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## Gaza, Saudi, Iran, Venezuela and More



Image by Ömer Yıldız.

It would have been outlandish to suggest that a small region like Gaza, seemingly bereft of significant natural resources, political will of its own, and let alone sovereignty, would become the world's most significant geopolitical spot on earth.

The ongoing Israeli war on Gaza and the legendary resistance of the Palestinian people, however, have changed our calculation – or perhaps miscalculation – regarding what a besieged nation can achieve, in terms of collective resistance, in fact changing the rules of the game altogether.

However, it is still early to fully fathom the surely significant possible outcomes of the current upheaval resulting from the Gaza war and Resistance.

While Israel and the United States are desperate to return to the status quo model, which existed in the Middle East prior to October 7, the newly emerging Palestinian leadership is keen on introducing a new era of international relations, namely new geopolitical players, who could, in turn, rope in new allies, with their own political ambitions and economic interests.

That said, 2023 was also rife with other major geopolitical shifts that will impact our world in the coming year; in fact, for many years to come.

These are some of the most significant geopolitical events, with the potential of having a long-lasting impact on international relations.

### **Saudi-Iran Deal**

One, is the Saudi-Iran deal. The Riyadh-Tehran political reconciliation on April 6, took the region and the world by surprise, as the two Muslim neighbors have had major differences that resulted in a breakdown of relations seven years ago.

The rift between two significant Middle Eastern, Muslim and oil-producing countries has impacted the geopolitical stability of the Middle East, invited greater foreign meddling and has, directly or indirectly contributed to existing conflicts.

The identity of the mediator of the peace treaty, China, was equally significant, as this opportunity allowed, for the first time in the modern history of the region, Beijing to play the role of the peacemaker, in an area long-dominated by US-Western influence.

The Saudi-Iran deal has proved durable, despite the ongoing conflicts and struggles that continue to define the region.

### **Expansion of BRICS**

Two, is the expansion of BRICS.

The BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – have taken their economic alliance to new heights in 2023.

The group has agreed, on August 24, to allow for a significant expansion to its membership, and will, as of January 1, 2024, include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Additionally, the BRICS New Development Bank is itself expanding, both in terms of membership and its overall financial capital.

According to data from the UK-based research firm, Acorn Macro Consulting, BRICS members have surpassed the Group of Seven (G7) in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) calculated on purchasing power parity (PPP).

Why is this significant?

The importance of BRICS has become more apparent following the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022, as it allowed Russia significant margins to operate economically beyond the confines of Western-led sanctions.

With China, too, facing a US-led trade war, BRICS has created new platforms for new major markets, concentrated mostly in the Global South.

With the growing polarization between the West and the East, and the Global North and the Global South, it was only natural that BRICS began to take on a greater political role with a more defined political discourse. This shall become even more apparent in the coming year.

The geopolitical importance of BRICS lies mostly in its ability to create a powerful new model for alternative economic, financial and, eventually, political platforms that will directly challenge Western hegemony around the world.

### **Rise and Fall**

Three, is the rise and fall of international political actors.

Shortly before the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, Germany has served as the economic engine of Europe.

Despite the setbacks and challenges that faced various Western European economies, Europe seemed on its way to a complete recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. True, some analysts warned of over-optimism and structural fault lines, but Europe persisted in its recovery efforts.

Then, the Ukraine war started, exposing Europe's vulnerable economic spots – mainly its energy dependency – along with its geopolitical limitations, namely the balancing act between its political and military reliance on the US, energy reliance on Russia and economic reliance on China.

Europe's dream of recovery has turned into a seemingly never-ending nightmare. According to a study conducted by the Swiss National Bank and published last September, "the war in Ukraine has reduced European economic growth and 'considerably' pushed up inflation across the continent," Reuters reported.

While Europe continues to struggle with this unenviable position, other countries that have, for many years, been marginalized due to their outright political conflicts with Western countries, are finding themselves in a much stronger position.

The changing global and military dynamics have, indeed, allowed countries like Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and others – mostly in West Africa and its Sahel region –

to confront their former colonizers, in this case France, and to redefine the concept of post-colonial sovereignty.

Venezuela, on the other hand, which was heavily sanctioned by Washington, is finally able to sell its oil on the international market, thus pivoting away from a grinding economic crisis, unprecedented in decades. This only became possible because of the global energy crisis resulting from the war in Ukraine.

All of these geopolitical shifts are likely to stay with us in 2024, leading to yet other significant changes to the world's political map and, unfortunately, yet more conflicts, as well. Time will tell.

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