

Evolving Dynamics in the Region: Reflections on Recent Developments in Lebanon, Syria, and Their Implications for Palestine

Introduction

The current political circumstances in the region, specifically the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah and the unexpected collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, produce a challenging scenario for the assessment of the Palestinian political and strategic standpoint. The ceasefire on the Lebanese-Israeli border has been negotiated by diplomatic means and mediated by the United States and France in order to stop a prolonged state of military confrontation (Biden, 2024). However, the continuation of hostilities, if on a less intense scale, highlights how delicate this agreement is. At the same time, the fall of the Assad regime in Syria, a significant shift after more than a decade of civil war, brings in a new element to the regional power dynamics (Reuters, 2024). All these events have an impact on the current strategy of regional powers which may affect the structures of support for the Palestinian resistance and advocacy. This bulletin aims to analyze these occurrences in order to understand how they may influence the political, diplomatic, and military approaches of the Palestinians. The implications are numerous and can be seen as both opportunities as well as challenges for the achievement of the Palestinian goals and aspirations in the shifting dynamics of the region.

The Ceasefire Between the occupying state of Israel and Hezbollah

The ceasefire agreement between Hezbollah and the Israeli occupying state was reached on the 26th of November, 2024, with mediation by the United States and France following a sustained period of military confrontation triggered by the events of October 7th, 2023 (New York Times, 2024). This diplomatic intervention aimed to defuse a conflict that threatened not only to destabilize Lebanon but also to widen into a more significant regional confrontation. While the agreement was initially met with cautious optimism, its fragility became evident as violations surfaced shortly after its implementation.

Specific examples of ceasefire breaches emerged within days, as there have been reports of violations on both sides with each accusing the other of violating the ceasefire. On November 29th, Israeli fighter jets launched targeted airstrikes near the Lebanese border, claiming to preempt Hezbollah rocket deployments (CBS News, 2024). In response, Hezbollah retaliated with precision-guided missile attacks on Israeli military positions in the Shebaa Farms region, a contested territory occupied since 1967 (New York Times, 2024).

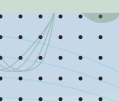
These immediate escalations demonstrated that both parties viewed the ceasefire as a temporary tactical pause rather than a durable resolution. Each violation was met with mutual justifications, with the occupation state emphasizing security concerns and Hezbollah framing its actions as defensive measures against continued aggression.

The fragility of the ceasefire further reveals a broader pattern in Israeli military doctrine: ceasefires serve as strategic opportunities to regroup and redirect focus to other areas, particularly Palestinian territories. For instance, shortly after the November ceasefire, reports emerged of intensified Israeli raids in the West Bank, leading to mass arrests, home demolitions, and civilian casualties. This redirection of military operations highlights how such agreements—while framed as measures of de-escalation—can serve a broader strategy where peace is leveraged to recalibrate military presence and strategy.

The immediate impacts on Lebanon also merit attention. Local communities along the southern Lebanese border remain under constant threat, as sporadic exchanges of fire disrupt livelihoods and force displacement. Schools, agricultural operations, and healthcare services have been particularly affected, amplifying the humanitarian toll on a region that already faces economic collapse. Meanwhile, Western mediators, including the U.S. and France, have maintained a narrow focus on "stability" without addressing the root causes of the conflict, including the Israeli occupation of disputed Lebanese territories.

Further, the involvement of the Western powers, more specifically the United States and France, in mediating this ceasefire exposes their interests in allegedly stabilizing the region according to their benefits, possibly at the expense of addressing underlying issues like the Palestinian question. While the U.S. and France focus on preventing regional escalation, their diplomatic efforts often overlook the issues critical to Palestinians, such as ongoing occupation and human rights violations (Reuters, 2024; CBS News, 2024). Therefore, this intervention offers an opportunity to question the role of international diplomacy in the management of regional conflicts and whether or not such diplomacy helps or hampers the Palestinian cause.

From a Palestinian perspective, these violations and their aftermath serve as a critical reminder of the occupation state's consistent use of military aggression to achieve political and territorial goals. The ceasefire's fragility not only reflects Israel's unwillingness to commit to genuine de-escalation but also underscores its broader regional strategy of leveraging conflicts to further entrench its occupation agenda across multiple fronts (Biden, 2024; CBS News, 2024; New York Times, 2024).



Israel's Occupation of Occupied Syrian Territory

Israel's ongoing occupation of the Golan Heights remains a significant and often overlooked aspect of its regional strategy. The Israeli occupation state occupied the area in 1967, and annexed it in 1981, despite international condemnation and violations of United Nations Security Council resolutions. The UN continues to view the Golan Heights as Syrian territory under Israeli occupation. In response to the annexation, UN Security Council Resolution 497 declared Israel's actions as "null and void" and reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Yet, Israel has continued to expand illegal settlements in the region while exploiting its natural resources, actions that have not been reversed despite global opposition (UN, 1981).

Israeli actions in the Golan Heights follow a familiar pattern seen across other occupied territories: demographic engineering, resource extraction, and militarization. Israeli settlements have steadily increased, displacing Syrian residents and altering the local economy to serve settler interests. For instance, the establishment of settlements such as Katzrin—now the largest illegal settlement in the Golan—has led to the displacement of entire Syrian villages, including Majdal Shams and Quneitra. This demographic engineering is coupled with the Israeli occupying state's exploitation of the Golan's natural resources, such as water and agricultural land, which are now predominantly controlled by settlers, severely restricting the livelihoods of remaining Syrian residents (Golan Marsad, n.d.).

Economically, the Israeli occupying state's presence in the Golan Heights has focused on integrating the territory into its domestic economy. The occupation state has capitalized on the Golan's agricultural potential, especially in wine production, with products marketed internationally as 'Israeli' despite their illegal origins. Additionally, Israel's exploitation of the Golan's water resources, particularly the Sea of Galilee and surrounding streams, has redirected critical supplies away from Syrian residents and toward Israeli settlements (UN, 2024).

Militarization remains central to Israel's control of the Golan Heights. The occupation state has established extensive surveillance infrastructure and military bases to secure the territory and maintain its geopolitical leverage. For example, the Mount Hermon military outpost, equipped with advanced radar systems, plays a significant role in monitoring movements within Syria and beyond, effectively weaponizing the Golan as a tool of regional domination (UN, 2024).

The collapse of the Assad regime adds a new layer of complexity to Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights. The current power vacuum in Syria provides the occupying state of Israel with an opportunity to consolidate its presence under the guise of security concerns, particularly as new factions and foreign actors vie for influence in post-Assad Syria. For instance, the occupation state has intensified its settlement expansion and resource extraction under the pretext of safeguarding its 'northern border.' Moreover, aspirations for the annexation of new Syrian areas along the 'northern border' are being executed in parallel with plans for the annexation of the entire West-Bank. (Tariq, M., 2024; Aasi, J., 2022)

Developments in Syria: New Regional Dynamics

The Syrian political system has gone through a significant change with the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, an event that brought an end to one of the most challenging periods of Syrian history and the beginning of a new period of the region's history. This change which took place after more than a decade of civil war will have an impact on Syria and the region as a whole (Reuters, 2024). Assad's removal from power resulted in a power void which can either help to shape new political structures or lead to more instability.

The aftermath of Assad's regime collapse has seen a power struggle between different factions including groups such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) aiming to control and implement their visions in shaping the future of Syria (Reuters, 2024). This power vacuum has the possibility of reshaping the regional structure which will in turn affect the existing alliances and may provide a platform for new international powers to take shape. Russia, a staunch supporter of Assad, may reconsider its role in Syria, particularly if its influence is challenged by emergent powers. Similarly, Iran faces a strategic dilemma, as its long-standing presence in Syria—critical to its regional network—may be jeopardized.

The demise of Assad also raises issues on the future of Iranian-Shiite militancy and Hezbollah's strategic interest in Syria which has been very critical in supporting the latter. Hezbollah, heavily reliant on Syria as a logistical and operational hub, may also be forced to recalibrate its strategy to safeguard its interests. With the removal of Assad, these groups are faced with the question whether or not to readjust their strategy, they could either scale down their activities in other areas in the region in favor of the protection of their interests in Syria after the Al-Assad era or vice versa. This may result in shifts in the alignments of these actors in relation to the Palestinian question.





Furthermore, the Syrian case has relevance for the Kurdish forces in the northeast, who have been left to manage their own semi-autonomous region. This raises the question: Could Assad's regime's collapse result in a power-sharing deal with these entities? Or does it trigger fresh hostility over land and authority making Syrian politics even more complex? Another aspect that makes the Syrian crisis even more compounded is Turkey's interest in containing the Kurdish forces in Syria; Ankara could choose to sustain or scale down the situation in a way that would be preferable to it (MSN, 2024).

For Palestinians, these developments in Syria pose both opportunities and challenges. The fall of Assad's regime may signify the end of a political authority that had minimal positive impact over the course of the Assad's government, but which wasn't always in favor of the Palestinian cause. Palestinian refugees in Syria, who have already suffered from the civil war, have no knowledge about their future status and rights in Syria. However, new leadership in Syria—whether unified or fragmented—may offer avenues for renewed Palestinian advocacy, particularly if emerging actors seek legitimacy through alliances with Palestinian factions.

Implications for Palestinians

The recent events in Lebanon and Syria including the Hezbollah-Israel ceasefire agreement and the collapse of Assad's regime have opened up several possibilities concerning Palestinians' future in the region. An analysis of these changes in the power dynamics of the region shows that they have various implications for Palestinian political plans, security, and international presentation.

First of all, the ceasefire between the occupation and Hezbollah, while reducing the immediate threats towards resistance groups in Lebanon, may unintentionally put more pressure on Palestinian territories. Ceasefires in the past have been strategically used by the occupying state of Israel to relieve pressure on certain fronts and escalate it on others, which may very well lead to increased activities in the West Bank or Gaza, such as the military operations in refugee camps and various cities in the West Bank as well as the exponential increase arbitrary arrests recently (New York Times, 2024). The Palestinian resistance movements that have received support from Hezbollah may have their tactics and strategies of operation dented if the organization is either weakened by Israeli attacks or is otherwise engaged in the process of establishing its foothold in Lebanon or Syria due to the recent events (PBS News, 2024).

Also, the ceasefire agreement is quite fragile, and the violations by the occupying state of Israel may give a clearer picture that peace is a very delicate concept in the region. This may lead the various Palestinian factions to reconsider their dependence on external backers which in turn may create pressure for Palestinians to become more self-sufficient or to seek a more diverse range of allies (CBS News, 2024).

This ceasefire was brokered by Western powers, mainly the United States and France, which could indicate future trends whereby the Palestinian struggle will not be a priority in international relations for the sake of stability in the region that match Western views and interests.

Furthermore, the Israeli ongoing occupation of the Golan Heights has significant implications for Palestinians, particularly in light of recent plans to further annex Syrian lands along the northern border, mirroring its approach to the West Bank. The parallel between Israeli annexation of the Golan and the West Bank is clear, as the Israeli occupying state intensifies settlement expansion under the guise of security concerns, using the collapse of Syria's Assad regime as an opportunity to solidify its military and territorial presence (Tariq, M., 2024; Aasi, J., 2022). This strategy not only undermines Syrian sovereignty but also further entrenches the occupation state's settler-colonial agenda.

Concerning the Syrian case, the fall of the Assad government brings in new factors that affect Palestinians. The Assad government, while at times an ally and at times an opponent, provided a stable environment where the Palestinian factions could work (The Conversation, 2024). The power vacuum and the possibility of the formation of new powers in Syria may either weaken the backup systems of these factions or provide new opportunities for diplomacy or logistics (Reuters, 2024). Palestinian refugees in Syria are already suffering the consequences of the civil war and will have to wait for the resolution of the conflict to know about their status, protection, and rights in post-Assad Syria. The new political entities might either seek to engage more with Palestinian issues and form closer ties with them to garner international support, or choose to prioritize internal stabilization, potentially sidelining Palestinian concerns.

The general implication in this case is the shifting of the regional alliances. With the Iranian foothold in Syria decreasing, the Palestinian movements that have close ties with Iranian-backed resistance groups in the region may either have to search for new alliances or change their approaches (Reuters, 2024). Conversely, if new Syrian leadership emerges with a different ideological bent, perhaps more aligned with Sunni governance or Western interests, this could either benefit or challenge Palestinian movements depending on the new regime's stance on regional conflicts and Palestinian rights.

In conclusion, the recent developments in Lebanon and Syria, while offering both challenges and opportunities, emphasize the broader instability in the region that continues to shape the Palestinian political and strategic landscape.



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