



SCENARIOS OF THE AL-AQSA FLOOD OPERATION AND THE WAR ON GAZA

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Summary:

■ The outcome of any war is uncertain. Thus, we cannot predict how the Israeli war launched on the Gaza Strip, following the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation launched by Hamas on October 7, will end. This position paper explores the following potential scenarios, based on the evolving dynamics of the actors:

■ **First scenario: Containing the conflict (present scenario):** The most probable scenario for the coming weeks is that the conflict will primarily remain between the Israeli forces and Hamas in Gaza, amid regional and international pressure to avoid escalation. Israeli military operations, which include a ground invasion, will focus on weakening Hamas’ capabilities. However, the success of this operation remains uncertain. The resistance of Hamas, the complexities of urban warfare in Gaza, regional and international reactions, and pressure on the Israeli government related to the hostages’ issue are factors that will influence its outcome.

■ **Second scenario: Regional escalation with a proxy war (high probability):** The conflict has a high probability of expanding, particularly in the next three to six months. In this scenario, the conflict will geographically expand beyond Gaza and will attract regional actors. Iran could play an important role by mobilizing its regional network of proxies to challenge Israel’s interests. The United States may launch air strikes against Iranian proxies, while countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt will juggle between their security concerns and diplomatic engagements with the United States and “Israel”.

■ **Third scenario: Large-scale regional war (weak probability):** The conflict could escalate and lead to broader instability in the Middle East if disproportionate military responses and uncalculated offensives occur. Such a scenario is more plausible in the longer term. It may include the direct participation of Iran in the war and permanent deterioration in the security environments of countries affected by the war.

■ **Fourth scenario: Diplomatic agreement (moderate probability):** There is a small probability that international diplomatic efforts will lead to a ceasefire agreement. Global and regional powers are leading initiatives and exerting great pressure to promote negotiations. Indirect negotiations, mediated by Egypt and Qatar, may lead to agreements for the exchange of prisoners and hostages.

■ Scenarios 1 to 3 show potential gradual escalation paths. The occurrence of each stage increases the likelihood of the next. Also, transiting from one scenario to the next indicates the deepening and widening of the conflict.

Overview:

■ In the aftermath of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation launched by Hamas on 7 October, “Israel” announced a war on Gaza, intending to “destroy” Hamas. At first, the Israeli army launched vicious air attacks on Gaza. It later started a ground operation that has not yet evolved into a full-fledged invasion. The initial plan to launch a full-scale ground invasion was faced with complications on the ground. These include the fierce resistance against the Israeli forces, the presence of 240 Israeli and foreign hostages in Gaza, and the dire humanitarian conditions, which have resulted in a shift in the global position and calling for ending the war.

■ Israeli leaders are talking about a long war, that has no precedent in Gaza. Regardless of the internal Israeli debate about the military feasibility of expanding ground operations, the coordinated offensive on Gaza from the air, sea, and land is likely to continue. It has become clear that the destruction of civilian infrastructure is premeditated and aims to make at least half of the northern part of Gaza uninhabitable and force citizens to either migrate towards the south or potentially leave Gaza. This scenario could lead to the imposition of a wider buffer zone in northern Gaza.

■ Considering the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the extreme measures taken by Israel in the West Bank, popular confrontations in the West Bank may increase, in parallel with the operations of Hamas and allied groups. Outside the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel, Iran-allied militia groups in Syria and Iraq have been targeting American bases. Also, the Houthis in Yemen have officially declared war on Israel and tried to target southern “Israel” with drones and missiles.

■ So far, Lebanese Hezbollah has adopted a conservative military approach based on skirmishes at the Lebanese-Israeli border, which are characterized by their increasing intensity. The strategy adopted by Hezbollah will most probably focus on maintaining a “distraction front” rather than opening a “war front”. Hezbollah will likely avoid a large-scale war not only because of the political and economic challenges faced by Lebanon but also to avoid direct targeting by the Americans.

■ Despite the mentioned, the strategic priority of Hezbollah is to prevent “Israel” from defeating Hamas in Gaza. However, Iran will decide whether there should be a regional escalation or not. It is worth noting that, over the past years, Iran has invested in Hezbollah as part of a broad geopolitical equation through which Tehran aimed to raise the cost of targeting it militarily. Iran’s current priority is to contain the Gaza war to avoid exposing its vast military influence in the region to direct American targeting and use it instead to deter any potential attacks on its territory.

■ Israel seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Inflicting strategic military damage to the resistance infrastructure in Gaza - including annihilating the tunnel network, which protects the armed groups in Gaza - as well as destroying Hamas’ military industry. Moreover, “Israel” aims to target Hamas’ political and military leaders to regain its deterrence capacities, both internally and externally.

2. Establishing a new security and political system in the Gaza strip, while excluding Hamas from governance. This would enable Israel and settlers to feel safe again. Israel has no clear conception of such a system and is confused about the shape of the civilian political authority that would govern the Strip as well as the limits of the Israeli army's role in Gaza. Finally, such plans are subject to internal, regional, and international controversy.
3. Liberating hostages or killing most of them in the ongoing military operation to prevent Hamas from achieving a political victory by forcing Israel to undergo a major prisoner swap.

■ **Hamas seeks to achieve the following objectives:**

1. Countering the Israeli military operation and proving that it is not possible to “eliminate Hamas”, as planned by the Israeli army. Despite the destruction of infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and the huge humanitarian cost, Hamas' main goal is to thwart the objectives of the Israeli military operation. Such objectives include dismantling the strategic structure of the groups resisting Israel, imposing a political and security authority in Gaza that is affiliated with Tel Aviv, and displacing the civilian population.
2. Protecting the gains that Hamas has achieved, in particular the retention of hostages.
3. The goals of Hamas are clear, as it has already won the intelligence war on the 7th of October because of the element of surprise. This has enabled the Movement to be in a defense position, with specific goals, even though the cost is high. Meanwhile, the Israeli army desires for revenge. As such, it is facing difficulty in determining its goals, despite the superiority of its military apparatus and its destruction capacities.
4. Based on these general aspects, which leave significant room for uncertainty, this position paper has developed four scenarios that outline possible escalation paths for the conflict. It also assessed the likelihood of the occurrence of each scenario, as well as its potential timeframe and impacts.

First Scenario: Containing the Conflict (Present Scenario – Very High Probability)

- This is the most probable scenario, at least for the coming three months, during which “Israel” will focus on rebuilding its military hegemony. Meanwhile, the conflict between “Israel” and Hamas will remain confined to the Gaza Strip, with no major escalation involving regional actors such as Iran, Hezbollah, or other Palestinian factions in the West Bank or Syria. The primary driving factor is the goal of “Israel”, Iran, and the United States to limit the conflict to defined borders and avoid a broader regional confrontation.
- A rapid and decisive military victory may strengthen the position of “Israel”, although such victory is unlikely because the Israeli army is facing fierce resistance and suffering from constant losses. A prolonged conflict with heavy casualties for the Israeli army will lead to internal and international pressures for a ceasefire.
- The success of the ground invasion depends on several factors, of which the extent of resistance from Hamas and the other Palestinian factions, geographical challenges related to the urban warfare in Gaza, as well as regional and international reactions. The densely populated urban landscape in Gaza, with limited open spaces, further complicates the operations of the Israeli army.
- The military operation will most probably not succeed in eliminating Hamas, despite the enormous pressure exerted on the group, and the targeting of its leadership, infrastructure, and military assets.

The Movement is deeply rooted among Gazans and has demonstrated an ability to maintain a level of operational capability with its network of tunnels and fortified infrastructure. All these factors will ensure that Hamas remains a major player in Gaza, which will be characterized by its resistance capabilities despite the destruction and won't fall under the complete control of "Israel".

- If the ground invasion enabled "Israel" to control Gaza, this would result in wide geopolitical fluctuations. For instance, the reoccupation of "Israel" of Gaza, the ethnic cleansing, or the forced displacement of Palestinians to Sinai could result in a broader regional crisis. Egypt's reaction to such a development will be decisive, as this will be reflected in Israel's overall relations with the countries of the region and will interrupt the process of Arab countries' normalization with Israel.
- Such a scenario will have strong consequences and will lead to a long-term conflict that will destabilize the region. Moreover, it will have a strong impact on the humanitarian situation in Gaza and will strengthen the status quo, which prevents any substantive progress toward a broader peace agreement or towards resolving the Palestinian issue.

Driving Factors	Uncertainties
The strategic goal of "Israel" is to limit the conflict to Gaza.	The actual ability of the Israeli army to destroy Hamas' military capacities.
The United States' support for the Israeli objectives and the military operation in Gaza.	Reactions and strategies of regional actors, including Hezbollah and Iran, and the consequences of the Israeli victory on them.
The indirect or limited involvement of external regional actors remains limited, despite the war's intensity.	The humanitarian situation in Gaza and its impact on the level of international support received by each side.
Pressure from regional and international parties to prevent the expansion of the war outside Gaza.	The development of the military strategies and tactics of the two sides of the conflict, and possible changes in their internal leadership dynamics.
International and regional diplomatic efforts remain ineffective to stop the war.	Egypt's position and its willingness to facilitate a potential displacement of population from Gaza to Sinai.
Repercussions	The reshaping of the political landscape in Gaza and potential shifts in regional control and influence.
	Significant humanitarian consequences, including population displacement and destruction of infrastructure in Gaza.
	Ongoing security challenges, including continued resistance and instability in Gaza and the region.
	Potential changes in regional geopolitical dynamics, especially "Israel's" relations with its neighbors.
	A possible recalibration of the relations of countries in the region with international parties, and damage to the image of the West in the Arab and Muslim countries.

Second Scenario: Regional Escalation with a Proxy War (High Probability)

- The war may expand beyond the boundaries of Gaza and the Palestinian territories. Such probability increases the longer the war lasts and the direr the humanitarian situation becomes. Uncalculated operations on the Lebanese front or against American interests in the region could trigger a regional conflict. The recent increase in attacks by Iranian-backed groups in Syria and Iraq against the US military presence and the Houthis’ shooting down of a US spy plane consolidate this analysis.
- According to this scenario, the escalation of the war between “Israel” and Hamas will cement regional tensions and result in a broader conflict that involves both state and non-state actors. This will start with an intensification of attacks on Gaza and a deeper penetration of the Israeli army into the Strip to dismantle Hamas’ military capabilities. The urban warfare will cause high numbers of casualties on both sides, with a worsening of the humanitarian conditions in Gaza. Meanwhile, the regional landscape becomes precarious as other actors play more important roles in defending their interests.
- Iran will have to play a more influential role without getting involved in an open confrontation with the United States. It will encourage its proxies throughout the region, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, to launch attacks against Israeli targets to further deplete “Israel’s” military capacity. In this context, proxies in Iraq and Yemen will also intensify attacks against US assets. Such a scenario will result in a precarious security situation that will affect international shipping routes in the region.
- The United States will maintain a delicate balance by launching air strikes on Iranian proxies while avoiding a full-scale regional war. Regional actors - namely Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt - will focus on protecting their territories. Diplomatic efforts to reach a ceasefire will increase, mainly through Egypt and Qatar.
- The regional escalation through proxies will further destabilize the already volatile region and may lead to a partial disruption of global oil market supplies. It could also result in further destabilization of vital maritime checkpoints, such as the Straits of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandeb. Diplomatic solutions may be more difficult to reach because of the involvement of multiple actors with varying degrees of influence and goals. As such, the conflict will be prolonged.

Driving Factors	Uncertainties
The ability of Hamas and allied groups to target Israeli cities and resist the ground invasion in Gaza. This, in turn, will lead to the escalation of the Israeli attacks.	The effectiveness and impact of the Israeli army’s military strategies in managing a multi-front conflict.
Proxy attacks are coordinated by Iran to demonstrate its influence, by using its network of allies in the region.	The sustainability of the proxy war model and the possibility of direct military clashes between the main adversaries.
The military deployment of the United States and its ability to execute strategic air strikes against Iranian proxies.	The influence of global diplomatic and political dynamics in the course of the conflict and its outcomes.
The possibility of miscalculations, unintended escalation, or radical shifts in the course of the conflict.	The ability of regional countries to contain escalation and mediate a ceasefire.

Repercussions	A multi-faceted conflict, characterized by diverse theaters of operations and the involvement of several actors.
	Disruption of the regional geopolitical landscape, leading to a change in some alliances and strategic calculations.
	Long-term effects on the stability of the Middle East, the prospects for peace, and the path of normalization of relations with Israel.
	Potential review of relations of countries in the region with international parties, and damage to the prominence of the West in the Arab and Islamic countries.
	Impact on energy markets and prices, and high risk within international shipping lanes in the region.

Third Scenario: A Large-Scale Regional War (Weak Probability)

- There are weak chances that the conflict might escalate to a large-scale regional war. The probability of such a scenario increases the longer the war lasts, as this results in an increased possibility for disproportionate military responses or attacks that are based on incorrect assessments. Even though this scenario is a possibility in the coming 12 months, events could accelerate unexpectedly, leading to increased regional instability.
- In this scenario, the conflict will transform into a large-scale regional war in which major state parties and non-state actors will participate. As such, the conflict will not be limited to the confrontation between “Israel” and Hamas. Accordingly, the conflict will expand to include several fronts in the Middle East in a highly unpredictable war. Deep geopolitical rivalries, strategic military calculations, economic vulnerabilities, and the complex network of alliances and hostilities that mark the region will characterize such a scenario.
- Iran will be forced to enter the war in response to the pressure exerted against its allies and interests. Iran’s military strategy will mainly revolve around its network of proxies in the region. This will result in a multi-front campaign against Israeli interests, which would include actors such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis in Yemen. If the conflict further deteriorates, Tehran may directly target Israeli military bases, vital infrastructure, and urban centers. However, such probability is weak because it will lead to the direct targeting of Iran, not only by Israel but also by the United States.
- The intensity of Iranian naval operations will increase, especially in strategic waterways. Potential threats to close the Strait of Hormuz and launch attacks on oil infrastructure will have repercussions on global oil markets. This will result in a considerable rise in prices and exert pressure on the global economy. The presence of the US Navy in strategic locations, such as the Persian Gulf, will play a pivotal role in protecting sea routes and ensuring the flow of global energy supplies. Such presence will also deter potential Iranian naval operations.
- The regional escalation will overshadow the events in Gaza. Thus, Israel will have to address the complex and changing scenery of the conflict. Even though Israel can defend its territory in the face of multiple threats, the “Israeli” government will confront unprecedented security challenges, including

missile attacks that target Israeli cities and infrastructure. “Israel” will carry out air and sea operations to target major enemy installations and missile launching sites, as well as control and command centers throughout the region.

- At this stage, Russia’s role will become more prominent. Because of its military presence in Syria and its alliance with Iran, Moscow could play a pivotal role in supporting or restricting some of the anti-Israel fronts. Russia may provide logistical and operational support to its allies, such as Iran and Syria, and thus, indirectly engage in the conflict while maintaining its interests and strategic alliances in the region. However, Russia will not fully engage in the war to avoid draining its military and diplomatic resources given its military activities in Ukraine.

- The Gulf states, Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq will be endangered. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are expected to enhance their military readiness, given their concerns related to the expansion of the conflict. As such, they may engage in limited military activities to protect their interests against Iranian-backed attacks. Egypt will also play a role in the conflict. However, it will juggle between its internal security and economic considerations, as well as its role as a main mediator in the conflict. Other Arab countries will most probably remain neutral to protect themselves from the conflict’s consequences. These countries’ strategies will focus on maintaining internal stability, managing the economic impacts of the conflict, and dealing with the geopolitical outcomes.

Driving Factors	Uncertainties
Increased military pressure on Iran’s allies in the region would prompt it to get involved to defend its hegemony.	The results of diplomatic interactions between the United States and Russia regarding the conflict.
Firm American military and diplomatic support for Israel.	The emergence of unexpected alliances or support for the parties involved in the conflict.
The tactical and strategic decisions taken by Hamas and Hezbollah, and the level of coordination between them.	The limits of the American military response to the escalation of Iranian proxy attacks in the region.
Military alertness in “Israel” and the Israeli army’s willingness to respond to attacks on several fronts.	Controlling strategic locations, such as the Straits of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandab.
Iran’s direct military intervention, including the deployment of forces and military assets of the IRGC.	Steps taken by the United Nations or regional parties regarding the conflict.
Repercussions	A large-scale humanitarian crisis, including displacement and destruction of infrastructure in the areas concerned.
	Direct impacts on global oil supplies that could raise prices to \$150 per barrel, which could lead to a global recession.
	Reshaping regional and global diplomatic and military relations and alliances because of the conflict.
	The possibility of the rise of armed groups and extremist ideologies because of the conflict.
	China will be called upon to play a broad diplomatic role given its relations with Iran and countries in the region. Moreover, it will support containing the war because of its impact on its global economic interests.

Fourth Scenario: A Diplomatic Agreement (Moderate Probability)

- There is a moderate probability of reaching a diplomatic agreement in the coming months. Changing international positions and priorities may result in the emergence of a favorable environment for diplomatic interactions. This could be prompted by the deepening of the humanitarian crisis, international diplomatic pressures, the changing nature of geopolitical relations, and potential shifts in strategic priorities.
- Such a scenario entails the success of regional and international diplomatic efforts in achieving a ceasefire between “Israel” and Hamas, and thus, preventing a regional escalation. The international community, led by the United States and the European Union, will reassess its position following the deepening of the humanitarian crisis and realize that unconditional support for the Israeli military operation is not sustainable and will be counterproductive. Moreover, the inability of the Israeli army to achieve a decisive military victory will support such a direction.
- Negotiations will be conducted indirectly. Egypt and Qatar will mediate between all parties to facilitate dialogue. Once an agreement is reached on the exchange of hostages and prisoners, there will be a major shift that will encourage further negotiation and avoid further escalation.
- Internal dynamics within “Israel” and Hamas will change. In “Israel”, there will be a growing awareness that a military solution is only achievable through paying a high cost by sacrificing human lives and international relations. In turn, Hamas will realize the limited external military support they receive and the enormous suffering the conflict brings to the Palestinians. The Netanyahu government will not easily accept a diplomatic solution. At the domestic level, it will be faced with a strong political reaction, especially from the more conservative and extremist components of the Israeli society and government.
- Hamas’ governance of Gaza will depend on several factors, including the conditions imposed by diplomacy, and regional political dynamics within the Palestinian territories. The governance of Gaza might be included in diplomatic negotiations and may encompass various Palestinian factions, potentially under international supervision. As such, such negotiations may not result in the hegemony of Hamas over governance in Gaza.
- A ceasefire may be achieved without reaching a comprehensive diplomatic solution. In this context, there may be agreements on specific issues, such as the prisoners’ swap and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from certain areas. In this scenario, the ceasefire would serve as a temporary measure to stop violence and create a climate for further negotiations or prevent a broader escalation of the conflict. This may not resolve outstanding issues or lead to a lasting peace but will provide immediate relief from the ongoing conflict and prevent further devastation and loss of lives.
- After negotiations, Gaza will go through a phase of reconstruction and rehabilitation. International aid will flow into Gaza, with efforts being made to rebuild infrastructure and improve people’s living conditions. The road to recovery will be long and filled with challenges. Israel will impose political and security restrictions. Moreover, the people will suffer from economic hardships given the intense need for resources and aid, which will make the pace of reconstruction slow and perhaps not comprehensive.

Driving Factors	Uncertainties
Israel's failure to achieve a decisive military victory, which will push the Israeli government to reconsider the possibility of reaching a diplomatic solution.	The duration of the ceasefire to enable meaningful diplomatic negotiations.
Change in the position of the United States and the European Union, and their giving up of unconditional support for Israel for a more balanced approach to resolving the conflict.	The recognition of Hamas as a legitimate representative in the negotiations and abandoning the goal of destroying it.
Effective participation of Egypt and Qatar in mediation, given their role and relationships with the parties concerned.	Internal Israeli disputes, and the impact of the diplomatic solution process on the stability of Netanyahu's government.
Resolution of the hostage crisis may serve as a catalyst for broader negotiations.	Participation of other Palestinian factions in the negotiations, and disagreements over the future of Gaza's governance.
The tragic humanitarian situation in Gaza will represent a compelling factor to push for international intervention and pressure to reach a solution.	The role and influence of regional parties such as Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, in shaping the outcomes of the diplomatic process.
Repercussions	A potential ceasefire may pave the way to a more sustainable peace process because the Palestinian issue is recognized as a pillar for peace in the region.
	Reconstruction and rehabilitation of Gaza, which will lead to a gradual improvement of living conditions.
	Re-evaluation of international positions and policies towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
	A potential reshaping of the political landscape within Israel and the Palestinian territories, which will affect future leadership and policies.
	Changing security arrangements and considerations, including the possible deployment of peacekeeping forces or international oversight mechanisms.



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