UNGA 2025: FIVE MIDDLE EAST FLASHPOINTS TO TRACK

Liam Hamama, J Street Policy Analyst
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1) A wave of states will officially recognize Palestine
(Read the J Street Policy Center's piece on US recognition of Palestine here)

Six more states are expected to join the UK, Canada, Australia and Portugal in officially recognizing Palestine – France, Belgium, Malta, Luxembourg and San Marino.

Notably, Canada, Australia and Belgium conditioned their recognition on commitments made by the Palestinian Authority (PA) to reform and hold elections, as well as the exclusion of Hamas, and the demilitarization of a future Palestinian state. Belgium also lists the release of all Israeli hostages in its conditions for full recognition.

New Zealand is still considering recognizing Palestine this week. If it proceeds, **by the end of this week, up to 158 of the 193 UN member states – or 82 percent – will have recognized Palestine.** The United States will continue to exercise its veto power in the UN Security Council, thereby preventing the wave of recognition from resulting in Palestine's admission as a full UN member state.

Unfortunately, rather than embracing recognition as part of the New York Declaration that links statehood with Hamas' disarmament, exclusion from governing Gaza, and a commitment to a transitional international force in the aftermath of the war, the Israeli government and opposition leaders criticized the move as a premature "reward to Hamas."

2) Potential annexation and other retaliation by Israel and the Trump Administration

Prime Minister Netanyahu and other senior ministers have signaled that Israel may officially annex parts of the West Bank in retaliation for the wave of recognition by Western states. The two most likely outcomes are:

- **Israel refrains from annexing this week**, particularly if the UAE and Saudi Arabia convincingly signal that any annexation would kill the Abraham Accords and future normalization. The UAE's response has so far been muddled, raising the likelihood of annexation, while Saudi Arabia has drawn a firmer line – stating that annexation is a red line for normalization, and vowing economic and security-related retaliation. In his response to the wave of recognition, Netanyahu signaled that he is waiting for US backing before taking any concrete steps.
- **Israel only annexes the Jordan Valley,** which is the same territory Netanyahu sought to annex back in January 2020. Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer reportedly believes that Israel can proceed with this step without major backlash from the US or the UAE.

Given the recklessness with which Netanyahu has been operating since Trump entered office, **it is possible, though much less likely, that Israel will annex the entirety of Area C.**

It is also worth looking out for unilateral measures by Trump to punish countries that recognize Palestine. When Canada announced its intention to recognize Palestine in late July, Trump threatened to respond through US-Canada trade talks. Countries intending to recognize Palestine are reportedly aware of this risk and are likely hopeful that strength in numbers will spare them Trump's ire.

3) As France and Saudi Arabia promote the New York Declaration, look out for whether Arab states will pledge forces to Gaza's post-war security.

Beginning today (Monday, September 22), France and Saudi Arabia are co-hosting a high-level international summit on ending the war in Gaza and a path to a sustainable two-state solution. The meeting is a resumption of the July summit that produced the New York Declaration – backed at the time by all 22 Arab League members and all 27 EU members. Most notably, the New York Declaration unequivocally condemns Hamas and lays out material support for:

- **Ending the Gaza war**, including Hamas' disarmament and exclusion from future governance, the release of all hostages, surging aid into Gaza, and IDF withdrawal.
- **Creating a transitional governance body** under the umbrella of the Palestinian Authority.
- **Establishing a temporary UN-mandated international force**, invited by the PA, to stabilize Gaza and support the PA's transition to power.
- **Advancing the PA's reform agenda**, including its continued rejection of violence and incitement, holding credible elections and improving governance.
- **Achieving full Arab mutual recognition of Israel** in exchange for an irreversible Israeli commitment to a two-state solution.

Both the New York Declaration and Tony Blair's US-backed post-war plan call for the creation of a transitional international stabilization force to provide security in Gaza after the war. Obtaining force commitments will be the most challenging obstacle to turning this proposal into a reality, and is unlikely until there is more progress on negotiations to end the war. However, this framework should be embraced by Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the United States to build momentum for such an outcome.

4) Barring a last-minute extension, UN sanctions will be reimposed on Iran, which may quit the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)
(Read the J Street Policy Center's full explainer on Iran "snapback" here)

Diplomacy tends to take place at the last minute, and it just so happens that the deadline by which the E3 states (UK, France, and Germany) and Iran must agree on a temporary extension to sanctions relief falls at the end of a week when leaders from all four countries will be in New York. On August 28, the E3 states triggered the "snapback" sanctions mechanism in the 2015

Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA), launching a 30-day process that concludes on September 27 and is set to restore some UN sanctions suspended by the deal.

French President Emmanuel Macron believes that snapback is a "done deal," but the E3 reportedly remains open to last-minute diplomacy if Iran agrees to enable international monitoring of its nuclear program. Iran, meanwhile, has threatened to withdraw from the NPT if snapback proceeds – ending its legal obligation to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency and leaving the international community in the dark regarding its nuclear activities. European diplomats, however, seem prepared to call Iran's bluff, which makes this a story to watch closely.

5) Seeking an image of stability and further US sanctions relief, Syria may reach a security agreement with Israel

Speaking ahead of his first-ever UNGA speech, the new President of Syria, Ahmed al-Sharaa, said his country may reach a security arrangement with Israel within days. Any deal would focus on restoring the border arrangements that existed before Israel occupied territory in southern Syria following the Assad regime's collapse, and halting Israeli air strikes in Syria. Reports suggest Israel is seeking access to an aerial corridor to Iran via Syria and a demilitarized southern Syria.

Syria is also seeking further US sanctions relief, as the Syrian foreign minister advocated for during his trip to Washington last Thursday, and it is certainly possible that the White House will link sanctions relief to the security arrangement with Israel.