

The Persian Gulf region: The US at an impasse

by Karin Leukefeld*



Karin Leukefeld
(Picture ma)

Sixty days ago, on 17 June, the presidents of Iran and the United States of America signed a “Memorandum of Understanding” (MoU), a declaration of intent intended to bring an end to the war of aggression against Iran that the US and Israel had launched on 28 February 2026. Today, the agreement is “in a coma”, as they say in Iran. Israel is blocking it at every level.

A look back

The attack by the US and Israel took place whilst Iran and the US were engaged in negotiations brokered by the Gulf state of Oman. Two days before the surprise attack, on 26 February, the delegations from both countries had parted in Geneva, agreeing to meet again a week later.

The mediator and Omani Foreign Minister, *Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi*, travelled to Washington to inform US Vice-President JD Vance of the positive outcomes of the Geneva meeting during a gathering on 27 February.

By the time Al Busaidi returned to Oman on the morning of 28 February, Israeli and US fighter jets had already reduced the official residence and home of the supreme leader and religious leader *Ali Khamenei* to rubble and ashes and had announced a “decapitation strike” against Iran. US *Tomahawk* missiles destroyed a



Destroyed primary school in Minab, rocket fragments.
(Picture Al Jazeera)

primary school in Minab in southern Iran, killing 168 schoolchildren as well as support staff and teaching staff.

Iran responded with massive defensive strikes against US and Israeli military and intelligence bases and supply facilities in all Arab countries in the region. Both states imposed a news blackout on the destruction, but the US Army, on its regional websites, urged its personnel throughout the region to evacuate to safety on the next available flights. The Arab Gulf states were in a state of shock. The promise that US President *Franklin D. Roosevelt* had made to the Saudi King *Abdulaziz Ibn Saud* on 14 February 1945 – that the US would protect the Gulf states and, in return, always have access to their oil – turned out to be nothing but empty talk.

On 8 April, President *Trump* agreed to a ceasefire. The ceasefire was brokered by Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Oman and Qatar acted behind the scenes. Despite the ceasefire and in violation of clear provisions of international law, Israel escalated its attacks with the Israeli armed forces and its settler troops in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Gaza Strip, southern Lebanon and Syria. The Strait of Hormuz, controlled by Iran and Oman – which had been open to international shipping until the attack by the US and Israel – remains closed until further notice. Supplies of oil, liquefied natural gas and other products to the world market are stalling.

The apparent defeat in the attack on Iran has pitted the former allies against one another. Trump faces the mid-term elections on 3 Novem-

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ber. Recent poll figures show approval for his policies at just 33 per cent.

Israel is the main obstacle

The US President is caught between his own supporters in Congress and within the administration on the one hand, and *Netanyahu's* friends in the White House on the other, who exert considerable influence over Trump. On Monday [17 August], Trump declared the "Memorandum of Understanding" null and void and called on Iran to surrender and "raise the white flag". Trump threatened the Sultanate of Oman with devastating air strikes should the country attempt to exert influence over the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran and Oman are the actual coastal states bordering the strait, which connects the Persian Gulf with the Arabian Sea. Both have now negotiated two shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz and are awaiting a statement from the US on the matter. President Trump stated that he wished to declare the sea passage part of US territory. In Iran, the reaction has been calm, with the country monitoring regional and international developments. At the same time, preparations are being made for the possibility that the US and Israel might reignite the war.

On Monday, the Iranian Foreign Minister *Abbas Araghchi* accused Israel of actively obstructing the implementation of the "Memorandum of Understanding". Israel is the main obstacle to achieving a lasting ceasefire between the US and Iran. "The Zionist regime was and remains the greatest adversary and obstacle to implementing the Memorandum of Understanding," said Araghchi. Israel had "made every effort to prevent such an agreement and done everything to ensure its failure".

The Iranian Speaker of Parliament, *Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf*, is expected in Baghdad today [19 August] for talks. He is accompanied by a high-level delegation. The agenda for the talks in Baghdad includes the strengthening of bilateral relations, security along the shared border, cooperation against terrorism and the expansion of economic cooperation.

Syria – None of the promised aid has arrived

The defeat of the US and Israel in the war against Iran is leading to a significant shift in the regional balance of power. The Arab Gulf states are attempting to stabilise their bilateral and regional relations. Iraq is seeking to strengthen co-



*Shatila Palestinian refugee camp, Beirut.
(Picture Karin Leukefeld)*

operation with its immediate neighbours, Iran and Turkey.

Meanwhile, the leadership in Syria is focusing on appeasing the states that helped the long-standing *Al Khaida* leader in Syria, *Al Jolani* – now known as "Transitional President" *Ahmed al Sharaa* – to political power. The north of the country is largely under Turkish control, whilst the south is occupied and influenced by Israel. Agreements have been reached with the European "kingmakers" regarding a host of non-governmental organisations intended to "help the Syrian people". The UN, which, together with the *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC), stood by the population during the war years, is now left with nothing more than a bit-part role.

There is close legal cooperation with Germany – which had taken in many Syrian refugees, who are now expected to return – in the prosecution of the "violent and unjust Syrian government" led by the "long-standing dictator" Assad. Numerous death sentences have been handed down in recent weeks.

Former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his brother *Maher* were sentenced to death in absentia, whilst two cousins, *Atef Najib* and *Wassim al-Assad*, were sentenced to death in their presence in Damascus. Atef Najib and Wassim al-Assad were present in the courtroom in separate proceedings, both wearing striped prison uniforms and confined to a cage.

They are all accused of "premeditated murder, torture and crimes against humanity". In the case of the verdicts handed down in absentia against Bashar and Maher al-Assad, the legal evidence still needs to be presented.

The Jolani leadership has so far insisted on the extradition of Bashar al-Assad, who has been granted humanitarian asylum in Russia along with his family. Russia rules out extradi-

tion. Nevertheless, there have apparently been intensive negotiations between Russia and the Jolani leadership in recent months. These focused on the two Russian military bases at Hmeimim (Latakia) and in the port of Tartus. Russia's military presence in Syria is being largely scaled back, with equipment and, above all, fighter jets being returned to Russia, according to the agreement. Instead, both sides have agreed on bilateral military training cooperation, according to media reports. Russia may also continue to use Hmeimin Airport to supply its troops in Africa and to maintain trade relations on the African continent.

The situation of the civilian population is scarcely mentioned in the official Syrian and international media. However, conversations with local people reveal a high level of uncertainty, particularly outside the capital, Damascus. The Syrian Golan Heights and the villages located there are repeatedly subjected to Israeli raids and bombing attacks. The capital, Damascus – like Beirut and the Palestinian territories occupied and besieged by Israel – is under surveillance by Israeli reconnaissance drones.

Residents of Damascus report shortages of petrol and water in the city, high unemployment and rising prices. A security report for church circles, which has been published regularly for many years, stated a few days ago that there are so many meetings between Syrian "government representatives" and officials from other countries and business delegations – and that letters of intent are even being signed – but one must ask what the population actually gains from this. "Do we see any results in the economic sphere? In reconstruction, in security, in the justice system? Have incomes risen, even slightly? Have living conditions for the population improved? Are there new jobs? The international community promises aid for reconstruction, but there is no sign of it here. Funds were promised, but nothing concrete has come of it!! Have the sanctions even been lifted?"

Lebanon – Entire villages destroyed

In southern Lebanon, Israeli attacks continue daily. An agreed ceasefire and alleged negotiations between Israel, Lebanon and the US are being ignored by Israel. On Monday alone, at least ten buildings were attacked by Israel in the area around Nabatieh, the Ali Taher Hills and in Mansouri, not far from the port city of Tyre. Is-



*Destroyed houses in Kfar Kila, southern Lebanon.
The poster reads: "America is the mother of all wars."
(Picture Karin Leukefeld)*

raeli troops and bulldozers are continuing unabated with the complete destruction of villages along the Lebanese-Israeli ceasefire line, the "Blue Line"; on Monday, the destruction of residential buildings in Majayoun and Bint Jbeil was reported.

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) also reported on Monday that Israel had been attacking Lebanon at an average rate of "137 projectiles a day" over the past two weeks. This represents "a sharp increase", according to UNIFIL. Israel's actions violate UN *Security Council Resolution 1701* of 2006. Under the resolution, no armed forces – apart from UNIFIL and the Lebanese Army – are permitted to be present between the "Blue Line" and the Litani River.

Israel currently occupies around 20 per cent of Lebanon and is systematically destroying civilian infrastructure, residential buildings, agricultural land and historical monuments. Israeli troops are setting forests alight and are also using white phosphorus and herbicides as they advance.

War crimes

The Israeli Minister of War, *Israel Katz*, boasted in an interview recorded at the end of July, according to the "Times of Israel": "Twenty-four centuries-old Lebanese villages – we have destroyed all the buildings, not house by house, but entire villages. Their destruction is complete. One must bear in mind: in all 24 villages, between 15,000 and 20,000 houses were destroyed." "They will not return," he said, referring to the more than 600,000 residents of southern Lebanon displaced by Israel. "They will not return, and do you know why? Because there is nowhere for them to return to."

This statement echoes the call by Israel's far-right Minister of Police to kill even more

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. "I think targeted killings should be carried out in Gaza, eliminating 30 or 40 (people) every night," said the leader of the *Ozma Yehudit* (Jewish Power) party in a podcast. He explained that he was not referring solely to militant Palestinians who posed an immediate threat. Rather, he said, there were people in the Gaza Strip who did not deserve to live.

The deliberate killing of civilians and the deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure, including schools, residential buildings, clinics and cemeteries, constitutes a war crime under international humanitarian law, the Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols.

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