

The Arab League has returned to Syria after 11 years of suspension. It is a victory for Syria but also for Saudi Arabia, which is asserting itself as the master of clocks on the Arab scene. Syria's regional isolation is officially broken. The next act will be normalization with Turkey after the elections. Erdogan and the opposition are both in favor of it.

At the end of April, after the aid al-fitr, Saudi Foreign Minister Fayçal Ben Farhan went to Damascus to seal reconciliation between the two countries. At the Munich security conference in mid-February 2023, the same Saudi minister expressed his desire to renew dialogue with Bashar al-Assad, because the situation of the population in Syria and refugees in neighbouring countries is disastrous. The recent earthquake has only accelerated the descent into hell of the Syrian people. However, this generates a risk of regional destabilisation for decades comparable to the problem of Palestinian refugees after 1948. It should be noted that Saudi Arabia's concern for Syria is part of the context of reconciliation with Iran carried out under the aegis of China. On March 10, 2023, the two countries thus planned to restore their diplomatic relations and King Salman officially invited President Ebrahim Raisi to visit Saudi Arabia. The so-called Bashar al-Assad earthquake diplomacy works thanks to this process of appeasement at the regional level. Moreover, the earthquake is the best opportunity to get closer without losing face. Condolences are moments of reconciliation between angry parents or hostile neighbors who are ultimately just waiting for an opportunity to erase the past.

It is time for reconciliation in the Middle East with China and Russia as peacemakers. Saudi Arabia does not want to leave diplomatic initiatives to the UAE. The two countries are now cold, they oppose more than they support in Yemen and compete in their relations with the United States, Russia and China. Mohamed Ben Salman wants his country to be the policeman of the Middle East, for that, he must take the diplomatic ascendancy in the Arab sphere. The settlement of the Syrian crisis could give him the opportunity to do so. But, just as with Recep Tayyep Erdogan, Bashar al-Assad will not rush into the arms of MBS without having raised the stakes to the maximum. Patience remains his major asset.

Bashar el-Assad was therefore to be in Ryad on May 19 for the Arab League meeting. It is a diplomatic victory, because there is no longer any obstacle to the reopening of all Arab embassies in Syria. Arab solidarity must now demand the final lifting of sanctions on the country to Westerners. Some of them are temporarily lifted for humanitarian reasons, it will now be difficult to restore them.