



Delegates leave the UN General Assembly Hall in New York, the US, on September 26, 2025, as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu steps up to the podium to speak at the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly. ● STEFAN JEREMIAH/AP

weakens global support for the Palestinian cause. To challenge Israel, Palestinian

institutions must shift their approach — from desperate pleas to a clearer, legal, and humani-

tarian language. Instead of settling for conditions that push aside Palestinian rights, they

should decisively invoke the principles of international law, the right to self-determination,

and full territorial integrity. In today's climate, Palestinians cannot afford to pursue a non-sovereign, dignity-stripped state. Rather, their demands must be legally and firmly set forth, anchored in universal human rights — including the right to a fully independent and sovereign state.

Role of The Hague and International Court of Justice

The Hague Group and the International Court of Justice are currently pursuing cases related to Israel's crimes, which could serve as powerful tools for holding the regime to account. While Palestinian institutions have been waiting on some sort of robust global reaction, they must also realize that foot-dragging could end up costing Palestinians even more. If Arab countries and Palestinians can effectively make use of these legal mechanisms, they may help break the vicious cycle of injustice and push the world toward a fundamental shift in its policies on Israel.

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Silence and inaction are in no way to the advantage of Palestinians. Muslim countries must step in with unity and coordination to confront Israel. Halting normalization with Israel remains one of the most effective tools in this regard. Should Arab states call off these normalization deals, they could bring significant economic and diplomatic pressure to bear on Israel. Normalization not only plays into the hands of the Zionist project indirectly but also weakens global support for the Palestinian cause.

Israel main source of instability in Middle East

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OPINION

Is conflict in the Middle East at an inflection point? It might seem so, given how international outrage over Israel's lethal conduct in the Gaza Strip has become increasingly intense and widespread in recent weeks. Several major Western countries that previously had declined to join most other members of the United Nations in formally recognizing a Palestinian state used the opening of the current session of the General Assembly as the occasion to take that step. Popular demonstrations in the West in support of the Palestinians have been as large and conspicuous as ever, and recent polls show a sharp decline in the American public's support for Israel. Such responses are the least that can be expected in the face of new lows in barbarous Israeli actions against the residents of the Gaza Strip. An Israeli military assault on Gaza City has added to the rubble to which most of the city had already been reduced. The assault has given remaining inhabitants the choice of suffering and perhaps dying in place or fleeing once again to someplace else in the Strip with still no assurance of safety. The armed attacks and imposed starvation have seen the death toll of Gazans increase to what is now probably several times the officially reported figure of about 65,000. The international responses, including diplomatic recognition of Palestine by Western governments, fall short of eliciting a constructive Israeli response. The recognition of a Palestinian state has been the target of criticism from some Palestinians who rightly point out that it does nothing to alleviate the immediate misery on the ground. Diplomatic moves and street demonstrations do not speak the only language that Israel appears to understand, which is one of force and compulsion. The Israeli response to the latest diplomatic moves has been one of defiance and threats to inflict still

more depredations on the Palestinians. The Israeli national security minister, right-wing extremist Itamar Ben-Gvir, is pushing to make annexation of the West Bank the main Israeli response to Western recognition of Palestine. Most Israelis, and not just their cabinet or the extremists within it, see international pressure as just more evidence of bias against Israel and of the need for Israel to use force to protect itself, regardless of worldwide outrage. Survey research shows that most Israelis believe there are "no innocents" in Gaza and favor expulsion of residents from the Gaza Strip. An appeal to morality will not get a positive response from a cabinet that has this population as its political base. Only the imposition of significant costs and consequences on Israel would lead it to change its policies. Although we may not be at an inflection point regarding the Palestinian-Israeli tragedy, the thinking of Arab regimes in the region has reached an inflection point of sorts in recent weeks. The Israeli attack in early September on the territory of Qatar, in an unsuccessful attempt to kill Hamas leaders



Displaced Palestinians walk through a muddy road amid the destruction in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip on February 6, 2025. ● BASHAR TALEB/AFP

engaged in Gaza-related negotiations, shocked that thinking. The attack in Qatar comes amid a fusillade of Israeli armed attacks against regional states, including Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iran, in addition to the carnage in Palestine. These and other regional states (such as Iraq and Egypt) have been the targets of Israeli attacks

— both overt military and clandestine — for many years, but it is the near-simultaneity of some of the attacks over the past month that has added to the shock. The attack in Qatar demonstrated to the Arab governments not only that Israel is the most destabilizing entity in the region but also that any one of their own nations could be similarly attacked. Qatar's security relations with Israel's prime backer, the United States — which has a large military presence at the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar — did not protect it from the Israeli aggression. Although Arab governments may be showing signs of fatigue in their decades-long support of the Palestinian cause, they are highly concerned about the possibility of any assault on their own territories. The concerns of Egypt — party to the first Arab peace treaty with Israel — are great enough for Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to label Israel an "enemy" in his remarks at an emergency Arab summit following the attack in Qatar. Egypt, like Qatar, has mediated cease-fire talks on Gaza, and could become another target of Israeli determination to kill Hamas officials wherever they may be, even ones involved in peace negotiations. Egypt also fears consequences for its own security of continued Israeli ethnic cleansing

of the Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip, which adjoins Egypt. Jordan has similar fears regarding how increasingly aggressive Israeli moves against Palestinians in the West Bank could push them eastward and upset Jordan's already fragile domestic situation. One result of these events is to remove, at least for now, the possibility of more diplomatic normalization agreements between Arab states and Israel, to add to the ones that Bahrain, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates signed during President Trump's first term. There might even be some retreat from cooperation by governments that did sign such agreements. The UAE responded quickly to talk in Israel about annexing the West Bank by warning that annexation would cross a "red line". A benefit of this development is to help debunk the notion, which one sometimes hears in the United States, that the upgrading of relations with Israel — the so-called "Abraham Accords" — represents progress and even a step toward Israeli-Palestinian peace. To the contrary, such upgrading is an alternative to Israel making peace with the Palestinians. It is a way for Israel to enjoy, and be seen by the world to enjoy, full relations with regional neighbors while continuing the subjugation of Palestinians and occupation of their

territory. Given the Israeli inclination also to view such agreements as the core of an anti-Iranian alliance, these supposed "peace agreements" also have sharpened lines of conflict in the Persian Gulf. An implication for the United States is that it should discard the fixation, which has characterized both the Trump and Biden administrations, on seeking more normalization agreements between the Israelis and the Arabs. Given the other circumstances in the region, including what is transpiring in Gaza, such agreements do nothing to advance peace and security in the Middle East or other US interests. Another implication flows from the decreased value that Arab governments are almost certainly placing on security cooperation with the United States. The Israeli attack in Qatar, a small state that had implicitly placed much of its security in the hands of the United States, has amplified the Arab doubts. The United States may need to prepare for lesser military access to Arab territories. It is good for US interests that a new formal security agreement with an Arab state, such as what the Biden administration pursued with Saudi Arabia, has become less likely than before. This development helps to minimize the risk of the United States getting ensnared in conflicts not of its own making. But as the Qatar episode illustrates, even just an implicit guarantee entails costs and risks. With Israel primed to repeat such attacks anywhere in the region, the United States, owing to its close association with Israel, may again be put in a difficult position. The United States needs to get beyond the familiar mantra about Iran supposedly being the biggest source of instability in the Middle East. It needs to consider what other entity actually has started more wars and attacked more nations — and is currently killing more civilians — than any state in the region, and to fundamentally reappraise its relationship with that entity.

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