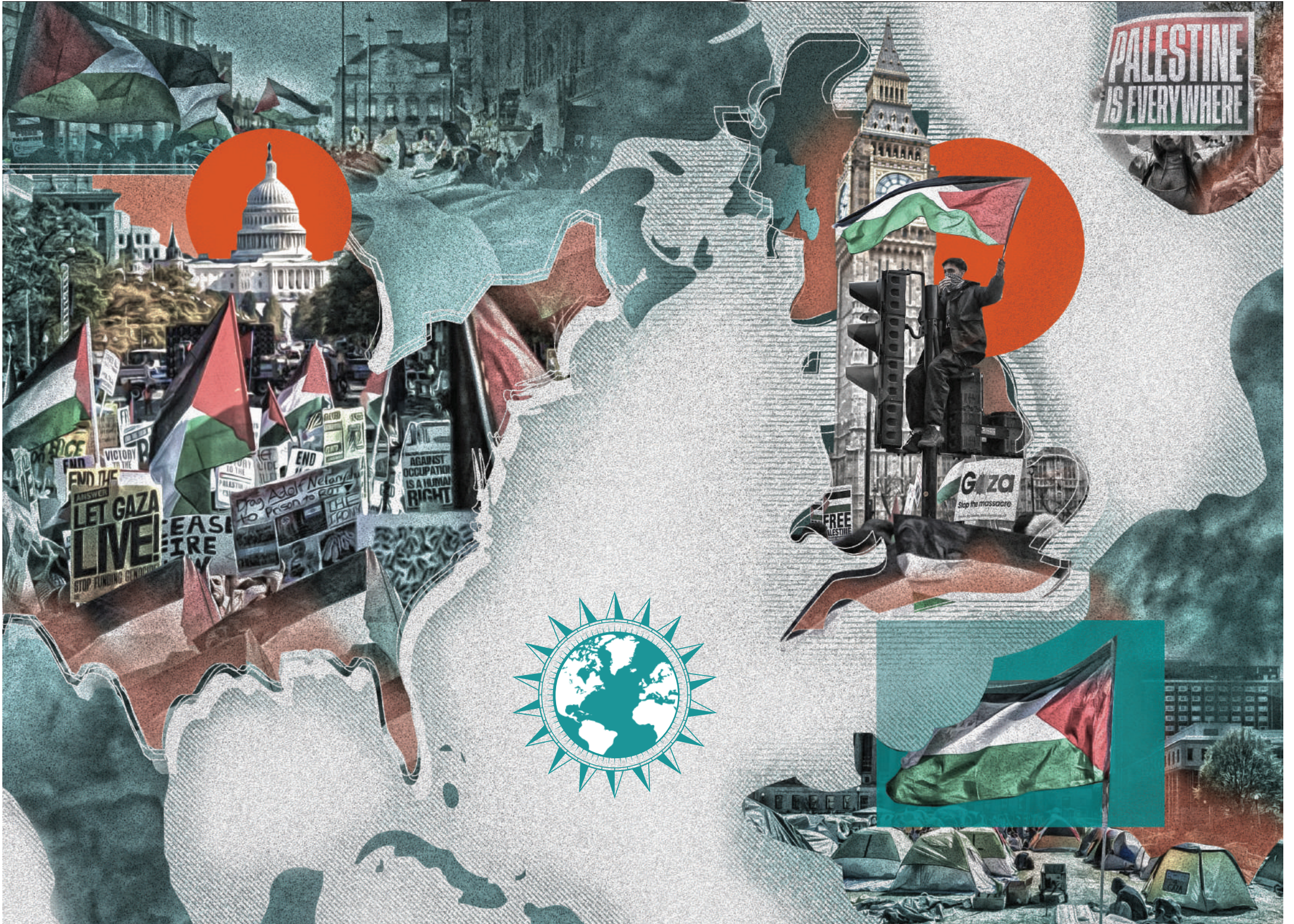


# Spotlight<sup>2024</sup> IN REVIEW



## GAZA CONFLICT

# Outrage over civilian suffering

Israel's war in Gaza triggered a global movement in solidarity with Palestine, but a ceasefire remained elusive

Jonathan Gornall London

When Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, the world was appalled by the savagery of an assault that left more than 1,200 Israelis and people of other nationalities dead, and saw some 250 taken hostage.

At that moment, Israel had the unbridled sympathy of the Western world. But within days that sympathy had all but evaporated, swept away by rising disgust at the slaughter unleashed in Gaza by the Israel Defense Forces.

By Oct. 24, 2023, just 17 days after the Hamas-led attack, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was urging the UN Security Council to rein in Israel. He had "condemned unequivocally the horrifying and unprecedented acts of terror by Hamas in Israel."

But now, he said, "those

appalling attacks cannot justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people" being meted out by Israel in Gaza. "Even war has rules," he added.

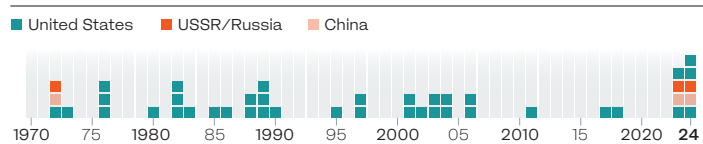
Even before Guterres spoke out, thousands appalled by Israel's behavior had already begun to take to the streets in Western capitals to express their horror and offer their moral support to the Palestinian people.

Some of the first protests took place in the UK, on Oct. 15, just a week after the Hamas-led attack. In London, thousands rallied in response to a plea by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and marched on Downing Street, home of the British prime minister.

Many carried Palestinian flags and banners with messages including "Free Palestine — end Israeli occupation" and "Stop bombing Gaza."

The protests spread like wildfire to other cities and campuses throughout the UK and then to Europe, the Middle East and Asia. By the end of October, demonstrations had

### VETOES OF UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS ON PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES



Sources: United Nations, as of November 20, 2024, AFP

ARAB NEWS

erupted in Copenhagen, Rome, Stockholm, and Wellington.

In France, despite a ban on pro-Palestinian rallies, protests still braved arrest to make their voices heard in Paris and Marseille.

The protests were no flash in the pan, either. Into the new year and up until today, they have kept on coming.

As the death toll in Gaza mounted, reaching 30,000 by March 2024, it was not long before the outrage spread to the US, where on March 20 NBC reported that "in cities across the country, highways have been blocked, trains have been delayed and sections of college campuses have been shut down by hundreds of

thousands of people who have taken to the streets ... protesting Israel's invasion of Gaza."

A week later, on March 27, a Gallup poll found that a majority of Americans opposed Israel's military action in Gaza.

In the UK, the lengths to which the pro-Israel lobby was prepared to go to distract attention away from the cause of the protests became evident after an extraordinary episode in April.

The media rushed to report the claims of Gideon Falter, the chief executive of the Campaign Against Antisemitism, that he had accidentally stumbled into the path of a pro-Palestinian protest and had then been threatened with arrest because his "openly Jewish" appearance

was antagonising the marchers.

The determined assault on the defenders of Palestine by the Jewish lobby has continued unabated. In the UK last week, the head of the British Medical Association was accused by campaign group Labour Against Antisemitism of creating "a hostile environment" for Jewish doctors, and is now under investigation by her own organization.

Over in Ireland, it was reported last week that Israel is to close its embassy in Dublin, accusing the Irish government of "extreme anti-Israel policies" and "crossing every red line."

All over the Global North, universities had "ousted students simply for being members of outfits such as Students for Justice in Palestine."

"Similar actions were taken against journalists and people in public services, even those who accompanied their criticism with a condemnation of the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, 2023."

It was, he added in an article published in the Palestine

Chronicle, "clear that we are facing a coordinated campaign led by the pro-Israeli lobby and aimed at continuing the historical denial of the ongoing Nakba."

That denial, however, appears to be falling on deaf ears.

In recent weeks, thousands have continued to protest on the streets of London and other Western capitals. The UK-based Palestine Solidarity Campaign has even announced plans for its first national demonstration of 2025.

On Jan. 18, it said, "we will march through London once again to demand an end to Israel's genocide in Palestine."

It added: "It is vital we continue to take to the streets in huge numbers to demand an end to British complicity in Israel's genocide and apartheid, including through an end to all arms trade with Israel."

As 2024 has seen an extraordinary outpouring of global outrage at the death and destruction being wrought by Israel in Gaza and Lebanon, so 2025 will see no let-up in the calls for Israel to be held to account.



# Spotlight<sup>2024</sup> IN REVIEW



AFRICA

## Sudan's 'living nightmare'

Civilians endure yet another year of conflict marked by famine, displacement, atrocities and international neglect

**Robert Edwards** London

Sudan's descent into chaos, triggered by the outbreak of civil war in April 2023, has created one of the worst humanitarian disasters of the 21st century.

Despite its magnitude, the crisis has been overshadowed this year by events in Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, leaving millions to endure unimaginable hardship with insufficient international attention or assistance.

The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces, led by Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, has plunged the nation into a spiral of violence, famine, displacement, and suffering.

Observers say the crisis, described by the UN as a "living nightmare," has exposed the failure of the international community to provide adequate support or enforce meaningful accountability.

Hunger is now a fact of life for millions of Sudanese. The crisis has unleashed famine, particularly in Darfur, Kordofan, and neighboring regions, where the fighting has decimated agricultural production and disrupted supply chains.

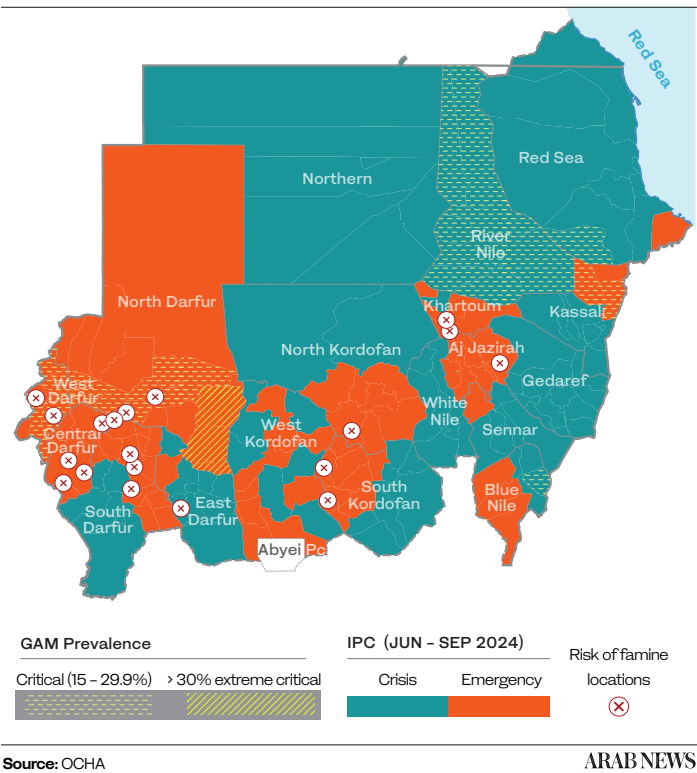
In August, the Global Famine Review Committee officially declared famine in parts of Sudan, confirming IPC Phase 5 conditions in camps near Al-Fashir in Darfur. More than 25.6 million people face acute food insecurity, while 1.5 million are on the edge of famine.

The outbreak of famine was no accident. Humanitarian agencies say both the SAF and RSF have weaponized hunger by blocking aid routes, looting food supplies, and destroying farmland.

Children have been the most vulnerable, with malnutrition rates soaring to catastrophic levels. Disease outbreaks, including cholera and malaria, have compounded the misery.

The conflict has also triggered one of the largest displacement crises in recent history. More than 14 million people have been forced from their homes, with 11 million internally displaced and 3 million fleeing

### SUDAN'S DEEPENING HUNGER CRISIS



to neighboring countries such as Chad, Egypt, and South Sudan.

Refugees who have sought sanctuary in neighboring countries now find themselves in overcrowded camps, with inadequate provisions and limited access to healthcare.

The war has crippled Sudan's healthcare system, with more

than 70 percent of medical facilities destroyed, looted, or knocked out of action.

Humanitarian aid has been woefully insufficient. Only half of the \$2.7 billion needed for Sudan's relief operations in 2024 was funded, leaving millions without adequate support.

The conflict has also been marked by the widespread and systematic use of sexual violence, with harrowing accounts of abuse continuing to emerge.

In July, Human Rights Watch released a report detailing the extent of these atrocities, stating that sexual violence in Khartoum had become "widespread," particularly at the hands of the RSF.

The report documented numerous cases of rape, gang rape, forced marriages, and sexual slavery, with victims ranging in age from nine to 60.

In April, Canada's Raoul Wallenberg Center for Human Rights concluded that atrocities committed in Darfur meet the legal definition of genocide.

The RSF and allied militias have targeted communities, particularly the Masalit people, in what experts describe as a campaign of ethnic cleansing with echoes of the slaughter perpetrated by the RSF's predecessor, the Janjaweed, in 2003-05.

Mass killings, sexual violence, and the destruction of villages have become hallmarks of the conflict. Survivors have recounted chilling accounts of entire families being executed and homes being razed.

Many observers believe the international response to Sudan's crisis has been fragmented and insufficient.

In August, the Aligned for Advancing Lifesaving and Peace in Sudan Group, which includes Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE, proposed the creation of humanitarian corridors and civilian protection measures. However, ongoing violence has stymied these efforts.

External actors have continued to arm factions in the conflict, further complicating international mediation efforts. The UN Security Council, meanwhile, has faced criticism for its perceived inaction.

As the war continues into another year, Sudan remains a stark reminder of the human cost of indifference and the urgent need for concerted global action.



# Spotlight<sup>2024</sup> IN REVIEW



LIBYA

## Of fragmentation and state failure

Entrenched rivalries and foreign meddling made progress elusive, prolonging the suffering of the Libyan people

Robert Edwards London

When the Arab uprisings swept through the

Middle East and North Africa in 2011, many in the West hoped the fall of these entrenched regimes would herald a new era of development and good governance. Instead, it marked the beginning of a period of unprecedented suffering for millions.

Since the NATO-backed uprising that ousted Muammar Qaddafi, Libya has become a byword for state failure — divided between rival administrations, plagued by criminality, and used as a proxy battleground by foreign powers keen to exploit its oil and strategic location.

While 2024 offered glimpses of possible reconciliation between the North African nation's competing factions, steps toward national elections, and perhaps even justice for its long-suffering citizens, the country remains deeply unstable as it enters the new year.

In April, Abdoulaye Bathily, the UN special envoy to Libya, resigned, citing the country's entrenched political stalemate. His resignation followed 18 months of attempts to mediate between Libya's divided factions, but a "lack of political will and good faith" thwarted progress.

"The selfish resolve of current leaders to maintain the status quo must stop," Bathily told the Security Council.

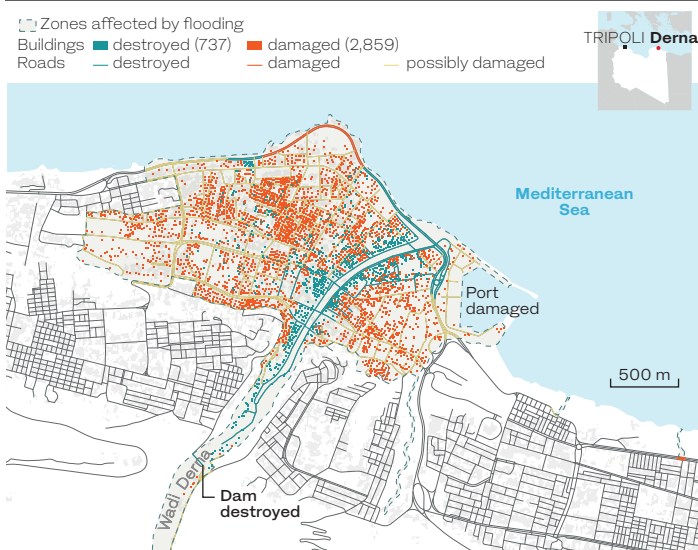
Libya's fragile peace was repeatedly shattered in 2024, with violence escalating across major cities and border regions. In May, clashes in Zawiya between militias loyal to the GNU left one dead and six injured.

Violence escalated in Tripoli in July, where clashes between the Interior Ministry's Special Deterrence Forces, also known as RADA, and Presidential Council units resulted in 13 fatalities, including civilians. August brought another tragedy in Tripoli, with nine killed in militia fighting.

Amid this summer of bloodshed, there was a glimmer of justice. In July, Libya's Derna Criminal Court sentenced 12 officials to up to 27 years in prison for their roles in the catastrophic

### DEVASTATION IN LIBYA'S DERNA

In July 2024, 12 officials were sentenced to 27 years in prison for their roles in the Sept. 10, 2023, dam collapse



Sept. 10, 2023, dam collapse.

The disaster, triggered by Storm Daniel, unleashed torrents of water that obliterated entire neighborhoods in the coastal city of Derna, claiming thousands of lives. Rebuilding efforts remain slow, hindered by political infighting.

September brought a breakthrough as Libya's rival legislative bodies agreed to appoint Naji Mohamed Issa

Belqasem as interim central bank governor, ending months of turmoil over financial leadership.

October saw the International Criminal Court unseal arrest warrants for six Libyans implicated in war crimes during the Second Libyan Civil War of 2014-20. The suspects, linked to the Kaniyat militia, face charges including murder, torture and sexual violence.

In November, the GNU's

Interior Minister Emad Al-Trabelsi sparked widespread condemnation from human rights groups when he announced plans to establish a morality police force.

"Al-Trabelsi's sweeping moral measures were never likely to materialize," Jalel Harchaoui, a Libya expert and senior fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, told Arab News. "Enforcing such rules requires broad territorial control, religious credibility, and a clear moral gap to address."

"Much of Libya's population is already conservative, the Interior Ministry lacks religious backing, and no armed actor — Al-Trabelsi included — can truly project power citywide, let alone nationwide."

"Unsurprisingly, nothing substantial has followed the initial announcement, which had drawn so much international attention."

Libya has become one of the busiest and most deadly routes used by migrants and refugees attempting to reach Europe.

Tragedy struck Libya's migrant routes repeatedly in 2024, with multiple fatal incidents highlighting the perils faced by those seeking refuge.

In September, a boat capsized near Tobruk, leaving 22 missing. October brought another disaster, with only one survivor from a vessel carrying 13 passengers. Then in November, 28 people disappeared off Libya's coast when their rubber boat got into difficulty.

The Kremlin's strategic ambitions in Libya are likely to keep growing in the new year as it seeks to offset losses in Syria following the overthrow earlier this month of Assad, a key ally who had permitted Russian use of air and naval bases.

Moscow has deepened ties with General Haftar's Libyan National Army in recent years, using Libya as a launchpad for expanding its influence in North Africa and the Sahel.

As Libya's rival factions vie for power, analysts believe this kind of foreign influence could further complicate efforts to achieve peace and sovereignty.

While Syria embarks on its own delicate transition out of war and dictatorship, Libya stands as a cautionary tale for what can happen when factionalism, greed, and foreign interests are allowed to trump the needs and aspirations of a long-suffering people.



# Spotlight<sup>2024</sup> IN REVIEW

GAZA STRIP

## Unfinished humanitarian catastrophe

Little hope of respite from war for embattled Palestinian enclave, despite persistent calls for a ceasefire

Anan Tello London

As the war in Gaza approaches its 16th month, Palestinian civilians trapped inside the besieged territory hold little hope of a respite, despite international calls for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

On Dec. 11, the UN General Assembly adopted two key resolutions, demanding an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, as well as the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

The Assembly also reaffirmed its full support for the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNRWA, considered a lifeline for millions, and condemned Knesset legislation, passed on Oct. 28, barring the agency's work.

Since Oct. 7, 2023, when the Palestinian militant group Hamas launched a surprise attack in southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and saw 240 taken hostage, the Israeli military has bombarded Gaza and restricted the flow of aid into the territory.

The strikes have killed at least 44,900 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, destroyed homes, health, education, and sanitation services, and displaced some 90 percent of the population — many households multiple times.

Israel's blockade of at least 83 percent of humanitarian relief entering Gaza, and the looting of those aid convoys that do get through, has led to severe food shortages and crisis-level hunger affecting more than 2 million people.

In the north, where no aid has arrived for almost three months, some 65,000 Palestinians face an imminent threat of famine. In the south, where aid is more accessible but still insufficient, UN agencies reported in mid-February that 5 percent of children under the age of two were acutely malnourished.

For this reason, along with other alleged war crimes relating to the Gaza war, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant have been threatened with arrest if they travel to any of the 124 member states of the International Criminal Court.

In late November, the ICC

issued warrants for Netanyahu, Gallant, and Hamas commander Mohammed Deif, who Israel says it killed in July.

In January, Israel accused several UNRWA employees of involvement in the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack, leading many Western donors to suspend funding while the agency investigated the allegations. After confirming the involvement of nine employees, UNRWA fired them, and all donors, except the US, reinstated the money.

Israel says it aims to minimize civilian casualties and accuses Hamas of using civilian infrastructure to shield military operations, a claim Hamas denies.

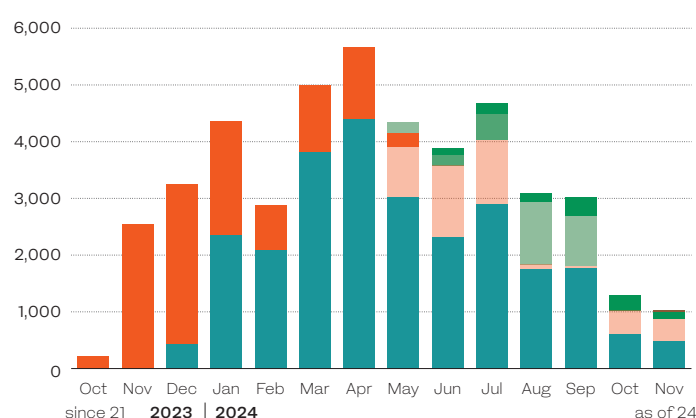
In the north, Kamal Adwan

### HUMANITARIAN AID ENTERING THE GAZA STRIP

Number of trucks by month

#### CROSSING POINT

■ Kerem Shalom ■ Rafah ■ Western Erez ■ Gate 96 ■ JLOTS\* ■ Erez ■ Kissufim



\*US military Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore System, since dismantled

Sources: AFP, UNRWA

ARAB NEWS

Hospital in Beit Lahiya has been a target of Israeli raids. The region's last partially functioning medical facility endured months of heavy shelling and a renewed blockade.

Despite denials from local medics and Hamas of any militant presence at Kamal Adwan, Israel continued to batter the facility with heavy airstrikes. In late December, Israeli forces arrested the hospital's director, Hussam Abu Safiya, and closed the facility in a deadly incursion.

Nevertheless, public criticism of Hamas is increasing in Gaza, both in public spaces and online. Some Gazans have accused the group of placing hostages

in apartments near crowded marketplaces or of launching rockets from civilian areas.

Many thought there was a chance the war would end on Oct. 17 when Yahya Sinwar, the mastermind behind the Oct. 7, 2023, attack, was killed after a chance encounter with an Israeli patrol in Rafah, southern Gaza.

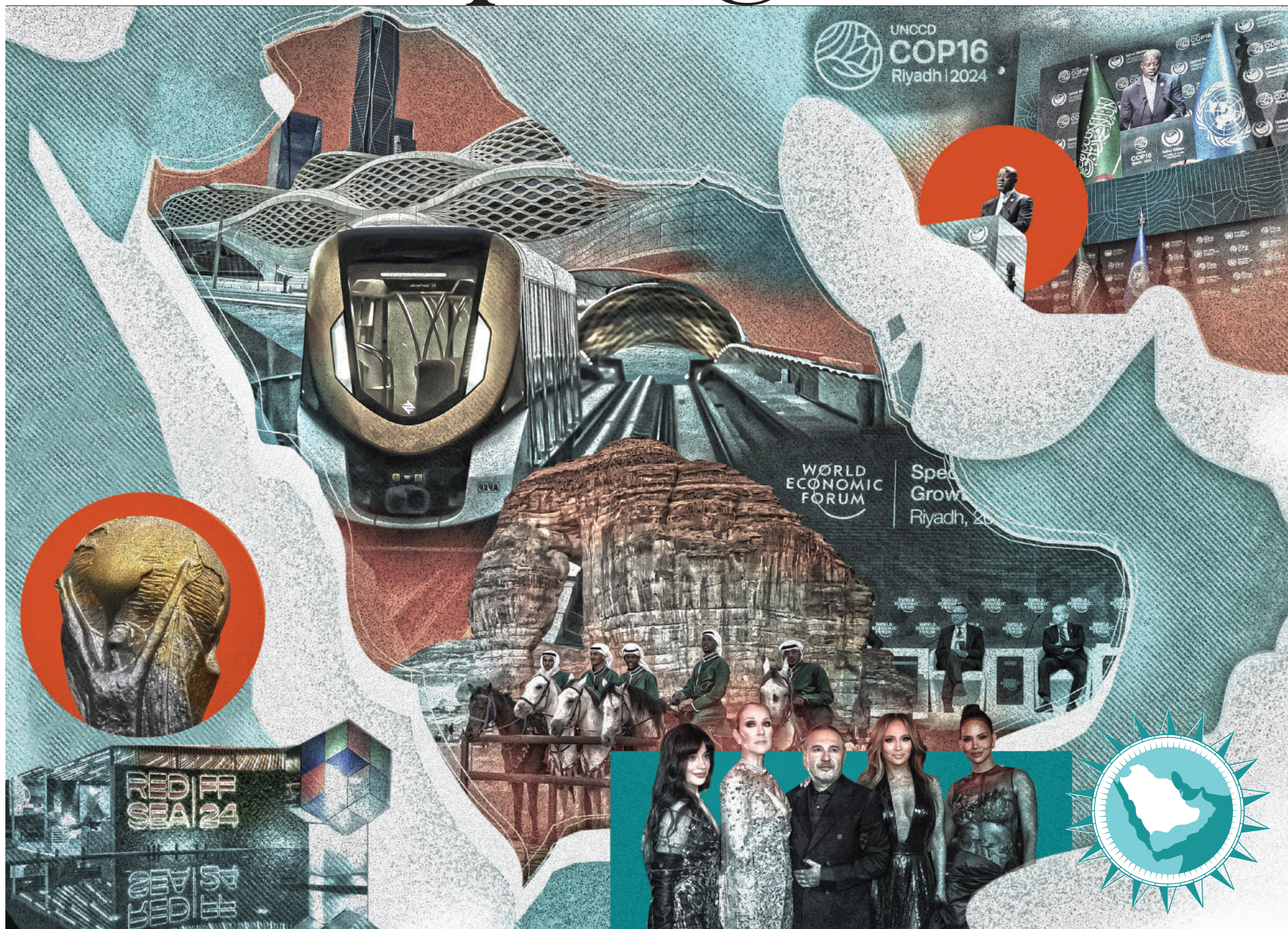
Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh was killed in July by a bomb in his Tehran guesthouse bedroom.

Although Sinwar's death was deemed a defining moment in the Gaza war, Netanyahu made it clear the conflict is not over. In a post on X, he wrote: "While this is not the end of the war in Gaza, it's the beginning of the end."





# Spotlight<sup>2024</sup> IN REVIEW



SAUDI ARABIA

## A time of transformation

The past 12 months have seen the Kingdom host some of the biggest events in sport, culture and diplomacy

Jonathan Gornall London

In 1924, Riyadh was a small oasis town, covering less than 1 square kilometer and home to no more than 30,000 people.

One hundred years ago, the motor car had yet to displace the camel as the primary form of transport and the future capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was still contained within the defensive walls that had encircled it for 200 years. Today, Riyadh is a vast metropolis, the largest city on the Arabian Peninsula. Ever expanding, the capital is currently spread over 1,500 square kilometers and has a population close to eight million, largely reliant on the car.

In 2024, however, Riyadh took a significant step toward an increasingly sustainable future with the opening on Dec. 1 of the first three lines of a revolutionary new driverless metro system linking all parts of the city over 176 km of tracks.

Riyadh's goal is not only to get bigger, but also to get

better, leading the nation in following the blueprint of Vision 2030, the plan to transition the Kingdom away from an oil-dependent economy — and the new mass-transit system will relieve pressure on the roads by removing tens of millions of car journeys every year.

A decade in the making, by the end of January 2025 all six metro lines are expected to be open, with 190 trains serving 85 stations, initially carrying 1.2 million passengers a day and with a planned capacity of 3.6 million. The year in Saudi Arabia began as it is ending, with the Winter at Tantora Festival, the culture, art and music festival at AlUla, which this year started on Dec. 19 and continues until Jan. 11.

From its beginnings in December 2018, when the festival featured the Italian singer Andrea Bocelli and the French violinist Renaud Capucon, it has grown to become a globally recognized celebration of art, music, and culture, with many events taking place in the stunning mirror-walled Maraya concert

### MORE SAUDI MILESTONES

**February:** 15 trillion standard cubic feet of natural gas discovered at Jafurah Field.

**May:** Students secure 27 awards at the International Science and Engineering Fair in the US.

**August:** Saudi Arabia's Team Falcons crowned Esports World Cup club champions.

**September:** Riyadh hosts the third edition of Global AI Summit, also known as GAIN.

**September:** Kingdom tops region, 4th globally in UN's digital government services index.

**October:** 4,000-year-old town dubbed Al-Natah discovered hidden in Khaybar oasis.

**October:** Archeologists discuss findings from Al-Faw, Kingdom's newest World Heritage Site.

ARAB NEWS

hall in AlUla's Ashar Valley.

An early highlight in the 2024 season was the classical concert on Dec. 27 by singer Abeer Nehme and The National Arab Orchestra, which celebrated the rich tapestry of Arab heritage.

At the other end of the musical scale in 2024 was MDLBEAST

Soundstorm, the mid-December music festival which, with some justification, lays claim to being "the loudest weekend in Riyadh," and this year featured acts including Eminem, Muse, David Guetta and Linkin Park.

Another mass-participation cultural event that is increasingly putting Saudi Arabia on the global entertainment map is Riyadh Season, a high-octane, multi-venue, six-month celebration that is billed as the biggest and most diverse entertainment festival in the world.

Starting on Oct. 12 in 2024, within two months the season had attracted more than 10 million visitors.

One highlight this year was the bout in the Kingdom Arena between light-heavyweight boxing champions Dmitry Bivol and Artur Beterbiev, won by the Russian Beterbiev, who became the first undisputed four-belt light-heavyweight champion since 2002. By way of contrast, and summing up the eclectic diversity of the entire season, on Nov. 14 stars flew into Riyadh

from around the world for the 45th anniversary celebration of Lebanese couturier Elie Saab.

The fashion show was attended by celebrities including Jennifer Lopez, Halle Berry, Celine Dion, Nadine Nassib Njeim, Monica Bellucci and Razane Jammal.

Over on the west coast in Jeddah, the fourth iteration of the Red Sea International Film Festival, which ran from Dec. 5 to 14, continued to reinforce its reputation as a rapidly emerging force in the global film industry.

On the sporting front, this year the Kingdom added another sport to a rapidly growing portfolio that already embraces soccer, golf, boxing and Formula One. This year's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix on the Jeddah Corniche Circuit, the second round of the F1 championship, was the fourth in the country and was won by Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

In November, the Women's Tennis Association finals were held in Riyadh for the first time, with a record \$15 million prize purse on offer.

The final saw world No. 3 Coco

Gauff beat Zheng Qinwen in what is slated to be the first of several such finals to be held in the Kingdom. But perhaps the biggest moment in Saudi Arabia's 2024 came on Dec. 11, when global footballing body FIFA confirmed that the 2034 World Cup would be held in the Kingdom.

Hosting the 48-team tournament in 15 stadiums across five cities will bring in hundreds of thousands of fans and players, many of whom will be experiencing the Kingdom in person for the first time.

Fun and games isn't the only stage on which Saudi Arabia is opening up to the world.

In 2024 the Kingdom hosted a number of high-level global conferences, including biodiversity conference COP16 over the first two weeks in December, at which global pledges to combat drought and land degradation topped \$10 billion and, in April, the World Economic Forum's Special Meeting on Global Collaboration, Growth and Energy for Development.