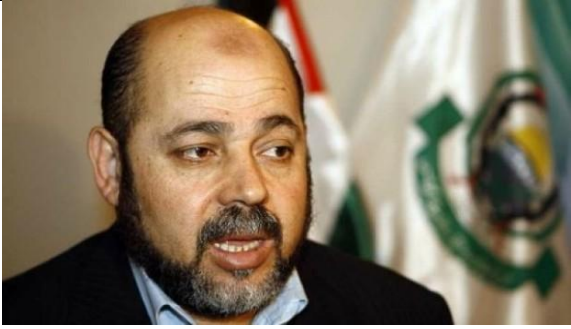


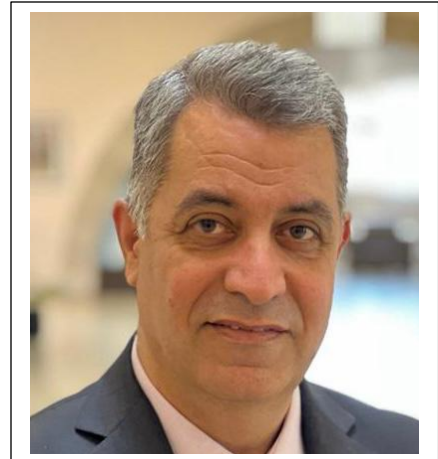
**What is Required from Hamas
to Restore the Balance of the Palestinian People and Ease their Burdens**



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Jehad Harb is the Director of the THABAT Centre for Research and Opinion Polls. He is a researcher and academic specialising in governance and political issues, with diverse experience in Palestinian public affairs. He worked for twenty years in the Legislative Council as the rapporteur of the Budget Committee, then as the Director of the Media Department, and later as the Director of the General Administration for Research. After 2020, he joined the Coalition for Integrity and Accountability (AMAN) for four years as a lead researcher, overseeing studies and reports issued by the coalition and serving as the principal author of the annual report.



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Jehad holds a master's degree in political science from the Faculty of Law and Political Science in Tunisia since 1999. He writes a weekly column specializing in Palestinian affairs and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He is a contributing author to the Arab Security Index Report, the State of Reform in the Arab World Report ("Arab Democracy Index"), and a core team member of the Palestinian Integrity Index Report and the Integrity Index in the Palestinian Security Sector. He was also a member of the expert team supporting the work of the National Reconciliation Path Support and Development Group / Security Sector.

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What is Required from Hamas to Restore the Balance of the Palestinian People and Ease their Burdens

Jehad Harb¹

Introduction

The statement made by Mousa Abu Marzouk, a member of the political bureau of Hamas, to The New York Times on February 24, 2025, stating, "Knowing these consequences would have made supporting such an attack impossible. If we had known what was going to happen, there would have been no October 7," has reignited the debate over the political assessment of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation. It also raises questions about the various aspects of what occurred before and during the operation, its trajectories and outcomes, or the achievement of its objectives from multiple perspectives considered during its planning, beyond just the military dimension.

Typically, the evaluation process aims to examine successes and failures and compare operational aspects with political dimensions, particularly in the context of national liberation. It also involves analysing the incurred, expected, or paid costs within an integrated process to draw lessons, understand the experiences, and comprehend the causes and effects.

This "position paper" aims to present proposals that help reduce the burdens resulting from the war that accompanied October 7, 2023, ensuring the interests of Palestinian citizens and the future of the Palestinian cause. It focuses on the necessity of Hamas's internal review regarding its responsibilities after the prolonged war faced by the Palestinian people following the movement's decision for the large-scale military operation known as the "Al-Aqsa Flood."

The paper examines the planning principles required as a condition for the success of the military operation and the understanding of political risks. It reviews the objectives of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, explores the preconceived notions held by Palestinians and Israelis about each other, and then assesses the gains and losses of the operation. Finally, it presents several recommendations that Hamas needs to review to help restore the balance of the Palestinian people and ease their burdens.

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(1) The Military Operation and Conditions for Success

Effective civil and military planning, as well as strategic military and political decision-making, require adherence to several key principles to ensure success and achieve objectives:

1. **Due Diligence:** This involves taking all necessary precautions to prevent any issues that could compromise the mission, derail its objectives, or weaken its performance during execution. In essence, it is about maximizing the chances of success.
2. **Outcome Assurance:** This principle focuses on ensuring the desired results are achieved.
3. **Risk Management:** This entails assessing potential or existing risks to prepare for and respond effectively to Israeli and international reactions to the operation.

Although the military operation on October 7 achieved unexpected success by breaching borders and reaching military bases and Israeli towns in the Gaza Envelope, documents released by Hamas related to the "Al-Aqsa Flood"—including the statement by Mohammad Deif, Chief of Staff of the Al-Qassam Brigades, announcing the operation, and the "Hundred Days Document" titled *"This is Our Vision... Why Al-Aqsa Flood"*—suggest that the principle of due diligence was not fully observed. This oversight impacted the operation's ability to be executed as a "clean operation" without errors that could undermine its success or affect its long-term effectiveness.

The **"This is Our Vision... Why Al-Aqsa Flood"** document clearly indicates that due diligence was compromised when no precautions were taken to prevent civilians from entering Israeli towns in an uncoordinated manner. This lapse may have occurred due to the rapid and complete collapse of the Israeli security and military apparatus, leading to chaos as a result of widespread breaches in the fence and the buffer zone between Gaza and the operation areas.

Moreover, Mohammad Deif's statement highlighted the broad objective of the operation: *"Today, yes, today, our people revive their revolution, correct their path, and return to the project of liberation, return, and statehood through blood and martyrdom."* This ambition exceeded Hamas's capabilities in Gaza, particularly since the operation was not coordinated with other national and Islamic factions, allies, or even its military wing in the West Bank. Achieving liberation requires unifying all forces into at least one cohesive front.

Regarding risk management, which is crucial for anticipating reactions and calculating the costs of such an operation—especially given that the primary victims are civilians and their properties, lives, and families—the assessment needed to weigh these costs against

potential gains, such as securing the release of prisoners. This issue is central to all Palestinians, as ensuring their freedom and ending their suffering is a shared goal. Decision-makers typically refrain from confronting risks if the cost of prevention exceeds the cost of the risk itself.

In this context, an accurate situational assessment requires a political perspective that goes beyond mere military planning. It also necessitates broadening consultations beyond a singular viewpoint and attentively listening to critics and dissenters. This inclusive approach allows for a more comprehensive risk evaluation.

The failure to apply due diligence and ensure outcomes consistent with available capabilities, coupled with the absence of broad consultations and risk management measures, led to actions that crossed internationally acceptable lines—particularly regarding attacks on Israeli towns and the capture of civilians, including the elderly and children. Consequently, this resulted in a loss of international solidarity, which was crucial for legitimizing the wide-scale military operation, "Al-Aqsa Flood," and sustaining international support for Palestinian resistance against the occupation.

(2) Objectives of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" Operation

The statement announcing the launch of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, delivered by Mohammad Deif on the morning of October 7, 2023, raises questions about the true objectives of the operation. Was it intended as a liberation war to reclaim all Palestinian territories occupied since 1948, fulfilling the "Promise of the Hereafter," or to liberate the lands occupied in 1967? Or was it designed to reignite the Palestinian cause and shift the balance of power?

On one hand, the statement begins by describing the establishment of Israel at the expense of Palestinians but quickly pivots in the second paragraph to accuse the Israeli occupation of disregarding international law and UN resolutions—some of which laid the groundwork for the creation of Israel itself: *"We warned the occupation leaders against continuing their crimes, and we urged world leaders to intervene and stop the occupation's crimes against our people, our holy sites, our prisoners, and our land, and to force the occupation to comply with international law and resolutions. Yet, the occupation leaders did not listen, and the world leaders did not act. Instead, the occupation's crimes escalated beyond all limits."*

The statement outlined the motivations behind the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation as follows:

1. The threats to Al-Aqsa Mosque, including continuous assaults by the occupation and settlers and fears of its demolition to build the alleged temple.
2. The continued detention and suffering of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

3. Military raids by Israeli forces on Palestinian cities and villages in the West Bank.
4. Ongoing land confiscation to expand settlements and increasing settler violence against Palestinians.
5. The ongoing blockade on Gaza.

All these motivations relate to Israeli practices in the territories occupied in 1967. This interpretation is further supported by Deif's appeal to Palestinians in the 1948-occupied territories:

"To our people in the occupied interior— in the Negev, Galilee, Triangle, Jaffa, Haifa, Acre, Lod, and Ramla— set the ground ablaze under the occupiers' feet, with killing, burning, destruction, and roadblocks. Make the cowardly occupier understand that the Al-Aqsa Flood is far greater than they anticipated."

This contrasts with his call to Palestinians in the West Bank to *"sweep away the occupier and its settlements from all our land in the West Bank."* The statement concludes that the Al-Aqsa Flood operation was launched: *"In light of these ongoing crimes against our people, the occupation's arrogance and defiance of international laws and resolutions, American and Western support, and international silence, we decided to put an end to all of this, with God's help, so that the enemy understands that the era of unchecked aggression is over."*

In addition, Hamas's document released 100 days after the Al-Aqsa Flood, titled *"This is Our Vision... Why Al-Aqsa Flood"*, emphasized the operation's broader ambitions: *"What can be done to fulfil the hope of 7 million Palestinians to return to their homes after 75 years of exile and displacement?"* The document further stated:

"The Al-Aqsa Flood operation on October 7, 2023, was a necessary step and a natural response to counter Israeli schemes aimed at liquidating the Palestinian cause, seizing and Judaizing the land, asserting sovereignty over Al-Aqsa Mosque and other holy sites, and ending the unjust blockade on Gaza. It was a natural step towards ending the occupation, restoring national rights, achieving independence and freedom like all other nations, exercising the right to self-determination, and establishing an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital."

Achieving these ambitious goals and rallying Palestinians across different regions and allies across multiple fronts requires two main considerations:

1. **Preparation and Mobilization:** Proper groundwork was needed across various arenas. However, the limited military council responsible for planning the operation seemingly assumed that other factions would automatically align with its vision without the necessary groundwork to activate these fronts.

2. **Coordination with Allies:** Effective coordination with key allies, including Iran, Hezbollah, and their affiliates, was crucial to ensure their readiness for active participation. However, this coordination appears to have been incomplete, requiring more time, as revealed by leaked documents about the limited military council's meetings that planned the "grand project."

(3) Misconceptions of Palestinians and Israelis About Each Other

The misconceptions held by Palestinians and Israelis about each other have proven to be inaccurate or misleading, reflecting the imagined perceptions they have developed over the years. Palestinians believed that Israeli society could not sustain a prolonged war, preferring short, swift conflicts conducted outside their own territory, based on Israel's previous wars. They also assumed that Israelis and their governments were highly sensitive to the lives of their citizens, striving to prevent them from being captured or held in captivity for long periods.

In reality, this was not the case, as demonstrated by Gilad Shalit's captivity for about five years and the continued captivity or unreturned remains of soldiers from the 2014 war, nine years before the outbreak of war on Gaza on October 7, 2023. Palestinians also thought that Israelis would flee the country in large numbers during a war and that the Israeli economy could not withstand the damage or that Israelis would not tolerate heavy losses.

It seems that those who successfully planned the military operation on October 7 did not fully consider the profound changes within Israeli society. These include, first, the shift towards the right and far-right, the influence of religious Zionism in its various forms, and the growing power of settlers in Israeli governance. Second, most Israelis today are native-born, either in Israel or in settlements in Jerusalem and the West Bank, rather than immigrants, meaning they have a deep connection to the land. Third, the concept of a Jewish state is deeply ingrained among all Israelis, regardless of their backgrounds or political views, despite internal disputes over the nature of governance rather than the state itself. The opposition's disagreements with the government are within the political system, representing the interests of specific social groups, with institutions in place to safeguard public interests, such as gatekeepers and courts.

Conversely, Israelis believed that Palestinians would succumb to Israel's brutal policies or to the destruction of their lives, including the devastation of infrastructure built over more than thirty years and the loss of homes, businesses, and possessions. They also assumed that continuous oppression would force Palestinians into submission, consistent with the "Iron Wall" philosophy held by Revisionist Zionism, which dominates the Israeli cabinet and emphasizes military force to maintain Israeli control. The Israeli Prime Minister

believes that prolonging the war would help him overcome the psychological defeat suffered on October 7 and provide more time to intensify Palestinian suffering and undermine the popular support for resistance factions.

The significant success of the military operation on October 7—breaching borders and reaching military bases and Israeli towns near Gaza—along with the continued resistance for over fifteen months, disproved the Israeli occupation's colonial assumptions. These misconceptions reflected a failure to understand the Palestinian society's nature, resilience, and capacity for resistance, as well as its ability to critically analyze the conflict by distinguishing between the primary contradiction (the occupation) and secondary contradictions (internal divisions and differing priorities among Palestinian factions).

At the same time, it appears that those behind the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation did not fully grasp the significance of the cultural and social changes within Israeli society over the past twenty years.

(4) Gains and Losses of "Al-Aqsa Flood"

On October 7, 2023, the Israeli side experienced a massive shock to its deterrence theory and the aura of Israeli deterrence power in the entire region, as well as to the military superiority based on boasting about high-tech capabilities and military industry. It shook the status of the Israeli army, the "sacred cow" in Israeli society, which appeared incapable of protecting the state's borders or its citizens, and revealed the shortcomings in the intelligence capabilities of Israeli security agencies. Not to mention the failure of Israeli government estimates and institutions to predict or assess the magnitude of threats or the behaviour of "hostile" parties, as situation assessment reports indicated that Hamas was deterred, unwilling to engage in confrontation, and sought to preserve its rule in Gaza. On the other hand, "Al-Aqsa Flood" (the military operation) represented a remarkable success for the Palestinians, one they had not previously experienced in such magnitude, with the number of fighters involved, tools, capabilities, and means. It restored Palestinians' confidence in themselves and their ability to confront the occupying forces and "outperform" their military and technical capabilities. This operation brought the Palestinian issue back to the international community's agenda, which had been absent for years, or rather, had no longer been seen as necessary for achieving security and peace in the Middle East.

In contrast, the Israeli government considered revenge or war as an opportunity to return to the biblical dreams and ideological ideas adopted by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to restore colonial ambitions by establishing a Kingdom of Israel from the river to the sea, as recorded in his book "A Place Among the Nations," using Israel's brute force and the international support it received at the start of the war, relying on the "Iron Wall" theory that advocates the use of excessive force to force Palestinians into submission or displacement from their lands.

The Israeli government pursued a systematic policy of total and comprehensive destruction in the Gaza Strip to eliminate any possibility of life there and to target Palestinian civilians broadly, destroying infrastructure, including the healthcare system in all its components, as well as education and environmental systems in the sector. These are strategic losses for all Palestinians, affecting and will affect their way of life and cultural and social structures for decades to come.

On the other hand, the Palestinians succeeded in restoring their issue to the international community's agenda, increasing international solidarity at the people-to-people level, granting the State of Palestine exceptional privileges in the United Nations, closely resembling those of member states, and a change in the positions of some countries, most notably the recognition of the Palestinian state by European countries, and the emergence of signs of boycotting Israel from some European countries on specific issues. There was also the activation of legal actions against Israel in international courts, such as the International Court of Justice in the case filed by South Africa regarding its violation of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the International Criminal Court, which issued arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister and Defence Minister as war criminals. Additionally, the United Nations General Assembly ratified the decision of the Advisory Court regarding the illegality of the Israeli occupation and its continued prevention of the Palestinian people from exercising their right to self-determination, which is one of the main objectives of the United Nations Charter and its creation. These successes at the international institutional level were not solely the result of "Al-Aqsa Flood military operation," but rather a show of solidarity with the Palestinian people in Gaza following the disaster that befell them and the result of continuous political efforts over many years.

(5) What is Required to Ease Burdens and Alleviate the Suffering of the Palestinian People and Restore Their Balance

There is no doubt that the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip, have suffered a humanitarian catastrophe through the most brutal ethnic cleansing for more than fifteen months at the hands of the Israeli occupation, which has systematically destroyed the components of life in Gaza and the dignity of its citizens.

This pivotal stage in the life of the Palestinian people requires a national approach aimed at national salvation; this can be achieved by restoring Palestinian unity, which strengthens national immunity on the one hand, and achieves national and societal integration on the other hand, and mitigates the consequences and effects of this war on the third hand. This approach also ensures the ability to engage with the international community to begin rebuilding life in Gaza and act internationally without Israeli and its supporters' persecution. It is essential to transform the international solidarity that the Palestinian people have received due to the Israeli occupation's war crimes and crimes

against humanity in Gaza into tools for organized pressure on Western governments to isolate Israel on the fourth hand.

Achieving this requires that the active Palestinian parties make courageous decisions stemming from their awareness of the public interest of Palestinian citizens, preserving their dignity, ensuring national partnership, and minimizing "losses" while preserving what remains of the Palestinian people's resources and strengthening the internal front. This means that every Palestinian faction, especially Fatah and Hamas, must take and adopt responsible decisions on their own initiative to prioritize the public interest of the Palestinian people over factional interests. This can be achieved through the following proposals:

- ✓ **Adopt the Victim Discourse:** Acknowledge the crime of genocide committed by the Israeli government and adopt this narrative by all factions and Palestinians globally. This discourse should focus on garnering international solidarity and condemning the occupying government, ensuring its accountability for the crime, rather than focusing on "victories" to maintain Palestinian morale. The priority is to gain the international community's solidarity and ensure accountability for the crimes committed.
- ✓ **Form a New Political Party by Hamas:** This would help overcome the label of terrorism imposed by influential countries in the international community, such as the European Union and the United States, and their pursuit of Hamas in these countries. There should be guarantees for positive engagement with this transformation from the international community.
- ✓ **Declare Hamas's Resistance Efforts Not Limited to Armed Struggle:** Hamas should declare that it will not limit its resistance to armed confrontation with the Israeli occupation and should highlight other forms of resistance in alignment with the United Nations Charter.
- ✓ **Transfer Governance of Gaza to a National Salvation Government:** This government should be agreed upon through national dialogue, with guarantees to prevent the use of weapons in internal disputes or the disruption of government operations or the violation of the rule of law.
- ✓ **Agree on the Entry of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Political Governance Institutions After Holding General Elections:** An agreement should be reached on the date of the elections to be held no later than two years from the cessation of hostilities.
- ✓ **Fatah and PLO Factions Should Provide Guarantees to Hamas for General Elections:** Fatah and PLO factions should guarantee to Hamas the holding of general (legislative and presidential) elections at the agreed-upon time and work towards overcoming any obstacles to the elections from the moment a ceasefire agreement is signed, in consultation and national agreement.

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