive Director of the Geneva-based watchdog organisation, expressed grave concern: "I am not aware of a single UNRWA teacher who has been fired when found inspiring anti-Semitic hate." Neuer questioned, "Why is it that an ostensibly neutral UN agency, supposedly teaching tolerance, continues to employ staff who support terrorism and anti-Semitism?" IDF troops discovered Hamas military headquarters and weaponry in tunnels beneath every UNRWA institution in Gaza. According to watchdog documentation, a hate culture is systematically taught in UNRWA classrooms, where Palestinian children are told that Jews are liars and fraudsters who spread evil. Terrorists wearing green headbands are glorified as role models of martyrdom. Lessons inciting violence are taught across all grades and subjects, including maths and science classes. This systematic teaching of hatred is viewed as a political time bomb. The average Gazan regards UNRWA as a validator of Palestinian identity and victimhood.

Hamas terror groups possess the funds, administrative structures, and resources to undertake large, sophisticated projects such as underground tunnels, bunker facilities, and storage built to standards to well-organised commando units with top-notch

communication and intelligence capabilities. They also generate thousands of fake social media accounts for disinformation and propaganda.

Many donor states, shocked by these activities, paused their funding, including Argentina, Canada, China, France, Germany, Nepal, the Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Thailand, the United States, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken demanded that UNRWA's administration investigate the "highly credible" allegations, particularly after the discovery that a hospital chief was a high-ranking Hamas brigadier. Philippe Lazzarini, the UNRWA chief who receives a salary package of approximately \$1 million annually, has been criticised for failing to root out anti-Semitism and terror elements within the organisation. US Senators Marco Rubio and Susan Collins called for Lazzarini's termination in a letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, asserting that he allowed militants to operate freely in a UN-funded facility. Opinion makers in the region have raised a fundamental question: why do Palestinians receive hundreds of billions of dollars in welfare, hospitals, schools, and food aid, while genuine refugees from Yemen, Egypt, or Sudan do not enjoy such largesse?

SINAI - AN ANCIENT POLITICAL JIGSAW

A sparsely populated peninsula of 61,000 sq km, cut off from the mainland since the digging of the Suez Canal in the mid-19th century, is three times the size of Israel and four times that of Lebanon. Its population is 600,000 Bedouins. Despite being demilitarised as per the terms of a peace treaty, its vast mountains and desert have remained a no-go area for the Egyptian public. The population density (30 per square mile) is one of the lowest globally. The peninsula is divided into two principal regions. The southern region has variable terrain with high mountains such as Mount Catherine, Mount Sinai (7,500 feet, or 2,285 metres), and Umm Shumar (8,500 feet, or 2,585 metres). These mountains are composed of igneous rocks and are sharply incised by deep, canyon-like wadis (seasonal watercourses) that drain towards the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba. The northern and broader portion forms about two-thirds of the Sinai. It is a great plateau sloping from heights of more than 3,000 feet (900 metres) towards the Mediterranean, characterised by island-like massifs, broad western and northern coastal plains, and extensive sand dunes. An underdeveloped

and neglected peninsula, it enjoys more than 1.6 million acre-feet (2 billion cubic metres) of water annually. About one-fourth of this water flows on the surface as runoff, and a similar amount percolates to groundwater reservoirs, thereby offering opportunities for irrigation. The road network and transport infrastructure are hazardous and rudimentary. The ruins of a 19th-century Ottoman-era railway were never replaced. Nomads have turned Arish city into a no-go area, under the mercy of lawless bandits.

The military has been charged with running the Sinai's affairs, manning numerous checkpoints, restricting travel, and frequently scrutinising documents with unannounced closures.

Sinai's ownership has been a matter of dispute. Egypt was formally an Ottoman province until 1922 but also became a British protectorate. The Taba Crisis of 1906 began when the Ottoman military, under Sultan Abdul Hamid II, attempted to seize Taba at the apex of the peninsula. Britain responded by deploying Coast Guard steamers to reoccupy the area and dispatching warships to the eastern Mediterranean, seizing small islands then controlled by the Ottoman military. Turkish forces evacuated Taba in mid-1906, after which Britain and the Ottomans demarcated a formal border. Following the establishment of Israel, Taba was located on the Egyptian side of the armistice line. Egyptian military control over the Straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal stifled Israel's navigation, culminating in Nasser's actions triggering the 1967 war, which routed the Egyptian army.

Subsequently, Sinai was demilitarised as part of the peace agreement.

Over many decades of isolation from the mainland, the absence of proper governance created new dynamics of collaboration between the military and local bandits. Since the removal of Mubarak, a militia group led by Ibrahim el-Organi, along with other known tribesmen such as Lafy and Deleh, formed the Union of Sinai Tribal Militia to liaise with the Egyptian military. The "union militias" became the Egyptian military's primary proxies. These arrangements gave bandits a free hand in illegal trade, human trafficking, hashish smuggling, and money laundering, particularly in the Rafah region. Nomad militias evolved into institutionalised gangs, operating as extensions of the military in a peculiar criminal enterprise. Organi's tribal chiefs established alliances with the military, with co-opted outlaws being protected, paid, and issued special ID cards. Documentary evidence shows these militias collaborated with Hamas gangs in

weapons smuggling and money laundering without directly implicating Cairo's generals.

THE ARAB MEDIA IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE MASSACRE

In a fair environment, objectivity and professionalism are generally accepted principles of journalism, but their role is questionable when it comes to Middle Eastern authoritarian state-owned media. Following the October 7 massacre, Arab media, with few exceptions, filled their space celebrating Hamas's "victory," employing selective reporting and using advanced disinformation techniques on a scale not seen since 1967. They often referred to terrorists as freedom fighters and martyrs. The region's media commentators were in complete denial of the massacre, deliberately downplaying the catastrophic tragedy. Concerns were raised about the apparent bias displayed by European-based Arabic media outlets, which frequently invited pro-Hamas guests and spread antisemitism. One example was Mr Makram Khoury, a director of the Cambridge Palestine Research Centre, who jubilantly praised the Hamas massacre on social media, calling it a victory and describing the murder of 1,300 Israelis as proof of Palestinian fighting prowess. Arab media, especially Al Jazeera, played a significant role in inciting public hysteria. Public Opinion Polls (AWRAD) conducted a field survey from 31 October to 7 November to gauge Arab sentiments. The poll surveyed 668 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the fourth week of the Hamas-Israel war. The survey was conducted through tablet-assisted, face-to-face interviews across the West Bank and in shelters and households in three "southern" areas of Gaza (Deir al-Balah, Khan Younis, and Rafah). The sample included people from different socioeconomic groups, ensuring fair representation of men and women, and was proportionately conducted across the West Bank and Gaza. The majority of respondents expressed support for Hamas.

Arab media often referred to the kidnappings of Israeli civilians as the detention of "enemy detainees." BBC Arabic, a taxpayer-funded network established in 1940, has come under criticism for becoming the fiefdom of a clique of journalists, mostly Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians, whose editorial line frequently spreads anti-

Semitic and anti-Western sentiments. BBC Arabic Service bias became evident in both the choice of guests and the exclusion of those who do not align with certain agendas. Some journalists were *taken* off the air for their social media posts, which explicitly supported Hamas. The Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA), a US-based non-governmental organisation advocating for balanced and accurate coverage, initially reported that BBC journalists' social media activity displayed an anti-Israel bias. *Many broadcasters* praised Hamas as freedom fighters following the October 7 massacre and described the Hamas operation as a "morning of hope." In many cases, the media serve as the mouthpieces of their founders. Several studies on the main broadcasters in the region—such as Al Jazeera Arabic, Al Arabiya, and Iran's state media—highlight their strong biases in covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the war in Yemen, the Qatari crisis, Egypt's military power, and civil wars in Lebanon, Syria, Libya, and Sudan. Reporting from these outlets is strongly skewed, often serving the political agendas of the governments they represent, with significant use of disinformation.

DEEPPAKE SOCIAL MEDIA ROBOT ACCOUNTS ARE A PROPAGANDA TOOL

False news floods the media space with fabricated stories lacking verifiable sources, presented by imposters as legitimate. The Middle East environment is awash with fake news feeds, thanks to the latest AI manipulation by several state actors. Fake news serves two purposes: disinformation and misinformation. In recent years, it has taken the form of misleading statements, headline posts, image captions, misquotes, and the sharing of outright false information in graphs and charts. With the advent of AI, fake news has reached new levels of deception. Deepfake videos mimic the appearance and voice clones eerily close to the voices of targeted public figures and their families, both within and outside the region. During the Hamas-Israel war, several AI-generated news websites were rife with bogus stories and imagery, harassing people online for political purposes. A population subjected to decades of restricted access to knowledge would find it difficult to discern or separate fact from fiction, particularly as most people receive their news via social media.

Research by Reuters revealed that more people now primarily access news through social media (30%) than via an established news site or app (22%). In the Arab world, these figures are likely much higher due to widespread disinformation and the low reliability of state-controlled media. This is the first time social media has become a direct source of news. The underlying goal of this phenomenon is to foster hate and confusion in the public sphere.

AI technology is increasingly becoming a powerful tool for disinformation. Deepfakes utilise what is called a Generative Adversarial Network, or GAN. A GAN pits two artificial intelligence algorithms against each other: the generator and the discriminator. The generator is fed random noise and transforms it into an image. This synthetic image is then added to a stream of real images fed to the discriminator.

Middle Eastern regimes heavily rely on deepfake accounts to bolster their public image or, conversely, to discredit the reputation and credibility of individuals or organisations. These accounts often propagate propaganda, undermining established facts. For example, some deepfake videos depicted an implausible close interaction of a dozen Egyptian military jets to bolster public perceptions of military strength. Those behind such accounts work hard to evade identification, though modern techniques are increasingly capable of reducing their digital footprint. Disinformation—intentionally misleading information manipulated to create outright lies—spreads rapidly online. Regime-affiliated groups often whip up fabricated stories, particularly those with religious or nationalistic themes, sharing them without any fact-checking. This has the potential to inflict real harm on targeted groups.

For instance, fake accounts circulated false claims that Hamas had captured thousands of Israelis, as well as American, British, French, and German soldiers on the battlefield in Gaza. These stories aimed to exaggerate Hamas's power and falsely portray the involvement of major global powers in the Middle East conflict.

While social media platforms can provide real-time reports from events, such as street protests or actual fighting, many posts are fabricated for disinformation purposes. These manipulations are designed to influence the public's perception of the political situation, turning social media into a principal tool of modern warfare. A single hateful comment online can trigger violence and cause real harm.

Many regimes and their allies in the region employ networks of propagandist accounts that target gullible, angry, and politically persuadable groups. As Professor Lampe of

the University of Michigan observed, "Moments of crisis are very fertile ground for misinformation and disinformation." He added, "Sometimes people share information in a heightened emotional state without verifying it, and sometimes there are bad actors trying to advance their agenda by exploiting a crisis." Legitimate TV outlets in democracies vet their information and images before publishing. Although they may be slower to report breaking news, they adhere to ethical codes and strive for accuracy.

By contrast, social media platforms, while allowing for the rapid sharing of real-time events, are often used to spread disinformation that manipulates public perception. This commentary of hate online can trigger violence and cause significant harm.

Unfortunately, many regimes and their allies in the region continue to employ networks of propagandist accounts, targeting gullible and politically vulnerable groups. As Professor Lampe noted, "It's sadly common that moments of crisis are very good fertiliser for misinformation and disinformation."

THE PALESTINE

A populist political approach often relies on the standard narrative of accumulated misconceptions and half-truths repeated over decades in heated, angry, and ultimately meaningless debates. To evaluate the validity of such narratives, one must study the major historical events that have shaped the region's landscape over the last two millennia. The standard narrative is one of victimisation and violence prevailing. The massacre of October 7 has prompted a deeper search into history beyond the often-repeated legends found in media soundbites.

Until very recently, Gaza held a special status with little or no connection to either Jerusalem or Ramallah. The historical land of Palestine, a small stretch of medieval settlement, extends from northern Gaza to about 20 miles beyond.

Historically, the term Palestine derives from Philistia, the name given by the Greeks to the land inhabited by Mediterranean tribes who, in the 12th century BCE, occupied a small stretch of land on the southern coast between modern Tel Aviv and Gaza. The name was revived briefly by the Romans in the 2nd century CE as Syria *Palaestina*, designating the southern part of the Syrian province. The term made its way into

Arabic vocabulary and has been in use since the early medieval era. However, the name was largely lost during the early Roman period, and Islamic caliphates did not assign it any official status. It was revived during World War I by British historians seeking ancient names for Ottoman provinces in the Levant while creating new states. For example, Iraq replaced Mesopotamia, and the naming of Syria and Jordan followed a similar pattern.

The Palestine region was placed under British mandate and included an area roughly corresponding to present-day Israel. The West Bank included territory east of the Jordan River, forming the Kingdom of Jordan, which Britain placed under a separate form of administration from the western portion, allocated as a homeland for Jews. Similar arrangements were made by the French in forming a Maronite Christian-dominated Lebanon, sandwiched between a northern coastal Alawite state, a Druze principality, and Aleppo, which were later added by the French to create a viable Syrian federation. Basra province was initially allocated to Syria but was later added to the new state of Iraq for energy and strategic considerations. Alexandrone, an Arabic-speaking province, was incorporated into the newly formed Republic of Turkey to provide a Turkish Mediterranean port.

Major dislocations of populations, particularly among nomadic communities, were not uncommon, often under the influence of religious pressures. The largest population migration occurred during the Mongol invasions of Persia and the Levant. For several centuries, Baghdad had a larger Jewish population than Jerusalem, up until the mid-19th century.

The renaming of states was not unusual during the 19th and 20th centuries. For instance, Sudan and the *Arabian Peninsula* underwent similar transformations. The Hijaz kingdom was renamed the *Kingdom* of Saudi Arabia, honouring the family name of its founder following the removal of King Hussein (the great-grandfather of the current King of Jordan). King Hussein had surprised the world by proclaiming himself the Caliph of the Muslim world after the demise of the Ottoman Caliphate.

Conspiracy theorists found fertile ground in the choices made by the victorious powers of World War I, imagining sinister motives behind the renaming of post-Ottoman provinces. Many have speculated about the selection of Roman-inspired names, noting the lack of adoption of any purely Arab name for the new states.

TRUMP AND NETANYAHU - RESHAPING THE MIDDLE EAST

Two events have significantly altered the course of the Middle East: the use of domestic electronic devices as tools of war, and the influence of President Donald Trump.

Arab leaders in the oil states favoured Donald Trump's re-election, viewing it as good news for the Arab states and Israel. The Republican administration recognised the challenges crucial for lasting peace, with the Middle East remaining central to this equation. Russia, China, and Iran are entwined with the West in a global balance of power. The October 7 attack by Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon was part of a broader proxy agenda to derail the world order. Iran and Russia principally backed the two militias, with their leaders hosted by Qatar and supported by Turkey—both key US regional allies. Qatar eventually took the pragmatic step of asking the Palestinian leadership to leave the state.

Key Arab leaders had prior experience working with Trump and his team, where strong personal ties—a cornerstone of Middle Eastern politics—were formed. Notable connections include Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the United Arab Emirates, and possibly Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and de facto ruler. Throughout his campaign, Trump referred to bin Salman as a friend and, on one occasion, described Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as “my favourite dictator.”

It is anticipated that a renewed Trump administration would continue this approach, refraining from directly criticising regimes on issues like political freedom and human rights. Trump's stance on Iran was part of a broader international strategy. Iran has increasingly lost the confidence of its proxies, which have become liabilities and drains on its economic and political spheres—evidenced by the failure of Hamas's October 7 attack.

Trump's close ties with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also influenced the outcome of the ongoing conflict. Republican Representative Elise Stefanik, a prominent voice against anti-Semitism, has been a staunch supporter of Israel. Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee served as the US Ambassador to Israel,

with Trump remarking, “He loves Israel, and the people of Israel love him.” Steve Witkoff acted as a special envoy to the Middle East. Trump’s appointments, including Fox News Channel host Pete Hegseth as Secretary of Defense, marked a new era in Western politics.

Israeli-Saudi normalisation is viewed as an essential step in broadening the Abraham Accords, creating a new security and economic axis more powerful than any regional organisation in the past eight decades. Saudi Arabia, more confident with a weakened Iran and its proxies, sees this change as a game-changer. Such developments are likely to unsettle entrenched regimes like Iran and Egypt, while rendering the Arab League increasingly superfluous in this new alignment.

Arab regimes would no longer need to maintain large military and security apparatuses under this emerging framework.

HEZBOLLAH

The Iran-supported Shia militia in Lebanon, considered the most powerful non-state entity in the world, suffered significant damage during Israel’s military campaign against Hezbollah in October 2024.

Hezbollah, designated a terrorist entity by the US and many European countries, faced a critical blow in late 2024 when Israel killed its longtime leader Hassan Nasrallah and launched a major ground offensive in southern Lebanon to dismantle its military and financial infrastructure.

Hezbollah—Party of God—is a Lebanese Shia Islamist political party that operates its own army, which is stronger than the Lebanese Army and equivalent to a medium-sized state military. As a hybrid force, it has headquarters, uniforms, military ranks, and conventional military capabilities, making it the most powerful non-state actor globally.

The organisation is more highly regarded than Hamas, often criticised as corrupt and operating remotely from Qatar, 1,000 miles away. Hezbollah’s former leader Hassan Nasrallah claimed in 2021 that its military strength included 100,000 trained full-time fighters, including reservists. The group is financed partly by Iran and involved in the

opium trade, as well as money laundering through a complex network of rogue banks. Hezbollah's military budget exceeds \$1 billion.

Its strategy against Israel revolves around firing rockets and drones as offensive weapons, combined with light infantry and anti-armour units to defend launch positions. Hezbollah claims an arsenal of 40,000 to 120,000 rockets—more than most sovereign nations.

In November 2024, Hezbollah's media chief, Mohammad Afif, was assassinated. He had previously declared, "Yahya Sinwar lived as a hero and has now become a legend," accusing the United States of being a direct partner in the war against Lebanon and its people. Afif also described America as "the mother of all crime."

Lebanon's current Prime Minister, Najib Mikati, has served in a caretaker capacity since September 2021. A Sunni Muslim, his position adheres to Lebanon's 1943 political arrangement established under French mandatory rule following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. This power-sharing agreement assigns the role of Prime Minister to a Sunni Muslim, President to a Maronite Christian, and Speaker of Parliament to a Shia Muslim.

Tensions and violence have become endemic among these groups, escalating into civil war as demographic shifts upset the balance. The Sunni population has grown in number and influence, particularly with the influx of Palestinians and Syrians into Lebanon—historically part of Greater Syria.

Israel occupied southern Lebanon in 1978 and again in 1982 to stop Palestinian militias from launching incursions into Israel.

THE HOLY CITY OF JERUSALEM

The centrality of Jerusalem in Christianity, self-evident in the adoption of the Old Testament by Christians, was reinforced by the New Testament account of Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection there. Throughout its history, the Holy City of Jerusalem has borne its fair share of scars from a traumatic past: it has been destroyed at least twice, besieged 23 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times. The early City

of David shows evidence of settlement in the 4th millennium BCE, reflecting the tradition of encampments by nomadic shepherds.

During the Canaanite period (14th century BCE), Jerusalem was named *Urusalim* on ancient Egyptian tablets, meaning "City of Shalem," after a Canaanite deity. During the Israelite period, construction of the First Temple in Jerusalem began in the 10th century BCE (the Iron Age), and by the 9th century BCE, the city had become the Jewish religious and administrative centre of the Kingdom of Judah. According to the Hebrew Bible, King David conquered the city from the Jebusites and established it as the capital of the United Kingdom of Israel, and his son, King Solomon, commissioned the building of the Temple.

During Persian rule, Jews faced persecution, exile, and deportation in large numbers to the north at the beginning of the first millennium. Many settled in Baghdad and other cities, retaining their traditions. During the early Islamic caliphates, large numbers of Jews converted to Islam and served in the caliph's court and administration; some rose to positions of chief scribes, wielding significant influence on religious thought, while others fell in or out of favour depending on the Sultan's whims. Many medieval mosques featured the Star of David inscribed on their walls, including the Dome of the Rock and the Grand Mosque of Al-Azhar. Moroccan coins were adorned with the Star of Zion for many centuries.

During the early Ottoman era, the city walls were rebuilt for the last time around Jerusalem in 1538 by Suleiman the Magnificent. These walls still define the Old City, which has grown rapidly since the mid-19th century and is divided into four quarters: Armenian, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim. The Old City was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981 and is listed as a World Heritage Site in Danger.

In 2022, Jerusalem had a population of about 971,800 inhabitants, of which almost 60% were Jews and nearly 40% were Arabs. In 2020, the population stood at 951,100, comprising 570,100 Jews (59.9%), 353,800 Muslims (37.2%), 16,300 Christians (1.7%), and 10,800 unclassified residents (1.1%).

Sunni Islam regards Jerusalem as the third-holiest city, after Mecca and Medina. The city was the first Qibla (direction of prayer) designated by Allah for Muslims, as per Islamic tradition. It is also believed that Muhammad made his Night Journey to Heaven (*Isra and Mi'raj*) from Jerusalem in 621, ascending to heaven to speak with God and the other Abrahamic prophets. However, a new study by Canadian

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archaeologist Dan Gibson claims that the earliest Qibla was directed southward towards Petra, in modern-day Jordan, for approximately two centuries before its redirection to Mecca. His findings, which contradict standard Islamic traditions, have sparked angry debates among religious communities.

The place of Jerusalem for Jews in the Quran is addressed in a specific verse. For clarification and to avoid ambiguity in translation, the exact verse has been shared in Arabic for transparency.

The Old City, less than one square mile in area, holds immense religious significance and has been the focus of rivalries throughout history. At its heart lies the Temple Mount Plateau, home to the Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock. The Al-Aqsa Mosque, built over the south part of the Temple Mount on the site of a Byzantine church, shares the plateau. The octagonal Dome of the Rock is an unusual structure, as it mimics the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and lacks prayer direction markers.

New discoveries using modern research tools, such as carbon dating and the study of historical milestones from the mid-medieval period and the Crusades up to the early Ottoman era, are prompting revisions and reconstructions of historical narratives. These developments are certain to fuel fierce debate in the future.

ISRAEL NEW POLITICAL VISION

The current political situation owes its existence mainly to Britain, France, and the United States of America, and to a lesser extent imperial Russia, following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Then-Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden created the Arab League as a regional organisation allied to Britain, intended to represent the Levant and Arabia.

The Arab communities were soon ruled by rival dictators who lacked the ability to manage the affairs of state. They relied on tools of propaganda to sustain a war-psychosis and promote hatred of Western values. Their activities and efforts espoused antisemitism, built a violent narrative advocating the annihilation of Israel, and neglected the core duties of building stable institutions, improving living standards, and fostering good governance. After 80 years, the Arab League has reached a point where a new regional order that includes all willing states is needed.

Israel, the only democracy and a key regional power, enjoys the highest Human Development Index in the region. It is one of the richest countries in the Middle East and Asia, has been a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) since 2010, and ranks 16th globally by nominal GDP per capita. The Jewish state, the most advanced and free nation in the Middle East and North Africa, has maintained a parliamentary system elected by proportional representation since its independence. The Prime Minister serves as the head of government and is elected by the Knesset, Israel's unicameral legislature. Arab Israelis are fairly represented in the Knesset and government.

By the 17th century, Jerusalem and other towns had shrunk into small settlements. The Mongol invasion during the mid-12th century marked a significant turning point in the disintegration of the last Islamic caliphate.

European rivalries manifested in the Levant, as seen during Kaiser Wilhelm II's visit in 1898. The Kaiser asked the Sultan in Istanbul to provide a "benevolent sanction to the Zionists in the Holy Land." Like Napoleon a century earlier, the Kaiser had broader imperial ambitions, including influencing Indian Muslims to undermine British control. During his visit, the Kaiser bolstered the Zionist movement by meeting Dr Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism, twice in Jerusalem and once in Istanbul. The German royals' support strengthened Zionism's legitimacy in Jewish and global opinion. The Kaiser even asked Herzl, "What do you wish me to ask of the Sultan?"

The Kaiser's journey began in Istanbul on 16 October 1898. After meeting the Sultan, he travelled by yacht to Haifa, then visited Jerusalem and Bethlehem, making an unscheduled visit to the Mausoleum of Saladin in Damascus. In his speech in Damascus, the Kaiser declared:

"In the face of all the courtesies extended to us here, I feel that I must thank you, in my name as well as that of the Empress, for them, for the hearty reception given us in all the towns and cities we have touched, and particularly for the splendid welcome extended to us by this city of Damascus. Deeply moved by this imposing spectacle, and likewise by the consciousness of standing on the spot where held sway one of the most chivalrous rulers of all times, the great Sultan Saladin, a knight sans peur et sans reproche, who often taught his adversaries the right conception of knighthood, I seize with joy the opportunity to render thanks, above all to the Sultan Abdul Hamid for his hospitality. May the

Sultan rest assured, and also the three hundred million Mohammedans scattered over the globe and revering in him their caliph, that the German Emperor will be and remain at all times their friend."

— *Kaiser Wilhelm II*

This political support encouraged the serious return of Jews to their historical homeland and the rise of Zionism, advocating the establishment of a Jewish homeland. Hardworking and committed Jewish settlers purchased millions of acres, established schools and universities, and founded Tel Aviv in 1909. The Zionist Anglo-Palestine Bank, established in 1902, operated in Haifa, Jerusalem, and Damascus, issuing its own currency.

Significant documents such as the Faisal-Weizmann Agreement, the Balfour Declaration, and League of Nations decrees played critical roles in shaping the region's future. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire accelerated Jewish migration to the area, increasing tensions between Arab and Jewish communities. The UN-approved 1947 partition plan triggered a civil war. The British Mandate ended on 14 May 1948, and Israel declared independence on the same day.

On 15 May, five neighbouring Arab states—Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt—invaded the former Mandatory Palestine during the First Arab-Israeli War. Apart from Egypt, the other Arab states were newly independent, weak, and deeply factionalised. Despite their vocal rhetoric, their military forces were disorganised, poorly disciplined, and lacked coordination. Each state pursued its own agenda. During the war, approximately 300,000 Arab residents were displaced, largely following advice from tribal leaders and the directives of Iraqi and Syrian authorities.

Partitioning territories and changing boundaries, especially after major wars, was common practice. These boundaries were determined by political, geographical, cultural, and religious factors. For instance, France shares land borders with seven countries, and major cities like Constantinople and Alexandria changed hands multiple times during medieval periods.

Following the 1949 Arab-Israeli armistice, Egypt took over the Gaza Strip, and Jordan annexed the West Bank, forming an enlarged kingdom with a predominantly Palestinian population. During the mid-1950s, successive regimes continued skirmishes with Israel, blocking Israeli ports in the Red Sea. Arab League offices around the world worked to demonise and boycott Israel.

The 1967 Six-Day War marked another turning point, with Israel decisively defeating Arab forces in just six days and occupying East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights. Decades later, Israel annexed East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, a move welcomed by many inhabitants and solidifying Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Following the Yom Kippur War on 6 October 1973, Israel signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and normalised relations with several Arab countries, including North African states, Sudan, and oil-rich Gulf nations. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have since emerged as the most influential Arab states politically and economically, developing a new strategic alliance with Israel.

THE BLINKEN-CAMERON MOMENT

The American Secretary of State, Tony Blinken, and his counterpart, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord David Cameron, shortly after the start of the war to eradicate terror infrastructure, focused their political efforts through several shuttle diplomacy trips to the region to establish a foundation for a new, stable, and lasting regional political order. While their priority is to secure the release of Israeli hostages and protect Palestinian civilians, they are also working to boost the flow of aid to Gaza. Their diplomatic efforts have led to the release of young civilians, and foreign citizens have been allowed to leave Gaza.

For the first time, Iran launched salvos of rockets and drones from its territory thousands of miles away at the Israeli mainland, triggering a worldwide crisis. Though unsuccessful, the attack underscored the importance of a comprehensive New Regional Order.

Politically, Gaza represents the tip of the iceberg of dysfunctional Arab politics—a result of 75 years of destructive proxy wars. Across the volatile Arab landscape, millions of Syrians, Iraqis, Lebanese, Palestinians, Sudanese, and North Africans are roaming Europe and America as illegal migrants and refugees. This situation threatens to grow, endangering national cohesiveness, as evidenced in major cities and universities in the Western world.

Both Blinken and Cameron have firsthand experience with Arab World politics, particularly in handling the exit strategies of Arab dictators during the Arab Spring of 2011, although the situations in Libya and Yemen became violent and bloody. Lord Cameron was the first Western leader to support the Arab Spring uprising in 2011, walking in Tahrir Square—the epicentre of the uprising that removed Mubarak from power. Blinken has supervised the process for humanitarian pauses in Gaza while ensuring military and logistical support for Israel.

“It is our view now that a ceasefire would simply leave Hamas in place, able to regroup and repeat what it did,” Blinken stated. Early in the conflict, the United States deployed aircraft carrier groups to the Mediterranean “to deter hostile actions against Israel or any efforts toward widening the war.” Cameron echoed similar sentiments, stating, “We must see the instruments of terrorism in Gaza dismantled.”

To some extent, Blinken and Cameron are following the political philosophy of Henry Kissinger from fifty years earlier.

The long-term prospects of the region present Blinken and Cameron with a fresh set of opportunities and challenges. A Western strategy to maintain and strengthen the geopolitical alliances between India, the UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Israel provides a sound foundation for stability. Kuwait and Oman are slowly and pragmatically aligning with this new geopolitical arrangement.

By bypassing the slow and often hindering machinery of the Arab League, this new development demonstrates the effectiveness of Western powers’ involvement in stabilising the region. The traditional political roles of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq have become marginal. The Blinken-Cameron diplomatic initiative represents an opportunity to create a new, stable, and responsible regional governance framework to end decades of violence, coups, counter-coups, and the displacement of millions.

The outdated Arab League has become a hub of conspiracy and irrelevance. The time has come to establish new organisations in North Africa and east of the Suez Canal, including Israel, Turkey, and Iran, based on the principles of good governance and public good. Ukraine and the Middle East remain pivotal, and changes in these regions could mark the most significant geopolitical shifts of this century.

A two-state solution remains a remote proposition for many reasons. Hamas has always adhered to a fanatical militant ideology inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood. It has set itself Islamist goals: to annihilate the State of Israel, liberate sacred Muslim

lands, and prevent any federation with the West Bank inhabitants to form a neighbouring state for Israel.

The sovereign state idea was stillborn, as evidenced by attempts at unification in 2005 that ended in violent dislocation. A rerun of the Oslo Accords is an outdated concept, especially following the October 7 massacre. A perpetual state of animosity between violent Hamas and the corrupt Palestinian Authority undermines broader regional peace aspirations. Rearranging the regional landscape to allow population movement may alleviate some tensions, particularly by opening up the vast lands of Jordan and other sparsely inhabited territories in the immediate neighbourhood.

THE ARAB LEAGUE A POLITICAL WRECK

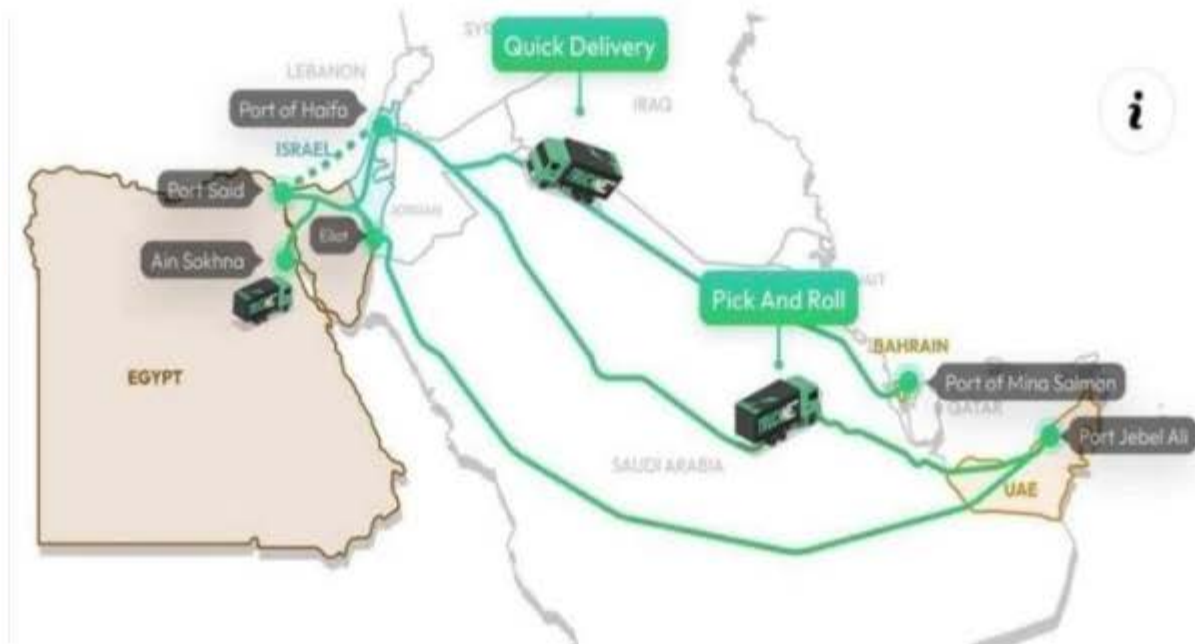
A gathering of Arab regimes has often centred on the primary agenda of ensuring the survival of authority rather than addressing the respective public's needs. For eight decades, it has rumbled on without tangible progress, becoming a playground for intrigue, regional rivalries, coups, and civil unrest—unlike other world organisations.

It has been run by bullies and violent rulers such as Nasser, Saddam Hussein, Gaddafi, Arafat, and Assad. Successive dictators fostered the false belief that Palestine was the core issue of the Arab cause, thereby neglecting much larger tragedies in Yemen, Sudan, Iraq, and Syria, where hundreds of thousands have been killed and millions displaced.

The League, divorced from reality, has failed to address fundamental issues of good governance. Its offices perpetuated myths of Jewish conspiracy against Arab nations. Arab states have lost over a trillion dollars in pursuing a futile conflict. The recent regional realignment between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Israel, bypassing the Arab League, highlights the growing importance of dissolving the League.

The political ideology of the League was established during the mid-1940s by its first Secretary General, Abdul Rahman Azzam Pasha. Azzam was instrumental in pressuring the Egyptian government to join the 1948 war against Israel. Born in 1893, Azzam was a long-time Arab nationalist and political agitator known for his antisemitic rants. He was banned from entering Britain due to his pro-Nazi activities and radical Islamic rhetoric. Azzam notoriously threatened the Jewish people,

claiming that a Jewish state would mean “a war of extermination and momentous massacre of the Jews, which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacre and the Crusades.”



The new Israeli-Arab ‘Silk’ Road, connecting the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, would have a significant impact on the Suez Canal’s commercial viability.

Over the decades, recognising the League’s destructive influence, some states began disengaging from its politics. A new political arena emerged through trade and strategic cooperation between Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.

This new alliance also connects India with Europe, heralding a fundamental shift in the Middle East landscape and rendering the Arab League’s existence increasingly irrelevant.

REFORM OF EDUCATION A PREREQUISITE FOR STABILITY

The spread of anti-Western and antisemitic sentiment in Arab streets, as well as among Arabs in the diaspora, raises concerns about embedded prejudice. Hate and

political bias, deeply ingrained in schoolbooks, media, literature, and mosques, have fostered a state of cultural antipathy.

The lack of good governance is directly linked to the long-term failure of education systems in the Middle East, which has hindered harmony and prosperity in the region.

Addressing this generational phenomenon of disinformation requires removing direct and indirect hatred at all levels, particularly in schoolbooks and religious institutions.

Reforming education to encourage critical debate and creativity will pave the way for a prosperous and inclusive future in the Middle East. Lessons can be learned from countries like India, Bangladesh, and several African and Eastern European nations whose development successes offer valuable models for emulation.

ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism in the Arab world is an acquired and alien phenomenon, introduced by a new group of Levantine political agitators, primarily educated in Nazi Germany.

This imported ideology brought botched misadventures in conspiracy theories, political agitation, and antisemitism, which had a devastating effect on communities in cities like Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo.

Some of these politically hardened men went on to found the ultranationalist Ba'ath Party in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. Hatred of Jews reached its zenith between 1937 and 1945, fuelled by intensive Nazi propaganda disseminated through Arabic books and periodicals.

This propaganda was based on disinformation about a supposed global Jewish conspiracy. The Egyptian media at the time, owned and edited by individuals from the Levant, spread this rhetoric, which later influenced politics in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon.

Haj Amin al-Husseini, the self-styled Mufti of Jerusalem, played a disruptive role in anti-Jewish agitation. He was the first to contextualise European antisemitism within an Islamic religious framework.

Other factors contributed to the rise of antisemitism, including the emergence of Islamic nationalism and the influence of newly introduced Arabic-language radio stations. The German shortwave transmitter in Zeesen broadcast between 1939 and 1945, targeting Indian and Arab Muslims. The German National Socialist government funded and ideologically supported future Arab dictators such as Nasser, Qasim, Numairi, and Gaddafi, exploiting religious and nationalistic undertones to spread their agenda.

20. وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ يَا قَوْمِ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ جَعَلَ فِيكُمْ أَنْبِيَاءَ وَجَعَلَكُمْ مُلُوكًا وَآتَاكُمْ مَا لَمْ يُوْتِ أَحَدًا مِّنَ الْعَالَمِينَ

21. يَا قَوْمِ ادْخُلُوا الْأَرْضَ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ الَّتِي كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَلَا تَرْتَدُّوا عَلَىٰ أَدْبَارِكُمْ فَتَنْقَلِبُوا خَاسِرِينَ

22. قَالُوا يَا مُوسَىٰ إِنَّ فِيهَا قَوْمًا جَبَّارِينَ وَإِنَّا لَنَدْخُلُهَا حَتَّىٰ يَخْرُجُوا مِنهَا فَإِن يَخْرُجُوا مِنهَا فَإِنَّا دَاخِلُونَ

23. قَالَ رَجُلَانِ مِنَ الَّذِينَ يَخَافُونَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمَا ادْخُلُوا عَلَيْهِمُ الْبَابَ فَإِذَا دَخَلْتُمُوهُ فَإِنَّكُمْ غَالِبُونَ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَتَوَكَّلُوا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

24. قَالُوا يَا مُوسَىٰ إِنَّا لَنَدْخُلُهَا أَبَدًا مَا دَامُوا فِيهَا فَاذْهَبْ أَنْتَ وَرَبُّكَ فَقَاتِلَا إِنَّا هَاهُنَا قَاعِدُونَ

25. قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي لَا أَمْلِكُ إِلَّا نَفْسِي وَأَخِي فَافْرِقْ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَ الْقَوْمِ الْفَاسِقِينَ

26. قَالَ فَإِنَّهَا مُحَرَّمَةٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً يَتِيهُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَلَا تَأْسَ عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْفَاسِقِينَ

27. وَاتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ ابْنَيْ آدَمَ بِالْحَقِّ إِذْ قَرَّبَا قُرْبَانًا فَتَقَبَّلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمَا وَلَمْ يُتَقَبَّلْ مِنَ الْآخَرِ قَالَ لَأَقْتُلَنَّكَ قَالَ إِنَّمَا يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ

Quranic verse where Allah enforced destined the holy land for the tribe of the Israel

Dismantling Hamas and Hezbollah's terror and financial infrastructure presents a rare opportunity for regional peace. The inability of Arab governments to adopt conflict-resolution schemes is a significant reason for UN involvement in establishing governance norms. An example worth emulating is the African Union's role as an effective partner in handling the Sudan civil war, ultimately establishing an independent South Sudan and a civilian government.

Transparent parliamentary elections in South Sudan testify to the establishment of the rule of law, in stark contrast to the unfortunate situation in North Sudan. The Arab League's dissolution marked an important step in freeing Arab nations from being locked inside a cage of failure. The age of a solitary and violent man at the helm, micromanaging all strands of power, is over.

Furthermore, establishing a Nuremberg-style trial is a measure to guide Arab states on a pathway to rehabilitation by bringing to justice those involved in violent regimes, abetting terror, or committing acts of violence. The International Court stands for accountability, bringing justice to society under international law, and ending impunity.

A new generation of judges requires re-education and training in the principles of fairness, equality, and respect for human rights. These psychopathic tyrants have caused devastation and misery in intractable conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli, Iraq-Iran, Egyptian-Saudi, and Yemen wars.

The Nuremberg Academy is a suitable mentor; it upholds the Nuremberg Principles and the rule of law with a vision of sustainable peace through justice. It furthers knowledge and builds the capacities of those involved in judicial processes related to core international crimes.

Experience proves that simply injecting billions of dollars of aid without means-testing or scrutiny fosters a culture of dependency and does not resolve endemic corruption and apathy. Western nations, given their historical connections, are best positioned to mentor a wide-ranging debate among Arab nations in a free and fair environment of trust.

WHAT'S NEXT

The English proverb says that looking at the past is the best way to predict the future. Arab violent conflicts erupt abruptly and end in enormous losses of life and the destruction of infrastructure. Unashamedly, dictators blame the West, avoiding their responsibility. The denial culture prevalent in the Arab mindset is a form of acquired cognitive dissonance at all levels of governance. The Israel-Hamas war is as devastating as previous Middle East wars in terms of lives lost and infrastructure destroyed.

Looking objectively into the future does not require gazing at a crystal ball. The past, whether real or fabricated, is accessible, yet most Arab states impose strict censorship, disallowing the publication of articles or books critical of ruling groups. This stifling of debate has diminished the voice of reason. Faced with such constraints, reaching an optimistic outcome is challenging. Continuing on the current path of propaganda and institutional failure is no longer viable for Arab states.

The Arab League failed to establish a genuine structure for interstate integration, instead entangling itself in perpetual conflict and civil wars. Arabic, as a regional language, is a hybrid and varies significantly across countries, causing economic and cultural cycles to evolve in isolation. There are no meaningful cultural exchanges or transport systems connecting these states. The only major gathering is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, conducted under the gaze of a massive and fierce security operation.

Reforming education is a practical starting point for nurturing a new generation of well-informed citizens. Addressing endemic poverty, improving women's status, and ending authoritarian regimes definitively are critical steps.

The oil-rich GCC states, located on the eastern edge of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, are building bridges with Asia and Europe, boasting an abundance of skilled labour and business opportunities. Europeans, Indians, and Filipinos are considered safer and more sustainable labour forces without the burden of political insurgency or religious polarisation. Mauritania, another anomaly at the remote edge of the Atlantic, has minimal ethnic or cultural links with the broader Arab region. These mega hubs have virtually bypassed the Arab geopolitical landscape.