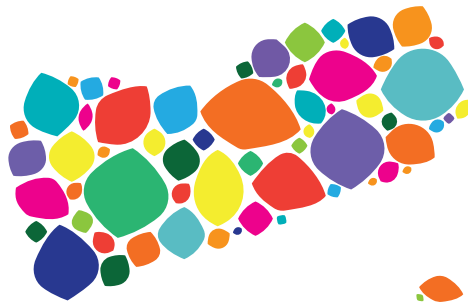




# Al-Aqsa Flood and the Battle of the Promised Conquest: How the Houthis Mobilize Popular Support

By: Nasr Rushdi



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*Cover Photo : Local authority leaders and tribal figures rally at demonstrations organized by the Houthis in Dhamar governorate on March 15, 2024 // Sana'a Center photo*



The Yemen Peace Forum initiative is a track II youth and civil society platform facilitated by the Sana'a Center and funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This interactive initiative seeks to both invest in building and empowering the next generation of Yemeni youth and civil society actors and to engage them in critical national issues. Building on the Sana'a Center's core goal of producing knowledge by local voices, this initiative seeks to develop and invest in young policy analysts and writers across Yemen.

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The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

Since day one, the Houthi group (*Ansar Allah*) has openly supported and praised the Al-Aqsa Flood operation launched by Hamas on October 7. The group has pledged its full support to the Palestinian resistance in its war against the Israeli army, which is waging a military campaign in the Gaza Strip aimed at dismantling Hamas and other Palestinian resistance factions.

The Houthi stance on the Gaza war has reverberated domestically within areas under their control. The group has unequivocally embraced religious rhetoric in support of Palestine and the Palestinian resistance through official media outlets, which are largely influenced by or affiliated with the Houthis. Local radio channels have adjusted their program schedules, airing political songs in support of Palestine and *zawamil* (Yemeni tribal poetry).

The Houthis have utilized all their available resources and media platforms to advocate for the Palestinian cause, and declared that Yemenis should be proud of their role in this war, which involves launching missiles at Israel and targeting Israeli vessels and other ships passing through the Red Sea. Furthermore, they have preached the idea that Yemen can defeat both the United States and Israel, urging participation in military training to prepare for war against these countries.

The message that “God has chosen Yemenis to triumph over America” resonates in mosques in regions under Houthi control. During Friday prayer sermons, Abdelmalek al-Houthi, the leader of the group, is portrayed as a righteous ruler, sent by God to ensure victory for Yemenis. Obedience to him is deemed obligatory, and his leadership is seen as devout and virtuous, advocating for Yemen and the Palestinian people.<sup>[1]</sup>

The demonstrations of support from Houthi-controlled state institutions and civil society groups are numerous. A declaration in support of the Palestinians was made during a conference, “The Scholars of the Ummah and the Responsibility to Advocate for the Vulnerable People of Gaza and Palestine,” hosted by the Yemeni Scholars Association in Sana’a on January 1. It urged public mobilization for battle, praised the Houthis’ Red Sea Operations, and emphasized support for a comprehensive boycott against Israel and its allies. The scholars concluded that it is incumbent upon youth to undergo training in preparation for potential confrontations and response strategies, to be determined by *Al-Wali Al-Alam* (The Foremost Temporal and Spiritual Authority), Abdelmalek al-Houthi.<sup>[2]</sup>

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[1] Friday Prayer Sermon, Al-Khulafa’a Mosque, Sana’a, January 19, 2024.

[2] “The Scholars of the Ummah and the Responsibility to Advocate for Gaza and Palestine [AR],” Yemen TV, January 1, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEI-u3aEZ2o>

# Houthis Launch Series of Solidarity Campaigns

The Houthi campaign “You Are Not Alone” is one of many prominent initiatives in areas under the group’s control, leading boycotts of American and Israeli products and organizing marches<sup>[3]</sup> and rallies every Friday afternoon at Al-Sabaeen Square in Sana’a and other public spaces. These gatherings are convened either by a directive from Abdelmalek or the central committee of the campaign, chaired by cleric Mohammed Muftah. The pivotal aspect of these rallies and marches is the chanting of “We delegate to you,” by participants at the conclusion of each event. This declaration constitutes an oral, public, and collective acclamation of Abdelmalek, legitimizing his authority and Houthi rule.

The “Al-Quds is Closer” campaign, also known as “Our Money Protects Al-Quds”, was launched to raise funds and donations in support of Palestine. The Al-Nasr Brigades, part of the Houthi-run 5th Military Region, donated 132.5 million Yemeni rials to representatives of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine in Sana’a.<sup>[4]</sup>

The Women’s Committee within the Houthi group is actively engaged in gathering donations and coordinating aid to support Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.<sup>[5]</sup> Government institutions and departments have spearheaded campaigns to collect donations and gather assistance for Palestinians. The General Authority for Zakat and its personnel have initiated dedicated donation drives for Gaza, amassing nearly 1.4 billion Yemeni rials.<sup>[6]</sup>

The Ministry of Education too has issued directives to launch a multi-pronged awareness campaign on the Al-Aqsa Flood operation through school activities, morning assemblies, and school radio stations. The campaign adopts religious discourse and encourages support by explaining the Palestinian cause and the current events in the Gaza Strip. It

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[3] “Nusrat Al-Aqsa Committee calls for march under the banner ‘We stand with Palestine... and America is the mother of terrorism’ [AR],” Saba News Agency, January 17, 2024, <https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3297215.htm>

[4] “Al-Nasr Brigades provide financial support to the Palestinian resistance [AR],” National Information Center, October 29, 2023, <https://yemen-nic.info/news/detail.php?ID=76745>

[5] “The Women’s General Cultural Commission to coordinate Al-Aqsa flood convoy in support of the Palestinian people [AR],” Saba News Agency, November 25, 2023, <https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3283480.htm>

[6] “The General Authority of Zakat and its employees launch a campaign to support and donate to the people and mujahideen of Gaza in the amount of 1 billion and 390 million riyals [AR],” General Authority of Zakat, November 20, 2023, <https://www.zakatyemen.net/2023/11/20/هيئة-الزكاة-تدشن-حملة-الدعم-والترعات/>



also broadcasts Palestinian and patriotic songs and symbols in support of Palestine. The adoption of religious and resistance ideologies is increasingly conspicuous in public schools, alongside moral preparation to confront the enemy in war. An aura of power is fostered around the Quranic March and the Leader of the Revolution (Abdelmalek al-Houthi), who is seen as guiding Yemen to victory in its war with the United States and Israel.<sup>[7]</sup>

This instructional ethos is also prevalent at Sana'a University, where the "Al-Aqsa Flood Open Forum"<sup>[8]</sup> began with the goal of highlighting the daily crimes committed by the Israeli army against civilians in Gaza, including children and women, and highlighting the sacrifices and operations of the Palestinian resistance. The forum is open to all researchers and students to discuss the dimensions of the Palestinian cause. Seminars and workshops on the Al-Aqsa Flood operation are held in every department of Sana'a University, and there have been calls to devote the first ten minutes of each lecture to discussing it and the war on Gaza.

In furtherance of the weekly marches and solidarity vigils held by university students and academic staff in support of Gaza, it was announced that ten points would be added to each student's grades, and an hour of bonus pay provided for each faculty member who participates in such events.<sup>[9]</sup> Dr. Al-Qasim Abbas, Dean of Sana'a University, stated: "Sana'a University is an integral part of the Al-Aqsa Flood campaign and continues open and public mobilization. We call on those who have not yet joined to register at the university's office for public mobilization, participate in training and rehabilitation courses, and increase readiness to confront the Zionist entity and the Americans at any time."<sup>[10]</sup>

On December 5, 2023, Mahdi al-Mashat, the Chairman of the Supreme Political Council, signed Law No. 4 of 2023, prohibiting and criminalizing the recognition of Israel or normalizing relations with it. Al-Mashat stressed that "the law will allow Yemen to confront the Zionist entity with greater determination and in a more formalized manner."<sup>[11]</sup>

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[7] Interview with a school social worker in Sana'a, January 17, 2024.

[8] "Launch of the Al-Aqsa Flood Open Forum at Sana'a University" [AR], Saba News Agency; November 7, 2023, <https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3278679.htm>

[9] A WhatsApp message was sent on January 8, 2024 addressed to faculty members of Sana'a University. Among the recommendations of the faculty board meeting that were put forward were: Urging all faculty members to attend the pro-Gaza demonstration on Wednesday of each week; add an hour's bonus for each faculty member who attends the event, in line with the instructions of the University's Deanship; add ten points to the grades of each student who participates in this event (in individual subjects); dedicated a space for each faculty, where all its members can gather during the pro-Al-Aqsa event.

[10] "A student march at Sana'a University in solidarity with Gaza [AR]," Al-Masira TV, January 17, 2024, <https://www.masirahtv.net/post/246297/مسيرة-طلابية-في-جامعة-صنعاء-تضامناً-مع-غزة>

[11] "President Al-Mashat signs a law prohibiting and criminalizing recognition of the Zionist enemy entity or normalizing relations with it [AR]," National Information Center, December 5, 2023, <https://yemen-nic.info/news/detail.php?ID=76934>

## Military Mobilization on the Ground

Houthi Popular Mobilization Forces have welcomed recruits to join Al-Aqsa Flood training sessions, a series of military drills financed through contributions and donations. These sessions, spanning from ten to thirteen days, are conducted in collaboration with neighborhood chiefs (aqel) and tribal sheikhs across various regions, as well as at student gatherings at both public and private universities. The course covers the handles of firearms, including machine guns and pistols, as well as rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars. The theoretical component of the course is conducted at local mosques and community prayer centers in neighborhoods.<sup>[12]</sup>

Participants subsequently transition to three days of practical exercises and intensive field drills conducted in open fields and vacant areas. Drills have been held in tribal areas such as Ozlat al-Hadb and Rub' Bani Qays in Bani Matar district, in Sana'a governorate.<sup>[13]</sup>

In various governorates and cities under Houthi control, the first batch of participants in these courses (about 16,000 fighters)<sup>[14]</sup> graduated in an official ceremony that was held in Al-Sabeen Square in Sana'a in early December. Some 20,000 fighters graduated in the city of Hajjah<sup>[15]</sup> in another official ceremony that took place in late December.<sup>[16]</sup>

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[12] A WhatsApp message addressed to residents of a neighborhood:

*"(Important Announcement):*

*A workshop entitled "The Al-Aqsa Flood" will be organized Below are the details and objectives of the workshop:*

*First: The duration of the workshop is ten days, starting tomorrow, [redacted date] ... It will take place at [redacted] Mosque ... .*

*Second: The objective of the workshop is to train participants on the use of all types of weapons, from Kalashnikovs to machine guns of all kinds.*

*The training will entail theoretical knowledge plus practical application. Third: The workshop is open to all young people as well as the elderly.*

*Anyone interested in benefiting from this course should attend and register. I hope everyone can attend for personal benefit, first and foremost. It is good that a person is familiar with the military aspects.*

*Certificates of participation in the workshop will be given to those who attend and benefit. It is only two hours a day and spans over a period of ten days only.*

*This is an opportunity that we must all seize and take advantage of.*

*We ask everyone to participate and interact in this workshop, given its great benefit at all levels ...*

*Best regards,*

*Your brother, the neighborhood Aqel"*

[13] "A military exercise in Bani Matar on the occasion of the graduation of the second batch of Al-Aqsa flood training courses [AR]," Al-Masirah TV, January 20, 2024, [https://www.masirahtv.net/post/246444/من-الدفعة-الثانية-من-مناورة-في-بي-مطر-بمناسبة-تخريج-الدفعة-الثانية-من](https://www.masirahtv.net/post/246444/من-الدفعة-الثانية-من-مناورة-في-بي-مطر-بمناسبة-تخريج-الدفعة-الثانية-من-مناورة-في-بي-مطر-بمناسبة-تخريج-الدفعة-الثانية-من)

[14] "A parade of the first batch of graduates from Al-Aqsa flood training courses in Al-Sabeen Square [AR]," Saba News Agency, December 2, 2023, [https://www.saba.ye/ar/news/3285389.htm?file\\_id=1](https://www.saba.ye/ar/news/3285389.htm?file_id=1)

[15] "Hajjah: More than 20,000 jihadists graduate from the first batch of the Al-Aqsa flood training courses [AR]," Saba News Agency, December 24, 2023, <https://www.saba.ye/ar/gallery/21713.htm>

[16] Kameel Abu Munassar, deputy commander in charge of the Public Mobilization, interview with Al-Mayadeen TV, Sana'a, December 21, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tTIIY6Zp6A>

Houthi military forces have carried out several live-fire military exercises referencing Gaza war. One maneuver dubbed “Al-Aqsa Flood”<sup>[17]</sup> was conducted by Houthi-affiliated Support and Backup Battalions, a reserve force established by the group. An exercise entitled “You Are Not Alone,”<sup>[18]</sup> was conducted by the First Presidential Guard Brigade in Al-Jawf Governorate in late December and another called “We Are Ready for the Battle of the Promised Conquest and Holy Jihad”<sup>[19]</sup> took place in Al-Baqa’ in Sa’ada governorate on January 13, the day after airstrikes by American and British warplanes began targeting military installations with the aim of diminishing the Houthis’ ability to disrupt international marine traffic in the Red Sea.

Regiments of fighters who graduated from different units underwent training that bore the name “Al-Aqsa Flood,” including a regiment of fighters from the Al-Badr Brigade (led by the Military Police)<sup>[20]</sup> in Sa’ada Governorate, and a regiment of fighters from the Al-Quds Brigade (Special Forces) of the Central Military Region in Sana’a.<sup>[21]</sup> The reserve forces of the border guards performed close-order drills with the participation of 10,000 soldiers.<sup>[22]</sup> Another group, named Rami RPG, graduated from the Central Military Region in Sana’a, after training to use the Al-Yassin 105 anti-tank shell employed by the Palestinian resistance factions against Israeli armored vehicles and tanks.<sup>[23]</sup>

In its public rhetoric, the Houthi group underscores the vital role of training, military exercises, and donation initiatives as key elements of mobilization and building military capacity. The group asserts that these efforts comprise a wave of support for Al-Aqsa and Palestine and an important resource in the event of direct confrontation with US or Israeli forces.

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[17] “Support and Backup Battalions Carry Out Military Exercise dubbed ‘Al-Aqsa Flood’ [AR],” Saba News Agency, October 30, 2023, <https://www.saba.ye/ar/video461.htm>

[18] “A new military exercise themed ‘You Are Not Alone’ [AR],” Yemen TV, December 24, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-AurSXx4G4>

[19] “A maneuver titled ‘We Are Ready for the Battle of the Promised Conquest and Holy Jihad’ takes place in Al-Baqa [AR],” *Ansar Allah*, January 13, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240115064909/https://www.ansarollah.com/archives/656729>

[20] “Military exercise by members of Al-Badr Brigade (led by the Military Police) in Saada [AR],” Saba News Agency, November 3, 2023, <https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3277682.htm>

[21] “A military batch – special forces – graduates from Al-Quds Brigade in the Central Military Region [AR],” Saba News Agency, November 7, 2023, <https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3278721.htm>

[22] “A close-order drill by the reserve forces of the border guards to express readiness to confront the Zionist entity [AR],” Saba News Agency, November 16, 2023, <https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3281172.htm>

[23] “The Central Military Region celebrates the graduation of a batch of fighters from ‘The Battle of the Promised Conquest and the Holy Jihad’ course [AR,]” Al-Thawra newspaper, January 27, 2024, <https://althawrah.ye/archives/858149>

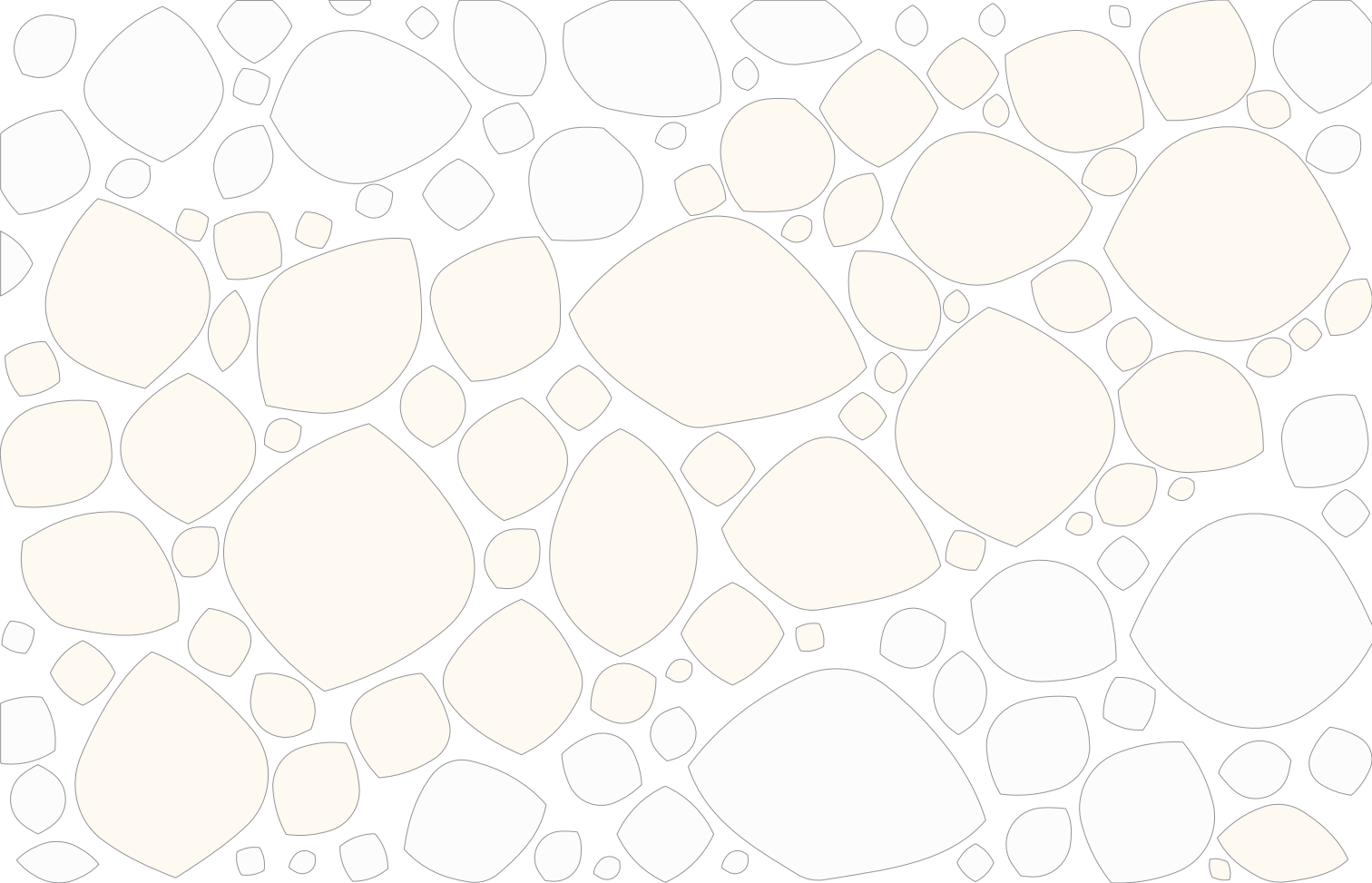


Within the areas under its rule, the Houthi group has bolstered its political clout by portraying itself as a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause and a potent challenger against the United States and Israel, particularly in light of the perceived shortcomings in the responses of the Arab and Islamic world. Leveraging its longstanding political rhetoric, the group has prioritized its commitment to these ideals, temporarily deferring discussions on other contentious issues— both political and economic—until the end of the conflict in Gaza and the cessation of the US and British strikes.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Nasr Rushdi** is a Yemeni researcher writing under a pseudonym.

This commentary was produced as part of the Yemen Peace Forum, a Sana'a Center initiative that seeks to empower the next generation of Yemeni youth and civil society activists to engage in critical national issues.



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