

AL-AQSA FLOOD: THE UNRAVELLING OF US-ISRAEL RELATIONS?

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Abstract: The October 7, 2023, Al-Aqsa Flood operation, initiated by Hamas from Gaza, marks a pivotal and transformative moment in the Israel-Palestine conflict. This bold and unexpected offensive has been described as a 'rupture' in the psychology of resistance, representing the most significant paradigm shift for Palestine since the First Intifada in 1987. The operation shatters the long-standing myth of Israeli security and military invincibility, fundamentally challenging the established order. The reverberations of the Al-Aqsa Flood extend beyond the immediate conflict, affecting broader Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) politics and resonating deeply within the United States, Israel's key ally. Growing disillusionment among American youth and college campuses regarding unconditional U.S. support for Israel mirrors the anti-war sentiments of the Vietnam era, suggesting a potential re-evaluation of the historically strong U.S.-Israel relationship. This paper explores the strategic and symbolic significance of the Al-Aqsa Flood and its far-reaching implications for U.S.-Israel relations. As public opinion in the U.S., especially among younger generations, increasingly empathizes with the Palestinian cause, the traditional bipartisan support for Israel is facing unprecedented scrutiny. The analysis includes emerging debates within the evangelicals and the general public, highlighting a complex and evolving landscape. Finally, this paper attempts to provide a preliminary systems mapping of the Al-Aqsa Flood's impact, aiming to elucidate the interconnected consequences of various aspects of the conflict and broader regional politics. This approach seeks to better visualize how Al-Aqsa Flood could fundamentally alter U.S. foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and reshape Middle East diplomacy.

Keywords: Al-Aqsa Flood, Israel-Palestine Conflict, Paradigm Shift, U.S.-Israel Relations, Middle East Diplomacy, Systems Mapping

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INTRODUCTION

The October 7 2023 Al-Aqsa Flood operation launched by Hamas from Gaza marked a significant turning point in the decades-long conflict between Israel and Palestine. Much like the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War, this bold and unexpected assault shook the foundations of the Israeli occupation and exposed the vulnerabilities of its military might. Some experts have even described it as a major paradigm shift in the philosophy of resistance, a 'rupture' that significantly impacts the psychology and epistemology of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Middle East politics (Muhammad Huseyin Mercan, 2023). The infiltration of the

military operation into swaths of occupied territories by land, sea, and air not only shifted the mindset of Palestinians in terms of their tactical ability, but also shattered the Israeli invincibility myth and the reputation of Mossad as being one of the most advanced intelligence organization in the world.

The intense fear experienced by Israelis following the events of October 7 led to a level of aggression from Israel that some describe as irrational and unprecedented (Muhammad Huseyin Mercan, 2023). This heightened aggression has resulted in a devastating crisis in the Gaza Strip. In the past 9 months, the conflict has caused a staggering loss of life, with almost 40,000 confirmed civilians killed, tens of thousands more injured, almost all of the 2.1 million Gazans displaced, and up to 186,000 more deaths due to indirect causes such as disease and famine (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/gaza-death-toll-how-many-palestinians-has-israels-campaign-killed-2024-07-25/>) (Khatib, R., McKee, M., & Yusuf, S., 2024). The rising death toll and clear evidence of deliberate actions by top Israeli officials have compelled the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to acknowledge, on 26 January 2024, that Israel's actions at the least constitute "plausible" genocide (<https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203454>).

In another significant ruling on July 19, 2024, the International Court of Justice unequivocally declared Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and its apartheid policies illegal under international law (<https://www.icj-cij.org/node/204176>). Additionally, on May 20, 2024, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Karim A. A. Khan, applied for arrest warrants for Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes they have committed in Gaza (<https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-aa-khan-kc-applications-arrest-warrants-situation-state>).

As a result, Israel's actions have become increasingly indefensible and difficult to rationalize. This situation has cast a spotlight on the historic alliance between the United States and Israel, prompting intense scrutiny and raising fundamental questions about the sustainability of this partnership.

Historically, the United States has been a steadfast ally of Israel, providing substantial military, financial, and diplomatic support. Since Israel's establishment in 1948, the U.S. has wielded its veto power at the UN at least 46 times to block resolutions against Israel (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/26/how-the-us-has-used-its-veto-power-at-the-un-in-support-of-israel>).

The United States provides substantial military and financial aid to Israel, primarily under a 10-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2016, which allocates \$3.8 billion annually. This aid is almost entirely military, with about 99% directed towards enhancing Israel's defense capabilities, including advanced weaponry and missile defense systems like the Iron Dome. In 2022, the U.S. committed over \$3.3 billion to Israel, making it the second-largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid after Ukraine. Since Israel's founding in 1948, it has received approximately \$318 billion in total assistance, with military aid comprising around 86% of that total (<https://usafacts.org/articles/how-much-military-aid-does-the-us-give-to-israel/>). In April 2024, following the Al-Aqsa Flood the previous year, President Biden signed into law \$14.3 billion in emergency security assistance for Israel (<https://www.ajc.org/news/what-every-american-should-know-about-us-aid-to-israel>).

This unwavering support, often described as 'bipartisan,' transcends political affiliations, receiving backing from both Democratic and Republican administrations. A recent instance of this occurred on July 27, 2024, when Netanyahu was invited to deliver a speech at a joint session of Congress amid the height of the humanitarian crisis in Palestine, resulting from his actions.

However, recent trends indicate growing internal divisions in the United States, both in politics and among the general public regarding Israel's actions in Palestine—especially among the younger generation. On college campuses, a growing sentiment of disillusionment with unconditional US support for Israel has taken hold. This shift in public opinion, reminiscent of the anti-war movement during the US involvement with Vietnam in the 1960s, signals a potential sea of change in the historically ironclad US-Israel relationship (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68908885>).

Just as the Tet Offensive launched by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese People's Army in January 1968 galvanized opposition to the Vietnam war within the US, the Al-Aqsa Flood operation has the potential to become a watershed moment that fundamentally strains the special bond between Washington and Tel Aviv, altering the geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East and beyond (<https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/campus-protests-moment-israel-loses-west-could>).

This article will first explore the strategic and symbolic significance of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, then examine the increasing dissent within the United States and the changing perspectives among various American demographics and political groups, such as youth, evangelicals, and conservatives. Next, it will address the declining appeal of traditional pro-Israel arguments. Finally, the article will provide a preliminary systems mapping of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation's impact and its broader implications for U.S. support for Israel.

AL-AQSA FLOOD: A RUPTURE AND PARADIGM SHIFT

The Al-Aqsa Flood operation, launched by the Al-Qassam Brigades—the military wing of Hamas—on October 7, 2023, marked a pivotal moment in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict because it signals a significant psychological and epistemological shift (Muhammad Huseyin Mercan, 2023). To date, the last comparable turning point in the paradigm of Palestinian resistance is the 1987 Intifada. After the 1987 Intifada, Palestinians have come to accept that they can no longer rely on Arab states for support in their struggle for liberation (Weltbank, 2013). It was also during this intifada that Hamas was formed.

Thirty-six years later, the Al-Aqsa Flood operation crystallizes this realization, demonstrating that effective resistance must be self-initiated and self-sustained. Hamas, through its publication "Our Narrative...Operation Al-Aqsa Flood," justifies its operation as part of a longstanding struggle for "independence, dignity, and liberation" from 105 years of violent and oppressive settler colonial occupation. This period includes 30 years of British colonial rule and 75 years under Zionist Israel's occupation (Hamas Media Office, 2024). In the last 23 years before the 7 Oct operation (2000-2023), official figures have shown that the Israeli occupation has killed 11,299 Palestinians and injured 156,768 others—mostly civilians (Hamas Media Office, 2024). Hamas has also highlighted the illegal and inhumane blockade that has been in place since 2007, effectively turning the densely populated Gaza Strip into an open-air

prison. Moreover, the increasingly aggressive violence around Al Aqsa in the years and months preceding October 7 has further intensified the situation (Hamas Media Office, 2024).

Ultimately, the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation was not merely a tactical adjustment but reflects a deeper psychological awakening among Palestinians. It fosters a renewed sense of agency and empowerment, highlighting a critical shift from its traditional approach of defensive or semi-active resistance to a more active one—as evident from its multi-pronged sea, land, and air attack into Israeli-controlled occupied lands (Muhammad Huseyin Mercan, 2023).

The repercussions of the military operation extend well beyond immediate tactical outcomes. The Al-Aqsa Flood operation has effectively exposed vulnerabilities in Israel's perceived security, challenging the long-held narrative of Israeli invincibility. Such developments are poised to reshape the regional political dynamics in the MENA region.

The humanitarian crisis resulting from Israel's response to the Al-Aqsa operation has sparked widespread international condemnation, not much different with the global backlash against the U.S. during the Vietnam War (<https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/campus-protests-moment-israel-loses-west-could>). This growing discontent is particularly evident among younger generations of the United States, where there is increasing skepticism towards the unconditional support traditionally extended to Israel.

GROWING DISSENT WITHIN THE UNITED STATES

Even before October 7, public sympathy for the Palestinians was on the rise. A Gallup poll from March 2022 highlighted this shift, showing that 26% of Americans sympathized with Palestinians, marking the highest level in a 20-year trend (<https://news.gallup.com/poll/390737/americans-pro-israel-though-palestinians-gain-support.aspx>). Following the events of October 7, divisions within the U.S. regarding Israel's policies became more pronounced, with various segments of American society, including members of Congress like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and others in the progressive Democratic 'Squad', voicing increased criticism. On October 18, 2023, hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters, many from the Jewish community, organized a massive demonstration inside the congressional building on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C. This unprecedented act of civil disobedience, led by Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now, called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and an end to U.S. support for Israel.

By May 2024, almost 140 university campuses across the United States had witnessed pro-Palestinian protests and encampments. Beginning in April 2024, these protests gained momentum as students pushed for their universities to divest from Israel, leading to more than 3,100 arrests at over 60 campuses (<https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/news/which-universities-are-experiencing-pro-palestine-protests/134553/>). These protests occurred at numerous universities globally, including notable institutions such as Columbia University, the University of Michigan, and Yale University.

The demonstrations are led mainly by student activists urging universities to divest from companies and institutions they believe are supporting or profiting from the conflict in Gaza. These protests have featured encampments, sit-ins, and walkouts, with rallying cries like "No tuition for genocide" and "Divest from Israel now!" At Columbia University, students

established a "Gaza Solidarity Encampment" and called for divestment from companies they associate with the conflict (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/30/divest-from-israel-breaking-down-the-us-student-protesters-demands>).

This wave of protests has even led to violence, primarily involving law enforcement attempting to disperse demonstrators and clashes with counter-protesters. Numerous confrontations between protesters and police have occurred, including an incident on May 1 at Columbia University and City College of New York, where approximately 300 arrests were made during the occupation of a university building (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2024/photos-violence-erupts-campuses-activists-counterprotesters-clash/>). Similar events took place at the University of Wisconsin, where police cleared an encampment and arrested 34 protesters (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2024/photos-violence-erupts-campuses-activists-counterprotesters-clash/>).

At Columbia University, a counter-protester reportedly drove a car into a group of pro-Palestinian demonstrators, leading to injuries and arrests (https://sg.news.yahoo.com/driver-charged-allegedly-hitting-pro-230530736.html?_fsig=HgZ0uBNBy8oCSpzOji21VA--~A&guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cucGVycGxleGl0eS5haS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAHBvYQwPzNO9P7KRp9qvez_LeTFvGdGSQ-p8PkyEdaQemsb05zF9jTh9XQP8bXQWWusAsnBF4LW7kgBwggciYLcOnp6bVixqdluEDBrK8yJERW6jXke26-3F7wOPPwlt97tVkkFls3_bzYlOxm2PBbU3xYfVtOdFt5rKxYheLBzl). At the University of Pennsylvania, on May 1, an unidentified individual sprayed tents and signs with an odorous substance which organizers compared to "skunk spray" (<https://www.thedp.com/article/2024/05/penn-palestine-gaza-protests-arrests>).

1. The Younger Generation

The positive stance of younger Americans toward Palestine goes back to before the October 7 attack. In a July 2022 Pew Research Center survey (refer Figure 1), 56% of those aged 18-29 say they view Palestine more positively than Israel, compared to only 38% and 27% among the 50-64 and 65+ age groups (<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/07/11/american-views-of-israel/>). Similarly, a Pew Research Center survey conducted in March 2022 found that U.S. adults under 30 view the Palestinian people slightly warmer (61% very or somewhat favorable) compared to Israelis (56%) and rate the Palestinian government almost as favorably (35%) as the Israeli government (34%) (<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/05/26/modest-warming-in-u-s-views-on-israel-and-palestinians/>). However, older Americans still favor Israelis more than Palestinians, and favors the Israeli government than the Palestinian government.

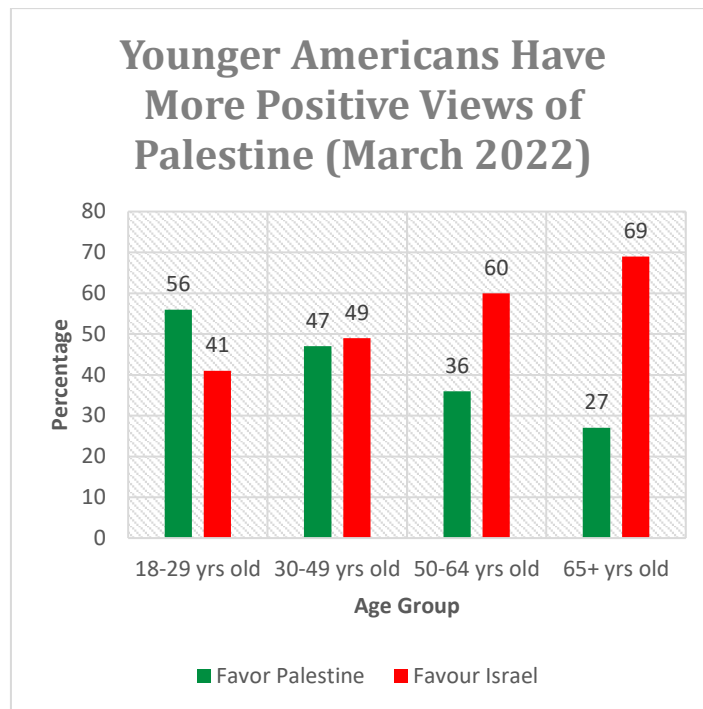


Figure 1: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/07/11/american-views-of-israel/>

However, contrary to the conventional belief that the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation would diminish American support for the Palestinians, a Pew poll conducted in February 2024 (refer Figure 2)—five months after the operation on October 7—revealed a surprising increase in favorability toward Palestine among American youth, now reaching 60 percent. Even more unexpectedly, there was a rise in support across all age groups: a 5-point increase among those aged 30–49, a 9-point increase among those aged 50–60, and an 18-point increase among those aged 65 and older (<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/02/younger-americans-stand-out-in-their-views-of-the-israel-hamas-war/>).

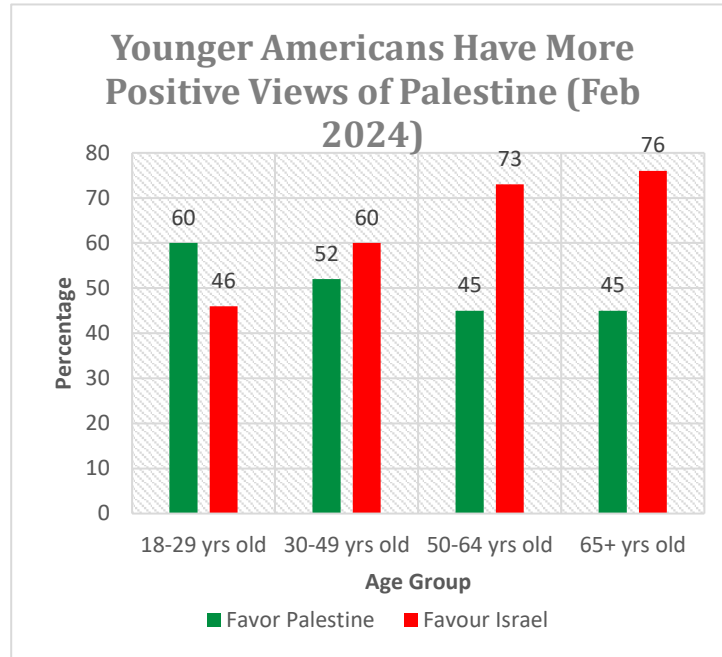
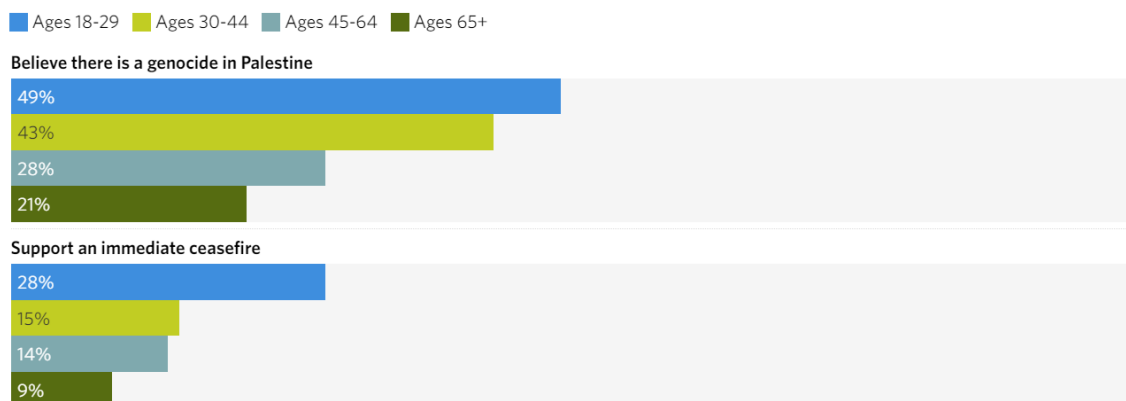


Figure 2: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/02/younger-americans-stand-out-in-their-views-of-the-israel-hamas-war/>

Along the same lines, a January 2024 Economist/YouGov poll (refer Figure 3) reveals that young people are the most inclined to view the situation in Palestine as genocide. Approximately 49% of youth believe "Israel is committing genocide against Palestinian civilians," while 28% advocate for an "immediate ceasefire," the highest support for this option among all age groups. This indicates a strong desire among many young people for the U.S. government to pursue a ceasefire as a concrete policy objective (<https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/young-voters-and-israel-palestine-conflict>).

Young People Are More Likely to Believe a Genocide is Underway and to Support an Immediate Ceasefire



CIRCLE Tufts University Tisch College · CIRCLE

Source: The Economist/YouGov Poll | January 21 - 23, 2024 | 1664 U.S. Adult Citizens

Figure 2: Young People Are More Likely to Believe a Genocide is Underway and to Support an Immediate Ceasefire

These findings indicate that the younger generation is more open and empathetic to the Palestinian cause, and less influenced by the traditional narrative of Israel as a democratic ally and a victim of terrorism.

On social media, TikTok posts featuring the #StandwithPalestine hashtag garnered nearly four times the global viewership compared to those using #StandwithIsrael in the initial weeks following the 7 October incident (<https://www.axios.com/2023/10/31/tiktok-views-pro-palestine-posts-israel>). On 14 November, the #freepalestine tag vastly surpassed the #standwithisrael at 25.5 billion views versus 440.4 million views (<https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxjb8b/tiktok-its-not-the-algorithm-teens-are-just-pro-palestine>). With about three in four (or 70.2% to be exact) of TikTok's user base falling within the 18-34 age group, the social media platform can be a potent barometer of the sentiments of the younger generation.

The disparity between the younger and older generations can be attributed to several factors. Chief among them is the younger demographic's increased exposure to social media and alternative information sources. Additionally, their identification with oppressed and marginalized groups plays a significant role, as does a prevailing disillusionment with US foreign policy and interventionism. These multifaceted reasons contribute to a perceptible generation gap in perspectives and attitudes.

The emergence of the more pro-Palestinian younger generation also affects other blocs known as ardent supporters of Israel such as the Christian evangelicals. As younger, more progressive evangelicals emerge, the next chapter will explore the implications of this shift and the evolving perspectives on social justice and human rights within the evangelical movement. It will also examine how counter-narratives within Christian theology, championed by leading theologians, are challenging pro-Zionist sentiments that are often shown to be unfaithful to the biblical text.

2. The Evangelicals

For decades, the Israeli regime has relied on the steadfast support of Evangelicals. Evangelicals, making up 10 percent of Americans and 23 percent of the Republican Party, remain one of the most influential—and often divisive—groups within the context of the bipartisan Democratic and Republican party system (<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-to-almost-eliminate-the-u-s-partisan-divide-on-the-middle-east/>). Its influence on American sentiment is so strong that changes within this group will directly impact the U.S. position on Israel, Islam, and Muslims (<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-to-almost-eliminate-the-u-s-partisan-divide-on-the-middle-east/>). The most influential evangelical pressure group in the U.S. is Christians United for Israel (CUFI), with over 10 million members (<https://cufi.org/press-releases/cufi-reaches-10-million-members/>).

However, over the last three years, support among young Evangelicals has plummeted by more than 50%, according to the Center for Study of the United States (CSUS) at Tel Aviv University (<https://www.jpost.com/christianworld/article-786545>). This support, often rooted in an interpretation of the Old Testament's portrayal of Israel as God's chosen people and land, along with the belief that Israel has a divine right to exist and expand, and that supporting Israel

would hasten the second coming of Christ (<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/the-bottom-line/2023/12/26/why-do-evangelical-christians-support-israel>), is now sharply losing its appeal among young, progressive Evangelicals who are more attuned to social justice issues. The rapid change within this growing segment of Evangelicals has raised concerns for Israel, suggesting a potential strategic shift within the next 10 to 20 years or even sooner, according to Dr. Yoav Fromer, head of CSUS (<https://www.jpost.com/christianworld/article-786545>).

Arguments by New Testament theologians have recently gained more public attention. They claim that support for Israel should not be unconditional, but contingent on Israel's adherence to God's covenant and the ten commandments, which include being godly, not murdering and stealing, and so on (Burge, G. M. (2010). *Jesus and the Land: the New Testament challenge to "Holy Land" Theology*. Baker Books). For instance, Professor Gary M. Burge—a New Testament Scholar, American author, and ordained minister—for example, in his critically acclaimed 2010 book *"Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to "Holy Land" Theology"* (Burge, G. M. (2010). *Jesus and the Land: the New Testament challenge to "Holy Land" Theology*. Baker Books), decry the theological views promoted by Christian Zionism, calling them not just "ill-informed and simply not biblical...but worse, dangerous" (<https://overthinkingchristian.com/2021/06/03/why-im-not-a-christian-zionist-by-gary-burge/>).

These New Testament scholars, such as Gary Burge, Stephen Sizer, and Naim Ateek (a Palestinian theologian and Anglican priest), frequently criticize Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, its human rights violations, and its disregard for international law as contrary to God's will (<https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/naim-ateek-israel-killed-many-good-palestinians-who-couldve-been-gandhis>). They emphasize Jesus as a figure who taught love and compassion for all people, regardless of ethnicity or religion. In terms of covenantal theology—a biblical framework concerning covenants between God and humanity—they often argue that God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament have been fulfilled in Christ and extended to the church, which is considered the new Israel. Consequently, they contend that the modern state of Israel has no special theological significance or divine right to the land (Sizer, S. (2021). *Zion's Christian Soldiers?: The Bible, Israel and the Church*. Wipf and Stock Publishers).

These arguments have challenged evangelical Zionism and resonated with evangelicals who are more focused on social justice and human rights issues. This stands in contrast to influential figures from the older generation of Israel supporters, such as Pastor John Hagee of Christians United for Israel, Gordon Robertson, president of the Christian Broadcasting Network and son of the late Pat Robertson, and former Vice President Mike Pence (<https://www.jpost.com/christianworld/article-786545>). Nevertheless, the influence of the Christian right continues to wane due to the aging of its leadership.

FOUR ARGUMENTS FOR AMERICAN SUPPORT OF ISRAEL AND THEIR DECLINING APPEAL

The Israeli lobby in the United States, characterized by influential groups such as AIPAC, CUFI, J Street, and AJC, has historically played a crucial role in shaping U.S. policy towards

Israel. However, the surge in public sympathy for Palestinians and the criticism of Israel's human rights record pose challenges to the lobby's influence. As public opinion diversifies, policymakers may face increased pressure to adopt a more balanced approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, challenging the lobby's traditional sway over U.S. foreign policy.

The decline in support for Israel and the rise in sympathy for Palestine may be attributed to several factors. Renowned scholars of international relations and U.S. foreign policy, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, notably challenge the assumption that the Israel lobby's influence is founded on strategic or moral grounds. Their 2007 book, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, reveals how the lobby manipulates public opinion and pressures politicians to prioritize Israel's interests, even when they conflict with America's long-term interests (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M., 2007).

Drawing on instances from the Bush Administration's management of the Lebanon disaster and the Iraq war, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt argue that Israel in fact poses a huge risk to Americans by jeopardizing U.S. relations with the Arab world and unsettling ties with American allies. They assert that U.S.' unqualified support for Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians has fuelled terrorism and motivated leaders like Osama Bin Laden of Al-Qaeda to spread anti-American sentiments in the Islamic world (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M., 2007).

The following is a summary of four major pro-Israel arguments (and their rebuttals) that are made to the U.S.:

a. Shared Strategic Interests:

The once-unchallenged belief in shared strategic interests in the Middle East, such as countering Iran's nuclear ambitions and regional influence, has eroded. The U.S. and Israel now diverge on key issues like the Iranian nuclear deal, the Palestinian conflict, the Syrian civil war, and the Arab Spring (Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M., 2007; <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/israel-on-edge-as-us-reports-progress-on-reviving-iran-nuclear-deal/>).

b. Moral Obligations:

The moral obligation argument based on shared cultural and political values, such as democracy and human rights, is also faltering. Criticism of Israel's policies that violate these values, including its occupation of Palestinian territories and use of excessive force, has gained traction (<https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/young-voters-and-israel-palestine-conflict>).

c. Domestic Politics:

Public support and political influence, once a stronghold for Israel, are diminishing. Polls indicate a decline in favorable views of Israel, especially among young people, minorities, liberals, and progressives (<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/02/younger-americans-stand-out-in-their->

views-of-the-israel-hamas-war/). Pro-Palestinian groups such as BDS, MIFTAH, and CAIR, are now playing a more active role in shaping the public sentiment.

d. Christian Zionism:

The theological foundation of Christian Zionism, which supported Israel based on the Old Testament's description of Israel as God's chosen people has now been challenged. New Testament theologians argue for contingent support based on Israel's adherence to God's covenant and ethical standards (Burge, G. M. (2010). *Jesus and the Land: the New Testament challenge to "Holy Land" Theology*. Baker Books; Sizer, S., 2021).

SYSTEMS MAPPING: AL-AQSA FLOOD AS A SIGNIFICANT NODE

The Al-Aqsa Flood operation serves as a critical node within a complex web of interrelated systems that influence and are influenced by various socio-political, psychological, and cultural factors. This chapter examines the significance of the Al-Aqsa Flood by employing preliminary systems mapping, a crucial modeling and visualization tool in systems thinking, to reveal the multifaceted and complex effects of Al-Aqsa Flood on U.S. support for Israel.

What is Systems Thinking?

Emerging in the 1970s, systems theory has become a vital approach for addressing complex or 'wicked' problems. A core element of systems thinking is the distinction between "simple" and "complex" systems. Simple systems follow a direct chain of cause and effect, whereas complex systems involve feedback loops, where causes and effects perpetually interact without a definitive end (Brown, Stephan E. & Daniel C. Lerch, 2007). A feedback loop is defined as:

... a circular connection between two or more system elements in which a change in one element, or input, causes other elements to generate a response, or output, that eventually feeds back to the original element

(Brown, Stephan E. & Daniel C. Lerch, 2007).

The concept of systems thinking is often summarized by the phrase "seeing the forest for the trees," which emphasizes focusing on the entire system and the relationships between its components, rather than just the individual elements. Stephen E. Brown and Daniel C. Lerch illustrate this with an example: placing trees, bushes, dirt, water, and squirrels together in a room doesn't create a forest, but rather a disorganized mess. A true forest is defined by the relationships among its elements—the soil and water sustain the trees, the trees provide shelter for animals, and the animals consume the plants ((Brown, Stephan E. & Daniel C. Lerch, 2007).

Since its development, systems thinking has impacted a wide range of fields, including planning and evaluation, education, business management, public health, sociology, psychology, cognitive science, human development, agriculture, sustainability, environmental

sciences, ecology, biology, earth sciences, and other physical sciences (Cabrera, et al., 2008). International organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) (De Savigny et al., 2009), have also embraced systems thinking to tackle significant global challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic (Bradley, 2020).

Visualizing the Impact of Al-Aqsa Flood through Systems Mapping

In addition to understanding the complexity of a problem or issue, visualization is also crucial. Peter Senge, a pioneer in systems thinking and author of the renowned *The Fifth Discipline*, is renowned for identifying various systems archetypes through feedback loop diagrams, which illustrate common patterns of relationships within systems. These archetype diagrams or mappings provide essential frameworks for tackling complex issues that many policymakers may not fully recognize, a situation Peter Senge cautions against, warning of the risks of being trapped in such ignorance (Peter, Senge, 1994).

Systems mapping goes beyond simply integrating different stakeholder perspectives; it reveals emerging dynamics that arise from the interactions among elements, which might not be identified through a linear approach. Sometimes, the process of creating a systems map can be more valuable than the final map itself (Sterman JD, 2000).

Systems mapping also allows for the identification of key nodes—points where changes can have significant ripple effects throughout the system. Effective systems mapping can illuminate how different components within a system interact and how disruptions in one area can propagate through others, leading to cascading effects.

Given its complexity, the impact of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation on U.S. support for Israel can be more clearly understood through systems mapping, which illustrates how this event affects various stakeholders and their perceptions. Below is the preliminary mapping offered by this article:

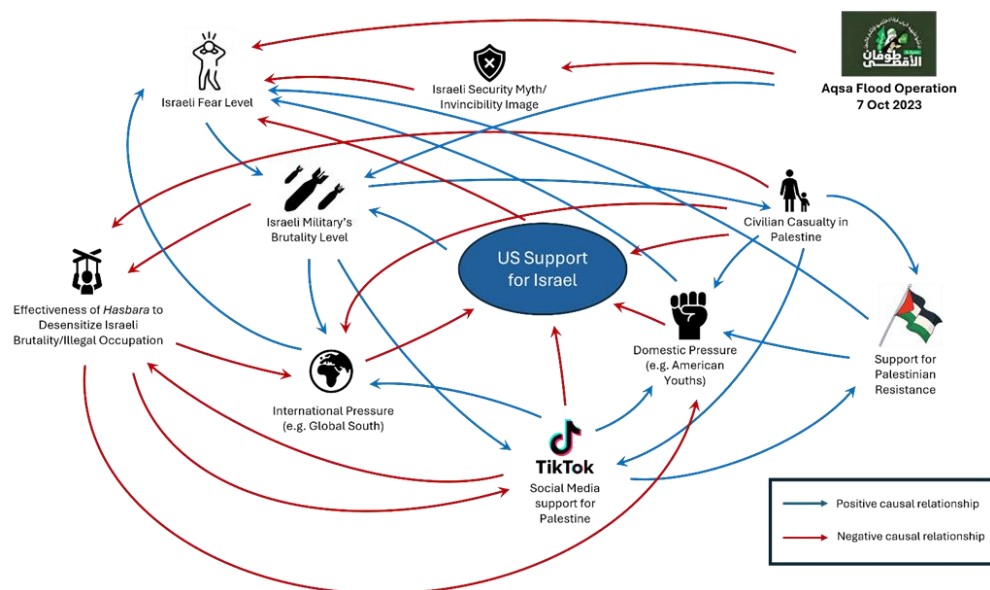


Figure 4: Systems Mapping of the Impact of the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation to US Support for Israel

In this systems mapping, several key observations emerge:

1. The Al-Aqsa Flood operation directly impacts the psychology of fear among Israelis by dismantling the longstanding myth of Mossad's intelligence supremacy and Israel's military superiority.
2. This heightened Israeli fear influences the intensity of bombardments and retaliatory actions, which in turn affect several elements:
 - The effectiveness of *Hasbara*, Israel's propaganda machine, in legitimizing its unlawful actions and genocidal projects.
 - The level of international pressure on Israel, which is reflected in United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions, International Court of Justice (ICJ) rulings (on genocide and illegal occupation), and the International Criminal Court's (ICC) war crime proceedings against Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, along with reactions from other international blocs or specific nations (e.g. BRICS, Global South, China, South Africa, Malaysia, and etc).
 - The increase in social media support for Palestine allows unfiltered information to spread rapidly, enabling Americans (as well as any global citizens) to witness Israel's atrocities almost in real-time.
3. Social media serves as a crucial node connecting various elements that influence U.S. support for Israel:
 - It directly undermines *Hasbara*—the Israeli propaganda machine—by facilitating the rapid, organic spread of on-the-ground realities, which is more effective than traditional propaganda.
 - Social media, particularly platforms like TikTok, where 70% of users are aged 18-34, plays a significant role in boosting support for Palestine among younger Americans.
4. There are also several 'reinforcing feedback loops' or 'vicious cycles' (where each element enhances or amplifies one another in a certain direction):
 - Increased Israeli fear escalates the brutality of Israel's military actions, which in turn amplifies international pressure on the U.S. to reduce its support for Israel, further intensifying anxiety and fear among Israelis.
 - Heightened Israeli fear leads to more severe military actions, which boosts social media support for Palestine. This growing support, particularly among American youth, strengthens the Palestinian cause and adds to the fear felt by Israelis.

In summary, the Al-Aqsa Flood operation exemplifies a significant node within a complex system characterized by intricate interdependencies and feedback loops. Its effects extend beyond immediate military outcomes, influencing psychological states, international

relations, and regional dynamics. By employing systems mapping, researchers and policymakers can better understand these interconnected impacts and devise strategies that consider the broader implications of such operations. This holistic approach is essential for addressing the multifaceted challenges inherent in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and fostering pathways toward sustainable peace.

CONCLUSION

The October 7, 2023, Al-Aqsa Flood operation by Hamas represents a crucial inflection point in the long-standing conflict between Israel and Palestine, reminiscent of historic moments such as the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War. This bold and unexpected attack exposed vulnerabilities in Israel's military defenses and challenged the perceived invincibility of its security apparatus. It has been described as a paradigm shift, fundamentally altering the strategic and symbolic landscape of the conflict, and affecting the psychological and epistemological understanding of the struggle for both Palestinians and Israelis.

The operation's impact extends beyond the immediate region, affecting the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East and the nature of U.S.-Israel relations. In the United States, particularly among younger generations—both in general and within Evangelicals—there is a growing disillusionment with the traditional, unconditional support for Israel. This shift in public sentiment, marked by significant political demonstrations, campus encampments, and social media trends, signals a potential re-evaluation of U.S. foreign policy. The humanitarian crisis resulting from Israel's response to the Al-Aqsa Flood operation has only intensified this scrutiny, challenging the sustainability of the longstanding U.S.-Israel alliance.

Traditional arguments used to justify U.S. support for Israel, such as shared strategic interests and moral obligations, are now being questioned more than ever. The evolving theological debate within American evangelical communities also reflects a nuanced shift, challenging the unconditional support previously grounded in religious beliefs.

The Al-Aqsa Flood operation thus serves as a critical juncture in the broader narrative of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It highlights a transition towards a more assertive and self-reliant Palestinian resistance, reshaping the psychological and geopolitical frameworks within which the conflict is understood. The event also emphasizes the complexities of U.S. domestic politics, where public opinion and policy are increasingly influenced by a diverse array of voices and perspectives.

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