**Operation Wall Guard**

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Israel launched an offensive operation, code named Wall Guard on May 10 in Gaza against Hamas. According to international media reports, Israel has sent 80 jets to bomb Gaza, and dispatched infantry and armour to reinforce the tanks already gathered on the border. As of 12 May, 33 Palestinian casualties have been reported while the count of wounded civilians is multiple times higher than the casualties.

The initial response of Hamas’ Qassem Brigade is highly surprising for many defence analysts of the region. It has fired over 130 rockets to Tel Aviv and promised severe retaliation against Israeli air and ground forces in the coming days. According to initial reports, the rocket attacks have killed two women including an Indian female worker in Israel.

The recent Israeli offensive operation will likely bring in severe strategic and political consequences. For instance, in Israel-Palestine conflicts, uncontrolled escalation by Israel and joining of more non-state and state actors has always worsened the humanitarian crisis and diminished peace initiatives. Hezbollah can play a vital role in this Operation Wall Guard. So far, Hezbollah has not joined Hamas in retaliation for the Israeli military operation. However, the fear is that Hezbollah can join Hamas’ retaliation operations at any stage instigated by Iran. Hezbollah has been largely silent against Israel after the 34-day war of 2006. Since then, it has developed extraordinary capability in its missile programme and reportedly has over 130,000 missiles and remains a potential security threat to Israel. After the acquisition of guided missiles capability and improved capacity of ground intelligence, Hezbollah could pose a serious challenge as compared to 2006 by imposing a two-front war on Israel.

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The operation has coincided with the recent general elections of Israel held in March 2021. Despite a robust media campaign and signing a series of peace accords with Arab states, Netanyahu has fallen short of majority. The election results are not only vital for Netanyahu’s political career but being in power could distance him from imprisonment due to alleged charges of corruption and misuse of power. Netanyahu will use the new escalation to stay in power, whether by denying the opposition the chance to form a coalition or by insisting on another national emergency government.

The role of Iran in this escalation will likely determine the escalation of conflict in near future. Israel has been engaged in target killing operations of high-profile Iranian officials since January 2020. Two major assassinations including General Soleimani’s killing in January 2020 and Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in November 2020 along with an alarming rise of cyber-attacks on Iran’s nuclear installations have enraged Iran with little choice of direct confrontation with Israel. However, by launching Operation Wall Guard, Netanyahu has provided Iran a favourable environment to use its proxies and avenge Israeli attacks on Iran’s interests since January 2020.

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Setting aside strategic and political motivations and consequences, Operation Wall Guard is surely bringing humanitarian calamity for Palestinian masses. For a common Palestinian, Operation Wall Guard means killings of non-combatant innocent civilians, grieving on destroyed homes and shops, fear of losing loved ones forever, hunger, inflation and unemployment. The initial response of the United Nations, European Union, Gulf countries, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab League suggests that the world once again has adopted the lip service approach. Mere statements will less likely compel Israel to stop operation in Gaza. Practical measures such as embargoes, sanctions and diplomatic pressures will surely lead to quick demise of Operation Wall Guard.

In the presence of lethal Israeli weapons, more actors waiting to join the conflict and mere lip service to the world community, the future of Palestinians and hope for peace in Gaza seems bleak.