Scenarios After Operation Al-Aqsa Flood

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Introduction

Future studies of political, social and economic phenomena, particularly those related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, require distinguishing between an event, a sub-trend, a trend and a mega-trend,[2] while taking into consideration turning points and Black Swan events. The former are events that lead to a fundamental shift in the mega-trend, and the latter are unexpected and sudden events with profound repercussions. Unlike turning points, Black Swan events are not initially anticipated, such as Anwar Sadat assuming power in Egypt as a turning point and his assassination as a Black Swan.

Based on this introduction, projecting the future outcomes and repercussions of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood should be done by incorporating them into the mega-trend of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This necessitates discussing three steps:

1. Identifying the highest strategic goals for each central party in the conflict, including Palestine, Israel, US, Arab neighboring countries and the rest of the international community.

2. Determining the mega-trend of the conflict.

3. Developing scenarios for the mega-trend, including:

- Continuation of the mega-trend.

- Partial shift in the mega-trend.

- Gradual formation of an alternative mega-trend.

First: Outlining the Key Strategic Goals of the Conflict Parties

To link the analysis steps in order, it's vital to start by outlining the key strategic goals of the conflict parties, summarized as follows:

1. Palestine:

Achieving the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, encompassing land and population (citizens and refugees).

2. Israel:

› a. Retaining the largest possible area of the West Bank (WB) and Jerusalem with the least Palestinian population.

› b. Eradicating any form of armed Palestinian or Arab resistance against Israel.

› c. Preventing any future Arab development that may pose a threat to Israel.

3. US:

› a. Achieving a settlement that provides Israel with maximum security guarantees.

› b. Utilizing the region in managing its international conflicts.

4. Arab neighboring countries:

Internal security: Accepting any settlements that do not affect the stability of their political regime.

5. International community:

Achieving a political settlement to mitigate the negative political, economic and social effects of the Arab-Israeli conflict on international affairs.

Second: Determining the Mega-Trend of the Arab-Israeli Conflict

Foresight into the future necessitates overcoming two gaps in traditional analysis. The first is the complete elimination of wishful thinking, and the second eliminating cognitive dissonance, where people, using mental maneuvers, try to adapt and interpret conflicting thoughts to make them feel consistent with their cognitive framework, on one hand, and consistent with prevailing social ideas, on the other hand.[3]

Based on the above, the general course of the Arab-Israeli conflict, since 1948, indicates the crystallization of a mega-trend through several stages as follows:

First Stage 1948–1967

This stage was characterized by the dominance of a zero-sum perspective on the conflict (where any gain by one party was considered a parallel loss for the other, and there were almost zero common interests). The official Arab position during this period

was the complete rejection of Israel's existence, and the situation between the two parties was considered "armistice lines," meaning that they only mean a temporary ceasefire, and are not considered international borders according to international law, and do not mean the end of the state of war between the two parties. It is necessary here to describe the situation that existed between the Arabs and Israel. There are four prevalent terms that must be clarified, and they are:[4]

›**1. Truce:** An informal brief and temporary halt in fighting. They are typically arranged locally, allowing each side some time to evacuate casualties from a battlefield. Truces do not necessarily signal any willingness to settle the larger conflict.

›**2. Cessation of Hostilities:** It is broader and more formal than a truce. One or both sides declare that they will "suspend fighting over all." Cessations are usually meant to be the start of a larger peace process, but they are provisional and nonbinding, and in a conflict that involves many parties, the cessation may apply to only some opponents.

›**3. Ceasefire:** A cease-fire is typically a negotiated agreement to cease hostilities and take other steps to calm things down, like pulling back heavy weapons or marking out a "green line" or demilitarized zone to separate opposing forces. Though cease-fires are usually meant to be binding, to last a while and to hold even after a few violations, they do not themselves end a conflict, only pause it.

›**4. Armistice:** A formal agreement to cease all military operations in a conflict permanently. It ends the war, but it does not establish peace; for that, a peace treaty must be negotiated and ratified. But in an armistice, the parties make a commitment to stop trying to settle their differences on the battlefield.

The first stage of the conflict 1948–1967 was a "truce" period as defined earlier; it only meant a temporary cessation of military action and did not include a commitment to a peaceful settlement.

Second Stage 1967–1973

The June 1967 War marked a fundamental turning point in the Arab position, representing a shift towards a non-zero-sum perspective of the conflict. This shift manifested in the acceptance of UN Resolution 242, acknowledging Israel's right to exist, and considering armistice lines of the first phase international borders between the two parties, while the 1967 borders were deemed unacceptable. However, this shift had deep

implications in dealing with Israel as part of the regional landscape, despite disagreements on specific issues, for it involved adopting the concept of "cessation of hostilities" without compulsion.

Third Stage 1973–1977

The October 1973 War deepened the non-zero-sum perspective by accepting Resolution 338 (which reinforced the acceptance of Resolution 242) and the Agreements on Disengagement of Forces in Sinai and the Golan Heights. The term "truce" began to fade, making room for the term "cessation of hostilities," and even approaching the conditions of "ceasefire," which implies readiness for diplomatic activities leading to a specific settlement. This shift was further affirmed by the visit of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem, who delivered a speech in the Israeli Knesset, thus transforming the conflict into a "dispute"; where a conflict is a difference settled by non-peaceful means, while a dispute is settled by peaceful ones. This had laid the foundation for the next stage when the transformation increased and the non-zero-sum perspective became deeper.

Fourth Stage 1979–1994

In this stage, the non-zero-sum perspective moved from being theoretical and at the legal level to the practical political level through two key steps:

1. The Egyptian-Israeli Treaty, where the largest and most significant Arab state officially and legally acknowledged Israel, treating it on par with any other nation. Mutual cooperation, trade, tourism and continuous diplomatic visits began to flourish. Consequently, the non-zero-sum perspective laid the groundwork for Arab-Israeli relations, marking a transition to the fourth stage—the armistice.

2. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, Egypt's shift to a non-zero-sum perspective by disengaging from the conflict with Israel, and the extensive upheaval in Iraq, alongside its military setbacks in wars against Iran and the United States, collectively prompted the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to formally embrace the non-zero-sum perspective through the Oslo Accords in 1993. This marked the ascendancy of the non-zero-sum perspective as a Mega-trend, exerting significant

influence on other Arab states. The momentum gained additional reinforcement when Jordan promptly embraced the non-zero-sum perspective with the Wadi Araba Treaty in 1994, just about a year after the Oslo Accords. This contributed further to the Mega-trend's mounting pressure on other Arab parties.

📌 Fifth Stage 1994–2023

The fourth stage laid a robust foundation for the widespread adoption of the Meg-trend—non-zero-sum perspective—in Arab political spheres. The 2002 Saudi-proposed Arab Peace Initiative represented a theoretical apex of Arab acknowledgment of the non-zero-sum perspective. This initiative proposed "full Arab recognition and normalization with Israel" in exchange for the establishment of a Palestinian state. The process began with recognition; confidential, public, individual and collective engagements with Israeli counterparts; predating the formation of the Palestinian state. Mauritania initiated the normalization process in 1999 through diplomatic recognition of Israel (though it reversed this decision in 2010). Subsequently, normalization gained momentum in 2020 with the participation of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, underscoring a sustained commitment to the non-zero-sum perspective.

Third: Limitations in the Mega-Trend

Throughout the discussed period, sub-trends emerged, with some solidifying into stable directions while others receded partially. These trends appeared at various levels, including the local (Palestinian/ Israeli), regional (Middle Eastern/ Arab) and international (fluctuations in polar movements). To prevent getting entangled in fleeting events and sub-trends, we concentrate on those trends that defy regression and oppose the prevailing Mega-trend, specifically:

📌 1. The Shifting of Conflict Management with Israel From the Hands of States to Armed Arab Movements

Along the Mega-trend discussed above that explained the withdrawal of "states" from the conflict (Egypt, PLO, Jordan, Abraham Accords signatory countries, etc.), an opposing trend emerged involving the rise of popular armed forces committed to armed resistance. Besides the initial armed Palestinian resistance movements during 1965–1981 (Fatah, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—PFLP, the Vanguard for the Popular Liberation War—*Al-Saʻiqa*, etc.), new armed movements arose, including the Palestinian Islamic Jihad—PIJ (1981),

Hizbullah in Lebanon (1982), Hamas (1987), Ansar Allah in Yemen (2004) and the Popular Mobilization Forces—PMF in Iraq (2014). These forces received support from certain states and gradually assumed the management of the conflict with Israel. Several factors contributed to the growing momentum of these movements:

❱ a. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 and its contrary stance to official Arab directions, providing support to these movements. This represents a crack in the dominant non-zero-sum perspective.

❱ b. Popular rejection of any relationship, normalization or concessions in Palestine, evident in Arab public opinion polls, conducted by Western and Arab bodies. This opposition is strengthening,[5] potentially limiting the future of the non-zero-sum perspective.

❱ c. Cultural and religious heritage shaping the perception of Jews in the Arab mind, reinforcing support for the zero-sum Mega-trend.

❱ d. Complete failure in achieving a political settlement through peaceful means, continued settlement activities, threats to *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and negative Israeli policies, all suggesting that the non-zero-sum perspective contains inherent risks.

❱ e. The rise of religious extremism within the Israeli political establishment, reinforcing all the previous indicators in favor of the zero-sum perspective.

📌 2. Changes on the International Level

On the international level, several factors have deepened the gaps in the Mega-trend we discussed, and the most important of these factors are:

❱ a. We previously indicated in a quantitative study the existence of a linear inverse relationship between the international support for Palestinian rights and the continued escalation of resistance against Israel. This hypothesis was reinforced conclusively during Operation al-Aqsa Flood, and it was explained also in another study.[6] It is sufficient to note this in the increasing support for the Palestinian position in the United Nations (UN) Security Council and General Assembly resolutions during Operation al-Aqsa Flood, evident in the following table:[7]

UN Body	Vote on 16/10/2023	Vote on 18/10/2023	Vote on 8/11/2023
Security Council	5	12	13
	Vote on 26/10/2023	**Vote on 12/12/2023**	–
General Assembly	121[8]	153	–

◗ b. Despite the limited strain in the US-Israeli relationship for several reasons, the diminishing global standing of the US has started to complicate the dynamics of their partnership. The deterioration of the US standing in the international system necessitates adaptive adjustments in US foreign policy, which will inevitably influence its relationship with Israel to a certain degree. In an earlier study, we highlighted indicators of US decline and a relative decrease in the strategic significance of the Middle East in U.S. policy priorities.[9] This transition will impact the significance of Israel's role in US strategy, coupled with a notable increase in power indicators for emerging global powers, particularly China. It signifies a strategic advantage for resistance forces in the medium and long term, compounded by the gradual shift in US public opinion following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, particularly among Democrats and American youth, with potential repercussions in the future.

◗ c. Israel confronts a challenging dilemma on the global stage. The international consensus, involving key players such as the US, EU, Russia, China and numerous other countries worldwide, favors the two-state solution. This places Israel at a crossroads: it must either embrace this solution, triggering substantial internal discord among diverse political factions within Israeli society and a confrontation with the hundreds of thousands of settlers in WB, or opt for the alternative of rejecting the solution. The latter choice would expose Israel to an exceedingly uncomfortable international position, potentially inviting international pressure akin to what transpired with South Africa.

Fourth: The Impact of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood

Operation Al-Aqsa Flood in Gaza Strip (GS) marked a tangible strategic turning point, transcending mere theoretical implications. This military operation not only affirmed a sub-trend in Palestinian history, but also signaled a shift in the dynamics of confrontation, moving from official armies to armed popular movements with broad Arab popular support. Additionally, it instigated a positive

transformation in international public opinion, accelerating its progress and fostering acceptance even in societies traditionally hostile to Palestinian rights. Furthermore, the operation compelled a reconsideration within the Israeli mindset, challenging the political optimism narratives propagated by the Zionist right.

However, the aftermath of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood will unfold along multiple trajectories in the next two years, giving rise to consequences that necessitate careful consideration and strategic planning:

First Path: Palestinian Path

Over the next two years, Palestinian leaders and society will face the following challenges:

✒ 1. Rehabilitation of Economic and Social Life in GS

The Israeli aggression has resulted in the complete or partial destruction of more than a quarter of a million residences, commercial centers, official or community institutions (Medical facilities, including hospitals and pharmacies; schools; universities and mosques), hundreds of kilometers of roads, extensive areas of agricultural land, and the devastation of water sources along with sewage network leaks. The human toll includes hundreds of thousands of children, women and physically or mentally disabled individuals left without support, alongside the near-complete shutdown of production institutions.

Consequently, the immediate and crucial priority is to restore life in GS to its pre-aggression state. However, several obstacles must be addressed, including securing funds and materials for the restoration and treatment of the aforementioned entities. Preliminary estimates within the initial two months of the conflict suggest that the required amount will exceed fifty billion dollars. The prolonged conflict is likely to escalate this figure,[10] necessitating international conferences to raise the necessary funds. Nevertheless, careful attention must be given to the following considerations:

- Financial aid may arrive early, but funds may take an extended or shortened time based on the response rate associated with the positions of donor countries. The results of the International Humanitarian Conference held in Paris on 9/11/2023 and its follow-up committee on 6/11/2023 suggest that raising funds for rehabilitation will not be smooth and may involve "blackmailing the resistance."[11]

- The Arab countries most capable of providing aid are the least aligned with the orientations of Palestinian resistance, potentially leading them to impose undisclosed political conditions for assistance. These conditions may include directing funds to an international or regional entity or the Palestinian Authority (PA),

with expenditures subject to scrutiny to prevent allocation to resistance institutions or support for the families of resistors.

- The US, European countries and Japan are expected to attach political and administrative conditions to their aid, aimed at weakening the resistance comprehensively and forcing it into challenging political decisions.

- Chinese and Russian aid may be relatively free of political conditions, but especially Russian assistance might be limited compared to the required amounts, considering the present conditions in Russia.

- Egypt might tie the provision of aid, reconstruction materials and social rehabilitation necessities to ensure its companies secure a substantial share in rehabilitation projects, particularly those associated with the Egyptian army (similar to the post-Israeli aggression scenario in 2021).[12]

- The resistance movement is likely to encounter jurisdictional conflicts with the PA, particularly concerning the receipt of aid funds, their distribution and spending priorities.

2. Clarifying the Political Position on International Initiatives and Decisions

This becomes especially crucial post-ceasefire, encompassing negotiations related to prisoners and hostages, whose duration may extend or contract based on battlefield developments. Managing this aspect poses challenges and dilemmas for the resistance. Israel, US and certain Arab nations may exert pressure on the resistance to refrain from advocating for the emptying of Israeli prisons of all Palestinian prisoners, where some aspects would be tied to aid distribution as a coercive measure.

Second Path: Regional Position

The regional position can be divided into two dimensions:

1. Arab Position: It is essentially comprised of two components: the Egyptian position and the position of the Resistance Axis. The Egyptian position appears to remain relatively stable, while the influence of the Resistance Axis may either diminish or stay consistent, contingent on the war developments in GS.

2. Role of Iran and Turkey: Given the current on-the-ground situation, it is probable that each country will uphold its position. Iran is expected to openly endorse Palestinian

rights, particularly by sustaining its support for the resistance, without directly engaging in any subsequent conflict unless there is a substantial development directly impacting Iran. While Turkey is likely to confine its approach to publicly criticizing Israeli policies while maintaining its consistent trade and political relations in practice.

Third Path: International Path

The possible direction in the following areas can be outlined:

The international community, particularly major powers, is increasingly convinced of the need to find a peaceful settlement. The two-state solution is endorsed by most countries globally, putting Israel in a delicate position with two options (As we noted earlier):

1. Acceptance of the two-state solution, potentially leading to internal conflicts within Israel's political forces, possibly escalating to violence.

2. Rejection of the two-state solution, further diminishing public and international support for Israel, putting Arab countries engaging with Israel in a more precarious position. Consequently, there will be an increase in the phenomenon of the conflict management shifting from the hands of states to armed Arab movements.

Developing a Cross-Impact Matrix among the three levels and assessing its consequences offers an initial insight into the potential continuation of the conflict. However, the immediate aftermath of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood will set the stage for the period extending beyond the next two years. This means that the military battle outcomes and rational management by the resistance in the immediate post-fighting phase will remain predominant in the next two years. For GS to restore its normal life, at the very least, it may take more than the next two years.

[1] An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.

[2] The term refers to any political event; an election, assassination, victory, ministerial change, military conflict, diplomatic relations cut, trade agreement, imposition of a blockade, peace treaty, etc. As for the sub-trend, it is a set of events that repeat in the same field, such as the repetition of cutting and then restoring relations (diplomatic field), or the repetition of border clashes (military field), etc. As for the trend, it is a set of sub-trends affected by repetition but in the same direction; meaning that the relationship may be a linear relationship (improving or deteriorating continuously) or a non-linear relationship (oscillating between progress and regression from one stage to another), and the sum of trends that coordinate their movement in one direction (linear or non-linear) is called the mega trend. For more details, see Walid 'Abd al-Hay, *Manahij al-Dirasat al-Mustaqbaliyyah wa Tatbiqatiha fi al-'Alam al-'Arabi* (Methods of Futures Studies and their Applications in the Arab World) (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Studies and Research, 2007), pp. 11–18.

[3] Sebastian Cancino Montecinos, *New Perspectives on Cognitive Dissonance Theory* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2020), http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1411016/FULLTEXT01.pdf

[4] There is a wide debate about these terms among jurists, especially since the meanings of these terms have changed throughout history, but contemporary international jurisprudence has tended to make some distinctions between them. See details in: Sydney D. Bailey, "Cease-Fires, Truces, and Armistices in the Practice of the UN Security Council," *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 71, no. 3, July 1977, pp. 461–469; Truce, Cease-Fire and Armistice: The Legal Nuances, *The New York Times* newspaper, 22/2/2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/23/world/middleeast/truce-cease-fire-and-armistice-the-legal-nuances.html; Marika Sosnowski, *Redefining Ceasefires* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 13–22; and Margaux Pinaud, "Pathways to Peace? A Mixed Methods Study of the Role of Civil Society in Ceasefire Monitoring" (PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, Faculty of Humanities, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, 2021), https://pure.manchester.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/196052041/FULL_TEXT.PDF

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[6] Compare between the two studies: Mohsen Mohammad Saled (ed.), "The Palestine Issue and the International Situation," *The Palestine Strategic Report 2018–2019* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre For Studies and Consultations, 2021), pp. 415–416; and Walid 'Abd al-Hay, Transformations in International Public Opinion and Operation al-Aqsa Flood, site of al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 4/12/2023, https://eng.alzaytouna.net/2023/12/04/academic-paper-transformations-in-international-public-opinion-and-operation-al-aqsa-flood/

[7] See details, UN News (@UN_News_Centre), site of Twitter, 27/10/2023, https://twitter.com/UN_News_Centre/status/1717992371906839005/photo/2; and US vetoes UN resolution calling for Gaza ceasefire, site of Al Jazeera, 8/12/2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/antonio-guterres-urges-un-security-council-to-push-for-gaza-ceasefire

[8] Most news agencies reported that those who voted in favor were 120, however, one UN member country, citing technical difficulties, changed its vote after the vote was recorded, so the final tally was 121 in favor, see UN General Assembly adopts Gaza resolution calling for immediate and sustained 'humanitarian truce', site of United Nations (UN), 26/10/2023, https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142847

[9] Walid 'Abd al-Hay, American Declinism and the Dilemma of Arab and Israeli Strategic Options, al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 11/11/2020, https://eng.alzaytouna.net/2020/11/11/academic-paper-american-declinism-and-the-dilemma-of-arab-and-israeli-strategic-options/

[10] Adnan Abdul Razzaq, Rebuilding Gaza: The huge cost of Israel's devastating war, site of The New Arab, 27/11/2023, https://www.newarab.com/analysis/rebuilding-gaza-huge-cost-israels-devastating-war; UN report warns war has already set Gaza and West Bank economy back more than a decade, site of Cable News Network (CNN), 9/11/2023, https://edition.cnn.com/2023/11/09/middleeast/un-report-gaza-economic-impact-poverty/index.html; and Cathrin Schaer, Israel conflict: Who will pay for Gaza reconstruction?, site of Deutsche Welle (DW), 13/12/2023, https://www.dw.com/en/israel-conflict-who-will-pay-for-gaza-reconstruction/a-67714098

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