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The Days of the
Epic of the Sacred
Defense

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Objection: Al-Azhar; An Unfinished Narrative, a Hasty Judgment

Question:

Has Al-Azhar's judgment against Iran been formed on the basis of an incomplete narrative, and does this not call its religious authority into question?



Al-Azhar and the Heavy Responsibility of Speaking in the Name of Religion

Al-Azhar's recent statement on regional developments and Iran's actions has once again revived an important debate in the intellectual space of the Islamic world: the relationship between religious authority and political positions. As one of the oldest and most influential scholarly centers in the Islamic world, Al-Azhar has always held a place beyond national borders, and its words are regarded in many Islamic societies as a kind of religious judgment. For this reason, it is expected that this institution, when confronting the political crises of the region, should speak with scholarly precision, fairness in judgment, and avoidance of hasty partisanship. The recent statement, however, has raised questions and criticisms among observers and analysts.

1. In this statement, the main focus has been placed on condemning Iran, while, by contrast, no reference has been made to some of the important and determining factors in the formation of regional tensions.

The reality is that the crises of the Middle East have not taken shape in a vacuum. The extensive military presence of the United States in the Persian Gulf, political and military support for the Israeli regime, and the continuation of the Palestinian issue are among the main elements in the region's security equations. In addition, in the narrative presented of recent developments, no reference has been made to events such as the martyrdom of the great leader of the Shia world and a number of Iranian commanders and citizens in operations attributed to the United States and the Zionist regime. Ignoring such contexts has caused some analysts to view the image presented in this statement as an incomplete image of the complex reality of regional developments.

2. Another noteworthy point is the way the statement cites religious texts. In this statement, Quranic verses and religious concepts are cited to strengthen the condemnation of Iran, while this condemnation has been formed on the basis of a claim that does not clearly correspond with field reports.

The text of the statement implies that Iran's actions have harmed Arab societies or caused the killing of Muslims, whereas existing reports show that Iran's attacks targeted American military bases and facilities, not public places or the infrastructure of Arab countries, and no documented report has been published of Muslim citizens being killed in these attacks. Under such circumstances, citing Quranic verses to legitimize a political condemnation formed on the basis of a questionable accusation is regarded by many observers as a wrongful appropriation of the Book and the Sunnah in the service of a political judgment; something that does not appear compatible with the scholarly tradition and jurisprudential caution expected from an institution such as Al-Azhar.

3. Beyond the content of this statement, the more important issue is the consequences of such positions for the solidarity of the Islamic world. When a major religious institution takes the side of a particular narrative in regional political disputes, its words can be regarded as a

religious judgment, and this can unintentionally add to existing political rifts. The Islamic world today faces many shared challenges, and many expect religious reference institutions to play a role in strengthening convergence and Islamic unity, rather than reflecting political disagreements.

4. Al-Azhar's historical credibility has also depended to a large extent on precisely this role. Public trust in this institution is the result of centuries of scholarly and educational activity, and preserving this capital requires religious authority to remain comprehensive, precise, and independent in its judgments. Defending the oppressed, condemning oppression without political considerations, and refraining from using religious texts in political rivalries are among the expectations that have always been raised with regard to such an institution. The widespread reactions to the recent statement also show that sensitivity to preserving the credibility of religious authority in the Islamic world remains very high.