

A Trump influence?

Donald Trump communicated clearly to Netanyahu that he wanted the fighting to end before he took office. He doesn't want to inherit Joe Biden's mess, and he wants to enhance the illusion that he brings peace while the Democrats bring war.

Netanyahu won't end the genocide in Gaza. It is clear that Israel is digging in for a long operation there. The fighting with Hezbollah can be stopped, at least for a while, and that will have some benefits for Israel as well.

But as much as Trump might talk about being against a war in the Middle East, his picks for senior staff reflect a very different agenda. His Ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, is a Christian Zionist who yearns to see the Third Temple built on the ruins of Al-Aqsa Mosque and believes there is

"no such thing as a Palestinian".

His Secretary of Defense nominee, Pete Hegseth, sports a Jerusalem Cross tattoo, a symbol of the Crusaders and Christian nationalism, and was enough of a concern that, when he was in the National Guard in 2021, he was barred from providing security at Joe Biden's inauguration.

Major Iran hawks such as Mike Waltz and Marco Rubio, as well as Islamophobic ideologues like Seb Gorka, are also key figures on Trump's team.

With this lineup, there is every reason for Netanyahu to believe that he will be able to manipulate circumstances toward the large-scale attack on Iran that he has wanted for decades.

Trump is also going to be sympathetic to the Persian Gulf Arab monarchies, and they are working very hard to avoid

that outcome. The Saudis, Emiratis, and Qataris will be able to incentivize Trump with business interests and massive arms purchases, whereas Netanyahu has, at times, fallen out of favor with Trump. These factors give some reason for hope.

But Netanyahu knows Washington better than the Arab leaders and will have far more sway over members of Trump's team. It will remain to be seen which of those influences prove the more powerful.

But at least for the first few months of Trump's term, it seems likely that the cease-fire with Lebanon should hold. Given the amount of blood spilled in Lebanon since September, any such respite has to be welcomed.

The full article first appeared on Mondoweiss.



A man gestures as he holds a Hezbollah flag in Tyre, Lebanon, after a cease-fire between Israel and Lebanon took effect on November 27, 2024.

● AZIZ TAHER/REUTERS



Smoke billows above Beirut's southern suburbs following Israeli airstrikes on November 26, 2024, a day before the cease-fire between Israel and Lebanon took effect.

● FADEL ITANI/AFP

Cease-fire in Lebanon will not last long



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OPINION

And so it has come to pass. Late on Tuesday night, Israel agreed to a cease-fire in Lebanon, which came into effect at 4 am (02:00 GMT) on Wednesday. The deal, in theory, puts an end to a nearly 14-month war that has killed thousands of Lebanese and dozens of Israelis. Over a period of 60 days, Israel will withdraw its forces from Lebanon, and Hezbollah will pull back from the border area. The Israeli genocide in the Gaza Strip will meanwhile carry on undeterred.

Those familiar with Israel's modus operandi could sense the imminence of a cease-fire in Lebanon, given the recent surge in manic bombardment by the Israeli military, which has a habit of stepping up its acts of lethal barbarism whenever there is a looming danger of temporary peace.

True to form, Israel spent much of the day prior to the cease-fire announcement bombing the living daylight out of various parts of Lebanon, including the capital, Beirut, where its sadistic pounding of residential areas — pardon, "Hezbollah infrastructure" — sent much of the population fleeing in terrorised panic. After all, there is nothing like an impending cease-fire to empty your arsenal and make room for new goodies. All the better if you go ahead and pulverise as much territory as possible before the referee says — time's up.

During Israel's last major war on Lebanon in 2006, which killed approximately 1,200 people over a span of 34 days, the Israeli military geared up for the inevitable cease-fire by launching millions of cluster bombs at the southern part of the country. As is par for the course with such weaponry, a large percentage of bombs failed to explode on impact and instead functioned as de facto landmines for years to come.

Indeed, one could argue that this quite literally illustrated Israel's intention not to attain a lasting peace but rather to prepare the ground for future conflict. Now, almost two decades later, the game is hardly over — as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu all but confirmed on Tuesday with his pledge to "strike decisively" in the event that Hezbollah violates the cease-fire: "In full coordination with the United States, we retain complete military freedom of action."

Given Israel's track record of violating regional cease-fires and then blaming the violation on the opposing party to justify bouts of mass bloodshed, we can safely assume that Israel will decide to "strike decisively" whenever it decides it is up for another round in Lebanon.

The gist of the current cease-

fire agreement is basically the same as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, which served as the basis for the cease-fire in 2006. Israel must withdraw from Lebanon, the Lebanese army must deploy to the south of the country as the only armed outfit aside from UNIFIL — the UN's supposedly "interim" force that has been in place since 1978 — and both Israel and Hezbollah must abstain from cross-border violations. But since we have already had 18-plus years to ponder the effectiveness of Resolution 1701, it is a bit difficult to share US President Joe Biden's optimism regarding the newly repackaged cease-fire: "This is designed to be a permanent cessation of hostilities."

For starters, the Lebanese army is a force that is entirely incapable of defending the country against Israel's predatory designs — and the US will continue to ensure that it remains so. As for respecting the mutual border, consider that, even prior to the onset of outright hostilities in 2023, the Israeli military continuously violated Lebanese airspace, including by breaking the sound barrier over Beirut and other cities — a nerve-annihilating little trick that not only constitutes a blatant viola-

tion of Resolution 1701 but also amounts to a form of terrorism in itself.

At the end of the day, Israel accuses Hezbollah of "terrorism" in order to distract from the fact that its military has been terrorising Lebanon for decades. And what do you know: the whole arrangement has been directly enabled by the very country that is now presiding over the "permanent cessation of hostilities," with Biden additionally promising: "What is left of Hezbollah and other terrorist organisations will not be allowed, I emphasise, will not be allowed, to threaten the security of Israel again."

Israel, of course, will be allowed to proceed in its quest to eradicate the population of the Gaza Strip, while also "threatening the security" of everyone else in the region — and all with the assistance of billions upon billions of dollars in aid and weaponry from the US. Netanyahu himself has straight-up acknowledged that a cease-fire in Lebanon will permit the Israeli military to better focus its energy on Hamas and Iran.

An Al Jazeera dispatch outlining the details of the cease-fire specifies that "an international task force headed by the United States that includes French peacekeepers would also be

deployed to oversee implementation of the truce". This may sound vaguely familiar.

After the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and siege of Beirut that killed tens of thousands of Lebanese and Palestinians in the country, a US-brokered agreement oversaw the evacuation from Beirut of officials and fighters belonging to the Palestine

Liberation Organization (PLO). Under the terms of the deal, a multinational force involving — who else — the Americans and the French was meant to guarantee the safety of Palestinian refugees remaining in the city. And yet no sooner had the PLO leadership departed than it was time for the notorious Israeli-orchestrated Sabra and

Shatila massacre of up to 3,500 Palestinian refugees and Lebanese civilians.

And as we watch to see how the latest cease-fire plays out, just remember that "permanent cessation of hostilities" is never on the US-Israeli agenda.

The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.



A man waves a Lebanese flag as he stands amidst the rubble of a building destroyed in Israeli strikes, after a cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah took effect, in Tyre, Lebanon, on November 27, 2024.

● ADNAN ABIDI/REUTERS