



# The Politics and Society Institute

## Position Paper (No. 1)

### Strategic and regional dimensions of Operation “Al-Aqsa Flood” and the Israeli war on Gaza



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## Introduction

The event was not expected in terms of timing and planning, but it was in harmony with the levels of local, regional, and international circumstances and contexts that led to it. The most right-wing Israeli government spared no effort in isolating the Gaza Strip, continuing its siege, annexing more West Bank territory, and repeatedly breaking into the Al-Aqsa Mosque. This reached a point where Palestinian parties saw their cause being undermined, coinciding with an unprecedented wave of Arab-Israeli normalization that seemed to disregard Palestinian rights. Furthermore, some statements and discussions suggested a diminishing significance of the Palestinian issue and the end of its centrality in the regional order.

On the contrary, it was clear that it was following what the administration of former US President Donald Trump presented in terms of the deal of the century and in terms of replacing the regional peace project with a final solution to the issue. Reducing the Palestinian issue only to the issue of "improving the lives of Palestinians", as if they were without political and human rights.

In light of these interconnected contexts and stations, it is possible to read Hamas's unprecedented attack on the settlements and the major earthquake that they caused, which will have significant repercussions on the level of Palestinian policies, Israeli and regional policies, and the priorities of the international agenda of the great powers, not far from that the declaration of war by Israel on Gaza, and the statement of the Israeli Prime Minister that the war will change the face of the Middle East.

In an initial approach to reading these events - and the subsequent expansion of the work of the Palestinian factions, the declaration by the Israeli Prime Minister of a state of war, the heavy Israeli raids in the Gaza Strip, the military reaction from Hamas and its armed wing, statements by Abu Obeida talking about a coming regional war similar to what Netanyahu stated, the recall of one of the largest aircraft carriers in the world to the Mediterranean coast to support Israel, and the declaration of Britain, Germany and Italy their full support for Israel - PSI publishes this preliminary assessment of the situation and will follow it by subsequent readings and estimates.

## Beyond the attack: strategic objectives and political investment

The sudden attack and sudden incursion of the Qassam Brigades (Hamas's military wing) on the Gaza periphery, capturing and killing Israelis, and throwing rockets at other areas under Israeli control (reaching Tel Aviv and even Haifa) represented a strategic surprise and a fundamental shift in the military action of the Palestinian armed resistance factions, which may have revealed a clear Israeli intelligence deficit.

It seemed clear that the last government led by Netanyahu focused on expanding the settlement process in the West Bank, especially with the presence of "Smotrich" and "Ben Gvir", which coincides with a huge political vacuum due to the absence of the Palestinian Authority from the scene, the continuation of the crisis of the besieged Gaza Strip, and the repeated incursions by Israeli officials into Al-Aqsa Mosque and the harassment of worshipers there, which created many gaps specifically between the Palestinian political



leadership, which seemed unable to deal with these policies on the one hand, and the Palestinians who on the other hand, feel that the legitimacy of the authority led by Mahmoud Abbas is fragile and has begun to erode. This legitimacy erosion which Israel has tried to build on and exploit without taking into account the presence of armed groups without clear leadership, or that Hamas may explode at any moment, even if it adopts a state of silence following the Israeli raids on Islamic Jihad leaders and fighters in the last two years, puts doubts at the time about the reality of the unity of the Palestinian factional arena, or the tension in the security scene in many Palestinian areas which was also witnessed earlier this year in Jenin.

There are objective contexts that led to this attack, through which Hamas sought to achieve strategic goals in the first place, mainly with Iranian support, and the intersection between the agendas of each of the two sides, and whatever the strategic analysis of what happened, it - that is, the attack - re-established the resistance alliance in the region, after witnessing divisions and differences between Hamas and the rest, following the war in Syria, since 2011.

One of the most important questions in building a perception of what is happening is the strategic and political objectives behind Hamas's unprecedented attack.

The Palestinian issue represents a political, central, and influential matter for international and regional security. In the face of international and regional agendas that have begun exerting significant pressure on the Palestinian Authority to transform the issue into an administrative, security, and economic file, several objectives have emerged. These objectives are related to the catastrophic humanitarian and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, the symbolic matter concerning the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its importance, Israeli violations, as well as crossing what Hamas previously considered red lines related to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. They also pertain to the issue of Palestinian prisoners, aiming for a large-scale prisoner exchange deal. Additionally, some objectives are connected to Hamas's popularity in the face of the declining and increasingly weakened power of the Palestinian Authority.

In conclusion, the previous goals are combined in a strategic outcome sought by Hamas, which is to "change the rules of the conflict" and to build new rules that suit the new concept presented by the last war, with the remarkable development of the capabilities of the Qassam Brigades, thus benefiting from this in strengthening Hamas' position in the internal, regional and international calculations on the one hand, as the most difficult figure that cannot be surpassed, and in finding a better equation for the Gaza Strip on the other.

Some strategic goals are achieved, at first, but what is important in the strategic outcome is the development of the situation on the ground, the ranges, levels and actual results of the war, as these are the ones that will decide who will succeed, and more importantly not only in the military goals behind the Hamas attack, but also in who will invest politically in what is happening; is it Hamas with its strategic objectives referred to, or the Palestinian Authority that can restore the world's attention to the issue and its centrality, or Benjamin Netanyahu, who was facing a major crisis domestically and today is trying to capitalize on the wave of war to represent himself as the one capable of defeating Hamas.



## Initial data, impact, and strategic outcomes

What are the expected outcomes and repercussions of the event? There are still many questions related to the extent of the war: Will it be limited to Gaza, and will it be limited to heavy aerial bombardment and achieve symbolic results in the face of the collapse in Israel's reputation or will it lead to a large-scale ground invasion of Gaza? If Gaza is invaded, what will Israel do next? In light of the lack of any Israeli strategic interest in reoccupying the Gaza Strip? Will it be able to achieve a symbolic victory and take a picture of victory in the face of the "image" presented by the Qassam Brigades? This raises the question of the situation in the West Bank and the lands inside the green line, are we facing a scenario of a sudden explosion or will the issue remain within the limits of tension and skirmishes between the Palestinians in these areas and the Israelis?

According to diplomatic leaks, international efforts were keen in the early days of the battles to take guarantees from Hezbollah and Iran not to enter the war, and the Iranian answer was that there was no intention of entering the war. As for Hezbollah, according to the same leaks, it linked its entry into the war with a major invasion of the Gaza Strip and massacres against civilians.

This is on the level of final outcomes, which are associated with the field developments that will necessarily continue for a period of time. The results will not be immediate or short-term in nature, but rather, they will be part of a strategy linked to regional equations, international agendas, and convictions. We are facing a significant change in the entire regional playing field, a Game Changer. However, this does not negate the existence of initial implications and results that can be summarized as follows:

**Regarding Palestinian politics**, the operation affirmed the weakness and incapacity of the Palestinian Authority. It reinforced the convictions of major powers that the Palestinian Authority lacks effective solutions and keys to influence events, having transformed into a limited security and administrative authority. Relying solely on a security-driven agenda (commonly referred to as Dayton 2) is a failed project and will not be effective. Hamas remains a formidable player, regardless of the military battle's outcomes.

**At the level of Israeli policies**, there will certainly be accountability, after the dust of the battle goes around, on more than one level, security, military and political, and many officials will pay the price, but it is not clear whether these events will weaken or strengthen the orientations of the extreme Israeli right, and whether they will lead to modifying extremist Israeli policies, especially in Jerusalem, settlements and internal policies in Israel and the transformations that have taken place in recent decades.

**At the level of international policies**, it is clear that whatever the results are, the current events have brought the Palestinian issue back to the forefront and to the priorities of the international agenda, and ended great dreams for the regional normalization project as an alternative to the final solution, although this result does not necessarily mean reviving the two-state solution, as it was already among the dead, before the war, to think about other solutions and try to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.



**At the level of regional policies,** it is clear that the battle has proven Iran's strength in the region, and the escalation of the role of non-state actors, militias, armed resistance, and others, with the shift in the patterns of wars and the concepts of armed confrontations, not only in Palestine but in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. With what is happening in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya and others, the armed organizations prove their effectiveness on the ground and their ability to significantly exceed the capabilities of regular armies.

There are preliminary and direct results, immediately after the end of the battle and other strategic results on the medium and long runs.

### The impact on Jordanian policies

It is evident that there are numerous strategic determinants in the Jordanian stance, some of which are conflicting with each other, especially given the Western positions that adopted the Israeli media narrative and offered unconditional support for Netanyahu's military policies in response to "The Aqsa Flood." This is particularly the case with the U.S. President Biden's administration, which granted Netanyahu an open check for retribution against Hamas without setting limits or restrictions on the human cost. On the other side of the equation is the Iranian stance, which represents substantial support for Hamas and Hezbollah. If the war were to escalate into regional dimensions, alongside these considerations, there are internal dynamics that have contradictory aspects as well.

The first is related to the absent political relationship between Hamas and Jordan's support for the Palestinian Authority. This is connected to the ideological and political affinity between Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, which has entered a state of "sustainable crisis" with the executive authority in Jordan. There is a growing belief within the ruling circles that the Brotherhood is an internal adversary, and their license was revoked years ago, with concerns that the group might attempt to exploit this politically on an internal level.

However, on the other hand, there is a public Jordanian opinion that is angry and resentful of the Israeli massacres in Gaza, supporting what Hamas is doing in confronting Israel through military operations. This support was reflected in the massive historic popular demonstration that took place in the city center on Tuesday, October 10, 2023, in support of Hamas. Any official stance that deviates from this popular sentiment is likely to clash with public opinion.

Within these politically and strategically complex calculations, the official decision-maker draws his positions and builds his statements and political discourse, and in dealing with the great pressure by the US administration on the decision maker to issue statements condemning the killing of civilians by Hamas, which Jordanian officials rejected and said to condemn the killing and assault of civilians, from any party, and to emphasize the need to stop the escalation against civilians in Gaza, open the door for humanitarian aid, and reject policies of cutting off electricity and water to besieged civilians.

As for the strategic implications and repercussions imposed by the "Al Aqsa Flood" operation, it is evident that Jordanian officials are displaying caution and vigilance, especially in monitoring the evolution of the conflicts and events. Jordanian authorities



are highly concerned about the impact on political stability in the West Bank, adjacent to the Jordanian borders, and how it might lead to a further deterioration of the situation, either on the Palestinian-Palestinian or Palestinian-Israeli level. Such a development could pose a looming threat to Jordan's national security. Jordan fears the collapse of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah and the risk of chaos, with an American agenda closely aligned with the extreme Israeli right. Some elements within the Israeli right-wing are now talking about Jordan as the solution to the Israeli demographic problem and an alternative to the collapsing authority in Ramallah. This perspective has led to new approaches in these circles, where the discussion revolves around an alternative regime rather than an alternative homeland. Consequently, this direction sees the opportunity available today as a chance to revive Arab coordination, specifically (Jordan - Saudi Arabia - Egypt), regarding the Palestinian issue, or even to revitalize the peace process on the basis that collective action is more beneficial and productive for all parties.

On the other hand, the Jordanian political elite believes that what is happening confirms the Jordanian narrative, which has been warning of this scenario, for four years, and Jordan is talking about the danger of moving the US embassy and bypassing the issue in the regional normalization process and the results of Israeli violations of Al-Aqsa Mosque and ignoring the importance of the Palestinian cause in regional security and stability of the region. It is rational and realistic in addressing the world and alerting to the importance of the Palestinian cause, its centrality, and the great Jordanian regional role related to stability in the region.

## Conclusions

It is not currently possible to judge the results, but in principle, the cards have been mixed at the three levels (Palestinian, Israeli, and regional levels), and despite the great symbolic victory achieved at the beginning, there are other stages that are still ongoing and the coming chapters will be dangerous, and the important question is related to who are the political winners and losers? This prompts the "decision makers" in Amman to reinforce and confirm the Jordanian narrative that confirms and constantly says that the Palestinian cause is central, important, and pivotal and that what the far-right government is doing in Israel will lead to dangerous results and will blow up the region, and that regional normalization is not a substitute for the political, human and basic rights of the Palestinians.

The narrative is a crucial element in this battle, and it is clear that there is an initial victory for the Israeli narrative in the United States and the West. There is sympathy from political and media circles for this narrative. However, what is needed on the Jordanian side is to present and frame what Western media is trying to ignore and obscure: the Palestinian suffering and the significant human rights issue. There is a requirement to shift from this perspective to an attempt to undermine the project of resolving the Palestinian issue, which began with the Trump administration and has continued with the current administration.