



Zentrum
Liberale
Moderne

Network Middle-East

PERSPECTIVES FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION OF THE MIDDLE-EAST CONFLICT

by Kerstin Müller and Ralf Fücks (editors), with contributions by
Samer Sinijlawi and Eli Bar-On, Yossi Beilin, Zippora Diskind,
Huda Abuarquob, Abdulaziz Alkhamiz and Anwar El Sadat

LibMod Policy Paper



From left: Martin Kobler, Anwar El Sadat, Marius Strubenhoff, Huda Abuarqoub, Tzipi Diskind, Kerstin Müller, Ralf Fücks, Eli Bar-On, Peter Lintl, Miri Shalem, Samer Sinijlawi and Hannah Mann at the network's meeting in Berlin in September 2025

Members of the Middle East Network

Israel: **Eli Bar-On**, co-founder and CEO of *MENA2050*; **Dr. Yossi Beilin**, initiator “*Holy Land Confederation*”, former Minister of Justice, initiator of the Oslo Agreement; **Yifat Ovdia**, lawyer, founder and CEO of *Tema*; **Yifat Sela**, chairperson of *Emunah*, the national religious women’s movement; **Miri Shalem**, CEO, Culture Hall of Bet Shemesh, network *Tema*; **Zippora Diskind**, journalist, network *Tema*; **Rabbi Yitzhak Ben David**, Institute for the training of municipal rabbis, community leader.

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Germany: **Martin Kobler**, former ambassador, former UN special envoy to Iraq, DRC Congo and Libya; **Peter Lintl**, researcher, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP); **Carsten Ovens**, CEO, *ELNET* Deutschland; **Kerstin Müller**, former MP and minister of state of the foreign office, senior fellow *LibMod*, co-host of the network; **Ralf Fücks**, former president of the *Heinrich Böll Foundation*, CEO and founder of *LibMod*, co-host of the network.

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Ehud Olmert, former Israeli Prime Minister, and Kerstin Müller at an event organized by the Middle East Network on November 10, 2025, near Jericho, Palestinian Territories

INTRODUCTION AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

October 7 was a dramatic turning point

To many, the Middle East conflict seems like a never-ending saga of ever-renewing crises and wars that repeatedly give rise to new levels of escalation. Hardly anyone dares to believe in a political solution anymore. October 7, 2023, marked yet another dramatic turning point. Hamas's murderous attack on Israel was a watershed moment not only for Israel but also for Jews worldwide. Israel exercised its right to self-defense and responded with a counter-offensive against Hamas, with the stated goal of destroying the terrorist organization and its military infrastructure. The war lasted two years until, finally, through the mediation of the Trump administration, the release of the remaining hostages and a ceasefire could be agreed upon. Since Hamas had hidden its fighters and military facilities within an extensive tunnel network and civilian facilities such as hospitals, schools, and residential neighborhoods, the war claimed the lives of thousands of civilians and nearly completely destroyed Gaza's infrastructure.

Israel's war against Hamas and the resulting humanitarian crisis in Gaza did not merely spark global solidarity with the Palestinians. It triggered a tsunami of anti-Israel sentiment and barely concealed antisemitism, which has had a massive impact on Jews worldwide. The renewed conflict also led to a military exchange of blows with Iran and to a fresh escalation of fighting between Hezbollah and Israel. The war with Iran in the spring of 2026 can also be interpreted as a long-term consequence of October 7. This demonstrates just how closely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is intertwined with the region's major fault lines. This is another reason why a solution is hardly possible without the involvement of regional actors.

Middle East Network: ways out of the cycle of violence

Despite this seemingly hopeless situation, 21 representatives from Israeli and Palestinian civil society came together from June 2023 to November 2025 at the invitation of the “Center for Liberal Modernity” to form a “Middle East Network” and discuss ways to break the cycle of escalation. They were supported by experts from Saudi Arabia and Egypt as well as German think tanks. All participants viewed the regional actors as key to a political solution to the Middle East conflict. The Hamas attack on October 7 was also intended to torpedo a normalization agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Abdulaziz Alkhamiz, a Saudi journalist, writes in his article about the new strategic situation following the Iran-Iraq War, while Anwar El Sadat, nephew of the assassinated Egyptian president, outlines Egypt’s important role as a mediator. A distinctive feature of this network is its diverse composition. Among the Israeli members were representatives of the National Religious Movement and the Haredim; on the Palestinian side, participants included figures from the democratic opposition to Fatah and Hamas. In her article, Tzipi Diskind explains how religion can also serve as a point of connection for understanding rather than a source of hostility. The Palestinian Huda Abuarqoub argues that women are indispensable for a sustainable peace process.

During five rounds of dialogue and numerous working group meetings, post-war scenarios for Gaza, reforms of the Palestinian Authority, and issues related to humanitarian aid and reconstruction were discussed. A robust international protection force, ideally mandated by the UN, was deemed necessary by all participants – not only because of Israel’s legitimate security interests, but also to ensure security for the Palestinians.

Rethinking the two-state solution

A sustainable future for the people of the Gaza Strip will only be possible if the pacification of Gaza can lead to a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The existing models for a political solution – ranging from the historic Oslo Accords to the 2002 Saudi-Arabian peace initiative, the “Clinton Parameters,” and more recent concepts such as the “Holy Land Confederation” and “One Land for All” – have been the subject of intense and, at times, controversial debate. In his text, Yossi Beilin, one of the initiators of the Oslo Accords, provides a retrospective on these historical processes and an outlook on new future approaches to a solution.

The extent to which the old models of a two-state solution can still serve as viable proposals for both Israelis and Palestinians, and what chances they have of being realized, remained a point of contention in the network’s discussion panels. What is clear is that the idea of a two-state solution has eroded in both societies. While the majority of Palestinians continue to aspire to their own state in all polls, Islamist forces such as Hamas have gained strength here as well; these groups refuse to compromise with the Israeli side or even seek Israel’s destruction. On the Israeli side, too, there has not been a majority in favor of a two-state solution for some time. The loss of trust on both sides is too great, especially after October 7, 2023. Due to the lack of political prospects, extremist forces on the Israeli side – calling for the annexation of the West Bank or even the resettlement of Gaza – are also growing stronger.

Deradicalization and reintegration

In order to lay the groundwork for peaceful coexistence in both societies once again, more than just new approaches are needed. Above all, trust must be systematically rebuilt. Initiatives that work to reduce hostility between Israelis and Palestinians play a vital role in deradicalizing the conflict. This is a prerequisite for any constructive political process. The “Middle East Network” makes an important contribution to such deradicalization and reconciliation. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the joint article by Eli Bar-On and Samer Siniylawi. They argue that the central conflict is not between Israelis and Palestinians, but between “extremists and moderates” on both sides. The extremists systematically destroy any attempt at peaceful coexistence and understanding. They therefore advocate strengthening the moderate political center on both sides, which opposes extremism and enables a sustainable, shared political future.

On the ground, the network has initiated dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis through various events. The need for such initiatives was demonstrated by the network’s two successful closing events in November 2025 – one in the Palestinian territories (Jericho) and the other at Tel Aviv University – which took place immediately after the ceasefire. Over a hundred Israelis and Palestinians gathered to discuss prospects for peace following the end of the Gaza War.

Recommendations from the Middle East Network

If efforts succeed in stabilizing the still fragile ceasefire and launching a new political process to resolve the conflict, the “Middle East Network” recommends that the following conditions be taken into account:

1. Regional actors, such as the signatories to the Abraham Accords, as well as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt, who are seeking a peaceful resolution to the Middle East conflict, should be included in future negotiation processes from the outset.
2. The resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be linked to a regional process for security and cooperation. This can also help strengthen support for peaceful coexistence within both Israeli and Palestinian societies.
3. A post-war plan for Gaza and the West Bank can only succeed if the Palestinians are also given the opportunity to elect their own political leadership. These elections must be subject to certain conditions, such as a commitment by all participating parties and individuals to renounce violence. Above all, Hamas must be disarmed.
4. Alongside such a political fresh start, humanitarian aid must be ensured in Gaza, and reconstruction must begin with international assistance. An international peacekeeping force – ideally mandated by the UN – is necessary to allow the Israeli army to withdraw gradually and to ensure that the Palestinians are also protected.
5. New models for a modified two-state solution must be openly discussed. They will only be viable if they are widely debated within society. For this reason, diverse social groups on both sides should be involved: in Israel, for example, the Haredim, and on the Palestinian side, the democratic opposition to Fatah and Hamas.
6. Direct dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian civil society is essential to the success of any future peace process. To achieve mutual reconciliation and deradicalization, trust must be built systematically and incrementally from the grassroots level. This also involves strengthening the political center on both societies, which can counter extremists and build a sustainable majority in support of reconciliation.

Kerstin Müller and Ralf Fücks, October 7, 2024



Kerstin Müller is a Senior Fellow at *LibMod* since 2024 and a Senior Associate Fellow at the *German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)* since 2019, focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Middle East. She is a member of the German Advisory Board of *ELNET*, the European Leadership Network. From 2013 to 2018, she served as Director of the Israel Office of *Heinrich Böll Foundation* in Tel Aviv. Prior to that, for 19 years until 2013, she was a Member of the German Bundestag for *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*, including serving as chair of the parliamentary group and foreign policy spokesperson with a focus on the Middle East and German-Israeli relations. From 2002 to 2005, she was Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office. Kerstin Müller is a lawyer and studied law in Cologne and in France.



Ralf Fücks is managing partner at the *Zentrum Liberale Moderne (LibMod)* and previously served for 21 years as a director of the *Heinrich Böll Foundation*, the political foundation of the Green Party. Prior to that, he was co-chair of the Green Party (1989–90) and Senator for the Environment and Urban Development in the City of Bremen.



Over a hundred Palestinians and Israelis attended the event organized by the Middle East Network on November 10, 2025, near Jericho. Pictured here is the keynote speaker, Ehud Olmert, former Prime Minister of Israel, with Kerstin Müller and Samer Sinijlawi.

„What is needed now is the deliberate reconstruction of a serious moderate center, Israeli and Palestinian alike, capable of articulating not merely what it opposes, but what political order it is prepared to build.“

Eli Bar-On and Samer Sinijlawi (see article p. 8)



Foto: Tobias Kunz

Samer Sinijlawi (left) and Eli Bar-On (speaking) at the network's meeting in Berlin in September 2025

THE REAL CONFLICT IS BETWEEN EXTREMISTS AND MODERATES

*The defining struggle in the Israeli-Palestinian-conflict today is not taking place simply between Israelis and Palestinians, but between extremists and moderates within both societies, argue **Samer Sinijlawi**, a Palestinian political activist and **Eli Bar-On**, CEO of the Israeli NGO Mena 2050. Both together warn that extremists on both sides are shaping political reality and silencing pragmatic voices, thus fueling a cycle of fear and perpetual conflict. Both call for a revitalized moderate center on both sides to challenge extremism and build a viable, shared political future.*

Extremists on both sides are currently prevailing

A persistent analytical mistake continues to shape how much of the world understands this moment. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is too often described as if it were simply a conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. That description is no longer sufficient. It misses the deeper political struggle now determining the fate of both societies. The more consequential conflict today is between extremists and moderates, within each camp. Currently, the extremists are prevailing.

They are prevailing not only in military terms, but also in something more consequential over time: their ability to define political reality. They dominate the language of public life, frame the fears of both peoples, and narrow the range of what can be said, imagined, or attempted. In both Israeli and Palestinian societies, moderates increasingly find themselves politically marginalized, morally intimidated, and institutionally weak. This condition is not sustainable. Nor is it inevitable.

Endless war is not a strategy

We write this together, one Palestinian and one Israeli, not because we underestimate the depth of the conflict between our peoples, but because we believe an equally important conflict is being ignored. There are still, on both sides, individuals and constituencies who understand that endless war is not a strategy, that maximalism is not politics, and that extremism, if left unchallenged, will consume whatever remains of our collective future.

Among Palestinians, there are many who understand that Hamas has not advanced the national cause but has instead helped entrench catastrophe, deepen internal fragmentation, and subordinate Palestinian political life to a logic of permanent militarization. Among Israelis, there are many who realize that impractical nationalism, violence against defenseless communities, and the normalization of continual domination erode the moral and institutional foundations of Israeli society while foreclosing any viable horizon for stability.

Asymmetry matters as does introspection

These truths are not symmetrical in power, legal status, or historical responsibility. That asymmetry of the conflict matters, and any serious analysis must begin from it. However, asymmetry does not eliminate the need for introspection. It does not absolve either society from confronting the political failures that have made this conflict more intractable, more dehumanizing, and more difficult to resolve.

Indeed, one of the defining pathologies of this era is that each side increasingly invokes the worst of the other to silence the best within its own camp. Extremists feed one another. Each side uses the violence, rhetoric, and absolutism of the other as both justification and political fuel. The result is a mutually reinforcing ecosystem of fear, grievance, and moral simplification in which moderation is seen as weakness and self-critique as betrayal. Nowhere is the toll of this more visible than in Gaza.

1947

UN Partition Plan
rejected by Arab states



1949

Israel after the War of
Independence



1967

Israel after the Six-Day War



Today



- Jewish state
- Arab state
- International status

- Occupied by Israel

- Israeli civil administration
- Palestinian civil administration
- Palestinian autonomous territory

Gaza: The condensation of the conflict

For Palestinians, Gaza has become the most concentrated expression of abandonment, devastation, and historical despair. For Israelis, it has become inseparable from trauma, insecurity, and the collapse of trust. But if Gaza is to have any future beyond rubble, dependence, and recurrent war, then two propositions must be accepted simultaneously.

The first is that Gaza cannot remain under indefinite Israeli military presence. No serious vision of political stability, legitimacy, or regional normalization can be built on the indefinite confinement of more than two million Palestinians in half the area of the tiny Gaza Strip.

The second is that Gaza cannot be reconstructed under a permanent logic of militias, competing armed authorities, and unaccountable coercive power. No meaningful recovery can occur where there is no monopoly over force, a legitimate governing authority, and a credible institutional framework for civil life.

These are not contradictory positions. They are mutually necessary. If Gaza is to recover, it must transition toward legitimate Palestinian governance, accountable civilian authority, and a unified legal and security framework. Reconstruction cannot be conceived merely as a technical exercise in aid delivery and infrastructure repair. It is inseparable from the political architecture under which Palestinians will live and from the security architecture under which Israelis will judge whether security can last.

This is where the international conversation often becomes evasive. Too many external actors prefer vague formulas that offend no one and precise enough to commit no one. But ambiguity is no longer a virtue. A post-war Gaza that is neither occupied nor militarized by factional rule is not an aspirational ideal; it is the minimum threshold for avoiding another collapse.

The role of politicized religion

The same clarity is required elsewhere. Religion, too, has been distorted by political extremism on both sides. In Palestinian society, violent Islamist currents have hollowed out Islam's ethical core and recast a faith rooted in mercy, justice, and moral accountability into a language of death, absolutism, and sacrificial politics, often mobilizing religious narratives to justify violence and perpetuate conflict. In Israel, too, strands of religious nationalism have increasingly been mobilized to justify the use of force and diminish regard for the suffering of others.

When religion is stripped of mercy, it ceases to be faith and becomes an instrument of power. In both societies, some of the most destructive political actors have sought to transform theological vocabulary into a permission structure for cruelty.

Yet perhaps the most significant failure of this period is not only that extremists have grown stronger. It is that moderates have too often retreated into caution, private despair, or strategic silence.



Samer Abdelrazzak Sinjilawi was arrested during the First Intifada at the age of 14 and sentenced to five years in prison. There he came to understand the Israeli perspective on the conflict. A member of the Palestinian Fatah party, he opposes party leader Mahmoud Abbas. He is chairman of the Jerusalem Development Fund and a political activist focused on governance reforms and regional stability. He is a passionate advocate of the peace proposal initiated by Ehud Olmert (former Israeli Prime Minister) and Nasser Al-Kidwa (former Palestinian Foreign Minister). This proposal outlines a shared vision for a transition to peaceful coexistence between two states. Samer Abdelrazzak Sinjilawi lives in Jerusalem.



Eli Bar-On, an Israeli national, is the co-founder and executive director of MENA2050, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting regional cooperation and integration in the Middle East and North Africa. He has held various senior legal positions within the Israeli government and served as a professor at the Israel National Defense College, specializing in national security, strategy, and international relations. Eli Bar-On has delivered expert presentations to high-level delegations worldwide, led strategic international dialogues, and lectured at renowned academic institutions around the globe.

The silence of the non-extremist bystanders

Too many Palestinians know that internal authoritarianism, factional fragmentation, and the glorification of armed absolutism have exacted a devastating price on their own society yet feel unable or unwilling to speak out publicly. Too many Israelis understand that the occupation, violence against helpless people, and the capture of state institutions by extremist forces are leading their country toward moral and democratic degradation yet hesitate to organize political life around that recognition. This silence is not neutral. It has become one of the enabling conditions of collapse.

What is needed now

What is needed now is not another competition in rhetorical purity. It is not another politics of performative outrage. What is needed is the deliberate reconstruction of a serious moderate center, Israeli and Palestinian alike, capable of articulating not merely what it opposes, but what political order it is prepared to build.

That core must start from several elementary truths: occupation cannot be the basis of security; armed factional rule cannot be the basis of Palestinian national recovery; Jewish supremacist violence and Palestinian armed nihilism are both enemies of a livable future. But security, dignity, and legitimacy cannot be sequenced indefinitely as though one people must wait for the humanity of the other to be restored before their own can count.

None of this is naïve. On the contrary, it is the only form of realism still available. The real illusion is the belief that the current trajectory of managed escalation, permanent military control, recurring devastation, and collapsing legitimacy will somehow produce either security or peace. It will produce neither. It will produce only a more sophisticated form of ruin.

A moderate center striving for a realistic and viable solution

The question, then, is no longer whether extremists are dangerous. That is already evident. The question is whether moderates, on both sides, are capable of becoming politically influential before the forces of absolutism and dehumanization harden into the permanent grammar of this conflict.

The future will not be saved by those most fluent in outrage. It will be saved, if at all, by those willing to rebuild legitimacy, moral seriousness, institutional restraint, and political courage. That is the alliance this moment demands. And it is long overdue.



FROM OSLO TO THE “HOLY LAND CONFEDERATION”

Yossi Beilin recounts how the Oslo Accords began as a secret effort to achieve peace but ultimately stalled due to cautious leadership decisions, rising mistrust, and escalating violence. He argues that the failure to move beyond an interim agreement entrenched division, worsened by settlement expansion and conflict. Beilin proposes a new solution – a “Holy Land Confederation” inspired by the European Union. This is intended to serve as a facilitator to ultimately achieve a two-state solution, with the parties to the conflict deciding on the final borders.

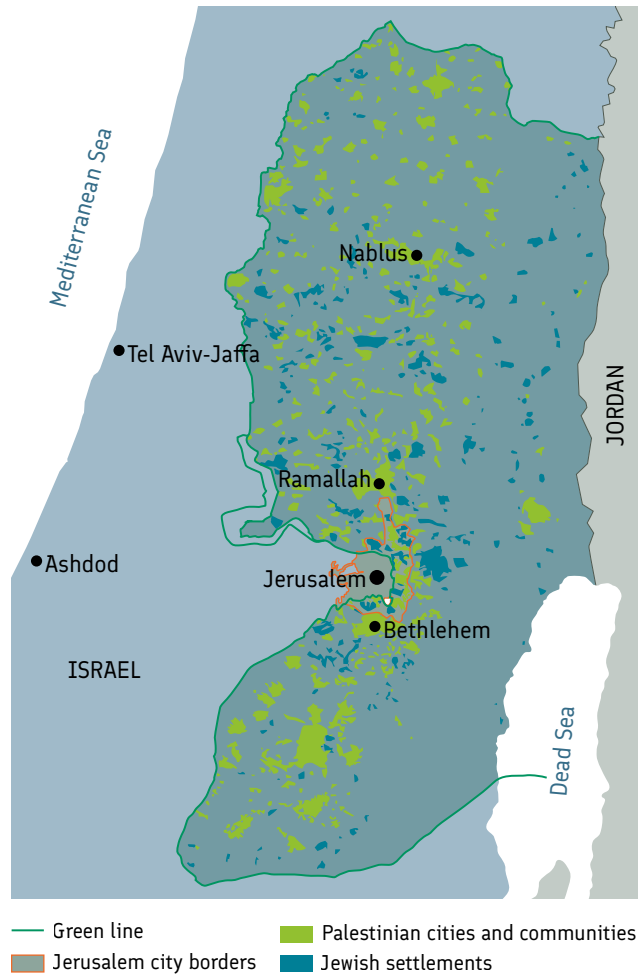
The Oslo Accords (1993) were an interim agreement. It was the first accord ever between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. At that stage, it was agreed that negotiations would take place between Israel and the PLO, and in parallel with Israel’s gradual withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, the parties were supposed to negotiate a peace treaty. The deadline for the conclusion of the talks was May 4, 1999.

From the initial idea ...

After the Israeli election in 1992 and the Rabin-led Labour Party’s victory, I was appointed deputy to the Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, and I began the secret process without informing my superiors, for fear that I would not receive the green light for such a move.

My goal was to hold secret negotiations and try to resolve the issues that were in dispute in the unsuccessful negotiations between Israel and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation established at the Madrid Conference (1991), which very quickly found itself at an impasse.

About a month after the secret talks began in Norway, and when we reached a joint document of principles, I received approval from the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to carry out the process and even upgrade it. At this point, I came to the conclusion that we were facing a pragmatic partner who was interested in reaching a solution, and I thought it would be a waste to invest additional efforts just to reach an interim agreement. I discussed this with the prime minister and suggested that we immediately move on to negotiations on a permanent settlement. He feared the failure of such a move, preferring to adhere to the procedure outlined in the invitation document to the Madrid Conference two years earlier. Unfortunately, this cautious decision of his has



Source: Peace Now, May 2025

opened the door for opponents of the arrangement on both sides to torpedo the agreement. In the end, the interim agreement did not bring about a permanent agreement, and the unfinished Oslo Process became a permanent monument to itself.

... to its deadlock

Hostility between the sides increased. Many Palestinians believed that Israel did not want to reach a permanent agreement at all, preferring to perpetuate an interim arrangement that was convenient for it. Many Israelis felt that the Palestinians did not seriously

intend for a permanent solution and took advantage of the agreement to build up force for terrorist acts against Israel. The second intifada increased hostility, while the October 7 massacre (albeit carried out by Hamas) and Israel's response to this massacre, distanced the peoples from each other.

Massive expansion of settlements

If in 1993 there were close to 100,000 settlers in the Occupied Territories, now we are talking about more than half a million settlers, not counting those who live in East Jerusalem. Even if, as part of a land swap, some 300,000 settlers are able to find themselves on the Israeli side, it will still be necessary to solve the problem of the hundreds of thousands who will be on the Palestinian side of the future border, because there is no future prime minister in Israel on the horizon who will evacuate so many people.

Tackling the challenge

A Palestinian group headed by lawyer Hiba Husseini, and an Israeli group headed by me, is suggesting a permanent agreement that would include a two-state solution without moving anyone, from any side.

Our model is the European Union, and like it, we would like to establish a structure that will begin with initial cooperation, and will expand, over the years, to become much tighter, without harming the independence and sovereignty of either state. Later, it will also be offered to other countries such as Jordan or Lebanon to join the confederation that we are proposing.

The European Union as an example

Israeli citizens who find themselves in the Palestinian state after the peace border is drawn, can, of course, move to the Israeli side of the border and receive compensation that will allow them to build their home. But those who want to remain in Palestine can do so while maintaining their Israeli citizenship and also receiving permanent residency in the Palestinian state – while accepting its authority and respecting its laws. At the same time, Palestinian citizens, who wish to do so, will be able to move to Israel under the same conditions. This solution is not about the Palestinian refugees from 1948, and we are proposing another solution to them, in the spirit of the parameters of President Bill Clinton (2000) and the Geneva Initiative (2003).

At the same time, we propose a long list of joint institutions that will work together – without having enforcement authority – and will derive the great advantage of neighborliness between the two countries.

The map between the two states will not be a concrete wall, but rather a necessary marking of different sovereignties. We hope that the solution we are proposing will not only be a specific solution to the question of the settlers but will be a gate to a high level of coordination and cooperation between Palestine and Israel. ■



Dr. Yossi Beilin served as a member of the Knesset from 1988 to 2008, holding various ministerial posts – including those of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Minister of Finance, and Minister of Justice. Yossi Beilin initiated the Oslo Peace Process and the informal Geneva Peace Agreement and is currently the chairman of the Geneva Initiative. Together with the experienced peace negotiator Hiba Husseini, he developed the concept of the Holy Land Confederation from 2020 to 2022 as a mediator for the two-state solution, an unofficial draft of a final-status agreement to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Dr. Beilin is the founder and president of Beilink Business Foreign Affairs – a global consulting firm established in 2008.



Tzipi Diskind (left) and Kerstin Müller at the network's meeting in Berlin in September 2025

MY PERSONAL HISTORY GIVES REASON FOR HOPE

*Ironically, it is her own personal story that offers hope: **Tzipi Diskind**, an Israeli, was born in Jerusalem and belongs to the ultra-Orthodox Haredi community. The mother of four believes that her religious community could play a unique mediating role in the conflict with the Palestinians. After all, she shares many things in common with religious Muslims. For dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians to succeed, she believes, what is needed above all is trust and empathy for each other's history. She believes this, despite the difficult political situation.*

The year was 1934 and my great-grandfather was, once again, on a business trip in Cairo. He was an agent of an international company, travelling on the Damascus-Alexandria line. This time, he had something important in his pocket: a picture of a young woman from Tel Aviv

who was very much interested in marrying him. While he was many years her senior, she was very attractive: good looking, highly intelligent, polyglot, an excellent baker and chef. For some reason, he wasn't sure yet. Sitting with his Cairene friends, he casually mentioned this woman, showing them her picture.

Grandfather's story

"Are you nuts?" came the answer. "How can you even think twice about it? Marry her!" The rest is history. And so, my great-grandfather's Arab friends from Egypt are one of the factors of how I came to exist.

This anecdote has so many layers in it, relevant to our current days, but the first question I would like to entertain is – why couldn't this happen today? Or at least, why are the odds for this to happen today so low? Why can't a Jewish businessman from Jerusalem consult with his Palestinian peers from Ramallah about a possible future wife?



Tzipi Diskind is an Israeli woman who was born and lives in Jerusalem. She belongs to the ultra-orthodox Haredi community. A mother of four, she works as a journalist, and is also a member of the *Tema* network, an Israeli NGO that has initiated a dialogue on the conflict between the various Israeli communities. Tzipi believes that her religious community has a special mediating role to play in the conflict with the Palestinians.

For me, the first answer is that we learned to think about each other in terms of labels, coins, put each other into molds, often led, too often misled, by the media we consume. After so many years of hostility between our nations – we stopped thinking about each other as individuals, human-beings, persons with lives full of everyday details, characters, desires, dreams and hopes. We stopped trying to understand what is driving the other side's actions, we often just hypothesize about what they are, based on our prior misled assumptions.

Haredim as mediators

And this is so unfortunate. To quote a friend of mine: Us, Charedi people, could be a bridge to our neighbors. Because the fact we are religious creates an understanding of the religious feelings of our neighbors in general, and to everyday practices stemming from religion in particular. I, as a Charedi woman who dresses modestly and covers her hair with a headscarf, who teaches her children to devote their lives to the ways of G-d, can very much identify with a Muslim woman who does the same. I stop my day to pray the Mincha prayer, just as a Muslim woman stops to pray one of her afternoon prayers. I could go on and on with this.

But how many times do we think this way? How many times did we really stop to think about our neighbors, seeing them as human beings? I know exactly how and why we came to be this way, yet I think that our way to stop this is to start knowing each other. The only Palestinians we know are those who work inside Israel, so we might know them as construction builders or movers, but we almost never know anything about their lives. Who are they, why do they live here, what do their lives look like?

Talking with one another instead of talking about the other

The only way to break this is to really stop educating ourselves about the others. So let me start with myself – I'm a mother of four living in Jerusalem where my mother and grandfather were born. A software engineer by my education, I write about science, technology and foreign news for Mishpacha Magazine, a widely-read magazine for the Jewish Orthodox community around the globe. I see the fact that I live in the city where my ancestors lived as a huge merit. My youngest daughter is going to school right across the street from where my grandfather's grandparents used to live – their apartment is still there. As a religious woman, I feel double-privileged

to live in the holy land, because many of the Mitzvot, Hebrew for commandments, are dependent upon our living on this land. It is a Mitzvah in the Torah, the 5 books of Moses that gave us the name The People of the Book, to live in the holy land. And there is a chain of Mitzvot that we can fulfill only with the Holy Land's produce or the Holy Land's fields. This desire to fulfill G-d's commandments is what led my ancestors to come back to this land, and is why I, and many thousands of people from my community, live here – not because of any political desire, but because of our desire to do what G-d commanded us to do.

To live side by side with one another

This worldview is what led a delegation of Charedi rabbis from Jerusalem to travel to Jordan on February 24, 1924 and meet the Emir Abdallah, later the first king of Jordan, and his father, the Sheriff Hussein Bin Ali. They wanted to make sure that the Arabs will know that the intentions of our community were to live here alongside Arabs, and cooperate with them. Hussein Bin Ali was all for it – but history went in different directions.

Seeking a solution via religion

The sad fact is, that the international community dealing with the Israeli – Palestinian matter knows non of the above facts, and they continue to commit a grave mistake by not including delegates from my community in the international talks. First, because one cannot talk above the heads of millions of people in the Holy Land and around the globe who see this land as vital for pure religious practicing. Second, because we bring this unique point of view to the table, of seeing matters through the religious lens, seeking to get the best decision in terms of saving lives, regardless of politics. The ultimate decision regarding a two state solution will always include our religious leaders, and their only interest is to save lives. Should a solution that proves to become life saving be brought to a final decision – their support is guaranteed.

The time has come for us to renew those 1924 efforts – let's have delegations of our religious leaders meet each other. Let's meet each other ourselves. It's time for us to break the spell of the bloodshed here and to start striving for a mutual future. I believe we can do it. Do you? ■



Photo: The News 2 / Imago

Palestinian women

BEYOND PLANS AND POWER: WHY PALESTINIAN WOMEN ARE ESSENTIAL TO LASTING PEACE

Previous peace initiatives have been male-dominated and negotiated by external and internal political elites. Huda Abuarqoob argues why it is essential for sustainable peace and for the success of current and future peace initiatives to involve Palestinian women in political power and include them in decision-making processes.

External agreements negotiated by political elites don't work

For decades, peace initiatives on Palestine have followed a familiar pattern: externally designed, elite-driven, and overwhelmingly male-dominated. From Oslo to the more recent “Trump plan”, these efforts have shared a critical flaw, not only in substance, but in structure. They have systematically excluded those who have consistently sustained the very possibility of peace: women.

From a Palestinian perspective, the “Trump plan” was never a credible starting point. It lacked legitimacy, sidelined core Palestinian rights, and was introduced without meaningful Palestinian participation. Yet beyond its political shortcomings, it reflects a deeper and recurring problem: the assumption that agreements negotiated by political and security elites alone can deliver sustainable peace.

Women's central role in Palestinian society...

Evidence globally and locally suggests otherwise. Palestinian women have long been central to social resilience, political mobilization, and peacebuilding. During the First Intifada, women organized grassroots networks that sustained communities under occupation. In the years since, they have remained at the forefront of dialogue, mediation, and conflict transformation efforts (particularly in Track II and Track 1.5 spaces). They have built trust where formal politics has entrenched division.

... and their structural exclusion from political power

Yet despite this sustained engagement, Palestinian women remain largely excluded from formal political decision-making and high-level negotiations. Their contributions are welcomed in civil society but rarely translated into political power. This is not incidental; it is structural. The consequence is a persistent disconnect between the realities on the ground and the frameworks negotiated at the top. Comparative experiences reinforce this point.

Peace processes are significantly more likely to succeed and endure when women are meaningfully included. Liberia offers a compelling example: women mobilized across divides, applied sustained pressure on warring parties, and remained engaged beyond the signing of agreements, helping ensure implementation. Durable peace has rarely been achieved without such inclusive dynamics.

Any sustainable initiative must address structural imbalance

In Palestine, the exclusion of women has narrowed the very definition of peace reducing it to territorial and security arrangements while overlooking the social, economic, and human dimensions that determine whether peace is actually lived and sustained. If any future initiative – American, European, or regional – is to serve as a genuine starting point, it must address this structural imbalance. For European actors, particularly Germany, this presents both a responsibility and an opportunity. The EU has long positioned itself as a normative power committed to inclusive governance and gender equality. Yet in practice, its engagement on Palestine has often prioritized political expediency over inclusive process.

What it needs from European partners ...

Moving forward, European support financial, diplomatic, and political should be explicitly tied to inclusive negotiation frameworks. This includes requiring the meaningful participation of women in official delegations, supporting women-led political platforms, and investing in pathways that connect civil society leadership to formal decision-making. Without such alignment, European policy risks reinforcing the very exclusions it seeks to overcome.

... and from Palestinians

Equally important is a shift within Palestinian political structures themselves. Inclusion cannot be externally mandated alone; it must also be internally embraced. This requires rethinking leadership pipelines, party dynamics, and negotiation teams to reflect the full spectrum of Palestinian society. The question, therefore, is not whether Palestinians can contribute to peace, Palestinian society, particularly its women, already does. The real question is whether political frameworks will evolve to recognize and integrate these contributions.

No peace without the structural inclusion of Palestinian women

For too long, peace efforts have been shaped by those who hold power, rather than those who build it. Re-centering Palestinian women in peace processes is not a matter of representation alone. It is a strategic necessity. Without it, future initiatives regardless of their origin, risk repeating the failures of the past, agreements that are signed but not sustained, processes that are initiated but not owned. If there is to be a credible starting point for peace, it must begin not with another externally imposed blueprint, but with a fundamental rethinking of who gets to define, negotiate, and carry peace forward.

Palestinian women are not a complementary voice in this process. They are indispensable to its success. ■



Huda Abuarquob is a Palestinian expert in peacebuilding with over 15 years of experience in conflict resolution, Track II diplomacy, and inclusive governance. She also serves as an advisor on issues related to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace, and Security.” She has led national and regional initiatives focused on dialogue, social cohesion, and political reform, and regularly gives lectures on Middle East policy and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

SAUDI ARABIA AFTER THE IRAN WAR: THE END OF STRATEGIC ILLUSIONS

*The war with Iran is forcing Saudi Arabia to fundamentally rethink its previous assumptions about deterrence, diplomacy, and regional stability, analyses **Abdulaziz Alkhamiz**. He argues that while Riyadh has benefited from its cautious policy, it now faces the task of developing a more robust security architecture and new strategic alliances. At the same time, the war marks a turning point toward a tougher, more realistic policy toward Iran and a strengthened geopolitical role for Saudi Arabia in the Middle East.*

Iran is more than a rival power

For Saudi Arabia, the Iran war is not just another regional crisis to be managed from a distance: It is a strategic audit. It has tested the Kingdom's deterrence, exposed the fragility of the old regional order, and forced Riyadh to confront a truth it has long understood but could previously postpone: Iran is not merely a troublesome neighbor or a rival power. It is a revisionist actor that treats instability as leverage, civilian infrastructure as pressure points, and maritime chokepoints as political weapons. Recent attacks and threats tied to the current war have reinforced that judgment across the Gulf.

The most important consequences are conceptual

The most important consequence of the war for Saudi Arabia is not military in the narrow sense. It is conceptual. For years, Riyadh tried to lower temperatures with Tehran without surrendering its own interests. The 2023 rapprochement brokered by China was part of that effort: a rational Saudi hedge against endless escalation. But the war has shown the limits of diplomacy when the other side still believes coercion pays. Iranian strikes and threats against Gulf energy, water, and military infrastructure have not simply created a security problem; they have discredited the fantasy that accommodation alone can neutralize a regime that sees the region through the lens of ideological contest and asymmetric intimidation.

Cautious action, diversification of partnerships

That does not mean Saudi policy was mistaken. On the contrary, the Kingdom's caution now looks wiser than ever. Riyadh did not rush into maximalist confrontation when others were intoxicated by slogans. It bought time, diversified partnerships, strengthened its defense posture, and kept its economy moving. Saudi officials have publicly stressed that economic activity remains normal and that the fiscal position is strong despite the war's spillover effects. At the same time, Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan has warned that the wider impact on supply chains and the global economy is still not fully priced in. That is the Saudi position in miniature: no panic, no naivety.

Yet restraint should not be confused with strategic comfort. The war has made plain that Saudi Arabia remains a front-line state whether it seeks that role or not. Prince Sultan Air Base was hit again this week, wounding U.S. personnel and damaging aircraft, while missile and drone attacks have reached across the Gulf. Saudi territory is not a symbolic backdrop to this confrontation. It is part of the battlespace.

A new hard-security architecture

This is why the old formula of "de-escalate and develop" can no longer stand on its own. Vision 2030 requires stability, but stability cannot survive on investor presentations and mega-project renderings if the region's hard-security architecture remains porous. The war has brutally clarified that diversification, tourism, logistics, and global capital flows depend in the end on air defense, missile interception, maritime security, redundancy in export routes, and credible retaliation. Saudi Arabia's continued ability to route some exports via the Red Sea has demonstrated foresight, but it has also underlined the geographic logic of the challenge: a kingdom with global economic ambitions cannot allow its strategic environment to be held hostage by Iran's missile doctrine or Hormuz brinkmanship.



Photo: Felix Zahn (AA) / Imago

Welcome remarks at the meeting between German Foreign Minister Waidephul and the Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, in Riyadh in June 2025

Saudi-Arabia's geopolitical role

The second major impact concerns Saudi Arabia's regional role. The war is making the Kingdom less a balancing actor and more the indispensable Arab pole around which any serious postwar order must be built. Not because Riyadh sought this role theatrically, but because events are imposing it. Smaller Gulf states remain divided over how quickly the war should end and on what terms. Some want an immediate ceasefire to limit economic damage; others insist that any settlement that leaves Iran's missile and drone capacity intact would merely reset the countdown to the next crisis. Reuters reported recently that Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain are pressing Washington for a resolution that degrades Iran's coercive tools rather than pauses them.

That is the key policy shift. Before this war, many in the region still spoke as if the strategic objective were coexistence with Iran's power. After this war, the emerging Saudi view appears harder: Coexistence may be possible with Iran as a state, but not with Iran as a permanently armed extortion system. In other words, Riyadh's threshold has changed. It is no longer enough to avoid war; the issue is whether the war ends in a way that makes a repeat less likely. That is a much sterner standard, and a much more realistic one.



New debates, new alliances

This shift also reshapes the Saudi conversation about normalization with Israel and the Abraham Accords. The war does not make Saudi-Israeli normalization automatic. Saudi Arabia still has its own political, religious, and Arab calculations, and the Palestinian issue has not evaporated. But the war has done something else: It has made the strategic logic of selective alignment more visible. The Kingdom has seen, in real time, that the principal threat to Gulf infrastructure and regional order is not rhetorical solidarity from self-appointed “resistance” actors, but an Iranian military doctrine that targets airports, ports, bases, energy installations, and potentially water facilities. In that environment, the question is no longer whether Israel is a controversial regional actor. The question is whether a coalition of status-quo states can be built to contain a revolutionary one.

Saudi Arabia is unlikely to embrace a crude “enemy of my enemy” formula. That is not how serious states operate. But neither can it ignore the lessons of the battlefield. The postwar Middle East will reward networks of integrated air defense, intelligence sharing, cyber coordination, and maritime security. If the Abraham Accords evolve from diplomatic symbolism into real security architecture, Riyadh will examine them less as a public-relations question and more as a strategic instrument. The war has not settled the normalization debate. It has stripped it of illusion.

A realistic view on Iran

There is, however, a danger for Saudi Arabia in reading the moment too triumphantly. Iran may emerge weakened, but a weakened Iran is not the same as an irrelevant Iran. Even after weeks of strikes, Tehran has continued to demonstrate disruptive capacity through missiles,

The Abraham Accords

In 2020, four Arab states – Bahrain, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates and Sudan – signed the Abraham Accords with Israel, brokered by the United States. The accords mark a turning point in relations, following more than 60 years during which much of the Arab world had refused to recognize Israel or establish political ties with it. The agreements provide for a comprehensive normalization of relations, as well as concrete cooperation in politics, research, and civil society, and even in the difficult area of security. Jordan and Egypt, which already have peace treaties with Israel, are involved in the process. Talks are underway with other countries, such as Oman and Saudi Arabia, for similar agreements. The alliance is united by a common enemy, Iran, whose nuclear program is viewed as a threat in the region by both the Sunni states and Israel alike.

drones, maritime pressure, and proxy activation. The Houthis' widening involvement is a reminder that Iran's regional model has never depended solely on conventional strength. It depends on distributed instability.

Four principles for a Saudi Strategy

That means Riyadh's strategy after the war must rest on four principles.

- First, Saudi Arabia must deepen deterrence, not merely defense. Interception is essential, but interception alone creates a permanent tax on stability. The Kingdom needs stronger integrated defenses with trusted partners, but also a clearer doctrine about costs for attacks on its territory and infrastructure.
- Second, it must accelerate redundancy in energy and trade corridors. Hormuz can no longer be treated as a commercial artery that politics occasionally interrupt. It is now a contested strategic lever, and Iran has shown again that it is willing to weaponize it.
- Third, Saudi Arabia should convert its current caution into diplomatic authority. Any regional settlement that treats Gulf security as secondary to U.S.-Iran bargaining will fail. Riyadh has earned the right to insist that any postwar framework include enforceable restrictions on missile threats, proxy warfare, and maritime coercion. Gulf security cannot remain the footnote to other people's negotiations.
- Fourth, the Kingdom must resist the temptation to define victory merely as Iran's humiliation. The true Saudi objective is not spectacle; it is structure. A regional order in which Gulf states can build, invest, and modernize without living under the shadow of periodic missile blackmail. That is a higher ambition than revenge, and far more difficult to achieve.

No time for ambiguity

In the end, the Iran war has narrowed Saudi Arabia's room for ambiguity. It has vindicated some of Riyadh's caution, buried much of the old optimism about de-escalation, and elevated the Kingdom's role as the central Arab power in any serious reordering of the Middle East. The lesson is not that Saudi Arabia must become reckless. It is that it can no longer afford strategic sentimentality.

The postwar era, whenever it formally begins, will not reward states that merely survived. It will reward states that learned. Saudi Arabia now has to show that it has. ■



Abdulaziz Alkhamis is a Saudi-British journalist living in Dubai. He has worked as author and editor for a number of newspapers and magazines as well as a TV-producer and presenter. He was editor-in-chief of *Al-Arab* newspaper in London and producer and presenter of *Friendly Fire*, a show hosted on SkyNews Arabia. Beyond writing, he is a creative entrepreneur, presently building *JETIME*, a café and podcast studio in Abu Dhabi that serves as a space for intellectual dialogue and multimedia production. He focuses on Middle Eastern geopolitics, AI and political forecasting as well as historical and military narratives.

EGYPT'S IMPORTANT ROLE AS A MEDIATOR FOR A FUTURE RESOLUTION OF THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

Anwar E. El Sadat examines Egypt's central role as an indispensable mediator in the Middle East conflict following the Gaza War and in the context of the Trump peace initiatives. He explains how Cairo balances the interests of international actors, provides humanitarian aid, and simultaneously bears the economic burden. The key question remains: Can Egypt's pragmatic diplomacy pave the way for a realistic two-state solution?

Egypt's central role in regional conflict resolution

As the Middle East navigates the complex aftermath of the Gaza war and the implementation of the Trump administration's peace initiatives, Egypt has emerged as an indispensable mediator. Cairo's strategic position – geographically, politically, and historically – has positioned it as a key broker in efforts to stabilize the region and advance prospects for a lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A legacy of mediation

Egypt's role as a regional mediator is deeply rooted in its history. Since the 1979 peace treaty with Israel, Cairo has consistently positioned itself as a bridge between conflicting parties. Today, this legacy is being actively leveraged across multiple fronts simultaneously. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi has personally emphasized that Egypt is pursuing an “honest and sincere” mediation to end regional conflicts, noting from experience that “wars only result in destruction, ruin and hurting the interests and destiny of the people”.

Egypt was among the first to engage in diplomatic efforts immediately after the outbreak of war, convening the Cairo Peace Summit on October 21, 2023, with broad international and Arab participation (more than 30 countries and organizations). The summit aimed to halt the escalation, protect civilians, ensure the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza, and open avenues for a comprehensive settlement based on the two-state solution.

Furthermore, French President Macron's visit to Egypt, his visit to El Arish, and his firsthand observation of Palestinians in Egyptian hospitals had a huge positive impact, reflecting on European awareness of the facts.

Egypt also hosted the Sharm El-Sheikh Peace Summit on October 13, 2025, co-chaired by Egypt and the United States, with broad international participation, to solidify the ceasefire in Gaza and promote stability in the Middle East. The summit aimed to solidify the agreement to end the conflict, discuss the future of the Gaza Strip, address reconstruction efforts, and usher in a new era of regional security.

Egypt's humanitarian role despite the economic damage

Egypt's role in the Gaza crisis represents one of the most significant humanitarian operations in recent Middle Eastern history. By the numbers: over 800,000 tons of aid, 70 percent of all assistance reaching Gaza, \$105 million in Red Crescent expenditure, 35,000 volunteers, and 18,560 wounded Palestinians receiving medical care in Egyptian hospitals. Beyond the statistics, Egypt has provided the diplomatic infrastructure for ceasefire negotiations, maintained firm political principles against displacement, and ensured that even when borders closed, a corridor for aid remained open.

On the other hand, the Gaza war caused enormous damage to the Egyptian economy. Especially, with Suez Canal revenues dropping by over 50% due to Houthi attacks on ships. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi has personally emphasized that The EGP 500bn decline in Suez Canal receipts, combined with global supply chain disruptions and rising energy costs from conflicts in Gaza and Iran, has placed Egypt at a “historical crossroads.”

This crisis has caused a massive drop in foreign currency, severely damaging Egypt's already fragile financial situation and reducing tourism, contributing to an overall economic cost.

Expectations of the parties and the two-state solution

The parties' expectations of Egypt reflect their distinct interests. Israel views Egypt as a critical security partner, expecting Cairo to prevent Hamas from rearming and to ensure reconstruction does not strengthen militant capabilities. Palestinian factions turn to Egypt as a traditional Arab power; Hamas has consistently preferred Egyptian mediation, while the Palestinian Authority looks to Cairo to preserve the framework for eventual Palestinian unity. The United States relies on Egyptian diplomacy to implement ceasefire agreements; senior US officials have met with Egyptian counterparts to coordinate next steps. The international community values Egypt's insistence that the Palestinian question "must not be overlooked" and that post-conflict arrangements must serve the two-state solution.

Egypt's support for the two-state solution remains consistent. The Trump administration's "Board of Peace" framework conditions reconstruction on the disarmament of armed groups – a condition Egypt cautiously embraces while maintaining channels to all parties. Cairo lacks the economic leverage of major powers, but it possesses a balanced network of relationships, experience in conflict management, and geographical control over a vital crossing point.

Ultimately, Egypt's role is indispensable. Whether the two-state solution proves realistic or utopian depends on whether regional and international actors align their expectations with Egypt's pragmatic, patient diplomacy. For now, Egypt keeps the diplomatic door open.

In addition, Egypt has consistently supported the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) as a crucial transitional body for post-war governance. Established in January 2026 under UN Security Council Resolution 2803, this 15-member technocratic committee led by Ali Shaath is tasked with managing Gaza's daily civil affairs, overseeing reconstruction, and coordinating humanitarian relief. Egypt has further pledged to train Palestinian police personnel to maintain security in the enclave. Critically, Cairo views the NCAG as more than a temporary administrative fix – it is a positive catalyst for the two-state solution. Egyptian officials have explicitly linked the committee's work to a transitional phase designed to stabilize Gaza, thereby preserving Palestinian territorial unity and advancing the goal of an independent Palestinian state. ■



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The situation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Middle East seems almost hopeless in the wake of October 7, 2023, the Gaza War, and the conflicts with Lebanon and Iran. Nevertheless, at the invitation of the “Center for Liberal Modernity,” actors from Israeli and Palestinian civil society, supported by experts from Saudi Arabia and Egypt as well as German think tanks, came together to form a “Middle East Network” to discuss ways out of the spiral of escalation. In this brochure, members of the network from the region present their proposals and recommendations.

Sponsored by



Auswärtiges Amt

Published in May 2026 by

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