

Shia Faction Involvement in the Israel-Palestine Conflict: Sunni Responses through the Lens of Religious Moderation

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Abstract

This article examines the Israel-Palestine conflict, which has persisted since the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917. The declaration paved the way for the establishment of Israel in 1948 and consequently led to the displacement of the Palestinian population. Since then, numerous confrontations have occurred, including the Six-Day War, the Intifada movements, and repeated assaults on Gaza. The conflict reached a new level of escalation in October 2023 through the Taufan al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa Storm) operation, involving Hamas with the support of Hezbollah (Lebanon), the Houthi movement (Yemen), and Iran. Although Sunni and Shia groups differ ideologically, the participation of Shia factions demonstrates a shared opposition to Israel and a unified front in defending Palestine amidst the complex geopolitical tensions of the Middle East. The findings of this article indicate that the involvement of Shia factions in the Taufan al-Aqsa conflict, such as Iran's support through Hezbollah and the Houthi movement has effectively created a proxy war against Israel, encompassing both military and ideological dimensions. Despite theological differences, Sunni and Shia actors remain united in resisting Israeli occupation. Within the framework of religious moderation, the principles of tawassuth (moderation) and tasamuh (tolerance) enable Sunnis to support the Palestinian cause on humanitarian grounds, without necessarily endorsing Shia doctrinal positions. Solidarity rooted in shared human values thus serves as the foundation for cross-sectarian collaboration in the ongoing Palestinian struggle.

Keywords: Shia Faction, Israel-Palestine Conflict, Religious Moderation.

1. Introduction

The Israel–Palestine conflict is not a recent phenomenon; disputes over the establishment of a state within a state have persisted for decades, tracing back to the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917. The sequence of events following the British promise to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine led to the formal creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Subsequently, Israel engaged in a series of major regional wars, including victories over Egypt, Jordan, and Syria during the Six-Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War (1973). This period was followed by Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the First Intifada (Palestinian uprising) from 1987 to 1993, and the Second Intifada between 2000 and 2005. Further hostilities erupted during the Gaza Wars of 2007 and 2014. In more recent years, tensions reignited around the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in 2021 and 2022, culminating in the latest escalation that began on October 7, 2023 (AFP, 2023).

Beginning with the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and culminating in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, a series of military conflicts between Israel and Palestine began to unfold. Key confrontations such as the Six-Day War in 1967, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the First and Second Intifadas, and the Gaza conflicts between 2007 and 2014 have significantly shaped the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. These longstanding tensions resurfaced with heightened intensity during the *Taufan al-Aqsa* operation launched by Hamas on October 7, 2023, marking a new phase in the protracted Israel–Palestine conflict.

Since October 7, 2023, Israel's large-scale military offensive against Palestine has been known as Operation *Taufan al-Aqsa*, or the *Al-Aqsa Storm*. The operation has been framed as a call for solidarity among Arab and Islamic nations to engage in the broader struggle for Palestinian liberation (Budiman, 2023). Marking the one-year anniversary of Operation *Taufan al-Aqsa*, the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Gaza released a comprehensive report documenting the severe humanitarian and infrastructural impacts of the conflict. The report records that 814 out of 1,245 mosques across Palestine were completely destroyed, while an additional 148 sustained partial damage due to Israeli airstrikes. Beyond mosques, three churches and nineteen cemeteries were also demolished, reflecting the indiscriminate nature of the attacks. Moreover, eleven administrative and educational institutions were reduced to ruins, symbolizing not only physical devastation but also the erasure of cultural and educational heritage. The total estimated losses from these assaults amount to approximately 5.4 trillion rupiah (Wismoyo, 2024).

The operation initiated by Hamas successfully mobilized the involvement of various actors across different factions. Although it originated from a Sunni-identified movement, it attracted participation from Shia-affiliated groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and several factions from Iran, all aligning themselves with the broader Palestinian political agenda. However, their participation is rooted in fundamental historical and theological differences with the Sunni camp, raising questions about the underlying motives and geopolitical calculations that drive Shia actors' engagement.

In this conflict, Palestine, as in previous confrontations, is represented by Hamas, an Islamic resistance movement that emerged from the Intifada and continues to signify a resurgence in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Abu-Amr, 1993). However, Hamas is not acting alone; Hezbollah, a Shia militant organization from Lebanon, has also been actively assisting Hamas since October 7, 2023 (Kompas Media, 2024). In

addition, the Houthi Shia militia from Yemen has launched attacks on Israel by firing missiles at an Israeli vessel in the Gulf of Aden that was en route to Israel (Kurniawan, 2024). Moreover, Iran, as a sovereign nation, has been a particularly vocal supporter of Palestine. The late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi publicly expressed full support for Palestine through Hamas when the conflict erupted on October 7, 2023 (Muhaimin, 2023).

Observing the actions of Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iran, all Shia groups and states, that continue to actively support Hamas and Palestine, both predominantly Sunni, raises several questions. What are the underlying objectives of Shia factions in their involvement in the Israel-Palestine conflict? And where are the other Arab nations that appear to remain silent? Furthermore, the relationship between Hamas and Iran was once strained during the uprisings against Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria (Skare, 2023). With the involvement of Shia factions in the Israel–Palestine conflict, particularly in the ongoing Operation Taufan al-Aqsa, how have Sunnis around the world, including major Middle Eastern nations and other predominantly Sunni countries, responded? In this context, the author seeks to examine these responses through the lens of religious moderation, exploring how Sunnis react to the actions of Shia groups, who are often perceived as ideological and political adversaries.

The participation of Shia actors in a conflict historically associated with a predominantly Sunni resistance movement has drawn significant attention to how Sunni-majority states and communities perceive and respond to this development. This study explores these responses through the lens of religious moderation, aiming to analyze the interplay between sectarian identity, political alliances, and broader Islamic solidarity within the context of the ongoing conflict.

2. Methods

This study employs a library research method combined with a qualitative descriptive approach, which is well-suited for conceptual and interpretative analysis. The data consist of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, official reports, and credible news publications related to the Israel–Palestine conflict, Sunni–Shia relations, and the concept of religious moderation. Data selection was carried out through targeted searches in academic databases such as Scopus, Taylor & Francis, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and institutional archives, using inclusion criteria to ensure relevance to the research topic while excluding sources lacking credibility or empirical foundation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Result

3.1.1. The History of the Israel-Palestine Conflict

The history of the Israel-Palestine conflict constitutes a complex and protracted sequence of events that can be traced back to the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which endorsed the establishment of a “national home” for the Jewish people in Palestine, and the subsequent formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 as the official representative of the Palestinian people. Tensions escalated following the first

Arab–Israeli War and the 1948 Nakba (catastrophe), which resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homeland and marked the establishment of the State of Israel. Since then, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have undergone numerous shifts in territorial control, recurring conflicts, and intermittent peace efforts, including intifadas, invasions, military operations, and enduring blockades. The deepening rift between major Palestinian factions, particularly Fatah and Hamas, has further compounded the crisis, as this protracted conflict continues to inflict suffering on civilians and hinder prospects for a sustainable and just peace (Elmah, 2023, pp. 7–10).

Additionally, Zionism, a nationalist ideology advocating for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, emerged in Europe in the late 19th century under the leadership of Theodor Herzl. Its central tenet was to encourage Jewish migration to Palestine to form a demographic majority, despite Jews initially constituting a small minority (Liebman, 1970, p. 95). This ideological agenda became evident in the evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and intensified following the 1947 UN Partition Plan, which allocated 56% of Palestinian territory to the Jewish population, even though they had previously owned only about 6%. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Israel's territorial control expanded to approximately 78%, reinforcing the settler-colonial dimension of Zionism and further shrinking Palestinian public and residential spaces. Although Zionism was originally conceived to ensure the security and self-determination of Jewish communities, in practice it often intensified tensions between Jews and Muslim-majority societies and provoked accusations of dual loyalty within parts of Europe (Elmah, 2023, p. 12).

The history of the Israel–Palestine conflict also encompasses a geopolitical dimension involving major global actors such as the United States, the Soviet Union (now Russia), and several Arab nations. The United States' extensive military and political support for Israel has significantly strengthened Israel's position in the Middle East and reshaped the region's balance of power. Conversely, Arab countries have offered moral, political, and material assistance to Palestine, although their responses have often lacked cohesion and consistency. At the international level, United Nations (UN) resolutions, such as Resolution 242, which called on Israel to withdraw its forces from territories occupied during the Six-Day War (1967) (UN Security Council, 1968), and Resolution 338, which urged a ceasefire during the Yom Kippur War (1973) and reaffirmed the call for withdrawal from occupied territories (UN Security Council, 1974), have sought to promote peace and stability. However, efforts toward conflict resolution have frequently been hindered by the competing national interests of the involved states, thereby perpetuating the prolonged stalemate.

The peace process in the Israel–Palestine conflict began with the United Nations (UN) Partition Plan of 1947 and gained significant momentum following the First Intifada in the early 1990s. The Oslo Accords, Oslo I (1993) and Oslo II (1995), sought to establish the Palestinian Authority and facilitate the gradual withdrawal of Israeli military forces from occupied territories. However, these initiatives failed to produce lasting peace due to persistent violence, mutual distrust, and unresolved political disputes. Subsequent efforts, including the Camp David Summit (2000), the Arab Peace Initiative (2002), the Road Map for Peace (2003), and the Annapolis Conference (2007), all promoted the two-state solution but faced recurring obstacles, such as Israel's reluctance to fully withdraw from occupied lands and the continuing debate over Palestinian refugees' right of return. Meanwhile, UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 2334 reaffirm the international

consensus on a two-state framework and the necessity of peaceful negotiations, although progress remains hindered by vetoes from permanent members of the Security Council and divergent national interests (Elmah, 2023, pp. 21–23).

As of September 2024, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, supported by 124 member states, called for an end to Israel's "unlawful occupation" of Palestinian territories in response to the renewed escalation of the Israel–Palestine conflict since October 7, 2023. The Assembly condemned Israel's violations of international law and urged all member states not to recognize Israel's presence in the occupied territories as legitimate. Furthermore, it proposed the establishment of an international mechanism to provide reparations for damages resulting from Israel's actions and to suspend the import of products originating from Israeli settlements. The Assembly's emergency special session was adjourned with the authority to reconvene at the request of any member state, ensuring continued oversight of the resolution's implementation (Mishra, 2024).

Johan Galtung, in his research, emphasizes that the prolonged and unresolved Israel-Palestine conflict can be analyzed through four key dimensions of conflict theory. The first dimension concerns competition over national claims, wherein Israel and Palestine assert overlapping territorial sovereignty, resulting in a zero-sum dynamic in which the existence of one state is perceived as an existential threat to the other. Both the Jewish and Palestinian communities claim the right to establish a nation within the same territory, thereby generating a fundamental and enduring structural conflict (Galtung, 1972).

Second, the historical dimension of the conflict reveals that it is deeply rooted in a long-standing sense of injustice and dispossession. Palestine remains the only Arab territory that was denied full sovereign statehood, a circumstance that has fueled persistent resentment and a strong nationalist aspiration for independence among Palestinians. For many Arab nations, the establishment of Israel is perceived as a continuation of Western imperial domination, further complicating the geopolitical landscape and reinforcing collective sentiments of historical grievance and inequality.

Third, the dynamics of power illustrate a persistent asymmetry between Israel and Palestine. Israel is often perceived as a dominant state actor exerting extensive control over strategic areas such as the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem. This territorial control serves not only to secure its national borders but also to reinforce its political and military hegemony within the region. Israel's reluctance to withdraw from these occupied territories reflects an enduring interest in maintaining regional dominance and strategic leverage, which remains a central element in the protracted nature of the conflict (Galtung, 1972).

Fourth, the dimension of fear and perception plays a critical role in perpetuating the Israel-Palestine conflict. The relationship between the two parties is characterized by mutual mistrust and entrenched fear. For Israelis, there is a persistent fear of physical violence and security threats emanating from Palestinian resistance groups. Conversely, Palestinians experience structural violence and economic suppression that manifest through territorial restrictions, limited mobility, and unequal access to resources. This asymmetry of power and fear deepens negative perceptions, as each side perceives the other as an existential threat. Consequently, fear becomes both a cause and consequence of the conflict, sustaining a cycle of hostility and preventing the development of genuine reconciliation (Galtung, 1972).

According to Galtung's analysis, these factors form a multidimensional structure

of conflict, in which each component is interconnected and mutually reinforcing, thereby contributing to the persistence and escalation of tensions between the parties involved.

3.1.2. Iran's Relations with Its Affiliated Factions in Palestine

Iran's relationship with its affiliated factions became deeply rooted, particularly among Iranian revolutionaries following the 1979 Iranian Revolution. These revolutionaries were profoundly influenced by Shia ideology as articulated by prominent religious figures such as Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Kashani, and Ayatollah Taleqani. Furthermore, the notion of Third-Worldism advocated by Ali Shariati, combined with the anti-imperialist perspectives of Iranian leftist thinkers, reinforced the belief that revolution represents the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors (Alavi, 2021).

In Shia ideology, there is a profound emphasis on resistance against oppression. Consequently, Iran perceives the Palestinian struggle as an integral component of its revolutionary mission. Iran's support for the Palestinian movement, particularly the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Fatah faction, extends beyond moral solidarity and reflects calculated strategic interests. Yasser Arafat's visit to Tehran after the revolution served as a powerful symbol of this alliance, during which he was received as a hero embodying the struggle against Zionism and imperialism. Moreover, Iran provided guerrilla training to Palestinian groups, a role also undertaken by the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MKO), which had previously formed tactical alliances with these factions. This collaboration highlights the shared anti-imperialist ideology binding both sides and reinforces their collective commitment to confronting common adversaries (Alavi, 2021).

Shia clerics in Iran, including Ayatollah Murtadha Mutahhari, emphasize the moral duty of supporting the oppressed, a principle that further reinforces Iran's enduring commitment to the Palestinian cause. Within this framework, Iran's support is understood not merely as a moral obligation but also as a strategic instrument for projecting its power and influence across the Islamic world, thereby positioning itself as a leading actor in the struggle against perceived global arrogance, particularly that of the United States. Although this relationship has evolved amid various regional conflicts, Iran has consistently upheld its support for Palestine, integrating the Palestinian struggle as a central element of both its revolutionary identity and regional foreign policy strategy.

Nevertheless, in examining the relationship between Iran and Palestine, a persistent sectarian divide remains a major concern, as many Sunni groups question the motives underlying Shia support. The relationship between Shia-majority Iran and Sunni populations across the Middle East continues to evoke deep-rooted sectarian tensions. Iran's strong Shia identity and its consistent support for groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon are often perceived by Sunni actors as efforts to expand Iranian influence and advance Shia ideology at the expense of Sunni interests, thereby fostering widespread mistrust. Although Iran has historically supported the Palestinian movement, including Sunni groups such as Hamas, this assistance is frequently interpreted as serving Iran's strategic ambitions rather than reflecting genuine solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Such perceptions are further intensified by regional rivalry with Sunni-majority states, particularly Saudi Arabia, which views Iran as a direct challenge to its political stability and regional leadership. Cultural and religious narratives perpetuated by both Sunni and Shia leaders further entrench anti-Iranian sentiment, even though occasional cooperation occurs against shared adversaries such as Israel or ISIS. Ultimately, Iran's Shia identity simul-

taneously reinforces sectarian polarization while creating limited avenues for pragmatic engagement based on overlapping strategic interests.

Iran's support for Palestine, despite its Shia background, is widely perceived as a strategic effort to expand its influence in the Middle East and to compete with Saudi Arabia for leadership within the Islamic world. By leveraging the Palestinian cause, Iran seeks to transcend its sectarian identity and broaden its appeal among Sunni populations, particularly through its backing of groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Moreover, Iran's antagonism toward Israel is not solely based on solidarity with the Palestinian struggle but also stems from Israel's historical alliance with the Pahlavi regime, which was overthrown during the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Consequently, Iran frames its support for Palestine as part of a broader commitment to defending "the oppressed" (*al-mustadh'afin*), though this position is often shaped more by geopolitical calculations and sectarian competition than by purely ideological or humanitarian principles (Mehran, 2024).

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Convergences and Divergences between Sunni and Shia

Knott (2016) Sunni and Shia Islam historically emerged from differing interpretations regarding the rightful leadership of the Muslim community following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. At that time, his followers were divided over who was entitled and most qualified to assume authority. The Sunni faction maintained that leadership (*khilafah*) should be determined through consultation and consensus (*shura*), resulting in the selection of a caliph chosen by the community. In contrast, the Shia believed that leadership (*imamah*) was divinely ordained and should remain within the Prophet's family, specifically through his cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, and his descendants. This doctrinal difference gave rise to the Shia concept of *imamah*, which emphasizes a sacred and hereditary form of leadership believed to be guided by divine will.

The Shia inclination to prioritize the Prophet Muhammad's family profoundly shapes its theological and jurisprudential outlook, setting it apart from Sunni Islam. Shia Islam places significant emphasis on the teachings of the imams who are direct descendants of the Prophet, rather than on the interpretations of his companions. This orientation produces distinct religious practices, doctrinal interpretations, and approaches to Islamic law that differ from those of Sunni traditions. Conversely, Sunni Islam does not restrict religious authority to a specific lineage. Instead, Sunnis recognize a broad range of scholarly opinions and interpretive traditions developed by various *ulama* and thinkers, resulting in a more pluralistic framework for understanding Islamic teachings.

Each Shia imam designates a successor and, according to Shia doctrine, transfers spiritual authority to the next leader. The imams serve as both spiritual and temporal leaders, guiding the community in matters of faith and governance. However, as Shia groups gradually lost political influence to Sunni Muslim rulers, the imams increasingly shifted their focus toward spiritual guidance and theological development, which became the foundation of Shia thought and religious practice (Malbouisson, 2007).

In Shia Islam, an imam holds a position analogous to that of the Prophet Muhammad in terms of leadership and authority, encompassing the guidance of the community in social, military, judicial, and religious affairs. These responsibilities are administered through specific regulations implemented by the imam's representatives, resembling the

role of the Prophet's deputies during his lifetime. The Shia belief that an imam is divinely appointed constitutes the cornerstone of Shia doctrine, as this leadership is regarded as an integral component of the divine order (Muhtarom, 2015).

Despite their fundamental differences regarding leadership, both Sunni and Shia Muslims acknowledge the Qur'an and the Hadith as the primary sources of Islamic teachings. Both affirm the belief in one God as the only deity worthy of worship and in Muhammad as the final messenger who conveyed the divine revelation through the Qur'an. In theological terms, both sects uphold the conviction of monotheism and share essential principles of Islam, including the recognition of Muhammad's prophethood and the Qur'an as the ultimate guide for life. This shared foundation reflects a profound devotion to the same faith, explaining the internal cohesion within each sect. While significant doctrinal divergences persist, any viable path toward reconciliation must respect and accommodate the theological perspectives of both traditions.

The theological commonalities between Sunni and Shia Islam demonstrate a strong foundation of shared faith despite differences in interpretation. Both traditions display a profound commitment to their religion, which should serve as a constructive foundation for dialogue and the pursuit of peace between them.

The Sunni-Shia conflict in Iraq, largely shaped by colonial legacies, authoritarian regimes, and U.S. intervention, illustrates how political elites often exploit religious beliefs to mobilize followers in the pursuit of power. Nevertheless, this shared theological foundation provides opportunities for dialogue and collaboration in both religious and socio-political contexts, fostering pathways toward mutual understanding and sustainable cooperation (Modica, 2015).

Overall, these shared values are significant as they underscore the enduring relevance of religion in the daily lives of both Sunni and Shia Muslims. Eric Davis of Rutgers University defines religion as "a belief system based on piety and devotion. To claim membership in a religion, a follower must adhere to a set of principles that define their beliefs." Understanding religion in this sense highlights how both Sunni and Shia Muslims remain steadfast in their commitment to Islam, they adhere to the same foundational principles, and their devotion to faith is fundamentally similar. Consequently, they engage with their respective sects in everyday life and connect with others through shared religious identity. This deep sense of devotion and belonging establishes a foundation of trust, which political elites can, at times, exploit to mobilize followers along religious lines for political purposes (Modica, 2015).

3.2.2. Shia Faction Involvement in the Taufan Al-Aqsa Conflict

Long before examining the involvement of Shia factions in Operation Taufan al-Aqsa, it is essential to revisit how Iran succeeded in establishing its geopolitical hegemony in the Middle East. Social, political, and cultural tensions have continually escalated among the three major blocs, Saudi Arabia (Sunni), Iran (Shia), and Israel (Jewish), each of which exerts a significant influence on the Middle Eastern political landscape (Umam, 2022). Setting Israel aside momentarily, the opposing blocs of Saudi Arabia and Iran clashed intensely during the Arab Spring in 2011. Saudi Arabia supported the Syrian people's movement to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad, a Shia leader. Similarly, in Yemen, Sunni-aligned factions opposed the Shia-rooted Houthi movement. Consequently, Iran, which backed both Bashar al-Assad and the Houthis, directly countered the

Saudi-supported opposition (Umam, 2022).

Amid the proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Tehran extended its influence to neighboring countries and militias through a theological framework. Despite its rivalry with Saudi Arabia, Iran established Hezbollah with the aim of creating a new front, as Ayatollah Khomeini sought to initiate a movement against Israel, emphasizing that Israel should be confronted through resistance (Karmon, 2008). Hezbollah in Lebanon aligns itself with Shia ideology as a distinct entity representing Shia interests rather than as part of the broader Lebanese state. Consequently, Hezbollah adheres to the theocratic principle of *wilayah al-faqih* (the guardianship of the supreme jurist), thereby operating under Iran's ideological and political authority (Fawzy, 2015).

The concept of *wilayah al-faqih* is essentially an extension of the Shia doctrine of *imamah*. This concept is closely associated with the ideas of Ayatollah Khomeini, who consistently emphasized that religion and politics are inseparable in all aspects of life. According to Khomeini, efforts to separate religion from politics and to discourage clerical involvement in socio-political affairs constitute propaganda spread by imperialist powers seeking to dominate and exploit society's resources (Anas, 2015). *Wilayah al-faqih* can also be interpreted as an attempt to "fill the political void" during the occultation of the Twelfth Imam (al-Mahdi). During this period of occultation, a qualified *faqih* serves as the Imam's representative, guiding the community in both religious and socio-political matters (Lukpinius, 2016).

Turning to Yemen and the Houthis, there are notable theological and ideological differences between the Zaydi Shia in Yemen and the Twelver Shia in Iran. However, the Zaydi Shia still acknowledge the concept of *wilayah al-faqih*. In the 1990s, the Houthis, led by Badr al-Din al-Houthi, visited Iran as an expression of religious and ideological solidarity. Although both parties have denied the existence of a formal Houthi–Iran alliance, the Houthis have shown genuine support for Iran due to their shared opposition to the United States and Israel. The prevailing narrative that "the Houthis hold significant importance for Iran" has further reinforced their relationship (Karmon, 2017).

The relationship between Iran and the Houthis strengthened considerably during the Arab Spring. Since 2017, Iran has been actively supporting the Houthi movement, which opposes the internationally recognized Yemeni government by providing advanced weaponry and ammunition. According to several Western military analyses, Iran's strategy of supporting the Houthis closely mirrors its approach to backing Hezbollah in Lebanon in their resistance against Israel (Antuli and W. Abbas, 2022).

Iran has also long maintained close ties with its ally in Palestine, Hamas, since the group's founding, as Hamas's primary objective is to advocate for Palestine as an Islamic cause supported by Iran. Iran has organized conferences as demonstrations of solidarity with the *intifada*. Since the first *intifada* in 1987, Iran has shown considerable attention to Hamas, with leaders from both sides consistently expressing mutual praise and support (Alavi, 2021).

Observing Iran's strategy in cultivating relations with Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Hamas reveals that Iran, as an adversary of Israel, provides indirect resistance through these Shia-affiliated proxies. Hezbollah and the Houthis, both aligned with Shia ideology, function as Iran's extended arms, while Hamas, representing Palestine, accepts Iran and its allies' support in its struggle against Israel. Through this network, Iran demonstrates its ability to exert pressure and influence without direct military involvement, employing the concept of *wilayah al-faqih* to expand Shia authority under its leadership. At the same

time, Iran conveys a signal to Saudi Arabia that it maintains substantial regional influence by establishing a network of Shia factions capable of supporting Hamas and the Palestinian cause, a display of strength that Saudi Arabia has yet to counter effectively.

When Operation Taufan al-Aqsa erupted, Iran swiftly expressed its support for Palestine. In the aftermath, attacks launched by Hezbollah and Houthi forces against Israel expanded beyond Tel Aviv. Consequently, Israel's retaliatory strikes extended into Lebanon and Yemen. On October 14, 2024, Hezbollah conducted a drone strike targeting an Israeli military base near Binyamina, south of Haifa, resulting in several Israeli casualties and injuries. Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the operation, stating that it had deployed a "swarm of drones" and launched missiles toward Israel's logistical base in the Golan Heights (Sadat, 2024).

Recently, the Houthis have launched missile attacks targeting Tel Aviv, Israel (Rahayu, 2024). These actions were carried out in response to Israeli strikes on Yemen, which resulted in civilian casualties (Sihombing, 2024). The Houthis have reportedly attacked approximately 193 vessels linked to Israel, the United States, and the United Kingdom in the Red Sea, accusing them of supporting military operations in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. This escalation underscores rising regional tensions, particularly regarding the Yemen conflict and Israel's strategic interests in Tel Aviv. The United States and the United Kingdom have condemned these attacks, emphasizing their significant impact on maritime security in the Red Sea and the broader implications for global trade (Rosdalina, 2024). These developments are closely tied to Houthi support for Hamas in its ongoing conflict with Israel.

Iran, serving as the primary force behind Operation Taufan al-Aqsa, has played a central role in the ongoing escalation across the Middle East. In response to Israeli strikes on Palestine and Lebanon, Iran launched more than 180 ballistic missiles toward Israel. Supported by the United States, Israel successfully intercepted the majority of these missiles. The Iranian attack specifically targeted three military bases in Tel Aviv and reportedly involved the use of hypersonic ballistic missiles. Although Israel claimed to have intercepted most of the missiles, impacts were still reported in parts of central and southern Israel. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) declared that the assault was carried out in retaliation for the assassinations of Hezbollah and Hamas leaders, emphasizing that it represented Iran's firm response to what it described as Israeli aggression (Sorongan, n.d.).

Observing Operation Taufan al-Aqsa, it becomes clear that this conflict extends far beyond a mere exchange of missiles between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The confrontation has evolved into a broader regional proxy war, involving several neighboring states. With Hezbollah and the Houthis aligning themselves with Hamas, and supported by Iran as their principal backer, each party's strategic interests are clearly represented. Hamas receives political and logistical support from Shia-affiliated factions, while Hezbollah and the Houthis benefit from Iran's military assistance, which enables Tehran to further consolidate its influence in the Middle East. Meanwhile, Israel remains far from passive, as it continues to receive consistent backing from the United States. Iranian leaders appear content, at least for the moment, allowing their regional proxies to conduct operations that are both financed and armed by Iran (Anwar and T. Abbas, 2024).

3.2.3. Religious Moderation in Responding to the Involvement of Shia Factions in the Taufan Al-Aqsa Conflict

Religious moderation is positioned as a potential approach to managing sectarian differences. In this context, religious moderation embodies a balanced stance situated between two extremes. Religious extremism, by contrast, goes beyond moderation in both the interpretation and practice of religion (Azis and Anam, 2021).

It is important to recognize that this conflict can be viewed from multiple perspectives, making the Israel-Palestine conflict one of the most complex in modern history. The causes of the conflict involve both theological and ideological dimensions. From Israel's perspective, there exists a belief in a divine promise to the land that includes present-day Palestine. Conversely, Palestinians, as part of the former Ottoman territory, perceive Israel as having taken over their previously peaceful homeland. Differences in ethnicity, along with long-standing tensions between Jewish and Arab communities, also continue to fuel this enduring conflict. Notably, Israel's position as a state surrounded by Arab and Persian nations underscores its dominance over Palestine, a nation with a predominantly Muslim population similar to other Middle Eastern countries, whether Sunni or Shia.

In approaching this issue, it is important to adopt a neutral and objective stance, genuinely seeking the middle ground. This aligns with the concept of religious moderation advocated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019), where *tawassuth* is the primary value to consider. In addressing this conflict, as a Sunni, the author rejects the extremism manifested in Palestine. From a religious and human rights perspective, Israel's actions have violated fundamental rights, particularly the right to life. How, then, should Sunnis respond to Shia groups, which are generally considered outside of *Ahlu Sunnah wal Jamaah*, yet have been the most vocal in defending Palestinian Sunnis? The principle of *tawassuth* (moderation) requires an open heart, acknowledging that, despite ideological and doctrinal differences with Sunnis, Shia actors based on justice and a shared commitment to defending what is right, have stood with Palestine. Therefore, Sunnis should recognize and appreciate the contributions of Shia factions, particularly Iran, in this context.

The extreme measures taken by the Iranian faction and Hamas can be seen as preventive actions or forms of retaliation for attacks launched by Israel since the outbreak of Operation Taufan al-Aqsa. Therefore, one way to find common ground between Sunnis and Shia is through concrete actions in defending Palestine. Regardless of other motivations behind the Shia faction's involvement in Operation Taufan al-Aqsa, Sunnis should continue to support Shia efforts in resisting the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

With the attitude of *tawassuth*, *tasamuh* (tolerance) is manifested through the recognition and respect of differences, whether related to religion, ethnicity, race, social groups, or other aspects of life. Tolerance here implies an open-minded attitude and the willingness to accept ideological differences for the greater good. In defending humanity, all individuals stand beyond group or class interests. However, it must be emphasized that this tolerance constitutes respect for the sacrifices made by the Shia faction in defending against colonial aggression, rather than an endorsement of their ideology. Resistance from the Shia faction, grounded in their teachings, should be acknowledged without prohibiting their actions. Consequently, the Sunni position in accepting Shia tolerance pertains to practical support rather than ideological or legal alignment.

Using the balance of power theory, Ernst Haas explains that interactions occur between external and international powers among competing countries, revealing the pres-

ence of their respective hegemons (Haas, 1953). In this context, a form of bipolarity emerges, characterized by two equally strong forces in the international arena, represented by Israel and Iran.

4. Conclusions

The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is complex, beginning with the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and culminating in the formation of Israel in 1948, which led to the displacement of Palestinians. Various wars and intifadas have further exacerbated the situation. Global support for both sides has complicated peace efforts, although agreements such as the Oslo I and II Accords have been attempted. Since the outbreak of Operation Taufan al-Aqsa, the involvement of Shia factions, particularly Hezbollah and the Houthis, has strengthened Iran's role in the conflict. Iran leverages the concept of *wilayah al-faqih* to establish ideological and military ties with these groups in confronting Israel. The attacks carried out by Hezbollah and the Houthis are supported by Iran, creating a proxy war dynamic in the Middle East. From the perspective of religious moderation, the involvement of Shia factions in Operation Taufan al-Aqsa demonstrates a form of unity in resisting Israeli occupation, despite doctrinal differences between Sunnis and Shia. The principles of *tawassuth* (moderation) and *tasamuh* (tolerance) emphasize recognizing differences while upholding human justice. The actions of Shia factions, such as Iran and Hezbollah, can be seen as efforts to defend Palestine, notwithstanding their geopolitical interests. Sunnis may support these actions as an expression of solidarity without necessarily endorsing the Shia ideological framework in its entirety.

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