

Gaza Alone on the Ground, the Rest Under Siege: Where Has Palestinian Rage Gone?



“My youth in the West Bank,
and all our people across the different factions,
today is your day to sweep this occupier and his settlements from every inch of
our land in the West Bank, and to make him pay for his crimes during these long,
barren years.

Organize your attacks on the settlements with whatever means and tools are
available to you.

Today — yes, starting today — security coordination and its apparatus end, so you
may prove that your patriotism and attachment to al-Aqsa, Jerusalem, and
Palestine are greater than all the occupier’s illusions.

Today — yes, today — our people restore their revolution, correct their course,
and return to the project of liberation, return, and statehood, through blood and
martyrdom.

People of Jerusalem,
rise up to defend your al-Aqsa, expel the occupation forces and settlers from
your Jerusalem, and tear down the separation walls.

Our people in the occupied interior,
in the Negev, the Galilee, and the Triangle, in Jaffa, Haifa, Acre, Lod, and Ramle,

set the land ablaze beneath the feet of the usurping occupiers by killing, burning, destroying, blocking roads and make this cowardly occupier understand that the Al-Aqsa Flood is greater than he imagines.”

These calls formed a central part of the speech by the commander of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Mohammad Deif, when he announced the launch of the “Al-Aqsa Flood,” some twenty minutes after the start of the wide-ranging assault on occupation positions in what is known as the Gaza envelope, on 7 October 2023.

The commander’s remarks reveal that Hamas’s conception of the Al-Aqsa Flood went beyond a single, planned military act; at its core it was a political summons to open a revolutionary path linking Jerusalem with Gaza, the West Bank, and the interior, transforming a battlefield blow into a popular wave capable of creating new realities, redrawing the conflict’s equations, and pressuring the occupation into substantive concessions.

In fact, while the operation in Gaza succeeded in terms of precision and battlefield shock and shook the foundations of Israeli security and governmental structures, that shock was not mirrored across the other arenas of Palestinian action that should have formed a vital extension in the sequence of resurgence.

A series of obstacles converged: weak responses, institutional hesitation, preemptive repression campaigns, targeted deterrence mechanisms, and operations of consciousness-shaping designed to dampen popular mobilization a range of factors that turned what might have been a unifying flood into a reality of negative interaction.

The particularity of arenas: from an organizational principle to a tool for dismantling national action

For decades, the political consciousness of Palestinians has embedded the idea of “the particularity of arenas” as an organizational approach that takes into account the differing circumstances of Palestinians in their various places of residence from the occupied interior to the West Bank, Gaza, and the diaspora.

Yet this principle, which began with practical intentions adapting to different legal, political, and economic environments gradually became an entry point for unraveling a unified national project and for justifying field and programmatic isolation, until each Palestinian component became a captive of “its own arena” and its subsidiary headings.

At heart, this idea served as a political and cultural cover for normalizing the fragmentation imposed by the Israeli occupation since the Nakba, and it helped strengthen a policy of “enclaves” aimed at breaking the unity of the Palestinian people and the centrality of its cause.

Instead of using “particularity” as a way to adapt tools of struggle to differing conditions, it morphed into an instrument for avoiding confrontation with the structural problems of the Palestinian political system, and into a justification for disabling collective action and reducing the concept of national unity to a ceremonial slogan.

With the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian leadership found in “the particularity of arenas” a political way out of the dilemma of managing national struggle, by confining its responsibility to running an authority of limited self-government in the West Bank and Gaza and granting the remaining Palestinian components freedom of movement only within their “particularity.”

Palestinians of the occupied interior bore the burden of political experiment in Knesset elections in which the Palestinian Authority invested under the pretext of serving a “camp of peace,” refugees in the diaspora were neglected as being outside the circle of direct action, and Gaza and the West Bank were left to be laboratories of “security particularity” and “livelihood particularity.”

Thus, and especially after the end of the al-Aqsa Intifada and the emergence of Palestinian division that became administrative and geographical, a multiplicity of fragmented struggle narratives followed, each carrying its own “particularity” in discourse, objectives, and tools from the “Jerusalem Uprising” to the “Knife Intifada” to the “Great Return Marches” without the consolidation of a unifying national vision to reunify Palestinian struggle into a single, integrated context.

“Particularity” ceased to be merely a descriptive term for reality and transformed into an intellectual and institutional structure that entrenched the cooling of shared Palestinian action and weakened the possibility of renewing the liberation project on universal foundations.

Sword of Jerusalem: how the resistance tried to reunify the arenas

Faced with the fragmentation that decades of faith in “the particularity of arenas” had entrenched, the Palestinian resistance’s action in the Sword of Jerusalem battle was a conscious, radical attempt to transcend that logic and rebuild the unity of Palestinian action on the basis of mutual field linkage and shared destiny.

The battle was not a passing event or an impulsive reaction to Israeli assaults in Jerusalem; it was the practical expression of a strategic vision that had crystallized within resistance circles long before the confrontation erupted, aimed at breaking the geographic and political isolation that had separated Palestinian arenas since the Oslo Accords.

Resistance leadership, led by the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, had early on declared that the single-sided targeting of any arena by the occupation must be met by collective interaction across all Palestinian components.

This orientation is clearly evident in the statement by the Qassam military spokesman Abu Ubaida on 25 June 2020, when he said the resistance considered Israel's decision to annex the West Bank and the Jordan Valley an "act of war against the Palestinian people."

This was an early proclamation of the principle of linking the arenas, asserting that any assault on any part of Palestinian geography is an attack on the whole, and that the response must be collective and multifaceted.

Documents later shown in the Al Jazeera program "What's Hidden Is Greater" reveal the depth of this orientation within the resistance's organizational structure. Minutes from a Qassam general staff meeting on 7 January 2021 months before the Sword of Jerusalem battle included explicit items calling for "expanding the scope of resistance across all areas of the homeland, developing engagement rules, and incorporating Jerusalem into the engagement rules," as well as provisions linking Israeli violations against prisoners to military escalation.

That document was not merely an operational recommendation but a political and field roadmap reflecting an early recognition of the need to break fragmentation and reunify the arenas under one banner.

When the confrontation flared in May 2021, the rockets launched from Gaza toward Jerusalem were not a symbolic gesture of solidarity but the operational translation of the strategic decision to connect what was happening in Jerusalem with any military act in Gaza.

The battle erupted in response to calls from Jerusalemites in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood resisting forcible displacement, to assaults on al-Aqsa Mosque, and to provocative settler marches in Jerusalem, declaring that any aggression against the holy city would be met with a response from Gaza that reknit the Palestinian scene in a single moment.

Through this act, the resistance succeeded in redefining the rules of engagement: Jerusalem became a common national flashpoint, and aggression against it became a test of deterrence with Gaza. The battle also revived a collective national feeling; Palestinians in the West Bank, inside the 1948 borders, and the diaspora emerged in a synchronized scene that affirmed the unity of the people and the cause.

Sword of Jerusalem's effects were not limited to the military field; they extended to shape a new political consciousness that later manifested in the formation of armed resistance groups in the West Bank, such as the "Lions' Lair" in Nablus, which embodied the same extension of the idea: resistance to the occupation cannot be confined geographically, and arena unity is not merely a slogan but a

renewed, practical approach.

Sword of Jerusalem was meant to be an explicit declaration of the end of the era of fragmentation under the banner of “particularity of arenas” and the beginning of a new path in which the resistance works to reunify Palestinian geography within a single equation that asserts Jerusalem as the center, Gaza the heart of action, the West Bank its lungs, and the interior its depth which cannot be isolated or marginalized.

Reengineering consciousness: a strategy of preemption and deterrence

After the rare moment of Palestinian national unity ignited by the Sword of Jerusalem in May 2021, the Israeli security establishment realized that what occurred was not a fleeting event but a qualitative shift in Palestinian collective consciousness, where geography, politics, and identity converged in a single scene.

For the occupation, such a shift posed a strategic danger no less significant than a military one, as it undermined the very basis of its control the fragmentation of arenas and the distancing of Palestinians from one another. Accordingly, it rushed to build a new deterrence apparatus aimed at aborting any possibility of repeating that scene and “conditioning” public consciousness through long-term, systematic repression.

That policy began immediately after the ceasefire with an unprecedented wave of arrests that swept up thousands of Palestinians, targeting participants in demonstrations within Palestinian communities inside Israel, in refugee camps and occupied areas of the West Bank, and even networks on social media that had served as mobilization tools during the battle.

Israeli agencies sought to punish anyone who participated, incited, or even expressed support for the resistance, issuing draconian deterrent sentences meant to sow fear and prevent any recurrence of the Sword of Jerusalem model in mass popular interaction.

Israeli police and Shin Bet treated the wide popular mobilization in cities like Lod, Umm al-Fahm, Haifa, and Nazareth as rebellion against “public order,” carrying out pursuits, restrictions, and arrests that targeted hundreds of Palestinian youth, in what Hebrew-language press described at the time as “the widest operation in decades to control Arabs in Israel.”

These measures were coupled with legal and legislative tools aimed at criminalizing Palestinian political activity under the pretexts of “incitement” and “domestic terrorism,” and silent amendments to surveillance and digital pursuit systems increased control over Palestinian online space.

At the same time, the occupation found in the rhetoric of some Palestinian political elites inside Israel an opportunity to intellectually and morally dismantle the Sword of Jerusalem's effects. In March 2022, Ayman Odeh, leader of the Joint List, told the Israeli Kan channel: "It is not the role of factions in Gaza and the West Bank to greet or condemn terrorist attacks targeting Arab citizens of Israel... We reject arming our youth; our path is persistent popular struggle, and I appeal directly to Palestinian factions not to issue statements welcoming armed acts by Palestinian citizens of Israel."

The Israeli establishment used such discourse to cement a divide: "good Arabs" inside Israel versus "outlawed resisters," attempting to separate the interior from its national and political extension and normalize division in collective consciousness.

In the West Bank, Israel's security effort was more focused and precise, aiming to contain nascent resistance groups and prevent them from extending beyond the geography of northern refugee camps such as Jenin and Nablus.

This coincided with heightened security coordination with Palestinian Authority forces, whose declared aim became preventing a "repeat of the Gaza experience" in the West Bank. Tools used included intelligence, administrative detention, area closures, and targeted assassinations of the first cores of armed groups.

In this way, the occupation sought to create a state of "security suffocation" that would prevent the emergence of a parallel front or a chain reaction with events in Gaza or Jerusalem.

This comprehensive array of security, legal, and psychological measures was not intended merely to respond to what happened during Sword of Jerusalem but to reengineer Palestinian consciousness and ensure that mass cross-border eruptions that unsettled the occupation in 2021 would not recur.

Repression was turned into a "preventive" instrument, preempting any intifada or wave of solidarity through deterrence, surveillance, arrests, and discrediting of the resistance discourse.

The preemptive strike: an anticipatory battle in the opening days of the Al-Aqsa Flood

Consistent with this policy of conditioning consciousness and as a practical step translating the "preemptive deterrence" approach after Sword of Jerusalem, the occupation launched, in the days and weeks following the start of the Al-Aqsa Flood, a wide preventive campaign whose declared initial objective was to block any chance of a genuine, widespread Palestinian interaction with resistance calls to turn the Flood into a general revolutionary state.

This campaign was not a set of scattered military operations but a package of simultaneous measures security, legislative, economic, and colonial – designed to paralyze society’s ability to mobilize and take to the streets.

The first indicator of the size and brutality of this preemptive campaign was the extensive arrest waves: documentation shows that in the two months after 7 October the number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails multiplied, at one point exceeding 10,000 detainees; among them some 3,600 were held under administrative detention without charge or trial, compared with roughly 1,300 administrative detainees before the war.

These arrest campaigns had a clear objective: to empty the streets of their mobilizers and living forces local leaders, civil society activists, journalists, and academics leaving the public space devoid of popular decision-makers.

Inside the prisons, testimonies from the released and human rights reports revealed unprecedented levels of humiliation, abuse, and torture an extension of the policy of killing and detention into a space hidden from the streets; an intentional psychological tactic aimed at breaking the morale for resistance beyond the walls.

There were also reports that arrests systematically targeted “individuals capable of mobilizing,” which a rights official described as a methodical liquidation of activists in civil society, media, and the human-rights sector.

In the occupied interior, the scene went beyond mere suppression of protests; occupation agencies began a severe campaign of legislative and administrative intimidation, starting with declaring a state of war that enabled the use of emergency laws and counterterrorism formulations to carry out widespread prosecutions, enacting legislation to prosecute “incitement” on social media, detaining students and employees and excluding them from study or work, threatening to revoke citizenship from those deemed “sympathetic to Gaza,” closing shops, and imposing economic restrictions.

Official and popular voices provoked citizens by asserting that the interior constituted a “front” that must be suppressed.

This repressive rhetoric was matched with execution measures: an armed police arsenal was announced (the purchase of 10,000 automatic rifles to distribute to so-called “protection units”), the formation of a field regiment to organize civic countermeasures, and the release of threatening videos by police leaders warning citizens against protesting and promising comprehensive punishment.

The wave of fear was exploited to impose electronic surveillance and to pursue posts expressing even pain, supplication, or a Quranic verse understood as

solidarity with Gaza.

Politically and socially, these measures were designed to unravel trust networks between arenas by dismantling local leadership and undermining organizational capacity in the northern West Bank through the “Iron Wall” operations, which intensified raids and a persistent military presence in northern camps, along with displacement and social restructuring aimed at stripping camps of their social character and turning them into security and societal voids thereby making resistance a burden on local communities. Camps became arenas of suffering and pressure rather than bases for organized action.

The composite result of this preventive package was highly effective: it quickly incapacitated mobilization capacities, severed lines of communication between popular movement forces and civic centers, and left a latent collective psychological impact centered on fear of the high cost of participation.

Thus, when resistance statements and the Qassam commander called to transform the Al-Aqsa Flood into a sweeping revolutionary state, those calls collided with a wall of arrests, disappearances, legislation, incitement campaigns, and settler violence — a behavior designed to prevent anger from becoming sustained mass action.

A composite failure: between Israeli repression and Palestinian ossification. Despite an understanding of the scale of Israeli repression in the months following the Al-Aqsa Flood, Palestinian historical experience shows that repression alone has never been sufficient to extinguish the flame of national action.

The Palestinian people have faced policies of killing, destruction, and invasion for decades; yet uprisings and forms of resistance have never ceased.

But the difference this time was not simply the level of repression; it was the level of Palestinian preparedness and the absence of institutional and popular will to engage in a new intifada of the Flood’s scale.

A combination of internal and external factors produced a state of political and social paralysis that left Palestinian arenas unable to seize a historic moment that could have reshaped the balance with the occupation.

Although the occupation succeeded in “conditioning consciousness” through a system of systematic deterrence, that conditioning did not spare elites and key Palestinian actors, who found themselves before a wall of fear and bewilderment and preferred surveillance over initiative.

Manifold manifestations of failure at the activist and popular levels

This regression manifested across several levels. On the militant level, organized

resistance groups and individual initiatives were most advanced compared with other forms of Palestinian action; despite limited capacities they attempted to carry out qualitative operations in the West Bank in support of Gaza, paying a heavy price.

Nevertheless, such actions remained exceptional and were not connected to a broad popular movement after being separated from their popular base by repression, deterrence, and fear.

On the popular and political levels the retreat was deeper and more severe. Unions, student federations, popular councils, and sectors of youth and women were absent from the scene or limited themselves to faint symbolic expressions.

The Palestinian Authority was not remote from this context; it was one of the decisive factors cementing stagnation, exercising a direct deterrent role against any popular mobilization attempt in the West Bank.

Its security forces fired on solidarity marches, detained demonstrators, and constrained even schoolchildren a scene reflecting full alignment with the occupation's objectives of preventing broad popular interaction with Gaza's resistance.

Factors shaping political and field transformations

Inside the occupied interior, national and representative forces chose withdrawal and retreat, under the weight of massive Israeli repression already described. The scale of the repression became a “penetrating consciousness” among leaderships a conviction that any movement, even symbolic, would be met with violent responses they could not bear.

Thus, terror migrated from the level of field action to the level of collective perception, and silence became a form of strategic caution rather than a political stance.

More perilously, these forces, despite their long legacy of struggle and experience in overcoming bans and sieges, did not innovate new forms of action that corresponded to the current security conditions as they did in the first and second intifadas when they created frameworks for volunteer, union, and student work to overcome security constraints. Instead, they remained captive to traditional tools that no longer worked, waiting for external relief rather than making it.

Composite causes of failure

The composite failure revealed in the post-7 October period is the result of the interplay of two main factors:

First, the occupation's success in fragmenting Palestinian arenas and

strengthening deterrence through cumulative measures and comprehensive repression that created a psychological ceiling difficult to break.

Second, the political, social, and organizational ossification of Palestinian structures, which left them unable to absorb an event of the Al-Aqsa Flood's magnitude or to convert its momentum into a renewed national project.

The resistance in Gaza succeeded in breaking Israeli military equations, but it failed to move political Palestinian equations to the same degree. While the occupation built a wall of deterrence around each Palestinian arena, Palestinians at various levels failed to build a wall of collective consciousness capable of overcoming fear and restoring the spirit of confrontation.

Thus, the Flood turned from a historic opportunity to revive national action into a painful test of how much the Palestinian structure had suffered from weakness and erosion in both will and capacity.

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