

The Paradox of Peak Palestinianism: Transatlantic Public Opinion, Strategic Realism, and the End of the Two-State Solution



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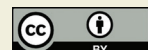
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ABSTRACT

The period after October 7, 2023, has opened a striking gap between transatlantic public opinion and the strategic calculations of Western and Gulf Arab governments. Polling across the United States and Western Europe records historic lows in support for Israel and unprecedented sympathy for Palestinians, alongside a wave of state recognitions that brought the total to 157 of 193 UN member states by September 2025. However, this rhetorical apotheosis of “Palestinianism” has coincided with - and arguably accelerated - the material extinction of any plausible path to Palestinian statehood. Drawing on recent polling and strategic analyses of the June 2025 Twelve-Day War and the degradation of Iran’s “Axis of Resistance,” and engaging sympathetically with the Jerusalem Strategic Tribune, this article argues that strategic convergence among Washington, Jerusalem, and the Gulf monarchies operates on a different plane from public sentiment. Record settlement expansion, Palestinian Authority delegitimation, the destruction of Hamas, the decapitation of Hezbollah, the collapse of the Assad regime, and strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities point toward an emerging Israeli regional hegemony underwritten by quiet Gulf-Israeli security cooperation. Transatlantic Palestinianism thus functions less as a political program than as a performative identity practice, decoupled from Arab state interests. Peak rhetorical embrace coincides with material impossibility.

Keywords: Abraham Accords, Iran, Palestinianism, transatlantic relations, two-state solution.

Introduction

In the final week of September 2025, on the margins of the eightieth session of the United Nations General Assembly, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Australia, and Portugal joined the lengthening register of states formally recognizing Palestinian statehood. France became the first permanent member of the Security Council to extend such recognition. By the close of the session, 157 of 193 United Nations member states - approximately 81 percent of the international community - had endorsed Palestinian sovereignty in some form (Beres, 2025). At precisely

the same political moment, however, the Israeli Cabinet was secretly approving a record number of new settlements in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Authority commanded the support of less than ten percent of Palestinian polling respondents, Hamas had been functionally destroyed as a military force, Hezbollah’s leadership lay in graveyards, the Ba’ath regime in Damascus had collapsed, and the Islamic Republic of Iran was reeling from coordinated American and Israeli strikes on its nuclear infrastructure that had begun three months earlier (International Crisis Group, 2025; The Soufan Center, 2025; Mahmoudian, 2025).

This article begins from the proposition that this constellation of events is not a paradox to be resolved but a structural feature of contemporary international politics that demands theoretical articulation. The simultaneous expansion of rhetorical sympathy for Palestinians across transatlantic publics and the foreclosure of the material conditions necessary for Palestinian statehood are not coincidental. They are, rather, mutually constitutive elements of a broader reconfiguration of regional and international order. Drawing on recent polling data, the secondary literature in international security and Middle East studies, and engaging sympathetically with arguments advanced by contributors to the Jerusalem Strategic Tribune, this article advances three interlocking claims.

The claim is rather that the rhetorical apotheosis of Palestinianism and the material foreclosure of statehood are co-occurring and mutually legible features of a single reconfiguration of regional and international order, and that situating them within a common interpretive frame clarifies the logic of each.

First, transatlantic public opinion on Israel has undergone a historically unprecedented negative shift since October 7, 2023, with measurable consequences for diplomatic posture and

electoral politics in numerous Western democracies. Second, this shift has not derailed-and in important respects has accelerated-the strategic convergence of the United States, Israel, and the Gulf Arab monarchies in confronting Iran and its regional proxies. Public sentiment and strategic calculation increasingly operate on distinct planes. Third, the rhetorical phenomenon I term “transatlantic Palestinianism”-the elevation of solidarity with the Palestinian cause into a constitutive marker of progressive political identity-has reached its apex precisely as the material possibility of Palestinian statehood has reached its nadir. The peak of one trajectory marks the end of the other.

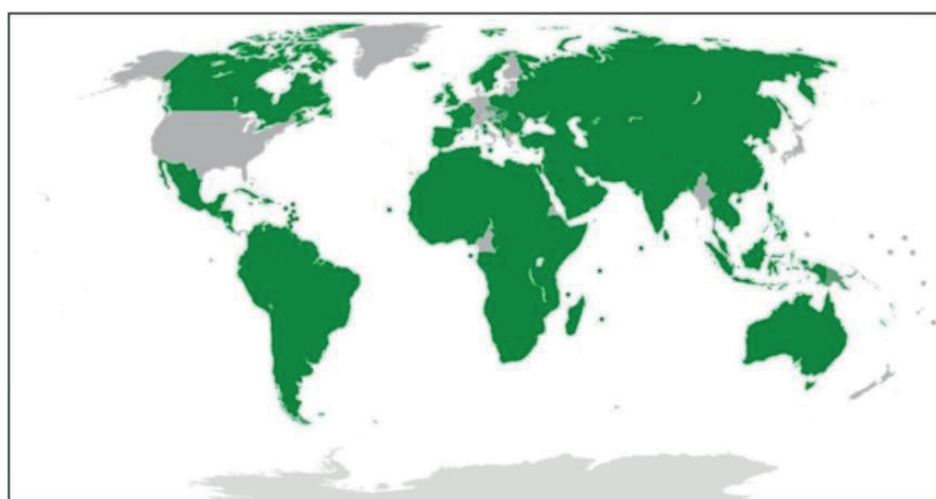
In framing these claims, the article extends sympathetically the analytical thrust of contributors to the Jerusalem Strategic Tribune (hereafter JST) who have argued that the two-state solution, far from being temporarily embattled, has been structurally extinguished by the conjunction of Palestinian rejectionism, Israeli political consolidation, Gulf strategic pragmatism, and the collapse of the Iran-led regional resistance project (Beres, 2025; Huberman, 2024; Mandelbaum, 2024; Wertman, n.d.). Where this article departs from purely policy-oriented analysis is in situating the rhetorical phenomenon of Palestinianism within a theoretical frame that highlights its function as a performative identity practice rather than a political program. This function paradoxically reinforces rather than challenges the structural foreclosure of Palestinian statehood.

A word on the status of the argument is in order at the outset. The analysis offered here is interpretive and structural rather than causal-inferential. It does not claim that transatlantic public discourse causes the deterioration of conditions

for Palestinian statehood, nor that the two trajectories stand in a causal relationship that could be established through an inferential test. The claim is rather that the rhetorical apotheosis of Palestinianism and the material foreclosure of statehood are co-occurring and mutually legible features of a single reconfiguration of regional and international order, and that situating them within a common interpretive frame clarifies the logic of each. Where the article speaks of the rhetorical practice as accompanying, coinciding with, or being implicated in the foreclosure of statehood, these formulations should be read in this structural and interpretive register rather than as assertions of unidirectional causation.

The article proceeds in five parts. Part 2 develops a conceptual framework for understanding transatlantic Palestinianism as a political-rhe-

torical phenomenon distinct from Palestinian nationalism in its indigenous register and from the Arab state's interest in the Palestinian cause. Part 3 surveys recent polling evidence on the transatlantic shift in public opinion, with attention to generational and partisan polarization. Part 4, the article's central analytical contribution, examines the strategic convergence of the United States, Israel, and the Gulf states against Iran from October 2023 through early 2026. Part 5 engages sympathetically with the JST argument that the two-state solution has structurally ended, drawing out implications for the wider transatlantic relationship. A concluding section reflects on the article's implications for the broader theme of strategic fragmentation in the Western alliance system, the organizing concern of this special issue.



As of September 22, 2025, the State of Palestine is formally recognized by at least 155 of the 193 United Nations member states (Photo: IMEMC, 2025).

Research Design, Analytical Approach, and Sources

A word on method is in order. This article is an interpretive, qualitative study rather than a hypothesis-testing or predictive one. Its aim is explanatory and theory-building: to render intelligible a puzzling conjunction - the simultaneous intensification of transatlantic sympathy for Palestinians and the material foreclosure of Palestinian statehood - by situating it within the concepts of symbolic politics and performative identity. The research design is accordingly interpretive and abductive, moving between empirical evidence and conceptual framing in the tradition of interpretive political science and critical international relations scholarship. It does not claim to establish causal relationships through controlled comparison; it offers instead a theoretically disciplined reading of a contemporary configuration.

Analytically, the argument proceeds through three complementary moves. First, it assembles and interprets quantitative public-opinion data as evidence of an aggregate attitudinal shift, reading polling series descriptively rather than treating them as independent causal variables. Second, it undertakes a form of critical discourse analysis, attending to how the vocabulary of “Palestinianism”-decolonization, settler colonialism, apartheid, genocide-functions performatively within transatlantic progressive milieus. Third, it triangulates these two registers against strategic and policy analyses of regional events, so that claims about the divergence between public sentiment and state behavior rest on the convergence of independent bodies of evidence rather than on any single source.

The analysis draws on three kinds of sources, each used for a distinct purpose. Public-opinion evidence is taken from established survey organizations, including the Pew Research Center, Gallup, YouGov, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, and national polling instruments in Europe. Strategic and policy analyses are drawn from research institutions and think tanks, among them the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Chatham House, the International Crisis Group, the Soufan Center, and the Stimson Center, and from the commentary of the Jerusalem Strategic Tribune, which is engaged both as evidence of a distinctive analytical position and as an interlocutor whose argument the article extends. Conceptual and historical claims are grounded in the peer-reviewed scholarly literature in Middle East studies, settler-colonial studies, and international relations theory, supplemented by primary documents, including the International Court of Justice’s January 2024 order and the International Atomic Energy Agency’s reports. Two limitations follow from this design and are acknowledged at the outset: the reliance on English-language sources, which may under-represent Arabic- and Hebrew-language debate, and the provisional character of any analysis of very recent events, whose longer-term significance remains open to revision.

Palestinianism as a Transatlantic Political-Rhetorical Phenomenon

The term “Palestinianism” has a contested intellectual genealogy. Edward Said deployed it in his 1970 essay, “The Palestinian Experience.” He elaborated it in subsequent writings to denote a positive political and cultural movement built on

the reassertion of Palestine's pluralistic history (Said, 1979). In subsequent academic usage, the term has been employed to designate the constellation of values, beliefs, traditions, and historical memory underwriting Palestinian nationhood as a counter-Zionist political project (Franks, 2009). For this article, however, I am concerned with neither Palestinian nationalism in its indigenous register nor Palestinianism as a positive cultural-political project animated by Palestinians themselves. Rather, I employ the term in a more restricted sense to designate a distinctively transatlantic political-rhetorical phenomenon: the elevation of solidarity with the Palestinian

cause into a constitutive marker of progressive political identity in Western democracies, particularly among younger cohorts and university-educated populations, since October 7, 2023.

This transatlantic Palestinianism has several distinguishing features. First, it operates at a high level of rhetorical generality, frequently invoking universalist categories such as decolonization, anti-imperialism, settler colonialism, apartheid, and genocide while remaining notably unconcerned with the specific institutional, demographic, and territorial questions that any actual Palestinian state would have to address (Busbridge, 2018; Lustick, 2019; Wolfe, 2006).



Palestinian families are forced to flee from Nasr due to the ongoing Israeli attacks in Gaza City, Gaza on September 21, 2025. Photo: VCG, 2025).

Second, it exhibits limited engagement with the political programs and stated preferences of actually existing Palestinian political actors—the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the various factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization—treating these institutional realities as either invisible or as morally compromised stand-ins for an idealized “Palestinian people” who can be invoked without specification. Third, it is increasingly decoupled from the actual interests and policies of Arab states, including those that bear most directly on the Palestinian question. Fourth, it functions performatively as a marker of in-group identity within transatlantic progressive milieus, generating significant social consequences for nonconformity that operate independently of the substantive policy debates the rhetoric ostensibly addresses (Hersh & Royden, 2023; Zacher & Shemla, 2024).

Not that Western publics have come to view Israel more critically (which is well-documented), but that this critical view has produced no corresponding strategic reorientation by Western or regional governments, and that the rhetorical practice itself appears to be implicated in the dynamic it ostensibly opposes.

Two brief illustrations make these indicators more concrete. The first is the campus mobilization register. The “Day of Resistance” toolkit circulated by National Students for Justice in Palestine in the

days after October 7, 2023 framed events overwhelmingly through the universalist vocabulary of liberation, decolonization, and settler-colonial rupture—describing the breaching of the Gaza perimeter as the puncturing of “the facade of an impenetrable settler colony”—while offering no account of the governance arrangements, territorial boundaries, security guarantees, or institutions of political representation that any Palestinian polity would require (National Students for Justice in Palestine, 2023). The second is the register of institutional resolution. The divestment referendum passed by 76 percent of the Yale student body in December 2024 (Grether, 2024) exemplifies a broader genre of campus measures organized around the moral grammar of complicity, apartheid, and divestment, in which the operative demand is the severing of the invoking institution’s material entanglements rather than any specification of the political order to be constructed in Israel-Palestine. In both registers, the discourse foregrounds universal moral categories and largely brackets the institutional questions—borders, sovereignty, security, representation—on which the realization of its stated aspirations would depend. This is precisely the property that distinguishes transatlantic Palestinianism, in the restricted sense employed here, from the programmatic nationalism of Palestinian political actors themselves.

This characterization is not intended to deny the depth of moral concern animating much pro-Palestinian sentiment, nor to dismiss the genuine humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza that has produced widespread revulsion across Western societies. The evidence that Israeli military operations in Gaza have produced devastating civilian harm is overwhelming, and the legal and ethical questions raised by these operations have rightly generated substantial scholarly and judicial scrutiny (International

Court of Justice, 2024). My analytical claim is rather that transatlantic Palestinianism, as a discursive formation, exhibits properties that distinguish it from earlier patterns of Western engagement with the Israel-Palestine conflict and that these properties are themselves objects of political-sociological inquiry.

Several features of the contemporary moment warrant emphasis. The framing of Israel as a settler-colonial project, formerly confined to specialist academic literatures, has migrated into mainstream public discourse at a notable pace (Busbridge, 2018; Khalidi, 2020; Wolfe, 2006). The genocide framework, advanced by South Africa in its International Court of Justice filing of December 2023 and by numerous human rights organizations, has been adopted by majorities of citizens in several European states; recent surveys indicate that approximately 62 percent of Germans believe that Israeli operations in Gaza constitute genocide (Königshofen & Schmid, 2025). The apartheid framing, advanced authoritatively by Human Rights Watch in 2021, Amnesty International in 2022, and the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem in the same period, has likewise become widely diffused (Amnesty International, 2022; B'Tselem, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021). Each of these frameworks contains significant analytical content and has generated substantial academic debate (NGO Monitor, 2022; Pedersen, 2023). However, each also functions in the contemporary discursive environment as a marker of political alignment, with adoption signaling identification with a particular political-cultural formation.

What is striking about the contemporary diffusion of these frameworks is their capacity to coexist with-and indeed flourish alongside-the systematic foreclosure of the political conditions that would allow their stated objectives to be realized. Calls for Palestinian self-determination, justice, and state-

hood escalate in volume and visibility precisely as the institutional capacity of Palestinian political actors collapses, as Israeli settlement expansion accelerates, as the Gulf states quietly deepen security cooperation with Israel, and as the regional balance of power tilts decisively against Iran and its proxies. This is the paradox the article seeks to explain: not that Western publics have come to view Israel more critically (which is well-documented), but that this critical view has produced no corresponding strategic reorientation by Western or regional governments, and that the rhetorical practice itself appears to be implicated in the dynamic it ostensibly opposes.

A useful theoretical analogy may be drawn from the literature on “symbolic politics” in international relations, which describes how states and publics may invest considerable resources in performative commitments that are decoupled from operational policy (Kaufman, 2001; Wendt, 1999). Transatlantic Palestinianism functions in this register: as a discursive practice whose primary effects are the constitution and reinforcement of in-group political identity, with strategic consequences for the actors invoked in the discourse that may run counter to the discourse’s stated aspirations. The wave of state recognitions of Palestine in September 2025 illustrates the dynamic. As Beres (2025) argues in JST, recognition by 157 states does not, in international legal terms, constitute the existence of a Palestinian state in the absence of the territorial, institutional, and demographic conditions specified in the 1933 Montevideo Convention. The proliferation of recognitions thus operates in significant part as a symbolic transaction within and among recognizing states-a marker of moral position-taking that does not produce the political object it appears to invoke.

The Transatlantic Public Opinion Shift

The empirical evidence for a historically significant shift in transatlantic public opinion against Israel since October 7, 2023, is substantial and converges across multiple polling instruments and methodological approaches. This section reviews the principal findings, with attention to the partisan and generational cleavages that structure the shift and to the cross-national variation across Western Europe.

Because the surveys canvassed here employ several distinct attitude measures that are not directly interchangeable, it is worth distinguishing them at the outset. At least four measures recur: (a) favorability toward Israel as a country; (b) comparative sympathy for Israelis versus Palestinians; (c) evaluations of the proportionality or justification of specific Israeli military operations; and (d) support for the two-state solution as a preferred outcome. These measures can move in different directions—support for the two-state framework, for

Table 1 summarizes the principal surveys drawn upon in this section, the dates and countries they cover, and the specific attitude each measures.

(Principal transatlantic public-opinion surveys on Israel-Palestine, October 2023–2026).

Survey (source)	Date	Country / region	Attitude measured	Key finding
Silver et al. (2024); Silver (2026)	2022–Apr 2026	United States	Favorability toward Israel	Favorable view 55% (2022) → 41% (Feb 2024) → 37% (Apr 2026); “very unfavorable” ~10% → 28%
Brenan (2025)	Feb 2025	United States	Comparative sympathy (Israelis vs. Palestinians)	Sympathy for Israelis 46% (25-year low); for Palestinians 33% (record high)
Vigers (2026)	2026	United States	Sympathy / two-state support	Israelis no longer lead Palestinians in sympathy (a first); two-state support 57%
Smeltz & El Baz (2025)	2025	United States	Warmth rating (0–100)	Israel warmth 50 (near half-century low); among Democrats 41
Smith (2025)	May 2025	6 Western European states	Net favorability; operation proportionality	Net favorability –44 (Germany) to –55 (Spain); only 6–16% judged Gaza operations proportionate
Bertelsmann Stiftung	2025	Germany	Favorability toward Israel	Favorable view 46% (2021) → 36% (2025)
ZDF (2025); Königshofen & Schmid (2025); Stolz (2025)	2025	Germany	Justification of operations; genocide perception; arms exports	76% deemed military action unjustified; 62% “genocide”; 51% opposed arms exports
Silver (2025)	Spring 2025	24 countries	Views of Israel and Netanyahu	Negative across nearly all surveyed nations
Brenan (2025)	2025	United States	Net sympathy for Israel by generation	+46 (Boomers) to +32 (Gen X) to –2 (Millennials)
Marist Poll (2023)	Oct 2023	United States	Support for U.S. backing of Israel	48% of Gen Z/Millennials vs. 83% of Boomers
Telhami (2025)	Aug 2025	United States	Sympathy among young Republicans	24% of Republicans 18–34 vs. 52% of those 35+

Compiled by the author.

instance, as an ideational preference, has remained high or even recovered, even as favorability toward Israel has fallen to record lows-and care is therefore required in comparing them across countries and over time. Table 1 summarizes the principal surveys drawn upon in this section, the dates and countries they cover, and the specific attitude each measures.

The American Trajectory

Pew Research Center polling indicates that the share of Americans holding a favorable view of Israel declined from 55 percent in 2022 to 41 percent in February 2024 and 37 percent by April 2026 (Silver et al., 2024; Silver, 2026). The share holding a “very unfavorable” view of Israel nearly tripled across this period, from approximately 10 percent in 2022 to 28 percent in 2026. Confidence in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reached 27 percent in the April 2026 survey, with 59 percent of respondents expressing no confidence in his leadership. Critically, the negative shift extends across both major parties: in the most recent surveys, majorities of adults under fifty in both the Democratic and Republican parties rate Israel and Netanyahu negatively (Silver, 2026).

Gallup’s annual World Affairs survey reveals shifts of comparable magnitude. The share of Americans expressing greater sympathy for Israelis than Palestinians fell to 46 percent in February 2025, the lowest level recorded in twenty-five years of tracking (Brenan, 2025). By 2026, Israelis no longer led Palestinians in American sympathies—a historic first in the polling series. The share of Americans expressing greater sympathy for Palestinians reached 33 percent in 2025, an all-time high. Notably, support for the two-state solution returned to 57 percent in 2026, near the record of 58 percent recorded in 2003, suggesting that the public erosion of support for Israeli

policy has not been accompanied by abandonment of the two-state framework as the preferred ideational solution (Vigers, 2026)—even as this article will argue, the material conditions for that solution have been systematically extinguished.

The partisan polarization evident in these data is historically unprecedented. Among Democrats, 59 percent expressed greater sympathy for Palestinians than Israelis in the 2025 Gallup survey, the first majority of any partisan group ever recorded as more sympathetic to Palestinians. The Israel favorability gap between Democrats and Republicans reached 35 points in the most recent Pew data, and the gap on support for a two-state solution reached 44 points in the most recent Gallup data, both representing the widest partisan divides in the history of these series. However, even Republican support for Israel has eroded: the 2026 Gallup survey recorded a 15-point decline in Republican favorability toward Israel from the previous year to 69 percent, the lowest figure in more than two decades of polling (Vigers, 2026).

Smeltz and El Baz’s (2025) survey provides a useful synthesis: Israel’s warmth rating among Americans reached 50 on a 100-point scale, the lowest figure recorded in nearly half a century of Council polling. Among Democrats, the warmth rating fell to 41, the first time the rating has fallen below the midline of the scale since the Council began tracking in 1978.

The European Trajectory

The European pattern shows even more pronounced negative shifts. YouGov’s EuroTrack survey of approximately 8,600 respondents across six Western European countries in May 2025 found net favorability toward Israel at record lows in every country surveyed: –44 in Germany, –46 in the United Kingdom, –48 in France, –52 in Italy, –54 in Denmark, and –55 in Spain (Smith, 2025).

Favorability ratings ranged from 13 to 21 percent across the six countries, while unfavorable ratings ranged from 63 to 70 percent. Only between 6 and 16 percent of respondents in any country believed that Israeli operations in Gaza had been proportionate. The share expressing greater sympathy for the Israeli side ranged from 7 to 18 percent, the lowest or joint-lowest figures in five of the six countries since October 7, 2023.

Germany's case warrants particular attention, given the centrality of the relationship with Israel to postwar German political identity. The Bertelsmann Stiftung (2025) reported that the share of Germans holding favorable views of Israel fell from 46 percent in 2021 to 36 percent in 2025. Approximately 76 percent of Germans surveyed by ZDF (2025) believed Israeli military action to be unjustified; 62 percent believed Israeli actions in Gaza constituted genocide (Königshofen & Schmid, 2025); and 51 percent opposed continued German weapons exports to Israel (Stolz, 2025). Among Germans under 40, the Bertelsmann Stiftung (2025) reported that 40 percent favored a reduction in Germany's relations with Israel—a finding without precedent in the postwar German polling record.

The Pew Research Center's spring 2025 24-country survey confirmed that views of Israel and Netanyahu were negative across virtually all surveyed nations, with 58 percent of Israelis themselves reporting that they believed their country was not respected internationally (Silver, 2025). The cross-national pattern of negative shift is sufficiently uniform across Western Europe to suggest that the underlying drivers operate at the level of the transatlantic system rather than reflecting nationally idiosyncratic political dynamics.

Generational and Institutional Dimensions

The generational structure of the shift in public opinion is among its most striking features. Net sympathy for Israel in Gallup's historical data ranges from +46 among Baby Boomers to +32 among Generation X to −2 among Millennials. NPR/PBS/Marist polling in October 2023 found that 48 percent of Generation Z and Millennial respondents believed the United States should publicly support Israel, compared with 83 percent of Baby Boomers (Marist Poll, 2023). Among Republican voters aged 18 to 34 in University of Maryland/YouGov polling in August 2025, only 24 percent expressed greater sympathy for Israelis, compared with 52 percent of Republicans aged 35 and older (Telhami, 2025). A Carnegie Endowment survey of early 2025 found that a plurality of Generation Z respondents who voted for Vice President Harris in 2024 felt most connected to Palestinians (Chivvis & Morganbesser, 2025).

Institutional manifestations of the shift have been correspondingly significant. The Princeton Bridging Divides Initiative (2024) recorded approximately 3,700 Israel-Palestine demonstration events in the United States since October 7, 2023, with approximately 1,150 encampment-related demonstrations at 150 colleges across more than 35 states. More than 3,000 individuals were arrested or detained in connection with these protests. Similar mobilizations occurred at 34 British campuses and at universities across Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Belgium (Princeton Bridging Divides Initiative, 2024). The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement registered substantial institutional gains: approximately 160 BDS measures were considered at more than 70 American colleges in 2024, with approximately 60 passing; the Yale student body voted 76 percent in favor of divestment of the university's 41 billion dollar endowment from weapons manufacturers in December 2024 (Grether, 2024).



People participate in a pro-Palestinian protest in Rome, Italy, on Sept. 22, 2025. (Photo: Li Jing/Xinhua, 2025).

These mobilizations have generated significant electoral effects. The British Labor Party lost four parliamentary seats to pro-Palestine independent candidates in the July 2024 general election. In Germany, Die Linke nearly tripled its membership to approximately 123,000, with substantial influxes of younger voters identified with pro-Palestinian positions; meanwhile, the Alternative für Deutschland repositioned itself, somewhat paradoxically given its origins, as a defender of Israel and of Jewish life in Germany, generating the political configuration that scholars have analyzed under the rubric of “horseshoe theory” in studies of German political attitudes toward Israel (Zacher & Shemla, 2024). In the United States, the Democratic Party’s 2024 presidential campaign was complicated by the “uncommitted” movement in the primary process, which secured 13 percent of the vote in Michigan in protest of the Biden administration’s Israel policy.

The wave of state recognitions of Palestine in September 2025 represents the most significant institutional outcome of this shift. The United Kingdom, France, Canada, Australia, and Portugal joined Belgium, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Andorra, and San Marino in extending recognition during the eightieth UN General Assembly session. France’s recognition was particularly significant as the first by a permanent member of the UN Security Council. By the close of the session, 157 of 193 UN member states recognized Palestine, including 14 of the 19 Group of Twenty members and, for the first time, three Group of Seven members (Beres, 2025). However, as the next section will demonstrate, this rhetorical achievement has been accompanied by and has not impeded the strategic developments that have rendered the political object of recognition increasingly chimerical.

Strategic Realism: The U.S.–Gulf–Israel–Iran Convergence

If the empirical record of transatlantic public opinion is one of unprecedented negative shift, the empirical record of regional strategic developments tells a markedly different story. From October 2023 through early 2026, the United States, Israel, and the principal Gulf Arab monarchies have advanced a strategic agenda whose central organizing principle is the containment, weakening, and rollback of Iranian regional influence. This agenda has produced military and political results of historical magnitude: the destruction of Hamas as a military force, the decapitation of Hezbollah, the collapse of the Ba'ath regime in Damascus, the systematic degradation of Iran's broader "Axis of Resistance," and the direct American and Israeli military strikes on Iranian nuclear infrastructure in June 2025 and February 2026. These developments have proceeded despite, and to a significant extent in defiance of, the negative public opinion trajectory documented in the previous section. They form the empirical basis for the article's central claim that strategic calculation in the present transatlantic-regional system operates on a plane meaningfully distinct from public sentiment.

The Twelve-Day War and the Striking of Iranian Nuclear Infrastructure

The June 2025 Israel-Iran war, designated the Twelve-Day War in subsequent Israeli usage, represents the most significant direct interstate confrontation in the modern Middle Eastern strategic environment. The proximate trigger was the International Atomic Energy Agency's determination on June 12, 2025, that Iran was in non-compliance with its nuclear safeguards obligations-the first

such formal determination since 2005-together with reporting that Iran possessed sufficient uranium enriched to 60 percent for the production of approximately nine nuclear warheads (International Atomic Energy Agency, 2025a, 2025b). The strategic context, however, was the systematic degradation of Iran's regional position over the preceding 20 months and the corresponding judgment in Jerusalem and Washington that the window for direct military action against the Iranian nuclear program had opened (Rodgers, 2025; Shapiro & Waldo, 2026).

Operation Rising Lion, launched by Israel on June 13, 2025, deployed more than 200 fighter aircraft in coordinated strikes against approximately 100 targets, including the Natanz and Fordow nuclear facilities. A simultaneous covert operation by Mossad killed approximately 30 Iranian generals and 9 nuclear scientists in the opening hours of the campaign, including Major General Hossein Salami, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces (Shapiro & Waldo, 2026). Iranian retaliation on June 15 produced ballistic missile strikes on Israeli population centers, including Bat Yam, Rehovot, and Tel Aviv, killing 9 Israelis and wounding approximately 200; an Iranian strike on an Israeli hospital was widely condemned as a war crime.

On June 22, 2025, the United States entered the conflict directly through Operation Midnight Hammer. Seven B-2 Spirit stealth bombers, supported by approximately 125 additional aircraft, delivered 14 GBU-57A/B Massive Ordnance Penetrators-the 30,000-pound bunker-busting weapons whose first operational use occurred in this strike-against the Fordow and Natanz nuclear facilities (Rodgers, 2025). President Trump declared in the immediate aftermath that Iran's key nuclear



Supporters of Lebanon's Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah carry his pictures, following his killing in an Israeli airstrike in Beirut's southern suburbs, in Saida, southern Lebanon on September 28, 2024. (Photo: CGTN, 2024).

enrichment facilities had been comprehensively destroyed. A ceasefire took effect on June 24, ending the principal phase of the conflict after twelve days of combat that produced more than 600 Iranian and 29 Israeli fatalities. Prime Minister Netanyahu declared that Israel had eliminated the existential nuclear threat from Iran.

The strategic significance of the Twelve-Day War lies less in any definitive resolution of the Iranian nuclear question—assessments of which remain contested, with leaked Defense Intelligence Agency analysis suggesting setbacks of months rather than years and the disposition of Iran's 400-kilogram stockpile of 60-percent enriched uranium uncertain (Rodgers, 2025)—than in the demonstration of a degree of operational

coordination and strategic alignment among the United States, Israel, and the Gulf monarchies that is without close historical precedent. Israeli strike packages transited Saudi airspace; Bahraini, Emirati, and Saudi air-defense assets engaged Iranian missiles and drones; and the wider regional architecture of bases, intelligence-sharing, and logistics operated as a unified system of containment against Iran (Foreign Policy, 2026). When massive Iranian protests in January 2026 destabilized the regime, follow-on operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion in February 2026 produced the killing of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei on the first day and strikes against more than 15,000 targets across Iran—the most extensive air campaign in the post-1945 record.

The Degradation of the Axis of Resistance

The Twelve-Day War was preceded and enabled by the systematic dismantling of the Iranian-led “Axis of Resistance” across the period from October 2023 to early 2025. The most spectacular operation in this campaign was Israel’s September 17, 2024, “pager strike,” in which thousands of Mossad-modified pagers exploded simultaneously across Lebanon, killing 42 and wounding more than 4,000 Hezbollah operatives and supporters (The Soufan Center, 2025). Ten days later, on September 27, the assassination of Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah by an Israeli airstrike employing more than eighty bunker-busting munitions decapitated the organization’s political and military leadership. Nasrallah’s designated successor, Hashem Safieddine, was killed on October 3. The Century Foundation’s subsequent assessment characterized the campaign as having broken Hezbollah’s military capacity and eviscerated its leadership through a combination of technological superiority, intelligence penetration, and operational ruthlessness (Ali-Khan & Cambanis, 2025).

Hamas suffered comparable degradation. Ismail Haniyeh, the organization’s political bureau chief, was assassinated in Tehran in July 2024; Yahya Sinwar, the senior Gaza-based military leader and architect of the October 7, 2023, attacks, was killed by Israeli forces in Gaza in October 2024. Mahmoudian (2025) assessed that Hamas had been functionally dismantled as a military force by the close of 2024, retaining significant political and ideological reach but lacking the organizational coherence and military capability to project regional influence.

The most consequential strategic shock to the Iranian regional architecture came on December 8, 2024, with the collapse of the Ba’ath regime in Damascus following an eleven-day offensive by Hayat

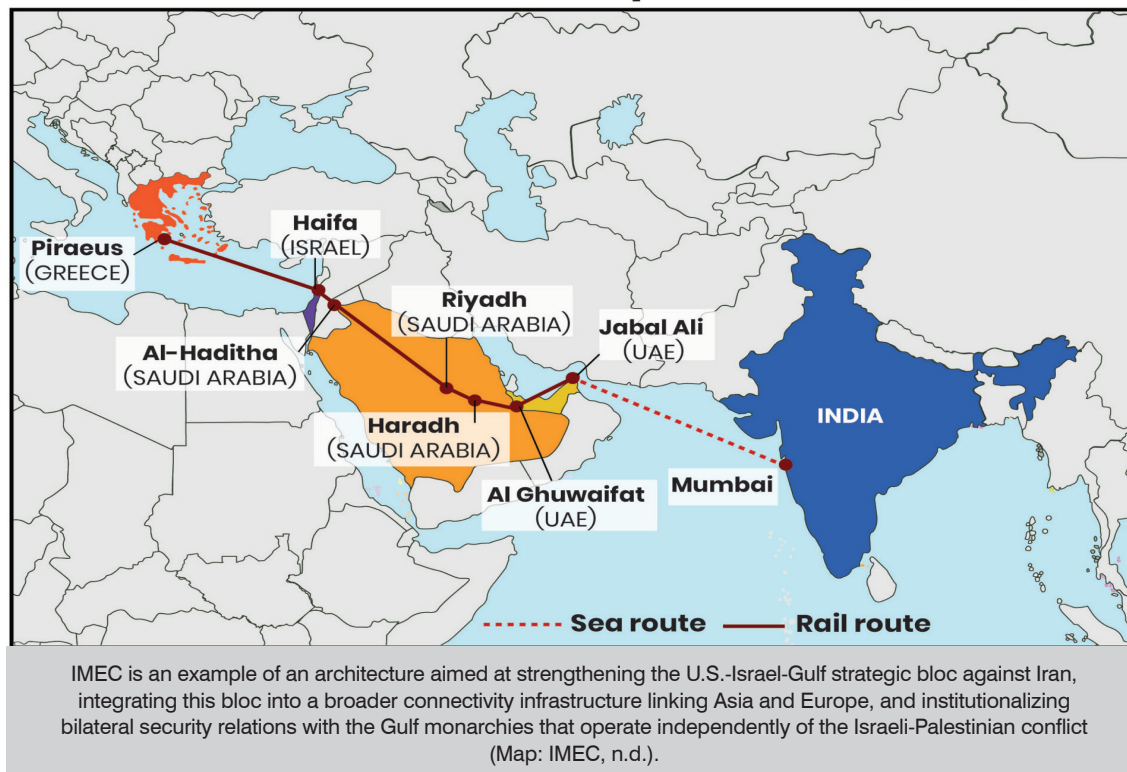
Tahrir al-Sham. Mahmoudian (2025) characterized the loss of Syria as the evaporation of billions of dollars in Iranian investment and the closure of Iran’s premier gateway to the Arab world. Iranian access to Hezbollah was now contingent on the goodwill of an HTS government in Damascus that had made clear its hostility to the Iranian project; the logistical pipeline through which Iran had sustained its Lebanese ally for four decades was severed almost overnight.

Of the principal proxy actors comprising the Axis of Resistance, only the Houthis in Yemen retained substantial operational coherence by 2025, and even there, the Israeli strike on Sanaa in August 2025 killed twelve of the sixteen senior figures of the Houthis’ government (The Soufan Center, 2025). The Iraqi Shi’a militia constellation, the smaller Iranian-aligned formations in Syria, and the various political-paramilitary affiliates across the broader region all suffered substantial setbacks across this period. Mansour et al. (2025) offered a useful corrective by noting that the Axis of Resistance had demonstrated significant adaptive capacity in earlier periods and that obituaries for the Iranian regional project should be issued with caution. The cumulative effect of the developments cataloged here, however, is the most substantial reordering of the regional balance of power against Iran since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979.

The Resilience and Quiet Expansion of the Abraham Accords

The Abraham Accords framework, established in 2020 between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, has demonstrated remarkable resilience across the post-October 7 period. No signatory has severed diplomatic relations with Israel despite the political pressure generated

India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC)



by the Gaza war; the operational architecture of bilateral cooperation has deepened in numerous concrete respects (Makovsky, 2025). The United Arab Emirates ratified a bilateral customs agreement with Israel in April 2025; Elbit Systems concluded a \$2.3 billion defense contract with the Emirati government in December 2025; and Morocco signed a substantial artillery contract with Elbit and participated in joint exercises with Israeli forces during African Lion 202. The Accords welcomed two new signatories in late 2025: Kazakhstan in November and Somaliland in December. Syria's post-Ba'ath government under Ahmad al-Shar'a declined to join despite American encouragement (Makovsky, 2025; The Heritage Foundation, 2026).

The economic substrate of the Accords has ex-

panded substantially. Trade between Israel and the United Arab Emirates rose from approximately tens of millions of dollars annually before 2020 to roughly 3 billion dollars in 2023, and Bahrain's trade with Israel grew approximately ninefold across the first seven months of 2024 (Makovsky, 2025). Security cooperation has intensified even as public diplomacy has contracted. Foreign Policy's (2026) assessment of the Twelve-Day War documented three distinct postures across the Gulf states: a restraint-oriented posture by Qatar and Oman; an active balancing posture by the United Arab Emirates, which proved willing to participate covertly in military operations against Iran; and a hedging posture by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain, which assisted the war effort while maintaining public ambiguity.

The Iranian retaliation phase exposed the limits of formal neutrality: Iranian strikes targeted oil and gas facilities, airports, and civilian infrastructure across all six Gulf Cooperation Council states, demonstrating that the Gulf monarchies could not extricate themselves from a confrontation in which their geographic position made them unavoidable participants.

The disjuncture between the public rhetoric of Gulf solidarity with the Palestinians and the operational reality of Gulf-Israeli security cooperation is among the most analytically significant features of the contemporary regional order.

The disjuncture between the public rhetoric of Gulf solidarity with the Palestinians and the operational reality of Gulf-Israeli security cooperation is among the most analytically significant features of the contemporary regional order. As reported in *The Atlantic*, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman privately acknowledged to Secretary of State Antony Blinken in January 2025 that his personal investment in the Palestinian cause was minimal, but that domestic political pressure required public affirmations of commitment (Foer, 2024). This admission, while embarrassing to the Saudi government when reported, captures a structural feature of the regional politics: the Gulf monarchies maintain rhetorical investments in Palestinian statehood that operate at significant remove from their actual strategic calculations, which are organized around containing Iran, securing Amer-

ican security guarantees, and deepening economic integration with Israel and the broader Western system.

Szalai's (2025) comparative analysis of Gulf state United Nations Security Council speeches from 2020 through 2024 confirmed this pattern empirically: while support for Palestinian statehood remained a central rhetorical theme, the Abraham Accords and the strategic shock of October 7 produced significant alterations in Gulf strategic narratives toward greater accommodation of Israeli regional security concerns and away from the previous discursive primacy of the Palestinian cause.

The Saudi-Israeli Trajectory

The trajectory of Saudi-Israeli normalization—the central remaining ambition of the Abraham Accords project—has been more complicated. Public Saudi positions hardened substantially after October 7. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman publicly affirmed in September 2024 that the Kingdom would not establish diplomatic relations with Israel in the absence of a Palestinian state, and Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan declared in October 2024 that normalization was off the table. Saudi Arabia subsequently joined Norway in launching the Global Alliance for the Two-State Solution in September 2024, a diplomatic initiative endorsed by approximately ninety states (Bunzel, 2025; Guzansky, 2026).

Behind these public positions, however, the operational record of Saudi-Israeli cooperation has continued to deepen. Saudi military helicopters reportedly intercepted Iranian drones during the June 2025 war (Zaken, 2025); the Washington Post documented expanded military coordination among Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates with Israel

during the Hamas war (Kenner, 2025). The Trump administration's May 2025 Riyadh visit resulted in a \$142 billion arms sale and a \$600 billion Saudi investment package, all without any Saudi commitment to Israel normalization (Hellyer, 2025).

Bunzel's (2025) assessment captured the analytical paradox: the principal incentive that had driven Saudi interest in normalization-the shared fear of Iranian aggression-had receded substantially with the degradation of the Iranian position, reducing the strategic urgency of formal diplomatic relations even as the operational substance of cooperation deepened (Bunzel, 2025). Guzansky (2026) reached a similar conclusion, noting that Riyadh now identified more risks than opportunities in formal normalization while continuing to expand *de facto* coordination. Hellyer (2025) observed that Washington had front-loaded sensitive technology cooperation, high-end defense sales, and upgraded security assurances without obtaining any Saudi commitment on normalization. This pattern suggests the United States itself has come to view formal normalization as less strategically necessary than the substantive bilateral relationships that have emerged in its absence.

The Trump Administration and the Architecture of Regional Hegemony

The return of the Trump administration in January 2025 produced a marked acceleration of the strategic dynamics described above. The administration's February 2025 "Gaza Riviera" proposal, developed by Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner, and Aryeh Lightstone, projected at 112 billion dollars over a decade, was opposed by 62 percent of Americans in subsequent polling and rejected by all Arab governments approached on the question

of Palestinian displacement (Baroud, 2025). Ambassador Mike Huckabee's May 2025 visit to the West Bank settlement of Shilo and his prior characterizations of Palestinian identity as a political construction signaled the administration's alignment with the Israeli right-wing consensus on territorial questions. Beyond the headline-generating proposals, the substantive policy architecture has been organized around three principal objectives: consolidating an American-Israeli-Gulf strategic bloc against Iran, integrating this bloc into broader connectivity infrastructure linking Asia and Europe, and institutionalizing bilateral security relationships with the Gulf monarchies that operate independently of the Israel-Palestine question.

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, agreed at the September 2023 Group of Twenty summit and pursued with renewed intensity by the second Trump administration, exemplifies this architecture. The corridor's projected route, from India through the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel to European markets, institutionalizes the regional integration initiated by the Abraham Accords and creates infrastructural realities that progressively foreclose alternative configurations (Roche, 2025; Szalai, 2025). The I2U2 framework-the quadrilateral grouping of India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States-has likewise advanced through high-level dialogue in New Delhi in April 2025 and a Modi address to the Israeli Knesset in February 2026 that explicitly invoked I2U2 and IMEC as organizing frameworks for the regional order. For Szalai (2025), these initiatives offer the Gulf states the opportunity to consolidate their roles as connectivity hubs linking Asia, the Middle East, and Europe-a structural inducement for continued cooperation with Israel that operates independently of the Palestinian question.

The aggregate effect of these developments is the emergence of a regional order in which Israeli military supremacy, American security guarantees, Gulf economic integration, and the systematic exclusion of Iran from the regional architecture form a self-reinforcing system. The political space for Western governments to translate the public opinion shifts documented in Section 3 into substantial policy reorientation has been constrained by the strategic imperatives of containing Iran, maintaining the Gulf relationships, and securing the connectivity infrastructure on which significant economic interests depend. Public opinion has shifted; strategic calculation has not. The two have come to operate on increasingly disjoint planes.

Three concrete instances from the period under review crystallize this decoupling. First, at the very moment of the September 2025 recognition wave, when the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Australia, and Portugal extended recognition of Palestinian statehood, the operational architecture of Gulf-Israeli security coordination and the IMEC connectivity project continued to advance without interruption, the recognitions registering as a symbolic transaction that left the strategic order untouched. Second, Saudi Arabia's public sponsorship of the Global Alliance for the Two-State Solution, launched with Norway in September 2024 and endorsed by some ninety states, coincided with the deepening of de facto Saudi-Israeli coordination, including the reported interception of Iranian drones by Saudi assets during the June 2025 war and the conclusion of the May 2025 Riyadh arms and investment package that proceeded without any Saudi commitment on normalization (Hellyer, 2025; Zaken, 2025). Third, and most starkly, the German case juxtaposed a public majority persuaded that Israeli operations in Gaza constituted genocide

with a governmental posture anchored in the doctrine of Israeli security as *Staatsräson*—that placed Germany within the European blocking minority preventing Union-level sanctions on Israel (Königshofen & Schmid, 2025; Stolz, 2025). In each instance, symbolic or public support for Palestinian statehood coexisted with—and did not disrupt—continued strategic coordination, the empirical signature of the decoupling this section has traced.

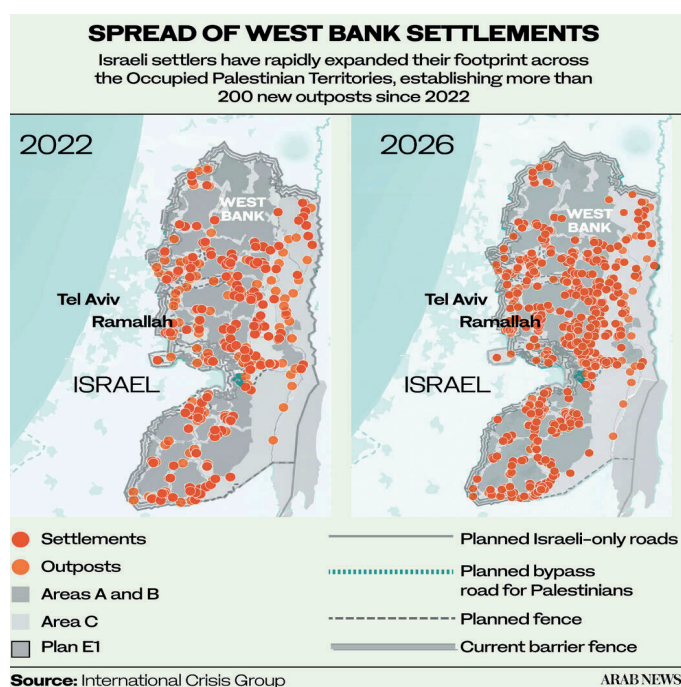
The End of the Two-State Solution: Extending the JST Argument

The cumulative implication of the developments examined in the previous sections is that the two-state solution—the organizing framework of international diplomacy on the Israel-Palestine conflict for more than half a century—has structurally ended as a realistic political possibility. By “structurally ended” I mean neither a merely temporary infeasibility nor an irreversibility guaranteed for all future time, but rather that the institutional, territorial, and demographic prerequisites of a two-state settlement have been undermined to a degree that renders such a settlement politically unattainable for the foreseeable future absent a transformation of the underlying conditions—a stronger claim than that the framework is deeply weakened but a weaker one than that its revival is permanently and irreversibly foreclosed. The argument is thus one of structural foreclosure under prevailing and reasonably foreseeable conditions rather than of impossibility for all time. This claim has been advanced with increasing analytical force by contributors to the Jerusalem Strategic Tribune across the post-October 7 period (Beres, 2025; Huberman, 2024; Mandelbaum, 2024; Schueftan, n.d.; Wertman, n.d.), and it con-

verges with conclusions reached independently by scholars of varied political commitments including Lustick (2019), Barnett, Brown, Lynch, and Telhami (2023), Thrall (2017), Baconi (2018), and O'Malley (2015). This section extends the JST argument sympathetically by integrating its policy-oriented analysis with the empirical record assembled in the preceding sections.

The case for the structural end of the two-state solution rests on several mutually reinforcing developments. First, the demographic and territorial realities on the ground have made a geographically coherent Palestinian state increasingly difficult to construct. The settler population in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem, reached 529,455 by December 2024, with approximately 700,000 settlers including East Jerusalem (Israel Policy Fo-

rum, 2025; Peace Now, 2025). The Israeli government advanced 28,872 settlement housing units in 2024, representing an increase of approximately 250 percent over the 2018 baseline (European External Action Service, 2025). The number of settlements and outposts reached 210 in 2025, up from 141 in 2022, an increase of nearly 50 percent in three years. In 2024, the Israeli government declared approximately 24,258 dunams (about 6,000 acres) as state land, equivalent to roughly half of all such declarations since the Oslo Accords (European External Action Service, 2025). The Israel Policy Forum (2025) projected that 2025 would prove the largest year of construction approvals in the history of the settlement enterprise, exceeding the cumulative approvals of the preceding five years.



In 2024, the Israeli government declared approximately 24,258 dunams as state land, equivalent to roughly half of all such declarations since the Oslo Accords (Graphic: Arab News, 2026).

The territorial trajectory is one dimension of a broader hardening of the Israeli position across all of the final-status issues that the Oslo framework had deferred for negotiation—territory and settlements, Jerusalem, refugees, and the very question of Palestinian statehood—and it is this cumulative shift, rather than settlement expansion alone, that has hollowed out the two-state solution. In Jerusalem, the trajectory has moved from the studied ambiguity of the Oslo period toward the consolidation of exclusive Israeli control: the United States relocated its embassy to Jerusalem in 2018, recognizing the city as Israel’s capital, and successive Israeli governments have treated a unified Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty as non-negotiable, foreclosing the shared or divided capital that every serious two-state blueprint had presupposed. On refugees, Israeli governments have hardened from the conditional formulas entertained at Camp David and Taba toward a categorical rejection of any Palestinian right of return, a position now advanced as a precondition rather than as a subject of negotiation. On statehood itself, the shift has been the most consequential: where the Oslo-era Israeli mainstream at least nominally accepted an eventual Palestinian state as the horizon of the process, the Knesset voted overwhelmingly in July 2024 to reject the establishment of a Palestinian state west of the Jordan under any circumstances, and the governing coalition has embraced the language of sovereignty and annexation over the West Bank (International Crisis Group, 2025). Each of these shifts has moved the operative Israeli position further from the parameters that have defined two-state diplomacy since Oslo, eroding the framework not only through facts on the ground but also through the progressive withdrawal of one of its two indispensable parties from its foundational premises.

Second, the institutional capacity of Palestinian political actors to constitute a viable state has collapsed. The Palestinian Authority, governing the West Bank under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, who at age 90 has remained in office since 2005 on an expired four-year mandate, commands the support of approximately 6 percent of polled Palestinians, with 80 percent calling for his resignation (Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2025). Hamas, governing Gaza until its operational dismantling in 2024, drew 29 percent support to Fatah’s 18 percent in the same survey. However, it lacks the institutional machinery and international legitimacy to function as a state-constituting actor. As a recent Third World Quarterly analysis has documented, the post–October 7 period has been characterized by the Palestinian Authority’s flawed expectations and failed leadership—a structural delegitimation that further diminishes the prospects for any reconstituted political authority capable of governing a Palestinian state (Iqtait, 2025).

The disjuncture between the public rhetoric of Gulf solidarity with the Palestinians and the operational reality of Gulf-Israeli security cooperation is among the most analytically significant features of the contemporary regional order.

Third, the regional and international political conditions that historically sustained two-state diplomacy have been substantially transformed. The Arab states most directly invested in the Palestinian

question-Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the smaller Gulf monarchies-have demonstrated through both their public diplomacy and operational behavior that their strategic priorities lie elsewhere. The Crown Prince's private acknowledgment to Secretary Blinken (Foer, 2024) that his personal commitment to the Palestinian cause is limited captures a broader pattern in which the Gulf states have substantially decoupled their strategic calculations from the Palestinian question. The Trump administration's February 2025 Gaza proposal, however unrealistic in its specifics, signaled a fundamental transformation in American policy away from the bipartisan two-state consensus that had structured American engagement with the conflict since the early 1990s.

The JST analysis articulates this conjunction with particular clarity. Beres (2025) argues that recog-

nition by 157 states does not constitute Palestinian statehood in the absence of the Montevideo Convention conditions: a defined territory, a permanent population, an effective government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states. None of these conditions obtains in the West Bank, Gaza, or any combined territorial configuration under contemporary circumstances. Huberman (2024), writing in the immediate aftermath of October 7, characterized the assault on Israeli civilians as having destroyed the residual public trust necessary for political concessions and rendered the pursuit of Palestinian statehood under prevailing conditions "dangerous" from an Israeli security standpoint. Wertman (n.d.) characterized the Palestinian Authority's historical failure as the inability to transition from a revolutionary movement to a state-building enterprise.



April 18, 2024: The United States vetoed a draft resolution recommending Palestine's full membership in the United Nations, blocking its bid for full UN membership (Cartoon: Carlos Latuff/Global Times, 2024).

Mandelbaum (2024), reviewing Pipes's *Israel Victory*, summarizes the underlying analytical claim: the Israeli policy of conciliation across the Oslo period failed because Palestinian political actors interpreted it as evidence that rejectionism was producing strategic returns, generating a structural dynamic in which each Israeli concession amplified rather than diminished Palestinian commitment to maximalist goals.

This structural analysis converges, notwithstanding its different political valences, with the conclusions reached by scholars in varied analytical traditions. Lustick (2019) argues that the political reality between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River is already a one-state reality—a single political entity governing the territory—and that the persistence of two-state rhetoric obscures rather than addresses the operative political situation. Barnett et al. (2023) report that 60 percent of academic specialists in Middle Eastern politics describe the situation as a one-state reality with structural inequality. Thrall (2017) argues that the persistence of the two-state framework in Western policy discourse functions to defer the substantive resolution of the conflict indefinitely while permitting the ongoing erosion of Palestinian rights. Baconi (2018, 2024) characterizes the two-state solution as an unjust and impossible fantasy. O'Malley (2015) characterizes it as a delusion. Cordesman (2023) describes contemporary diplomatic efforts to revive the two-state solution as zombie diplomacy.

The convergence of these analyses across markedly different political starting points—JST contributors writing from a generally pro-Israeli perspective; Lustick, Thrall, and Baconi writing from positions sympathetic to Palestinian rights—lends substantial weight to the claim that the two-state solution has structurally ended as a realistic po-

litical possibility. What divides these analyses is not the empirical assessment of viability but the normative response to the assessment: JST contributors generally accept the resulting configuration as a strategic given. At the same time, the Lustick-Thrall-Baconi tradition advocates a pivot to frameworks of equal rights within a single political unit. The empirical record assembled in this article suggests that the JST analysis better captures the operative political reality: the strategic configuration that has emerged in the post-October 7 period is being institutionalized at a pace and scale that render alternative political projects increasingly chimerical.

It is in this context that the rhetorical apotheosis of transatlantic Palestinianism acquires analytical significance. The wave of state recognitions, the proliferation of campus mobilizations, the diffusion of settler-colonial and apartheid frameworks, the South African International Court of Justice case, and the broader cultural elevation of Palestinian solidarity into a marker of progressive identity all proceed against the backdrop of a strategic reality in which the political object of these mobilizations—a viable Palestinian state—is being foreclosed at unprecedented speed. The peak of one trajectory marks the end of the other. The rhetorical practice does not, on this reading, alter the strategic trajectory; rather, it coexists with the structural foreclosure in a way that furnishes a symbolic register within which Western publics and elites alike can maintain investments in the two-state solution while declining to take the political risks that any serious effort at its realization would now require. Whether this coexistence also operates causally, whether, that is, the availability of the symbolic register actively eases the political path of foreclosure, is a further question that the interpretive design of this article does not purport to settle.

Conclusion: Strategic Divergence and the Future of the Western Alliance

This article has argued that the post-October 7 period has produced a structural divergence between transatlantic public opinion on Israel-Palestine and the strategic calculations of Western and Gulf governments. The empirical evidence for the public opinion shift is unambiguous: across the United States and Western Europe, support for Israel has reached historic lows, sympathy for Palestinians has reached historic highs, partisan and generational polarization has reached unprecedented levels, and institutional manifestations of pro-Palestinian sentiment—from campus mobilizations to state recognitions of Palestine—have proceeded at a pace and scale without recent precedent. The empirical evidence for strategic convergence is equally unambiguous: the United States, Israel, and the Gulf monarchies have, across the same period, accomplished the destruction of Hamas, the decapitation of Hezbollah, the collapse of the Ba'ath regime in Damascus, the systematic degradation of the Iranian-led Axis of Resistance, and the direct military striking of Iranian nuclear infrastructure—a cumulative strategic accomplishment without close parallel in the recent regional record.

The implications of this divergence for the broader theme of strategic fragmentation in the Western alliance system, the organizing concern of this special issue, are substantial. First, the divergence between public opinion and strategic calculation is not a contradiction to be resolved through democratic accountability but a structural feature of the contemporary system that has proven remarkably durable. The political space for Western governments to translate public opinion shifts into substantial policy reorientations has

been constrained by the strategic imperatives of Iran containment, Gulf security cooperation, and integration into the IMEC and I2U2 connectivity architectures. The German case is paradigmatic: a public majority believing that Israeli operations in Gaza constitute genocide (Königshofen & Schmid, 2025) coexists with a parliamentary resolution affirming Israeli security as *Staatsräson* and a German role in the European blocking minority that has prevented Union-level sanctions on Israel.

This constrained political space is distributed unevenly across the transatlantic alliance, and the differences bear directly on the question of who, if anyone, retains the capacity to advance a two-state settlement. The strategic interests of the United States and those of its European and other transatlantic partners are not identical. Washington is the system's security guarantor: it underwrites Gulf defense, brokers and arms the normalization architecture, sustains the IMEC and I2U2 frameworks, and possesses the coercive and inducement leverage over Israeli military aid, intelligence cooperation, and diplomatic cover at the Security Council that any external actor capable of altering Israeli policy would need to wield. Its interests are correspondingly bound up with the containment of Iran and the consolidation of the regional bloc, objectives that a renewed push for Palestinian statehood does not advance and might complicate. The European states, together with Canada and Australia, occupy a different position. Their publics have moved furthest against Israeli policy, and their governments have deployed the instruments available to them—recognition, support for the International Court of Justice proceedings, and threatened restrictions on trade and arms—but these are largely symbolic and declaratory instruments.

Lacking the security-guarantor role, the defense-industrial entanglement, and the direct leverage over the parties that the United States commands, and internally divided (the German blocking posture being the clearest instance), the European and other transatlantic states possess neither the unilateral capacity nor the collective cohesion to convert their publics' preferences into a viable two-state outcome. The result is a structural asymmetry: the actor with the greatest capacity to move the parties has the least interest in a two-state settlement, while the actors with the greatest declared commitment to it lack the capacity to deliver it.

Its interests are correspondingly bound up with the containment of Iran and the consolidation of the regional bloc, objectives that a renewed push for Palestinian statehood does not advance and might complicate. The European states, together with Canada and Australia, occupy a different position.

Second, the rhetorical phenomenon I have characterized as transatlantic Palestinianism has proven structurally compatible with the underlying strategic configuration rather than disruptive of it. The wave of state recognitions of Palestine, the proliferation of legal and rhetorical frameworks critical of Israel, and the cultural elevation of Palestinian solidarity into a marker of progressive identity have not impeded-and in some respects have facilitated-the consolida-

tion of an American-Israeli-Gulf strategic bloc whose operational behavior is decoupled from the substantive content of these rhetorical mobilizations. The disjuncture between the symbolic and operational registers is not a transient phenomenon but an institutionalized feature of the system.

Third, the structural end of the two-state solution - a conclusion reached, with different normative inflections, by analysts across the political spectrum - forecloses the diplomatic framework that has organized international engagement with the Israel-Palestine conflict since the late 1980s. The political and intellectual challenge of this foreclosure is substantial. It will require, on the Israeli side, a confrontation with the long-term political and demographic implications of governing a population in the absence of either a partition agreement or the extension of equal political rights. It will require, on the Palestinian side, a reckoning with the structural exhaustion of the statehood political program and the development of alternative frameworks for political mobilization. It will require, on the international side, a reckoning with the disjuncture between the rhetorical commitments that continue to organize formal diplomatic discourse and the operational realities that have rendered those commitments increasingly chimerical.

For the broader transatlantic alliance, the divergence documented in this article portends significant turbulence. The strategic convergence of the United States with the Gulf monarchies and Israel has been achieved at the cost of substantial alienation of younger and progressive constituencies across the Western democracies. European governments confront the difficult task of managing public opinion without translating it into substantial policy reorientations or compro-

mising the strategic relationships and economic interests on which they depend. The reconfiguration of transatlantic relations in the era of war and strategic fragmentation-the organizing theme of this special issue-extends beyond the headline questions of NATO burden-sharing, Ukraine policy, and Trump-era unilateralism to encompass this deeper structural question of how democratic publics and strategic establishments will continue to coexist in conditions of widening divergence.

The Iranian dimension of the contemporary regional reordering deserves particular emphasis as a closing observation. The Twelve-Day War and its aftermath represent a strategic accomplishment of substantial magnitude: the comprehensive degradation of an Iranian regional position built over four decades. However, this accomplishment has proceeded against, rather than in concert with, the trajectory of transatlantic public opinion. The political costs-domestic delegitimation, the narrowing of the political base supporting the strategic configuration, the alienation of younger cohorts-are substantial and may, over the longer term, complicate maintenance of the configuration. For the present, however, the operative reality is one in which strategic calculation has proceeded along a trajectory significantly disjoint from public sentiment, in which the rhetorical apotheosis of Palestinianism has coincided with the structural foreclosure of Palestinian statehood, and in which the post-October 7 reordering has been accomplished in defiance of, rather than in concert with, the visible movements of transatlantic opinion. This is the configuration with which scholars and policymakers concerned with the future of the Western alliance system, and the regional order it has historically underwritten, will have to reckon. 🌸

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