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THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF AL-AQSA FLOOD: NEW DIMENSIONS OF WARFARE AND STRATEGIC CHALLENGES



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Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF AL-AQSA FLOOD: NEW DIMENSIONS OF WARFARE AND STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

Introduction

The first anniversary of the Al-Aqsa Flood, which began on October 7, 2023, marks a significant milestone in regional and international developments. This military operation, initiated by the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas and other Islamic factions in Palestine, is a response to years of occupation and human rights violations committed by the Israeli regime against the people of Gaza. Beyond impacting Palestine's security and human rights conditions, the escalation has heightened tensions across the Middle East. Moreover, the situation has prompted a reevaluation of regional strategies, especially regarding support for Palestinian rights and counteractions against Israeli policies.

Since the onset of the Al-Aqsa Flood and the intensification of Israeli attacks on Gaza, solidarity and cooperation among various military factions in the Middle East have become increasingly evident in their support for Hamas. Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Iraqi Islamic resistance forces have each, in their ways, launched operations and expressed support for Gaza's people, illustrating a shared commitment among free-spirited individuals to stand against occupation and oppression.

Recently, the Israeli regime, now facing serious military and strategic challenges, has attempted under Netanyahu's leadership to restore its standing by targeting resistance leaders and intensifying assaults, aiming to sway public sentiment against the resistance and its allies. However, unwavering U.S. military support has failed to mitigate the regime's heavy losses. Consequently, these developments necessitate a reassessment of the Israeli regime's strategies toward Gaza and Hamas's Islamic resistance movement.

This article explores the first anniversary of the Al-Aqsa Flood, examining the factions involved, support for the resistance, and the multidimensional warfare and strategic crises confronting the Israeli regime.

THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE AL-AQSA FLOOD

The Al-Aqsa Flood operation, launched on October 7, 2023, by the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas, emerged as a significant and unexpected event that stunned regional and global powers alike. This military action was a response to the oppression and blockade imposed by the Israeli regime, alongside its occupation of Palestinian territories, especially Gaza, as well as retaliatory strikes in response to Palestinian resistance. Over a year, this event has led to substantial political, military, and social shifts across the region. These developments include heightened tensions and diplomatic efforts to de-escalate and establish a ceasefire.

Moreover, the human impact of this flood has been notable. Despite the Israeli regime's widespread crimes against Gaza's people, it has resulted in significant military and civilian casualties within Israeli society. Over the past year, 1,697 Israeli soldiers and officers have been killed, while another 5,000



have been injured, with 695 reported in critical condition. Additionally, 19,000 Israeli civilians have been wounded, and 143,000 have been displaced, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis and increasing the need for humanitarian aid on both sides of the conflict. Beyond the immediate casualties, the deep social and political rifts within Israeli society have been highlighted by the capture of around 240 Israelis by Palestinian resistance forces, adding to the far-reaching impacts of this operation across all political, economic, and security domains.

On the international front, the Al-Aqsa Flood has led to a sharp erosion of global support for the Israeli regime, owing to the unprecedented scale of violence inflicted. Thousands of cities worldwide have witnessed repeated protests condemning Israeli actions in Gaza. A Harvard University poll surveying 2,000 Americans from diverse age groups revealed that 51% of young participants believe a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would involve “ending Israel and transferring power to Hamas and the Palestinians.”

Additionally, ongoing strikes on Gaza have spurred various international institutions to pursue actions aimed at halting the Israeli regime’s actions. On March 25, 2024, the UN Security Council issued a resolution calling for an immediate and sustained ceasefire. Similarly, on January 26, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) resolved to implement interim measures to prevent genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, ensuring access to essential services, humanitarian aid, and prevention of further atrocities. Recently, the United Nations General Assembly also requested that the ICJ clarify the consequences of Israel’s continued occupation. However, by disregarding resolutions from international bodies and openly challenging these institutions, the Israeli regime has increasingly revealed itself as a defiant and lawless state.

RESISTANCE FRONTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Despite the support of millions worldwide who stand in solidarity with the people of Gaza and the resistance fronts in Palestine, led by the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas, other resistance groups under the banner of the “Axis of Resistance” in the Middle East have also launched military operations against the Israeli regime in solidarity with Hamas and in defense of Gaza’s people. Given Hamas’s resilience, endurance, and sacrifices in confronting the Israeli regime, which is widely recognized globally, we will forego detailed descriptions and instead offer brief insights into the active contributions of several other fronts in the Middle East aligning with the people of Gaza and Hamas.

Hezbollah in Lebanon: One of the principal factions within the “Axis of Resistance” in the Middle East is Hezbollah in Lebanon. In 2006, Israel launched a ground war against Lebanon, but after 33 days of intense fighting, Hezbollah emerged victorious, and Israel was forced to withdraw.

Following the launch of the Al-Aqsa Flood on October 8, 2023, when the brutal Israeli regime initiated airstrikes on Gaza’s children and civilians, Hezbollah responded by launching attacks on northern Israeli-occupied territories. Initially, this confrontation remained sporadic and irregular until the Israeli regime escalated by targeting Hezbollah’s headquarters in southern Lebanon, culminating in the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and several key figures on September 27. This act



intensified hostilities, with Israel subsequently initiating a ground invasion of Lebanon on October 1 this year. Despite Israel's continued airstrikes claiming dozens of lives daily, including children and women, Hezbollah's military capabilities have substantially increased compared to prior conflicts, allowing it to launch numerous missiles each day toward Israeli-occupied cities, including the capital and even the residence of Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Ansar Allah (Houthis of Yemen): The Houthi movement, also known as Ansar Allah, is another prominent political and military organization in the Middle East, formed in the 1990s in Yemen. Backed by Iran, the Houthis have been a significant faction in Yemen's civil conflicts, controlling extensive areas, including the capital, Sana'a, and much of the country's north. The Houthis began direct military action against the Israeli regime in response to its aggression against Gaza on October 19, 2023, launching several missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) towards Israel. In November of the same year, they targeted and seized an Israeli vessel in the Red Sea, subsequently carrying out further strikes against Israeli, American, and British ships. Reports indicate that by June of this year, they had attacked over 50 Israeli, American, and British vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of this movement, has consistently reaffirmed his commitment to continue operations against Israel in defense of the oppressed people of Gaza and Lebanon.

Islamic Resistance in Iraq

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a key military movement within the "Axis of Resistance" against Israel, has also conducted operations targeting American forces in Iraq and Syria following the Al-Aqsa Flood, in response to the U.S. role in the Gaza crisis. This movement released a statement on October 18, 2023, claiming responsibility for a drone strike on the Al-Harir Airbase in Iraqi Kurdistan, publicly expressing its support for Gaza. By October 30, 2023, the group had carried out approximately 20 attacks against American forces in Iraq and Syria. Throughout the year of Israel's operations in Gaza, Iraqi resistance forces intermittently targeted American and Israeli positions. However, following the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah during an Israeli strike on Hezbollah's southern Lebanon headquarters, the Iraqi resistance re-emerged as a primary force within the "Axis of Resistance." Two days after Nasrallah's assassination, it launched a drone strike on a critical target in the port city of Eilat in southern Israel, subsequently carrying out additional drone attacks on other sites in Eilat.

Iran's Position

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Iran has consistently opposed Israel, extending support to all factions that resist the Israeli regime, including Hezbollah in Lebanon. Over the years, prominent Iranian figures have been assassinated by Israel as part of its longstanding conflict with Iran. In an attempt to implicate Iran in the ongoing war, Israel recently assassinated Hamas's political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran and subsequently targeted Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. These provocations prompted Iran to launch approximately 200 missiles toward Israel, with Iranian sources reporting that around 90% of the missiles reached their intended targets, causing significant damage. Israeli media, however, has denied any substantial damage resulting from the Iranian missile strikes.



After issuing repeated warnings, Israel ultimately launched limited strikes on military bases in Tehran and other Iranian cities on October 26. According to Iranian sources, these attacks resulted in minimal damage and only two Iranian military casualties. Whether Iran will respond to these strikes remains uncertain, but the former commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Aziz Jafari, had predicted that Israel might initiate a limited strike on Iran. He warned that if Israel attempted any major attack, it would face a significantly amplified response. Based on footage, photos, and Iranian media reports regarding the scope of Israel's recent attacks, it appears that Israel's actions were neither substantial nor highly impactful, indicating that a direct and immediate response from Iran may not be necessary.

NEW DIMENSIONS OF WARFARE AND STRATEGIC CRISIS FOR ISRAEL

Given Israel's actions, including assassinations of political and military leaders within resistance movements, relentless attacks across the Middle East, and continued human rights violations, it appears that Israel's war strategists are pursuing three primary objectives:

1. **Restoring Lost Prestige through Aggression:** Under Netanyahu's leadership, Israel seems intent on restoring its lost reputation by intensifying operations against civilians, including women and children. The idea is that by escalating violence against the general populace, they may turn people against the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, and other groups within the "Axis of Resistance" supporting it in the war. Netanyahu has frequently used speeches to incite Palestinians against Hamas, and more recently, in a video message to the Iranian people, he attempted to provoke them against their government.
2. **Entangling Regional Powers in the Conflict:** Through widespread attacks in the Middle East, Israel seems to aim to draw regional powers like Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia into the war. Following Israel's repeated warnings of a possible large-scale strike on Iran, the head of Turkey's National Intelligence Academy stated that Turkey could be drawn into the conflict if Israel initiates a massive attack against Iran. He also suggested that Russia and China may not remain neutral. Given the limited scale of Israel's recent strike on Iran, however, it appears that the United States, Israel's primary supporter, may restrain Israel from fulfilling this ambition. Nonetheless, the continued atrocities in Gaza and Lebanon, along with the silence of the international community, means the potential for future regional involvement remains significant.
3. **Eliminating the Resistance Fronts and Confronting Iran:** Israel's strategy seems to be to first dismantle Palestinian resistance and subsequently all fronts of resistance across the Middle East, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, groups in Iraq, and factions in Syria, before eventually confronting Iran as a regional rival. Whether or not this strategy is achievable raises important questions, and several points should be considered:
 - **Grassroots Nature of Hamas Resistance:** The Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, is rooted in the Palestinian people, the true owners of Palestinian lands. Defending one's



land is not only a universal human right but also a religious duty that grants sanctity and purity to the cause. The people of Palestine and all resistance factions, under Hamas's leadership, have committed themselves to this struggle.

- **Enduring Resolve of the People of Gaza:** Despite Israel's flagrant violations of international law and its brutal assault on Gaza—nearly a month of bombings and deprivation of food and water for civilians in northern Gaza—the people of Gaza have refused to abandon their land. They have chosen martyrdom over displacement, vowing not to repeat their forefathers' mistakes of 1948, declaring they will not leave their homeland.
- **Continuous Support from the Axis of Resistance:** Various groups within the "Axis of Resistance" continue their operations in support of Gaza, seeing the defense of Palestine and Al-Aqsa Mosque as a religious duty. The Houthis, who control the Red Sea gateway, persist in their attacks against Israeli ships and allied vessels. Hezbollah, after rebuilding its ranks following the assassination of its leaders, has launched attacks against Israel, which has suffered heavy casualties and financial losses in southern Lebanon.
- **Escalating Genocidal Attacks by Israel with U.S. Support:** Supported by the U.S., Israel continues its genocidal campaign with unrestrained aerial and ground assaults. The U.S. has consistently sided with Israel, not only justifying its crimes but also providing material support, including \$17.9 billion since the start of the Al-Aqsa Flood, and an additional \$4.86 billion directed against Yemen's Houthis. Yet daily reports reveal significant Israeli military casualties across multiple fronts. Moreover, rumors circulate that Israel's Iron Dome defense system is nearly exhausted. This potential vulnerability may explain Israel's restrained attack on Iran, as it likely aims to avoid provoking a large-scale response from Iran.

Israel faces a severe strategic crisis, one that has not only destroyed any chance of regaining its lost prestige but has also intensified catastrophic repercussions for itself and others.

Thus, Netanyahu seems intent on plunging the Middle East into a deep crisis. The extended conflict in the region may increase the likelihood of other regional powers intervening, which would only amplify the crisis further. Therefore, Israel needs to reconsider its strategy regarding Gaza and other resistance fronts in the Middle East.

CONCLUSION

A year into the Al-Aqsa Storm operation, Israel's extensive human rights violations and heavy civilian toll have amplified global awareness of the Palestinian plight—a people who have endured over seventy years of forced displacement, deprivation, torture, and humiliation. In contrast, the true nature of Israel's regime, with its oppression of the native population, has become clearer.



International demonstrations and polling data reflect shifting perspectives on the issue. Moreover, the responses of international institutions, though occasionally inconsistent, alongside various resolutions, signify a collective effort to reduce tensions and stabilize the region. However, Israel's persistent disregard for these resolutions continues to escalate the humanitarian crisis, extending the conflict beyond the region and posing serious challenges globally.

The brutality of Netanyahu's regime has only solidified Palestinians' resolve and strengthened their commitment to defend their land and sacred sites. This has driven resistance factions within Palestine toward unity, viewing armed resistance as the only viable path to reclaim their rights. Al-Aqsa Storm has displayed unprecedented cohesion among resistance groups, fostering a solidarity that not only bolsters Palestinian resistance efforts but has also placed Israel in a difficult position. Its actions against civilians have increased tensions, which may ultimately draw in regional powers. Considering the regional military support for Hamas and the people of Gaza, coupled with Israel's military constraints, its efforts to dismantle Hamas-aligned fronts face significant challenges. To prevent further escalation and wider conflicts, Israel must reconsider its strategies and pursue diplomatic and political solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **United Nations Action:** The UN should go beyond issuing non-binding resolutions and enforce practical measures to compel Israel to cease its brutal attacks, ensuring humanitarian aid access to the oppressed people of Gaza.
- **Suspending Support for Israel:** The United Nations should urge countries that support Israel to halt their military and economic aid.
- **Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Measures:** The OIC should adopt decisive actions in support of Jerusalem and the people of Gaza. If Israel does not cease its genocidal actions, the OIC should mobilize a peacekeeping military force to end the aggression.

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Contact Us:

Email: info@csrskabul.com - csrskabul@gmail.com

Website: www.csrskabul.com - www.csrskabul.net

Phone & WhatsApp: +93780618000

