

BOARD of PEACE



JABI Consulting

MENA Monthly Pulse

Providing policymakers, practitioners and leaders with the latest political and economic trends from the MENA region



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Message from Our Founder & CEO

Dear Partners, Clients and Friends,

Can the Trump Peace Plan Deliver Stability and Hope for Gaza?

Recent global attention has been dominated by multiple crises, from Ukraine and the new U.S.-Europe security posture to broader geopolitical realignments. Yet for Palestinians, and particularly for Gaza, a pivotal development has quietly unfolded: the formal launch of the Board of Peace and the announcement of the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), signaling the transition into a new phase of the Trump Peace Plan.



Hisham Jabi, Founder and CEO

These announcements arrive against a backdrop of profound humanitarian and social collapse in Gaza. More than 2.2 million people face acute deprivation. Hundreds of schools have been destroyed or repurposed as shelters. Children who once carried schoolbags now search for food, water, and basic medical supplies. Information flows are fragmented, trust is scarce, and hope has been systematically eroded by repeated promises that never materialized.

For Gaza's youth, the question is no longer ideological but existential. What future is being offered to them? Across Gaza and the wider Arab world, young people are educated, connected, and ambitious, yet trapped in systems that deny opportunity, dignity, and voice. In the absence of credible institutions, non-state armed actors exploit these gaps, offering belonging, income, and meaning where the state has failed. Radicalization, in this sense, is less a product of ideology than of alienation, exclusion, and governance failure by states.

The emerging NCAG presents a rare opportunity to break this cycle. But only if it succeeds in doing what has long been absent: placing the human being at the center of governance. Transparent administration, credible service delivery, respect for dignity, and a visible social contract are not peripheral concerns. They are the most effective tools for stabilization and long-term peace. Militias thrive in chaos and grievance. They cannot survive in systems built on accountability, rule of law, and opportunity.

The Middle East today is experiencing a deep public trust crisis from Gaza to Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, and beyond. Gaza may become the most important test case. If the NCAG can establish a transparent, civilian-led, and accountable governance model that prioritizes essential service, positive youth empowerment, livelihoods, private sector, education, and dignity, it could offer not only Gaza but the region a new reference point for recovery and legitimacy.

This moment is fragile and uncertain. Yet it carries a rare possibility that Gaza's recovery could mark the beginning of a different relationship between governance and youth to shift mindset rooted not in fear or force, but in trust, opportunity, and hope. Whether this promise is realized will shape not only Gaza's future, but the political and social trajectory of an entire generation across the Middle East.



Warm regards,
Hisham Jabi, Founder & CEO
jabiconsulting.com

Download our Blueprint for doing Business in the Gulf Region

Includes an exclusive “Market Readiness Assessment Tool”



Gaza Ceasefire and the Board of Peace



President Donald Trump holds the charter during a signing ceremony on his Board of Peace initiative at the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

Welcome to the jungle: Trump's Board of Peace goes global

European Council on Foreign Relations

President Donald Trump's Board of Peace (BoP) is not much of a peace mechanism. Look no further than its logo—a US-first western hemisphere flanked by rip-off UN olive branches burnished in Trumpian gold—to see the BoP for what it really is: a top-down project to assert Trump's control over global affairs.

At its Davos inauguration, the US president delivered a rambling speech to the 19 countries present, hailing them "the most powerful people in the world." Belarus's autocratic leader and an early BoP signatory, Aleksandr Lukashenko, was unable to attend due to European sanctions over human rights abuses. Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, was also absent, facing an International Criminal Court arrest warrant over alleged war crimes in Gaza.

After Trump's "top leaders" were presented, Jared Kushner unveiled a \$30bn "Trump development plan" for "New Gaza." Complete with a skyscraper-crammed coastline, the vision would see the wholesale bulldozing of the Strip to create a newly engineered society and economy under BoP supervision. Judging by the Arabic spelling mistakes in the PowerPoint presentation, no Palestinians were consulted on their "prosperous future". [Read more.](#)

International Law and the Trump Board of Peace Charter

Arab Center Washington DC

President Donald Trump’s Board of Peace (BoP) and the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) raise several international significant legal issues, most flowing from the BoP that provides the authority for the NCAG.



US President Donald Trump speaking at the Gaza peace conference in Egypt in October 2025. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

The BoP’s self-declared global conflict resolution mandate lacks a clear basis in international law beyond the claim that United

Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2803 provides a legal basis for its operation in Gaza. (See [here](#) for an analysis of what is missing from UNSC 2803). The Board’s draft governance structure, which could still be changed, concentrates power in one individual (Trump as life-long chair) and ties extended membership to hefty financial contributions (\$1 billion for a permanent place on the Board), an arrangement unusual in treaty-based organizations. Questions of legal personality and legitimacy arise, as the BoP was recognized by a UN Security Council resolution in Gaza as a “transitional administration with international legal personality” but operates outside the UN system without clear oversight. [Read more.](#)

The Latest on the Board of Peace: What We Know About Its Role, Reach and Limits

Better World Campaign

A new international body known as the Board of Peace was formally launched in January, following a November vote by the UN Security Council through Resolution 2803 that welcomed a U.S.-brokered, 20-point framework to end the war in Gaza. The initiative gained decisive momentum on January 22, when President Trump signed the Board’s charter at the 57th World Economic Forum in Davos.

Supporters of the Board describe it as a nimble alternative to collective action by the Security Council to facilitate reconstruction planning in Gaza. Skeptics, including close U.S. allies such as France and the United Kingdom, have raised concerns that the initiative could sidestep the existing multilateral system or be used to channel funding away from broadly supported UN organizations.

As of now, there’s still much we do not know, and we will continue to fine-tune our analysis in the weeks and months ahead. But for now, let’s look beyond the headlines to examine the Board of Peace on its own legal and institutional terms. [Read more.](#)

United Arab Emirates plans to bankroll first 'planned community' in south Gaza

The Guardian

The United Arab Emirates plans to fund "Gaza's first planned community" on the ruined outskirts of Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city. Palestinian residents there will have access to basic services like education, healthcare and running water, as long as they submit to biometric data collection and security vetting, according to planning documents and people familiar with the latest round of talks at the US-led Civil Military Coordination Center in Israel.

The planned city would mark the UAE's first investment in a postwar reconstruction project located in the part of Gaza currently held by Israel. The wealthy Gulf state has contributed more than \$1.8bn of humanitarian assistance to Gaza since 7 October 2023, according to UAE state media, making it Gaza's largest humanitarian donor.

Blueprints for the Emirati-backed endeavor are laid out in an unclassified slide deck obtained by the Guardian and first reported by Dropsite, but the UAE's role as its planned financier has not previously been reported. [Read more.](#)

US unveils plans for 'New Gaza' with skyscrapers

BBC

The US has unveiled its plans for a "New Gaza" that would see the devastated Palestinian territory rebuilt from scratch.

Slides showed dozens of skyscrapers stretching along the Mediterranean coast and housing estates in the Rafah area, while a map outlining the phased development of new residential, agricultural and industrial areas for the 2.1 million population.

They were presented during a signing ceremony at the World Economic Forum in Davos for President Donald Trump's new Board of Peace, which is tasked with ending the two-year war between Israel and Hamas and overseeing reconstruction.



The US plan for "New Gaza" was presented at the World Economic Forum in Davos. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

"We're going to be very successful in Gaza. It's going to be a great thing to watch," Trump declared. [Read more.](#)

Phase Two of Gaza's ceasefire will fail without a political vision for Palestine

Chatham House

As the US administration declares the launch of Phase Two of the Gaza ceasefire, the reality on the ground tells a different story.

More than 450 Gazans have been killed since the start of the ceasefire in October. Israel controls over half of the enclave, Hamas is still armed, and humanitarian conditions remain dire. Meanwhile, across the Israeli-occupied West Bank, de facto annexation continues with the expansion of settlements, and extremist settler violence has wreaked havoc on daily life.

Across both territories, the urgent need for security is intertwined with the broader priority of determining a political vision for Palestine. Indeed, the key pillars of the ceasefire plan, as well as hopes for broader regional stability, will fail without a political vision and a credible pathway for Palestinian self-determination. [Read more.](#)

UN report chronicles intensification of decades of severe racial discrimination by Israel in occupied West Bank

UN OHCHR

A comprehensive UN Human Rights Office report released today details the asphyxiating impact of Israel's laws, policies and practices on every aspect of daily life for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The report warns that Israel is violating international law requiring States to prohibit and eradicate racial segregation and apartheid.

Systemic discrimination against Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is a long-standing concern, the report notes, adding that the situation has drastically deteriorated since at least December 2022. The report contains numerous illustrative examples of how increasingly constrained and insecure life has become for Palestinians. [Read more.](#)

Governance and the Domestic Balance of Power after Two Years of War on the Gaza Strip

PCPSR

These are summary findings from the latest round of the Arab Barometer survey in Palestine, the ninth since these surveys began in the Arab world nearly twenty years ago. The survey was conducted by the institute for Polling and Survey Research West Bank and Gaza Strip during 8–26 October 2025.

The period preceding the survey witnessed several important developments, including the continuation of the war on the Gaza Strip until a ceasefire was reached two days after fieldwork began. In the West Bank, settler violence and terror continued against vulnerable, [Read more.](#)

Israel's Political Pressure and Tech Sector



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago on December 29, 2025. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

There's Never Been a President Like Trump on Israel

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

This week, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that the Board of Peace, the part of his twenty-point Gaza peace plan that will oversee the strip's transitional governance, has been formed. The announcement also included a fifteen-member Palestinian technocratic committee for administering Gaza. Given the realities on the ground—a divided, dysfunctional, and still sporadically violent Gaza—much of this move to the peace plan's second phase seems performative and untethered from reality. Indeed, an extraordinary amount of work needs to be done to move forward. And although much of it will focus on how to deal with Hamas's demilitarization and resurgence in Gaza, Trump's relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will prove critical to the peace plan's success or failure.

The two of us have spent a combined eight decades studying, working in, and writing about the Middle East. We can say with some certainty that nowhere are Trump's policy idiosyncrasies more clearly on display than in his relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Trump has been preternaturally pro-Israel and pro-Netanyahu while also applying an extraordinary and unprecedented degree of pressure on the Israeli leader. He has often ignored Netanyahu's suggestions or blindsided him on important policy decisions. For Netanyahu, who has based much of his appeal on his ability to "control" American policy, Trump has reversed the dynamic—it is Trump who sets the content and tone of this relationship. [Read more.](#)

Joint Statement of the United States and Israel on the Launch of a Strategic Partnership on Artificial Intelligence, Research, and Critical Technologies

U.S. Department of State

The Government of the United States and the Government of the State of Israel have affirmed a new Strategic Framework for Cooperation to deepen and formalize their long-standing collaboration in critical technology sectors. This initiative represents a cornerstone of the Pax Silica partnership, designed to secure critical technology frontiers and foster the next generation of scientific advancement. This partnership also aims to advance economic growth, create jobs, and enhance security through technological superiority. [Read more.](#)



At the launch of a Strategic Partnership on Artificial Intelligence, Research, and Critical Technologies on January 16, 2026.

[PHOTO CREDITS](#)

Israel's tech sector soars to \$111 billion in 2025 deals

JNS

Israel's tech industry generated more than \$111 billion in capital deals in 2025, nearly quadruple the previous year's total and surpassing 2021's previous record levels, according to Startup Nation Central's annual report released on Thursday.

The surge—propelled by mergers, acquisitions and public offerings—underscored renewed global confidence in Israel's innovation sector, even amid regional challenges. Growth in 2025 was led by productivity and AI-driven efficiency, not workforce expansion, the report said.



High-rises in Tel Aviv. July 14, 2024. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

High-tech exports climbed to 56% of Israel's total exports, while GDP contribution per employee rose 1.4% despite a slight decline in high-tech employment. AI integration reshaped company structures, compressing development cycles and boosting output.

Private funding hit \$16.7 billion across 801 rounds, with investors favoring larger, conviction-based deals. Meanwhile, M&A value totaled \$82.3 billion, signaling a maturing ecosystem built on stability and integration. [Read more.](#)

Prospects for Syria-Israel Relations

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Prospects for more normal if not formally peaceful relations between Syria and Israel were diminishing in recent months. Thus it was positive that Syrian and Israeli officials met in Paris on January 5-6 to discuss security arrangements. These talks were mediated by US officials. President Trump says he wants Israel to “get along” with Syria. But reconciling Israel’s security requirements post-October 7 with Syria’s sovereignty post-Assad regime remains a challenge.

President Trump prides himself on his closeness with Israel. But in early December, he criticized Israeli military operations in southern Syria. After an Israeli raid on November 28 killed 13 Syrians, the president warned Israel in a Truth Social post to refrain from activities that could “interfere with Syria’s evolution into a prosperous State.” [Read more.](#)

Building on Egypt and Israel’s Uneasy Gas Deal

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

On December 17, Israel announced the largest natural gas deal in its history—a \$35 billion agreement to expand exports to Egypt from offshore fields run by U.S. energy giant Chevron. Officials in Jerusalem and Washington quickly heralded the deal as a landmark success story, with the Trump administration calling it “a major win for American business and regional cooperation.” They also indicated it would be a topic on the agenda of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s December 29 visit with President Trump in Florida, even suggesting the possibility of a celebratory three-way meeting with Egyptian President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi.

No tripartite summit materialized, however, and Cairo publicly downplayed the new deal, with one spokesman stating, “The agreement in question is a purely commercial transaction concluded exclusively on the basis of economic and investment considerations and does not involve any political dimensions or understandings whatsoever.” [Read more.](#)

Recognizing Somaliland: Israel’s Return to the Red Sea

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

The surprise announcement on December 26 that Israel will be the first country to grant Somaliland full recognition has ignited new dynamics in the Red Sea Basin. As part of the agreement, Israel will establish a diplomatic presence and possible security presence in the area for the first time since relations with Eritrea broke down in 2020. Israeli relations had been further degraded by the suspension of normalization with Sudan since civil war broke out there in April 2023. The Somaliland breakthrough gives Jerusalem an opportunity to move past those setbacks and could spur other governments to recognize the republic as well. [Read more.](#)

Another Step in the Weaponization of Aid: Israel Bans Humanitarian Agencies in Gaza

Arab Center Washington DC

In late December 2025, two months after the much-lauded ceasefire agreement that was meant to end the physical destruction of Gaza and bring a significant increase in desperately needed aid, Israel announced it was suspending the work of 37 humanitarian organizations—about 15 percent of the total number of NGOs working on the ground in the Strip. These organizations include some of the

most well-established across occupied Palestine, including Defense for Children International, the International Rescue Committee, Medical Aid for Palestinians UK, Mercy Corps, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, known in English as Doctors without Borders).

[Read more.](#)

Israel in 2026: Elections will be a referendum on the legacy of 7 October – and the future of the social contract

Chatham House

As January 2026 unfolds, the winter air in Jerusalem carries a weight that transcends the usual political manoeuvring in Israeli politics. This year will likely redefine both Israel’s political map and determine the future of the social contract.

Officially, the parliamentary elections are set for autumn. But if the Knesset fails to pass the 2026 state budget by 31 March, the government will dissolve automatically. The government just submitted the budget to the Knesset this week, with a two-month delay, constituting a violation of the law. There are doubts regarding its prospects for approval. During the second half of 2025 there were many rumours of early elections. But Benjamin Netanyahu, ever the master of political survival, was uninterested in this gambit.

His calculation was and is still rooted in a stark polling contradiction: while his Likud party has shown a resilient recovery in the polls, the same polls show him falling short of forming a government with existing coalition allies – the ultra-orthodox and ultra-right wing parties. As it stands, the coveted 61-seat majority looks a distant prospect, trapped behind a wall of public fatigue and structural demographic shifts. [Read more.](#)



Gaza has experienced sharp declines in humanitarian aid. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)



Bahrain has long invested in building a future-ready workforce by boosting skills, embracing technology adoption and promoting workplace gender equality. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

Why the GCC might have an edge on implementing Agentic AI

World Economic Forum

Not long ago, a loan officer at a Middle Eastern bank spent two days processing a single mortgage application. Know Your Customer (KYC) verification meant hours of manual document checks, cross-referencing databases and waiting for approvals. Today, that officer completes the process in under four hours, not because she works faster, but because an AI agent handles the verification and flags only exceptional cases for human review.

So, what happens to the hours she wins back? She might analyze fraud patterns AI agents cannot interpret, mentor junior colleagues or spend more time with clients. The work hasn't disappeared; it has shifted toward judgment, empathy, cultural intelligence and trust.

While the world experimented with AI assistants and chatbots in 2023 and 2024, 2025 marked a clear inflection point in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), comprised of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman. New national AI frameworks, sovereign cloud rollouts and the first wave of enterprise deployments pushed Agentic AI from concept to practice.

AI agents not only respond to prompts but perceive their environment, make decisions and take coordinated action with humans "on the loop," are now a reality. [Read more.](#)

The GCC’s Calculus: Financing and Securing Gaza in 2026

Gulf Internatinal Forum

On January 14, the Trump administration announced the launch of the next phase of the Gaza ceasefire framework. U.S. Special Envoy Steve Witkoff stated that the second phase of the 20-point plan would prioritize “demilitarization, technocratic governance, and reconstruction.” Yet his remarks offered few specifics on how the agreement’s most complex and politically sensitive provisions would actually be implemented.



A group of Palestinians sit in a shelter made of a blanket stretched over four poles next to one of the destroyed Nada Towers in the Gaza Strip. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

President Trump’s Gaza plan might look simple, but its success hinges on the details—particularly how effectively it can engage with the Gulf. While the plan clearly envisions their role as primarily financial, Gulf states are wary of being perceived as the world’s ATM. Although their financial capacity provides significant leverage, they will not commit funds unconditionally. [Read more.](#)

‘Normalization Already Happened. The Only Question Is Formalization’: How Israel and the Gulf Are Building a Tech Partnership Beneath the Surface

The MediaLine

At first glance, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) does not seem to carry significant weight in Israel’s technology sector. The figures do not jump off the page. Investment volumes appear restrained, deal sizes remain relatively small, and most of the activity that can be clearly identified points to a single country.

Taken on its own, that picture points to a limited role. It is orderly, almost too orderly. What it captures is real, but it leaves out a parallel layer of activity that does not lend itself easily to measurement. Much of the Gulf’s engagement with Israeli technology sits precisely in that space, between what can be formally tracked and what is simply known inside the ecosystem.

The Annual Report 2025, published by Startup Nation Central, places this gap in context. In 2025, total private investment in Israeli tech reached \$16.7 billion, even as the number of funding rounds fell. At first glance, the drop in deal count might raise questions. The report’s data points elsewhere. Capital has become more concentrated, moving toward fewer companies and larger rounds, with a clear preference for later-stage firms that have already demonstrated traction. [Read more.](#)

A New Rift in the Gulf, and Only the Gulf Can Solve It

Center for Strategic & International Studies

For two countries now at each other’s throats, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have an awful lot in common. They share the ambition and resources to remake the Middle East as an engine of economic opportunity and to serve as global hubs for artificial intelligence, shipping and aviation, tourism, finance, and much more. They both long to turn the page on the region’s history of extremism and instability, and focus instead on commerce, social development, and economic diversification. They are both working to wean their economies away from dependence on oil, investing in renewable energy and their own human capital. They both want a strong security partnership with the United States to help defend against their ultimate threats, namely Iran and jihadi terrorists including al Qaida and ISIS. And they both think Israel should ultimately be an integral part of their region, even while their timelines and conditions for advancing that relationship differ sharply. [Read more.](#)

From partners to rivals: What the Saudi-UAE rupture means for Europeans

European Council on Foreign Relations

In December 2025, the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) launched a major offensive in Yemen’s Hadhramaut and al-Mahra regions, seizing key territory across the south. Its close proximity to the Saudi border escalated tensions with Riyadh, which viewed the move as a threat to its national security, and as a break in its understanding with the United Arab Emirates.[1] Saudi authorities then called for UAE forces to withdraw from Yemen and carried out strikes on shipments and facilities apparently linked to STC operations.



People hold a banner with images of the President of the United Arab Emirates, and Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia during a rally organised by Yemen’s main separatist group, Dec. 2025.

PHOTO CREDITS

But this rupture reflects a geopolitical divergence between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi which goes well beyond Yemen. A once tightly coordinated Arab Gulf partnership has given way to a geopolitical competition playing out across the Middle East, Africa and the Red Sea.

Now the two countries are competing for control of economic, mineral and energy resources—and for crucial technologies, such as AI. [Read more.](#)

64% of UAE residents now use generative AI

Rest of World

Artificial intelligence adoption has been on the rise globally, but new data shows some countries significantly outperforming others, while the gap between advanced nations and developing nations has widened. The United Arab Emirates and Singapore are the standouts, with over 60% of the population in both countries using some type of generative AI tool in the past year, according to a recent [report](#) by Microsoft that measured AI diffusion, or the percentage of population using generative AI, around the world.

Both countries also host a growing number of data centers, despite their [hot temperatures](#) that make for relatively unsuitable operating conditions. [Read more.](#)

Qatar Commits \$25B as It Expands Partnership With Goldman

Institutional Investor

Sovereign wealth fund Qatar Investment Authority will invest \$25 billion in Goldman Sachs Asset Management funds and direct investments, building on an existing arrangement.

QIA will also become an anchor investor in several of GSAM's flagship and other strategies, with a particular focus on AI, fintech, digital infrastructure and private credit.

Mohammed Saif Al-Sowaidi, CEO of QIA, said that the partnership also extends beyond capital deployment and continues the expansion of Doha as a key strategic hub for asset management. "This commitment will deliver meaningful benefits to our economy through knowledge-transfer, job-creation and enhanced expertise in alternative investments," he [said in a statement](#). "We look forward to working with the Goldman Sachs team to source and execute transformational investments that generate strong risk-adjusted returns for Qatar's future generations." [Read more.](#)

3 ways Bahrain is building a future-ready workforce

World Economic Forum

As economies worldwide navigate technological change, shifting geopolitics and the green transition, Bahrain is charting a distinctive path – one that places skills and economic inclusion at the centre of its transformation.

Bahrain has long invested in building a future-ready workforce by boosting skills, embracing technology adoption and promoting workplace gender equality. This long-standing commitment is rooted in a history of regional firsts – including being the first GCC country to introduce formal girls' education in 1928. Today, women make up 50% of higher education STEM enrolments according to the Higher Education Council. [Read more.](#)

Why US markets are betting on Saudi Arabia

Atlantic Council

While the world watched events unfold in Venezuela during the first week of January, Saudi Arabia quietly returned to the US debt capital markets, raising \$11.5 billion of senior unsecured debt across four tranches.

Shortly thereafter, Saudi Arabia's minister of finance approved the kingdom's 2026 borrowing plan, projecting total financing needs of \$57.9 billion. The proceeds are intended to fund a projected fiscal deficit of \$44

billion, equivalent to 3.3 percent of Saudi Arabia's gross domestic product (GDP).



A large banner shows Saudi Vision for 2030 at the inauguration of several energy projects in Ras Al Khair, Saudi Arabia, November 2016.

PHOTO CREDITS

This financing was highly successful, but as detailed in this report, the markets do not price Saudi Arabia as AA credit. In fact, Saudi Arabia trades at a discount to single A-rated sovereign debt, suggesting that the kingdom has work to do to build confidence in the country's ambitious economic transformation plans, while showing the marketplace that this nation has the ability to generate accretive value generating returns. [Read more.](#)

Exporting Fossil Fuels Through Cloud Computing

Carnegie Middle East Center

For decades, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have announced plans to diversify their economies away from fossil fuel extraction, with artificial intelligence (AI) now increasingly presented as the latest engine of transformation. They have prepared major economic planning documents, embarked on megaprojects in the desert, and promoted new sectors, as evidence that they are looking toward a post-oil future. Yet the Gulf's political economy remains structurally dependent on access to cheap fossil fuel energy, and this dependence continues to shape the domestic development strategies and international climate diplomacy of the GCC countries.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have expanded into petrochemicals, moving down the hydrocarbon value chain rather than exiting from it. Bahrain and later Dubai have invested in financial services, which thrive on regional capital flows that remain directly tied to fossil fuel wealth. Real estate development has spread across the Arabian Peninsula, absorbing surplus capital while locking Gulf cities into urban forms that depend heavily on access to cheap energy for cooling, desalination, transport, and maintenance. [Read more.](#)

Middle East Regional Shifts



Israeli airstrike on Gaza Strip during Gaza War. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

The MENA Youth Employment Time Bomb – And How to Defuse It at Scale

Hisham Jabi, CEO & Founder Jabi Consulting

Over the past two years, I have traveled extensively across the Middle East and North Africa—from the Gulf to Cairo, Ramallah, and Amman. In every city, in every meeting, and in every university hall, I encountered the same reality: a vast generation of educated, capable, digitally connected young men and women who are locked out of the economy, deeply frustrated, and increasingly detached from public institutions and from any credible promise of social mobility.

The data confirms what one sees on the ground. According to the World Bank and the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Middle East and North Africa has the highest youth unemployment rate in the world, at around 25–30% on average, compared to a global average of about 13%. In some contexts the numbers are far more severe: youth unemployment exceeds 35% in Jordan and Tunisia, and in Gaza it is above 60–70%, one of the highest rates recorded anywhere (World Bank, ILO, PCBS).

At the same time, the region is experiencing one of the largest youth bulges globally. More than 60% of the population in MENA is under the age of 30, and roughly one in three people is between 15 and 29 (UN DESA, World Bank). Every year, over 5 million young people enter MENA labor markets, while the formal economy creates only a fraction of the jobs needed to absorb them (World Bank, 2023). [Read more.](#)

The Middle East and North Africa at Davos 2026: Growth and tech ambitions to the fore

World Economic Forum

Geopolitics returned to centre stage at this year's Annual Meeting in Davos. Greenland, Venezuela, the US, Europe, China, Iran and Gaza featured prominently in panels and coffee breaks alike.

Despite this backdrop of global and regional geopolitical headwinds, leaders from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) were keen to highlight the opportunities for growth in the region.



Signing ceremony for the Board of Peace. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

From Morocco to Saudi Arabia, representatives from the region highlighted the economic shifts in full swing across MENA – from global sports tournaments hosted in North Africa to the rapid buildout of AI infrastructure in the Gulf. [Read more.](#)

OpenAI seeking investments from Middle East sovereign wealth funds for multibillion-dollar round

CNBC

OpenAI is in talks with sovereign wealth funds in the Middle East to try to secure investments for a new multibillion dollar funding round, CNBC confirmed on Wednesday.

The round is expected to total around \$50 billion, but the numbers could change and term sheets have not been signed, according to a source familiar with the discussions who asked not to be named because the details are confidential. [Bloomberg](#) was first to report the discussions. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman is in the United Arab Emirates to participate in the investment talks, the person said. The round is expected to close in the first quarter of the year.

OpenAI kickstarted the AI boom by launching its artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT in 2022, and has since become one of the fastest growing commercial entities on the planet. The company has raised billions of dollars from investors as it's worked to scale and develop new models and roll out new features.

Last year, OpenAI closed a [\\$40 billion](#) financing round led by SoftBank, the largest private tech funding on record. The round included participation from core investor [Microsoft](#), as well as Coatue, Altimeter and Thrive. [Read more.](#)

More Spasms of Violence Await the Middle East in 2026

Stimson Center

After more than two years of massive bloodshed, it would be wonderful to be able to predict a period of calm, reconstruction, and economic progress for the peoples of the Middle East. Alas, no analyst of the region ever went broke forecasting the opposite, and 2026 appears unlikely to alter this dismal paradigm.

The Trump administration's preference for short spasms of violence rather than protracted wars, as well as its preoccupation with the Western hemisphere, should help keep the region from a major new conflagration. But on every front, from Iran to Yemen, Lebanon to Syria to Gaza and the West Bank, more people are likely to die from armed confrontations, humanitarian failures, and external intervention. Only decisive political change — in Israel, Iran, or the U.S. — might alter this bleak forecast. What follows are a few modest if depressing predictions. [Read more.](#)

A year into his return, Donald Trump has changed the Middle East - but he is only getting started

Middle East Institute

In 2016, Donald Trump was brand-new to the presidency and, by many accounts, did not expect to win. It took him time to learn the ropes of domestic and foreign policy, and for much of his first term, many in his foreign policy and defence teams were long-term professionals who often opposed many of his ideas.

In his second term, Mr Trump came back with the experience of a former president and picked a domestic and foreign policy team composed of loyalists who echo and amplify his positions. In the second year of this second term, Mr Trump has been further empowered by his success last year of upending domestic and foreign policy in a revolutionary way. [Read more.](#)

Trump's National Security Strategy doesn't downgrade the Middle East, it redefines it

Atlantic Council

At the end of 2025, the White House released a comprehensive National Security Strategy (NSS) that reflects the strategic worldview of US President Donald Trump's current administration. Like the 2017 NSS issued during Trump's first term, this new document is branded as "America First," but it goes further in its clarity, prioritization, and ideological framing. The 2017 NSS already emphasized border security, economic nationalism, sovereign decision-making, and a renewed focus on great-power competition, yet the newly issued NSS formalizes these instincts more sharply. It treats sovereignty, industrial revival, the end of mass migration, tight border control, and burden-shifting to regional partners as core national objectives rather than rhetorical elements of diplomacy. [Read more.](#)

Jordan's Uncertain Future



The first EU-Jordan summit in Amman underscores Europe's bid to reassert influence in a region shaped by war and displacement. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

EU-Jordan summit highlights Brussels' Middle East ambitions

DW

When EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa arrived at Jordan's Al Husainiyah Palace at midday on Thursday, there was not a cloud in the sky. Temperatures hovered around a pleasant 20 degrees Celsius. While large parts of Europe were struggling with heavy snowfall, Jordan was showing its best side, as were the leaders gathered for the first-ever EU-Jordan summit in Amman.

Jordan's King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein and his son, Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah, welcomed the two EU leaders and their delegation. In their opening statements, all participants stressed their commitment to continued cooperation between the bloc and the kingdom.

"In times of growing geopolitical challenges, it is good to know that the European Union and Jordan stand side by side, because this is what friends do," Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

The push to deepen ties had already begun with the EU-Jordan Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership, signed in January 2025. Backed by €3 billion (\$3.5 billion) earmarked for the period between 2025 and 2027, the agreement aims to support Jordan in areas such as security, economic resilience and migration management. [Read more.](#)

Jordan affirms support for Syrian government's efforts to safeguard security, territorial unity

AA

Jordan on Friday reaffirmed its support for the Syrian government's efforts to protect security, stability, sovereignty, and territorial unity.

A Foreign Ministry statement said Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi conveyed his country's support during a phone call with his Syrian counterpart, Asaad al-Shaibani.



Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

During the call, the two ministers discussed developments in Syria, with Safadi stressing Jordan's "firm and consistent stance in supporting the Syrian government's efforts to safeguard Syria's security and stability, its sovereignty and territorial unity, and ensure the safety of its citizens," according to the statement. [Read more.](#)

US labels Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan as 'terrorists'

Al Jazeera

The United States has designated Muslim Brotherhood organisations in Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan as "terrorist" groups, as Washington intensifies its crackdown on Israel's rivals across the world.

The decision on Tuesday came weeks after [President Donald Trump](#) issued an executive order directing his administration to start the process of blacklisting the groups.

The US Department of the Treasury labelled the groups in Jordan and Egypt as "specially designated global terrorists", and the State Department blacklisted the Lebanese organisation with a more serious designation – "foreign terrorist organization" (FTO).

The Trump administration cited alleged support for the Palestinian group Hamas and "activities against Israeli interests in the Middle East" as the reason behind targeting the Muslim Brotherhood.

"Chapters of the Muslim Brotherhood purport to be legitimate civic organisations while, behind the scenes, they explicitly and enthusiastically support terrorist groups like Hamas," the US Treasury said in a statement. [Read more.](#)

Egypt and Regional Instability



The foreign ministers of the UAE, Qatar, Egypt, and Jordan discuss the future of Gaza in Riyadh, February 2024.

[PHOTO CREDITS](#)

Egypt's Tightrope Walk Between Saudi Arabia and the UAE

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

As tensions between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates sharpen over conflicting agendas in Yemen, Sudan, and elsewhere, Egypt is more acutely aware than ever that its economic survival and national security rely heavily on both of these Gulf rivals. Choosing to side with one or the other could be costly, yet their worsening rift makes pure neutrality more difficult to sustain. Cairo's current strategy is best understood as one of calibrated compartmentalization: that is, moving closer to the UAE when liquidity and mega-investment deals are at stake, but closer to Saudi Arabia on matters of regional security. In either case, Egypt seems determined to preserve a margin of strategic autonomy on its core "red line" dossiers.

Economic Lifelines and Risk Diversification

The economic dimension of Saudi-Emirati competition is not an abstraction for Cairo—it is existential. Egypt is deeply dependent on both countries as financial partners, but in different ways. The UAE has become Cairo's primary source of rapid liquidity. The [2023 investment package](#) in Ras al-Hikma, worth around \$35 billion, epitomized how Abu Dhabi could inject foreign currency into Egypt at speed, help stabilize the pound, and underwrite high-profile infrastructure projects. In today's fiscal environment, Cairo cannot afford to alienate the one actor willing to put large amounts of cash on the table with little notice. [Read more.](#)

Egypt Applauds U.S. Promise to Mediate in Deadlocked Nile Dispute

International Crisis Group

A letter sent from the White House to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on 16 January outlined U.S. President Donald Trump's willingness to reprise efforts to mediate in the diplomatic deadlock over Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Cairo, which regards the dam as one of its most pressing national security concerns, had made its request for U.S. involvement in the dispute a foreign policy priority. Sisi welcomed Trump's initiative, while Sudan, the other downstream country affected by the dam, also expressed its support for U.S. mediation.

Following the tensions in U.S.-Egyptian relations in the Trump administration's early months, the letter reflects the improvement in bilateral ties that dates from the two countries' efforts to reach a ceasefire in Gaza in October 2025. [Read more.](#)

Egypt: Partnering with Saudi Arabia on Security in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden

Arab Center Washington DC

Despite its extensive economic relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt appears to be hitching its wagon to Saudi Arabia in the kingdom's dispute with Abu Dhabi over Yemen and other regional issues. Egypt shares Saudi Arabia's perception that the UAE is attempting to undermine territorial integrity and sovereignty in Yemen, in Sudan, and elsewhere. From Cairo's perspective, the UAE's approach risks fostering instability in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden region, which can disrupt international shipping through the Suez Canal. Egypt depends upon canal transit fees for vital foreign exchange. Some reports suggest that Egypt is also uncomfortable with the UAE's close relationship with Israel and with some of its other regional stances. [Read more.](#)

How Egypt tackles its debt could be an example to other debt laden economies

World Economic Forum

Global sovereign debt has reached critical levels. As of 2024, total global public debt amounted to \$102 trillion, with developing countries accountable for about \$31 trillion of that burden.

Since 2010, public debt – debt owned by governments, also known as sovereign debt – in developing economies has been growing since at about twice the rate of advanced economies.

According to the most recent IMF statistics, total global debt (public + private) remains greater than 235% of global GDP, highlighting the broader picture of global debt pressure. Public debt alone is equal to nearly 93% of global GDP. This dramatic debt burden has serious social implications, particularly for developing countries. According to the United Nations, 3.3 billion people still live in countries where interest payments exceed national spending on health and education, [Read more.](#)

Lebanon: Harnessing Political Momentum



Lebanon's new banking reform laws and forensic audits mark a rare chance to pursue accountability for the financial collapse.

[PHOTO CREDITS](#)

Years into the Financial Collapse, Lebanon Still Awaits Justice

The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy

Six years into Lebanon's banking collapse, Riad Salameh, the former Central Bank governor whose policies led to the crisis appeared on television to defend himself. He had been released just two months earlier following a year of pretrial detention that produced no serious investigation into the most serious allegations against him. The fact that Salameh was sitting for TV interviews rather than facing courtroom trials, while much of the Lebanese population struggled under the weight of the crisis, underscored the depth of impunity in Lebanon.

Since the economic collapse in 2019, the country has witnessed little or no progress toward justice and accountability. It took a shake-up of the political system following the war with Israel in 2024 for the country to agree on a path forward, and for the state to take tangible measures to enable justice. Such efforts, however, continue to face immense push back from interest groups, mainly the influential banking lobby and its political allies.

The financial crisis has had devastating consequences for Lebanon's social fabric and the living standards of its population. The crisis manifested across three fronts: monetary instability that led to the collapse of the national currency; a banking meltdown that wiped out citizens' savings; and a fiscal breakdown that eroded state finances, undermined public sector funding, and crippled debt repayment. [Read more.](#)

Lebanon: Economic Rebound Marks Cautious Recovery amidst Progress on Reforms

World Bank Group

Lebanon’s economy registered in 2025 positive growth signaling the start of a modest recovery following years of severe contraction. According to the latest World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor (LEM), real GDP expanded by 3.5% in 2025, reflecting early signs of macroeconomic stabilization, a rebound in tourism, and the impacts of crucial—though uneven—reform progress.

The Winter 2025 edition of the LEM titled “A Fragile Rebound” highlights notable progress on Lebanon’s reform agenda with the passing of important economic and judicial laws and key appointments in the civil service, which contributed to greater political and institutional stabilization. Despite these achievements, critical structural reforms, including the “financial gap law” and key sector reforms, are still pending. These reforms are crucial for Lebanon to restore macroeconomic and financial stability and strengthen the impact and effectiveness of sectoral reforms.

“Lebanon’s recent economic gain underscores the importance of ongoing reforms,” said Jean-Christophe Carret, World Bank Middle East Division Director. [Read more.](#)

As Hezbollah Nervously Watches Iran, Washington Should Double Down on Disarmament

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

On January 8, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi landed in Beirut with an economic delegation and, reportedly, four suitcases full of cash for Hezbollah, continuing Tehran’s tradition of sending officials to Lebanon as a show of power every time a crisis emerges. Yet this time feels different—the Islamic Republic’s latest wave of protests and international pressure has seemingly cornered the regime, presenting Beirut with an opportunity to shift the political narrative around Hezbollah and the pace of the disarmament process on the ground.



Hezbollah flag. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

Lebanese officials appear to sense this change—local media reports indicate that Araghchi was not allowed to bring in the money. Although this was not the first time that airport security had forced Iranian officials to return home with bags of cash, last week’s incident was widely broadcast in the Lebanese media, seemingly sending a signal to Hezbollah. Indeed, both President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam have made strong statements against the group in recent days. During a January 11 interview with Tele Liban, Aoun stated that Hezbollah’s weapons had “outlived their purpose” and become a burden on the Lebanese people, [Read more.](#)

Lebanon says first phase of plan to disarm Hezbollah completed, but Netanyahu warns progress 'far from sufficient'

CNN

Lebanon on Thursday announced that it has completed the first phase of its plan to disarm Hezbollah and other militant groups in the country's south, but Israel said the progress was "far from sufficient" amid renewed concerns that the conflict could ramp back up.

The Lebanese Army said it now has operational control of Lebanese territory south of the Litani river, with the exception of five Israeli military positions inside Lebanon.

The army stopped short of declaring it had fully disarmed Hezbollah and other groups south of the Litani, acknowledging that "work in the sector is still ongoing" while signaling readiness to move to the next phases of the government's plan, "Homeland Shield".

"The Lebanese army confirms that its plan to confine weapons has reached an advanced stage after achieving the objectives of the first phase in an effective and tangible manner on the ground," the statement said. The army affirmed its commitment to implementing the government's initiative to "assume exclusive responsibility, alongside other security agencies, for maintaining security and stability in Lebanon, particularly south of the Litani River." [Read more.](#)



United Nations peacekeepers patrol in vehicles with Lebanese soldiers near the southern border with Israel, January 8, 2026. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

When UNIFIL leaves, south Lebanon still needs an international presence

Atlantic Council

With the arrival of 2026, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has entered its final twelve months of operations after a presence of forty-eight years in this volatile sector of the Middle East. While UNIFIL is expected to draw down and depart within a twelve-month timeframe in 2027, much thought is being given toward what could serve as an alternative presence in south Lebanon. Lebanon is concerned that a lack of external support will place a huge burden on an already strained Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which are responsible for security in south Lebanon. In addition, the absence of an international eye on a volatile corner of the Middle East could encourage Hezbollah and Israel into actions that lead to renewed conflict. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam urged for the continuation of an international force in south Lebanon during a meeting last week in Paris with French President Emmanuel Macron. [Read more.](#)

Syria: Rise in Conflict



Burnt military vehicles belonging to the SDF are seen in the Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood of Aleppo, Syria, following clashes with the Syrian army on 12 January 2026. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

How Damascus and the SDF came to blows in Aleppo – and what might come next

Middle East Institute

After months of building tensions, full-blown hostilities erupted between Syria's transitional government and militia fighters linked to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Aleppo on January 6. Through four days of fighting, government forces have now assumed full control of Syria's second city, after expelling SDF-linked forces from its northwestern districts. Challenging negotiations, mediated by the United States, have continued for months, but the SDF's commitment to integrate into the state has not been implemented. This latest conflict and the prospect for it to expand into new areas underlines the potentially existential challenge faced by Syria's transition, should it fail to assimilate rival non-state actors under a broader transitional authority.

A new government emerges in Damascus

When Bashar al-Assad's regime collapsed in December 2024, Syria fell to armed opposition groups that had fought the regime for more than a decade. But the interim government that swiftly took shape in the capital, Damascus, never attained control of all of Syria. To this day, approximately 25% of the country remains under the authority of the SDF, a Kurdish-dominated militia that had been the primary partner of the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS since 2015. [Read more.](#)

Aleppo Escalation Puts Damascus–SDF Integration Agreement under Further Strain

International Crisis Group

On 6 January fighting erupted between Syrian government forces and the police forces of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, known as the Asayish units, in Aleppo's Sheikh Maqoud and Ashrafiyah neighbourhoods. The violence has since displaced over 140,000 people and killed at least 22, including civilians. The army declared both areas "closed military zones" on 7 January. On 9 January, following U.S.-mediated negotiations, the Defence Ministry announced a ceasefire and offered the Kurdish units safe passage to the north east. Government forces subsequently entered Ashrafiyah. But the local Kurdish councils rejected the terms as "a call to surrender", vowing to defend their neighbourhoods. The evacuation deadline has since expired and fighting resumed. This escalation casts further doubt on the unimplemented framework for integrating SDF institutions into the Syrian state memorialised in a 10 March 2025 agreement.

The embattled Kurdish-controlled enclaves inside Syria's second-largest city are isolated pockets that Damascus likely views as challenges to its authority in territory it otherwise controls. [Read more.](#)

Caught in the Crossfire: Islamic State Detention Sites at Risk

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Almost overnight, the map of Syria has changed again as stalled talks between the central government and forces controlling the northeast escalated into violence. Misinformation and disinformation have spread rapidly, with each side blaming the other for releasing hundreds if not thousands of individuals affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) and held in local detention sites run by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). As the situation continues to shift, questions are flooding in about the actual status of these sites, the future of the long-delayed detainee repatriation effort, and the important role that the United States has played—and should keep playing—on both issues.



A woman at an IS detention center. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

The Past and Present of IS Detention Sites

Between late 2018 and early 2019, as the SDF seized former IS territory with support from the U.S.-led coalition, thousands of men, women, and children affiliated with the terrorist group were captured and transferred to various pop-up detention sites in northeast Syria. With more than 70,000 Syrians, Iraqis, and third-country nationals (TCNs) taken into custody during this time, the SDF developed a policy to divide these populations: most women and children [Read more.](#)

Syria's Kurds could be al-Sharaa's partners in rebuilding. Why did Damascus assault them instead?

Atlantic Council

Among the unsung success stories of Syria's transition after the fall of Bashar al-Assad were two agreements between the interim government in Damascus and Syrian Kurds—rare examples of peaceful compromise in a year marked by sectarian killings of other minorities, including [Alawites and Druze](#).

The [March 10 agreement](#) between Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) commander Mazloum Abdi and interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa was intended to integrate the SDF into the new Syrian army. The [Aleppo Agreement](#), signed in Syria's second largest city in April, was the first practical implementation of the March 10 agreement, because it entailed the integration of local police forces: the Kurdish Asayish and Internal Security Forces linked to the interim government. [Read more.](#)



Syrian Kurds attend a protest in solidarity with the people in the neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah in Aleppo, in Hasakah, Syria, January 7, 2026. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

How Syria Can Succeed in Integrating the Kurds

Center for Strategic & International Studies

Intensified conflict between the Syrian transition government (STG) and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) poses the most significant threat to [Syria's fragile transition](#) to date. The SDF overplayed its hand in negotiations with the STG, but now President Ahmed al-Sharaa risks similar overreach. A shaky [four-day ceasefire](#) is set to expire on January 24. Good faith gestures from Sharaa that bridge the gap between the imperatives of a unified Syria and Kurdish demands for community-led protection and local autonomy in Kurdish-majority areas are critical at this moment and can serve as an important off-ramp for conflict. Otherwise, Syria's transition could be derailed, with significant ripple effects across Syria and the wider region.

Background to Tensions

Early in Syria's post-Assad transition, Kurdish integration stood out as among the most challenging issues facing the transition government. A March 2025 [integration agreement](#) aimed to establish a process for folding Kurdish-led governance and security entities into the Damascus-led transition government by the end of 2025. It called for border crossings and oil and gas facilities in SDF-controlled areas of Syria's northeast to come under transition government control [Read more.](#)

Syrian government agrees to ceasefire with Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces

PBS News

The Syrian government Sunday announced a ceasefire with the Syrian Democratic Forces, taking almost full control of the country and dismantling the Kurdish-led forces that controlled the northeast for over a decade.

The announcement comes as tensions between government forces and the SDF boiled over earlier this month, eventually resulting in a major push by government forces toward the east. The SDF appeared to have largely retreated after initial clashes on a tense front line area in eastern Aleppo province.



Women walk with Syrian flags, after Syria and the main Kurdish fighting force SDF struck a wide-ranging deal. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

Hours after the government announced the deal, SDF leader Mazloum Abdi confirmed it in a video statement, saying the group had accepted the agreement, which stipulates their withdrawal from Raqqa and Deir el-Zour provinces "to stop the bloodshed." [Read more.](#)

All Eyes on Southern Syria

Carnegie Middle East Center

By crossing the Euphrates River in recent days, Syrian government forces broke through a decade-old boundary that had defined Syria's conflict, behind which the Kurd-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had sustained a de facto autonomous area in northeastern Syria. The next phase could still swing from confrontation, [if dialogue fails](#), to complex bargaining over Kurdish rights, control of weapons, and political participation, among other issues, that will not be easy to resolve. Syria's cohesion looks set to be decided in the northeast, with reverberations in other parts of the country, not least in the south where influential figures in the Druze community have sought self-determination for Suwayda Governorate.

The recent developments began around the new year. After government forces [pushed Kurdish fighters out of Aleppo](#), they turned their sites on areas west of the Euphrates, where the SDF had deployed during the period of vacuum that followed the downfall of Bashar al-Assad's regime. The U.S. mediated in talks that ran parallel to the military buildup and briefly produced a workable formula: an [SDF pullback east of the Euphrates](#). However, the [rupture](#) came during the withdrawal and handover, as Arab tribes in Deir al-Zor and Raqqa rose up against the SDF, [Read more.](#)

Yemen's Shaky Future



Saudi-backed forces advancing in southern Yemen.
PHOTO CREDITS

From coalition to confrontation: Saudi-UAE rivalry in Yemen and its regional implications

Middle East Institute

The final days of 2025 marked a turning point in the Middle East, as competition between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen spilled out into the open. Tensions between the two coalition partners, which jointly launched a military intervention in Yemen in 2015, have simmered for years and are now rapidly escalating, with far-reaching implications for both Yemen and regional security more broadly. The situation came to a head when Saudi Arabia carried out airstrikes on the Mukalla seaport on December 30, targeting weapons and military equipment it said had been delivered from the UAE to the Southern Transitional Council (STC), an Emirati-backed group that seeks the independence of southern Yemen.

In a remarkably blunt statement, the Saudi foreign ministry accused the UAE of pressuring the STC to conduct military operations along the kingdom's southern borders, describing the move as a direct threat to Saudi national security and a "red line" for Riyadh that it would not hesitate to confront. Hours later, the president of Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), Rashad al-Alimi — who is backed by Saudi Arabia — issued a decree canceling the joint defense agreement with the UAE and demanding the withdrawal of Emirati forces from Yemen within 24 hours.

[Read more.](#)

Oman, eastern Yemen, and the fragile geometry of neutrality

Chatham House

In the closing days of 2025 Yemen experienced another dramatic reversal in its already convoluted war. After a decade of joint military intervention, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates found themselves on opposing sides of a conflict they had once waged together.



Pro-government Homeland Shield forces pictured in Seiyun, governorate of Hadhramaut, Yemen, on January 05, 2026. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

The rupture was triggered when the UAE-backed

Southern Transitional Council (STC) launched a sweeping campaign to seize control of eastern Yemen, capturing the vast governorates of Hadhramaut and Al-Mahra, which together account for more than half of Yemen's landmass.

The STC's advance was short-lived. Alarmed by the implications of a secessionist authority consolidating along its southern border, Saudi Arabia moved decisively. [Read more.](#)

People of Yemen are starving in silence, warns IRC

International Rescue Committee

Yemen is entering a dangerous new phase of food security with over half the population, 18 million people, expected to face worsening levels of food insecurity in early 2026. The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) projections warn that an additional one million people are at risk of facing life-threatening hunger (IPC Phase 3+). Pockets of famine impacting over 40,000 people are expected in four districts within the next two months - the worst outlook for the country since 2022.

Years of conflict and displacement have devastated livelihoods and severely restricted access to basic health and nutrition services. This has been compounded by a nationwide economic collapse that has eroded household purchasing power, alongside a sharp decline in humanitarian assistance. By the end of 2025, the humanitarian response was less than 25% funded – the lowest level in a decade- while lifesaving nutrition assistance received less than 10% of the funding required.

This rapid deterioration - driven by catastrophic humanitarian funding cuts, climate shocks, economic collapse, and compounded by recent insecurity - calls for urgent action to reverse the unfolding catastrophe. [Read more.](#)

USAID and Foreign Aid Legacies



A flag outside the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) headquarters in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 3. The agency was shut down on July 1; remaining programs have been transferred to the State Department. [PHOTO CREDITS](#)

US Congress Says Yes to Foreign Aid—Now Comes the Hard Part

Center for Global Development

Against the odds, congressional appropriators struck a deal to fund development and diplomacy priorities in FY26. The topline figure, coming in at \$50 billion, represents a 16 percent cut compared to FY25, but that's before subtracting select emergency funding and rescissions. And unlike last year's continuing resolution extending funding at prior levels, lawmakers put their own stamp on the new spending bill. A host of reporting requirements and mandated briefings will ensure that key actors on Capitol Hill remain engaged with a range of development and humanitarian policy issues in the months ahead.

That said, there are plenty of lingering questions about the extent to which the vision for future international assistance—as sketched out in the bill—comes to fruition, given both the Department of State's lean staffing and the administration's views on impoundment and its penchant for withholding funds. Nevertheless, appropriators are voicing a desire to see continued US leadership in the provision of foreign aid and in various multilateral fora. The deal is yet to pass the Senate, but here's a rundown of how several major accounts fared and what might come next. (You can find the link to the bill text [HERE](#) and the joint explanatory statement [HERE](#).)

Despite years of bipartisan backing and the administration's stated commitment, the president's budget proposed a staggering 60 percent cut to funding for global health programs. [Read more.](#)

International development aid: A burden or a soft power tool? Here's what Europeans think

Euro News

In a world increasingly dominated by conflict and tension, international aid seems to be one of the first casualties.

The past few years have seen a growing number of countries slashing or scaling back their budget devoted to developing economies.

With some exceptions, cuts have been particularly severe in the US (-56% from 2023 to 2025) as well as in Canada (-25%) and several European countries.



A sign at the Berahle refugee camp in the Danakil Depression, Ethiopia, March 2019.

[PHOTO CREDITS](#)

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimated a drop in international aid resources ranging from 9% to 17% in 2025.

Germany, the UK, France and Italy are among the countries that, whether in GDP or absolute terms, have reduced their commitments. Spain, on the other hand, bucks the trend, though its contribution - 0.25% of its gross national income - is still far from the UN's 0.7% goal. [Read more.](#)

Lack of Finance Is Not the Only Constraint on Global Development

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Since the start of this century, the number of people living in extreme poverty has declined from more than one in four people to fewer than one in ten. But in the 2020s, developing countries have faced a confluence of challenges. The headwinds of COVID-19, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, inflation, debt challenges, and ongoing conflicts and civil unrest have disrupted the spread of prosperity and improved health outcomes.

The year 2025 compounded these challenges. The closure of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the world's largest bilateral aid donor, garnered the world's attention for the impact and scale of the cuts. The agency's dismantling is the most visible sign of a broader decline in global support for the institutions and financing underpinning the international development system. This financial disruption, combined with a U.S. retreat from the United Nations and numerous U.S. tariff policies upending multilateral trade, has prompted questions over which parts of the existing aid and development system should be prioritized, which should be [Read more.](#)

Agency Strategic Plan: Fiscal Years 2026-2030

U.S. Department of State

Forward by Secretary Marco Rubio

I am pleased to submit the Department of State’s Agency Strategic Plan (ASP) for Fiscal Years 2026-2030. These four years come at a defining period for the United States and our place in the world. With President Trump’s agenda of domestic renewal and peace through strength, we will usher in a new era of American greatness.

President Trump inherited from his predecessor a dangerous world full of unprecedented challenges facing this nation: systematic infringements on our sovereignty; the return of multi-faceted great power competition unlike any we have seen since the end of the Cold War; rampant abuse and exploitation in the global trading system; a post-war global order increasingly plagued with anti-Western ideology and weaponized against us; the erosion of our borders and an epidemic of unchecked global mass migration; and global chaos, instability, and armed conflict of a scale not seen in decades.

Tackling these problems requires a dynamic and vigorous America. Yet, after years of weak leadership, we are beset by social division. We have been suffering from a declining manufacturing and industrial base. We have been growing increasingly dependent on foreign supply chains. We have become increasingly ashamed of our own culture, identity, and values. And, in many quarters, there is a creeping fatalism about the future of American power and prosperity. Moreover, we call upon a set of core allies with the same ailments, and which have grown increasingly weak and incapable of protecting themselves— much less willing to shoulder their fair share of responding to collective challenges.

[Read more.](#)

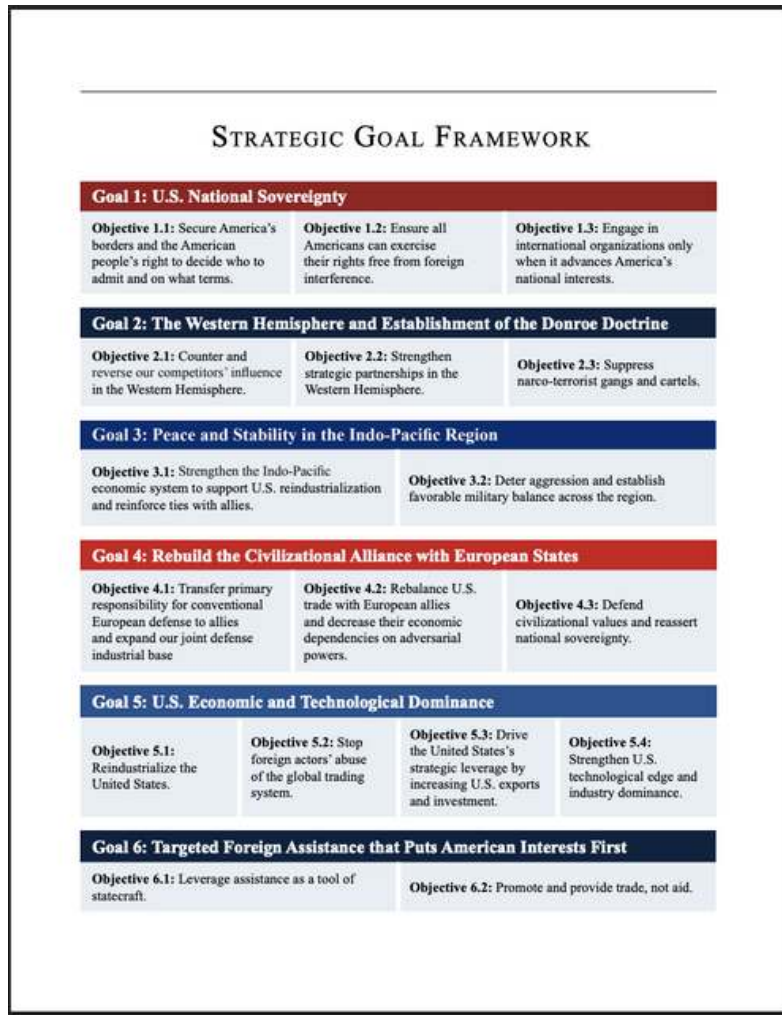


PHOTO CREDITS

World Economic Forum Annual Meeting: Davos 2026



Throughout the Annual Meeting, discussions repeatedly returned to how cooperation is adapting in a more fragmented and competitive world.

PHOTO CREDITS

From coalition to confrontation: Saudi-UAE rivalry in Yemen and its regional implications

World Economic Forum

At this year’s World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland, geopolitics took centre stage.

The gathering – which welcomed nearly 400 top government officials, including close to 65 heads of state, as well as hundreds of business leaders, academics, heads of international organizations and civil society representatives – convened at “one of the most complex global moments in generations,” said World Economic Forum President and CEO Børge Brende.

Yet the Annual Meeting, Brende added, served as a “testament to the fact that leaders are committed to a spirit of dialogue.”

Here are five key geopolitical takeaways from Davos 2026.

1. Geopolitical complexity is the new normal

[*Read more.*](#)

Inside the biggest Davos debates (other than Greenland)

Atlantic Council

This week Davos, Switzerland, returns to being a charming ski town. The shops and restaurants—temporarily rented by every major tech company on the planet to host events and receptions—return to their owners and will soon be filled with tourists on holiday.

But what happened at the 2026 World Economic Forum won't soon be forgotten. This was the year the forum changed policy. As one attendee told us on her way off the mountain, "Imagine what would have happened this week if Trump didn't have to meet the Europeans face to face." It's an intriguing, if chilling, thought.

While Trump's speech this past Wednesday and his subsequent decision to backtrack on [Greenland](#) threats drove the roller coaster news cycle of the week, there were several other notable moments that may have much longer term—and more important—policy repercussions. Here's what we saw on the ground: [Read more.](#)

3 messages to young people from leaders at Davos on how to grow up with AI

World Economic Forum

One of the [most talked-about topics](#) at this year's meeting in Davos was AI — from conversations with [leaders from the field](#), to debates on [whether or not there's an AI bubble](#), the transformational technology dominated the agenda.

While much of the focus was on what impact it will have on industries and jobs, another important question came up throughout the week: what does it mean for young people? Here are three messages leaders in Davos were keen to get across on the issue. [Read more.](#)



The Day After AGI session with Dario Amodei and Demis Hassabis.

[PHOTO CREDITS](#)

What Davos Said About AI This Year

Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence dominated discussions at this year's World Economic Forum in Davos—from closed-door roundtables on governance to high-profile panels on business transformation.

[Read more.](#)

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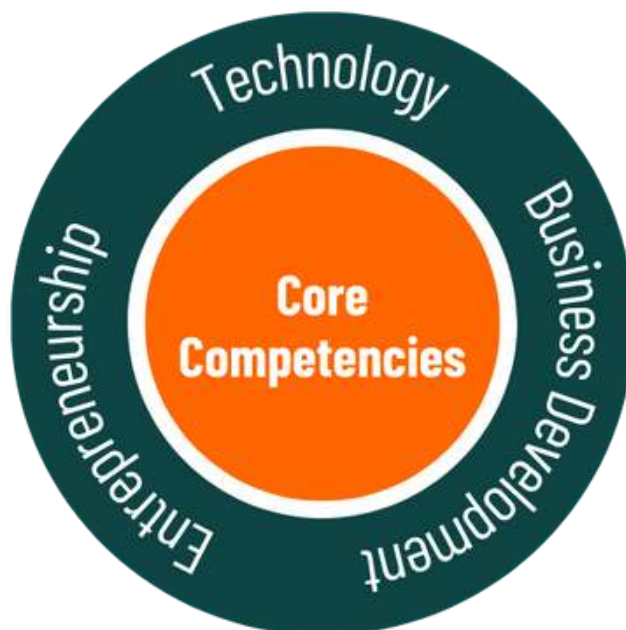
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Contact Information:

United States

11708 Indian Ridge Rd
 Reston, Virginia 20191
 (202) 340-261
info@jabiconsulting.com



Palestine

Al Kena Building
 Haifa Street
 Nablus, Palestine
 + 972 56-644-4644
info@jabiconsulting.com



Core Competencies

Jabi Consulting, based in Washington, DC, specializes in helping private and government contractors compete, expand and succeed in emerging markets. We provide strategic advisory, market intelligence, and partnership facilitation to drive growth and impact in defense, infrastructure, and public and private sectors. We collaborate with USG contractors across various industries, with a strong focus on public administration and business consulting. We bring strategic insights, technical expertise, and hands-on experience to drive impactful and sustainable solutions in complex operating environments.

Core Competencies:

- Capture & Proposal Development
- Market Research & Analysis
- Public Sector Advisory & Implementation
- Digital Transformation & Innovation
- Capacity Building & Management Training
- Project Management & Implementation
- Technology Integration Strategy

Key Differentiators

Client-Oriented & Results-Driven – Focused on delivering solutions that maximize efficiency, time, and resources.

Agile & Flexible – Quickly adapts to shifting priorities and delivers results under tight timelines.

Expert in Client Management – Skilled in navigating and managing client relationships for smooth operations and strategic alignment.

Strategic Cost Efficiency – Provides innovative, cost-effective consulting solutions to optimize budgets and achieve client goals.

USG & MENA Expertise – Deep understanding of USG contracting and the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of the Middle East, bridging global expectations with local implementation.

Turnkey Proposal Support – Manages the full proposal development process, allowing clients to focus on project execution.

Efficient Project Costing – Delivers accurate cost estimates and streamlined proposal preparation for competitive and successful bids.

Rapid On-the-Ground Support – Conducts quick reconnaissance trips, providing real-time insights for operational readiness.

Company Information

Registered in 2022 in Virginia
UEI: GLVNQ7783YC8
CAGE Code: 9NJF9

PCS Codes: R406, R410, R429,
R431, R499, R607, R699, R707,
R799, D399, D302, D303, D305,
D306, D307, D308, D310, D318,
D322, D324

Business Size: Small and
Minority-owned

NAICS Codes: 928120,
541611, 541612, 541512,
541519, 541618, 561110,
561311, 561312, 561320,
561499, 611430

SAM Registration: Active

Commonwealth of Virginia
Designation: Micro Business



**We Grew our
Client Portfolios
by \$130 Million
in 2024.**

Past Performance

- **2025, IDG** – Worked with IDG leadership to draft a concept note on a Palestinian economic governance plan for the Gaza Day After.
- **2024, Palladium** – Led the development of a global youth workforce strategy and a growth strategy in the Middle East. Spearheaded a corporate strategy, positioning the firm for the Gaza Day After, including a monthly bulletin analyzing political and economic consequences and donor responses.
- **2024, IBI/URC** – Drafted a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) growth strategy for the MENA region, including a \$43M Trade, Investment, and Blended Finance proposal.
- **2023, Panagora** – Led the capture and proposal development of a \$26M USAID MEL activity in the Middle East.
- **2022, USAID Middle East** – Contributed to USAID-funded regional research, leading two research questions to examine transitions in secondary education across 10 Middle Eastern countries.
- **2022, Creative Associates** – Led the design and proposal development for a \$25M TVET program in the Middle East.
- **2022, The World Bank** – Designed a model to engage 173 municipalities in the Middle East, focusing on livelihoods for local communities in partnership with MS.
- **2022, UNOPS** – Jabi Consulting played a pivotal role in launching a green economy initiative and establishing a Regional Green Community of Practice (GCoP). Facilitated stakeholder engagement, consultations, and strategic meetings to build consensus on a green finance framework.
- **2022, ILO** – Worked closely with the ILO team to design comprehensive TVET strategies for Lebanon, Yemen, and Syria, with a focus on integrating technology.
- **2022, Chemonics** – Led the design of an \$87M USAID economic growth proposal in the Middle East, which was successfully awarded to Chemonics.
- **2022, IBTCI** – Led the design and drafting of the management strategy for a third-party monitoring (TPM) proposal in the Middle East.
- **2021, The World Bank** – Designed a framework and drafted nine case studies on the impact of technology on youth entrepreneurship in the Middle East.