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## Global Competition for Re-making the Middle East



Amongst the issues that Israel's genocidal war on Gaza has exposed is the hollowness of the Western liberal ideas of free speech. That the collective West has no qualms about not waging wars is not a fresh revelation. At least ever since the end of the Second World War, the harbingers of liberalism have waged more wars – and killed more people – than those professing other ideologies and/or practising different political systems. Yet, nothing else could have exposed the shallowness of the Western model of democracy and the claimed respect for human rights than the ways in which the West has failed to protect Palestinian lives. The domestic reaction in the US led by the students and faculties of leading Universities reflects this overall failure. Apart from the unravelling it has caused domestically, this failure is also relevant in a geopolitical sense because it has created an opportunity for Western competitors to push for alternative ways of resolving the crisis. But the West is also pushing against these efforts because it understands that the success of its

competitors will undermine its domination. A third key actor in this is the Middle Eastern Muslim states that are playing on both sides to ensure their own survival.

China has been playing some role from this perspective. When Israel began its war, Arab states rushed to Beijing for support and mediation. Washington, obviously, did not like this decision because it showed how the Middle East – which has been following a “look west” policy since the end of the First World War – was now following a “look east” policy. More recently, China has been trying to create a unified political force in Palestine by bringing Hamas and Fatah closer. If China can succeed in this effort, it could be a major step towards this idea of a Palestine state. From the Chinese perspective, this effort could end the conflict, allowing Beijing to reshape regional geopolitical alignments for its Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) to flourish more freely in the world’s most resource-rich country.

On Tuesday, April 30, [China hosted](#) both Hamas and Fatah in Beijing as part of its ongoing efforts. How is this effort different from the West? In contrast to Western efforts to sideline Hamas – which is nothing but a recipe for disaster, like *The Abraham Accords* – China’s preference is for legitimising Hamas as a political force. Not only is this internal unity crucial for peace in the region (because it would allow all Palestinian factions to collectively bargain for their rights, power, and existence as a state on par with Israel), but presenting itself as a power that favours unity over a politics of divide and rule helps Beijing to clearly distinguish itself from the US and its allies.

This was the second consecutive meeting between Hamas and Fatah arranged by non-Western powers. In February, the Palestinian factions had also met in Moscow. As opposed to the West’s mindless – and genocidal – support for Israel’s “right to self-defence” (whatever that means!) – the meeting in Moscow underscored a lot of empathetic ideas. Mustafa Barghouti, the secretary general of the Palestinian National Initiative [told the media](#) that the purpose of these talks was a future national consensus government, which would “[devote] its attention and its work mainly to alleviate this terrible suffering in Gaza” and prevent “Israeli efforts to enforce ethnic cleansing on the people of Gaza”.

The US, on the other hand, has repeatedly rejected Chinese and Russian diplomacy over Gaza, including any rhetoric that presents Israel’s war as genocidal. Since October 7, Washington’s strategy has been to provide both material and moral support to Israel. The reason for this is simple: Israel is too crucial for Western interests in the Middle East to be left alone. Washington, in fact, sees Israel as a suitable, alternative provider of security to the Gulf states against Iran. In fact, this was the central idea of *The Abraham Accords*. If the (Sunni) Middle Eastern states could be woven together with Israel, it would allow

Washington to leave the Middle East to this bloc and focus more on the Indo-Pacific region to compete with China. This goal was/is threatened by the ongoing war and how US rival states are moving in the region. Washington wants to maintain a strong Israel is one key reason why the former continues to support the latter even after seeing about 35,000 Palestinians officially killed! In the end, Washington is supporting Israel's so-called "final solution" – which is much more than the mere elimination of Hamas and includes a systematic extermination of the Palestinian society – to the longest-running conflict in the region.

Given that the US still has influence means why most Gulf states are still forced to pay attention to Washington's moves and interests. These states' interest is to end the ongoing war as soon as possible, i.e., without necessarily caring for the outcome in terms of a one-state or two-state solution. As it stands, these states have not expressed any vocal support for or opposition to the idea of a one or even two-state solution. Their "flexibility", however, is to make sure that a solution (any solution at all) can be found. And, the reason for this is simple: if Israel's war on Gaza leads to a wider war in the region, it will seriously disrupt these states' economies, including their massive modernization programmes. More importantly, if the sufferings of the Palestinians do not come to a quick halt, this could radicalise their societies both vis-à-vis Israel and against the Gulf regimes themselves.

Therefore, ultimately, the diplomatic effort to find a solution is a battle that has many actors whose interests don't necessarily align with each other, but each one of these actors is pursuing ideas that have the potential to reshape the Middle East in profound ways. Whereas Russian and Chinese ideas prefer bringing the conflict to an end to allow for a more peaceful Middle East for a smoother integration of the region with their systems, Washington's approach does not include a preference for a permanent conflict resolution. It only includes short-term solutions that don't address the underlying cause of the conflict, i.e., Israeli domination, because of how that cause remains crucial for Washington itself. In-between these two, the Gulf states are neither here nor there insofar as their ability to lead and push for permanent peace is concerned. Having said that, any diplomatic move to support Russian and Chinese ideas for peace could radically shrink the space for Washington and its allies to impose their ideas of short-term peace and long-term genocide.

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