
Al-Aqsa Flood: What are the Reactions in Iraq and the Consequences for the Country?

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Authors

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Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani, Prime Minister since October 2022

In a press statement, the leader of the Iraqi government reaffirmed his steadfast support for the Palestinian people and their cause, reiterating its legitimacy. While the Prime Minister indicated that these events are a logical consequence of the illegitimate oppression and occupation of "the Zionist state, which does not respect international resolutions", he nevertheless called for a de-escalation.

Muqtada al-Sadr, Leader of the al-Sadr movement

Iraq's most popular politician, Muqtada al-Sadr, remained terse in his statement. He first called for prayers for the Palestinians in all the mosques of Iraq. Subsequently, on Monday, he called on the Iraqi people on Twitter to take to the streets and gather in al-Tahrir Square on Friday 13 October, after midday prayers. The gathering will serve to demonstrate for the Palestinian cause, against Israel and the United States, and to show the determination of the Iraqi street to "terrorise the enemy". He specifically urged demonstrators to burn Israeli flags and wave Palestinian ones.

In a 10-minute video published on Tuesday 10 October, the political leader attacked the French government's stand: "I'm not surprised by Western support for Israel, led by the great devil, the USA, [...] nor by France's position, which is just the tail of the American dog and supports the revolutionaries".

During his speech, he accused Paris of its unwavering support for Israel. While the religious cleric also attacked the United States and other allies of the Hebrew state, he violently singled out France for a second time towards the end of his speech. According to al-Sadr, Paris has seen its honour scorned following its rout in the Sahel, and is counting on this resurgence of the conflict in Palestine to regain legitimacy on the international stage: "The West is in the middle of a contradiction, on the one hand they are helping the Ukrainian people to defend them against the Russian oppressors, and on the other they are helping the terrorists in Syria and the revolutionaries. They support the Israeli oppressors who massacre the Palestinians".

Abdul Latif Rashid, President of the Republic

The President, a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), vigorously condemned the "Israeli aggression against Palestinians", and supported them in their struggle to win their rights. He called on the international community to do likewise.

Ali Bapir, Leader of the Kurdistan Justice Group (formerly the Kurdistan Islamist Group)

The Kurdish Islamist leader strongly supports Hamas' "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation against Israel. He believes that the success of the action is the fulfilment of Divine Will. He called on Muslims around the world to redouble their efforts in support of the Palestinian cause.

Hadi al-Amiri, Leader of the Badr political party and the Fateh coalition

He said he was proud of this major Hamas operation against Israel, which he described as victorious. He called on the Muslim and Arab people to shoulder their historic responsibility by remaining on the side of the Palestinians. On 9 October, he declared that "the flags of the Palestinian liberation will leave from Iraq".

Haider al-Abadi, Leader of the Shiite al-Nasr coalition

The former Prime Minister (2014 to 2018) announced his support for the Palestinians' right to resist the Israeli occupation and to live as sovereigns in their own State. He added that the Zionist occupation of Palestine is contrary to international law and therefore calls on the international community to support the Palestinians and force the occupier to leave Palestinian lands.

Nouri al-Maliki, Leader of the Islamic Dawa party and the State of Law coalition

The former Prime Minister (2006 to 2014) and Vice-President (2016 to 2018) declared that he followed with great pride "the courageous attack and the meticulously prepared plan of the military operation that the al-Qassam brigades led against the Zionist occupation". He felt that this operation was of such quality that it had exceeded the imagination of the now panicked Zionist government. He called on the Axis of Resistance (the groups armed against Israel) to get involved, hoping that it would mobilise all its resources until the Palestinians are freed.

Qais al-Khazali, Leader of the Shiite militia Asaïb Ahl al-Haq

He expressed "unimaginable pride at this great victory of the Palestinian Islamic resistance against the Zionist and Jewish occupation" and said that he was monitoring events and was ready to intervene if necessary.

Ali al-Sistani, Grand Ayatollah, highest religious authority for the Shiites of Iraq

Ali al-Sistani calls on all Muslims around the world to come to the aid of the "Muslim people of Palestine". He also encouraged all Muslims to do their utmost to "dissuade the aggressors" and recover the usurped Palestinian rights. He also added that the "Islamic land of Palestine" must be saved from the "usurping aggressor".

Mohammed al-Halbousi, Sunni President of the Iraqi National Assembly

For the time being, he has not offered a public reaction.

The Kurdistan Regional Government has also not yet commented on the events.



What could be the consequences of the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation for Iraq, a country controlled by Iran, particularly if the conflict escalates? Five experts on the region answer this question.

Dr Sardar Aziz

There are a number of developments in the region that will be directly impacted by the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation.

First, the apparent quietness in the Middle East, including in Iraq, which the US has been wanting to maintain in order to keep the region at the periphery, has now ended. Although the US would rather not have the Middle East back in the focus of the media, its attention is definitely going back to the region. They now have aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean Sea as a deterrence tool.

In addition, the Iran-backed militias in Iraq have shown strong support to the Hamas operation. We will have to see how the US will handle this situation, given its existing priorities, including China, Ukraine and a difficult domestic situation, which may not be conducive to active engagement.

A consequence could be a wider war in the region, depending on the relationship between the US and Iran, insofar as the Americans decide to fully support Israel against Hamas and Hezbollah. Iraqi pro-Iranian groups might put pressure on the US in Iraq, even if it isn't really in their interest since it would break the truce in Iraq, which they benefit from due to the high oil prices. For now, Hezbollah has limited its escalation.

Another consequence to be expected is the delay, or even the possible failure of the Saudi-Israeli-American deal, which was in its final stage. The Saudis have been cautious regarding the steps they take in the Gulf countries due to this venture. If Saudi Arabia's relationship with Iran deteriorates, it will directly impact its relationship with Iraq.

All these consequences also depend on decisive factors, such as the scale of the retaliation Israel will inflict on Gaza, how long it will last, and the damages it causes.

Haider Barzanji, political scientist researcher

Decades have passed since the Palestinian issue first entered the global media and political landscape. Yet the international community continues to overlook this central issue.

Iraq has been and still is supportive of the Palestinian cause, and does not abandon it regardless of the consequences. This is a matter both of humanitarian concern and religious significance, as well as an issue of what's right and wrong. In its clear and frank statement, the Iraqi government naturally supports the Palestinian people, as it's the correct thing to do.

However, should the Iraqi government fail to provide tangible assistance to the Palestinian people, it would risk being seen by the Iraqi people as complicit in the human rights infringements and breaches of international law committed by Israel, including the Gaza attacks and the imposed blockade.

To address the Palestinian issue, it is imperative that effective international measures - Iraq included - be implemented to quell violence and promote peaceful resolutions. These efforts should stress the importance of justice and human rights.

Myriam Benraad, political scientist, specialist of the Arab world

The latest events in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel, and now also in southern Lebanon following the latest Israeli bombardments, are clearly putting off indefinitely the prospect of normalisation of relations between Iraq and Israel - a normalisation that was once put forward by certain Iraqi political players, albeit on the fringes.

The effects of the current conflagration in the Middle East on Iraq could be all the more serious given that Iran, sponsor of the Palestinian movement Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah, two of Israel's existential opponents, is now the dominant regional power on the Iraqi scene.

The outbreak of this umpteenth crisis could have a major impact on Iraq, with a resurgence of violence both internally and on its borders. It remains to be seen to what extent the deterioration of the regional situation will reverberate within Iraq itself, between its communities, but also between its different political currents. How might the escalating regional instability impact the already strained relationship between the pro-Iran authorities in Baghdad and the Kurds, who often face allegations of aligning with Israel?

Pierre-Jean Luizard, historian, Research Director at the CNRS

Iraq - under Iranian influence, like Syria, Lebanon (with Hezbollah) and other countries - paradoxically showed a timid joy in reaction to the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, as if it had been imposed on them from outside. This timid reaction, limited to a few restrained statements, is the least that can be expected.

Iraqis have always been indifferent to the Palestinian cause, which has been exploited by Arab nationalists since the 1960s. For them, it is above all community and sectarian tensions that remain, as can be seen from the poor relations that persist in Gaza between Islamic Jihad and Hamas. The official support of Iraq and the Shiite militias backed by Iran is therefore limited by a popular refusal to be drawn into a military spiral against Israel.

This Palestinian cause, compared with the Iraqis' rejection of Iran, is negligible for the population. The walls of Baghdad

and Kerbala are covered in graffiti saying "Iran out". The Iranian stranglehold, particularly on pilgrimage sites, has become a, if not the unifying factor, for the Iraqi population, encompassing both Shia and Sunni communities.

Surprisingly, even denominational differences cannot compete with the "Iraqist" desire of the people for stability and a rejection of war, as illustrated by the popularity of the Sadrist movement with its nationalist overtones. Iraq is a country that has suffered enormously, and these half-hearted declarations - admittedly with a call to demonstrate in Baghdad on Friday, but that's the least we can do - show that the political leaders don't dare get more involved by going against the will of the people.

For the time being, this new war should not turn Iraq upside down. However if the crisis intensifies, I fear that the Iraqis will once again disappear into the turmoil without having a say, even though they have their own problems. From their perspective, this conflict appears to be a matter at arm's length, and they do not warrant any more significant engagement on their part other than their commitment to Iraq.

Ziryan Rojhelati, Director of Rudaw Research Center

The Hamas attack on Israel has a range of consequences for Iraq. With certain Iraqi factions stationed in Syria (Asaib Ahl al-Haq, Badr organization, etc.), they are strategically close to the Israeli borders, which could be crucial if tensions rise. In the event that this conflict escalates and involves other groups, Iraq could inadvertently become a theatre for a proxy war. In the short term, this scenario could bolster the confidence of the current governing forces aligned with Iran. This could drive them to challenge the US and the coalition's continued presence in a bolder manner.

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