



## Lines on the Map

Peter Makari

Global Relations Minister for the Middle East and Europe for Global Ministries

Almost two full months have passed since the United States and Israel launched their second military campaign against Iran in less than a year. For the most part, US media coverage has focused on diplomatic threats and possibilities between the United States and Iran, the opening and closing of the Strait of Hormuz, and the war's impact on geopolitics and the global economy, especially because of rising energy prices.

Such a focus ignores the offensive's broader scope, treating Israel's war on Lebanon and its continuing genocide and war on Palestinians as marginal or separate. It also minimizes the war's human impact: more than three million Iranians and more than one million Lebanese have been displaced within their own countries, not to mention the two million Palestinians in Gaza who continue to live in dire conditions. Moreover, the war has drawn attention away from intensified military occupation and settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, as well as accelerated Israeli settlement expansion and land annexation.

The modern Middle East is the product of imperial designs following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. After World War I, the Conference of San Remo established mandatory rule over western Asia, based largely on the Sykes-Picot Agreement between the British and French. These imperial powers drew lines on the map, dividing what would become Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine between them. (Iran was never colonized by European powers.)



In 1947, the British announced it would terminate its mandatory control of Palestine, and the UN voted to partition Palestine between a Jewish state (55% of the land), an Arab state (42%), and a small international “corpus separatum” for Jerusalem and its surroundings (3%). The 1948–49 war ended with an expanded territory for the newly-declared Israeli state along an armistice line—also known as the Green Line—that continues to be Israel’s internationally recognized border (78%) with the West Bank and Gaza (22%). Israel has occupied these Palestinian territories since 1967, employing apartheid policies and practices—separate laws and policies for Palestinians and Israeli Jews living on the same land—and it continues to expand its control over them. Israel, though, has never defined its own borders, and Prime Minister Netanyahu continues to speak of “Greater Israel.”

Israel has also occupied the Syrian Golan since 1967, and it further extended its control of southwestern Syria in 2024 after the fall of the Asad[PM1.1] regime by invading an additional 500 square kilometers of Syrian sovereign territory.

After Israel’s invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982, it occupied the southern part of the country until it withdrew in 2000. At that time, the UN published a Blue Line, based on a World War I boundary, to mark where Israel was to fully withdraw. Since then, Israel has repeatedly violated Lebanon’s sovereignty by bombing towns and villages in Lebanon’s south, notably in 2006, 2024, and 2026, killing hundreds and forcing mass evacuations of more than a million people. Israel continues to occupy more than 10% of Lebanon, and just this week declared a Yellow Line as a basis for continued [occupation](#) of about 10 kilometers into Lebanon along its border.

The Yellow Line in Lebanon replicates [Israel’s Yellow Line in Gaza](#), which it established following the October 2025 “ceasefire,” dividing Gaza and preventing Palestinians from accessing at least 55% of their land. In the last two and a half years, Israel has killed more than 72,000 Palestinians in Gaza, injured more than 172,000, and

displaced almost all of Gaza's two million people—many multiple times. Israel exerts full control over access to Gaza, including limiting or completely preventing the flow of humanitarian supplies to the desperate population.

Describing its occupations in Syria, Lebanon, and Gaza as “buffer zones,” Israel nevertheless crosses the lines of international law, violating the principles—and national borders—of sovereignty and self-determination.

The international community has selectively invoked international law as a red line to hold governments to account, including Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, but has failed to do so as Israel expands its control in the Middle East.

The United States, which played a central role in establishing the international rules-based order following World War II, has normalized Israel's repeated violations of international law, providing diplomatic, military, and even theological support for it to do so. When asked if the Bible justifies Israel controlling lands “from the wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates,” (Genesis 15:18), US ambassador to Israel (and Southern Baptist pastor) Mike Huckabee responded, “It would be fine if they took it all,” crossing the line between his diplomatic role and his beliefs.

Ignoring or willfully transgressing the lines of national sovereignty and international law, and unilaterally imposing new and arbitrary lines of control, means that there can be no justice or peace, just a perpetuation of colonial patterns and occupation, which will only provoke continued resistance. In the Middle East, when it comes to respect for international law, upholding the rights of people to live a dignified life safe from threats and abuses of their dignity, and holding violators accountable, it is long past time to draw the line.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Peter Makari is the Global Relations Minister for the Middle East and Europe for Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ.

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