

# 6. Peace negotiations in the Middle East

- The Middle East was the scene of six negotiating processes in 2024, which accounted for 12% of all such processes worldwide.
- In 2024, the deadlock in the negotiations over Iran’s nuclear programme persisted, though Tehran and the European countries involved in the dialogue resumed diplomatic contact at the end of the year.
- The parties to the conflict in Yemen made no progress on the roadmap outlined by the UN special envoy in late 2023 in a context influenced by hostilities between the Houthis and Israel.
- The armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah escalated significantly, but a ceasefire agreement was reached at the end of the year.
- Indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the US continued, though no agreement was achieved on a ceasefire. A deal was agreed in early 2025.
- Initiatives to promote intra-Palestinian unity were mediated and/or facilitated by Russia, China and Egypt throughout the year.
- The abrupt fall of Bashar Assad’s regime in December opened a new scenario in Syria and gave rise to renewed approaches to a political transition in the country.

This chapter analyses the main peace processes and negotiations in the Middle East throughout 2024. First, it presents the main characteristics and general trends of the negotiating processes in the region. Second, it studies the evolution of contexts during the year, including references to the gender perspective and implementation of the international agenda on women, peace and security. At the beginning of this chapter, a map is also presented identifying the countries of the Middle East that were the scene of negotiations in 2024.

Table 6.1. Summary of peace processes and negotiations in the Middle East in 2024

Peace processes and negotiations	Negotiating actors	Third parties
Iran (nuclear programme)	Iran, France, United Kingdom, Germany, China, Russia, EU	UN
Israel – Lebanon (Hezbollah)	Government of Israel, Government of Lebanon, Hezbollah	USA, France, UN
Israel – Palestine	Government of Israel, Hamas	Qatar, Egypt, USA, France, UN
Palestine	Hamas, Fatah, other Palestinian political groups	Russia, China, Egypt
Syria	Government, political and armed opposition groups, regional and international actors <sup>1</sup>	UN (Geneva process); Russia, Türkiye, Iran (Astana process with Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, UN and ICRC as observers); Arab League (Jordanian initiative)
Yemen	Internationally recognised Yemeni government (backed by Saudi Arabia), Houthis / Ansar Allah, Saudi Arabia	ONU, Oman, Saudi Arabia, <sup>2</sup> ICRC

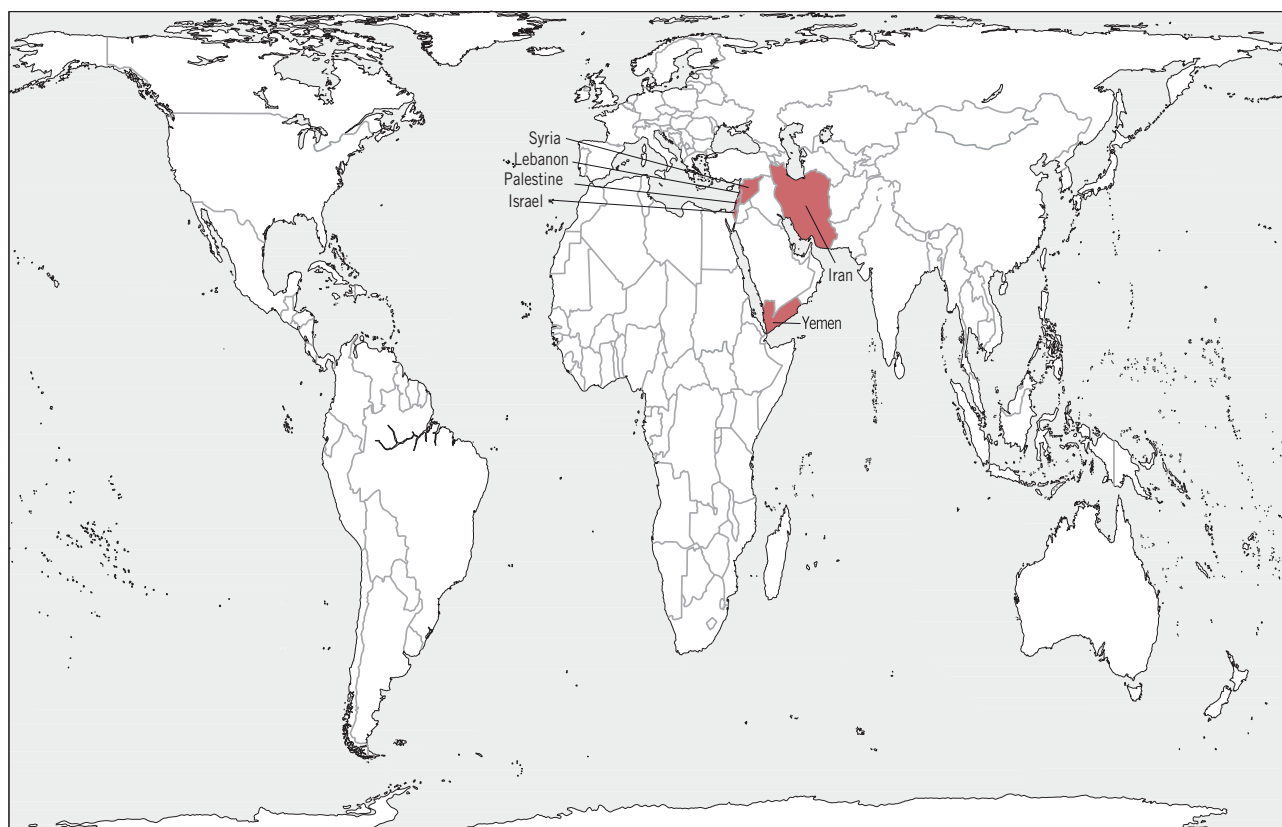
## 6.1 Negotiations in 2024: regional trends

This chapter analyses six negotiating processes that took place in the Middle East in 2024, accounting for 12% in the last year worldwide. Four were related to armed conflicts—Israel-Lebanon (Hezbollah), Israel-Palestine, Syria and Yemen—and the other two were linked to socio-

political crises: one associated with the development of Iran’s nuclear programme and the other related to the dispute between the Palestinian groups Hamas and Fatah. The Palestinian negotiating process was internal in nature, whilst all others were internationalised internal (Syria and Yemen) and international (Israel-Lebanon (Hezbollah), Israel-Palestine and the tension surrounding Iran’s nuclear activities). Geographically,

1. Although some regional and international actors present themselves as third parties, in practice they also operate as negotiators and favour understandings to ensure their presence and influence on Syrian soil.  
2. Saudi Arabia also plays a role as a mediator/facilitator in disputes between various actors on the anti-Houthi side, and between the internationally recognised government and the Houthis.

## Map 6.1. Peace negotiations in the Middle East in 2024



Countries with peace processes and negotiations in the Middle East in 2024.

two of the negotiating processes were located in the Gulf region (Iran and Yemen) and the other four were in the Mashreq region (Israel-Lebanon (Hezbollah), Israel-Palestine, Palestine, and Syria). Compared to last year's edition of this yearbook, the number of Middle Eastern negotiating processes rose slightly due to the inclusion of diplomatic initiatives to achieve a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah amidst escalating regional conflicts and tensions since late 2023.

**Governments were involved in all the negotiating processes** in the region through direct, formalised or indirect contacts with other state or armed actors. In some cases, non-state armed organisations involved in the negotiations operated as de facto governments in the territories under their control. Despite the ongoing deadlock in the negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme for most of the year, in late 2024, Tehran and the European countries involved in the negotiations resumed direct diplomatic contact for the first time since 2022. Following the significant escalation of hostilities in 2024, the Israeli and Lebanese governments engaged in dialogue facilitated by the US and France to reach a ceasefire agreement. This dialogue included the Lebanese militia party Hezbollah, even though it did not directly participate in the negotiations. Benjamin Netanyahu's government was also one of the parties to the indirect negotiations over the Gaza Strip. These negotiations also involved

***Various actors were facilitators and mediators whilst continuing to provide support to some of the parties in conflict or being directly involved in the hostilities***

Hamas, which has controlled Gaza since its split with Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 2006. Both Hamas and Fatah/PA were the main partners in the talks aimed at achieving intra-Palestinian reconciliation, in which other Palestinian political groups also participated. In Yemen, some of the mediation efforts in sought to implicate the Houthis—who control the capital and most of the north of the country—and the internationally recognised government led by the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC). Before the hasty overthrow of Bashar Assad's Syrian regime in December, it continued to participate in some of the negotiating schemes launched in recent years, both in the Astana process, led by Russia, Türkiye and Iran, and in talks with several countries in the region promoted by the Arab League, though without any sign of a substantive approach to the underlying causes of the armed conflict.

Several negotiating processes showcased the **ambivalent involvement of some regional and international actors** in some of the region's disputes. Many of these actors played facilitation and/or mediation roles, whilst also providing significant support to one or more parties in conflict and/or parties directly involved in the hostilities, thereby actively seeking to preserve their interests or spheres of influence. This was true of the United States, which was one of the mediators in Israel's negotiations with Hamas and the Lebanese government

in 2024, whilst at the same time maintaining its policy of providing key political and military support for Netanyahu's government, including through the massive supply of weapons. Syria continued to be another example of this dynamic, as illustrated by the Astana process, shaped by Russia, Iran and Türkiye primarily to establish a status quo and spheres of influence in Syria and to avoid friction between these countries, which are directly involved in the armed conflict. Saudi Arabia also continued to be one of the facilitators and mediators of contact between various parties in the dispute in Yemen—including the Houthis and the PLC—whilst at the same time remaining a key player in supporting the internationally recognised government. Its role in the conflict has prompted it to act as a direct partner in talks with the Houthis, though unlike in 2023, these meetings were not as intense in 2024 and made no progress towards any possible political solution, partly as a result of the Yemeni armed group's involvement in armed attacks in the Red Sea and in its confrontation with Israel.

***Saudi Arabia, China, the United States, Egypt, France, Russia and Qatar were involved as third parties in the region's negotiating processes***

**Third parties** were involved in all the negotiating process in the region, in line with what was observed in previous years. In some cases, several third parties were involved in mediation and facilitation efforts as part of consecutive or simultaneous actions. The UN continued to be involved in promoting most negotiating processes in the Middle East. In some cases it did so through special envoys—such as in Syria and Yemen—or through missions, such as the one established in Yemen in 2018 to support the agreement on the port of Al Hudaydah (UNMHA) and the one deployed in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to monitor the agreement for Israel's withdrawal from that country, endorsed by UNSC Resolution 1701 of 2006, which was also involved in the implementation of the ceasefire agreement reached in 2024. The UN also acted through some of its agencies, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which conducts technical monitoring of the agreement on Iran's nuclear programme. The UN continued to issue monitoring reports on UN Security Council resolutions on the conflicts in Syria and Yemen and the dispute over the Iranian nuclear programme. Its reports on Yemen, for example, analyse the implementation of previous agreements and action taken against some of the actors in the conflict, such as sanctions against the Houthis. There was also a verification mechanism, UNVIM, based in Djibouti. Regarding the Palestinian-Israeli issue, the UN came together with the EU, Russia and the US to establish the Middle East Quartet in 2002 to support and promote peace negotiations, but this forum remained inactive. Indeed, its last public statement dates from 2021. The UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) did remain in place, but the office did not play a leading role as a third party in the negotiations. The UN Secretary-General continued to urge a ceasefire throughout 2024 and the international organisation supported various peace initiatives through

Security Council resolutions. UNSC Resolution 2728 (March) called for an immediate ceasefire for the first time for Ramadan, overcoming a veto from Washington, which had opposed related resolutions in previous months, while UNSC Resolution 2735 (June) endorsed US President Joe Biden's ceasefire proposal.

Regarding regional organisations, in 2024 the Arab League kept open the dialogue channel established in 2023 with Bashar Assad to try to outline a regional solution to the Syrian crisis and address priority issues for several countries in the region, such as the return of refugees and the control of drug trafficking from Syria, though no progress was made before the regime fell. As in previous years, several countries were involved as third parties in mediation and facilitation efforts in 2024. In addition to the aforementioned efforts of the United States and Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt were involved in the indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas, France was involved in negotiations between Israel and Lebanon (Paris also facilitated contacts regarding Gaza at the beginning of the year) and Russia, China and Egypt played roles in meetings on intra-Palestinian reconciliation. Oman also continued to facilitate meetings as part the Yemeni negotiating process. Third parties active in the region also included the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In Yemen, the ICRC continued to monitor the Stockholm Agreement, particularly regarding the exchange and release of prisoners.

The **negotiating agendas** in the Middle East covered various topics, depending on the specifics of each context. In general terms, however, two particular issues can be highlighted, which were also found in previous years. The first was the attempt to achieve ceasefire agreements. This was particularly relevant for the Israel-Palestine and Israel-Lebanon (Hezbollah) conflicts. In the latter conflict, between Israel and Lebanon, an agreement was reached in November and was being implemented in a fragile context by the end of the year. Hezbollah committed to a ceasefire after months of conflict and a situation of attrition, affected by Israel's assassination of its leader (Hassan Nasrallah), and renounced the condition it had set thus far that any ceasefire in Lebanon would depend on the end of Israeli attacks on Gaza. The issue of a ceasefire remained one of the central topics of the discussions between Israel and Hamas. Throughout the year, Hamas insisted on its interest in a permanent ceasefire, whilst Netanyahu's government repeated its limited willingness to merely pause hostilities without hindering the possibility of a new offensive to achieve its goal of "total victory" over Hamas. In this context, a ceasefire in Gaza was not achieved until early 2025. The various negotiating channels for Syria were virtually blocked throughout the year, but following the overthrow of Bashar Assad, the issue of a nationwide ceasefire emerged as one of the main challenges of the new era.

The second notable item on regional negotiating agendas was **prisoner exchanges and releases**. The conditions, number and timing of the exchange of individuals held by Hamas and imprisoned by Israel were key issues in the negotiations mediated by the US, Qatar and Egypt. In April, a phased exchange similar to the one agreed upon in January 2025 was explored, but it was continually postponed throughout 2024, largely due to obstacles imposed by Netanyahu's government. In Yemen, meanwhile, this issue materialised in follow-up meetings on the Stockholm Agreement commitments and in the Houthis' unilateral release of over 100 individuals in coordination with the ICRC. At the same time, the UN became involved in efforts to secure the release of more than 60 individuals from NGOs, diplomats and the UN itself held by the Houthis.

*Most of the negotiations in the region were at an impasse or faced serious obstacles to reaching agreements and addressing the causes of the conflicts*

Regarding the **progress of the negotiations**, most were deadlocked during the year or faced various kinds of serious obstacles in reaching agreements and addressing the causes of the conflicts in detail. Throughout 2024, the interconnections between different conflicts were evident both in terms of conflict dynamics and in prospects for peace. Thus, for example, in Yemen, Houthi attacks in the Red Sea shaped the prospects for a political agreement that had emerged in 2023. The Houthis justified these attacks as acts of solidarity with Palestine to demand an end to the Israeli offensive on Gaza following the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023. Washington pressured Saudi Arabia to avoid an agreement with the group under these circumstances, which led to the deployment of a US-led maritime military operation. The escalation of regional conflicts and tensions in 2024 was also key to creating the conditions for the overthrow of Bashar Assad, which led to a scenario in which it seemed imperative to re-evaluate the roadmaps and proposals for any political transition designed thus far. In some contexts, limited agreements were reached (such as in Yemen, on certain economic issues, for example). Some formal agreements were also achieved that did not bring about any significant changes, at least in the short term, such as the China-sponsored agreement for political reconciliation between Palestinian groups. At the end of the year, two developments encouraged greater expectations, but also uncertainty. The first was the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah, which had an impact on reducing violence but was marred by multiple violations. The second was the reactivation of diplomatic contact between Tehran and the European countries that had signed the agreement on Iran's nuclear programme after two years without direct talks. Uncertainty about the trend of these conflicts and negotiating processes in the region was also partially related to the return of Donald Trump to the US presidency and the possible effects of his policies in the Middle East starting in January 2025.

Finally, the negotiating processes in the Middle East continued to experience **shortcomings in terms of inclusiveness and specifically gender**. Thus, for example, both the negotiating and mediating delegations for Gaza were led exclusively by men. In Yemen, women continued to participate in consultation processes "from below", calling for a genuinely inclusive peace process in the country and denouncing the obstacles to women's substantive participation in the political arena. Moreover, women have been demanding a greater role in shaping Syria's future for years. Following the overthrow of Bashar Assad's regime, they expressed hope but also concern and alarm about the path to be charted by the new authorities, particularly with regard to respect for women's rights.

## 6.2 Case study analysis

### Mashreq

Israel - Lebanon (Hezbollah)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government of Israel, government of Lebanon, Hezbollah
<b>Third parties</b>	USA, France, UN
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006), Cessation of hostilities agreement (2024)

#### Summary:

Since 1978, the United Nations has been operating in southern Lebanon through an interim force (UNIFIL) to try to secure the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the country and to help the Lebanese government to restore its authority in the area, where Palestinian groups are active. The mission's mandate has changed over the years, in line with developments. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which encouraged the creation of the Lebanese Shia militia Hezbollah, led to a new period of hostilities. In 2000, Israel withdrew its forces along the Blue Line, the separation line with Lebanon established by the UN that serves as a de facto border between both countries. In 2006, following clashes between Hezbollah and Israel, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1701, which established a cessation of hostilities to be supervised by UNIFIL. In more than two decades, the resolution has not led to a permanent ceasefire or a long-term solution and successive reports on its implementation indicate repeated violations of the agreement's provisions. In 2022, Washington brokered the agreement that fixed the maritime borders between Israel and Lebanon for the first time. Hostilities around the Blue Line intensified again significantly from October 2023, following the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023, the start of the Israeli offensive against Gaza and Hezbollah's decision to launch attacks against Israel in solidarity with the Palestinian population. In November 2024, Israel and Lebanon reached a new and fragile cessation of hostilities agreement after mediation by the United States and France (an influential player in Lebanon due to ties from its colonial past).



**The armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah escalated significantly during 2024, but at the end of the year a ceasefire agreement was reached after more than 13 months of fighting that reduced the violence, albeit amidst great fragility.** The cessation of hostilities agreement was implemented in November after two months of intensified fighting that had serious impacts, mostly in Lebanon, in terms of civilian deaths, destruction of infrastructure and forced displacement.<sup>3</sup> In September, Netanyahu's government had decided to redouble its offensive on the "northern front" by increasing its air strikes throughout Lebanon. In October, it launched a ground invasion of southern Lebanon. Meanwhile, Hezbollah attacks managed to penetrate Israel at a greater distance from the border. **Following mediation by the US and France, a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon was announced on 26 November and came into effect the following day.**<sup>4</sup> The terms of the deal resemble provisions laid out in UNSC Resolution 1701, which ended the war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 but has not been fully implemented. The Lebanese Shia group was not directly involved in the negotiations and did not sign the November deal, but it did agree to its terms, which call for it to withdraw.

The agreement broadly stipulates that the Lebanese government must prevent Hezbollah and other armed groups from launching attacks against Israel from Lebanese soil and ensure that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the UN mission in the area (UNIFIL) are the only forces operating between the south of the Litani River and the Blue Line. Though not an international border, the Blue Line, established by the UN in 2000, acts as a line of demarcation between both countries. The agreement also commits Israel to suspend all its offensives in Lebanon and to gradually withdraw its forces from the country. The deployment of the LAF and the Israeli withdrawal must take place within 60 days. The LAF must also dismantle military infrastructure in southern Lebanon, confiscate unauthorised weapons and control the flow of weapons. To ensure that the LAF can fulfil its obligations under the agreement and deploy around 10,000 soldiers in the area, the US and France have pledged to work with the international community to improve its capabilities, including through the Military Technical Committee for Lebanon (MTCA4L), an initiative launched by Italy in March to coordinate foreign support for the Lebanese military forces. The agreement also provides for the reformulation of the monitoring mechanism established

by UNSC Resolution 1701. Whereas previously it was tripartite, involving Israel and Lebanon in coordination with UNIFIL, it now includes Washington and Paris. The US (which acts as mediator, but is also a main political and military ally of Israel) is now leading this mechanism, which is responsible for monitoring and enforcing the commitments made.

The agreement was attributed to a confluence of different factors and motivations of the parties involved. Netanyahu's government needed to give the troops a break after a year of fighting and reduce the need for conscription amidst pressure from its ultra-Orthodox partners. Moreover, Israeli public opinion was more supportive of an agreement after the elimination of Hezbollah's leadership. Seriously weakened, the Shia militia abandoned the condition upon which Nasrallah had insisted, to only agree to a ceasefire with Israel after it ended its attacks in Gaza. Hezbollah and other Lebanese political groups also came under pressure from the serious impact of the Israeli offensive, including more than 4,000 deaths and a million displaced, which threatened to inflame sectarian tensions in the country.<sup>5</sup> The agreement was generally welcomed in Lebanon, but it was criticised in Israel, including by extremist members of the government and by the approximately 60,000 Israelis displaced by hostilities with Hezbollah. Although Netanyahu's stated objective on the "northern front" was to create the conditions for the displaced Israelis' return, no such timetable was defined after the agreement was reached with Lebanon. Experts pointed to weaknesses in the agreement's prospects for implementation, such as the failure to specify how the monitoring mechanism will ensure compliance or resolve disagreements. The text expressly recognises that Israel and Lebanon maintain their right to use force in self-defence. According to reports, there is an additional agreement that the US and Israel will share information about potential violations of the agreement by Hezbollah, that Israel has the right to respond to threats from Lebanon and that it can also enter Lebanese airspace to conduct surveillance.<sup>6</sup>

**Although overall levels of violence have declined since the agreement was signed in November, both sides have accused each other of violating the cessation of hostilities,** with multiple incidents resulting in many deaths. UNIFIL expressed concern about Israeli forces' continued destruction of residential areas, agricultural land and road networks in southern Lebanon.<sup>7</sup> On 2 December, Hezbollah responded for the first time since

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3. See the summary on Israel – Hezbollah in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2025! Report in armed conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2025.
  4. UN Security Council, *Announcement of a Cessation of Hostilities and Related Commitments on Enhanced Security Arrangements and Toward the Implementation of UNSCR 1701*, (Annex to the letter dated 29 November 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of the United States of America and France to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council), S/2024/870, 2 December 2024.
  5. Kaufman, Asher, "Why Israel and Hezbollah reached a ceasefire now – and what it means for Israel, Lebanon, Biden and Trump", *The Conversation*, 27 November 2024.
  6. International Crisis Group, "Can the Hizbollah-Israeli Ceasefire Hold?", Middle East and North Africa Q&A, 3 December 2024.
  7. Security Council Report, "Lebanon: Closed Consultations", *What's in Blue*, 11 January 2025.

the truce went into effect, describing its behaviour as a “defensive act of warning” in response to what it called failures to stop Israel’s violations by “the relevant parties”, an apparent reference to the monitoring mechanism. According to reports in diplomatic circles, in late 2024 the US was seeking an extension of the 60-day deadline for withdrawal. Media reports indicated that the Israeli government intended to keep its troops on Lebanese soil beyond the established deadline and stated in early 2025 that it had withdrawn from only two of the dozens of towns it had occupied in southern Lebanon.<sup>8</sup> At the end of 2024, Hezbollah’s situation was affected by the fall of Bashar Assad’s regime in Syria, one of its regional allies and essential to maintaining its supply and communication lines with Iran.

Israel-Palestine	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government of Israel, Hamas
<b>Third parties</b>	Qatar, Egypt, USA, France, UN
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Israel – PLO Mutual Recognition (1993), Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (Oslo I Accords), Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area (Cairo Agreement) (1994), Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Oslo II) (1995), Wye River Memorandum (1998), Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum (1999), Road Map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (2003), Annapolis Conference Joint Understanding on Negotiations (2007)

**Summary:**  
The Palestinian-Israeli peace process launched in the 1990s has not resulted in an agreement between the parties on the most complex issues borders, Jerusalem, settlements, Palestinian refugees and security or the creation of a Palestinian state. Since the timetable established by the Oslo Accords broke down a series of rounds of negotiation have been conducted and various proposals have been made, but they have all been unsuccessful. The peace process has developed amidst periodic outbursts of violence and alongside the fait accompli policies of Israel, including about its persisting occupation. These dynamics have created growing doubts about the viability of a two-state solution. Meanwhile, after periods of escalating violence, truce and cessation of hostilities agreements have been reached between the Israeli government and Palestinian armed actors.

**Indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas, mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the US, continued throughout 2024, but no ceasefire was agreed.** The impasse continued despite the scale of the violence and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the increasingly widespread accusations that Israel was committing

genocide against the Palestinian population. There were also only very limited humanitarian pauses during the year (in January, facilitated by Qatar and France, to allow partial access to medicine to Gaza, and in July, to allow polio vaccinations). The US continued to provide key political and military support for Benjamin Netanyahu’s government, supplying huge amounts of weapons to Israel whilst it was involved as a mediator in the negotiations.

Following a brief temporary suspension of hostilities in November 2023,<sup>9</sup> the negotiations remained deadlocked despite several meetings between the mediating actors and Israel in Paris in early 2024. The proximity of Ramadan (10 March to 9 April) raised expectations of the possibility of reaching an agreement, but the truce did not take shape. **Nevertheless, after four failed attempts, the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for an immediate, albeit temporary, ceasefire to mark Ramadan during this period, the first time it had done so.**<sup>10</sup> UNSC Resolution 2728<sup>11</sup> was approved on 25 March with the United States abstaining. Washington had vetoed three similar resolutions and had avoided public calls for a ceasefire so as not to compromise what Israel describes as its “right to self-defence”. Some analysts attributed the change of stance to several factors, including domestic pressure over the situation in Gaza and the realisation that Israel’s efforts to free the hostages were not working.<sup>12</sup>

**In early April, the mediators drew up a proposal for a three-phase ceasefire, lasting six weeks each,** which included the gradual release of hostages, a gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, an end to the fighting and an increase in humanitarian aid and resources for Gaza’s reconstruction. **Some analysts indicated that the negotiations held in Cairo and Doha were substantive.** Hamas reportedly repeated the deal it had proposed to the mediators when the Ramadan truce was being discussed: a permanent ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the return of the displaced population and a “serious” exchange of hostages for Palestinian prisoners. Netanyahu described the Palestinian group’s demands as “maximalist” and said that after a pause in hostilities, Israel would continue its offensive until achieving “total victory” over Hamas. This came despite mounting internal pressure (in April, more than 100,000 people gathered in Tel Aviv to demand a deal with Hamas and call for early elections and relatives of hostages stormed parliament to demand an agreement) and **increasing accusations against Netanyahu for obstructing a deal in order to cling to power and avoid being put on trial for corruption.** The negotiations were also influenced by Israel’s threats to invade Rafah, where more than half of Gaza’s population had gathered to flee from Israeli attacks.

8. Sewell, Abby and Melanie Lidman, “The fragile Israel-Hezbollah truce is holding so far, despite violations”, *AP*, 4 January 2024.  
9. See the summary on Israel-Palestine in the previous edition of this yearbook.  
10. The New Humanitarian, “UN Security Council passes Gaza ceasefire resolution”, *The New Humanitarian*, 25 March 2024.  
11. UN News, “Gaza: Security Council passes resolution demanding ‘an immediate ceasefire’ during Ramadan”, *UN News*, 25 March 2024.  
12. Shehada, Muhammad, “The Biden Administration’s False History of Ceasefire Negotiations”, *Center for International Policy*, 8 January 2025.

In early May, Hamas accepted the proposal drawn up by the mediating countries with some reservations and requests for changes. Netanyahu was quick to call Hamas's demands "delusional" and ordered a ground invasion of Rafah two days later.<sup>13</sup> In this context, **in late May, US President Joe Biden announced a three-stage plan** that partly responded to some of the demands made by Hamas. The first stage would consist of an immediate ceasefire, the swap of a first group of hostages (women, wounded and elderly) for some Palestinian prisoners and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from populated areas of Gaza. The second stage would entail a permanent cessation of hostilities in exchange for the release of the remaining hostages and a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The third stage would involve the return of the bodies of the dead hostages and the implementation of a reconstruction plan for Gaza. **Biden's plan was endorsed by the UN Security Council through Resolution 2735 (10 June).**<sup>14</sup>

Although Biden presented his plan as an Israeli one, Netanyahu and other members of his administration distanced themselves from it, saying it did not reflect Israel's stance. The prime minister said he was willing to make a partial deal to secure the release of the hostages but insisted that his government would only accept a pause in hostilities and that its offensive would continue until Hamas was eradicated. The most extremist members of the Israeli government, hardline ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, rejected the plan and threatened to leave the government coalition if it were implemented. Nevertheless, the indirect negotiations continued, with **Hamas suggesting several modifications to Biden's plan and accepting an updated version on July 2. Hamas reportedly agreed that a "complete and permanent" ceasefire would not be a condition for signing the agreement and that it could be negotiated during the first stage**, but asked for guarantees that the ceasefire would lead to the end of hostilities and not be a mere pause. This was a change in the Palestinian Islamist group's position since the start of negotiations in November.<sup>15</sup> In this context, which raised expectations about the development of the negotiating process, **Netanyahu presented a series of conditions that he described as non-negotiable, which became a new stumbling block.**<sup>16</sup> These included the prerogative to resume hostilities after a pause until Israel's war aims were achieved, the permanence of Israeli forces in the

Philadelphi or Salaheddin corridor (a strategic area on the border between Gaza and Egypt),<sup>17</sup> restrictions on the return of displaced people to northern Gaza and an increase in the number of hostages released in the first stage. **Members of the mediation teams and even Israeli officials considered these conditions a deliberate attempt to sabotage the agreement** and highlighted the tensions between Netanyahu and the Israeli negotiating team.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, **Israel stepped up its attacks on Gaza and killed senior Hamas leaders, including Ismail Haniyeh, the Islamist group's top political leader and head of the negotiating team.** Haniyeh's death in Tehran on 31 July, preceded hours earlier by that of Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukur, raised fears of an intensification of the regional escalation and led to fresh diplomatic arrangements to defuse the crisis. Iran and Hezbollah announced that they would respond to the attacks, blamed on Israel, but in a way that would not stymie efforts to reach a ceasefire in Gaza. According to reports, both parties agreed not to retaliate if an agreement was reached. This set off another round of meetings in August. The US incorporated all of Netanyahu's conditions into a new proposal and reportedly tried to compensate Hamas by limiting Israel's ability to veto the names on the list of Palestinian prisoners to be released under the agreement.<sup>19</sup> Haniyeh was succeeded by Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' military leader and the mastermind of the 7 October attacks, who insisted on supporting the formula of early July. Despite the impasse, the idea that the negotiations had a chance of success was promoted in the context of the presidential election campaign in the USA. Finally, the Biden administration ended up accusing Hamas of blocking the negotiations. From September onwards, international attention focused on the "northern front", following the intensification of Israeli attacks in Lebanon.

The killing of Sinwar by Israeli soldiers in Gaza on 17 October fuelled speculation about new prospects for a ceasefire, offering Netanyahu the opportunity to present it as a decisive victory over Hamas, especially given the impossibility of achieving his goal of "total victory". Several figures drew attention to this opportunity, but the Israeli government was immersed in an escalation of war with Iran and in Lebanon, where it had launched a ground incursion and killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah (28 September). In addition, Netanyahu's popularity ratings were beginning to improve.<sup>20</sup> **Faced**

13. Although the US had drawn a red line in Rafah, warning that any action in the area would affect arms supplies to Israel, in practice Washington only stopped sending a boat carrying bombs.

14. UN Security Council, *Resolution 2735*, 10 June 2024.

15. Tondo, Lorenzo, and Julian Borger, "Israel-Hamas talks to resume, raising hopes of a Gaza ceasefire", *The Guardian*, 5 July 2024.

16. Shehada, Muhammad, op. cit.

17. The Philadelphi Corridor, as Israel calls it, which is known as the Salaheddin corridor to Palestinians and Egyptians, is a 14-km-long and 100-metre-wide strip of land between Egypt and Gaza created in 1979 under the Camp David Accords. For further information, see the BBC, *Qué es el corredor Filadelfia, la zona desmilitarizada en Gaza junto a la frontera con Egipto atacada por Israel*, 5 January 2024.

18. Times of Israel, "Netanyahu issues list of 4 'non-negotiable' demands as hostage talks slated to restart", *Times of Israel*, 7 July 2024.

19. According to sources involved in the mediation efforts, Netanyahu had vetoed 100 of the 300 names submitted by Hamas, including that of Marwan Barghouti, and Washington proposed reducing the Israeli veto to 65. The US did not obtain any commitment from the Israeli prime minister to support this proposal, which Hamas rejected as too favourable to Israel.

20. Burke, Jason, "Death of Yahya Sinwar is boost for Netanyahu but may not end the war", *The Guardian*, 17 October 2024; Tait, Robert, "Harris says death of Yahya Sinwar is chance to finally end Israel-Gaza war", *The Guardian*, 18 October 2024; Pitta, Antonio, "La muerte de Sinwar presenta a Netanyahu una oportunidad para un alto el fuego en Gaza", *El País*, 18 October 2024.

with the impasse in the negotiations, in November Qatar announced that it was abandoning its role as mediator, warned that it would not resume this role until the parties committed to the process and closed Hamas' office in Doha. It was not until late 2024, after the US presidential election won by Donald Trump, that indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas resumed and meetings were held again in Doha and Cairo. Diplomatic work intensified in early January 2025 due to the Biden administration's aspirations to present some result before the end of its term and Trump's expressed interest in reaching an agreement before arriving to the White House. **The negotiations led to a ceasefire agreement in principle in early 2025,**<sup>21</sup> in a regional scenario shaken by other events, such as the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah (November) and the fall of Bashar Assad's regime in Syria (December).

### Gender, peace and security

The negotiations were led exclusively by men throughout the year, according to what emerged from the composition of the negotiating and mediating delegations. In addition to the absence of women in the high-level negotiations, activists also called attention to the marginalisation of Palestinian female civil society leaders, asserting that despite the serious circumstances, none had spoken before the UN Security Council since January 2022.

Palestine	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Hamas, Fatah, other Palestinian political groups
<b>Third parties</b>	Russia, China, Egypt
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Mecca Agreement (2007), Cairo agreement (2011), Doha agreement (2012), Beach Refugee Camp agreement (2014)

**Summary:**  
 Since the start of the confrontation between Hamas and Fatah, which materialized as of 2007 with a de facto separation between Gaza and the West Bank, several mediation initiatives have been launched in an attempt to reduce tensions and promote an approximation between these two Palestinian formations. It was not until May 2011 that the confluence of several factors –including the deadlock in negotiations between the PA and Israel, changes in the region as a result of the Arab revolts and the pressure exerted by the Palestinian

public opinion– facilitated the signing of a reconciliation agreement between the parties. The diverging opinions between Hamas and Fatah on key issues have hampered the implementation of this agreement, which aims at establishing a unity government, the celebration of legislative and presidential elections, and reforming the security forces. Successive agreements have been announced between both parties since, but they have not been implemented.

Alongside the indirect negotiations to reach a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, several initiatives were pursued throughout 2024 to try to promote reconciliation and unity between Palestinian factions, and particularly between Hamas and Fatah. **Despite several meetings and announcements, no significant progress had been made by the end of the year,** in a context shaped by discussions on who could govern the Gaza Strip after the possible cessation of hostilities. According to reports, **the main initiatives to promote intra-Palestinian unity in 2024 were mediated and/or facilitated by Russia, China and Egypt.** In late February, 14 Palestinian groups met in Moscow for three days to discuss the formation of a national unity government, making this the fourth such meeting promoted by Russia in recent years. The meeting took place just days after Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh resigned with the stated intention of facilitating the formation of a technocratic government. According to participants in the meeting in Moscow, the context of violence in Gaza, increasingly described as genocide, heightened leaders' sense of responsibility to begin a process that would lead to an agreement on unity among the Palestinian leadership.<sup>22</sup> After the meeting, the Russian foreign minister said that Hamas had agreed to recognise the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), which is internationally identified as the representative of the Palestinian people and dominated by Fatah.

In the following months, China took the lead role in mediating between the Palestinian factions, showing a greater interest in getting involved in the affairs of the region.<sup>23</sup> In March, Chinese diplomat and foreign ministry envoy Wang Kejian met in Doha with the political leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, in the first meeting between an official Chinese representative and a representative of the Palestinian Islamist group since 7 October 2023. A month later, in April, Beijing hosted a meeting between Hamas and Fatah representatives.

21. The three-stage agreement was announced on 15 January 2025, whose outline is generally similar to the proposal presented by Biden in May. In the first, six-week stage, hostilities are expected to be suspended, Israeli forces will withdraw from the main cities of the Gaza Strip and concentrate on one area there, the displaced Palestinian population will begin to return and humanitarian aid will be significantly increased. In this stage, Hamas must release 33 of the Israelis it holds, prioritising minors, women (including soldiers) and people over 50 years of age. In exchange, Israel must release around 1,700 Palestinians (1,000 of which were detained after 7 October). In the second stage, whose duration was not defined, the remaining living Israeli hostages held by Hamas would be exchanged for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel and Israel would fully withdraw its forces from Gaza. In a third stage, the bodies of dead Israeli hostages and soldiers would be exchanged for dead Hamas fighters and the reconstruction of Gaza would begin. The plan began to be implemented on 19 January amidst some expectations and many uncertainties. These included how the transition from stage 1 to stage 2 would be managed (the details of the second stage would be subject to negotiation starting on the sixteenth day of the implementation of the ceasefire) and how key aspects of stage 3 would be resolved, which involves settling governance issues and what type of authority will assume control of Gaza. On this last point, see the summary on Palestine in this chapter.

22. Al-Jazeera, "Palestinian unity on agenda as Hamas, Fatah leaders meet in Moscow", *Al-Jazeera*, 29 February 2024.

23. In 2023, China promoted the agreement to restore diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.



These efforts led to talks in the middle of the year to promote unity that brought together representatives of 14 Palestinian organisations in Beijing, including Fatah, Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestinian People's Party (PPP), the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF) and the Palestinian National Initiative, among others. After two days of exchanges, the event concluded on 23 April with the signing of an agreement, the **“Beijing Declaration for Ending Division and Strengthening Palestinian National Unity”**,<sup>24</sup> signed by Palestinian delegates (only one of them a woman) in the presence of diplomatic representatives from China, Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Russia and Türkiye. According to the text, the Palestinian factions agreed to achieve reconciliation and unity among the different factions, affirmed that the PLO was the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and pledged to form an interim national reconciliation government focused on the post-conflict reconstruction of Gaza and on promoting the establishment of a Palestinian state in accordance with UN resolutions. The agreement specified that the national unity government would be temporary, that it would be the result of consensus among all Palestinian factions and that it would exercise its authority in both Gaza and the West Bank, unify institutions, initiate the reconstruction process and prepare for general elections. China framed its proposal in a three-stage initiative requiring a long-term ceasefire in Gaza, international support for post-conflict governance in Gaza under the principle that the “Palestinians govern Palestine” and support for Palestine to become a full member of the UN.

Following the announcement, critics stressed that the Beijing agreement did not address key issues of disagreement between Hamas and Fatah, expressed doubts about both groups’ willingness to move towards reconciliation and highlighted pessimistic reactions among the Palestinian population given previous failures. A week after the agreement was signed in Beijing, Israel killed Haniyeh in Tehran. His assassination encouraged some debate about an opportunity for intra-Palestinian reconciliation, but in practice there was no change.<sup>25</sup> **In December, however, following fresh contact between Hamas and Fatah promoted by Egypt, both parties agreed to establish a technical committee of between 10 and 15 politically independent Palestinians, most of them from Gaza, which would assume the civil governance of the territory after the war. Specifically, this Community Support**

Committee would deal with education, healthcare, the economy and the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip with the help of the international community, in addition to managing the Rafah border crossing on the border with Egypt. The Community Support Committee would report to the Palestinian Authority. The agreement was interpreted as a sign that Hamas was somewhat willing to give up a role in the future governance of Gaza and to support attempts to mediate a ceasefire.<sup>26</sup> At the end of the year, the draft agreement on this committee was still pending ratification by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, an increasingly unpopular figure who has been accused of torpedoing reconciliation efforts in the past.<sup>27</sup> Following the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas announced in January 2025, discussions have once again focused on the future governance of Gaza. Netanyahu’s government has ruled out any role for Hamas or the Palestinian Authority (PA) in a future Gaza government. The PA has rejected transitional formulas or any separation of the administration of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Arab countries have insisted that the PA should be allowed to administer the Gaza Strip in collaboration with UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees declared a terrorist organisation by Israel.

Syria	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, political and armed opposition groups, regional and international actors <sup>28</sup>
<b>Third parties</b>	UN (Geneva process), Russia, Türkiye, Iran (Astana process, with Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and the ICRC as observers), Arab League (Jordanian initiative)
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Geneva Communiqué from the Action Group for Syria (2012); UNSC Resolution 2254 in support of the International Syria Support Group Roadmap for a Peace Process (Vienna Statements (2015))

**Summary:**  
Given the serious consequences of the armed conflict in Syria and amidst concern about the regional repercussions of the crisis, various regional and international actors have tried to facilitate a negotiated solution and commit the parties to a cessation of hostilities. However, regional actors’ and international powers’ different approaches to the conflict, together with an inability to reach consensus in the UN Security Council, have hindered the possibilities of opening the way to a political solution. After a brief and failed attempt by the Arab League, the UN took the lead in the mediation efforts, led by special envoys Kofi Annan (2012), Lakhdar Brahimi (2012-2014), Staffan de Mistura (2014-2018) and Geir Pedersen (since 2018). Other initiatives have come from the EU, United States,

24. Ministry of Foreign Affairs The People's Republic of China, *Palestinian Factions Sign Beijing Declaration on Ending Division and Strengthening Palestinian National Unity*, 23 July 2024.  
25. Browne, Gareth, “With no love lost between Hamas and Fatah, Haniyeh’s killing unlikely to tip Palestinian politics”, *Al-Monitor*, 2 August 2024; Gester, Karin, Jan Tirowski and Katja Hermann, “Is the Beijing Declaration an Opportunity for Palestine?”, *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*, 8 September 2024.  
26. McKernan, Bethan, “Hamas and Fatah agree to create Committee to run postwar Gaza Strip”, *The Guardian*, 3 December 2024.  
27. Bajec, Alessandra, “Inside the Fatah-Hamas talks for Gaza’s post war governance”, *The New Arab*, 11 July 2024.  
28. Although some regional and international actors present themselves as third parties, in practice they also operate as negotiators and promote understandings to guarantee their presence and influence in Syrian territory.

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Russia and leaders of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). In 2015, the ISSG peace talks in Vienna -led by Washington and Moscow and in which twenty countries and international organizations participated- resulted in a peace plan for Syria that was endorsed by Security Council resolution 2254 the ONU. As of 2017, in parallel to the UN-led Geneva process - which has included intra-Syrian talks promoted by De Mistura- a new channel began: the Russian-backed Astana process, which also involve Türkiye and Iran. In 2023, the Arab League began a new attempt to get involved in addressing the Syrian crisis. The various rounds of negotiations held since the beginning of the armed conflict have shown deep differences between the parties and have not been able to halt the high levels of violence in the country. The fall of Bashar Assad regime in December 2024 opened a new chapter in the country's history, with broad challenges for the transition.

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Throughout 2024, the various diplomatic channels established to address the conflict in Syria (the Geneva process, the Astana process and the Jordanian track) remained open, though none of them made progress during the year. **The abrupt fall of the regime of Bashar Assad** on 8 December after an offensive led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) from the north (Idlib), which took control of the country within 10 days, **opened a new scenario in Syria after more than five decades of dictatorship**. This new context changed the positions of regional and international actors<sup>29</sup> and **prompted renewed bids to try to influence in this period of change and a political transition in Syria**.

Prior to this turn of events, the Astana process had held two meetings, one in January<sup>30</sup> and another in November.<sup>31</sup> The joint statements issued at the end of these meetings by the actors involved, Iran, Russia and Türkiye, which are also armed actors in the Syrian conflict, expressed particular concern about the situation in the Middle East, marked by the consequences of the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023, the genocide in Gaza and the escalating tensions between Israel and various regional actors. Overall, however, no progress was made on attempts to resolve the conflict. The ministerial contact group established in 2023 to outline a regional solution to the Syrian crisis as part of the Jordanian initiative, promoted by the Arab League to engage in dialogue with Assad's regime, held only one meeting in 2024, in September. At the meeting with the Syrian foreign minister in Cairo, the priority issues were still the return of the Syrian refugee population and the production and trafficking of drugs from Syria, matters

of particular interest to the Arab countries involved in the Jordanian initiative. Meanwhile, the UN-led Geneva process remained blocked, with no meeting of the Constitutional Committee, which was supposedly trying to make progress on the draft of a new Constitution for Syria. The last meeting of this process, which brought together delegates from the regime, the opposition and civil society, was held in June 2022.<sup>32</sup>

**Following the fall of Bashar Assad's regime, many questions have arisen about the transition and the actors that will lead the new Syria**, starting with HTS, which evolved from the al-Qaeda faction in Syria. HTS and its leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, who abandoned his nom de guerre, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, have attempted to project an image of pragmatism, appealing to unity and principles that connect with the aspirations of the Syrian revolution. In this context, on 10 December, it was announced that Mohamed al-Bashir, until then head of the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) in Idlib, a structure established by HTS to administer the area under its control, would lead the caretaker government until March 2025. Days later, the transitional authorities announced the suspension of Parliament and the Constitution in this stage and declared their **intention to form a mechanism for national dialogue**. However, some Syrian sectors expressed reservations about the lack of transparency and limited representation in forming it. In light of this new scenario, there were many diplomatic initiatives and visits to Syria by various actors seeking to establish relations with the new authorities and influence the development of the political process.

**The UN special envoy for Syria and leader of the Geneva process, Geir Pedersen, travelled to Syria in December and asserted that there was an opportunity for an inclusive transition that respects the diversity and plurality of the people of Syria.**<sup>33</sup> Until then, UN initiatives had been based on UNSC Resolution 2254, which outlined a roadmap for the transition in Syria. Whilst Pedersen acknowledged that this framework could no longer be applied automatically, as it had been designed for negotiations between Syrian opposition forces and the Assad regime, he still insisted that its key principles remained relevant and valid. These included the need for a new Constitution and free elections. **Al-Sharaa, who described Resolution 2254 as outdated, suggested an alternative roadmap that does not foresee elections for another four years** to allow time for the restoration of infrastructure, communication with Syrian

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29. For more information, see "Syria: The overthrow of the Assad regime opens a chapter of expectations and uncertainty in the country" in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Escenarios de riesgo y oportunidades de paz*, January 2025.

30. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, *Joint Statement by Representatives of Iran, Russia and Türkiye on Outcomes of the 21st International Meeting on Syria in the Astana Format*, Astana, 24-25 January 2024.

31. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, *Joint Statement by Representatives of Iran, Russia and Türkiye on Outcomes of the 22nd International Meeting on Syria in the Astana Format*, 11-12 November 2024.

32. In June 2022, in the context of its strategic relationship with Russia, Syria demanded a change of location for the Geneva process, arguing that Switzerland had ceased to be a neutral facilitator due to its support for sanctions against Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine. The lack of consensus on where to hold the talks has since been one of the obstacles to continuing them.

33. Wintour, Patrick, "The UN wants to influence a pluralist Syria – but will the country listen?", *The Guardian*, 8 January 2025.

communities abroad and updated population statistics. The timeline of Resolution 2254 envisaged a transition with elections within a year and a half. Syrian groups abroad also tried to promote their own roadmaps to the new Syrian authorities. Following a meeting in Doha in December, the day before the fall of Damascus, several Arab countries (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt and Jordan), along with members of the Astana process, declared that they supported a political process guided by Resolution 2254 and explicitly supported the UN's efforts.<sup>34</sup> The Arab League's Ministerial Contact Group on Syria met in Aqaba, Jordan and stressed that a peaceful transition in Syria should be facilitated by the regional organisation and the UN, following the principles of Resolution 2254. It also called for the establishment of a UN political mission to assist Syria in this process.<sup>35</sup> Other actors, such as the US, France, Germany, the UK and the EU, also insisted on the need for an inclusive and non-sectarian transition that guarantees respect for human rights, including those of women and minorities.<sup>36</sup> At the end of the year, the deadlines and terms for lifting the sanctions imposed at the time against the government of Bashar Assad were emerging as one of the tools of external pressure on the new authorities.

**Various analysts identified the main political and security challenges of the new situation in Syria, including achieving a nationwide ceasefire;** controlling the many armed groups operating in the country and avoiding cycles of revenge and retaliation; preserving evidence of crimes and human rights violations for use in future mechanisms of accountability, justice and reparation; dealing with the displaced and refugee populations and the thousands of missing persons (most of whom were held by the former regime); addressing hostilities between Türkiye and the SDF and, more generally, the Kurdish issue in Syria (shaped by the evolution of contacts between Ankara and the PKK<sup>37</sup>); and facing the challenges arising from Israel's penetration into Syria and its plans to increase the population in the occupied Golan Heights.

## Gender, peace and security

Faced with the new scenario in the country, Syrian feminist activists repeated their demands to take an active part in the transition. Whilst expressing hope for the new stage, they also had doubts about a future government led by HTS, particularly with regard to women's rights, given the allegations of their violations during its experience governing Idlib. Some international actors, such as the EU, announced that they would only lift sanctions if the transition plan guaranteed women's rights.

## The Gulf

Iran (nuclear programme)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Iran, France, United Kingdom, Germany, China, Russia, EU
<b>Third parties</b>	UN
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Joint Plan of Action (provisional agreement, 2013), Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (2015) endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231

### Summary:

Under scrutiny by the international community since 2002, the Iranian nuclear programme has become one of the main sources of tension between Iran and the West, particularly affecting Iran's relationship with the United States and Israel. After more than a decade of negotiations, and despite the fact that various proposals were made to resolve the conflict, the parties failed to reach an agreement and remained almost unchanged in their positions. The US, Israel and several European countries remained distrustful of Tehran and convinced of the military objectives of its atomic programme, whilst Iran continued to insist that its nuclear activities were strictly for civilian purposes and in conformance with international regulations. In this context, the Iranian atomic programme continued to develop whilst the UN Security Council, US and EU imposed sanctions on Iran and threats of military action were made, mainly by Israel. Iran's change of government in 2013 favoured substantive talks on nuclear issues, facilitated new rounds of negotiations and ended in a deal aimed at halting the Iranian atomic programme in exchange for lifting the sanctions. In 2015, Iran and six other countries (China, the USA, France, the United Kingdom and Russia, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany) signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). After several years of implementation, the Trump administration withdrew from the agreement in May 2018 and reimposed sanctions on Iran as part of a policy of "maximum pressure" on Tehran. Since 2019, Iran has been gradually moving away from compliance with the provisions of the agreement and has stepped up its nuclear programme.

**The deadlock in negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme continued in a regional context deteriorated** by the escalation of conflicts and tensions that included a direct armed clash between Iran and Israel for the first time. The UN Secretary-General's biannual reports on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) stated that restoration of the full and effective implementation of the agreement remained elusive and called out Iran for continuing to distance itself from its nuclear commitments and the United States for not rejoining the deal it abandoned in 2018 and for not repealing the unilateral sanctions imposed against Iran since then. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s periodic reports repeatedly warned of Iran's non-compliance. In its last report of the year, the IAEA repeated that it had not been able to verify the total stockpiles of

34. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, *Joint Statement by Foreign Ministers of Arab Countries and the Astana Process on the Situation in Syria*, 7 December 2024.

35. Iraqi News Agency, *The final statement of the Arab Foreign Ministers' meeting*, 14 December 2024.

36. UK Foreign Office, *Joint Statement on Syria*, Press Release, 14 December 2024.

37. See the summary on Türkiye (PKK) in chapter 5 (Europe).

enriched uranium in Iran since February 2021 and in fact anticipated a significant increase. According to its estimates, as of October 2024, Tehran had more than 6,600 kilograms (compared to the maximum of 202 kilograms set in the JCPOA), of which almost 185 kilograms were enriched up to 60% (approaching the 90% needed to make nuclear weapons). The IAEA also noted that Iran had not provided clear information on uranium detected at two of three undeclared sites found in 2019, that no progress had been made in implementing the agreement reached between the IAEA and Iran to restore certain verification and monitoring activities in March 2023 and that Tehran had not restored the credentials withdrawn from several IAEA inspectors since September 2023.

Faced with this situation, the European countries that signed the agreement—Germany, France and the United Kingdom (E3)—said that Iran’s actions had emptied the 2015 agreement of its content and its value for non-proliferation and voiced their concern that the period of application of UNSC Resolution 2231 was nearing its end. UNSC Resolution 2231 had endorsed the nuclear agreement in 2015 and it will expire in October 2025. **The E3 and the United States praised the IAEA Board of Governors for censuring Iran for its repeated lack of cooperation in June.** However, the censure was described as counterproductive by Iran and seven other countries (including Russia and China, which had also signed the JCPOA). Tehran also criticised the censure for taking place during its period of national mourning following the death of President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a plane crash on 19 May. The nuclear issue was put on hold until the presidential election, which was won by Masoud Pezeshkian. Considered a political moderate, he has shown more willingness than his predecessor to resume talks on the nuclear programme since taking power in late July. In various statements, including his speech to the UN General Assembly in September, Pezeshkian made it clear that Iran was ready to engage on the issue. It should be noted that the Iranian president is not the only one involved in decisions on the nuclear programme in Iran.

In this context, **Tehran offered to suspend uranium enrichment to 60% during the Iranian authorities’ meetings with the AIEA in mid-November.** Raised as a first step towards rebuilding trust with the West, Iran’s offer was rejected by the US, the EU and the

European countries involved in the agreement. The E3 considered the concession to be too little, too late, and backed the IAEA Board of Governors in censuring Iran again, whilst also asking the agency to prepare a comprehensive report on Iran’s nuclear programme over the past five years. The report is seen as the first step in the process to ask the UN to reimpose the sanctions on Iran that were in force before the JCPOA was signed.

Iran responded to the censure by announcing that it would accelerate its nuclear programme and accused European countries of acting irresponsibly and of politicising the IAEA. The agency confirmed that Iran planned to install around 6,000 new centrifuges to enrich uranium to 5% (the limit agreed in the JCPOA was 3.67%). **Despite this impasse, Iran and the E3 resumed direct diplomatic contact for the first time since the negotiations of the Vienna process were suspended in August 2022.** Diplomats from Iran (represented by Kazem Gharibabadani), France, Germany and the United Kingdom, as well as the EU, held talks in Geneva in late November. They reportedly explored the Iran’s offer and the possibility of it being more transparent about its nuclear activities, as well as the possibility of Iran limiting its military cooperation with Russia in exchange for a partial lifting of economic sanctions.

Attempts to save the nuclear agreement were made amidst alarm over the progress of the Iranian nuclear programme and the victory of Donald Trump in the presidential election in the United States (November), as well as by greater fragility and pressure in Iran due to internal factors (economic crisis) and external factors. This was partly due to the erosion of Tehran’s security and influence resulting from the impact of its conflict with Israel<sup>38</sup> and the weakening of various regional members of the “Axis of Resistance” (to which was added the Assad regime in Syria, a key Iranian ally in the region, which was toppled in December).<sup>39</sup> A second round of meetings, which the parties described as “consultations” rather than “negotiations”, was held in mid-January 2025, a week before Trump’s inauguration, and were described by the participants as serious and constructive. In this context, Iranian Vice President for Strategic Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif called on Trump to begin negotiations with Tehran over the nuclear programme and emphasized that figures from his first term who were key to the US withdrawal from the pact (Mike Pompeo and John Bolton) are not part of the current administration.

***In late November, Iran and the E3 reactivated direct diplomatic contact for the first time since negotiations were suspended in August 2022***

38. See the summary on Israel-Iran in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2025! Report on conflicts, human rights and peace building*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2025.

39. See the summary on Syria in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2025! Report on conflicts, human rights and peace building*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2025.



Yemen	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Internationally recognised Yemeni government (backed by Saudi Arabia), Houthis / Ansar Allah, Saudi Arabia
<b>Third parties</b>	UN, Oman, Saudi Arabia, <sup>40</sup> ICRC
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Stockholm Agreement (2018), Riyadh Agreement (2019), truce agreement (2022)

#### Summary:

Affected by several conflicts in recent decades, Yemen began a difficult transition in 2011 after the revolts that forced Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down as president after more than 30 years in office. The eventful aftermath led to a rebellion by Houthi forces and former President Saleh against the transitional government presided over by Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who was forced to flee in early 2015. In March 2015, an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia decided to intervene militarily in the country in support of the deposed government. Since then, levels of violence in the conflict have escalated. Given this turn of events, the United Nations, which has been involved in the country since the beginning of the transition, has tried to promote a political solution to the conflict, joined by some regional and international actors. Despite these initiatives, the meetings were unsuccessful, and the talks have been at an impasse since mid-2016. It was not until late 2018 that meetings between the parties resumed and led to the signature of the Stockholm Agreement at the end of that year, arousing cautious expectations about the possibilities of a political solution to the conflict. The hostilities have significantly worsened the security and humanitarian situation in the country. In 2019, under the mediation of Saudi Arabia, various actors signed the Riyadh Agreement to try to resolve the struggles and differences within the anti-Houthi faction. In 2022, the internationally recognized government backed by Riyadh and the Houthis reached a five-point truce agreement at the request of the UN. Though it ceased to be formally in force months later, in practice the de facto drop in hostilities and violence has held up, as well as some parts of the agreement. Meanwhile, direct negotiations began between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, mediated by Oman.

**Efforts to resolve the Yemeni armed conflict remained blocked throughout 2024 and by the end of the year the main warring parties had not reached any agreement on the roadmap outlined in late 2023 by UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg.** Mediation efforts continued to be hampered by the intensification of regional conflicts and tensions, particularly the Houthis' campaign of attacks in the Red Sea and their conflict with Israel.<sup>41</sup> Despite this impasse, the front lines between Yemeni armed actors remained relatively stable throughout 2024. Though not formally renewed, the UN-backed ceasefire reached in 2022 remained in force on the ground.

Certain expectations were raised about the political process in Yemen in 2023, but this dynamic was affected by the repercussions of the situation in Gaza following the events of 7 October 2023.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, in December 2023 the UN envoy announced that both parties (the Houthis on one side and the internationally recognised and Saudi-backed government led by the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) on the other) were committed to setting the conditions for a nationwide ceasefire and to resuming a peace process at the request of the UN. Until then, the negotiations had mainly taken place between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis under the mediation of Oman. Once 2024 began, however, no progress was made. The United States, which deployed a military operation to confront the attacks in the Red Sea, had reportedly pressured Riyadh to delay any agreement with the Houthis and involve Saudi forces in its campaign against the Yemeni group. Later, Washington reportedly gave Riyadh a green light informally to try to revive negotiations with the Houthis in cooperation with the UN.<sup>43</sup> In his contacts with the group, Grundberg reportedly made it clear that the suspension of attacks in the Red Sea was a condition for signing the roadmap. Throughout the year, however, **the Houthis insisted on separating their willingness to move forward in negotiations over the conflict in Yemen, either with the UN or bilaterally with Riyadh, from their attacks in the Red Sea, which they refused to stop.** In addition, parts of the Yemeni government, and particularly southern separatist groups, stressed that the terms of the roadmap had to be recalibrated in light of evolving events. In May, senior officials of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) stressed that two preconditions were needed for progress to be made: greater transparency on the roadmap (especially to clarify the financial resources that the Houthis would receive, given the fear that this could strengthen their position) and external guarantees for the ceasefire through a UN monitoring mission.

In the months that followed, **the main development was the agreement reached in July, intermediated by Saudi Arabia, to de-escalate the "economic war" between both sides.** The Houthis and the PLC promised to reverse action taken against banks, improve the operations and resume and increase the flights of the Yemeni airline (Yemenia Airways) and initiate contacts to address economic and humanitarian challenges.<sup>44</sup> The UN attempted to move forward with the parties in discussing other economic issues, such as unifying the Central Bank, stabilising the currency and other matters. Thus, for example, it held meetings with the Yemeni government to address issues

40. Saudi Arabia also plays a role as a mediator/facilitator in disputes between various anti-Houthi actors and between the internationally recognized government and the Houthis.

41. See the summary on Yemen (Houthis) – Israel, USA, UK in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2025! Report on conflicts, human rights and peace building*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2025.

42. See the summary on Yemen in the previous edition of this yearbook.

43. Wintour, Patrick, "US gives Saudis green light to try to revive peace deal with Houthis", *The Guardian*, 14 May 2024.

44. OSESGY, *Statement by the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen*, 23 de julio de 2024.

related to the management of ceasefire agreements. At a meeting in Jordan in December, they discussed examples from other contexts in the world that may be useful to the Yemeni experience. The mandate of the UN mission to support the agreement around the port of Al Hudaydah (UNMHA), established as part of the Stockholm Agreement (2018), was also renewed during the year. Under this same scheme, contacts continued for the release of detained persons. The monitoring committee, led by the UN special envoy's office and the ICRC, met in Oman in July and reportedly made progress on some agreements.<sup>45</sup> Previously, in May, the Houthis had unilaterally released 113 prisoners in a coordinated action with the ICRC. During the year, the **United Nations was also involved in efforts to secure the release of more than 60 people (local and international NGO staff members, diplomatic staff members and 13 UN staff members) detained by the Houthis in June.** The Houthis also seized the headquarters of the UN Human Rights Office in Sana'a in August. Grundberg and other senior UN officials condemned these actions and demanded the immediate and unconditional release of these people and of all others arbitrarily detained throughout the year.<sup>46</sup>

Under these circumstances, the UN special envoy continued his contacts with the Houthis, including meetings in Oman with the Houthi chief negotiator, Mohammed Abdulsalam, Grundberg also made his first visit to Sana'a since May 2023 at the end of the year. Meanwhile, he continued his shuttle diplomacy in several countries in the region, including Iran and Saudi Arabia. In late 2024, repeated the need for national and regional de-escalation, the UN special envoy as recent events in the Red Sea had reduced the scope for mediation and dialogue (according to press reports, Oman tried to facilitate contacts between the US, Israel and the Houthis to deal with the crisis, but without

success). The UN special envoy also stressed the importance of a Yemeni-owned process and the urgency of addressing the country's enormous humanitarian challenges whilst pressing the warring parties to commit to a roadmap that would ensure a far-reaching ceasefire, economic measures, such as the regular payment of salaries, and an inclusive political process. In a context characterised by profound changes in the Middle East, various analysts provided different interpretations of how this would influence the Houthis' position. The arrival of Donald Trump to the White House was also a factor to consider, given that in his first term as US president he had declared the Houthis a terrorist group and had accused Joe Biden's government of reacting weakly to the events in the Red Sea. At the beginning of his term, Biden had removed the Houthis from the list of terrorist groups, but reinstated them in January 2024, though with a less severe formula than that used by Trump.<sup>47</sup> Throughout the year, the Biden administration and its special envoy for Yemen, Tim Linderking, repeatedly advocated intensifying sanctions against the Houthis and strengthening the verification mechanism (UNVIM, based in Djibouti) that oversees the implementation of the embargo against the group.

## Gender, peace and security

As in previous years, Yemeni women continued to demand a significant role in the political process in the country. The UN special envoy's office, in partnership with UN Women, continued to hold consultations with women in a "bottom-up" process aimed at promoting a grassroots vision for a genuinely inclusive peace process in Yemen. This issue was also addressed at a feminist conference held in Aden in early December, where obstacles to women's substantive participation in the political arena were again discussed.

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45. OSESGY, *Ninth meeting of the Supervisory Committee on the Implementation of the Detainees Agreement concludes in Oman*, 7 July 2024.

46. In January 2025, the Houthis unilaterally released another 153 prisoners of war. Following the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, they also released the crew of the *Galaxy Leader* ship, held since the start of the incidents in the Red Sea. The same month, however, the Houthis also arrested seven other UN officials, prompting the organisation to suspend all travel by its employees to Houthi-controlled areas.

47. During Donald Trump's first term as president (2016-2020), he designated the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organisation through two mechanisms: a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Group (SDGT). Both involve economic sanctions, but only the FTO authorises sanctions on those who provide "material support" to the designated group. Biden lifted both designations in February 2021 and only reimposed the SDGT in January 2024. By January 2025, the new Trump administration had begun the process of redesignating the Houthis as an FTO.