

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014 – 2015



Edited By

Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh



Al-Zaytouna Centre For Studies & Consultations

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014 – 2015



**Al-Zaytouna Centre
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The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	5
List of Tables	11
List of Abbreviations	15
List of Contributors	17
Introduction	25
 Chapter One: The Internal Palestinian Scene	
Introduction	29
First: The Governments of Ramallah and GS	29
Second: The National Consensus Government:	33
1. The Relationship with GS	33
2. The Cabinet Reshuffle	37
3. Political Issues	38
4. The Financial and Economic Situation	38
5. The Security Situation	39
Third: National Reconciliation and Putting the Palestinian House in Order	40
Fourth: Palestinian Factional Relations	47
Fifth: Israeli-Palestinian Security Coordination and its Repercussions on the Internal Palestinian Situation	54
Sixth: The Repercussions of the Israeli Aggression on GS in the Summer of 2014 on the Internal Palestinian Situation	59
Conclusion	64
 Chapter Two: The Israeli-Palestinian Scene	
Introduction	75
First: The Internal Israeli Political Scene:	75
1. The Fall of the Government and the Formation of Another	75
2. Racist Laws	83
3. Corruption Cases	85
4. Prosecutions and Political Strictures	87

5. Election of a New Israeli President	89
6. The Repercussions of the Israeli Aggression on GS	89
Second: The Most Prominent Demographic, Economic and	
Military Indicators:	90
1. Demographic Indicators	90
2. Economic Indicators	95
3. Military Indicators	104
Third: Aggression and Resistance:	116
1. The Killed and Wounded	116
2. The Prisoners and Detainees	118
3. Israeli Blockade on the Palestinian People	122
4. Aggression on GS 2014	123
5. The Jerusalem <i>Intifadah</i> 2015	125
Fourth: The Israeli Position Towards the Domestic Palestinian Situation	126
Fifth: The Peace Process	130
Conclusion	138

Chapter Three: The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

Introduction	153
First: Stances of the League of Arab States:	154
1. Impact of Arab World Transformations on the Palestinian Issue	154
2. The Stance Regarding the Palestinian Internal Conflict	155
3. The Position Towards the Peace Process	155
Second: Stances and Roles of Some Key Countries:	156
1. Egypt	156
2. Jordan	168
3. Syria	174
4. Lebanon	179
5. KSA and the Gulf Countries	183
6. Other Arab Countries	185
Third: Developments of Normalization	186
Fourth: Arab Public's Position and its Directions	190
Conclusion	192

Chapter Four: The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

Introduction201
First: Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)201
Second: Turkey203
Third: Iran214
Fourth: Malaysia223
Fifth: Pakistan224
Sixth: Trade Exchange226
Conclusion228

Chapter Five: The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

Introduction237
First: The Quartet240
Second: The United Nations (UN):243
 1. The General Assembly244
 2. Security Council245
 3. ECOSOC245
 4. ICC246
 5. UN Human Rights Council (HRC)248
Third: Major International Powers:249
 1. The United States of America (US)249
 2. The European Union (EU)256
 3. BRICS Countries265
Fourth: International Public Opinion273
Fifth: Prospects for 2016:276
 1. The US Presidential Elections276
 2. Arab Internal Developments Continue to Dominate International
 Agenda, Overshadowing the Palestinian Issue277
 3. The Implications of the Continuation of *Intifadah*277
 4. Expanding the Quartet278
 5. Escalation of the Bid to Activate the Work of the ICC278
 6. The Continuation of the PA’s and UNRWA’s Financial Problems278

Chapter Six: The Land and the Holy Sites

Introduction	289
First: Islamic and Christian Holy Sites:	289
1. <i>Al-Aqsa</i> Mosque	289
2. Jerusalem’s Islamic Holy Sites	307
3. Jerusalem’s Christian Holy Sites	308
4. Islamic and Christian Holy Sites in the Rest of Palestine	312
Second: Jerusalem’s Population	312
Third: Judaization and Settlement in Jerusalem:	316
1. Developments in the Building on the Separation Wall	
Around Jerusalem	316
2. Settlement Consolidation	316
3. Infrastructure that Reinforces the Jewish Presence	320
Fourth: Israeli Settlement Expansion in WB	321
Fifth: Israel’s Demolition of Palestinian Homes	325
Sixth: The Separation Wall: Development of its Building and	
its Impact on the Palestinian Situation	327
Seventh: Bypass Roads	329
Eighth: Israeli Attacks on Palestinian Agriculture and Water Resources	331
Ninth: Military Checkpoints in WB	334
Conclusion	335

Chapter Seven: Demographic, Economic and Educational Indicators

Introduction	345
First: Demographic Indicators:	345
1. The Palestinian Population Worldwide	345
2. The Demographic Characteristics of Palestinians	347
3. The Palestinian Refugees	355
4. Demographic Growth Trends	359
5. Palestinians Outside Palestine and the Right of Return	360

Second: Economic Indicators in the WB and GS:	361
1. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in PA Territories (WB and GS)	362
2. GDP per Capita in PA Territories	366
3. General Government Debt	369
4. The PA's General Budget	371
5. General Budget of the GS Dismissed Government	373
6. Work and Unemployment	374
7. Development of Industrial Activity	377
8. Development of Agricultural Activity	379
9. Trade	381
10. PA's External Financing	385
11. Economic Outlook for the PA Performance	388
Third: Educational Indicators in the WB and GS:	389
1. The General Educational and Cultural Situation	389
2. Basic and Secondary Education	390
3. University Education	394
4. University and Community Colleges	397
Conclusion	398

List of Tables

Table 1/2: The Main Party Groups on the Eve of the 20th Knesset Elections	78
Table 2/2: Comparing the Results of the 20th and 19th Knesset Elections.....	79
Table 3/2: Population of Israel 2009–2015.....	91
Table 4/2: Number of Jewish Immigrants to Israel 1990–2015.....	92
Table 5/2: World Jewish Population by Country 2013.....	93
Table 6/2: Israeli GDP 2009–2015.....	95
Table 7/2: Israeli GDP per Capita 2009–2015	96
Table 8/2: Budget Performance of Israeli Government Receipts and Payments 2013–2014.....	98
Table 9/2: Total Israeli Exports and Imports 2012–2015	99
Table 10/2: Volume of Israeli Trade, Exports and Imports to/ from Selected Countries, 2014–2015	101
Table 11/2: Israeli Exports by Commodity Group 2013–2015	103
Table 12/2: Israeli Imports by Commodity Group 2013–2015	103
Table 13/2: US Bilateral Aid to Israel 1949–2015	104
Table 14/2: Ordinary Budget Performance of Ministry of Defense Payments 2007–2014	115
Table 15/2: The Killed and Wounded Among Palestinians and Israelis in the WB and the GS 2011–2015	117
Table 16/2: Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Prisons 2011–2015.....	119
Table 17/2: Administrative Detainees in Israeli Prisons at the End of Each Year 2010–2015	122
Table 1/3: Volume of Trade Between Israel and Some Arab Countries 2012–2015	188

Table 2/3: Israeli Exports and Imports to/ from Some Arab Countries 2012–2015	189
Table 1/4: Volume of Trade Between Turkey and Israel According to Turkish and Israeli Statistics 2012–2015	212
Table 2/4: Israeli Exports and Imports to/ from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2012–2015	226
Table 1/5: Official Visits by US Secretary of State 2014–2015	250
Table 2/5: Views of Israel’s Influence by Country 2013–2014	274
Table 1/6: Developments in the Representation of the “Temple” Associations in the Israeli Knesset	290
Table 2/6: The Most Prominent “Temple” Associations	293
Table 3/6: Violations of Holy Sites in Historic Palestine for 2014.....	312
Table 4/6: Home Demolition Operations in Jerusalem During the Period 2000–2015.....	313
Table 5/6: Total Number of Approved Residential Units in the Settlements of Jerusalem 2014–2015	317
Table 6/6: Residential Units Approved or Proposed for Construction in the Settlements of Jerusalem 2014–2015	318
Table 7/6: Residential Units in Israeli Settlements in WB 2014.....	323
Table 8/6: Distribution of Residential Units in WB Settlements Including Jerusalem, 2015	324
Table 9/6: Distribution of Demolition Operations and Orders in WB Governorates	326
Table 10/6: Plan Numbers of Deposited Plans and the Targeted Locations.....	331
Table 1/7: Palestinian Population Worldwide Estimate According to Place of Residence at the End of 2014 and 2015	346
Table 2/7: Palestinian Total and Refugee Population in the WB and GS 2014–2015.....	347

Table 3/7: Estimated Population Count by Governorate, 2007 and 2015	350
Table 4/7: UNRWA's Figures of RPS Abroad March 2016	353
Table 5/7: Selected Demographic Indicators of Palestinians by Residence	355
Table 6/7: Palestinian Refugees Worldwide; Population Estimates in 2014	356
Table 7/7: UNRWA-RPs According to Their Area of Operation as of 1/1/2015	357
Table 8/7: Estimated Population Count of Palestinians and Jews in Historic Palestine 2015–2020	359
Table 9/7: GDP in PA Territories 2010–2015	362
Table 10/7: GDP in the WB and GS 2010–2015	364
Table 11/7: GDP Growth in the WB and GS 2010–2015	365
Table 12/7: GDP in PA Territories and Israel 2010–2015	365
Table 13/7: GDP per Capita in PA Territories 2010–2015	367
Table 14/7: GDP per Capita in the WB and GS 2010–2015	368
Table 15/7: GDP per Capita in PA Territories and Israel 2010–2015	369
Table 16/7: Public Debt in PA Territories 2010–2015	370
Table 17/7: Fiscal Operations of the PA (Cash Basis) 2010–2016	371
Table 18/7: Revenues and Public Expenditures of GS 2008–2015	374
Table 19/7: Distribution of Palestinians Aged 15 Years and Above in the WB and GS by Labor Force and Unemployment 2008–2015	375
Table 20/7: Industrial GDP in PA Territories 2010–2015	377
Table 21/7: Agricultural GDP in PA Territories 2010–2015	380
Table 22/7: Commodity Trade Balance in PA Territories 2010–2015	382
Table 23/7: Volume of Palestinian Trade, Exports and Imports in Goods in PA Territories to/ from Selected Countries 2013–2014	383
Table 24/7: PA External Budgetary Support and Development Financing 2010–2016	385
Table 25/7: Sources of External Financing for the PA 2012–2015	387

Table 26/7: Basic and Secondary Schools in the WB and GS by
Supervising Authority 2010/2011–2014/2015391

Table 27/7: Number of Schools, Students, Teachers and Sections
in PA Territories by Sex 2013/2014–2014/2015392

Table 28/7: Number of Schools, Students, Teachers and Sections in
Government Schools in PA Territories 2010/2011–2014/2015394

Table 29/7: Number of Students in Traditional Universities in
PA Territories by Sex 2013/2014–2014/2015395

Table 30/7: Number of Students Seeking Open Education in
PA Territories by Sex 2013/2014–2014/2015397

Table 31/7: Number of Students in University and Community Colleges
in PA Territories by Sex 2013/2014–2014/2015398

List of Abbreviations

AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
AKP	<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i> (Justice and Development Party)
ARIJ	The Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem
BDS	The international Boycott, Divestment and Sanction Campaign
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CBR	Crude Birth Rate
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CDR	Crude Death Rate
CEIRPP	Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EU	European Union
GC	General Command
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GS	Gaza Strip
HRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISA	Israel Security Agency (<i>Shabak</i>)
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IUMS	International Union for Muslim Scholars
KNC	Kurdish National Council
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LAS	League of Arab States
MB	Muslim Brothers
MK	Member of Knesset
MP	Member of Parliament
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA-oPt	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-occupied Palestinian territory
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PA	Palestinian Authority
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PCC	Palestine Central Council
PEGASE	Palestino-Européen de Gestion et d' Aide Socio-Economique
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP-GC	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command
PIJ	Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PMA	Palestine Monetary Authority
PNC	Palestinian National Council
PPP	Palestinian People's Party
PRC	Palestinian Return Centre
RC	Refugee Camp
RP	Registered Person
RR	Registered Refugee
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UFG	Union Fenosa Gas
UK	United Kingdom
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
US	United States of America
VAT	Value-Added Tax
WB	West Bank
WCO	World Customs Organization

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Editorial team at al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations.

Introduction

The years 2014–2015 saw no improvement in the conditions of the Palestinian issue. The Palestinian political impasse and Israeli extremism continued, the Arab environment remained overwhelmed with internal conflicts, and for the international community the Palestinian issue was not a priority.

Despite signing al-Shati' Agreement on 23/4/2014, and forming a National Consensus Government of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian political reconciliation program faced many obstacles, including the government refusing to pay the salaries of the employees of the previous Haniyyah's government. However, there were additional indirect reasons, such as the deep mistrust between Fatah and Hamas; the fundamental conflict between the resistance project and the peace process project; and the influence of international, Arab and Israeli players on any actual implementation of reconciliation, especially with their animosity towards resistance factions and "political Islam" movements.

During the fifty-day Israeli war on Gaza Strip in 2014, the Arab, Muslim and international countries did not do much to face the aggression, rebuild the Strip and lift the siege. As a matter of fact, the Egyptian government implemented unprecedented closure procedures at the border. The Jerusalem *Intifadah* launched in fall 2015, and ushered in an impressive youth resistance that suffered not only brutal Israeli repression but also that of the PA security forces in Ramallah, and was ignored by the Arab and international countries.

Unstable conditions, internal conflict, and the drainage of energies and potential in the surrounding area of Palestine and the Arab region, had a negative impact on the Palestinian issue. The danger of division on sectarian and racial bases is very real, whereas the revival and unifying trends are still seeking to regain their positions. Despite the fact that the Palestinian flag was hoisted at the United Nations, the status of the Palestinian issue declined, losing its position on the top agenda of international politics.

This is the ninth edition of *The Palestinian Strategic Report* series, which currently holds a distinguished status among Palestinian studies, and has become an indispensable book for researchers and specialists, as well as for all those that

have an interest in this field. It is not only full of extensive, precise and documented information, it also seeks to present scientific material in an objective and analytical framework, controlled by the standards and methodology of scientific research, while seeking to foresee future developments. *The Palestinian Strategic Report* is marked by its comprehensiveness, as it covers the internal Palestinian situation, the Israeli scene, the tracks of resistance and the peace process, and the Arab, Islamic and international dimensions of the Palestinian issue. It gives ample space for Palestinian land and holy sites, and to the Palestinian demographic, economic, and educational situation.

Sincere thanks are due to our specialist colleagues, to the experts who participated in the writing of this Report, and to the advisers who reviewed its texts. Also many thanks are due to our al-Zaytouna staff; assistants and archive staff, who were instrumental in providing the academic material, reviewing and scrutinizing the texts, and producing the Report in its proper format.

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The Editor,

Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

Chapter One

The Internal Palestinian Scene

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Introduction

The crises and divisions in the internal Palestinian scene continued during 2014 and 2015. Despite the brutal Israeli assault on Gaza Strip (GS) in the summer of 2014, and the huge destruction and devastation it wrought, and despite the progress achieved by internal reconciliation efforts in Palestine with the formation of the National Consensus Government in early June 2014, the political, geographic, and administrative division continued to dominate the landscape without any real change.

The government did not extend its control over GS, or the government institutions and administrative structures there. Border crossings and civil servants in GS became the main points of contention in the ongoing crisis between Hamas and Fatah and the national accord government on the other. Meanwhile, the suffering of the GS people continued, as a result of the ongoing blockade and the failure of the new government to deliver services.

In 2014 and 2015, security coordination between security forces in Ramallah and their Israeli counterparts continued, despite the impasse in the negotiations and the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* (uprising), and despite decisions issued by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Central Council (PCC) calling for an end to security coordination with Israel. Frustration among Palestinians grew, meanwhile, as the reconstruction of GS stalled, because donor countries failed to fulfil their financial pledges.

First: The Governments of Ramallah and GS

The Palestinian Authority (PA) government in Ramallah, headed by Rami Hamdallah, continued with its functions in the first five months of 2014. At the political level, the government adhered to the framework set by Hamdallah when he was sworn in; at the time, he said his government was the government of President ‘Abbas and was committed to the PLO program.¹

Despite Palestinian calls for neutrality over the incidents in Egypt following the military coup of 3/7/2013, the Palestinian Minister of Labor Ahmad Majdalani soon proclaimed that toppling “political Islam” was a help to the Palestinian issue.² Although his views did not necessarily reflect those of the government, the statement exacerbated the polarization and sent a negative message to Palestinian Islamist movements led by Hamas and Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ).

Hamdallah, upon taking his constitutional oath before President Mahmud ‘Abbas on 6/6/2013, said the government would pay close attention to resisting Israeli settlement activity and supporting Palestinian farmers on their lands.³ Hamdallah said the main obstacle to economic growth was the occupation, which he said must end.⁴ However, his government’s actions were limited to such statements regarding resisting settlements, defending Jerusalem, and defending *al-Aqsa* Mosque against Judaization and raids by settlers. The Palestinian government praised the residents of the Qasra village in the northern West Bank (WB), who detained 10 settler attackers in January 2014 before they were handed over to the Israeli army, saying this was an act of self-defense.⁵ However, an anti-settler government and community safety network that Hamdallah promised to establish on 17/1/2014 in order to defend Palestinian villages, did not materialize.⁶

Regarding the issue of Palestinian prisoners and liberated prisoners, the government reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the amended Prisoners and Liberated Prisoners Law of 2014, and to do everything required to ensure a decent life for them.⁷ However, the commission following up prisoners and detainees’ emanating from the factional coordination committee in Nablus said that there was deliberate prevarication by the government in implementing this commitment.⁸

The Hamdallah government fulfilled a part of its commitments vis-à-vis GS, resuming the payment of salaries to civil servants that the Ramallah government recognizes (most of whom had previously been absconders at the request of Ramallah). This accounted for nearly 69% of expenditures on GS. The government also paid the bills for a number of services.⁹ It dispatched a convoy carrying medicines, laboratory items, and medical equipment and supplies to GS. Hamdallah, addressing the people of GS, said: “You are not alone in facing the blockade and its repercussions. We are with you and our whole people are behind you.”¹⁰

Among the challenges faced by the Hamdallah government was corruption in government institutions. A 2014 report on corruption issued by Transparency Palestine, underscored the lack of transparency in the PA revenues, the collection of which is overseen by Israel. Israel is accused of protecting corrupt individuals. Furthermore, the high cost of healthcare was squandering the health budget. Another challenge was the continued abuse of using government vehicles and public funds, in light of weak oversight and accountability in the General Directorate of Permits, all as the wages given to officials in non-ministerial official institutions and bodies continued to rise.¹¹

Despite al-Shati' Agreement signed on 23/4/2014, in which Hamas and Fatah agreed to form a National Consensus Government replacing the two governments of Ramallah and GS, in May 2014 the government stopped the distribution of the *Felesteen* daily newspaper affiliated to Hamas. This was despite an agreement had been reached between Fatah and Hamas to allow newspapers from GS and the WB to be distributed in both regions.¹²

The Ramallah government resigned in April 2014 following the al-Shati' Agreement, but continued to serve until 2/6/2014, when the National Consensus Government was sworn in before the PA President Mahmud 'Abbas.

For its part, the caretaker government in GS headed by Isma'il Haniyyah of Hamas continued serving until such time as the National Consensus Government took over, too. During that period, the Haniyyah government faced immense challenges on two levels: the crippling blockade on GS, which severely exacerbated the suffering of its residents; and the continuation of political and security tensions between the Haniyyah government and the Egyptian authorities.

The government took over after Isma'il Haniyyah declared the beginning of Palestinian reconciliation, and announced a series of decisions to push reconciliation forward, which was welcomed by President 'Abbas and Fatah.¹³ Haniyyah announced 120 cadres of Fatah would be returning to GS as part of a goodwill gesture towards the implementation of reconciliation, stressing that the government and Hamas had provided positive initiatives to push forward the reconciliation.¹⁴ Haniyyah took further steps towards reconciliation on 23/3/2014 when he presented a road map for ending the division on the basis of partnership and armed resistance.¹⁵

Following the signing of the al-Shati' Agreement on 23/4/2014, a wave of optimism prevailed in the ranks of Haniyyah's government regarding the formation of a consensus government capable of ending the suffering of the GS people and resolve the Strip's major crisis, amid assurances it would not abandon its core political principles. Haniyyah appeared more optimistic when he said that an agreement had been reached to create a national fund to compensate the victims of the division worth of \$60 million*.¹⁶

In the midst of the efforts to form the National Consensus Government, Haniyyah stressed that Hamas was handing over power voluntarily for the sake of the people and their unity.¹⁷ However, on a second occasion, he said that Hamas's exit from the government did not mean leaving power.¹⁸ Haniyyah's government said it was ready to abide by the commitments of reconciliation and hand over all tasks to the National Consensus Government. When its ministers were being sworn in, Haniyyah stressed that Hamas and his previous government had done everything they could to end the division, and expressed full readiness to cooperate with the new government.¹⁹

At the same time, Haniyyah's government made significant efforts to support the resistance. Haniyyah said, in an event organized by the Ministry of Interior in GS, that his government would not abandon its responsibility to protect the "back of the resistance." He stressed that the Interior Ministry forces constituted the solid nucleus of a security structure that extended over all the Palestinian land occupied in 1967.²⁰ On 10/3/2014, Haniyyah reiterated his government's position on the resistance, confirming that it was a red line that could be waived, and that its weapons were aimed at Israel only.²¹ On another occasion, Haniyyah stressed that the capture of Israeli soldiers was at the top of the agenda of Hamas and the Palestinian resistance, stressing that the liberation of Palestinians prisoners could only be achieved by capturing Israeli soldiers.²²

Haniyyah's government maintained its ability to control the internal security situation in the Strip. Following the signing of al-Shati' Agreement, Haniyyah warned that reconciliation did not mean the return to security chaos again, stressing that an Arab committee would oversee the rebuilding of the security forces in accordance with the reconciliation agreement.²³

* US Dollar.

On more than one occasion, Haniyyah and security officials stressed that they were keen on preserving Egypt's security and good relations with Cairo, despite the smear campaigns led by some sections of the Egyptian media against Hamas and the people of the Strip, following the coup against President Muhammad Morsi.²⁴ At a time when the relationship between the Egyptian authorities and Hamas had taken a sharp turn, and especially in light of the decision to ban Hamas and indict some of its commanders, some of whom were dead, the government dealt with this quietly, denying any interference in internal Egyptian affairs.²⁵

Second: The National Consensus Government

The National Consensus Government was formed under the leadership of Rami Hamdallah on 2/6/2014, ending the administrative duplicity and conflict between the two branches of the PA in the WB and GS, amid a climate of optimism at both the popular and official levels. There was a belief in the government's ability to accomplish the tasks allotted to it, where there are major problems and great suffering left behind by the division. But those hopes quickly evaporated on account of the differences between Fatah and Hamas, as efforts to heal the rift between them failed.

We turn to look at the top issues the government tackled upon its formation until the end of 2015, as follows:

1. The Relationship with GS

Differences and tensions marred the relationship between the government and the GS, which remained under de facto Hamas control. Differences erupted between Hamas and Fatah shortly before the National Consensus Government was declared regarding the Ministries of Prisoners and Foreign Affairs. Then another dispute emerged when Hamdallah declared that his government was committed to the PLO's political program, which was rejected by Hamas. Only a few days later, the salary crisis became the main issue of contention; the government refused to pay the salaries of the employees of the previous Haniyyah government, who numbered almost 40 thousand, and decided to form a legal committee to look into the issue of civil servants in accordance with the law and administrative needs.²⁶

Government spokesperson Ihab Bseiso said, “The government has done its utmost to resolve the GS salaries crisis, [but] since Qatar declared its readiness to transfer \$20 million a month to cover the salaries of GS civil servants, the banks refused to receive these funds of fear of being harassed by the Israeli side.”²⁷ The National Consensus Government stressed that it was seeking to secure financial support from Arab countries to deal with all the repercussions of the division.²⁸ Prime Minister Hamdallah said, “the PA will not pay the salaries of 40 thousand employees so the crisis (the crisis of non-payment of previous GS government employees’ salaries) may reignite, due to the absence of confirmed commitments by Qatar or any other country to pay those sums.”²⁹ Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki said that neither the Palestinian government nor the Fatah movement had agreed to pay the salaries of Hamas’s civil servants, and claimed that blaming this crisis on the new government from the first day was a reflection of “bad intentions.”³⁰

When an Israeli assault on GS began, on 8/7/2014, the government declared a state of emergency to support the Gazans.³¹ It raised the emergency aid level to GS to 55 million shekels³² (\$16 million), before again allocating an additional 10 million shekels (\$2.9 million) to support GS.³³ Despite some tense positions issued by PA officials, including that of Security Forces Spokesman Adnan al-Damiri, who threatened not to admit the Palestinians being sacrificed for factional interests, accusing Hamas of targeting Fatah members in GS,³⁴ the government confirmed that it would meet its responsibilities towards the GS.

After the war, the salaries crisis entered a difficult phase. The Union of GS Civil Servants threatened to prevent PA employees from entering their workplaces until the crisis was resolved. Hamdallah commented on his failure to tackle the problem by saying, “My hands are tied and so are my feet, and I am being asked to swim.” He also said, “The government and banks operating in the Palestinian territories have been warned that in the event (salaries of employees of) the Hamas previous government in GS were to be paid, the government will be boycotted.” He added, “All the countries of the world bar none have warned that the government and the Palestinian people would be boycotted if these funds are paid,” saying that if that happens, the Palestinian banking system would suffer great problems that would pose a threat to the Palestinian situation.³⁵

The National Consensus Government took a practical step towards GS when the entire cabinet visited the Strip on 9/10/2014, holding an extraordinary session there. During the meeting, Hamdallah promised to resolve all of GS's problems in the coming period.³⁶

However, Hamas Member of Parliament (MP) 'Atif 'Adwan said that Hamdallah did not fulfil his promises in solving the GS problems.³⁷ However, the latter offered the payment of \$1,200 to GS civil servants as part of a Qatari grant aimed at helping resolve the salaries crisis.³⁸ The Deputy Head of Hamas's Political Bureau Musa Abu Marzuq stressed that Hamas would not abandon the civil servants in GS, and that the de facto government was working hard to secure their rights in line with those of other PA employees. He cautioned that things would be very difficult if the crisis was not resolved.³⁹

A visit by Rami Hamdallah and his government to GS in November 2014, which was meant to follow up reconciliation issues and resolve problems facing GS, was postponed, following bombings that targeted the homes of Fatah leaders and a ceremonial stage set up to commemorate the anniversary of President Yasir 'Arafat's death. As expected, a new crisis ensued between Hamas and the government. The GS Interior Ministry said that the failure to allocate a budget for the Ministry was affecting its work.⁴⁰ This prompted a response from Hamdallah, who said Hamas was the actual security authority in GS,⁴¹ in turn prompting the Ministry to say it lacked the administrative authority on account of Hamdallah's refusal to cooperate.⁴²

With the end of the year, the government decided, in a session held in GS, on the return of absconders and the assimilation of appointees since Hamas's takeover, declaring the spending by the PA on GS was no less than 47%.⁴³

However, mutual accusations soon returned. The Hamas led Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), held a session in GS in January 2015, considering the government's decisions as invalid and unconstitutional.⁴⁴ That happened at a time when the government conditioned carrying out its duties in GS on being allowed to do so without any obstacles,⁴⁵ having accused Hamas of obstructing its work and its bid to impose its sovereignty over the Strip. In January 2015, some post offices and banks, which are subject to the administration of the Hamas movement in the GS, began disbursing financial advances to the GS staff, who had not been yet recognized by the National Consensus Government.⁴⁶

Tensions between Hamas and the government intensified when the Interior Ministry in GS in mid-March 2015 published confessions of PA security officers, who snitched on resistance operatives and carried out a series of bombings in GS.⁴⁷

Before the end of March, Hamdallah visited GS along with a senior delegation from his government, at the direct guidance of President ‘Abbas. Their mission was to cement internal reconciliation, and find a solution to the problem of employees in return for taking control of border crossings controlled by civil servants from the previous Haniyyah government, but these efforts failed.

On 7/4/2015, the government re-formed the legal committee studying the civil servants issue, and formed a committee to take over GS’s crossings.⁴⁸ This was followed by a visit by a ministerial delegation from the government to the GS on 20/4/2015 to discuss the civil servants issue, but the delegation cut short the visit, blaming Hamas for preventing them from performing duties in the Strip. ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, Fatah Central Committee member in charge of the reconciliation dossier, said: “The unity of the country is more important than all civil servants and governments. The unity of institutions is the unity of the country, and the unity of the government is the unity of the PA and legal unity.” He then claimed that Hamas had undermined everything, turning the issue of the civil servants into a pretext to disrupt the implementation of the reconciliation agreement.⁴⁹

On 3/6/2015, the PLC convened in GS in the presence of Hamas deputies. The meeting accused the PA of corruption and of looting GS’s funds, calling for those responsible in the PA to be investigated.⁵⁰ In June 2015, Hamdallah said the leadership and the government were willing to resolve the issue of GS’s civil servants, but only in parallel with the handover of the crossings in GS to the government.⁵¹

Abu Marzuq said the crisis of the civil servants in GS was one of the instruments of the immoral war against Hamas. He said the issue would not have arisen if the National Consensus Government had undertaken its responsibilities towards GS including assimilating the civil servants and fulfilling their rights under the reconciliation accord. Abu Marzuq pointed out that during the negotiations for the ceasefire in Cairo, the Egyptian side had said there was no Israeli or American objection to the civil servants issue, and had said it was an internal issue. Abu Marzuq pointed out that government members would always respond to the movement’s demands regarding the civil servants by saying the decision was political and in the hands of President ‘Abbas.⁵²

The Rafah crossing between GS and Egypt was an explosive point of contention between Hamas on the one hand, and the PA and Egypt on the other hand. Egypt insisted on the National Consensus Government taking over the crossing as its condition for agreeing to reopen it and ending the humanitarian crisis ravaging GS as a result of its closure. However, Hamas insisted this take place as part of the implementation of all the clauses of the reconciliation agreement, including compelling the government to disburse the salaries of the civil servants appointed by the Haniyyah government. The dispute prompted a factional initiative proposed to Hamas and the government at the end of 2015, with a view to resolving the crisis, but at the time of writing it has yet to be met with any serious response from either side.

The kidnapping of four members of Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, after crossing into Egypt via Rafah in August 2015, as well as the Egyptian government's flooding of tunnels along the border with GS in September 2015, caused major tension between Hamas on the one hand, and Fatah, PA, and the Egyptian authorities on the other. Hamas held the Egyptian government fully responsible for the lives of four fighters, and called for their immediate release.⁵³

Hamas also accused President 'Abbas and the PA of inciting the Egyptian authorities against GS and its people, following statements made by Egyptian President 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi who said that all procedures at the border were being coordinated between Egypt and the PA.⁵⁴

Concerning the GS reconstruction following the Israeli assault of 2014, the government prepared a detailed plan estimating a cost of around \$4 billion, and affirmed it would be fully responsible for following up this issue. This chapter details this dossier in the later section "The Repercussions of the Israeli Aggression on GS in the summer of 2014 on the Internal Palestinian Situation."

2. The Cabinet Reshuffle

Administratively, on 2/9/2014 the government approved the decision to abolish the Ministry of Prisoners and turn it into a higher national commission.⁵⁵ On 10/12/2014, Ziad Abu Ein, head of the Commission Against the Separation Wall and Settlements, died after he was assaulted by Israeli soldiers during a protest against the Separation Wall north of Ramallah.⁵⁶ On 30/7/2015, President

‘Abbas and Prime Minister Hamdallah agreed to a cabinet reshuffle covering five portfolios, which drew criticisms from Palestinian factions led by Hamas. Hamas said it did not recognize the new ministers.

3. Political Issues

No substantive political events occurred in 2014–2015. At the end of September 2015, President ‘Abbas delivered a speech in the United Nations General Assembly, in which he declared that the PA could not continue to be bound by all political, security and economic agreements with Israel, citing the refusal of all successive Israeli governments to abide by them. However, the year 2015 passed without any practical steps taken by the PA to fulfil the promises of President ‘Abbas.

The PA resorted to making such positions after the failure of several attempts to go to the United Nations Security Council with draft resolutions imposing a timeframe for ending the occupation by 2017. The last of these was a French-sponsored resolution aimed at reviving the political process between the PA and Israel, which France withdrew under United States (US) and Israeli pressure in early July 2015.

In early 2015, the PA filed an official request to join the International Criminal Court (ICC), after the PA signed up to join a number of international treaties and conventions including the Rome Statute establishing the ICC, in response to the Security Council’s failure to pass a resolution to set a timeframe to end the occupation.⁵⁷ On 18/5/2015, Palestine received formal approval to join the World Customs Organization (WCO). On 3/8/2015, Palestine filed an official request to join INTERPOL.

As Israeli crimes continued in the aftermath of the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, the Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki called on the European Union (EU) to play an active role in the peace process.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Arab foreign ministers supported reviewing agreements with Israel according to the PCC decisions, if the situation remained unchanged.⁵⁹ (See Section 5 of Chapter Two entitled The Peace Process)

4. The Financial and Economic Situation

The National Consensus Government faced no serious tests in the financial and economic dossiers, until after the Israeli government withheld Palestinian tax revenues in retaliation against the PA after it lobbied for a draft Security Council resolution calling for the end of the occupation in December 2014. As a result,

according to Minister of Finance Shukri Bishara, the government lost up to 70% of its revenues.⁶⁰ According to the Governor of Palestine Monetary Authority Jihad al-Wazir, the government faced a severe financial crisis. Banks were forced to decline to give loans to cover civil servants' salaries.⁶¹ Consequently, the government approved an emergency budget for the year 2015, starting on 1/4/2015, in order to rationalize expenditure and increase revenues. Finance Minister Shukri Bishara stressed that as soon as the financial crisis ended, he would present a new supplementary budget.⁶²

On 18/4/2015, the government reached a deal with Israel to unlock tax revenues, with some deductions, especially in the electricity sector.⁶³ As a result of the financial crisis, the PA's public debt rose by 7.1% during the first quarter of 2015,⁶⁴ forcing the government to allocate 400 million shekels (\$100 million) to pay off the dues of the private sector.⁶⁵ In 2015, foreign financial support declined, Minister Bishara said that it dropped by 22%,⁶⁶ while the Finance Ministry said at the end of September 2015 that the treasury had received only 28% of expected foreign aid and grants.⁶⁷ (For more detail, see Section 2 of Chapter Seven entitled the Economic Indicators in the WB and GS)

5. The Security Situation

The internal security situation of the National Consensus Government covered the geographical scope of the WB alone, seeing as it was unable to impose its authority on GS, as it claimed, because of obstacles placed by Hamas.

With the exception of Israeli raids (which in many cases took place in coordination with Palestinian security forces) on PA controlled areas, the internal security situation of the settlers and the occupation was acceptable to Israeli officials. The Palestinian security forces carried out crackdowns and arrests against Hamas and PIJ activists. Dozens of Hamas members were arrested, accused by the PA of preparing attacks against Israeli targets to undermine the security of the WB and other attacks against the PA itself. Hamas categorically rejected the PA's account.⁶⁸

Interestingly, the PA denied any breach of security in the areas it controls by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group, following Israeli claims to the contrary in early 2015, with Israel claiming to have arrested cells affiliated to the jihadist group in Hebron in the WB.⁶⁹

With the outbreak of the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, in early October 2015, dominated by stabbing and ramming attacks, the government and its security forces observed neutrality on the ground in most times. It defended the Palestinians' right to protect themselves and stressed that violence and repression by Israel could only generate more violence. The government condemned Israeli terrorism and executions, stressing that the crimes of the settlers had been the main factor in igniting the situation in the WB.⁷⁰ And while the government expressed its objection to the militarization of the *Intifadah* and the use of arms,⁷¹ it called for international protection for the Palestinian people.⁷²

When Jordan signed an agreement with Israel to install surveillance cameras at *al-Aqsa* Mosque to control the security situation on the ground, the government refused this agreement, and said it was a trap that would lead to arrests against Palestinians under the pretext of incitement.⁷³ (See Section 5 of this Chapter entitled Israeli-Palestinian Security Coordination and its Repercussions on the Internal Palestinian Situation).

Third: National Reconciliation and Putting the Palestinian House in Order

National reconciliation was the key issue for Palestinians in 2014 and 2015, as it affected their national cause and daily lives. However, the failure of the two main parties to implement reconciliation agreements drove Palestinians to despair over the possibility of ending the division and estrangement between the two. The tone of talk about reconciliation lowered and was soon met with indifference and apathy among the majority of frustrated Palestinians.

Attempts to reach accord between Fatah and Hamas, and all the previous agreements—from the Cairo Accords up to the time of writing—proved that reconciliation in the proposed format was almost impossible to implement. The main reason was that the essence of the division was not addressed directly or clearly. Rather, secondary measures were agreed or escapist solutions reached, such as the formation of a National Consensus Government or beginning preparations for elections, while the essence of division was always the fundamental conflict between the resistance project and the peace process project.

Mahmud ‘Abbas officially declared in League of Arab States (LAS) meetings after the war on GS in 2014, and again in his speech at the GS Reconstruction Conference in Cairo, that there could be no reconciliation except on the basis of:

1. A unified political decision in war and peace.
2. Unified arms.
3. Unified authority.

If the unified political decision here means the decision to negotiate, hold accord, recognize the Oslo Accords and renounce violence, then this is something neither Hamas nor the PIJ or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and other factions would accept. If unified arms mean the exclusivity of arms of the security forces, commitment to security coordination with Israel and the elimination of armed resistance and the uprising, and everything that is classed as violent including stone throwing, stabbings, and so on, then this meant that there would be a disarmament of resistance in GS and handing over of the tunnels and other means of resistance. And if the unified authority means the authority in GS should come under the control and commitments of the most prominent party in the WB, then all the conditions of Mahmud ‘Abbas for reconciliation entail commitments that cannot be accepted by the resistance forces.

The year 2014 started with a positive climate reigning over the relationship between Fatah and Hamas. An agreement was reached between ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, the Fatah official in charge of the dossier, and Isma‘il Haniyyah, deputy chief of Hamas’s political bureau, to meet and discuss the formation of National Consensus Government and end the division between the WB and GS.⁷⁴ The efforts bore fruit in a meeting between Hamas and Fatah delegations on 9/2/2014 at Haniyyah’s home, to draft a plan to implement the reconciliation agreements.⁷⁵

The situation remained the same until 23/4/2014, with the signing of al-Shati’ Agreement following a meeting between a PLO delegation headed by ‘Azzam al-Ahmad and a Hamas delegation headed by Haniyyah in the latter’s home in al-Shati’ Refugee Camp. The declaration stipulated the implementation of the reconciliation clauses, first and foremost the formation of a National Consensus Government and convening a committee to activate the PLO within five weeks, followed by legislative, presidential, and national council elections simultaneously within six months of the formation of the government.⁷⁶

At a time when the Palestinian factions and the public welcomed the declaration, Nayef Hawatmeh, secretary general of Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), criticized it, cautioning that the Fatah-Hamas National Consensus Government would be short-lived.⁷⁷

On 28/5/2014, Fatah and Hamas ended their consultations regarding the formation of the government, and agreed to appoint Rami Hamdallah as prime minister. The official declaration of the government took place on 2/6/2014, and its tasks were determined as: reuniting civil and security institutions; the reconstruction of GS; and the restoration of cohesion between the WB and GS, despite some differences between Hamas and the Palestinian presidency.

A month after the government began its work, the first fundamental difference between Hamas and the government emerged over the issue of civil servants. Hamas rejected the government's decision to make a distinction between previous Fatah-affiliated employees who absconded after the events of 2007 and who were allowed to return to their jobs, and Hamas-affiliated employees who had to undergo legal and administrative reassessment before being paid their salaries. Hamas said this breached the reconciliation agreements.⁷⁸

However, the relationship between Hamas and Fatah and the National Consensus Government took the form of suppressed (and sometimes open) tension after three settlers were killed by resistance fighters (who later turned out to be from Hamas) on 12/6/2014; and after Hamas's battle against the Israeli assault on GS in the summer of 2014 and its insistence on specific conditions to end the fighting. Although a joint Palestinian delegation from Fatah, Hamas, and other factions was formed to lead ceasefire negotiations in Cairo, the leadership of Fatah especially Mahmud 'Abbas were irritated by Hamas's "monopoly" of the resistance in GS. 'Abbas accused Hamas of establishing a shadow government in GS, which was denied by Hamas, saying his statements undermined national unity.⁷⁹

In an attempt to contain the situation after the end of the war, Fatah formed a special committee to visit GS and engage with Hamas regarding key Palestinian issues including reconciliation. However, no meeting was held until 25/9/2014 in Cairo, where they agreed to resolve outstanding issues, most importantly political partnership, allowing the government to carry out its work in GS, the reconstruction of GS, and pay the salaries of civil servants.

Subsequently, no tangible progress was made regarding the accords' implementation, until November 2014 when Fatah declared its intention to send a high-level delegation to GS to overcome the obstacles especially in light of the return of media bickering. This delegation also went in order to participate in commemorations marking the 10th anniversary of the death of Yasir 'Arafat.⁸⁰ The efforts were aborted following a series of bombings targeting the homes of Fatah leaders in GS and a stage set up at the 'Arafat commemoration event on 7/11/2014, prompting Fatah to hold Hamas responsible for the bombings by virtue of its authority over the Strip,⁸¹ despite the latter's condemnation and call for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.⁸² The various Palestinian factions also condemned the bombings.⁸³

In response, Khalil al-Hayyeh, Hamas political bureau member, threatened to withdraw confidence from the government, accusing President 'Abbas of obstructing its work and of treating GS like a remote village.⁸⁴ For his part, Muhammad Faraj al-Ghoul, chairman of Hamas's PLC bloc, said that the government lacked legal and constitutional legitimacy for having failed to secure a vote of confidence in the council.⁸⁵ At the same time, Hamas Spokesperson Isma'il Radwan called for the government to be dissolved, accusing it of failing to fulfill its responsibilities towards the people of the GS.⁸⁶ Accordingly, four factions: PIJ, the PFLP, the DFLP, and the Palestinian People's Party (PPP), tried to heal the rift between Fatah and Hamas, but to no avail.⁸⁷

Prior the end of the time frame agreed for the National Consensus Government on 2/12/2014, tensions rose again. Musa Abu Marzuq called on Hamas to form a national unity government as an alternative to the existing government, accusing President 'Abbas of being unable to take the political decisions required to rescue the reconciliation,⁸⁸ and denying the presence of a shadow government run by Hamas in GS.⁸⁹

With the beginning of 2015, a wave of optimism came when Rami Hamdallah announced his intention to visit GS, pledging to find solutions to GS's problems within four weeks.⁹⁰ However, a government statement stressed that it would not be able to fulfill its role until it was allowed to fully exercise its powers without factional obstructions in GS. This took things back to square one, prompting Hamas to declare that the statement represented a coup against the reconciliation.⁹¹

Efforts for reconciliation resumed in early February 2015, after the PLO factions said they would send a delegation to GS to meet with Hamas. However, according to the PFLP, ‘Azzam al-Ahmad hindered those efforts, where a “lobby” inside the PA moved for obstructing reconciliation and marginalizing the GS.

With the return of media bickering and the emergence of unconfirmed rumors regarding the PLO factions sending a delegation to GS, Salah Bardawil, a Hamas leader, accused President ‘Abbas of obstructing the reconciliation and using the PLO to follow narrow political interests.⁹²

Before the end of April 2015, the PFLP circulated a detailed memo to the factions in GS that included ideas and a roadmap for ending the division and restoring Palestinian national unity,⁹³ but there was no response from Fatah and Hamas. However, Isma‘il Haniyyah called on Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to renew its efforts to end the division and implement the reconciliation.⁹⁴ This was rejected by Fatah through Mohammad Shtayyeh, Fatah Central Committee member, and Amin Maqboul, Fatah leader. They said the reconciliation dossier did not need new mediation efforts, and that what was required instead was to just implement the agreements between the two sides, accusing Hamas of attempting to neutralize Egypt by bringing in KSA.⁹⁵

While a total impasse prevailed over the reconciliation dossier, Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri sponsored a joint meeting between Fatah and Hamas in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, and proposed an important initiative to push the reconciliation forward, welcomed by both parties.⁹⁶ However, mutual accusations shelved the initiative without any practical results. This was followed by a visit by a government delegation to GS led by Ziad Abu Amr, deputy prime minister, to discuss the issues of crossings and civil servants. No agreement was reached.

With the end of the first year of the National Consensus Government in power by June 2015, controversy over the government and the nature of its lineup returned to the fore. Fatah proposed that Hamas form a new national unity government to replace it, prompting Hamas to place three conditions: replacing the prime minister, Rami Hamdallah; not adopting a political program that recognizes Israel; and seeking to implement reconciliation agreements including recognizing the rights of the civil servants appointed by the previous Haniyyah government in GS.⁹⁷

Hamas's position evolved into outright rejection and Khalil al-Hayyeh said it would not join any forthcoming government unless the government and its internal consultations become subject to a comprehensive national dialogue without exceptions.⁹⁸ However, in the end President 'Abbas ordered Hamdallah to carry out a cabinet reshuffle, which Hamas considered a coup against reconciliation, stressing it would not recognize the legitimacy of any reshuffle made without consulting Hamas.⁹⁹

The cabinet reshuffle was carried out on 31/7/2015, amid threats by Hamas of not recognizing it and opposition from some Fatah leaders, including 'Azzam al-Ahmad who stated that it was unjustifiable because negotiations for forming a national unity government were ongoing.

Despite the reshuffle, which bypassed Hamas, the movement continued to call for national partnership in all areas, and Khalid Mish'al, head of its political bureau, stressed the importance of democracy and the need to assume national responsibility in light of the challenges facing the Palestinians and Israeli schemes to undermine Palestinian rights.¹⁰⁰

Faced with Israeli plans that targeted the spatial and temporal division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in September 2015, 'Azzam al-Ahmad announced that he had received a mandate from President 'Abbas to communicate with Hamas to take practical steps towards reconciliation.¹⁰¹ At the same time, Usama Hamdan, a Hamas leader, called on President 'Abbas to ensure the unification of Palestinian ranks, stressing that reconciliation would help deter the occupation from dividing *al-Aqsa* Mosque.¹⁰²

It seemed that a new crisis was rearing its head on the internal Palestinian scene, when, on 16/8/2015, the Fatah Central Committee adopted a decision calling for the Palestinian National Council (PNC) to convene. Mahmud 'Abbas and nine members of the Executive Committee of the PLO submitted their resignations on 22/8/2015. Wassel Abu Yusuf, member of the Executive Committee, claimed there was a legal vacuum and accordingly the PNC was called to hold an emergency session within a month (14–15/9/2015) to elect a new Executive Committee for the PLO.¹⁰³ 'Abbas also appointed Saeb Erekat secretary of the PLO Executive Committee, after dismissing Yasser Abed Rabbo from this post on 30/6/2015.¹⁰⁴

Hamas rejected convening of the PNC in this way, which it considered a violation of all national agreements. It considered Abbas's insistence a violation of

national accords and at odds with national cohesion, seeing it as a re-formation of the PLO in accordance with Abbas's personal and partisan measurements.¹⁰⁵

The PFLP also refused to participate in the session in question, saying that holding a new session of the PNC, whether it is ordinary or exceptional, would deepen the crisis in the Palestinian arena and further protract the division. The PFLP warned against exploiting the council to pass political projects being hatched in Washington and Europe and to return to the negotiations. However, the PFLP said that its decision not to take part in the PNC session did not equate to a withdrawal from the PLO.¹⁰⁶

For their part, the resistance factions in GS, led by Hamas and PIJ, and including the resistance committees, the PFLP-General Command (GC), the Ahrar movement, the al-Mujahideen, and al-Saiqah movement, called for a boycott of the PNC meeting, saying the session would damage the prospects for national unity. They stressed the decisions made by the meeting would not be binding for the Palestinian people, and would only represent those taking part in it.¹⁰⁷

On a related note, a statement made by 70 deputies demanded the convening of the provisional leadership framework of the PLO in accordance with the reconciliation agreements. The deputies said they did not oppose the principle of participating in the PNC or the PLO bodies based on inclusive consensus, but stressed that they were against taking rushed unilateral measures that would lead to further division.¹⁰⁸ Hundreds of academic and independent figures signed another petition calling for postponing the meeting.¹⁰⁹

Because of the broad objections to the council meeting, President 'Abbas and the Fatah leadership were forced to withdraw the call for it to convene. On 9/9/2015, PNC Chairman Salim Za'noun, said the meeting was postponed and launched consultations to hold an ordinary session.¹¹⁰ This was met with relief and was welcomed by the Palestinian factions.¹¹¹

The chances to achieve reconciliation appeared to be at their lowest by the end of 2015, despite the climate created by the Jerusalem *Intifadah* to bring about internal Palestinian rapprochement in the face of the occupation. Therefore, it is difficult to predict the possibility of the success of reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah in the next stage, in light of current information, unless a dramatic change were to occur in the internal Palestinian scene that would push reconciliation forward.

Fourth: Palestinian Factional Relations

The tense relations between Hamas and Fatah and the PA received a lot of attention on the Palestinian national scene in 2014 and 2015, and were dominated by regular bickering in the media.

Opinion polls carried out by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research during 2014–2015, reflect the ongoing polarization between Fatah and Hamas. That is, Hamas and Fatah receive around two-thirds of the votes, one-third each. Meanwhile, other factions collectively receive around 11%. There are 20–23%, who have not decided on their allegiance—usually most of their votes are distributed between Fatah and Hamas. It was notable that Hamas latterly was the more popular party in the WB, while Fatah were more popular in GS. It was also notable that, should presidential elections take place, there would be a decline in the popularity of President ‘Abbas, versus that of Isma‘il Haniyyah, Hamas’s candidate. Haniyyah would receive 51% of the vote while ‘Abbas would receive 41%, according to a December 2015 poll.

Such polls emphasize the improbability of one party eliminating or marginalizing the other, and the necessity to accommodate all factions and respect their audiences. They also confirm the increase in frustration regarding the Oslo Accords, PA performance, and the security coordination, in addition to the increase in support for the armed uprising. All of this constitutes a mandate for the factions and the PA to carry out an overall revision of the Palestinian experience in light of the Oslo Accords, and to reach resolutions that enforce the spirit of resistance and preserve the fundamentals.

In early 2014, Hamas accused Fatah of attempting to eliminate it from the political scene, simultaneously denying having approved delegating President ‘Abbas to agree to the two-state solution.¹¹² The return of three Fatah leaders to GS who had left when Hamas tried to take control over GS in 2007, Majed Abou Shamla, ‘Alaa Yaghi, and Sufyan Abou Zaydah, in addition to ‘Azzam al-Ahmad’s attempt to appoint Rashid al-Ghannushi, leader of the Tunisian An-Nahda (Renaissance) Party, as mediator between Fatah and Hamas, did not contribute to the conclusion of the estrangement or closer relations between the two movements.¹¹³

Hamas accused Fatah of inciting Egypt against it. Meanwhile, Fatah Spokesperson Usama al-Qawasmi said that Hamas and the Muslim Brothers (MB)

movement had been planning to resolve the problem of the refugees in Sinai by establishing a state for the Palestinian refugees in GS, extending over 60 thousand km to Sinai. GS national and Islamist factions assured that Hamas is part of the national Palestinian movement, denying any external role for Hamas in Egypt.¹¹⁴

When tensions escalated between Hamas and Fatah, Hamas-PIJ relations took a positive turn and the latter's Secretary General, Ramadan 'Abdullah, confirmed that the two factions were partners in war and peace. He made those statements two days after the Israeli attacks on the GS.¹¹⁵

Hamas and Fatah's hostile standoff continued, along with the factions' reactions to them, until early June 2014 when the National Consensus Government was formed. A wave of optimism followed, which was soon dissipated due to recurring reciprocal disagreements between the two parties. Fatah firmly responded to Hamas's accusations that Abbas's positions do not represent the whole Palestinian people, stating that Hamas's positions never reflected those of the Palestinian people.¹¹⁶ The peak of the ill feeling came in late June 2014 when Musa Abu Marzuq warned that Hamas might be obliged to run GS, as the authority was marginalizing GS and its residents.¹¹⁷

Tensions escalated between Hamas and Fatah as a result of President Abbas's statements in which he described the resistance "as a war business," during the early days of the Israeli war on GS in July 2014. Statements by Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki, stating that Israel had the right to defend itself, as long as rockets were launched from GS, provoked Abu Marzuq to describe him as Benjamin Netanyahu's foreign minister.¹¹⁸ Tensions reached a climax when Fatah asked Hamas to suspend their membership in the MB movement. Meanwhile, Security Forces Spokesman Adnan al-Damiri, accused Hamas of targeting Fatah members in GS during the war. Fatah Central Committee member Sultan Abu al-'Aynayn accused Hamas of taking control over the Strip.¹¹⁹

There were several unsuccessful proposals, such as forming a Fatah committee for discussing the future of the relationship with Hamas, in addition to other suggestions by Khalid Mish'al aimed at ending the internal Palestinian deadlock and the ongoing tension between the two, following the September 2014 war. Media bickering continued, despite other factions' efforts at supporting reconciliation.

The stalemate motivated PIJ Secretary General Ramadan to call, on 23/10/2014, for genuine reformation in all Palestinian institutions, for the sake of saving the

Palestinian situation. No parties took interest in this proposition, and according to ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, Fatah expressed its support for the Egyptian arrangement which called for establishing a buffer zone on GS borders.¹²⁰

A slight hope appeared when a delegation from the National Consensus Government planned a visit to GS to resolve the ongoing problems in early November 2014. However, any hope was completely abolished following bombings that targeted the homes of Fatah leaders and a ceremonial stage set up to commemorate the death anniversary of President Yasir ‘Arafat. Accusations escalated to the degree of holding Hamas accountable for the explosions, accusing it of enforcing its security control and its separatist domination over GS.¹²¹ This caused overall frustration for the factions, where DFLP Secretary General Nayef Hawatmeh condemned the positions of Fatah and Hamas, and called on the Palestinian leadership to fix its social and political policies.¹²² Further to that, the PFLP accused the unity government of marginalizing GS, and Rabah Muhanna, a member of the PFLP political bureau, added that President ‘Abbas no longer wanted GS.¹²³

By the end of 2014, six main Palestinian factions (Hamas, PIJ, PFLP, DFLP, PFLP-GC and al-Saiqah movement) rejected the UN Security Council Resolution regarding ending the occupation, believing that it undermines the Palestinians’ rights and fundamentals.¹²⁴

New rounds of media bickering between Hamas and Fatah happened during the first few weeks of 2015, where ‘Azzam al-Ahmad called for GS to be considered a rebellious region.¹²⁵ In return, Salah Bardawil confirmed that the movement held documents proving the involvement of the PA in the killings of dozens of Gazans by providing the occupation forces with intelligence during the war.¹²⁶ This provoked Fatah to once again accuse Hamas of keeping its alliance with the MB movement, for which Bardawil confirmed that Fatah and the PA were providing false information to the Egyptian intelligence, inciting it against Hamas and Gazans.¹²⁷

At the end of February 2015, Fatah and the rest of the factions supported Hamas against an Egyptian court resolution aiming to classify it as a “terrorist movement.” Fatah Central Committee member Jamal Muheisen rejected the Egyptian court resolution, as did the PIJ and PFLP.¹²⁸ In an attempt to build bridges between Hamas and the Egyptian authorities, a PIJ delegation, headed by Ramadan ‘Abdullah,

paid a visit to Cairo, where they discussed with Egyptian officials the crisis with Hamas, the faltering reconciliation and the Rafah border crossing. The results of the visit were not revealed.¹²⁹

The PCC resolutions in early March 2015, which called for halting the security coordination and reconsidering other agreements with the occupation forces, constituted a new point of disagreement between the authority and the Palestinian factions. The factions and the public welcomed this resolution, but the possibility of implementing it was unclear. Therefore, Hamas questioned the seriousness of the Palestinian leadership in implementing the resolution.¹³⁰ ‘Abbas has not implemented the resolution up to the time of writing.

Hamas and Fatah resumed their media bickering, when the Ministry of Interior in the former Gaza government accused PA security forces in Ramallah of being involved in bombings that took place in GS. This was considered by Fatah as an attempt by Hamas to deflect attention from its internal crises.¹³¹ In response to statements by President ‘Abbas and one of his advisors calling for a “Decisive Storm” against GS in late March 2015, a reference to the Gulf alliance against Yemeni Houthis, the PIJ condemned these statements, which call for Arab intervention against GS. Musa Abu Marzuq launched scathing criticism against the PA leadership.¹³²

In early April 2015, Hamas, PFLP and DFLP welcomed the PA decision to join the ICC, and they called for expediting the submission of files for the sake of prosecuting leaders of the occupation forces for their crimes against the Palestinian people.¹³³

By mid-2015, relations between Hamas and Fatah had taken a sharp turn to the worse when President ‘Abbas accused Hamas of holding secret discussions with Israel via an Ethiopian mediator. These accusations were denied by Hamas, who described them as silly.¹³⁴

The French called for re-launching the peace process, setting standards for the Palestinian state within an unspecified duration. Hamas, PFLP and DFLP warned against the risks of this resolution seeing it as a detour away from Palestinian rights and fundamentals.¹³⁵

The relationship between the two parties became worse still when the PA arrested dozens of Hamas members in the WB on 3/7/2015. This was regarded by

Hamas as an attempt to weaken the movement and the resistance for the benefit of the occupation's security.¹³⁶ Meanwhile, the resistance factions confirmed that these arrests only serviced the occupation.¹³⁷ In response to Hamas's accusation, Fatah Spokesperson Usama al-Qawasmī accused the movement of negotiating with occupation leaders and the extreme Israeli rightwing regarding separating GS from the WB.¹³⁸ Consequently, Khalid Mish'al revealed that Hamas had held meetings with European and international parties for the sake of accelerating efforts of rebuilding the Strip, denying that any efforts for a long-term armistice with the occupation forces had been made.¹³⁹

In mid-August 2015, Fatah once again accused Hamas of holding negotiations with Israel via the Quartet's Special Envoy to the Middle East Tony Blair, claiming that such a step would entrench the division and the separation of GS from the WB. Fatah considered it a deviation from Palestinian legitimacy represented by the PLO.¹⁴⁰ However, Isma'il Haniyyah considered Fatah's stance to be an attempt to distort Hamas's efforts, confirming that Hamas rejected the idea of the formation of a state in GS and saying that its compass will remain directed towards Jerusalem and all of Palestine.¹⁴¹

However, with the Israeli government's hastened implementation of its plan for dividing *al-Aqsa* Mosque temporally and spatially, and the expansion of the Palestinian popular resistance operations in response, Isma'il Haniyyah declared in late September 2015 that *al-Aqsa* battle, liberation and reconciliation all required a decision to give the resistance a free hand in the WB and a halt security coordination.¹⁴² This resonated with Fatah Central Committee member 'Abbas Zaki who called for rebutting the Oslo Accords, which he described as ominous, and the reconciliation process, which he described as a failure, and called for a new strategy suitable for the new stage.¹⁴³

At the end of September 2015, President 'Abbas delivered a speech in UN General Assembly, in which he declared that the PA could not continue to be bound by all political, security and economic agreements with Israel, citing the refusal of all Israeli governments to abide by the them. This was seen by Fatah and the PLO as the beginning of a new phase in the history of the Palestinian issue. Meanwhile, a number of the factions did not see it as a serious threat, and considered it to have fallen short of their hopes and expectations.

When the Jerusalem *Intifadah* began in early October 2015, Fatah called for the preservation of its popular nature, warning Israel against compromising the historical status of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Meanwhile, the PFLP called for the formation of a united leadership for the battle against the occupation. Hamas called on the PA to halt security coordination and to provide cover for the resistance in the WB, in addition to agreeing on a unified national strategy for preserving the *Intifadah*, and for combining political and field action.¹⁴⁴

On 16/11/2015, ‘Azzam al-Ahmad announced an agreement between the PA and the Egyptian authorities for reopening the Rafah border crossing.¹⁴⁵ Hamas said that it was not part of that agreement but it concurrently expressed its willingness to deal with any positive suggestion for opening the crossing.¹⁴⁶ But official Egyptian sources denied reaching any agreement concerning the crossing, which some attributed to the interferences of Muhammad Dahlan that led to the thwarting of the supposed agreement at the last minute.

When Hamas and its affiliated ministries in GS expressed their intention to distribute government land to employees as a substitute for their financial dues, Fatah, other factions and civil society organizations launched an attack against this step. Fatah saw it as a crime, while the factions saw it as an entrenchment of the division.¹⁴⁷

Thus, the PA-factions relationships have been characterized with constant disagreement and tensions, with Hamas on one side, and Fatah and the PA on the other. Therefore, the continuation of this pattern in the coming phase is predictable.

The internal organizational dynamics of Fatah witnessed some troubles throughout 2014 and 2015. The higher leadership commission of Fatah in GS resigned in late January 2014 in protest over what it saw as its disabling. This pushed Fatah’s Central Committee to send a delegation to the Strip for the purpose of straightening out the movement’s internal situation.¹⁴⁸ Dozens of Fatah cadres submitted their resignations in late February 2014, under the pretext of the faulty appointment policy within the movement.

In parallel, internal disagreements increased within Fatah between President ‘Abbas and his supporters and the dismissed movement leader Muhammad Dahlan. That is, ‘Abbas dismissed a number of Dahlan’s followers from Fatah¹⁴⁹ which provoked a media standoff between the two parties, the highlight of which was Dahlan’s call for forming a unified Palestinian front for resisting Abbas’s behavior.¹⁵⁰

Further to that, Fatah concluded its internal elections in most of its regions, inside and outside of the WB, in light of obvious problems that interrupted the election procedures in the different GS regions, as a result of the pervasive conflict between supporters of ‘Abbas and those of Dahlan. And despite the official Egyptian effort which attempted to approximate the positions of Dahlan and ‘Abbas and to reconcile them, especially in late 2014 and 2015, it was fruitless because of Abbas’s opposing stands where he appeared unwilling to yield or to be flexible. And in mid-November 2015, Fatah’s Central Committee ratified recommendations presented by members of the preparatory committee for the movement’s seventh conference calling for postponing the conference indefinitely due to the ongoing internal conflicts and the rise in Dahlan’s popularity.¹⁵¹

Fatah can expect to experience relative organizational stability in the WB, and will struggle with internal organizational instability in GS, if the intense disagreement between ‘Abbas and Dahlan is not resolved.

At the time of writing, the PIJ financial crisis began to loom in the horizon following the shutting down of the “Palestine Today” satellite channel offices in occupied Jerusalem, which were managed by the movement from outside of Palestine.¹⁵² It seems that this crisis was a result of disagreements between PIJ and Iran, where Iran was not happy with the movement’s commitment to a policy of neutrality and non-interference in the affairs of any Arab country, and was not supporting the Iranian position in Syria, Yemen and other countries. Iran has considerably reduced its financial support to PIJ, which has made it very difficult for the movement to pay its employees and to have an operational budget for its institutions.¹⁵³

One of the negative aspects of these deteriorating bilateral relations was the establishment of Al-Sabireen Movement for Supporting Palestine (HESN) by the PIJ dissenter Hisham Salem in 2014 in GS. It is a Palestinian movement that is more aligned with Iranian positions and agendas.¹⁵⁴ This movement was not well received by Hamas who dealt with it cautiously. Many Palestinian parties were worried about the movement, out of fear that it might be a gateway for Iranian power or for spreading “Shi‘ism” in the Strip. On 13/3/2016, GS Authorities shut down the “Al-Baqiyat al-Salihah” organization, which is a front of Al-Sabireen, alleging that it was practicing politics while its license was related solely to charitable work.¹⁵⁵

Meanwhile, Abu Ahmad Fu'ad was elected in January 2014 as PFLP Secretary General, succeeding 'Abdul Rahman Mlouh who had resigned from PFLP's leadership councils during the 7th General Conference. Secretary General Ahmad Sa'dat was chosen, along with his deputy and members of the PFLP leadership council locally and in the Diaspora.¹⁵⁶

The central committee of the DFLP held its fourth session, headed by its Secretary General Nayef Hawatmeh in February 2014, during which it discussed a number of political developments witnessed on the Palestinian scene, in light of pressure from the US administration and ongoing settlement building. The front also discussed organizational reports presented by several leadership bodies and consequently took some necessary decisions. At the end of the conference, it issued the National Political Announcement.¹⁵⁷ On the 45th anniversary of DFLP, on 22/2/2014, Nayef Hawatmeh issued a statement to the Palestinian people, in which he called on Mahmud 'Abbas and all Palestinian factions to reject the American framework agreement. He also called on Isma'il Haniyyah and on the PA government to resign and to form a National Consensus Government immediately.¹⁵⁸

In August 2015, DFLP held its 7th General Conference in the North Gaza governorate. Several decisions were made, on the political, social and democratic levels. The conference approved the required organizational forms for bolstering public pressure, and finding solutions for communities affected by the aggression and the division, in a manner that would reinforce resilience and confrontation of the aggression, the siege and the policies aimed at isolating the Palestinians. Also, 30 delegates were elected to represent all operating sectors.¹⁵⁹

Fifth: Israeli-Palestinian Security Coordination and its Repercussions on the Internal Palestinian Situation

It is not controversial to state that security coordination between Israeli and PA security forces constitutes the biggest obstacle for achieving internal Palestinian reconciliation and harmony. That is, security coordination produced grudges and hatred among factions and eroded the Palestinian social fabric. This coordination did not stop throughout 2014 and 2015, in fact it expanded, according to Israeli sources, despite the Jerusalem *Intifadah* erupting in late 2015. In 2014 and 2015,

several Israeli settlers entered the PA regions, where the security forces handed them over to the Israeli army.

A governmental report issued by the information center in the Ministry of Planning documented the ongoing arrests and summoning of Hamas, PIJ and other faction members by the PA security forces in the WB. In addition to that, the PA held dozens of security meetings with Israeli security forces.¹⁶⁰

An important indicator of the extent of the security coordination was Abbas's pledge in May 2014 to continue coordinating with Israel whether negotiations resumed or not. He confirmed that security coordination was sacred and it would continue.¹⁶¹

As for Hamas, it called on the PA to immediately halt security coordination and security meetings with the occupation, and to condemn its frenzied arrests of Palestinian leaders and public figures. These included the PLC speaker and many MPs and political leaders.¹⁶²

But security relations with Israel took a detour when three Israeli settlers were kidnapped on 12/6/2014 close to Hebron in the WB. President 'Abbas pledged to help find the three settlers and to return them to their families and prosecute the kidnappers. He also confirmed that the PA would coordinate with Israel, expressing his belief that security coordination was in the best interests of the authority, aiming to protect the Palestinian people.¹⁶³

In an interview with an Israeli newspaper, President 'Abbas said that, since early 2013 and up to June 2014, the PA security forces had managed to thwart at least 43 attempts to target Israelis, constituting an important indicator.¹⁶⁴

When the Israeli war on GS started on 8/7/2014, PLO factions called on the Executive Committee to halt security coordination.¹⁶⁵ However, that did not happen; security meetings continued, without giving any consideration to the massacre of civilians and the massive destruction caused by the aggression on the Strip.

When Israeli media and political circles launched an attack against President 'Abbas following the assassination attempt against Israeli rabbi Yehuda Glick and some stabbings and assaults using vehicles executed by Palestinians, Israeli security officials confirmed that President 'Abbas sanctifies security coordination by word and deed. They added that 'Abbas's security forces were committed to implementing security agreements with Israel, and that he was coordinating against

Hamas and the Palestinian resistance. In addition to that, PA security officials in the authority reaffirmed their commitment to security agreements with Israel.¹⁶⁶

In 2015, security coordination continued. However, the major political event on the Palestinian scene was the PCC resolution. During a meeting on 5/3/2015, the council decided to “halt all forms of security coordination with Israeli occupation in light of its failure to abide by agreements signed between the two sides.”¹⁶⁷ Council members gave a standing ovation for this resolution, which had not been implemented at the time of the writing this report. It was not surprising that Israel did not pay much attention to such a resolution and that it was certain that it would not be implemented, in light of confirmations from sources close to President ‘Abbas that the halting of the security coordination was merely a recommendation, and that it would only be implemented via a presidential decree, a highly unlikely outcome.¹⁶⁸

Former Ambassador Uri Savir revealed that negotiations were held between Israeli and Palestinian security authorities to confront the Palestinian uprising. *Maariv* newspaper confirmed that 140 security meetings were convened in 2015.¹⁶⁹ Israeli website Walla, published a report on security coordination between the PA and Israel. It mentioned that in 2015, the PA returned 634 Israelis, who had entered WB territories, while in 2014 it returned 622.¹⁷⁰

As part of the security coordination, the PA launched a crackdown against Hamas militants in the WB. Israeli intelligence circles confirmed that this crackdown was coordinated with the Israel Security Agency—ISA (*Shabak*), which tracks financial cells that pay money and benefits to Hamas families and detainees. This served as confirmation of the security partnership between the two sides and the ongoing security coordination between them.¹⁷¹

As a result of this steady coordination, security in Israeli settlements in the WB improved. Israeli sources related this to security stability in the WB, which is the result of the alternation of roles between the Israeli and Palestinian security forces.¹⁷² The coordination provoked some Palestinian factions and the PFLP escalated its stand against it, similar to that of Hamas and PIJ. PFLP Political Bureau Member Rabah Muhanna addressed President ‘Abbas and the PA security in the WB, saying: “Aren’t you ashamed of the ongoing security coordination with the occupation despite its continuous crimes against our people?” He added: “Don’t you see that the ongoing measures taken by the occupation against our people is a reason for halting the abominable security coordination?!”¹⁷³

Following the crime of the burning of the Dawabsheh family in Nablus in early August 2015, Palestinian parties and factions called for revenge and activating the resistance against settlers in the WB. Fatah Central Committee member Jibril Rajoub affirmed his rejection of committing attacks against Israeli targets, to avenge the Dawabsheh family. He also confirmed that the PA would continue to fight anybody who attempted to thwart its political agendas, in reference to the resistance operations.¹⁷⁴

A senior officer of the Israeli army (who remained anonymous) gave a statement to the Israeli website Walla, in which he confirmed that President ‘Abbas was preventing an *Intifadah* through security coordination, despite the daily confrontations in the WB. His statement can be seen as an accurate summary of the PA’s security approach.¹⁷⁵

With the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* in early October 2015, Israeli Knesset Member (MK) Ksenia Svetlova visited Ramallah and met with senior PA security leaders, who confirmed their commitment to ongoing security coordination and that the PA security was working hard against all those who sought to compromise Israel’s security.¹⁷⁶ Amidst the *Intifadah* events and calls from Palestinian factions to the PA to halt security coordination, *Maariv* newspaper published a report in which President ‘Abbas confirmed that he was the protector of the security coordination and a fighter of “terrorism.”¹⁷⁷

Further to that, on 17/11/2015, the Hebrew language newspaper, *Yedioth Ahronoth* published the story of Jenin Governor Ibrahim Ramadan confirming that the PA security forces had prevented three stabbings that would have targeted Israeli soldiers at al-Jalama checkpoint north of Jenin over a period of two weeks (the first half of November 2015).¹⁷⁸

Despite the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* and its broad support from the Palestinian people that put major pressure on the PA, the latter attempted to confine its parameters, keeping it manageable in order to benefit from it politically, according to the PA’s agenda. Therefore, the PA insisted on maintenance of security coordination, despite overwhelming Palestinian public objections.

In this context, the head of Palestinian Intelligence, Major General Majid Faraj gave a statement to the American weekly *Defense News* published on 18/1/2016 saying that “since October, PA intelligence and security forces have prevented 200 attacks against Israelis, confiscated weapons and arrested about 100 Palestinians.”

In the interview, “Faraj views security coordination as a bridge that can sustain a decent atmosphere until the politicians go back to serious talks.” Faraj reconfirmed the importance of maintaining the security coordination between the authority and the Israeli army, adding that “We are sure that violence, radicalization and terrorism will hurt us. It won’t bring us closer to achieving our dream of a Palestinian state.”¹⁷⁹

In a sign of support for the head of the Palestinian intelligence, President ‘Abbas stepped forward to defend the security coordination policy, emphasizing that this commitment was irreversible, one of the major pledges of the Oslo Accords. During a meeting with the Israeli media in Ramallah on 21/1/2016, ‘Abbas said that he supported peaceful popular resistance and was against all forms of extremism.¹⁸⁰ On 23/1/2016, he confirmed that security coordination with the Israeli side was still ongoing. “Our security forces prevent any citizen from executing any operation.” He added that “We will not accept that our children throw rocks at the Israeli army and then get killed. The Palestinian security forces prevents that for their own protection, out of orders from me personally.” ‘Abbas clarified that the “security coordination is still ongoing till now. But I don’t know what will happen later. We are doing our job to the fullest. And I refuse to be dragged into a battle that I don’t want. I don’t want to go into a military battle that I cannot handle. And I don’t want my people to have a bleak fate.” ‘Abbas went on to say that “If Israel does not adhere to the agreements, we won’t adhere to them either.”¹⁸¹

The statements of ‘Abbas and Faraj reveal the extent of security coordination, and the real political position they take concerning its potential cessation. They confirmed the disregard of the PA leadership for the implementation of the PCC resolution for halting security coordination. Further to that, these statements refuted published reports regarding statements by Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO Executive Committee and member of Fatah’s Central Committee, claiming that the PA would start to officially cut its ties with Israel in early 2016, including security coordination.¹⁸²

Security coordination with Israel was enhanced further in December 2015. “The Committee of the Families of Political Detainees in the West Bank recorded 265 violations by PA security forces against resistance members and cadres, especially those belonging to Hamas.”¹⁸³ On 7/1/2016, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, quoting an Israeli security report which said that:

The PA has markedly reduced the anti-Israel incitement on its official media outlets, deployed uniformed security personnel at flashpoints in the West Bank to prevent confrontations with Israeli soldiers and resumed arresting Hamas military activists. In parallel, Fatah members ‘stopped attending demonstrations,’ as ‘significant improvement in security coordination’ was noted, which ‘one source called ‘exceptionally good’ in recent weeks.’

The paper added that Israeli authorities arrested a Hamas network comprising 25 activists.¹⁸⁴

Israeli authorities were keen to stress the impotence of the security coordination with the PA and on its efficiency in preventing or at least stalling operations against Israel and the settlers in the WB. An Israeli military report confirmed that Israeli-Palestinian security coordination was considered a fundamental building block in their relations, preventing the escalation of confrontations with Palestinians in the WB.¹⁸⁵ Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya‘alon said that the PA security forces continued to coordinate with the Israeli army. He added that this coordination and cooperation was helping the army put an end to the Jerusalem *Intifadah*.¹⁸⁶

Sixth: The Repercussions of the Israeli Aggression on GS in the Summer of 2014 on the Internal Palestinian Situation

The Israeli assault on GS in the summer of 2014 turned tens of thousands into homeless people amid the huge destruction of homes and properties. While the assaults of 2008–2009 and 2012 were also devastating, the assault of 2014 proved to be the most brutal and violent. As a result, GS reconstruction became the most important issue for its residents after the war ended. There followed great disappointment as a result of the stumbling efforts at reconstruction. (See Section 3 of Chapter Two entitled Aggression on GS 2014 on GS)

Efforts for reconstruction began during the indirect ceasefire talks in Cairo on 11/8/2014. Hamas and Fatah agreed to form a national commission led by President ‘Abbas to handle reconstruction, provided that it would be acceptable to Palestinian, Arab, and international parties.¹⁸⁷ Less than a month after the

assault, the National Consensus Government formed a ministerial committee to oversee preparations for reconstruction in GS and a donor conference.¹⁸⁸ Minister of Housing and Public Works Mufeed al-Hassayna, said GS was a disaster zone with losses of \$6–8 billion. The number of housing units full destroyed or rendered uninhabitable in GS was nearly 20 thousand, in addition to 40 thousand that were moderately or slightly damaged, including 180 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools.¹⁸⁹

As soon as the assault stopped, Khalil al-Hayyeh, a Hamas leader stated that the National Consensus Government was responsible for rebuilding GS, expressing his movement's willingness to back and support the government.¹⁹⁰ Ramadan 'Abdullah warned against complacency in the reconstruction dossier, stressing that the Palestinian people would not tolerate anyone who fails to fulfill the commitments in this regard.¹⁹¹ Hamas leaders emphasized their rejection of any trade-off between reconstruction and resistance under any circumstances.

Amid the growing tragedy in GS as a result of the assault, Musa Abu Marzuq called on the PA to begin reconstruction without waiting for the donor conference scheduled for October 2014 and the arrival of funds to its treasury.¹⁹² At a time when KSA pledged \$500 million for the GS reconstruction,¹⁹³ the National Consensus Government published its GS reconstruction national plan to the tune of approximately \$4 billion.¹⁹⁴ This was followed by a visit to GS by a government delegation on 9/10/2014, convening with its full lineup for the first time in GS. Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah promised to rebuild GS, explaining that his government would submit complete, detailed plans to the donor conference in Cairo.¹⁹⁵ However, by the end of October 2014, frustration prevailed amid statements by Hamdallah saying the government had not received "a single penny" of the funds pledged by the donor countries.¹⁹⁶

When UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry declared his plan for the reconstruction of GS in early November 2014, there were reports that Abu Marzuq was in favor of it. The latter denied his approval of a plan which placed an Israeli veto on the beneficiaries of reconstruction. Other factions called for it to be replaced or rectified.

At the end of November, Abu Marzuq said Robert Serry modified his plan to make it more acceptable to the Palestinian side, stressing that Hamas had many options if the parties concerned failed to fulfill their role in the reconstruction process.¹⁹⁷ By the end of 2014, Abu Marzuq reiterated his group's rejection of Serry's plan, pointing out that there was a preference to form a national body to oversee the reconstruction process,¹⁹⁸ but this was never implemented.

Robert Serry's plan included a truce between Israel and the Palestinian factions for five years, under the umbrella of the National Consensus Government, during which time the GS blockade would be fully lifted, reconstruction would take place, as the military activities of the resistance above ground and underground would be suspended. Interestingly, however, Serry did not propose his project until near the end of his term, suggesting it was less credible and serious.

The Quartet's Special Envoy to the Middle East Tony Blair (2007–2015), meanwhile, also made appearances shortly before the end of his term, talking about the need to put an end to the suffering of GS, and after visiting the Strip, declared he was keen to see the situation change. The broad outlines of his plan included Israeli 'concessions' and he talked about opening the crossings. The special envoy also stressed that Palestinian unity would encourage the peace process. He resumed his activities, meeting with Mish'al, stressing the need to lift the GS blockade, and the need for Hamas not to be bypassed. Blair even talked about his conviction that the European nations should deal publicly and directly with the movement.¹⁹⁹

Regardless of the initiatives of Blair and Serry, what is certain is that the spring and summer of 2015 witnessed increasing European activity to present an approach acceptable to all sides for ending the siege and beginning reconstruction. Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries were particularly active in this regard, in addition to Blair, who had his own connections in Britain and the US. Qatar and Turkey, sympathetic to Hamas's position and strongly in favor of ending the siege and beginning reconstruction, offered proposals for ending the blockade in return for a long-term truce.²⁰⁰

Hamas also confirmed that Western parties presented proposals for long-term truce and said it was studying them. Hamas's position, expressed by a number of its leaders and spokespersons, including Isma'il Haniyyah, Musa Abu Marzuq, 'Izzat al-Rishq, Usama Hamdan, Sami Abu Zuhri, Fawzi Barhum, Salah Bardawil, Tahir al-Nunu, and Isma'il Radwan, boiled down to:

1. The need for guarantees that would oblige Israel to lift the siege, end its assaults, and allow reconstruction to proceed.
2. The long-term truce must be secured as part of a national consensus, especially among resistance factions in GS.
3. The truce could not mean allowing Israel free reign in the WB or lead to any form of separation between the WB and GS.²⁰¹

In the early days of 2015, it appeared that the internal Palestinian situation had entered a bottleneck after the deterioration of the relationship between Hamas and the National Consensus Government. It announced that it would not be able to assume its responsibilities towards the reconstruction process unless it was allowed to impose its presence in the GS, including taking over the crossings. This statement was the result of accusations made by the government against Hamas claiming they had disrupted the work of a ministerial delegation from the WB that had come to the GS to discuss some issues, first and foremost the issue of civil servants, who absconded when Hamas took over GS in the summer of 2007.²⁰²

In mid-January 2015, the National Consensus Government announced that Qatar had transferred \$15 million to repair partially damaged homes, and to provide aid to persons displaced by the Israeli aggression on GS.²⁰³ In light of the tension between Hamas and the National Consensus Government, and the failure of the donor countries to fulfill their pledges for reconstruction, Hamas issued a warning through Deputy PLC Speaker Ahmad Bahar saying the situation in GS is on the verge of exploding.²⁰⁴

The government did not take long to defend itself. Minister of Public Works and Housing Mufeed al-Hassayna said on multiple occasions that the total amounts received by the PA for reconstruction did not exceed \$200 million. He also announced the start of a new phase to rebuild destroyed homes, despite the slow flow of donor funds and building materials, stressing that GS needed 130 thousand housing units because of the devastation caused by the aggression.²⁰⁵

On 10/3/2015, Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of National Economy Muhammad Mustafa, who is also chairman of the ministerial committee for the reconstruction of southern governorates, announced that, through a Qatari grant, compensation would be paid to the owners of businesses that suffered slight damage.²⁰⁶ However, Usama Hamdan, a Hamas leader, accused members of the

PA and the government of obstructing Qatari efforts to help reconstruction.²⁰⁷ On 28/3/2015, President ‘Abbas accused Hamas of obstructing reconstruction, in a speech at the League of Arab States Summit in Egypt, but this was dismissed by Hamas.²⁰⁸

Based on its desire to speed up the reconstruction process, on 7/4/2015 the government decided to form a committee to arrange for taking over crossings into GS. However, Hamas refused to comply with this, except on the basis of full implementation of the reconciliation accords, which took things back to square one.

On 9/4/2015, Minister al-Hassayna said the reconstruction would need eight thousand tons of cement per day. While, on 12/4/2015, Deputy Economy Minister Hatem ‘Oweida, pointed out that Israel allowed the provision of only 5% of supplies needed for reconstruction. When the government received the Kuwaiti grant for reconstruction worth \$200 million, Rami Hamdallah discussed with the reconstruction committee implementation issues, considering it the responsibility of the government.²⁰⁹

A full year after the National Consensus Government was formed, it accused Hamas of obstructing its work and reconstruction duties by refusing to hand over ministries and crossings, and allow civil servants to return to their posts.²¹⁰ In June 2015, Minister al-Hassayna announced an agreement regarding the mechanism for bringing in building materials, between the Israeli side and the Palestinian Ministries of Public Works and Housing and of Civil Affairs as well as the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the supervising authority monitoring the reconstruction mechanism. The minister noted that this mechanism was aimed at the owners of totally destroyed homes and new buildings, in addition to new floors.²¹¹ Then he declared that Israel had allowed enough material to rebuild 663 housing units that were completely destroyed during the aggression.²¹²

By mid-August 2015, al-Hassayna said preparations had begun to disburse the second installment of the Qatari reconstruction grant, after obtaining Israeli approval for procuring building materials.²¹³ With the start of the new academic year in early September 2015, all shelters were evacuated of their approximately 450 thousand people who had been displaced by the Israeli war that destroyed their homes.

According to PA officials, 560 tons of rubble were removed from various parts of GS. The PA supplied more than 2,200 mobile homes in the areas affected by the Israeli war.²¹⁴ On 26/10/2015, al-Hassayna said Kuwaiti-funded reconstruction projects would begin within weeks to build 2,000 housing units,²¹⁵ while the Ministry estimated the losses of infrastructure in GS at approximately \$3 billion.²¹⁶

On 18/11/2015, the Palestinian government signed a soft loan agreement in support of GS reconstruction with the Italian government worth of €15 million (\$16.7 million), to be repaid over 40 years.²¹⁷ At the same time, Minister al-Hassayna said that up to 90% of partially damaged homes had been repaired.

With the end of November 2015, Deputy Minister of Public Works and Housing Naji Sarhan announced a new, second Qatari grant covering one thousand to two thousand housing units, in addition to new reconstruction grants from Kuwait, KSA, the US, and other states to the UNRWA.

At the end of 2015, reconstruction continued to progress at a slow and limited pace, far below the expectations of the Palestinian government, factions, and people, amid the continuation of the intra-Palestinian division. No significant progress or radical change was expected to take place going forward, unless facts on the ground were to change with the National Consensus Government imposing its authority in GS, which remains under de facto Hamas control at the time of writing.

Conclusion

By analyzing the events of 2014 and 2015, one may conclude that there is now a growing Palestinian awareness of the negative repercussions of the Palestinian division on the internal situation. There are many factors pushing towards a kind of national accord, even at a bare minimum level, with a view to reconfiguring the Palestinian position to face major challenges. These factors are the crippling blockade imposed on GS, and the resulting difficult economic and humanitarian conditions; Israeli racist settlement and Judaization schemes; the Israeli government's refusal to comply with the bare minimum of Palestinian rights and

national aspirations; popular resentment over the division; and the decline of the Palestinian issue internationally.

The experience of the past two years has proven that the Israeli occupation, the US administration, and the international community are complicit in the imposition of the blockade, and have reached the conviction that it is impossible to break the Palestinian popular will and subdue Hamas, which controls GS, and force them to accept international conditions and dictates. This has forced these parties to seek new ways to deal with GS and its people, including proposals to ease the blockade in order to prevent an explosion.

Meanwhile, the scenario whereby the division would continue is plausible, in light of some powerful factors. Hamas's program based on resistance and its rejection of the Oslo Accords, recognition of Israel, and the conditions of the Quartet, is fundamentally contradictory to Fatah's program based on the peace process and resulting commitments. The issue will require a lot of effort to reach a compromise, which determines the priorities of the phase and its political program, and that would maintain core principles while managing differences in an acceptable way, within one institutional framework such as the PLO or the PA. This is a difficult task whose outcome could be the abandonment of the Oslo Accords or altering the function of the PA, entailing huge costs that could be rejected by many who benefit from the status quo.

Making matters more difficult for reconciliation is the fact that Israel can obstruct the work of the government and hinder elections. It can disrupt any development of security forces and other PA agencies in the WB, should Hamas and resistance forces be included as a real partner. Moreover, the regional and international climate remains opposed to Islamist movements and is therefore making real participation of Hamas and PIJ in the rebuilding of the PLO and the PA more difficult, not to mention the deep mistrust between Fatah and Hamas as a result of the long history of conflict and friction.

An opinion poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, in December 2015, showed increasing frustration towards the Oslo Accords; 68% of the respondents in the WB and GS were in favor of abandoning the Oslo Accords, compared to 25% who are against. According to the same poll, about half of the Palestinians in the WB and GS support the PA's dissolution. There is a wide support for the return of armed uprising (60%), and up to 65%

call for the resignation of Mahmud ‘Abbas. Only 26% support negotiations. These figures are similar to the ones obtained in previous polls, reflecting a real crisis facing the PA, with regard to the peace process it adheres to and the functional role it has.²¹⁸

Therefore, the sincere desire to achieve reconciliation must be accompanied by a confidence-building program with real and serious reviews of Palestinian action. These are essential bases to reach an effective working policy within a unified institutional framework that would preserve fundamentals and continue the liberation project. For this reason, the feasible reconciliation is the one that would preserve the arms of the resistance, end security coordination with Israel in the WB, and turn the PA into a resistance authority that endorses a full *Intifadah* on the basis of which national unity could be secured. Hence, it would be able to repel the occupation, dismantle settlements, end the siege on GS, and secure the release of all prisoners.

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Chapter Two

The Israeli-Palestinian Scene

The Israeli-Palestinian Scene

Introduction

During 2014 and 2015, Israel continued to take advantage of the Palestinian political division, and Arab weakness and dispersion, a situation that was worsened by internal challenges and conflicts. Israel also benefited from US-western cover that maintained it as “a state above the law.” With the increasing trends of the Israeli society towards extremism and the forestallment of the peace process, the Palestinian people continued to affirm their steadfastness through numerous forms of resistance. This was manifested in the fierce confrontation of the Israeli aggression on GS in the summer of 2014 and the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, which escalated in late 2015.

This chapter attempts to draw the internal Israeli political map, in addition to providing demographic, economic and military data on Israel. It also discusses the issues of aggression and resistance and the peace process during 2014–2015.

First: The Internal Israeli Political Scene

2014–2015 witnessed a series of important political events in Israel, some of which were short lived whereas others continued for a while, interacting with other events in other contexts that are addressed in this report, notably:

1. The Fall of the Government and the Formation of Another

Netanyahu’s third government (2013–2015) suffered from instability,¹ as the right wing of the coalition showed its intention to rebel within the ranks of the government to prevent a peace agreement with the Palestinians according to the plan of US Secretary of State John Kerry.² This plan involved the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the future State of Palestine.³ The right wing refused to negotiate with the Palestinians under the pretext that it was an immature interlocutor, implying that the Palestinian side had not yielded enough to the requirements of the Israeli extreme right.

In line with this instability, most of the coalition's parties were threatening to pull out and dismantle the government, and therefore ensure early parliamentary elections, i.e., before the end of the 19th Knesset.

The internal political scene in Israel was in constant turmoil due to the right's growing rejection of the peace or negotiating process with the Palestinians, along with the internal debate about the "Jewishness of the State." 2014 opinion polls indicated that the ranks of the right would be strengthened if early elections were held.⁴

Netanyahu was at the mercy of extremists in his party and other right-wing parties in the coalition government. Consequently, and following increasing contradictions within the government, a number of ministers submitted their resignations. Moreover, Netanyahu fired Yair Lapid and Tzipi Livni from ministerial posts, leading to the disintegration of the coalition and Netanyahu requesting the Knesset's approval to hold early elections. The differences within the government revolved around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which cast a long shadow on the government, despite all efforts to show otherwise.⁵

Following the announcement of early elections for the 20th Knesset, some of those who left Likud for personal or methodological differences with Netanyahu went on to form other parties. These included former Likud member Moshe Kahlon, who announced he was running for elections on the independent list, Kulanu (All of Us). The list won ten seats in the Knesset and joined the coalition government, with Kahlon becoming the Minister of Finance. The Avigdor Lieberman-led Yisrael Beitenu party left its alliance with Likud in anticipation of the 2015 elections.⁶ It won only six seats, having won 11 seats in the previous Knesset during that alliance, its loss benefiting Kahlon's list. As for the Kadima party founded by Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert in 2005, it disappeared from the political scene after its Chairman Shaul Mofaz joined the Labor Party.⁷

2014–2015 also witnessed the retirement of many Israeli political figures from the political and partisan scene, including Limor Livnat from Likud, who had occupied several ministerial seats, and Uzi Landau, former Likud member and Yisrael Beitenu member in the 19th Knesset, who also held several ministerial positions. He was known for his extremist tendencies and anti-Arabism. This was in addition to Binyamin Ben-Eliezer from the Labor Party who had to retire against a backdrop of financial corruption and ensuing police investigations.⁸

Immediately after the announcement of the dissolution of the 19th Knesset on 8/12/2014, political parties and movements in Israel began to prepare for the

20th Knesset elections in March 2015. Consequently, Tzipi Livni, the leader of The Movement Party (*Hatnua*), announced an alliance with the Labor party under the name Zionist Camp, with the goal to prevent Netanyahu's return to power. Opinion polls showed that the Zionist Camp had a small lead over the Likud and right-wing parties, prompting Netanyahu to try to persuade Lieberman to share the premiership within an alliance, but the latter rejected the proposal.

Netanyahu endeavored to maintain the sole leadership of Likud under a constitutional amendment through the appointment of an external candidate in the Likud electoral list without going through the Likud primary (internal) elections. In addition, Netanyahu completely disregarded the party's institutions, especially the Central Committee. At the same time, he did not allow the emergence of a new generation of political leaders, which would have ensured continuity between the ranks of the Likud.

In addition to the above, the personal relationship between Netanyahu and Gideon Sa'ar, one of the most prominent Likud figures, hit rock bottom. Sa'ar gained popularity among Likud members, especially the youth who saw him as a promising leader of the party and a future prime minister. However, Sa'ar was disappointed by Netanyahu's policies and behavior towards the party and towards him, and announced his stepping down from political life, albeit temporarily, as indicated by a number of observers and political analysts.⁹ It must be noted here that prominent Likud leaders have abandoned the political arena entirely or in part, or abandoned Likud because of their disagreement with Netanyahu's approach, including: David Levy, Dan Meridor, Roni Milo, Moshe Kahlon, and others.

Regarding religious parties, Eliyahu (Eli) Yishai withdrew from the leadership of the Shas party and formed a new electoral list, and Aryeh Deri took over as the party's leader in anticipation of the 2015 elections.¹⁰

Israel suffers from having many small parties in terms of representation in the Knesset, and this hinders the formation of a stable government. Accordingly, some political parties and movements sought to end it by raising the electoral threshold from 2% to 3.25%, which would lead to the disappearance of small parties. This was exploited by Lieberman to prevent the arrival of Arab parties to the Knesset as part of the exclusion of Arab citizens of Israel from the political process,¹¹ and to implement other discriminatory policies against them. But in spite of raising the electoral threshold, the Arab parties allied with each other in a Joint List, which took part in the 2015 elections as a single bloc and won 13 seats.¹²

Political parties took part in the 20th Knesset parliamentary elections in March 2015 with 26 electoral lists as per the following party groups:

Table 1/2: The Main Party Groups on the Eve of the 20th Knesset Elections

Political Spectrum	Parties
Right	Likud – The Jewish Home – Yisrael Beiteinu – Kulanu
Center	Zionist Camp – Yesh Atid
Center Left	Meretz
Religious Parties	Shas – Agudat Yisrael – United Torah Judaism
Arab Parties	Joint List

A careful reading of the programs of the Israeli parties that took part in the parliamentary elections reveals that they mostly agree on maintaining the form and substance of the “Jewishness of the State” and dealing with Arab citizens based on their religious affiliations without recognizing their national rights. Israeli parties have a tendency to retreat from the idea of a two-state solution and prefer to maintain the status quo, with earnest attempts to strengthen Israeli settlements in WB in order to achieve more control over the Palestinian territories through confiscation or the extension of control over what they call “state land” in the WB. This is while it continues to impose a siege on GS, despite the lack of achieving any tangible military and political goal in the successive aggressions against GS.

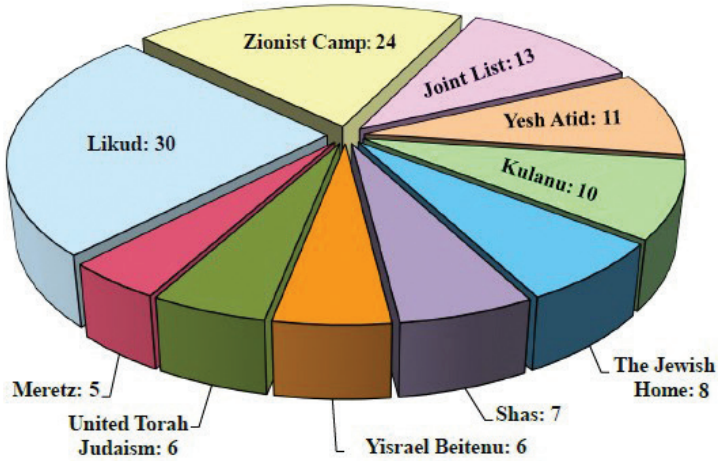
Netanyahu tried to reach an agreement with the Zionist Camp to shore up his power, but they rejected him, based on their belief in an impending election victory. This was despite the fact that there was a great affinity between the Zionist camp and the Likud concerning the political issues of the conflict, notably in the belief that Jerusalem is the only and eternal capital of Israel, and that the withdrawal from the city or its division are rejected.¹³ Netanyahu feared the possibility of a leftward political shift, believing that the settlement building project would end. During his campaign for the elections, he issued various forms of intimidation, the most notable one being those words he uttered on the eve of the elections: “Arab voters are coming out in droves to the polls,” which led to a state of panic among Israelis, and an increase in the number of votes for his party.¹⁴ This ostensibly racist phrase aroused the ire of Palestinian Arabs in Israel, along with Barack Obama’s US administration and some left-wing political circles in Israel, and Netanyahu was forced to apologize later on after winning the elections.

The following table shows the results of the 20th and 19th Knesset elections:

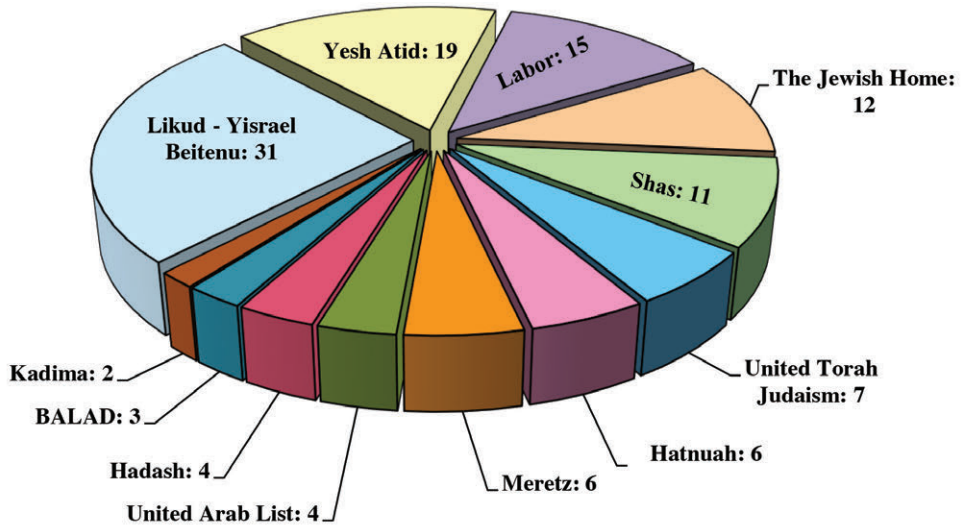
Table 2/2: Comparing the Results of the 20th and 19th Knesset Elections¹⁵

List name	20th Knesset 17/3/2015		19th Knesset 22/1/2013	
	Number of valid votes	Number of seats	Number of valid votes	Number of seats
Likud	985,408	30	885,163	31
Yisrael Beitenu	214,906	6		
Zionist Camp (Labor – The Movement)	786,313	24	–	–
Labor	–	–	432,118	15
The Movement	–	–	189,167	6
Yesh Atid	371,602	11	543,458	19
The Jewish Home	283,910	8	345,985	12
Kadima	–	–	78,974	2
Shas	241,613	7	331,868	11
United Torah Judaism	210,143	6	195,892	7
Meretz	165,529	5	172,403	6
Joint List (Hadash, National Democratic Assembly, Arab Movement for Renewal, United Arab List)	446,583	13	–	–
United Arab List	–	–	138,450	4
Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash)	–	–	113,439	4
National Democratic Assembly (BALAD)	–	–	97,030	3
Kulanu	315,360	10	–	–
Number of eligible voters	5,881,696		5,656,705	
Total number of votes	4,254,738		3,833,646	
Total number of valid votes	4,210,884		3,792,742	

Results of the 20th Kneset Elections on 17/3/2015



Results of the 19th Kneset Elections on 22/1/2013



According to the table above, 32 parties and lists participated in the 19th Knesset elections, with 12 electoral lists that exceeded the threshold and entered the Knesset. We also note that in the 19th Knesset elections, Likud formed an alliance with Yisrael Beiteinu within a single list. As for the Arab parties, they did not unite among themselves, each of them fighting the elections in a separate list, all of which exceeded the election threshold, thus maintaining their electoral strength.

What can be seen by comparing the two rounds of the last two Knesset elections is that the number of lists/parties shrunk to 10 in the 20th Knesset, apparently due to the unity of the Arab lists and the disappearance of Kadima. Moreover, Likud reinforced its positions and won 30 seats by going solo in these elections, without any alliance with Yisrael Beiteinu like in the previous elections. Whereas the Kulanu list/party headed by Kahlon was not far at all from the thought and practice of Likud because its chairman broke away from Likud, whose ideas and aspirations he maintained. Right-wing and religious parties strengthened their positions in the 20th Knesset elections, helping Netanyahu to form a right-wing extremist coalition government, in spite of the differences between Likud as a secular party, and other very religious parties.

The Zionist Camp was comprehensively defeated by Likud. Indeed, the unity between the Labor Party and the Movement Party did not yield much. The former fought this election after having had 15 members in the 19th Knesset while the latter had 6 members. This camp gained only 3 members following the 20th Knesset elections, reflecting the impasse in which the Israeli left found itself, and even the center in the face of the right's force, especially the extreme right. It can be concluded that voters in Israel tended toward more extremism, both in these elections and the preceding ones.

What was remarkable about this election was that the Arab parties and lists united in a Joint List in order to raise the electoral threshold referred to earlier. The advocates of raising the electoral threshold, including Avigdor Lieberman, the Yisrael Beiteinu party leader, wanted to prevent the election of Arabs to the Knesset. Arab parties felt that their political presence within the Israeli parliament was threatened and that they might disappear from the partisan scene if they went solo and did not make the electoral threshold. Despite the fundamental differences between the Arab parties, their coming together in a Joint List for the 20th Knesset

elections had great benefits, most notably unity (albeit somewhat forced) among themselves and putting aside their differences, putting the public interest before their own. Also, the list's victory was a slap in the face of the Israeli far right that sought to exclude Arabs from political life in Israel. The actions of the Arab parties demonstrated a pragmatic ability to move and adapt to new circumstances and emerging challenges, in addition to appearing locally, regionally, and internationally, as advocates of unity and unification. Such an act is a huge challenge on the Palestinian Arab domestic scene.

There was a relatively high participation rate (63.5%) among Arabs in the Knesset elections, the highest since the 15th Knesset elections in 1999 (75%); after it reached 53.4% in the 2009 elections, and 56.5% in the 2013 elections. Moreover, Arab representation in the Knesset reached its highest level since the first Israeli parliamentary elections in 1949, with 16 Arab deputies, including 12 deputies from the Joint List (in addition to a Jewish deputy); while four other Arabs also emerged victorious from four Israeli parties: Zionist Camp, Meretz, Likud, and Yisrael Beitenu. For the first time, an Arab bloc became the third bloc in parliament in terms of the number of deputies, after Likud and Zionist Camp.

According to statistics, 82.4% of Arab votes went to the Joint List, while 16.8% of the votes went to the Israeli parties. The popularity of the Joint List reached 94% in the Triangle (*al-Muthalath*) area, 87% in the Negev, and 77% in the north. Moreover, the 81% rate of Druze votes for Israeli parties reduced the overall Arab votes for the Arab List, for which only 18.8% of Druze areas voted, a rate comparable to the Druze rates in the elections of 2009 and 2013.¹⁶ There are usually Druze deputies in the Knesset representing Israeli parties.

After Netanyahu was tasked with forming the 34th government (his fourth), he was able to bring it together in the form of a coalition of 61 Knesset members from Likud, Jewish Home, Kulanu, Shas, and United Torah Judaism. The government won the confidence of the Knesset on 14/5/2015.¹⁷ The ministerial portfolios were distributed among the members of the coalition government, and two portfolios were added in violation of the set number of 18 portfolios as provided by the law.¹⁸

The government was formed by 11 ministers from the Likud, some of whom took over more than one portfolio, three ministers from the Kulanu list, three ministers from the Jewish Home Party, three from Shas, and one from the United Torah Judaism party.

Several petitions were submitted to the Supreme Court against the government, especially as regards the coalition agreements for being incompatible with the foundations of democracy, transparency and the public interest, as the interests of the parties forming the government emerged, as well as their interest in providing the necessary funds for their institutions. But the Court rejected all these petitions and appeals based on the freedom to act within the law.

Observers believe that the coalition of Netanyahu's government is extremely fragile, and that any difference in opinion and attitude between him and a member of the government, whether from his own party or any other party, could lead to its collapse. And then Israel would hold new parliamentary elections, confirming that governments in Israel are not stable, and that it is unreasonable that the elections are held once every two years. This implies that elections and governance need to be revisited and built anew.

The Central Elections Committee voted to disqualify Member of Knesset (MK) Hanin Zoabi from running in Knesset elections because of her participation on board the Mavi Marmara Turkish ship, which sought to break the siege on GS (in 2010). The High Court of Justice overturned that ruling and gave permission to MK Zoabi to participate in the elections. This was not the first time that right-wing parties operated to prevent the nomination of an Arab Deputy based on the premises of political differences, and to prevent Arab participation in political life in Israel.¹⁹

Despite of the fragility of the Netanyahu government in the Knesset, it sought throughout 2015 to end the track of negotiations with the Palestinian side. Moreover, its repressive policies toward the Jerusalem *Intifadah* in the last quarter of 2015, confirmed its extremist tendencies to pressure Palestinians to give up what remains of their land and rights. But, along with this, there are signs of political turmoil inside Israel, which may lead to new parliamentary elections by the end of 2016 or early 2017,²⁰ which are likely to produce a similar result.

2. Racist Laws

The "Jewishness of Israel" stirred a broad debate not only in the Knesset, but also the media and the education system. As regards education, a racist draft law²¹ was put forward stipulating that the role of the system is to promote Israel as a state for the Jewish people, and that the state is for the people of Israel only, with respect given to its religious minorities.

There was also an attempt to enact a law that eliminates the legal status of Arabic as an official language in Israel. Arabic has been an official language since Israel was established in 1948. This attempt falls within a larger project of Judaizing all aspects of life in Israel, and as part of de-listing Arabic as a second official language and the mobilization of Arabic speakers for the Israeli project.²²

Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon issued a directive that bans Palestinian workers from traveling on Israeli-run public transportation in the WB, because they pose a threat to the lives of Israelis. The move falls within the Israeli apartheid policies in regard to the separation of populations.²³

He also pushed a bill declaring Israel as the “nation-state of the Jewish people,” spurring a heated debate in the Knesset between the right-wing, religious and secular parties. Some, including Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, considered it to be against the course of democracy in Israel. It was frozen at the request of the religious parties as a condition of their coalition with Netanyahu during the formation of his fourth government in 2015.

It was not the first time that Lieberman issues racist remarks, having called for the expulsion of Arabs from Israel to maintain the Jewish purity of Israel as well as guaranteeing the Jewish demographic advantage. He also called for the exchange of areas to get rid of the largest number of Arabs, thus alluding to the project that gave the Wadi 'Ara Triangle to the PA, in exchange for the annexation of settlements in the WB, which would lead to a decrease in the number of Arabs in Israel and an increase of Jews. Lieberman considers that the Arabs in Israel as the fifth column.²⁴

2014 and 2015 witnessed increasing attempts by the government of Israel and the Hebrew municipality of Jerusalem at the intense Judaization of Jerusalem. In the same context, there were continued attempts by ministers, Knesset members and leaders of the Israeli settler movement to storm the *al-Aqsa* Mosque in order to confirm Israeli claims that support Jews' rights in the “Temple Mount.” It is worth mentioning that these continued Israeli attempts are one of the reasons behind the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, which began in the last quarter of 2015. There were increased cases of harassment against the Jerusalemites and disruption of their daily lives through the Israeli forces' continued inspection of individuals, homes, and shops. This was in addition to preventing the entry of Palestinians under 45 years old to

al-Aqsa Mosque for Friday prayers; the demolition of houses under the pretext of a lack of a permit; and the expulsion of Jerusalemite families from their homes, especially in Silwan,²⁵ under various pretexts.

The conflict in Jerusalem reached its peak with the kidnapping of the young boy Muhammad Abu Khdeir,²⁶ who was burned alive at the hands of three settlers. This horrific incident and the preceding and subsequent events led Jerusalemites and others to gather around and protect Jerusalem from escalating Judaization.²⁷

This was followed by the burning of the Dawabsheh family in the village of Duma south of Nablus, which showcased the horror of the crimes of occupation by settlers.²⁸ Defense Minister Ya'alon used security reasons to explain the Israeli authorities taking their time in identifying the perpetrators of this crime. But due to the sharp media and public debate in the Israeli street, indictments were submitted and the killers were identified and tried. The case went beyond a mere trial of the perpetrators, as it revealed racist backgrounds outlined in educational programs and books in addition to religious discourse in religious institutes that were forcefully established in the settlements in the WB and Arab Jerusalem. Moreover, it exposed the racism of settlers who raised a picture of the Dawabsheh family at the tip of a knife and danced during a wedding. Israeli intelligence began to expose Jewish terrorist gangs²⁹ with serious criminal plans against the Palestinians in the WB, their main objective being the expulsion of Palestinians from their land and homes. Inevitably, these painful events revealed the PA's inability to provide security and safety for its citizens despite the ongoing security coordination with Israel.

The Dawabsheh incident prompted Palestinians to respond to the crimes of settlers with a series of operations and confrontations with the Israeli soldiers and settlers that ultimately became known as the “Jerusalem *Intifadah*” or the “knives revolution.” This situation pushed Lieberman to submit a proposal for the application of a law allowing the execution of Palestinian resistance fighters.

3. Corruption Cases

The Tel Aviv District Court convicted former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of accepting bribes and committing a breach of trust in what became known as the “HolyLand scandal” in Jerusalem.³⁰ The same court sentenced Olmert to a six-year jail sentence. However, Olmert's attorneys appealed to the Supreme Court in Jerusalem, and he was acquitted of receiving bribes in the scandal, and

the sentence was commuted to a year and a half on other issues.³¹ In addition to causing outcry in public opinion in Israel, this trial demonstrated the contradictions in the judiciary in dealing with cases of financial corruption concerning political figures. Another financial scandal in the ranks of Yisrael Beitenu party leaders was revealed in 2014, as large amounts of money were illegally transferred to Israeli associations loyal to the party. Among the most prominent names linked to this scandal were the Minister of Tourism Stas Misezhnikov and Deputy Interior Minister Fania Kirshenbaum, who saw indictments submitted against them. The scandal undoubtedly affected the party's voters who are mostly constituted of Russian immigrants.³²

There was another scandal regarding money laundering, bribery, fraud, tax evasion and breach of public trust by former minister and leader of the Labor Party Binyamin (Fuad) Ben-Eliezer, who was interrogated at the embezzlement and fraud unit. There were some who considered the indictment that was submitted against him as the most serious indictment in the history of Israel against a prominent political figure. "The investigation of Ben-Eliezer uncovered approximately \$500,000 in cash in his home. He allegedly took tens of thousands of dollars in return for favors."³³ The political scene in 2016 will witness his trial in addition to other financial corruption and breach of trust cases.³⁴

Another financial scandal that provoked strong reactions in political circles and the media was linked to the confession by senior settler movement leader Gershon Mesika of transferring large amounts of governmental funds to the settlement projects outside the framework set in the public budget.³⁵

The involvement of several politicians and government employees in financial fraud and money laundering reflected deteriorating standards of values and ethics, and circumvention of the law with the assistance and coverage of police and senior officials in the state apparatus.³⁶

The Israeli media published news and reports on sexual harassment scandals by politicians, police officers, military officials and Jewish clerics, the most notable of which being minister Silvan Shalom's scandal at the end of 2015.³⁷ However, the charges against him began to spread in 2014, and continued throughout 2015. Shalom, a prominent Likud leader, had to step down from political life due to political, popular, and media pressure against him. It should be noted that scandals like this have followed one another over the past two years among senior officers

in the army and police, so much so that it was said derisively that there were no longer officers to run the police.³⁸

The Jewish Home MK Yinon Magal, a former journalist, was forced to resign from the Knesset due to complaints lodged against him by women who were subjected to sexual harassment, as he admitted himself.³⁹ Moreover, MK Oren Hazan (Likud) was accused of managing a casino and a prostitution ring in Bulgaria, but he had not yet resigned at the time of writing.

These scandals increased in the period covered by this report, the most notable of which was the scandal involving the Prime Minister's wife, Sara Netanyahu. It emerged that she "kept thousands of shekels from deposits on empty bottles that were returned, on her orders, to supermarkets in Jerusalem over the course of several years even though the bottle deposits were state property."⁴⁰ This was in addition to her rude and coarse manner with the residence staff, which raised the ire of public opinion, the media and the judiciary, and police began investigating her based on complaints made by a number of staff members, namely by the residence caretaker Menny Naftali. An indictment was submitted against Sara Netanyahu in the Labor Court in Jerusalem, and the court awarded Naftali 170 thousand shekels (about \$44 thousand) in damages over claims of verbal and emotional abuse.

4. Prosecutions and Political Strictures

Prosecutions and political strictures increased significantly over the past two years and were directed against Arab citizens of Israel. The most prominent political and judicial prosecution was against former MK Said Naffa',⁴¹ who was accused of visiting Syria and meeting with parties hostile to Israel as stated in the indictment, noting that hundreds of Arab citizens of Israel have visited Syria as per specific arrangements that were conducted for this purpose. The Israeli court sentenced Naffa' to nine months in jail.

In this context, the Government of Israel's decision to outlaw the Islamic Movement (1948)-Northern Branch and ban its activities⁴² carried out by 19 associations and foundations represented a strong blow to the movement, primarily as it was obliged to cease all activities in accordance with the law to avoid any sanctions.⁴³ Secondly, it revealed more of Israel's concerns about the movement's surge in popularity among the Muslims of the 1948 occupied territories, especially since the movement carried out a series of political, religious, social, economic

and cultural activities, which prompted the government to consider it a state within a state. However, these activities would not have taken place had it not been for the state's shortcomings in meeting the needs of some of those who are supposed to be its citizens. In addition, this move revealed the functioning of the Israeli government towards the besiegement, crackdown, and surveillance of Arab citizens, whom it always treats with suspicion.⁴⁴

Sheikh Raed Salah, head of the Islamic Movement inside the Green Line, confirmed that banning the movement's activities would not discourage it from performing its mission and emerge victorious in its principles, the most prominent being to defend Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Sheikh Salah also pointed out that the Islamic Movement's popular base would continue to march forward, stressing that the prosecution and arrest of its leaders would not dismantle it. He also accused an unnamed Arab side of supporting the ban on the movement.⁴⁵ Moreover, Salah's Deputy Kamal Khatib accused official Arab parties of being complicit with Israel in the movement's ban. He believed that the reason for the ban was the movement's position on the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its defense of it. Khatib said, "Netanyahu and his government are mistaken if they think that we will stop defending *al-Aqsa* [Mosque]. We will spare no means and we will never back down from our goal."⁴⁶

As for Lieberman, he considered that the Islamic Movement and the Arab MKs constituted a strategic threat to Israel, and this opinion was shared by Silvan Shalom, former Minister of the Interior. For his part, Netanyahu saw that the movement incited violence in East Jerusalem and Arab towns and villages in the interior. He accused the Islamic movement of being behind the violent events in the Palestinian territories. As for MK Ayman Odeh, head of the Joint List, he considered that the ban of the movement an incitement against Arabs, and stated that the Joint List would prevent the implementation of such a decision.⁴⁷ Moreover, academic Zakaria al-Qaq, who is a professor at Al-Quds University in Abu Dis, near Jerusalem, thinks that Israel is seeking to block the Islamic Movement from doing its work in *al-Aqsa* Mosque and will weaken the movement by outlawing it.⁴⁸

Some Israeli and Arab observers believe that the ban of the movement is a political mistake committed by the government and has led to the strengthening of the movement and its activities, which has lasted for three decades. Yoram Cohen, the then chief of the Israel Security Agency (*Shabak*) or Shin Bet said that "the Shin Bet had no intelligence linking the group to terrorism."⁴⁹ This step was

considered part of the measures undertaken by the Netanyahu government and its predecessors to impose more restrictions and surveillance on Arabs since they are the “internal enemy.”

5. Election of a New Israeli President

The Knesset elected Reuven Rivlin as the new Israeli president (a Likud MK who served as Speaker of the 16th and the 18th Knesset).⁵⁰ He is known for his radical right-wing stances and has been a steady presence in the Likud. He is not concerned with dissidents and he was one of the most vocal opponents of Netanyahu. His election was a setback for Netanyahu, who wishes to abolish the presidency in Israel and allow the prime minister to wield increased power. In other words, internal politics in Israel should tend toward the dictatorship of management and decision making according to Netanyahu’s vision. It is worth mentioning that the presidency is more symbolic than practical or effective. However, a number of Israeli presidents, and in particular those who possess a strong political background, have left their impact on certain political issues. This is the case of Rivlin, who has expressed his opinion freely, especially in regard to racist laws, knowing that he is not a supporter of the establishment of a Palestinian state. Indeed, he supports a one-state system according to the Zionist-Israeli perspective.

6. The Repercussions of the Israeli Aggression on GS

The domestic scene in Israel witnessed a split regarding the aggression on GS, as the intelligence figures severely criticized the political side by claiming that the aggression was not necessary. A number of former intelligence figures issued strong criticism against the government’s policies in GS. Israel incurred gross human and financial losses, and its attempt at garnering international sympathy as the permanent victim failed completely. However, there was a tightening of the blockade on the GS with only essential items allowed to enter in limited quantities monitored by Israel. Moreover, the international community has failed to put an end to these Israeli practices against the Palestinian people. As for the internal political dealing in Israel, there is almost a consensus among all Israeli parties on the need to continue the GS blockade under the pretext of preventing the exposure of southern Israel to shelling from there. The voices condemning the aggression were not sufficient to lift the siege and give the Palestinians more freedom of movement and access.⁵¹

Second: The Most Prominent Demographic, Economic and Military Indicators

1. Demographic Indicators

The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) estimated the population of Israel at the end of 2015 at 8.464 million people, including 6.336 million Jews, representing 74.9% of the population, compared with 8.297 million inhabitants, including 6.219 million Jews, representing 75% of the population, at the end of 2014. As for the Arab population, including residents of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, CBS estimated it in 2015 at 1.757 million, representing 20.8% of the population, compared to 1.72 million in 2014, representing 20.7% of the population (see table 3/2). If we deduct the number of East Jerusalem residents (nearly 324 thousand)⁵² and the Golan Heights (nearly 25 thousand), the number of those who are known as the 1948 Palestinians (i.e., who are living in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948) becomes about 1.41 million in 2015, 16.6% of the population.

In 2015, CBS classified about 370 thousand persons as “others,” representing 4.4%, compared to about 357 thousand in 2014, representing 4.3%. These “others” are mostly immigrants from Russia, the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, who are not recognized as Jews, or who tend to deal with Judaism as a nationality rather than a religious affiliation, or who are non-Jews or non-Arab Christians.

According to Arutz Sheva, an Israeli channel for radical settlers, the number of Jewish settlers in early 2016 reached 375 thousand in East Jerusalem, and about 407 thousand settlers in the WB, representing 782 thousand settlers.⁵³ Defense Minister Moshe Ya‘alon confirmed the channel’s estimates with respect to the rest of the WB, in response to the criticism at a meeting of the Likud party Knesset members in January 2016 in regard to the weakness of settlement building.⁵⁴

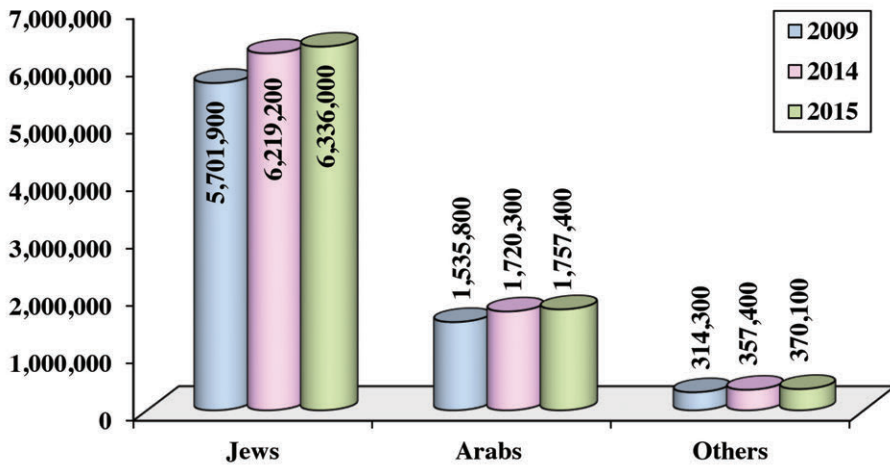
We do not have accurate data to corroborate the Arutz Sheva estimated number of settlers in East Jerusalem, which is estimated by other sources at about 200 thousand settlers only. However, The Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ) offers similar numbers and has noted that Israeli official authorities tend to hide the real number of settlers in the WB, perhaps to ease any potential pressure against their settlement building and Judaization practices, which the international community still considers it to be illegal and an obstacle to the peace process. The

institute warned that the CBS releases figures for settlements where the number of residents exceeds five thousand settlers, and that there are settlement blocs that are not listed officially. According to the ARIJ database for 2015, a total of 750 thousand settlers reside in the WB, including East Jerusalem.⁵⁵ It should be noted that ARIJ estimated the number of Israeli settlers in the WB (including East Jerusalem) at more than 656 thousand in 2012, and 693 thousand in 2013.⁵⁶

Table 3/2: Population of Israel 2009–2015⁵⁷

Year	Total population	Jews	Arabs (including the population of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights)	Others
2009	7,552,000	5,701,900	1,535,800	314,300
2010	7,695,100	5,802,400	1,573,100	319,600
2011	7,836,600	5,898,400	1,609,800	328,400
2012	7,984,500	5,999,600	1,647,200	337,700
2013	8,134,500	6,104,500	1,683,200	346,800
2014	8,296,900	6,219,200	1,720,300	357,400
2015	8,463,500	6,336,000	1,757,400	370,100

Population of Israel 2009 and 2014–2015



In 2014 and 2015, there was a 2% population growth rate in Israel, which has been roughly the same since 2003, noting that 171,444 persons and 176,427 persons were born in Israel in 2013 and 2014, respectively.⁵⁸

According to CBS, 27,850 immigrants came to Israel in 2015, compared to 16,929 and 24,112 in 2013 and 2014 respectively (see table 4/2). These figures show a relative increase in the immigration rate during 2014 and 2015, compared to the preceding decade, but they remain minimal compared to the 1990s. This comes after the diminution of the numbers of Jews willing to migrate, and after most Jews abroad went to developed countries in North America and Europe, where Jews do not have an incentive to migrate on a large scale. Perhaps the relative increase in the past two years is due in some respects to the economic stability and progress in Israel, and the decline of external threats. This is in addition to the broad activity of rightwing and religious forces that dominate the Israeli government in regard to immigration, settlement building, and Judaization programs, and to the fact that scores of Jews have an increased sense of instability as a result of the amplification of incidents that target them, such as the attacks in France.

It should be noted that immigration to Israel coincided with a continued emigration flow. According to CBS, 16,200 holders of Israeli passports, including 800 Arabs, left Israel in 2013, while 8,900 returned, including 445 Arabs. This means that the emigration rate was about 7,300 people.⁵⁹ According to some Israeli indications, there are around 750 thousand Israeli residents traveling outside Israel.⁶⁰

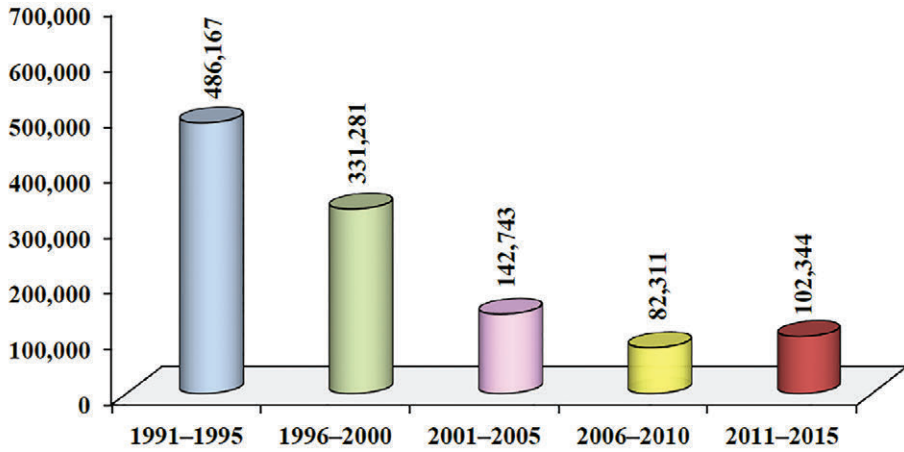
Table 4/2: Number of Jewish Immigrants to Israel 1990–2015⁶¹

Year	1990–1994	1995–1999	2000–2004	2005–2009	2010
No. of immigrants	609,322	346,997	182,208	86,859	16,635

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
No. of immigrants	16,893	16,560	16,929	24,112	27,850	1,344,365

The following chart shows the evolution of the number of Jewish immigrants to Israel for every five years during 1991–2015, noting that in 1990, there were 199,516 Jewish immigrants who arrived to Israel.

Number of Jewish Immigrants to Israel 1991–2015

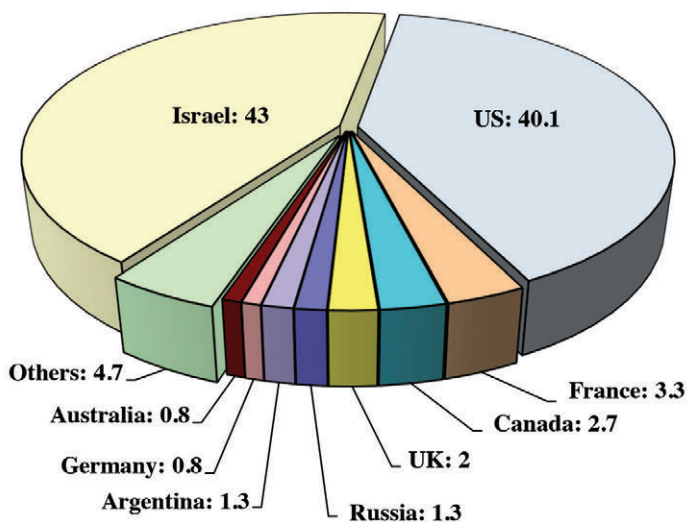


As for the world Jewish population, Sergio DellaPergola, the renowned demographer and statistician, indicated that it was estimated to be 14.213 million at the end of 2013, an increase of 358 thousand from the end of 2012, (a 2.6% increase), according to the latest statistics up to the writing of this report (see table 5/2). In the same vein, warnings were still issued against the “dissolving” of the followers of Judaism outside Israel, due to the high proportion of mixed marriages, which has an impact on the world Jewish population, especially in Western countries.⁶²

Table 5/2: World Jewish Population by Country 2013⁶³

Country	Estimates (thousands)	Percentage (%)
Israel	6,103.2	43
US	5,700	40.1
France	475	3.3
Canada	385.3	2.7
United Kingdom (UK)	290	2
Russia	186	1.3
Argentina	181.3	1.3
Germany	118	0.8
Australia	112.5	0.8
Others	661.5	4.7
Total	14,212.8	100

World Jewish Population by Country 2013 (%)



The 1948 Palestinians still suffer from Israel’s racially discriminatory policies. A report on racism in Israel noted that during 2015 the Israeli Knesset continued to discuss 9 draft discriminatory laws, after debating 16 in 2014.⁶⁴

As noted earlier, Israeli statistics integrate the Palestinians of East Jerusalem and the Syrians of the Golan Heights with the Palestinians of 1948. Therefore, this should be taken into account when discussing these citizens’ religious affiliation and social condition. Accordingly, data in 2014 shows that there are some 1.5 million (Sunni) Muslims representing 84.5%, 136 thousand Druze (7.9%), and 129 thousand Christians (7.5%).⁶⁵ In terms of population growth rates in 2014 and 2015, they reached 2.2% among Arabs, compared with 1.9% among Jews.⁶⁶ According to a report issued by the National Insurance Institute of Israel (NII) in November 2013, the poverty rate among Arab families reached 47.4% in 2013. The rate of people who are of working age was 73.8% of Arab men and 34.7% of Arab women in 2013, compared with 81% of Jewish men and 79.1% of Jewish women. The hourly wage rate reached 36.3 shekels (about \$10) for Arabs and 54.2 shekels (about \$15) for Jews,⁶⁷ according to the latest data available as of the writing of this report.

The average life expectancy was 76.9 years for Arab males and 81.2 for Arab females in 2014, compared with 81.8 years for Jewish males and 84.5 for Jewish females.⁶⁸

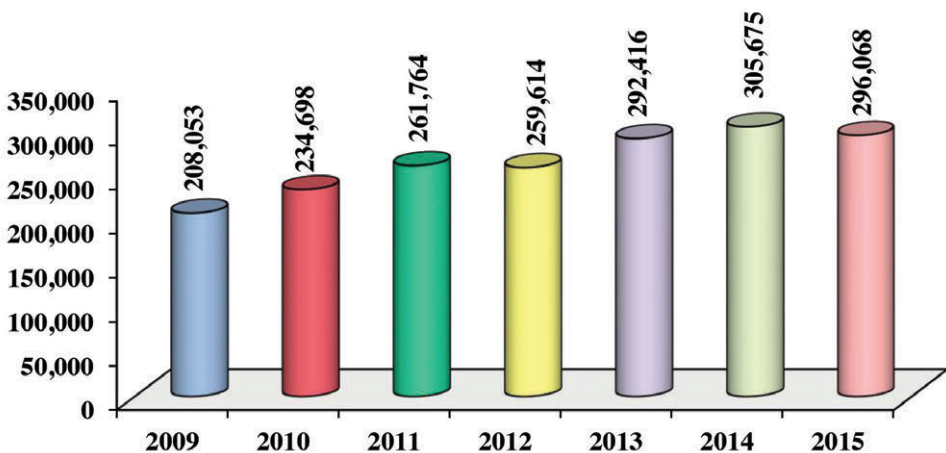
2. Economic Indicators

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was estimated in 2015 at 1,150.8 billion shekels (\$296.1 billion), compared with 1,093.7 billion shekels (\$305.7 billion) in 2014, and 1,055.8 billion shekels (\$292.4 billion) in 2013. According to these estimates, the GDP registered a 3.6% and 5.2% growth in local currency for 2014 and 2015, respectively. But when calculating the growth rate in US dollars, and because of the shekel's fluctuating value against the dollar, we find that the growth rate decreased by 3.1% in 2015 while it rose by 4.5% in 2014 compared to the previous year (see table 6/2). It is worth noting that these results are contrary to the growth expectations of the Central Bank in Israel, which were 2.5% in 2014⁶⁹ and 2.4% in 2015.⁷⁰ The statistics that we present are drawn from official sources, which update their data and make modifications to it from time to time.

Table 6/2: Israeli GDP 2009–2015 at Current Prices⁷¹

Year	GDP (million shekels)	GDP (\$ million)	Shekel exchange rate (according to Bank of Israel)
2009	818,189	208,053	3.9326
2010	876,129	234,698	3.733
2011	936,619	261,764	3.5781
2012	1,001,044	259,614	3.8559
2013	1,055,828	292,416	3.6107
2014	1,093,674	305,675	3.5779
2015	1,150,786	296,068	3.8869

Israeli GDP 2009–2015 at Current Prices (\$ million)

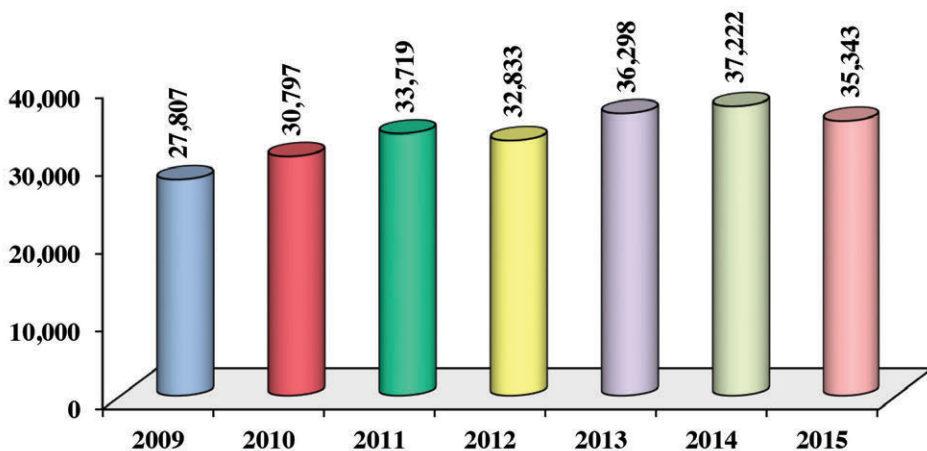


According to statistics, Israeli GDP per capita in 2015 was 137,376 shekels (\$35,343), compared to 133,178 shekels (\$37,222) in 2014 and 131,061 shekels (\$36,298) in 2013. Therefore, GDP per capita grew in local currency by 1.6% and 3.2% for 2014 and 2015, respectively. But when calculating the growth rate in US dollars, because of the fluctuation of the value of the shekel against the dollar, the growth rate decreased by 5% in 2015, while it rose by 2.5% in 2014 compared to the previous year. Hence, we should be wary of rushing to inaccurate conclusions if we do not take into account the difference in calculating the local currency against the dollar (see table 7/2).

Table 7/2: Israeli GDP per Capita 2009–2015 at Current Prices⁷²

Year	GDP per capita (shekels)	GDP per capita (\$)
2009	109,353	27,807
2010	114,966	30,797
2011	120,650	33,719
2012	126,599	32,833
2013	131,061	36,298
2014	133,178	37,222
2015	137,376	35,343

Israeli GDP per Capita 2009–2015 at Current Prices (\$)



With regard to the budget of the Israeli government, CBS indicates that the grand total (excluding expenditure dependent on income) in the approved 2014 budget of government payments amounted to 445.085 billion shekels (\$124.4 billion), compared with 453.074 billion shekels (\$125.5 billion) in 2013. However, the grand total of the budget performance of government payments totaled 446.416 billion shekels (\$124.8 billion) in 2014 compared to 425.528 billion shekels (\$117.9 billion) in 2013.⁷³

The budget is distributed on three axes; the first being the ordinary budget that includes expenses related to the presidency, the prime minister, and the ministries, etc. The second axis includes the development budget and debt repayment, and the third includes the budget of business enterprises. We note that the ordinary budget performance of 2014 was 307.439 billion shekels (\$85.9 billion), including that of Ministry of Defense 72.705 billion shekels (\$20.3 billion), and Ministry of Public Security 14.262 billion shekels (\$4 billion). This was in addition to 55.945 billion shekels (\$15.6 billion) spent by the Ministry of Education, and 36.681 billion shekels (\$10.3 billion) spent by the Ministry of Social Affairs. We also note that debt repayment has carved out a significant portion of the total expenditures, reaching 99.088 billion shekels (\$27.7 billion) in 2014 compared to 94.417 billion shekels (\$26.1 billion) in 2013.⁷⁴

The grand total of budget performance of government receipts in 2014 were 416.051 billion shekels (\$116.3 billion), compared with 410.956 billion shekels (\$113.8 billion) in 2013. A large part of the current receipts comes from income tax (104.9 billion shekels, or \$29.3 billion) and value-added tax (VAT) (87.2 billion shekels, or \$24.4 billion).⁷⁵

At the time of writing of this report, CBS had not yet provided the data for the 2015 budget.

It appears that the statistics obtained from the Israeli Ministry of Finance website focus on the ordinary budget primarily related to the government and its ministries, and the updated budget for 2014 shows total expenditure of 338.856 billion shekels (about \$94.7 billion), without any reference to debt repayment or business enterprises. Likewise, the updated budget for the year 2015 shows total expenditure of 353.788 billion shekels (\$91 billion).⁷⁶

Some inconsistency and confusion could happen to some researchers, for the statistics and figures issued by different Israeli official bodies did not specify if the intended budget was the grand total budget or the ordinary budget. It did not specify if it was the budget approved by the government or by the Knesset, and whether it is the updated budget for receipts and payments after the completion of the fiscal year.

The following table shows the receipts and payments of the Israeli government in 2013 and 2014:

Table 8/2: Budget Performance of Israeli Government Receipts and Payments 2013–2014⁷⁷

		2013		2014	
		Million Shekels	\$ million	Million Shekels	\$ million
Receipts	Current receipts	247,019	68,413	260,235	72,734
	Capital receipts	148,604	41,157	136,614	38,183
	Business enterprises	15,333	4,247	19,202	5,367
Grand total		410,956	113,817	416,051	116,284
Payments	Ordinary budget	295,622	81,874	307,439	85,927
	Development budget and debt repayment	114,463	31,701	119,774	33,476
	Business enterprises	15,443	4,277	19,203	5,367
Grand total		425,528	117,852	446,416	124,770
Deficit (%)		-3.5		-7.3	

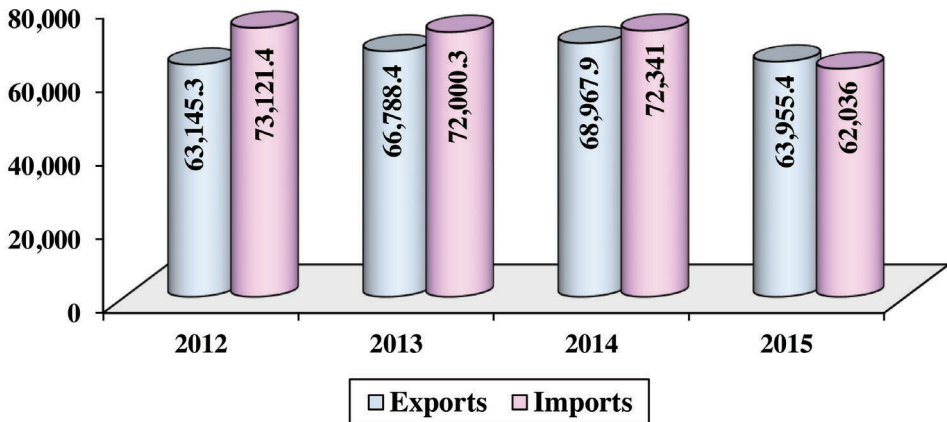
Israeli exports for 2015 amounted to \$63.955 billion, compared to a total of \$68.968 billion in 2014, and \$66.788 billion in 2013; thus, exports dropped by 7.3% in 2015, after achieving an increase of 3.3% in 2014. As for imports for 2015, they reached a total of \$62.036 billion, compared with a total of \$72.341 billion in 2014, and \$72 billion in 2013; thus, imports dropped by 14.2% in 2015, after achieving an increase of 0.5% in 2014 (see table 9/2). It must be noted that these statistics do not include foreign trade services such as export and import activities.

When exports and imports are calculated in shekels, there will be a difference in the data, as the value of exports will rise by 0.9% in 2015, and by 2.2% in 2014, and imports will fall by 6.8% in 2015 compared to a decline of 0.5% in 2014. Despite the Israeli shekel’s impact on statistics related to foreign currency, there was an improvement in the reduction of the import bill, and in the reduction of Israel’s trade deficit in 2014 and 2015 (see table 9/2).

Table 9/2: Total Israeli Exports and Imports 2012–2015 at Current Prices⁷⁸

		Exports	Imports	Surplus/ deficit (%)
2012	Million shekels	243,388.5	281,712.7	-15.8
	\$ million	63,145.3	73,121.4	
2013	Million shekels	241,171.8	259,889.5	-7.8
	\$ million	66,788.4	72,000.3	
2014	Million shekels	246,481.4	258,586.3	-4.9
	\$ million	68,967.9	72,341	
2015	Million shekels	248,677.3	241,099.6	+3
	\$ million	63,955.4	62,036	

Total Israeli Exports and Imports 2012–2015 at Current Prices (\$ million)



The US still maintains its status as a primary trading partner of Israel. In 2015, Israeli exports to the United States amounted to \$18.127 billion, representing 28.3% of total Israeli exports, compared to \$18.568 billion in 2014 (26.9% of the total Israeli exports). Israeli imports from the US in 2015 amounted to \$8.081 billion, representing 13% of total Israeli imports, compared to \$8.56 billion in 2014 (11.8% of total Israeli imports). Israel offsets its trade deficit to a large extent with most of its trading partners through the trade surplus with the US, which was \$10.046 billion in 2015 and \$10.008 billion in 2014, and represents a great support to the Israeli economy (see table 10/2).

China ranked the second largest trading partner for Israel, with Israeli exports amounting to \$3.246 billion in 2015 and \$2.793 billion in 2014. Israeli imports from China reached \$5.768 billion in 2015 and \$5.994 billion in 2014. Hong Kong ranked third in terms of trade volume with Israel, which amounted to \$7.36 billion in 2015, while it reached \$8.268 billion in 2014.

The UK advanced from the seventh to the fourth position in 2015, as the trade volume amounted to \$6.281 billion, having been \$6.308 billion in 2014. Switzerland retained its fifth position for a trade volume of about \$5.922 billion in 2015, down from \$6.615 billion in 2014 (see table 10/2).

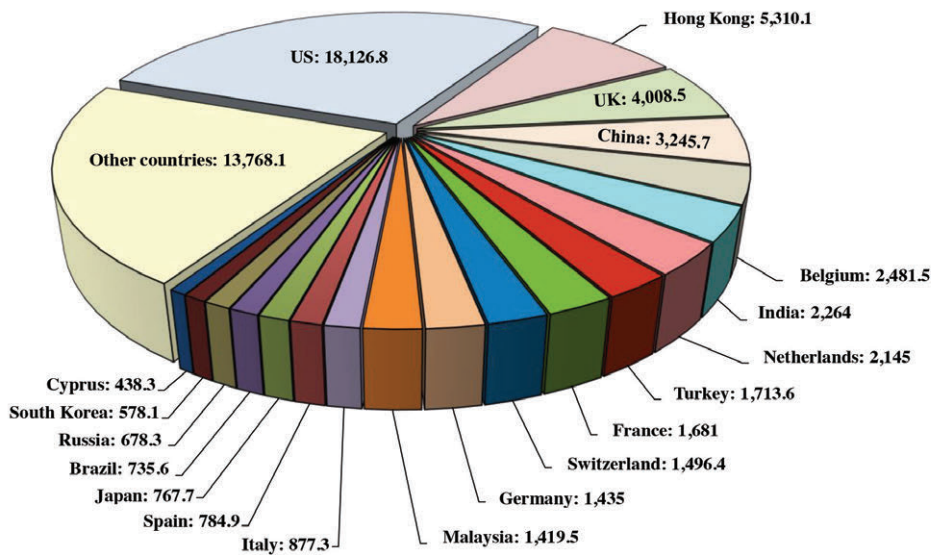
In addition to these states, the main countries that received Israeli exports in 2015 were Belgium (\$2.482 billion), India (\$2.264 billion), the Netherlands (\$2.145 billion), Turkey (\$1.714 billion), France, Germany, and Malaysia. The major countries that exported goods to Israel in 2015 were Germany (\$3.81 billion), Belgium (\$3.275 billion), Italy (\$2.491 billion), Turkey (\$2.446 billion), the Netherlands (\$2.422 billion), and India (see table 10/2).

In 2014, the main countries that imported Israeli goods were Belgium (\$3.3 billion), Turkey (\$2.756 billion), the Netherlands (\$2.485 billion), India (\$2.203 billion), Germany, France, Malaysia, and Italy. The major countries that exported goods to Israel in 2014 were Germany (\$4.652 billion), Belgium (\$3.818 billion), Italy (\$2.784 billion), Turkey (\$2.684 billion), the Netherlands (\$2.419 billion), and India (\$2.241 billion) (see table 10/2).

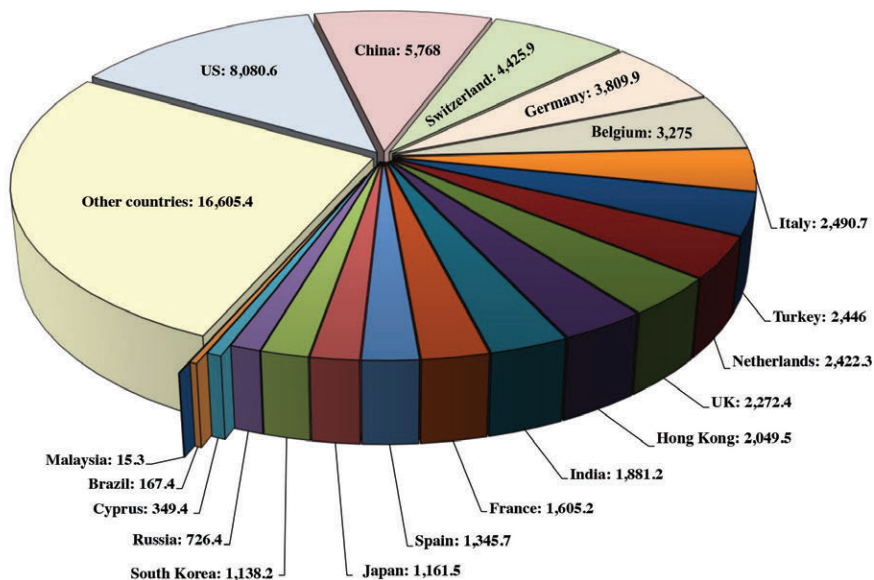
Table 10/2: Volume of Israeli Trade, Exports and Imports to/ from Selected Countries 2014–2015 at Current Prices (\$ million)⁷⁹

Country	Trade volume		Israeli exports to:		Israeli exports from:	
	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014
US	26,207.4	27,127.8	18,126.8	18,567.7	8,080.6	8,560.1
China	9,013.7	8,786.9	3,245.7	2,793	5,768	5,993.9
Hong Kong	7,359.6	8,267.7	5,310.1	6,128.9	2,049.5	2,138.8
UK	6,280.9	6,308.4	4,008.5	3,974.8	2,272.4	2,333.6
Switzerland	5,922.3	6,614.6	1,496.4	1,424.6	4,425.9	5,190
Belgium	5,756.5	7,118	2,481.5	3,299.6	3,275	3,818.4
Germany	5,244.9	6,379.8	1,435	1,727.8	3,809.9	4,652
Netherlands	4,567.3	4,903.7	2,145	2,484.9	2,422.3	2,418.8
Turkey	4,159.6	5,439.2	1,713.6	2,755.6	2,446	2,683.6
India	4,145.2	4,443.2	2,264	2,202.7	1,881.2	2,240.5
Italy	3,368	3,877.7	877.3	1,093.5	2,490.7	2,784.2
France	3,286.2	3,228.9	1,681	1,668.1	1,605.2	1,560.8
Spain	2,130.6	2,456.1	784.9	1,036.8	1,345.7	1,419.3
Japan	1,929.2	2,081.5	767.7	787.5	1,161.5	1,294
South Korea	1,716.3	1,985	578.1	627.8	1,138.2	1,357.2
Malaysia	1,434.8	1,427.7	1,419.5	1,375.7	15.3	52
Russia	1,404.7	1,939.6	678.3	965.3	726.4	974.3
Brazil	903	1,103	735.6	922.1	167.4	180.9
Cyprus	787.7	1,342.8	438.3	950.6	349.4	392.2
Other countries	30,373.5	36,477.3	13,768.1	14,180.9	16,605.4	22,296.4
Total	125,991.4	141,308.9	63,955.4	68,967.9	62,036	72,341

Israeli Exports to Selected Countries 2015 at Current Prices (\$ million)



Israeli Imports from Selected Countries 2015 at Current Prices (\$ million)



Manufacturing, mining and quarrying topped the list of Israeli exports for 2014 and 2015, amounting to 81.5% and 84.6% respectively. The net Israeli diamond exports amounted to 16.2% in 2014 and 13.5% in 2015. Agricultural exports and

those relating to forestry and fishing totaled to 2.4% in 2014 and 2.2% in 2015 (see table 11/2). The breakdown of industrial exports by technological intensity shows that high-technology industries accounted for 50.1% of total industrial exports (excluding diamonds) in 2015, while medium-tech industries accounted for 43.2%, and low-tech industries for 6.7%.⁸⁰

Table 11/2: Israeli Exports by Commodity Group 2013–2015 (\$ million)⁸¹

Year	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	Manufacturing, mining & quarrying excl. working diamonds	Diamonds		Others	Returned exports	Total
			Working of diamonds	Wholesale of diamonds			
2013	1,495.2	46,271.9	6,293.7	2,910	3.7	-103.6	56,870.9
2014	1,392.4	47,024.9	6,287.9	3,064.5	2.7	-105	57,667.4
2015	1,168.1	45,178.6	4,994.2	2,200.7	1.4	-116.2	53,426.8

With regard to Israeli imports, raw materials topped the list in 2014 and 2015, with 39% and 44% respectively. As for fuel imports, they amounted to 17.9% and 12.1% for both years. The import of consumer goods represented 17.6% and 19.5%, and investment goods 13% and 14.2%, while diamonds amounted to 12% and 10.3% in 2014 and 2015, respectively. The decline in Israeli exports and imports of diamonds is due to the global decline in the purchasing value of diamonds in 2014–2015 (see table 12/2).

It should be noted that Israeli fuel imports in 2015 were \$7.41 billion, a 42% decline compared to 2014, due to the Israeli investments in gas extraction in the eastern Mediterranean basin where production began in the Tamar field in 2013 in quantities that will suffice Israel for the coming 15–20 years.

Table 12/2: Israeli Imports by Commodity Group 2013–2015 (\$ million)⁸²

Year	Consumer goods	Raw materials	Investment goods	Fuels	Diamond rough and polished	Others	Total
2013	11,506.8	27,202.9	8,879.6	14,560.2	8,269.9	682.6	71,102
2014	12,545.6	27,820.3	9,316.5	12,769.8	8,584.1	443.3	71,479.6
2015	11,952.1	26,701.5	8,723.2	7,406.6	6,284.1	234.8	61,302.3

Although Israel is a rich and developed country, it still receives US aid annually that reached in 2015 a total of \$3.11 billion, including \$3.1 billion in military grants, while support in 2014 and 2013 reached a total of \$3.115 billion per year, including \$3.1 billion in military grants. Thus, Israel has received from the US during 1949–2015 a total of \$124.469 billion, according to the final report of the Congressional Research Services (CRS).⁸³

Table 13/2: US Bilateral Aid to Israel 1949–2015 (\$ million)⁸⁴

Period	1949–1958	1959–1968	1969–1978	1979–1988	1989–1998	1999–2008
Total	599.6	727.8	11,426.5	29,933.9	31,551.9	29,374.7

Period	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Total	2,583.9	2,803.8	3,029.2	3,098	3,115	3,115	3,110	124,469.3

3. Military Indicators

A state of anticipation prevailed over the Israeli military establishment during 2014 and 2015, due to the events on the northern borders of Israel, especially in light of the Russian military intervention in Syria that affected the balance of power. Moreover, Israel was not able to achieve “deterrence” on its southern border, which saw an aggression on GS in the summer of 2014, as the Commander of the Gaza Division in the Israeli army Brigadier General Itai Virov admitted that it was not possible to deter the resistance factions and that the war was not a war of deterrence.⁸⁵ This coincided with the growing threat of “international jihadist organizations.” In addition, there was the growing threat of cyber warfare, with the fear from the possibility of the cutting of cables, which supply internet to Israel.⁸⁶ The declaration of the nuclear deal between Tehran and the supreme powers on 14/7/2015, caused consternation in Tel Aviv, expressed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who strongly criticized the agreement, declaring that it would “all but guarantee that Iran will get those nuclear weapons—lots of them.”⁸⁷ On the other hand, the knives uprising and trampling and shooting operations carried out by Palestinians in the WB in the last quarter of 2015, created confusion among Israeli decision-makers and presented the Israeli army with a challenge it had not experienced since the decline of *al-Aqsa Intifadah*.

a. Appointments and Structural Changes

The failures of the Israeli war on GS in the summer of 2014 caused a series of changes carried out by the Chief of General Staff of the Israeli army, Benny Gantz, as they affected the largest military brigades that took part in ground operations during the GS war. The list of changes included the removal of the commander of the Paratrooper Brigade Colonel Eliezer Toledano and the appointment of Colonel Nimrod Aloni instead. The campaign also included the removal of the commander of the Givati Brigade Colonel Ofer Vinter, and the appointment of Colonel Yaron Finkelman instead. The army also decided to appoint Amos HaCohen as new commander of the Nahal Infantry Brigade instead of Uri Gordin.⁸⁸ The leader of the Kfir Brigade Asher Ben Lulu was removed and replaced by the former Hebron Hills Brigade Commander, Colonel Guy Hazot. The changes also included the removal of the leaders of the 7th Armor Brigade and 188th Armored Brigade in the Armored Corps. Hence, Colonel Dan Neuman was appointed as commander of the 7th Brigade to succeed Colonel Nadav Lotan, while Colonel Nir Ben-David succeeded Colonel Tomer Ifrah as commander of the 188th Brigade.⁸⁹ On 18/9/2014, Brigadier Herzi Halevi was promoted to the rank of major general and appointed commander of Directorate of Military Intelligence (AMAN), thereby succeeding Major General Aviv Kochavi,⁹⁰ who took office as commander of the Northern Command on 2/11/2014, succeeding Major General Yair Golan.⁹¹

On 14/12/2014, the government ratified the appointment of the Deputy Army Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Gadi Eisenkot, as successor to the Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Benny Gantz, and he officially took office on 16/2/2015.⁹² Eisenkot did not wait to take office and implemented these appointments during Gantz's term; he reestablished Major General Tal Russo as commander of the Depth Command and promoted Major General Tamir Hayman on 25/1/2015, making him head of the corps along the northern borders and the head of the military colleges.⁹³

Furthermore, Eisenkot decided to dissolve the Druze Herev Battalion, 41 years after its inception, dispersing the battalion's soldiers among the various military units in the Israeli army.⁹⁴

Netanyahu announced the appointment of Yossi Cohen as the new Director of the Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations (Mossad) on 7/12/2015, replacing Tamir Pardo, whose term expired in January 2016. Cohen was the chief of the National Security Council and had worked in the Mossad for several years.⁹⁵

Moreover, the army formed the Sayfan (Gladiolus) unit as part of the Engineering Corps, to “detect, identify and treat unconventional materials in a combat zone.”⁹⁶

b. Manpower

In 2014 and 2015 the number of Israeli soldiers who committed suicide increased compared with 2013. The army has said that 15 soldiers committed suicide in 2015, 10 of whom were in the mandatory military service,⁹⁷ compared to 15 soldiers who committed suicide in 2014, and 7 soldiers in 2013.⁹⁸ Also, the Israeli army reported that in 2014 there were some 1,900 draft dodgers and 2,700 defectors.⁹⁹

The head of the Israeli army’s Personnel Directorate, General Hagai Topolanski, declared that about 50% of Israelis do not serve in the army, as half of them are not included in the mandatory military service, and the other half evades the army under the pretext of religion.¹⁰⁰

In November 2015, Israeli army data covering the period since early 2015 revealed that 50% of 18-year-old males were drafted in the army, while the drafting of females rose by 250%. The drafting of young Bedouins fell by 50%, and there was an 88% drafting of Druze young people, which is the same percentage as young Jewish men from the Ethiopian community.¹⁰¹

On the moral level, on 24/12/2014, the commander of the Tzabar battallion of Givati, Lieutenant Colonel Liran Hajbi, was accused of sexual harassment of female soldiers.¹⁰² Moreover, the police service was involved in several corruption cases. On 27/1/2015, eight officers were dismissed, as they were involved in taking bribes and committing sexual assaults during the year and a half that followed the publication of the news.¹⁰³

Moreover, the commander of Lahav 433, Major General Menashe Arviv, was dismissed from the police in February 2014 on suspicion of receiving gifts.¹⁰⁴ As for Central District Police Chief Bruno Stein, he resigned in September 2014 because of his relationship with a lawyer who is suspected of giving bribes to the police in exchange for the closure of files.¹⁰⁵ In January 2015, commander of the “Judea and Samaria” Police District Kobi Cohen resigned on suspicion of a relationship with a police officer under his command. Moreover, Deputy Commissioner of the Israel Police Major General Nissim Mor, was investigated on 26/1/2015 on charges of sexual relationships with eight women under his command.¹⁰⁶

According to Israeli army data published on 28/4/2015, the number of sexual abuse cases in the ranks of the army has been on the rise in recent years, as there were 777 sexual assault complaints in 2012, including 511 related to sexual harassment. In 2013, the number rose to 930 complaints, including 561 related to sexual assault within the military, and in 2014 the number rose again, reaching 1,073 complaints.¹⁰⁷

The *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper revealed on 10/6/2015 that about 20 thousand Israeli soldiers are imprisoned annually, 71% of them because of evasion and absenteeism from the military service, 21% of them are tried for “breach of discipline” charges, and the rest for criminal charges.¹⁰⁸

c. Military Plans and Directions

Events and transitions taking place in the Arab and regional area affected the strategies, plans and directions of the Israeli military establishment. Thus, Israel became braced for a future confrontation with effective military forces that do not have the form of regular armies, such as ISIS and al-Nusra Front, with whom decisiveness is weakened during confrontation through conventional military structure and plans used by the Israeli army. Add to that the rising military capabilities and battle tactics of Palestinian resistance movements in GS and Hizbullah in Lebanon, which in recent years have become the biggest strategic threat to the Israel, as most Arab armies no longer pose a threat to Israel, in theory at least.

After Israel’s war on GS in the summer of 2014, it was unsatisfied with its deterrence and military achievements, and this led to a conflict between the military, along with the Ministry of Defense, and the Israeli Ministry of Finance about the military budget. Indeed, the latter, based on the recommendations of the Locker Committee it formed, attempted to impose major cuts on the budget of the Ministry of Defense, which affected the Israeli army structure for the first time. It demanded reducing the size of the conscripted forces as well as the rationalization of expenditures on army programs,¹⁰⁹ prompting the Chief of General Staff Gadi Eisenkot to announce the Gideon Plan on 20/7/2015, in anticipation of the publication of the Locker recommendations the next day. The Gideon Plan included the discharge of nearly 100 thousand reserve soldiers and the dismissal of 2,500 professional soldiers, all within the following five years. This was in addition to the cutting down of artillery brigades and light infantry brigades, as opposed to

the continued strengthening of the intelligence forces, cyberwarfare, and the Air Force. The plan also aims to shorten the duration of readiness for war to within hours instead of several days.¹¹⁰

Hence, on 6/7/2015 the Israeli army decided upon the Fire Formation Brigade as a way to increase operational efficiency and meet the combat methods used by the Palestinian resistance in the GS and by Hizbullah, after it became clear to the army that there were large gaps in its readiness to engage in “guerrilla warfare.”¹¹¹

In May 2015, the Israeli army decided to establish a new brigade to explore the depth of enemy territory and quickly carry out covert and dangerous missions during the battle, according to the *Maariv* newspaper, which added that this unit came as a lesson drawn from the war on the GS in the summer of 2014, during which more than 45 tanks and armored vehicles belonging to the army were destroyed.¹¹²

In an unprecedented move in the history of the Israeli army, Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot issued a military document, the “IDF Strategy,” which revealed the army’s military objectives and methods of achievement. The document, which can be seen as “Eisenkot’s doctrine,” reveals to the public the current military targets of the Israeli army, which are the Islamic organizations, in addition to the army’s national goals of maintaining Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. In this document, it is revealed that the Israeli army will determine in advance tens of thousands of targets in Lebanon and Gaza to hit in a short time frame, in the early days of the next war.¹¹³

According to the document, Israel’s present enemies are not any neighboring countries, but rather Islamic organizations such as ISIS, and especially Hamas and Hizbullah. In regard to combat strategy, the applied strategic principle is “prioritizing,” that is, giving up the pretense of maintaining forces for every possible need... but forces would rely on sophisticated means used with flexibility. Based on the new strategy, the military command expects the army to attack thousands of targets in the first days of the war.¹¹⁴

In the context of preparations for cyberwarfare, Eisenkot decided to reorganize the structure of electronic warfare in the Israeli army by establishing a cyber branch. It would be built similarly to the land, air, and sea branches and would be in charge of using force in everything related to cyberspace.¹¹⁵

d. Military Maneuvers

Concerning military maneuvers and exercises, the military and security context had an effect on the programs and objectives of military maneuvers during 2014 and 2015. This impact emerged through the military's focus on comprehensive training and exercises. For instance, the same maneuver involved air, sea, and land brigades, in addition to taking into account the technologies and challenges of cyber warfare. These exercises, especially those held in 2015, seemed to translate the doctrine of the Chief of Staff Eisenkot and significantly echoed the Gideon Plan recommendations, in an apparent reflection of the military establishment's perception of the nature of the wars and military and security challenges that will face Israel in the coming years.

On 8/3/2014, *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper revealed that the joint military exercise of the Israeli Infantry and US marines that ended on 7/3/2014 used Boeing-made V-22 Osprey plane-copter, which "can lift off and land like a helicopter, and can transform mid-flight into a high-speed turboprop aircraft."¹¹⁶ On 24/4/2014, the army conducted an exercise for scenarios in the event of an escalation in the WB.¹¹⁷ Then on 23/1/2015, it conducted a maneuver in the north of the country to prepare to face the challenges of the northern front.¹¹⁸ In March 2015, the army conducted an exercise for dealing with several scenarios, including the outbreak of major confrontations in the WB.¹¹⁹

In 2015 the army carried out a series of intensive military trainings simulating the scenario of the seizure of the Palestinian coastal territory in any future confrontation with Hamas in Gaza.¹²⁰ The Israeli air force conducted a 14-day joint military exercise in April 2015 in Greek airspace, aimed at simulating the confrontation of S300 defense missiles.¹²¹ On 8/5/2015, the Israeli army completed a one-week training that included the task of crossing the border with Jordan and Syria.¹²²

The Israeli Home Front Command conducted a drill in the period ranging from 31/5/2015 until 4/6/2015, with the participation local of authorities along with various government ministries and rescue organizations, simulating rocket attacks.¹²³ The Turning Point 15 maneuvers built a training scenario according to the designs of military and security officials on the development of the situation in light of regional events, especially in Syria.¹²⁴ Also, the Red Flag air maneuver took place in the United States in 2015 with the participation of the US, Israeli,

Jordanian and Singaporean air forces.¹²⁵ The “Blue Flag” exercise involving US, Greek, and Polish air forces was conducted in the second half of 2015 in Israel, the largest joint combat exercise to date.¹²⁶

e. Missile Systems

On 25/2/2014, the Israeli Ministry of Defense announced the successful trial of the Sky Shield laser system, a defensive anti-missile system designed to protect commercial planes.¹²⁷

On 11/5/2015, Minister Moshe Ya’alon said that Germany provided Israel with four Patriot missile batteries.¹²⁸ With regard to the Iron Dome system, the Israeli military leadership considers that it successfully neutralized GS missiles by a large margin during the GS war in summer 2014, while other Israeli sides questioned its credibility and usefulness from the strategic perspective. In the official figures of the Israeli army, the Iron Dome system intercepted approximately 90% of the shells fired during the 2014 aggression against GS, including rockets fired at Jerusalem and the Tel Aviv area.¹²⁹ A report by Hebrew newspaper *Makor Rishon* quoted a senior Israeli military official saying that Hamas had likely “extracted the results” of the 2014 war and realized that the Iron Dome had succeeded in reducing its ability to cause injuries in Israel through the use of medium-range and long-range missiles, prompting the movement to focus on the production of short-range missiles.

In contrast with the praise showered on the Iron Dome, the military analyst and former pilot in the Israeli Air Force Reuven Pedatzur criticized the system. In an article published in *Haaretz* newspaper in 2013, he said that the research of two Israeli experts and one US expert in the field of missile defense showed that the Iron Dome managed to intercept only 5% of the rockets fired by the Palestinian resistance, and not 84% as the Israeli army announced the end of the aggression against the GS in 2012.¹³⁰ According to the three scientists, “most of the explosions, which look as if they were successful interceptions, are actually just the self-destruction of the Iron Dome’s own missiles.”¹³¹ In the same vein, Israeli Air Force commander Amir Eshel admitted that the Iron Dome system will not be able to provide full protection for Israelis, and expected it to be a disappointment to the public.¹³²

Apart from talking about the success and failure of the system in intercepting the missiles of the resistance, these missiles were enough to close off airspace and

disrupt air traffic to and from Ben Gurion Airport for several days during the war. In an article published in *Haaretz*, commentator Uri Misgav agrees with military reservists and political officials who support the idea of “attack and invasion until victory” in saying that the Iron Dome system contributes to the strategic error of mere defense against the Palestinian resistance without a decisive victory.

This is consistent with the statements of strategic affairs analyst, Yossi Melman, who said that victory in war does not only come through defensive systems, explaining that the Iron Dome did not provide a solution for short-range mortars that caused the death and injury of many soldiers during the 2014 war, in addition to wounding dozens of civilians.¹³³ In 2010, the Israeli army devised the Raz Radar System, which is able to immediately and accurately detect rocket launch sites and threat levels.¹³⁴

Despite the harsh criticism against the dome system, Tel Aviv conducted several experiments it claimed were successful in 2015,¹³⁵ and the Israeli army announced in December 2015 that it would use the Iron Dome to intercept missiles aboard warships around offshore gas fields in the Mediterranean to deal with any potential threat of massive rocket fire.¹³⁶ In parallel, the Israeli Ministry of Defense announced on 21/12/2015 that it had conducted a series of tests on the Magic Wand missile defense system¹³⁷ in addition to a successful test of the Arrow-3 missile system on 10/12/2015.¹³⁸

After the use of large quantities of Iron Dome missiles during the 2014 war on GS, on 1/8/2014 the US Congress approved \$225 million in emergency funding for Israel’s Iron Dome missile defense system. On 30/4/2015, the US House of Representatives Armed Services Committee approved granting Israel \$474 million for the development of missile defense systems. The grant was divided as follows: \$41.4 million for the short-range Iron Dome rocket defense system, and \$165 million for Magic Wand short-range system, and the longer-range Arrow-3 missile defense programs. The Committee also ratified the allocation of \$267.6 million for research and development of an anti-tunneling defense system.¹³⁹

f. Armament and Arms Trade

After more than 40 years of using US-made Sky Hawk trainer jets, the Israeli Air Force received an Italian Lavi trainer jet on 21/3/2014, the first of 30 aircraft it is scheduled to receive through 2016.¹⁴⁰

The Israeli army announced on 3/4/2014 that it had begun to receive high-precision GPS-fitted Israeli mortar shells.¹⁴¹ In 2014, the Israeli Navy was supplied with Israeli-made sophisticated Adir radars that were said to constitute a viable response to the Russian-made Yakhont anti-ship missiles.¹⁴² On 29/8/2014, the World Tribune revealed that Israel had allocated a budget of up to \$750 million to develop an anti-tunnel program.¹⁴³ Moreover, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon received “government backing to purchase \$2 billion in Pentagon-approved arms and aircraft, including the troubled V-22 tilt-rotor Osprey.”¹⁴⁴

In 2015, Israel continued the installment of DSIT Solutions manufactured AquaShield Diver Detection Sonar system, which makes it possible to identify individual divers underwater from a far greater distance off the coast.¹⁴⁵

Moreover, Israel announced on 22/2/2015 that it had reached an agreement with Washington to buy 14 additional US F-35 stealth fighters. Israeli pundits considered the deal a confirmation that security and military relations between the two countries were not affected by the crisis in the relations between Netanyahu and President Barack Obama.¹⁴⁶

Israeli sources revealed that the Israeli army had adopted a program for the development of electronic capabilities, and it saw a greater interconnectivity of forces than ever before. In the Digital Army Program, “video and camera footage from a wide array of sources is funneled back from the field to a central core and from there streamed forward, either automatically or based on an HQ staff officer’s decision, to the appropriate commanders in the field.” The 2014 Operation Protective Edge was the first large scale operation in which the Israeli army’s Digital Army Program was widely used. That’s why some journalists called it “the first fully digital war.”¹⁴⁷

On 5/5/2015, the Defense Ministry signed a multi-million dollar agreement with the US company General Dynamics to acquire the mechanical parts needed to assemble state-of-the-art Namer armored personnel carriers. They will be equipped with the Israeli-developed Armored Shield Protection system, known as the “Windbreaker,” which is considered one of the most advanced countermeasure technological systems in military use.¹⁴⁸ In 2015, Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) developed the ULTRA-C1 radar. The standard version can locate drones and enemy planes up to 500 km away, while the more extensive models allow rapid and accurate identification of ballistic missiles launched thousands of kilometers away, as well as

“enemy” satellites.¹⁴⁹ *The Jerusalem Post* reported that the army leadership decided to retire its Merkava 2 tanks and convert them into armored personnel carriers, following previous failures in the recent war on Gaza in the summer of 2014.¹⁵⁰

On 17/12/2015, the Israeli Navy received a Dolphin submarine from Germany, which it named Rahav. The submarine, which reached the port of Haifa in January 2016, is Israel’s fifth Dolphin-class submarine. Israeli submarines are reportedly capable of being equipped with nuclear-armed missiles, affording Israel a “second-strike” capability in case it is attacked by nuclear weapons.¹⁵¹

As for India, the security and military relationship witnessed an important development, as Moshe Ya’alon declared that his government would strengthen security cooperation with India. The announcement followed a meeting between Ya’alon and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in conclusion of major defense deals worth \$1.5 billion. Ya’alon said in a meeting with the Indian prime minister in New Delhi that “The relationship [between Israel and India] is deepening after the [September 2014] meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu in New York. We see continuous progress and common interests.” India’s Kalyani Group and Israel’s Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Company announced that they signed a cooperation agreement to develop and manufacture advanced military hardware, through a joint venture in which the Indian company would hold a majority stake.¹⁵² Ya’alon was asked if the visit meant the countries could sign defense deals out in the open, Ya’alon answered “that’s true.”¹⁵³

As for Israeli arms exports, a report of the Israeli Ministry of Defense stated that exports declined by \$1 billion dollars in 2014 compared to 2013, but there was a 40% rise in arms exports to African countries. According to data from 2014, Israeli weapons manufacturers signed arms deals worth \$5.66 billion compared to \$6.5 billion in 2013. In parallel, Israeli arms exports to African countries increased in 2014, with \$318 million deals, a 40% rise in export volume compared to 2013. The Ministry said that Israel is still considered one of the top ten exporters of arms in the world.¹⁵⁴

As for 2015, Mishel Ben Baruch, director of the International Defense Cooperation Directorate (SIBAT), said that the Israeli arms industries had signed deals worth a total of \$5.66 billion in 2014, while in 2015 it topped \$5.7 billion.¹⁵⁵

The largest portion of the military exports was upgrading aircraft and aerospace systems, comprising 14% of all new contracts, with radar and electronic systems

coming in second with 12% and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) at 11%. The bulk of the exports were to Asia and the Pacific, comprising nearly 50% of the total earnings, \$2,321 million; with Europe coming in second at \$1,629 million, according to the specifics released by directorate. While North America's imports were at \$1,023 million, Latin America \$577 million and Africa \$163 million.¹⁵⁶

g. Military Budget

Disagreements took place between the military and economists prior to the adoption of the budget in 2015. The Locker committee proposed to set the military budget at 59 billion shekels (around \$15.5 billion) annually for the following five years,¹⁵⁷ while the Gideon Plan suggested an annual budget of between 60 billion shekels (about \$15.752 billion) and 64 billion shekels (about \$16.802 billion) a year that can be increased to adapt to higher prices.¹⁵⁸ However, on 19/11/2015 the Knesset ratified the proposal of the State budget Law for 2015–2016.¹⁵⁹ The Israeli Ministry of Defense obtained a budget of 60.1 billion shekels (\$15.47 billion) for 2015,¹⁶⁰ and \$17 billion for 2016, after it was increased by about \$2 billion upon the request of Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon for military and security purposes—especially after the outbreak of the wave of violence in Jerusalem and the rest of the WB.¹⁶¹

On 31/8/2014, the Israeli government approved the reduction of the budgets of the various ministries in order to cover the expenses of the aggression on GS. It also approved the proposal of the Prime Minister of a two-billion-shekel reduction (\$560.5 million) to be transferred to the Ministry of Defense. This included downsizing all ministries (except the Ministry of Defense), and using the amount of the reduction to increase the Department of Defense budget by 1.5 billion shekels (about \$420.4 million), with the rest used to compensate for the damage in the South.¹⁶²

According to a special report by the Israeli economic newspaper *TheMarker* published on 14/5/2015, Israeli army commanders have exaggerated the size of the expenses and costs of the GS aggression by about 30% since the July 2006 war, thus deceiving the Ministry of Finance on the reality of war costs. The report confirmed the announcement by the Israeli Ministry of Finance after the aggression against Gaza in 2014, when it rejected the army's claims about the cost of aggression. Indeed, the army requested 12 billion shekels (\$3.248 billion) in addition to the existing budget, while the Ministry of Finance insisted that the

aggression’s expenses had not exceeded 7 billion shekels (\$1.894 billion), and the amount ended up being transferred to the defense budget as part of the budget for the year 2014.¹⁶³

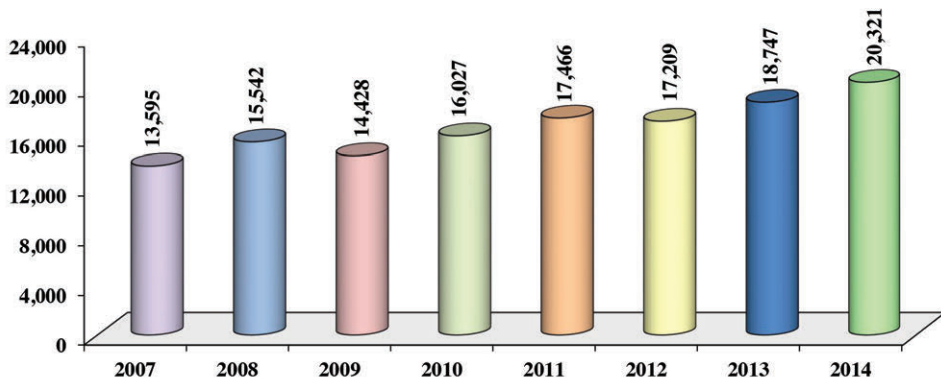
TheMarker also reported that the budget allocated for the operational activity of the reserve forces fell from 1.1 billion shekels (\$280 million) in 2014, ranging between 448–500 million shekels (about \$127 million) in 2015.¹⁶⁴

The following table shows the ordinary budget performance of Ministry of Defense payments in the 2007–2014 period:

Table 14/2: Ordinary Budget Performance of Ministry of Defense Payments 2007–2014 at Current Prices¹⁶⁵

Year	Payments (million shekels)	Payments (\$ million)
2007	55,849	13,595
2008	55,761	15,542
2009	56,738	14,428
2010	59,830	16,027
2011	62,494	17,466
2012	66,356	17,209
2013	67,689	18,747
2014	72,705	20,321

Ordinary Budget Performance of Ministry of Defense Payments 2007–2014 at Current Prices (\$ million)



It is worth noting that the updated budget published by the Israeli Ministry of Finance for the year 2013 showed that total expenditure of Ministry of Defense amounted to 67.5 billion shekels (\$18.7 billion), while spending amounted to 72.1 billion shekels (\$20.2 billion) in 2014, and 73.4 billion shekels (\$18.9 billion) in 2015.¹⁶⁶ This showed that the actual amounts tend to be higher than the approved amounts, and that military and security developments, especially in the Palestinian interior (resistance and uprising), impose additional expenses on the Israeli economy.

Third: Aggression and Resistance

Israel pursued its aggression on the Palestinian people in 2014 and 2015; where the summer of 2014 witnessed a major Israeli aggression, dubbed Operation Protective Edge by Israel and Operation Eaten Straw (*al-'Asf al-Ma'kul*) by the Palestinians. It was followed by a lull under Egyptian auspices that continued throughout 2015, in spite of “limited” Israeli violations, which were offset by a sharp drop in Palestinian rocket fire from the GS toward Israeli towns and cities. Indeed, 121 rockets were launched from GS in 2014, in addition to those launched during the aggression on Gaza, i.e., 2,470 rockets, compared to 35 rockets during 2015, according to data by the ISA.¹⁶⁷ In 2014 and 2015, Israel also pursued the closure of Gaza’s border crossings and the tightening of the blockade.

In the WB, Israel obtained a similar truce that lasted until October 2015, when a popular Palestinian uprising erupted in protest against Israeli violations against the Palestinian people and holy places. It was characterized by individual operations in the context of the increased security coordination between the PA’s security forces and the Israeli army as in previous years. It also maintained its incursions and arrests in the WB. The Shabak registered 2,347 attacks in 2015 compared to 1,793 operations in 2014 in the WB, including East Jerusalem. It should be noted that most of the operations that were registered during the two years in the WB were throwing stones and Molotov cocktails.¹⁶⁸

1. The Killed and Wounded

A total of 2,240 Palestinians were killed in 2014 (see table 15/2). The high number of people killed in 2014 was due to the Israeli war on GS, from 7/7/2014 to 26/8/2014. The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor has stated that

2,147 were killed during the aggression as well as more than ten thousand wounded, most of them children, women and the elderly.¹⁶⁹ In contrast, 179 Palestinians were killed in 2015 by the Israeli occupation forces and settlers in both GS and WB, including Jerusalem.¹⁷⁰

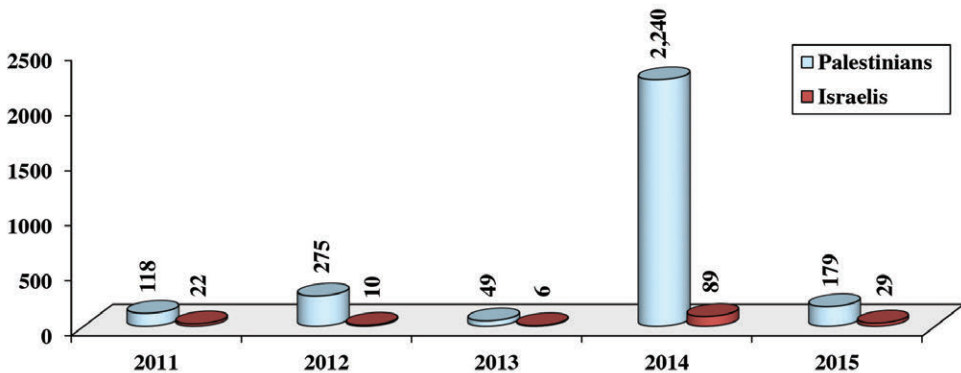
In 2014, 11,449 Palestinians were injured,¹⁷¹ compared to 1,618 Palestinians in 2015.¹⁷² In contrast, the Shabak stated that 89 Israelis were killed in 2014 and 29 in 2015 as a result of operations carried out by Palestinians. Moreover, 375 Israelis were injured in 2014, compared to 249 in 2015 (see table 15/2).¹⁷³

Table 15/2: The Killed and Wounded Among Palestinians and Israelis in the WB and the GS 2011–2015¹⁷⁴

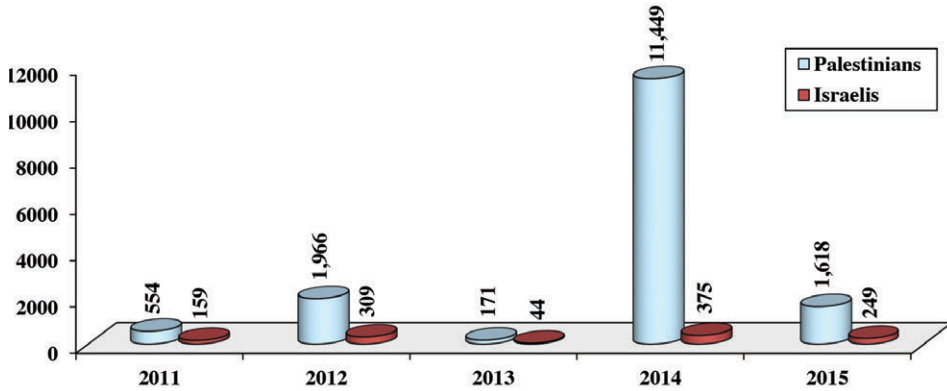
Year	Killed		Wounded	
	Palestinians	Israelis	Palestinians	Israelis
2011	118	22	554*	159
2012	275	10	1,966	309
2013	49	6	171	44
2014	2,240	89	11,449	375
2015	179	29	1,618	249

* Including international supporters.

Palestinians and Israelis Killed in the WB and GS 2011–2015



Palestinians and Israelis Wounded in the WB and GS 2011–2015



2. The Prisoners and Detainees

The suffering of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails continued in 2014 and 2015. By the end of 2015, there were 6,900 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, including 55 women and 450 children. There were 6,482 prisoners from the WB, of whom 500 were from Jerusalem, 328 from GS, and 90 Arab citizens of Israel. This was in addition to dozens of Arab detainees of different nationalities. More than 650 prisoners were classified as either administrative detainees or being detained pending trial, or what Israel calls “unlawful combatants” (see table 16/2).

At the end of 2014, there were around 6,200 prisoners in Israeli jails, including 22 women and 152 children. There were 5,729 prisoners from the WB, 371 from GS, 380 from Jerusalem, and 100 Arab citizens of Israel, in addition to dozens of Arab detainees of different nationalities. Moreover, 450 prisoners were classified as administrative detainees (see table 16/2).

Palestinian Prisoners Center for Studies monitored the arrest of 7,110 Palestinians by Israel in 2014,¹⁷⁵ but the frequency of those arrests fluctuated throughout the year, averaging to 592 arrests per month and 19 cases a day. Therefore, the number of arrests in 2014 converges with the number of arrests during 2015, which amounted to 6,830 detainees.¹⁷⁶ During 2015, 2,200 minors and children were arrested, a 72% increase on 2014. In 2015, more than 120 Palestinians were arrested because of their activities on Facebook, in addition to the arrest of 225 women. Israel also arrested 234 Palestinians from GS, of whom 32 were merchants crossing the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing who had legal permits.¹⁷⁷

Palestinian Prisoners Center for Studies stated that 2014 witnessed an intense and fierce campaign of arrests after the disappearance of three settlers near Hebron in June; more than three thousand Palestinians were arrested in less than two months. Jerusalem saw the largest share of the arrests, which exceeded two thousand persons. As in past years, the arrests during 2014 and 2015 affected all segments of Palestinian society without exception, including children and women, academics, editors, the sick, the elderly, human rights activists, journalists, and MPs. They were carried out in a number of ways, including storming into homes or hospitals, abduction from the street and the workplace, the kidnapping of the sick and injured, or via the “Arabized undercover security units,” or at the crossings and checkpoints, not to mention that dozens of fishermen were arrested at sea in the GS.¹⁷⁸

Table 16/2: Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Prisons 2011–2015¹⁷⁹

Year	Total no. of detainees	WB*	GS	Serving life sentences	Women	Children
2011	4,417	3,856	459	525	6	132
2012	4,743	4,115	437	529	10	193
2013	5,023	4,408	389	476	17	154
2014	6,200	5,729	371	481	23	152
2015	6,900	6,482	328	502	55	450

* Approximate numbers according to the Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association—Addameer.

In the framework of the peace process between the PLO and Israel, which resumed in late July 2013, Israel committed to release 104 prisoners who were arrested prior to the 1993 Oslo Accords. Indeed, 78 prisoners were released in three batches on 14/8/2013, 30/10/2013, and 30/12/2013. However, Israel disrupted the release of the fourth batch, which was scheduled for 29/3/2014, as a bargaining chip to be used with the Palestinian side. This release had still not taken place at the time of writing this report. Most of the freed prisoners belonged to the Fatah movement; and they were sentenced to one life imprisonment at least for the murder of Israelis.¹⁸⁰ The Solidarity Foundation for Human Rights—Tadamon stated that the occupation authorities informed the 21 released prisoners who reside in the WB that they were prohibited from traveling outside the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 for a period of ten years, in addition to being barred from traveling outside the borders of their governorate for a full year.¹⁸¹

The conditions experienced by prisoners saw no improvement in 2014 and 2015. Rather, Israel stepped up repressive measures against the prisoners, including medical neglect and torture, continuing to deprive prisoners from the right to receive individual family visits, based on “security prohibition” against them, or collective visits for the families of prisoners from GS. This was on top of malnutrition, a lack of blankets and clothing, and the confiscation of prisoners’ funds, which are all practices that constitute gross violations of international humanitarian law, and are often compared to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Their documentation in a scientific manner and discussion of these violations at all levels of society are essential.

In this context, the Palestinian Prisoners Center for Studies said that the year 2014 was one of the worst years for prisoners, as Israel re-abducted 71 prisoners who were released during the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange, including four female prisoners. Seven of them were released and the previous sentences were restored for 19 of them. Moreover, many arbitrary decisions were imposed on prisoners in 2014 that reduced their rights and narrowed down their chances of a decent standard of living, most notably the ratification by the Ministerial Committee of a law that authorized courts to prevent the head of state from issuing an amnesty for Palestinian prisoners or commuting their sentences. This was in addition to a decision to allow special units to use weapons during inspections and intrusions. Moreover, family visits were reduced to once every two months, and the monthly allowance prisoners receive through their parents was reduced to 400 shekels (about \$103).¹⁸²

In 2015, the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs reported that Israel committed 16 war crimes and seven crimes against humanity with the prisoners. The Commission stated that in 2015, the largest arbitrary and racist laws against prisoners were discussed and approved, as follows: the law for force-feeding of prisoners on hunger strike; the law to increase the number and duration of sentences against child stone throwers; the law tightening the minimum punishment for stone-throwers in Jerusalem; the law for the trial of children under the age of 14; the stop-and-frisk law that allows the authorities to conduct a body search in the absence of a reasonable suspicion; and the law exempting the intelligence services from documenting the investigation of this; the application of the Israeli criminal law in the 1948 occupied territories for the benefit of settlers; the draft law for the execution of prisoners; the draft law for the conviction of Palestinians without the existence of suspicion.¹⁸³

Administrative Detention

There were more than 650 administrative detainees held by Israel without specific charges or trial at the end of 2015, compared to 450 and 155 at the end of 2014 and 2013, respectively. The associations for prisoners, which include the Palestinian Prisoner Club, the Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association—Addameer, Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs, indicated that the increase in administrative detention cases came after the start of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* in October 2015. These institutions announced in a report that the Israeli authorities issued 161 administrative detention orders through February 2016, including 92 new orders, which brought the number of administrative detainees in Israeli jails to around 750 prisoners. According to the Palestinian Prisoner Club, this was the first time that there had been so many administrative detainees since 2009, adding that the Israeli authorities issued decisions of administrative detention against 84 Palestinians within ten days.¹⁸⁴

Although administrative detention is prohibited under international law, and violates the most basic human rights, Israel has continued to issue administrative arrest warrants for various segments of Palestinian society, including PLC members, human rights activists, workers, students, lawyers, mothers, and traders. As a result of the Israeli resort to administrative detention and its repeated renewal, administrative detainees went on a hunger strike and fought a “battle of empty stomachs.” On 24/4/2014, administrative detainees collectively began a hunger strike dubbed “water and salt,” so as to end their administrative detention. Some prisoners also went on an individual hunger strike that ended with their release: Khodor Adnan (2011/2012 and 2015), Hanaa Shalabi (2012), Ayman Sharawneh (260 days 2012/2013), Samer al-‘Issawi (1/8/2012–23/4/2013),¹⁸⁵ Muhammad ‘Allan, who was released after a 65 day hunger strike during 2015, Muhammad al-Qiq, who ended his hunger strike on 26/2/2016 after 94 days, after the Israeli authorities pledged to end his administrative arrest on 21/5/2016 by virtue of a non-extendable decision.¹⁸⁶

The hunger strike of administrative detainees represented an important step towards ending this unfair and arbitrary policy, as these detainees rejected all forms of vitamins, nutritional supplements, and medical examinations, and relied only on water to protest their administrative detention.¹⁸⁷ This prompted Israel to approve the law for force-feeding prisoners who were on a hunger strike, applying it for

the first time on administrative detainee Muhammad al-Qiq on 12/1/2016, through the introduction of fluids to his body against his will, in spite of the international ban on force-feeding hunger strikers.¹⁸⁸ The following table shows the number of administrative detainees in Israeli prisons at the end of each year during the 2010–2015 period:

Table 17/2: Administrative Detainees in Israeli Prisons at the End of Each Year 2010–2015¹⁸⁹

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Administrative detainees	207	310	178	155	450	650

3. Israeli Blockade on the Palestinian People

The Israeli occupation forces continued their siege of the GS for the ninth consecutive year and tightened the siege's measures on the population, continuing to impose severe restrictions on the movement of commercial crossings and those relating to the movement of individuals. There was no structural change in the siege measures in 2014 and 2015, as the alleged alleviations declared by Israel did not affect the main restrictions on the freedom of movement of people and goods.¹⁹⁰

Severe restrictions continued on the movement of GS residents through Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing, the only outlet to reach the WB. This resulted in depriving 1.8 million people of their right to travel. The almost-complete closure of Rafah International Crossing Point since the beginning of 2015 by the Egyptian authorities also denied the GS population their right to travel from or to Strip. Moreover, in 2015 there was an almost complete closure of the Rafah crossing according to the Ministry of Interior in GS, which explained that the Egyptian authorities opened the crossing sporadically and only for a period of 21 days, for humanitarian cases.¹⁹¹ Some 90 thousand citizens were in desperate need to travel through 2015, according to the Palestinian Border and Crossings Commission in the GS, 15 thousand of whom registered at the Interior Ministry, including 3,500 medical referrals.¹⁹²

As for the movement of goods, during 2015, the Israeli authorities closed the only commercial crossing in GS for 143 days, 39.1% of total days of the year. This led to a shortage of many basic commodities and essential items, including some types of fuel, especially cooking gas, and all construction materials. Israeli

authorities continued to ban the export of all GS products for the eighth consecutive year, excluding very limited quantities of Gaza exports, mostly agricultural commodities. GS exports amounted to two truckloads a day, compared to 150 truckloads per day prior to the siege.¹⁹³

Coordination continued between Egypt and Israel regarding the GS, and the director of the Political-Military and Policy Bureau at the Israeli Defense Ministry, Major General Amos Gilad, stated during the 2015 Herzliya Conference that there was Egyptian-Israeli coordination with regard to securing the border and “the fight against terrorism.” Gilad said that Egypt would help Israel in the fight against terrorism by demolishing tunnels used for hostile purposes, adding that Hamas was now isolated in GS thanks to Egypt.¹⁹⁴ The Egyptian regime destroyed about two thousand tunnels on the border with the GS from July 2013 until the end of 2015. According to Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* on 7/1/2016, Egypt asked Israel for clarifications on the progress of the talks being conducted with Turkey, in order to reach a reconciliation agreement between them. Israeli officials have said that the Egyptian government has expressed its reservation to grant Turkey a role in the GS, and asked to know whether Israel pledged to the Turks to ease the blockade on GS.¹⁹⁵

Thus, the facts on the ground indicate that no end is in sight to the blockade of GS, and contradict successive Israeli statements on easing the blockade. The facts confirm that the aim of Israeli authorities’ policies is the institutionalization of the siege imposed on the Strip, and the securing of international approval, which means success in circumventing the rules of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.¹⁹⁶

4. Aggression on GS 2014

GS was subjected to a broad Israeli aggression that lasted 51 days (7/7/2014–26/8/2014). The assault, which was dubbed Operation Protective Edge by Israel and Operation Eaten Straw (*al-‘Asf al-Ma’kul*) by the Palestinians, was the third war waged by Israel on the Strip in six years; after Operation Cast Lead/ Battle of al-Furqan (27/12/2008–18/1/2009), and Operation Pillar of Defense/ Stones of Baked Clay in November 2012. The Israeli targeted civilians in the GS, reflected in the mass killings of residents in their homes, a flagrant violation of international laws and human rights conventions.¹⁹⁷

The performance of the resistance during the 51 days of war showed its ability (most notably Hamas) to develop its missile systems, increasing their range to approximately 120 km, reaching all the Israeli population centers in the 1948 occupied territories. Moreover, the resistance managed to infiltrate the Israeli side by land, sea and air, and offered new surprises such UAVs. The command in the GS maintained its control of Palestinian resistance forces, and was not disrupted. It was able to continue effectively running ministries, civil society institutions and resistance processes. The Israeli side had a case of “intelligence blindness” on the ground, which weakened the potential for Israel to hit its targets. Moreover, the resistance achieved a popular and broad consensus of support, despite the extremity of the violence and damage inflicted by the Israeli forces on civilian areas.

According to statistics by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2,147 were killed, including 530 children and 302 women, 23 medical staff, and 16 journalists. Additionally 10,870 were injured, including 3,303 children and 2,101 women. The Israeli army attacked 5,263 targets in the Strip during the offensive,¹⁹⁸ with 60,664 rockets and missiles by land, sea and air, including government buildings, tunnels, and rocket launchers, houses, prominent activists, and weapons stores.¹⁹⁹ The aggression also led to the destruction of 17,123 homes, of which 2,465 houses were completely destroyed and 14,667 houses were partially destroyed, in addition to 39,500 damaged homes.²⁰⁰ Minister of Public Works and Housing in the Palestinian government Mufeed al-Hassayna said that Israel largely destroyed about 20 thousand housing units, which became uninhabitable, in addition to partially hitting nearly 40 thousand other units with varying degrees of damage.²⁰¹ Furthermore, the Palestinian Ministry of Endowments in GS also announced the full destruction of 71 mosques with 200 partially destroyed, in addition to targeting more than 24 endowment properties, 12 cemeteries, 6 Zakat committees, a church, an Islamic school, a branch of the Islamic Da‘wah College in northern GS, and the Directorate of Gaza Endowments.²⁰²

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor estimated the total direct and indirect economic losses suffered by the economic sector in the GS at \$3.6 billion. However, the Deputy Minister of Economy Taysir ‘Amr said on 28/8/2014 that the total losses suffered by the GS during the Israeli offensive were \$7.5–\$8 billion, including direct and indirect losses.²⁰³

According to Shabak, Operation Protective Edge/ Operation Eaten Straw led to the deaths of 73 Israelis, including 67 soldiers, while the number of injured was 312.

4,692 rockets fell on Israel from the GS (2,968 rockets and 1,724 mortar shells),²⁰⁴ targeting the surrounding southern settlements, as well as Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa and al-Khudaira (*Hadera*).

With regard to direct Israeli economic losses from the war, the Bank of Israel announced in its annual report that the GDP losses as a result of the aggression were estimated at 3.5 billion shekels (\$894.9 million).²⁰⁵ Moreover, Israeli sources estimated the direct and indirect economic damage by the war at 12 billion shekels (about \$3.07 billion).²⁰⁶ Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon also announced on 2/9/2014 that the direct cost of war exceeded nine billion shekels (about \$2.5 billion).²⁰⁷ With regard to indirect losses, economic newspaper *TheMarker* indicated that the tourism sector incurred big losses amounting to about \$650 million during the aggression, adding that the indirect losses in the industrial sector exceeded \$360 million.²⁰⁸ Moreover, the shekel also traded lower against the US dollar during the aggression, with its exchange rate at 3.614 on 10/9/2014, compared to 3.429 at the beginning of the aggression on 8/7/2014.²⁰⁹

5. The Jerusalem *Intifadah* 2015

Regardless of how we label what happened in October 2015, whether it was an uprising, an *Intifadah*, or a movement, the Palestinian population showed that they could overcome the weakness of its leadership, and revolted to send the occupier the message that the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the holy sites are a red line that cannot be crossed. There were several reasons that prompted the Palestinian youth to confront Israeli forces and try stop the imminent danger facing *al-Aqsa* Mosque and prevent its seizure or division, without any guidance from factional leaders. At the time of writing, having completed its third month, the Jerusalem *Intifadah* carries the potential of success and expansion, especially with the insistence of the Palestinian youth not to surrender to repeated Israeli violations.

The Jerusalem Center for the Studies of Israeli and Palestinian Affairs documented 210 Palestinian attacks against Israeli targets, which resulted in the killing of 24 Israelis and wounding 345 others. Palestinian operations included 73 shootings, 74 stabbings, 44 attempted stabbings, and 19 attacks by motorists.²¹⁰ The Palestinian Health Ministry also reported that 142 Palestinians were killed from the beginning of October 2015 until the end of 2015, including 27 children and 7 women, and 15,710 were wounded in the WB and the GS by bullets, suffocation, or burns.²¹¹

Fourth: The Israeli Position Towards the Domestic Palestinian Situation

In 2014 and 2015, Israel maintained its policy, more accurately described as a strategy, in dealing with the domestic Palestinian scene. It was the same strategy pursued over the previous years in the context of the continued Palestinian political and geographic division, faltering reconciliation efforts since 2007, and the absence of any serious Arab role in resolving the Palestinian issue.

As for the Palestinian reconciliation file, the Israeli leadership expressed resentment at, and strong opposition to, the signing of the Hamas and Fatah reconciliation agreement on 23/4/2014 at the home of the prime minister in Gaza, Isma'il Haniyyah, located in the Shati' Refugee Camp in Gaza City.²¹² Israel threatened to take unilateral steps and impose economic sanctions against the PA, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rushed to cancel the negotiation meeting that was scheduled to be held between the PA and Israel delegations on 23/4/2014. Netanyahu said, "Abu Mazen (Abbas) could have chosen peace with Israel instead of peace with a murderous terror organization. Tonight, while talks are ongoing to extend peace talks, he chose Hamas... He who chooses Hamas does not want peace."²¹³

After the formation of the National Consensus Government headed by Rami Hamdallah on 2/6/2014,²¹⁴ the Israeli Security Cabinet decided not to conduct any negotiations with the new Palestinian government, and authorized Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to impose additional sanctions on the PA.²¹⁵

Israel maintained its policy in the GS, including economic strangulation and military pressure in dealing with Hamas, in an effort to thwart the model posed by the latter, and to curb its influence in Palestinian society. The Israeli army launched its military strike Operation Protective Edge/ Operation Eaten Straw on 7/7/2014, claiming it was targeting the capabilities and interests of Hamas, in response to the continued firing of rockets at Israeli towns.²¹⁶ After the signing of the ceasefire agreement in the GS, which came into force on 26/8/2014, Israel tried to exploit it to its advantage through the "calm will be answered with calm" policy, neglecting easing the blockade and refusing to open the Rafah crossing and the rest of the crossings. Its aim was to retain the tools of economic pressure on Hamas in GS in order to chart a new political future for the Strip, and maintain the Israeli security interests.

Israel also kept the option of war against GS and the threat of its re-occupation open, waving it whenever it wanted, as a battalion commander in the Paratroopers Brigade threatened Hamas with retaliation for any operations against the Israeli army or Israeli settlements adjacent to GS. Israel's Minister of Intelligence and Strategic Affairs Yuval Steinitz, said in a BBC interview, "All that I can say is that it [reoccupation of GS] was seriously considered and I can tell you one thing, if Hamas would insist on continuing the rocket fire into Israel for another few weeks or months, I assume that this would be the only alternative."²¹⁷ Moreover, Avigdor Lieberman said that it was impossible to prevent a new military operation in the GS during the next summer [summer of 2015].²¹⁸

However, a new trend began growing inside Israel regarding the easing of the blockade, and it intensified after the negotiations to restore relations between Turkey and Israel reached an advanced stage and lifting the GS siege was put on the table. Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* quoted the recommendations of security officials to the Minister of Defense, Moshe Ya'alon, on the need to change the security cordon policy imposed on the GS, and the need to open the crossings, as this would contribute to the restoration of security on the GS borders for a long time.²¹⁹ Some progress was made regarding this issue in late 2015, although Netanyahu's statement, on 21/12/2015, rejected the Turkish condition of lifting the naval blockade on the GS,²²⁰ which may come in the context of an attempt to strengthen Israel's position in the negotiation.

In the midst of an escalating *Intifadah* and the increase of stabbing and shooting operations in the WB, the Israeli authorities have been keen to emphasize the importance of security coordination with the PA and its efficacy in preventing or reducing resistance operations carried out against the occupation and settlers in the WB. In this context, an Israeli military assessment assured that military coordination of the Israeli security forces with the PA's security forces remained a fundamental building block in bilateral relations and would prevent the aggravation of the confrontation with the Palestinians in the WB.²²¹

In order urge the PA to take more action against the uprising and to put obstacles in the path of the government, Israel threatened to reoccupy Palestinian areas of the WB by launching Operation Defensive Shield 2.²²² Moreover, the Israeli army tightened the economic noose in the WB through the establishment of a number

of checkpoints and blocked the flow of goods and commodities to the Palestinian domestic market as well as exports and imports through Jordan.²²³

Israel's dealings with Palestinian affairs in the WB and the GS was contradictory. On one hand, it wanted a long-term truce with Hamas and encouraged the continuation of the Palestinian internal division, but it did not want to pay any price. On the other hand, it refused to make any progress with the PA concerning the peace process, but hoped to prevent its collapse, fearing the emergence of a new reality that would be more difficult to deal with.

In spite of rumors on talks between Israel and Hamas on a long-term truce after the 2014 GS war, it was completely denied by both sides. In this context, we must point out what some called “Blair’s initiative”, the involvement of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. After the big fuss surrounding this initiative, it turned out to be a mediation without commissioning. According to the military correspondent for *Yedioth Ahronoth*, Alex Fishman, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that “dealing with it could seriously damage Israel, as it could push Mahmoud Abbas to resign, who sees the initiative as a betrayal on the Palestinian question.” Netanyahu also said that “any indirect or direct negotiations with Hamas provide legitimacy for Europeans to recognize the organization.”²²⁴

Netanyahu's remarks underlined his rejection of conducting negotiations directly or indirectly with Hamas. On 5/10/2014, Netanyahu said, “I negotiate with an enemy who wants to stop being my enemy. That’s how you make peace. An enemy who wants to destroy you remains committed to your obliteration is not, is not someone you can negotiate with.”²²⁵

Netanyahu also said he would never recognize Hamas or negotiate with it, even indirectly.²²⁶ Walla website quoted a non-official source in Netanyahu's office saying that there are no real negotiations between Hamas and Israel, whether mediated by Turkey, Qatar, or Tony Blair, and such negotiations were unthinkable.²²⁷

Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon also reiterated that Israel was not conducting any political negotiations with Hamas, adding that coordination with them about the reconstruction of the GS takes place through the UN or the PA.²²⁸ Major General Yoav Mordechai, the coordinator of government operations in the occupied Palestinian territories, linked the GS reconstruction and lifting of the siege to the return of the PA effective control of the Strip.²²⁹ Netanyahu also called

on ‘Abbas and the PA to take over the management of GS instead of Hamas, asking for international pressure on ‘Abbas to cease his partnership with Hamas.²³⁰

Fears grew in Israel in 2015 from potential chaos in the WB if ‘Abbas insisted on resigning. According to Alex Fishman, the Israeli intelligence services conducted discussions on scenarios for “the day after,” especially concerning who would succeed him, and expected that Abu Mazen would be succeeded by a three-party leadership: Saeb Erekat, Majid Faraj, and Salam Fayyad. Israel fears that in such a situation these three would not “keep things under control.”²³¹

Some in Israel believe that if Abu Mazen actually resigned from the presidency of the PA and the PLO, this would be a blow to the confidence of the Israelis over their estimated conditions in the Palestinian arena. The assessment in Israel is that ‘Abbas is working on an “exit strategy” from the mortgage he inherited from ‘Arafat, which includes serious commitments to the Palestinian people.²³²

The role of Israel regarding the succession of ‘Abbas has emerged, with a tendency to endorse Muhammad Dahlan rather than the rest of the presumed candidates through several indications and stances. Israeli newspaper *Maariv* reported that Netanyahu hopes that Dahlan will succeed ‘Abbas as the president of the Palestinian Authority, and that he sent his special envoy, attorney Isaac Molho to meet Dahlan in Dubai; it is believed that Molho and Dahlan have met many times. The newspaper added that it is estimated that Israel wants to maintain its relationship with Dahlan in anticipation of the moment when ‘Abbas decides to step down from his post as the PA president.²³³

Israeli sources indicated that a meeting took place between Israeli Foreign Minister Lieberman and Dahlan at the end of 2014, in France. According to Walla Website, Netanyahu sent a confidential message via Shabak chief Yoram Cohen to ‘Abbas, assuring him that the meeting between Lieberman and Dahlan had not taken place with his knowledge or consent. However, it is unlikely that this step was taken without prior coordination with Netanyahu.²³⁴

In an interview with Israel’s Channel 2 on 16/1/2015, Lieberman said there could be a peaceful solution to the conflict in the region by the end of 2015, but that Israel needed to get rid of ‘Abbas, not by assassinating him, but through negotiations with the PA and other Arab countries in the region to achieve a comprehensive peace. When asked about his meeting with Dahlan in Paris, Lieberman said that he met many Arab dignitaries there, but he did not remember their names.²³⁵

Citing high-level sources in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Israel's Channel 10 revealed the presence of the Israeli Ambassador to Egypt, Haim Koren, at the wedding of Muhammad Dahlan's son, which was held in August 2015 at the Fairmont Nile City Hotel in Cairo.²³⁶ *Haaretz* newspaper confirmed that in 2015 the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel agreed to inaugurate an official representation of the occupation in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. It seems that Dahlan played an active role in this matter, tweeting: "I congratulate Mohammed bin Zayed for the opening of an Israeli representation in the UAE, as this establishes close relations that will contribute to the fight against terrorism, and support peace and stability."²³⁷

Fifth: The Peace Process

US Secretary of State John Kerry's peace initiative, which lasted nine months and ended on 29/4/2014 requires analysis. The initiative was rejected by each party for different reasons, although the Israeli government bears the primary responsibility for the failure, as it insisted on including in the Framework Agreement a Palestinian recognition of Israel as a state for the "Jewish people," and on the refusal to withdraw from occupied East Jerusalem.²³⁸

Israel demanded the annexation of the large settlement blocs and their expansion to include the largest number of settlers and "random" settlements. It refused to draw their borders, in addition to demanding the stationing of troops from North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for an interim period after the withdrawal of Israeli troops. It also insisted on the stationing of the Israeli army along borders, the Jordan Valley, and other strategic areas for a period of 10–20 years, refusing the return of a single refugee in application of the right of return.²³⁹ Moreover, it did not agree on the return of even a modest number of refugees annually, even within the framework of the "Family Unification Laws" in effect in Israel.

Kerry failed, even though he agreed to bring up the Framework Agreement instead of discussing a peace treaty and a final agreement, as per the Israeli logic that favors transitional solutions so as to avoid the fundamental issues. He also agreed to submit an American document rather than a joint one, in order to allow the parties to make observations.

Kerry's failure was because any peace settlement that includes the creation of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders is rejected by the mainstream in Israel. The current Israeli government and its predecessors are managing the conflict, not resolve it, until its imposed racist occupational settlement becomes a fait accompli, rendering the establishment of a Palestinian state much more difficult. Ultimately, the most that can be earned by Palestinians in this context would be limited autonomy in inhabited and isolated ghettos. The Israeli logic was accepted, and what was discussed was conflict management rather than resolution.

Kerry stopped his initiative when he was convinced that the Israeli position was quite inflexible and could be changed without the kind of pressure that the US administration does not wish to exert. Also, the Palestinian side could not go further to show flexibility and compromise without losing its ability to convince its own people, from whom the political gap is expanding due to the failure of the approach, especially the option of bilateral negotiations under American auspices.

Kerry saw that the intransigence of the Netanyahu government amounted to a failure to respond even to the Palestinian demand for a settlement freeze and the release of the fourth batch of prisoners, who had been arrested before the Oslo Accords. This was despite the fact that this step was part of an agreement prior to the resumption of negotiations, which included their release in exchange for the abstention of Palestinians from joining international institutions throughout the agreed ceiling period of nine months for reaching an agreement. This means that it became impossible to pursue the negotiations, let alone reach an agreement.

The Netanyahu government considered that what was happening in the region was a historic opportunity to complete its remaining expansionist colonial goals. Israel gambled on the effects of the Saudi-Iran sectarian conflict for the formation of an alliance with Arab states against the Iranian axis. This would allow it to obtain regional political acceptance without the need to resolve the Palestinian issue through the establishment of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders. It even promoted the possibility that the negotiations were not Israeli-Palestinian, but regional, and hence it seeks a regional solution at the expense of the Palestinians.

The above confirms the earlier analysis that negotiations are futile, and that they are pursued only to prevent the emergence of other options and maintain the status quo. In this context, the negotiations that took place after the signing of the Oslo Accords in general, and after the collapse and failure of Camp David II

in 2000 in particular, and after Israel getting rid of Yasir ‘Arafat and the reformulation of power, now aim to maintain power, and not to reach a solution to end the occupation and establish a State. In fact, after the adoption of The Roadmap for Peace in 2003, which was rejected by the Sharon government with its 14 reservations, the Palestinians are now unilaterally carrying out their commitments without reciprocity on the Israeli side.

To reach conflict resolution and the establishment of a sovereign state on the 1967 borders, the rules of the game would need to change significantly, and this would require a radically different approach from the Palestinians.

It is noted that the number of parties that are still calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state has declined, even under Israeli conditions that leave the proposed Palestine effectively a state in name only. In a statement on the eve of the Israeli elections, Netanyahu dropped his acceptance of a Palestinian state, which he had declared in his speech at the University of Bar-Ilan in 2009. He then recanted from this stance, emphasizing the impossibility of the establishment of a Palestinian state now and until further notice.²⁴⁰ In Netanyahu’s view, if it were to be established, it would have to be committed to Israel’s security and political conditions that would turn it into anything but a state. After Netanyahu, the right, and the extreme right declared their stances, the Labor party, which was part of the “peace” and leftist camp, declared in a recent conference that the time is not right for the establishment of a Palestinian state. It suggested instead a unilateral separation plan that was unanimously approved. This plan complements the plan that Ariel Sharon initiated in GS and had planned to complete in the WB, had it not been for his clinical death.

There are parties, such as the Jewish Home, that suggest the exchange of populations and territory,²⁴¹ an idea previously put forward by Ehud Olmert to ‘Abbas, and reiterated later by Benjamin Netanyahu, which calls for the annexation of Area C. There are other parties claiming the annexation of the entire WB and the imposition of racial discrimination against the Palestinians, until the opportunity to expel them becomes available. They want to solve the Palestinian issue away from Israel through a regional solution, or at the expense of Jordan.

In parallel, in 2015 the US announced, most notably through Robert Malley, head of the Middle East desk of the National Security Council, that the Obama administration would not launch a new initiative for the resumption of negotiations

until the end of its term. The maximum it could do was launch initiatives to improve Palestinian living conditions, build confidence between them and the Israelis, and prevent the collapse of the PA. Mahmud ‘Abbas threatened to resign, and reconsider the relationship with Israel, moving from being peace partners to consider it a relationship with the enemy and the occupation. He also threatened to halt security coordination and change economic relations, as well as making the threat of withdrawing the PLO’s recognition of Israel in response to its lack of recognition of a Palestinian state, its denial of all agreements, its occupation and settlement expansion, and its stalling of the establishment of a Palestinian state.

These threats amount to maneuvers and tactics to pressure the Israelis, and there is no real intention to implement them, but there are growing indications of the inability of the Palestinian people to bear more of the US-Israeli pressures, most notably the *Intifadah*, and the erosion of the legitimacy and credibility of the PA and the President. This is in addition to the start of the battle of succession; all this emphasizes the importance of maintaining the momentum before things become politically impossible. Finally, German Chancellor Angela Merkel joined the voices saying that the current time was not the right time to establish a state.²⁴²

Since President Mahmud ‘Abbas was still betting on a resumption of negotiations, he did not carry out his threats to dissolve the Authority, which he said had become “without authority.” He also did not halt the commitments in accordance with the decisions of the Central Council taken in March 2015,²⁴³ which he asserted in his speech at the United Nations in 2015. ‘Abbas worked hard for the success of any initiative aimed at the resumption of negotiations because he is a believer, as he says, that negotiations are the only way, despite colliding with the Israeli intransigence and extremism, which increases each day. No changes seem to be on the horizon because a lot of the evidence indicates that Israel is moving towards more extremism, and does not intend to voluntarily consent to any settlement that would achieve a minimum of Palestinian rights under international law.

After Kerry’s failure, there were no negotiations, but rather a Palestinian accession to international institutions in batches, the first batch being after the Israeli government refused to release the fourth batch of prisoners on the agreed date (29/3/2014).²⁴⁴ Palestine joined 15 institutions and treaties, notably the Fourth Geneva Convention,²⁴⁵ preceded by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The second batch included signing up for the

Rome Statute and becoming the ICC's 123rd member. Whereas, the UN Security Council failed to adopt a resolution on Palestinian statehood, drafted by the Palestinians and backed by Arab countries, that was strongly opposed by the United States. It fell short of winning the nine "yes" votes necessary for adoption in the 15-member council, after Nigeria had been expected to support the resolution and changed its stance at the last minute. Washington was not, however, compelled to resort to its veto power to block the measure—a move that could have undermined US standing in the Arab world.²⁴⁶

Here, it should be noted that the Palestinian side was determined to submit the draft resolution to vote despite the fact that the nine votes were not guaranteed, and although a number of delegates from countries with provisional membership in the Security Council were to be replaced after a few days.

In addition to the above, it is preferable to have a high probability of the US veto being used against the draft Arab resolution than for this to happen after ensuring that the decision would have a large majority, as was happening earlier, where the Arab draft resolution mostly got more than 12 votes. It must also be pointed out that the Arab draft resolution was submitted to a vote without presenting it to the executive committee. This stirred a lot of criticism for circumvention of the primary institution, in addition to the need to consult on such issues with the various factions (within and outside the PLO), institutions, and experienced lawyers and diplomats, since it contains substantial concessions. Hence, it was withdrawn and amended without taking into account all the observations that were made.

It is worth mentioning that the same thing (submitting a draft resolution to the Security Council without ensuring the nine votes) took place in the United Nations 2011 session, when President Mahmud 'Abbas insisted on applying for full membership for the State of Palestine in spite of a broad Palestinian and Arab demand for an Observer State status before applying for full membership from a stronger position. The request for full membership in both times did not obtain the nine votes, and this defeat could have been avoided. Most importantly, a whole year was wasted (2011) under the pretext that "we are not afraid" of the US veto nor of confrontation with the US administration, while what happened both times was avoidance of confrontation in the name of confrontation.

After that, the Palestinian leadership took a series of steps, such as not approving the resumption of negotiations without having its requirements met,

the signing of international agreements, and joining organizations, including the ICC.²⁴⁷ However, the request to join the ICC was much delayed under the pretext of studying it and obtaining the approval and signature of all factions. After joining it, there was a reluctance to submit claims and organize a significant political campaign to pressure the court to proceed with investigations and address charges on past, current, and ongoing crimes, such as settlement building.

We cannot minimize the importance of these steps, which would have had a much greater impact if they had been part of a new vision and strategy using integrated and interrelated tools aiming to make the occupation costly for Israel and its supporters. They would impose the Israeli withdrawal without negotiations or conditions, or would make Israel accept to participation in negotiations that can lead to a peace settlement and an Israeli withdrawal, with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the WB and GS. Whereas in fact, these were just tactical steps aimed at pressuring Israel to resume negotiations according to previous principles and rules, or after modifying them in part by providing a formal international network that would add to the Quartet on the Middle East and some Arab countries.

As proof of the above, the president reiterated that he was ready to resume negotiations if Israel released the fourth batch of prisoners and freezed settlement activity, and then he rushed to support any French or non-French initiative for the resumption of negotiations. He did this without insisting on changing the rules and the terms of reference, and without withdrawing Palestinian concessions made in the previous negotiations and agreements. These concessions included the recognition of the right of Israel to exist, the agreement on the principle of “land swaps” and annexation of most of the “settlement blocs,” and having a “just solution” to the refugee issue, in addition to the demilitarization of a Palestinian state.

The tactical nature of the Palestinian steps was also present in the non-activation of the previous international resolutions, particularly those related to the right to resist occupation, the right of self-determination, and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in addition to joining international organizations or courts, in particular the ICC. It also appeared in the way the PA supported boycott and popular resistance, even peaceful resistance, which is primed for adoption, in addition to containing the *Intifadah*.

The French move emerges whenever the US role declines, where it attempts to fill the vacuum before it is filled by other parties (despite some positive points, such as the pledge to recognize the Palestinian state if the move fails).²⁴⁸ However, France's chances depend to a large extent on the European position, especially on Britain's and Germany's bias towards Israel, and the French therefore still need a US green light. The foundations and potential of the French approach consistently drop below any standard that could prove effective.

The French position began by claiming a Security Council resolution to determine the principles, perspectives and objectives of any action or initiative to reach a peace settlement within a short time span. It then dropped the ceiling of the draft resolution in response to US advice, and adopted the claim to expand the international Quartet Committee and hold an international or regional conference akin to previous ones, especially Annapolis Summit, which had the mission of providing a platform and cover for the resumption of negotiations.

The provision of international permanent support, without the permanent umbrella of the international framework and without determining a reference to control negotiations, will reproduce the perjurer role played by the Quartet on the Middle East Committee, as it was a form of circumventing international legitimacy. The UN must be the framework that organizes and leads an international movement (to obtain part of the Palestinian rights) and is not just one of four parties, away from compliance with international law and UN resolutions, and without an active pressuring role. The most the UN can offer is advice, for if it goes beyond this role, it will be met with US anger and rejection.

A return to negotiations to achieve a two-state solution on which the peaceful settlement project was based—without an Israeli commitment to international law and the resolutions of the United Nations as a reference, and without an effective international framework imposed on the parties to reach a solution within a short time span—means providing a lifeline to the occupation. This would enable Israel to continue its occupation and various crimes under an international cover, and could lead to pressure on the weak Palestinian party to accept solutions that deprive it of its basic national rights. The latter would be a party to a process that does not include a peaceful settlement but aims to maintain the status quo, which is constantly changing in favor of the Israeli side that is continuously creating facts on the ground, regardless of the nature of the government in Israel.

A Glance at the Near Future

The peace process is expected to move in one of three tracks. The first is based on maintaining the status quo more or less, without any dramatic changes. The possibilities of this scenario are decreasing, because the Palestinian situation is no longer viable, as evidenced by the *Intifadah* wave and the Israeli aggression, which mounts frantically in many forms, including continued attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and the efforts to complete the Judaization of Jerusalem, settlement expansion, the revival of the “greater Israel” plan, the removal of the Green Line, and the approval of more racist laws. This could force the PLO leadership and the PA to threaten Israel with popular resistance, boycott, and the activation of accession to the ICC, in addition to halting the obligations laid out in the Oslo Accords.

The second possible track is a new political process based on the French initiative, or something resembling it, so that an international conference will be prepared through indirect or direct preparatory meetings. This new process could be launched in the context of a conference about regional security, as planned by the French administration. In that conference, Palestinian efforts will try to lay foundations and reference for the peace process, in addition to defining a short time span to finish negotiations. It would be preceded by, or result in, a settlement freeze and the release of the fourth batch of prisoners, as well as the released prisoners who were arrested, and those detained in recent months.

As for Israel, it will attempt to empty the conference of any content or role, with the negotiations as its only reference, starting from the point at which the previous negotiations ended, so as to maintain previous Palestinian concessions and build upon them. It will also endeavor to normalize its relations with more Arab countries and improve regional negotiating opportunities, in the hope that this will lead to a regional solution in the future. What is agreed upon at this conference will be closer to the Israeli position, whether through the official version, or by having several interpretations, and the stronger party on the ground will be able to give it the interpretation that suits it. This effectively renders such a conference a waste of time.

The likelihood of this scenario will increase in case the regional crises, especially in Syria, move toward some kind of solution, or truce, or temporary or permanent co-existence. This scenario is more likely to happen if Palestinian reconciliation

is achieved through the formation of a national unity government, even if in the absence of the foundations for its sustainability and success.

A possible third track depends on the assumption that events will move towards an all-out confrontation between Palestinians and Israelis. In this case, there is no room for the return of bilateral negotiations in their old or modified form. The chance to end the division and accomplish unity is more likely in this scenario, because it would open the door to a review of previous agreements and concessions, and adopt a new approach focused on resistance and making the occupation costly for Israel, to the point of forcing it to withdraw, either unilaterally or through negotiations.

Such a scenario is unlikely at the moment but cannot be ruled out entirely. For there is an increasing Palestinian political and popular demand to adopt a new approach, in light of the failure of the previous options. However, it is not possible to get new popular support with obsolete leadership, structures and institutions. This is especially true if the factions do not implement a comprehensive change and renewal, or at least a reform to restore bygone legitimacy to the institutions, where the legal terms of the President and the PLC have ended, PLO institutions are suffering from paralysis, no PNC meetings, new forces and groups are not included, there is no review or accountability, and no PNC elections, not even in areas where elections can be conducted.

Conclusion

It seems that the internal re-positioning of Israeli parties caused by the Israeli elections in March 2015 did not add anything new to the overall track of Israeli society, which continued to move towards the far-right and religious extremism. Therefore, Israeli policies under the Netanyahu administration and the Likud Party have continued to adopt further settlement expansion, Judaization of the holy sites, blocking the aspirations of the Palestinian people to freedom and independence, and the foiling of a two-state solution.

In spite of the stability of the Israeli economy and its ability to provide high GDP and income per capita, despite the superiority of the Israeli military forces, and despite the state of Arab exhaustion as a result of revolutions, official repression,

and foreign interventions, the Palestinian people has expressed great fortitude and resilience. Indeed, the Israeli aggression on the GS in the summer of 2014 was thwarted through the fierce armed Palestinian resistance. Palestinians in WB also came up with a new form of resistance through a generation of young people who face the occupation with knives among other things.

Thus, although the Palestinian people still suffer from the occupation, the Zionist project still carries its crises from year to year, in an environment that refuses to give in or normalize relations, and looks forward to freedom and independence.

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Chapter Three

The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

Introduction

The impact of developments in the Arab world in 2014 and 2015 significantly influenced the strategic environment of Palestine, in their impact on both the domestic Palestinian scene and regional dynamics. They mostly enhanced the position of Israel in the conflict at the expense of the Palestinians and Arabs in general. Resistance forces took a particular hit.

Developments in the “ring countries,” especially the crises in Syria and Egypt, and their impact on Lebanon and GS, led to the deterioration of the position of major forces that threaten Israel on its northern and southern borders. On one hand, the continued fighting in Syria and the increased involvement of Hizbullah there, have participated to the exhaustion of the northern front on the military, economic and human levels. On the other hand, restoring the close “strategic relationship” between Israel and Egypt, the largest Arab military power, have secured the southern front and weakened the Resistance in the GS, which was also negatively impacted by the Syrian crisis.

Simultaneously, the increased internal conflict between change and counter change forces in many Arab countries, which led in 2014 and 2015 to a setback in the revolutions of Arab Spring and deepening of internal crises and their development into internal and regional wars, have weakened support for the Palestinian issue. Consequent human, political and economic losses inflicted on Arab countries and the social rift indicate that the region would be occupied for the foreseeable future with compensating the losses and repairing the destruction and damage wrought by conflicts, which might also extend for several years.

In addition, the ongoing conflicts have taken precedence over the Palestinian issue, as they are reshaping the geopolitical map of the region and have become a power struggle between the major regional powers, with the participation of international powers, most clearly visible in, but not limited to, the crisis in Syria.

This transformation is currently a danger to the Palestinian issue, for reshaping the region means the reformation of camps according to new priorities and

alliances, and a new assessment of sources of danger. This implies that the Arab-Israeli conflict is no longer the central regional conflict but has been replaced by an Arab-Iranian or Sunni-Shiite one. To this is added the re-emergence of extremist Islamic organizations that excommunicate and kill, further complicating the net of interests and alliances in the region.

First: Stances of the League of Arab States

1. Impact of Arab World Transformations on the Palestinian Issue

Studying the role played by the League of Arab States (LAS) in the Palestinian issue during 2014 and 2015, it is clear that its level of concern was more limited than during previous years.

The regional transformations that began in early 2011 continued to influence the LAS agenda, at the expense of the Palestinian issue. This was more so because of the crisis in Syria and its overlap with political developments in Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon. It became an international and regional arena for power struggle and a priority for Arab and regional countries, in addition to being another reason for Arab division.

Concerning internal crises, the confrontation between pro-change forces and those opposing change became a priority for a number of Arab countries in 2014. They launched a campaign to exclude Islamists, especially the MB movement, from the political scene. This confrontation has led to a discord between Qatar on one hand, and other Gulf countries and Egypt on the other, as was clear in the 25th summit of the LAS held in Kuwait in March 2014 when further departure from the Palestinian issue was noticed.

Besides the deterioration of the Palestinian issue among Arab priorities, the Kuwait summit and the following summit held in Sharm el-Sheikh in March 2015 maintained traditional position towards the Palestinian issue, whether concerning reconciliation, the peace process or any other matter.

In 2012 and 2013 the LAS stances improved concerning relations with Hamas and solidarity with GS against the Israeli aggression. While in 2014, the League demonstrated a weak position regarding Israel's summer aggression (dubbed Operation Protective Edge by Israel and Operation Eaten Straw by Hamas), as

compared to the stance during the 2012 Israeli aggression (dubbed Operation Pillar of Defense by Israel, and Operation Stones of Baked Clay by Hamas). Ultimately, the unprecedented visit to Gaza in 2012 by a delegate of Arab foreign ministers, headed by the LAS Secretary General was replaced in 2014 with support for the Egyptian initiative for ceasefire. This shows a deterioration in the influence of the Arab street on LAS stances, and the persistence of traditional Arab regime stances.

2. The Stance Regarding the Palestinian Internal Conflict

LAS stances mainly reflected official Arab positions towards the Palestinian schism. It supports the PA chaired by Mahmud ‘Abbas, the reconciliation agreement signed in GS in April 2014, and the National Consensus Government formed thereafter.

The wording of resolutions adopted at the 26th Arab summit in this regard was a clear indicator of this position. It reiterated respect for Palestinian national legitimacy under President ‘Abbas, appreciating his efforts at achieving national reconciliation. It stressed the continued support of the National Consensus Government under ‘Abbas’s leadership and commitment to the unity of the Palestinian decision, while working within the framework of the PLO, as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.¹ However, the position bypassed any reference to the unified frame of leadership stipulated in the 2011 Gaza reconciliation agreement.

Notably, the LAS did not witness any genuine diplomatic or political action in 2014 and 2015 regarding Palestinian reconciliation, aside from supporting the agreements reached and hailing the Egyptian role in this respect, although it was limited in the final agreement.

3. The Position Towards the Peace Process

There were no changes in 2014 and 2015 in LAS stances regarding the peace process as it still clings to the Arab Peace Initiative despite 13 years having elapsed since it was proposed and the absence of any Israeli response to it. Efforts mainly focused on providing political cover for the Palestinian negotiator; supporting PA steps in international forums most remarkably presenting a draft resolution for ending the Israeli occupation in the UN Security Council. In addition, the LAS reiterated its commitment to providing a financial safety net for the PA, but it never had any real impact on the course of negotiations.

In the context of stances supportive of the PA leadership, the LAS Kuwait summit completely rejected the recognition of Israel as a “Jewish state” and the pressures applied to the PA in this respect.² Also, the Arab foreign ministers supported Palestinian efforts to attain membership in specialized international bodies and to join international agreements and treaties in concurrence with the consent to the demand by American Secretary of State John Kerry to extend the round of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, which was supposed to end on 29/4/2014.³

As those negotiations failed, the LAS espoused a plan of action that adopted the PA recourse to the UN Security Council to present a draft resolution imposing a timeframe for ending the occupation. Indeed, the draft resolution was presented on 30/12/2014 via Jordan as the representative of the Arab Group; however, the step failed as it only secured eight of the nine votes needed to pass and was vetoed by the US.⁴

The 26th Arab summit in 2015 re-commissioned the Arab ministerial committee in charge of following up on the Palestinian issue to put forward a new plan to resort to UN Security Council with a similar resolution. It also reaffirmed its support for the PCC decisions calling for the reconsideration of all political, economic and security relations with Israel, which would ensure its commitment to signed agreements and its respect for international law and related international resolutions.⁵

But the efforts to submit a new draft resolution to the UN Security Council in 2015 did not crystallize despite the attempts to reach a wording acceptable for most sides. Thus, the efforts by France, the permanent member in the Security Council, to submit a draft resolution for ending the occupation failed and it withdrew it under US pressure.⁶

Second: Stances and Roles of Some Key Countries

1. Egypt

Egypt’s internal transformations and its interaction with the Palestinian issue in 2014 and 2015 served to improve the strategic environment for Israel. They enhanced the latter’s position as a regional partner, enjoying stable relations with Cairo in contrast to the deterioration in Egypt’s relations with the Palestinian

Resistance in GS, which was approached as a primary source of threat for Egyptian security on its eastern border.

At the same time, the disruption of the change course in Egypt was good news for Israel, which had eyed the repercussions of the Arab Spring and the rise of Islamists to power with concern. Israel welcomed the disruption as it enhanced the position of Arab forces that adopt the peace settlement as a strategic solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict, and it weakened its internal opponents without strengthening the Palestinian position vis-à-vis Israel. This was demonstrated in the strengthening of the position of the PA and Fatah Movement in the internal conflict with Hamas without any genuine support for improving the Palestinians' position in negotiations with Israel.

a. The Impact of Internal Changes on the Palestinian Issue

During 2014 and 2015, Egypt witnessed a series of internal changes, which impacted the Palestinian issue. These changes marked a continuation of the political crisis in Egypt since the January 25 Uprising, where there has been a conflict between the pro-change forces and those opposing it.

Politically, during these two years, Egyptian policy towards the Palestinian issue returned to the pre-January 25 revolution period. More specifically, the election of General 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi as president and the restoration to power of the military meant Egypt approached the Palestinian issue based on two essential determinants:

The first was the adoption of peace settlement as a strategic option for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. This would mean supporting the Palestinian side that adopted this position and a decline in relations with those who opposed it. Particularly, Hamas whose relations with Egypt have deteriorated, after it was accused of interfering with internal Egyptian affairs during the January 25 uprising and its aftermath, in support of the MB movement; the main opponent of the authority which assumed power after the July 2013 coup.

The other determinant is the management of relations with GS based primarily on Egyptian national security considerations, especially with the continued worsening of the security conditions in Sinai. Additionally, there was the refusal of any side to take responsibility for the GS humanitarian crisis, given that the Israeli occupation is the side imposing the siege and thus bears sole responsibility.

Hence, Egypt would not perceive the tunnels between GS and the Egyptian territories as a normal state although they have been a primary passageway for importing commodities into the Strip and overcoming the Israeli siege. For the Egyptian regime, there were no guarantees that the tunnels would not be used for other purposes. The regime also seemed unconcerned with changing the nature of Rafah crossing as one dedicated only for the movement of individuals, and whose opening and closure constitute a sovereign Egyptian decision, subject to different security and political considerations.

These changes have had repercussions on Egyptian conduct towards the Palestinian issue in a number of areas, notably the following:

1. The War on Tunnels

The Egyptian Army continued its destruction of tunnels between the GS and Egypt, thus targeting the lifeline on which Gazans depended to import essential commodities and goods as the Israeli siege remained intact. The tunnels were categorized by the Egyptian authorities as the main reason for the deterioration of security conditions in Sinai as they had been used as a conduit for weapons and armed men. Targeting tunnels was a continuation of the campaign launched after the killing of Egyptian soldiers in the Egyptian Rafah on 5/8/2012, and for which Egypt accused Hamas of being involved, thus marking one of the first signs of conflict between toppled President Muhammad Morsi and the military establishment led by General ‘Abdul Fattah al-Sisi.⁷ This campaign was further expanded in 2014 and 2015 through military and legal procedures to completely destroy the tunnels, including:

- Establishing a military fence along the Gaza-Egypt border by virtue of a decision made by the Egyptian authorities after a self-immolation⁸ attack targeted a military outpost in Karam al-Qawadis in North Sinai on 24/10/2014, leading to the killing of 28 soldiers, for which Palestinian individuals were charged.⁹

The decision included the establishment of a buffer zone extending 500 meters from the border fence.¹⁰ The zone was expanded to two kilometers in later decisions that included the complete removal of Egyptian Rafah city after the discovery of tunnels extending further in to Egypt.¹¹

- Employing new techniques for the destruction of tunnels, mainly through pumping sea water in the soil via a huge pipe along the border in order to flood

the tunnels and loosen the soil surrounding them thus causing their collapse.¹² This step was of major concern to Palestinians as sea water would cause great damage to Palestinian groundwater, the main source of water in Gaza, as well as for agricultural land in the Strip. Besides, it would move the soil and cause the collapse of Palestinian buildings and structures established on the Palestinian side of the borders.¹³ In response to this controversy, President al-Sisi said that all measures pursued by the Egyptian authorities on the border with Gaza were being coordinated with the PA.¹⁴

- Issuing a law which punishes the digging of tunnels, using them or equipping them for any purpose with a lifetime sentence. The new law punishes anyone convicted of having knowledge of a tunnel and using it or of any plot to dig one with the same life sentence.¹⁵

As the Egyptian Army has destroyed more than 2000 tunnels between the GS and Egypt since the coup in July 2013,¹⁶ and the repercussions of tunnel destruction have mainly been experienced in the economic and environmental conditions in Gaza (and Sinai) while the security conditions in the Peninsula continued to deteriorate as attacks against the Egyptian Army and security forces increased again in January and February 2016. These were carried out by *Wilayat Sinai*, which has pledged allegiance to ISIS.

The above observations raise doubt as to the efficiency of the war on tunnels in achieving peace in Sinai. In addition, the lack of evidence of Palestinian involvement in these attacks casts doubt regarding the credibility of the accusations against GS, categorizing it as a source of danger for Egypt's national security.

2. Closing the Rafah Crossing

Internal political crisis in Egypt and the decline of security conditions in Sinai, had a major impact on the management of Rafah crossing, where conditions deteriorated significantly in 2014 and 2015, a situation reminiscent of pre-January 25 uprising conditions. The May 2011 Egyptian measures to facilitate the crossing of Palestinians were cancelled, thus terminating all positive developments witnessed in the crossing from that time until the June 2013 coup. The decline was represented in re-enforcing the requirement for prior security permits for all age categories after the measure had been restricted to those aged between 18 and

40 years.¹⁷ In addition to increasing the closure days and decreasing operating hours on opening days to four. Ultimately, the crossing was opened 241 days in 2014 (closed for 66% of the year) while it was closed 344 days in 2015 (closed 94% of the year).¹⁸

Besides the renewed suffering of the Palestinians as they had to wait several hours in the “deportation hall” at the Rafah crossing until they were transferred to their destination, the number of Palestinians trapped in GS by the end of 2015 exceeded 25 thousand registered on travel lists at the Interior Ministry in Gaza, as well as thousands of non-registered people.¹⁹

The management policy of the crossing changed as compared to the pre-June 2013 coup policy. The crossing operated regularly (Seven hours per day) during the first six months of 2013, and was closed for only five days, other than the weekends and public holidays. Whereas, it was closed for 100 days in the second half of the year and the working hours decreased to just four.²⁰

The re-closure of the Strip to Arab and foreign visitors was another indicator of the change in Egyptian policy regarding GS, after the Strip was open to the world after the January 25 uprising. Also, the Egyptian authorities kept the Rafah crossing restricted for movement of individuals, as was obvious in the press releases of the Egyptian Army concerning its efforts to control the eastern borders. It frequently pointed out that Karm Abu Salem crossing was “the only legitimate outlet for access of goods into Gaza.”²¹

In addition to the above changes, the Arab Affairs Committee in the Egyptian Parliament recommended that a legal study be conducted regarding the crossing between Egypt and GS and the method of its operation. It would allow the introduction of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians and provide them with petrol and electricity in case Israel abstained from fulfilling its obligations as an occupation authority.²² Also during the same period, a three-stage plan was discussed to completely solve the electricity problem in GS and link it with the Eight Country Interconnection Project.²³

3. The Egyptian-Mediated Truce

There was a stark difference between the approach of Egyptian diplomacy towards reaching a ceasefire during the Israeli offensive on GS in summer 2014 and the efforts during the November 2012 attack. In 2014, Egypt refused the

interference of any Arab side in the mediation as it sought to deal with the GS file as a solely Egyptian issue. This was in contradiction to the stance of President Morsi's government during the 2012 offensive, where there was a keenness to include regional powers, such as Turkey and Qatar, which boosted Egypt's position and its ability to pressure Israel to accept the conditions of the Resistance.

This conduct also reflected Cairo's rejection of recognizing any legitimacy or authority for Hamas in GS. Egypt was keen to prevent the Resistance from achieving any political gains as its Foreign Ministry ignored the Resistance in GS in the formulation of its initiative, which was announced on 14/7/2014. It ignored the demands of the Resistance fighting on the ground. This, consequently, encouraged the Resistance to reject the Egyptian proposal, while Hamas stressed that it had not been officially consulted or informed about it.²⁴

The initiative, which placed at equal footing the Israeli acts of war against GS and the resistance operations, labeling both as aggressive acts, was immediately hailed by Israel, where the cabinet approved its announcement the next day.²⁵ Israeli Minister of Finance Yair Lapid praised its provisions, which sought to deprive Hamas of any genuine achievements on the ground, while ensuring that Israel would not have to make any concessions.²⁶ Later, Egypt rejected amending the initiative to meet the Resistance demands, while Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri even implicitly accused Hamas of extending the war and delaying the conclusion of a ceasefire agreement. In a press interview after the end of the aggression, he said that failing to accept the Egyptian initiative at an earlier time had caused an increased death toll.²⁷

At the same time, Egypt sought to enhance its role in GS through a call to convene an international donor conference for GS reconstruction in partnership with Norway and the PA. The conference, which was held in Cairo, on 12/10/2014, garnered \$5.4 billion in pledges, mainly from Qatar (\$1 billion), KSA (\$500 million), United Arab Emirates (UAE) (\$200 million) and Kuwait (\$200 million). Added to these commitments was additional aid approved for the Palestinians by the EU (\$568 million) and the US (\$212 million).²⁸

b. Egyptian-Palestinian Relations

Official relations between Cairo and the Palestinians generally restored the traditional form prevalent President Hosni Mubarak era, which supported the PA

and the peace process with Israel. It backed the PA in its internal conflict with Hamas, rejected any influential political role for the Palestinian resistance factions, and restricted the relationship with them to within security issues (intelligence apparatus). This was considered a deterioration in relations, which had become inclusive to different Palestinian factions after the 2011 revolution.

Egyptian support for the PA in its conflict with Hamas was clear in the declarations of Cairo and Ramallah regarding the tunnels and Rafah crossing. In this sense, Egyptian President al-Sisi reiterated that the measures by the Egyptian Army to regulate the borders with GS were carried out in complete coordination with the PA, which, he said, should return to the GS and supervise the crossings, claiming this would help open them on regular basis.²⁹ The Egyptian Ambassador in Ramallah, Wael Attia issued a similar statement regarding Rafah crossing as he said that the issue related to providing a mechanism for opening it under the supervision of the legitimate Palestinian Authority.³⁰ On the Palestinian end, there was a notable declaration by President ‘Abbas regarding the GS tunnels, where he said that he never wasted an opportunity to demand closure of the tunnels, whether through flooding them with sea water or building an iron fence on the borders. ‘Abbas’ statement came in an interview with al-Balad television in Egypt more than nine months before the Egyptian Army started this operation.³¹

This imbalance in relations between Egypt and the PA leadership and Hamas, and the impact of political and security conditions, prevented Egypt from acting as an impartial mediator in the internal conflict between the two Palestinian factions, and affected its capacity to host dialogue. Although Egyptian efforts did not stop and a reconciliation agreement was signed in GS between Fatah and Hamas in the presence of the PLO factions on 22/4/2014, the above factors led to a decline in the pace of the reconciliation process in which Cairo insisted on monopolizing the process.

The continued deterioration of the Egypt’s official relations with Hamas after the July 2013 coup, which was the main issue in the Egyptian-Palestinian relations in 2014–2015, stemmed from Egypt accusing Hamas of interfering in internal Egyptian issues. This was in the context of the campaign launched by the Egyptian authorities against the MB movement, accusing it of involvement in “terrorism” against Egyptian security forces in Sinai.

The Egyptian judiciary's verdicts against Hamas reflected the deterioration of relations between Cairo and Hamas, although the executive authority tried to avoid any effect of those verdicts on its role as an influential player in the Palestinian issue.

The first verdict was issued on 4/3/2014 as a "precautionary measure" which proposed temporarily banning Hamas's activities in Egypt pending the ruling in the "spying" and "prison break" files in which Hamas members, together with toppled President Morsi and MB movement leaders, were accused of criminal responsibility.³² In the context of holding Hamas responsible for the deterioration of security conditions in Sinai, in May 2014 Egypt's Public Prosecutor accused the Movement of supplying Ansar Bait al-Maqdis (later known as *Wilayat Sinai* after pledging allegiance to ISIS) with money and arms to attack the Egyptian Army in Sinai, and of training them in the GS.³³

However, the more severe verdicts targeting Hamas included designating Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades as a "terrorist organization," on 31/1/2015, then designating the Movement itself within this category on 28/2/2015. Both verdicts accused Hamas of being directly involved in armed attacks against Egyptian security and military forces in Sinai as well as of killing protesters in Tahrir Square and supporting the "terrorist MB movement."³⁴ Nonetheless, neither verdict presented tangible evidence proving that Hamas or any of its members were involved in the acts.

Designating Hamas as a terrorist organization raised controversy regarding its consequences on Egypt's stance towards Hamas and the possible restrictions on the role of Egypt in the Palestinian issue. Accordingly, the Egyptian government appealed the ruling of the Cairo Court for Urgent Matters through the State Lawsuits Authority, for the lower court lacked jurisdiction to issue the original ruling. On 6/6/2015, the Cairo Appeal Court for Urgent Matters overturned the ruling,³⁵ a decision that was welcomed by Hamas and several Egyptian parties.

Although since that time Hamas has repeatedly expressed its desire to improve its relationship with Egypt, developments in early 2016 did not suggest that a thaw is imminent. Egypt accused Hamas of involvement in the internal Egyptian crisis, days after Mahmud al-Zahhar, Hamas political bureau member, declared the Movement's aspiration for a new phase of relations with Egypt. He talked about the possibility of holding meetings with the Egyptian authorities to prove

that the Movement does not interfere in Egyptian internal matters, especially in the ongoing developments in Sinai.³⁶ This time the accusation was launched by Egyptian Interior Minister Major General Magdy Abdel Ghaffar who said that Hamas and leaders of the MB movement were behind the assassination of former Attorney General Counselor Hisham Barakat through targeting his convoy with a car bomb on 29/6/2015. Abdel Ghaffar announced in a press conference that “There is a major conspiracy targeting the Egyptian state... It began a long while ago and included a number of militant attacks, including the assassination of prosecutor-general Hisham Barakat.” He added that Turkish-based MB movement leaders masterminded the assassination, while Hamas “provided training for militants to execute it and also took part in planning it.”³⁷

As for the “prison break,” the Egyptian judiciary sentenced 107 people to death, including Hamas and Hizbullah leaders, along with President Muhammad Morsi, the General-Guide Muhammad Badi’ and the President of the International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUMS), Yusuf al-Qaradawi, after accusing them of involvement in al-Natrun prison escape case at the beginning of the January 25 uprising. Notably, 70 of the 107 names were of members and leaders in Hamas, including Ayman Nawfal and Ra’ed al-Attar,³⁸ who was killed during the offensive on GS in summer 2014. The “Hamas espionage case” was concluded with the sentencing of 16 persons to death, including Deputy General-Guide of the MB movement Khayrat al-Shatir, after they had been accused of “conspiring with foreign powers,” disclosure of national security secrets, and coordination with the Jihadi organizations inside and outside Egypt to destabilize the country.³⁹

In addition, withdrawal of Egyptian citizenship from Palestinians, who had obtained it after the January 25 uprising, was also one of the issues that unfolded in the Egyptian-Palestinian relations of 2014. Egyptian Interior Minister Muhammad Ibrahim announced in November 2014 that all citizenship decisions granted at that time were being reviewed by committees that had already examined the origins of 24 thousand Palestinians, including Mahmud al-Zahhar and 11 of his family members, in order to withdraw citizenship from those who were not qualified to receive it.⁴⁰ Yet, the Egyptian government did not pursue any further effective measures in this regard following this declaration.

The negative Egyptian position towards Hamas was used to incite public opinion. Remarkably, distortion campaigns went as far as supporting Israel during its offensive on GS in summer 2014.

Among the most notable examples in this context were the declarations by TV presenter Tawfiq 'Okasha, cursing the Gazans on live shows aired on his channel al-Faraeen and his denouncement of sending aid by the Egyptian Army to those "who have sold themselves and their cause," according to 'Okasha.⁴¹ Another example was the tweets by journalist 'Azza Sami, deputy editor of al-Ahram newspaper, thanking Netanyahu for striking Hamas, "the basis of MB movement corruption, treason, and betrayal,"⁴² as she claimed. Remarkably, these stances were mostly issued via pro-regime outlets, which could be interpreted as official consent, tacit approval, or at least ignorance, that encouraged their continuation. The danger of these campaigns is that they target the popular support of the Palestinian issue, which is an essential leverage for enhancing Egypt's positive role towards the issue. This was proved in the short-lived experience of Egyptian foreign policy after the January 25 uprising.

c. The Stance on Peace Settlement and the Relation with Israel

In 2014 and 2015, calm was restored in Egyptian-Israeli relations and the Camp David Accord restored to its stable condition, for its fate was of concern for Israel since the outbreak of the January 25 uprising and the ouster of President Mubarak. This development came about because the military regained control over the reins of power in Egypt and the situation restored the conditions as they were during the rule of former President Anwar Sadat, who perceived the peace settlement with Israel as the main factor for maintaining Egypt's strategic position in the region.

This orientation was demonstrated on 22/1/2015, in the speech of Egyptian President 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi at the World Economic Forum in Davos. He said that Egypt would continue its efforts to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on the two-state solution and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the June 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, considering it the only way for the people of the region to enjoy security. He added that prior to the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel no one had imagined that peace would take its current form, adding that no one could have imagined what President Sadat was thinking of when he proposed his vision for peace, but that time had proven the accuracy of his vision.⁴³

Comfortable relations were reflected in Egyptian and Israeli statements, security coordination reached unprecedented levels, correspondences between the two were continuous, and diplomatic relations were restored, where the Egyptian

ambassador returned to Tel Aviv three years after he had been recalled to Cairo.⁴⁴ On the Egyptian side, declarations by President al-Sisi started as soon as he announced his candidacy for presidential elections, declaring that the peace treaty with Israel had been stable for more than 30 years and that although it has faced challenges, Egypt respects it and always would, adding that the Israelis know that very well. Al-Sisi also stressed that commitment to the peace treaty is a key issue for all leaders and public opinion in Egypt.⁴⁵ A few days later, al-Sisi stated that Israel realized that the absence of the Egyptian Army from Sinai was more dangerous to Israel than Egypt, and that Israel did not object to the presence of the Egyptian Army in Sinai or to its deployment there in contradiction to the provisions agreed in the peace treaty. He added that the Egyptian Army operates in Sinai as it sees necessary and should the repercussions of violence in Sinai make it necessary to amend the agreement then it would be amended and Israel would not object, because it was aware of the gravity of the situation.⁴⁶

Al-Sisi reaffirmed these stances on several occasions after his election, including his speech at the international donor conference for GS reconstruction, where he stressed Egypt's commitment to achieving peace in the region.⁴⁷ Later, in an exclusive interview with France 24, he rejected the idea that his country was a "backyard" for attacking Israel.⁴⁸ Al-Sisi even went further in an interview with the Italian *Corriere della Sera* newspaper, stating that Egypt was ready to send military forces into the Palestinian state, help the local police and reassure the Israelis as guarantor, a role that would last the time necessary to re-establish confidence. He added that a Palestinian state must exist where troops can be sent, further explaining that he had discussed the idea with Mahmud 'Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.⁴⁹ At a later time, al-Sisi confirmed in an interview with *The Washington Post* the presence of a strong and warm relationship with Israel and Netanyahu to whom he talks "a lot," asserting that there was huge trust and confidence between the two sides.⁵⁰

On the Israeli side, various media outlets welcomed al-Sisi's declarations towards Israel. Thus, different articles and analyses hoped he would be victorious in the elections and later hailed his election as president, while the Israeli government was clearly pleased with the outcome of the elections.

Following his election, Israeli President Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Netanyahu phoned al-Sisi to congratulate him, announcing their country's full readiness to cooperate with Egypt at the political and security levels. Both Israeli

leaders also expressed their conviction that the new president would lead his country to the status and position it deserved based on his background as a combatant and leader who appreciates responsibility and served his country.⁵¹

On the media and research level, Israeli expert Yossi Melman described Israeli relations with Egypt, during al-Sisi's term, as a strategic treasure for Israel. He said that since al-Sisi's victory, Israeli-Egyptian relations had reached their closest point, with security coordination gradually improving. He added that mutual interests in fighting the Islamic State in Sinai and Hamas in GS, enhanced this coordination.⁵² An Israeli study issued by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), which is affiliated with Tel Aviv University, said that electing al-Sisi was the best and most appropriate opportunity for Israel due to his perception of peace with Israel as a strategic asset and his awareness of the positive impact of security coordination with Israel given his military background.⁵³

During the Israeli offensive on GS, Hebrew media praised al-Sisi and his relationship with Israel. In this context, Walla website said that the strong security coordination between Israel and Egypt during al-Sisi's rule had reached unprecedented levels that impressed Israeli leaders who believed that al-Sisi and other leaders in the region were ready to open a new and historic chapter in relations with Israel and ignore the Palestinian issue or, at least, cave in quietly to the idea that the problem could not be resolved.⁵⁴

In the same context, *Haaretz* newspaper commented on al-Sisi's speech at the Gaza reconstruction conference saying that the Israeli public perceived the Egyptian president as a "loyal ally." The paper described al-Sisi's speech as one of the most important speeches any Arab leader has given in recent years.⁵⁵

Israeli Channel 10 pointed to the enhanced relations between al-Sisi and Netanyahu. The Channel also said that Netanyahu was satisfied with the strategic relationship established with Egypt.⁵⁶

On the security level, different leaders praised the level of coordination between Egypt and Israel. In this context, General Roi Alkabetz, Commander of Eilat Territorial Brigade, responsible for securing the borders with Egypt, commended the security coordination shown by the Egyptian Army since the July 2013 coup. He said, on 6/6/2014, in an interview with Israel Hayom newspaper, that his forces sometimes did not find anything to do because of the role assumed by the Egyptian Army whose operations have decreased the level of danger faced by Israel.⁵⁷

Additionally, Head of the Israeli Army Planning Directorate, Major General Nimrod Shefer described Egypt as an “excellent partner.”⁵⁸

In the same sense, Israeli researchers and commentators have said that their government has provided important security support for al-Sisi regime to fight Islamic extremists in Sinai. They consider the stability of the Egyptian regime an Israeli strategic interest according to Ehud Eilam, researcher in Israeli national security affairs. Moreover, Channel 2 military analyst Ronnie Daniel said that Israel had provided the Egyptian Army with the aid it needed, and with intelligence information to help it face Jihadists.⁵⁹

2. Jordan

a. Impact of Arab Changes on the Palestinian Issue

Despite the surrounding crises, Jordan, of the “ring countries,” was the most stable internally and with regard to its foreign policies and alliances. This stability, in addition to historic, geographic and demographic conditions, allowed Jordan to be the most interactive arena with Palestinian official and popular developments in 2014 and 2015. Thus, although the Egyptian changes were among the most influential factors regarding the Palestinian issue, Egypt was mainly concerned with GS and Sinai’s security, considering them internal Egyptian issues, while its interest in other Palestinian issues witnessed significant deterioration.

Jordan focused on the developments in Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque, whose custodianship is held by Jordan, as per the agreements signed with the Israeli side. Notably, official action on this issue was influenced by Jordanian popular pressure as well as the impact of the popular uprising in Jerusalem.

There were Jordanian security concerns regarding tensions on its northern and eastern borders and the expansion of IS towards its territories, which consolidated the Jordanian-US alliance and resulted in a boost to security coordination with the latter and Israel.

At the same time, Iran’s aspirations and its alliance with the Iraqi government, as well as with the Syrian regime and Hizbullah, have increased Jordan’s fears of what King ‘Abdullah has called the “Shiite crescent” and encouraged it to balance its relations with utmost care. Thus, Jordan seems more intent than ever to enhance its relations with the Gulf countries and the stability of its western borders.

In light of these determinants, the strategic position of Jordan makes it a safety valve for the region, which encourages Israel to balance its relations with the Kingdom with care and pursue its interests while avoiding an explosion of the situation. Ultimately, this would provide methods of pressure that could be utilized to serve the Palestinian issue, should policy be orientated that way.

b. Jordanian-Palestinian Relations

Jordan maintained its strong relations with the PA as demonstrated in the repeated meetings between King ‘Abdullah and ‘Abbas in 2014 and 2015, which focused on coordination in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations file and the Israeli aggression on *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Contrarily, relations with Hamas became cold, after they had witnessed relative improvement in late 2012 and early 2013 with mediation from then Crown Prince of Qatar Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, and the three visits of Khalid Mish‘al with a Hamas delegation in one year to meet Jordanian officials, most notably King ‘Abdullah in January 2013.⁶⁰ Since that visit, however, no significant development or official meeting was recorded between the two sides, part of what can be seen as a negative attitude towards the MB movement (since July 2013 in concurrence with the military coup in Egypt) in a number of Arab countries. Jordan’s king accused the MB movement of hijacking the Arab Spring.⁶¹ Mish‘al visited Jordan in late January 2016; however, this was a family visit meant to check on his mother who lives in Amman, and no meetings with any Jordanian official were conducted during the visit.⁶²

A case, dubbed by the media as the “Hamas case,” implied that conditions for the resumption of relations had deteriorated. Jordanian authorities did not accuse Hamas officially with the case, in which 16 persons were tried most of whom were members of the Jordanian MB movement and Jordan Engineers Association, and including a Jordanian ex-prisoner. Nonetheless, the indictment pointed to the “participation of most suspects in military training in the Gaza Strip” and added that “a number of defendants were trained to use Kalashnikov, manufacture of explosive materials and recruiting members to execute military operations in the West Bank.”⁶³ Jordan State Security Court issued verdicts against 12 persons, including eight detainees who were sentenced between a year and five while four were sentenced in absentia to 15 years in prison and four were acquitted for lack of evidence. However, the MB refuted the accusations against its members and said they were “fabricated.”⁶⁴

Remarkably, this trial was held based on categorizing the accusations as “terror acts” which fell within the competence of State Security Court. In fact, the new law of the Court which was approved by the parliament in April 2014 had stirred controversy before it was adopted based on the refusal to add a provision stipulating the exclusion of any act against the Israeli occupation from trial before the court, and from the definition of “terror.”⁶⁵ This brings to mind the “weapons case” in which State Security Court tried three Jordanians for stockpiling weapons for the benefit of Hamas after they had been arrested in April 2006 on the eve of a visit scheduled for then Palestinian Foreign Minister and Hamas official Mahmud al-Zahhar to Jordan. At that time, Hamas denied the accusations stressing the case was political and was meant to prevent the visit, which was canceled by the Jordanian government after the arrest.⁶⁶

c. The Stance on the Peace Settlement and the Relationship with Israel

Jordan continued to push forward Palestinian-Israeli negotiations conducted under American auspices. King ‘Abdullah received Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 16/1/2014, a few days after a meeting with President ‘Abbas in Amman and another with US Secretary of State John Kerry.⁶⁷ Jordan reiterated its dedication to its supreme interests regarding final status issues while stressing its refusal to recognize the “Jewishness of Israel” and denying the idea of the alternative homeland which was described by King ‘Abdullah as a political illusion with no existence on the ground.⁶⁸ In addition, Jordan emphasized maintaining the right to be directly responsible for negotiations regarding Palestinian refugees who are Jordanian citizens, and to reject any formula that contradicts its interests.⁶⁹ However, as the round of talks reached their usual dead end, Jordan was urged to support Palestinian recourse to the UN to present a draft resolution on ending the occupation to the Security Council, where Jordan represented the Arab Group in 2014 and 2015.

The relationship between Jordan and Israel was influenced by a group of contradictory factors; some of which caused tension while others enhanced it. However, it was noted that the Kingdom was keen to balance these factors with precision to maintain the highest possible level of stability. The outcome was a compound form of relations, as political tension led to a crisis between the two, and the continuation of a “cold peace.” Economic and security factors led to growth of commercial exchange and economic agreements as well as an increase in security

coordination. In addition, Israeli measures in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, attempts to impose temporal and spatial division, and the attempts to end Jordanian custodianship, were the most remarkable points of contention between Amman and Tel Aviv, which had increased over the years and reached a climax in 2014 and 2015.

This was a result of the increased popular Jordanian reaction to Israeli aggression against *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Jerusalem in concurrence with the escalation of the popular uprising in Jerusalem. That prompted the Jordanian government to act more vigorously, especially after this file became a point of conflict with the Parliament, whose members repeatedly demanded the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador in Amman.

In February 2014, the crisis returned when the Knesset prepared to discuss a draft law calling for ending Jordanian custodianship of the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, stipulated in the 1994 Wadi Arabah Treaty. Ultimately, the Jordanian Parliament voted consensually on the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador and recalling of Jordanian ambassador from Tel Aviv. Also, it threatened to call a vote of confidence should the government refuse to comply with the demand, while some members of parliament demanded a draft law to cancel Wadi Arabah Treaty.⁷⁰ Despite these moves, the government did not pursue any step regarding the ambassadors.

The killing of a Jordanian judge on King Hussein Bridge by Israeli soldiers on 10/3/2014 exacerbated tensions at that time, and the parliament gave the government one week to expel the Israeli ambassador before submitting a vote of confidence. The parliament granted the government confidence when the deadline elapsed,⁷¹ although the latter did not comply with its demand, because the parliament had been told by “supreme sides” in Jordan of their rejection of toppling the government or expelling the ambassador.⁷² In a later development, the Jordanian Foreign Ministry summoned the Israeli ambassador to object to the restrictions imposed on the employees of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and Holy Places upon their entry to the Mosque, and the aggression against those employees as well as against worshippers.⁷³

Jerusalem was present in the speech of King ‘Abdullah at UN General Assembly 68th session. He said, “as Hashemite custodian of Jerusalem’s Muslim and Christian Holy Sites, I will continue to oppose any violation of *al-Aqsa* Mosque’s sanctity.”⁷⁴ But the Israeli escalation against the Mosque continued

through break-ins by settlers and officials as well as restrictions on Muslims' and Awqaf employees' access to the Mosque in concurrence with attempts to draft a law on dividing the Mosque temporally and spatially between Muslims and Jews. Such Israeli measures reached a climax at the end of October 2014 as it closed the Mosque completely after the assassination attempt on extremist Rabbi Yehuda Glick, which fueled tension in Jerusalem.

This escalation led the Jordanian government to recall the Jordanian ambassador to Israel, on 5/11/2014, and lodge a formal complaint with the UN Security Council.⁷⁵ The government also demanded an American mediation to calm the situation leading to a tripartite meeting on 13/11/2014 which brought together the King 'Abdullah II, Prime Minister Netanyahu and US Secretary of State John Kerry. 'Abdullah said that Israeli measures might thwart efforts to fight "terrorism" in the region, in reference to the international coalition battling IS and in which Jordan is a member alongside Washington.⁷⁶ The meeting ended with an agreement on measures to mitigate tension in Jerusalem, where Israel declared its commitment to the status quo in *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Hashemite role in protecting and safeguarding holy sites in the city.⁷⁷ The next day, Israel allowed worshippers of all ages to enter the Mosque.⁷⁸

The crisis had yet to subside when the Jordanian Foreign Ministry summoned Israeli ambassador to Amman to protest his remarks criticizing the Jordanian Parliament, while Tel Aviv sent complaints to Jordan objecting to parliamentary and governmental stances regarding the escalation of resistance operations in Jerusalem.⁷⁹

Despite the return of the Jordanian ambassador to Tel Aviv on 3/2/2015, attempts by the settlers and the Israeli authorities to increase the Jewish presence in *al-Aqsa* Mosque and ensure Israeli sovereignty over it continued. Remarkable in this context was the demand of Knesset Member Uri Ariel of the Jewish Home that the Israeli government prevent restoration works by the Awqaf in *al-Aqsa Mosque*,⁸⁰ and his participation at a later time in breaking into it.⁸¹ In addition to the continued and escalated break-ins, there was talk again about dividing the Mosque between Muslims and Jews. Ultimately, King 'Abdullah warned that such provocations might impact the relationship between Jordan and Israel where he said:

We in Jordan have been very concerned and angered with the recent escalations in Jerusalem, specifically in *al-Aqsa* Mosque. We have gotten

reassurances from the Israeli government that this would not happen. Unfortunately, these are reassurances we have heard in the past. So, I would like to state, in your presence that if this continues to happen, ...any more provocations in Jerusalem, will affect the relationship between Jordan and Israel; and Jordan will have no choice, but to take action, unfortunately.⁸²

As these developments unfolded, the Jerusalem *Intifadah* broke out on 1/10/2015 and once again, John Kerry returned to mediate between the Jordanian and Israeli sides. He met King ‘Abdullah and the Palestinian President in Amman and then announced a new agreement after the Israeli Prime Minister stated, “Israel has no intention to divide the Temple Mount [*al-Aqsa* Mosque], and we completely reject any attempt to suggest otherwise.” He added, “We respect the importance of the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as reflected in the 1994 peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, and the historical role of King ‘Abdullah II.”⁸³ Yet, despite this agreement, the orientations by the Israeli government and the increased attempts by the Right to change the status quo make it probable that the crisis will emerge again.

In contrast to political tension between Jordan and Israel, economic and security relations developed in 2014 and 2015, thus showing the extent to which bilateral relations had become complicated and tangled. Trade volumes increased by 39.7% between 2013 and 2015.⁸⁴ Also, an agreement was signed by the National Electric Power Company to buy Israeli gas for 15 years in a \$14 billion deal,⁸⁵ while two similar agreements were signed by the Arab Potash Company and its affiliate the Jordan Bromine Company in a deal estimated to be worth around \$771 million.⁸⁶

In February 2015, Jordan and Israel signed an agreement to start Phase I of the Red Sea-Dead Sea Water Conveyance Project, which stipulates the establishment of a conduit for transporting water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, through desalination stations to increase the water reserve in both countries, while limiting the decrease in the Dead Sea water level with the possibility of generating electricity by using hydropower.⁸⁷

On the security level, there were several indicators showing an increase in security cooperation between Jordan and Israel to face the “common danger” on Jordan’s northern and eastern borders mainly represented by ISIS. This followed increased Jordanian and Israeli concerns from the spillover of the security situation in Syria and Iraq and the increased possibilities of infiltration across Jordan’s

borders by militiamen who might execute attacks against Jordan or Israel. The warning by King ‘Abdullah mentioned earlier regarding the impact of Israeli violations against *al-Aqsa* Mosque on the war on “terror” has implied coordination between Jordan and Israel in this respect. The main indicators included Israel’s provision of “retired US-supplied [16 AH-1] Cobra combat helicopters to Jordan to help the Hashemite kingdom fend off insurgent threats on the Syrian and Iraqi borders, a US official with knowledge of the deal said.”⁸⁸ This was in addition to news published in *Haaretz* newspaper stating that Jordan was seeking aid from Israeli jets to increase surveillance on the Jordan borders with Syria.⁸⁹ Another indicator of the cooperation between Jordan and Israel was the participation by both sides in the “Red Flag” exercise held annually in the US, which focused on dealing with the Middle East based on Jordanian-Israeli cooperation. “The Israeli contingent also provided the Jordanian fighters with mid-air refueling en route.”⁹⁰

3. Syria

a. The Impact of Internal Developments on the Palestinian Issue

The ongoing Syrian crisis had a great impact on the Palestinian issue, due to the changes in the surrounding strategic environment, which could be summarized in the following:

1. The position change of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the regional agenda: The Syrian crisis changed from an internal crisis to a regional and international war for domination of the Middle East, and an arena of conflict to reshape the geopolitical map of the region starting from Syria. Thus, it topped the agendas of regional countries (Arab countries, Turkey and Iran) and international forces, which have interests and influence in the region (Russia, the US and European countries).

Consequently, Arab and international concern over the Palestinian issue deteriorated in 2014 and 2015; the region was busy with several crises and the Palestinian issue was at stalemate over the peace process and the resistance.

More dangerous was the deviation of concern from the central conflict with the Zionist project, which is an intruder to the region, to conflict among indigenous regional forces, depleting their resources and allowing Israel to establish more facts on the ground.

2. Strategically weakening the northern front facing Israel: The continued crisis in Syria meant further exhaustion of the military, economic and human resources of the country, in addition to shattering the social fabric in a way that impedes the establishment of a unified entity within the same geographic borders. For Israel, this means, among other things, that any political entity established on its northern borders, whether or not Syria remained unified, will be busy for several years with repairing war damage, while the threat remains from armed organizations rather than from the country as a whole.

At the same time, the Syrian crisis has exhausted the “Refusal Front” which lost its Palestinian dimension after Hamas left it, and after the criterion for defining what “Refusal” means had become the position towards Syria rather than towards the Resistance in Palestine. Notably, Hizbullah’s particular involvement in the Syrian crisis contributes to the depletion of the main security threats for Israel on its northern border.

Like Syrians, as a result of the continued and intensified fighting, Palestinian refugees in Syria suffered an increased humanitarian crisis. Consequently, the crisis led to the displacement of 390 thousand out of 560 thousand Palestinian refugees registered with United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Syria, of whom 280 thousand were displaced within their original place of residence in Syria. 110 thousand refugees left to other countries, mainly Lebanon (42 thousand), Jordan (18 thousand) and Europe, which has become a haven for increasing numbers of refugees, especially as countries surrounding Syria closed their borders to refugees.⁹¹ Meanwhile, the other Palestinian refugees (estimated at 450 thousand) live in Syria, and 95% of them are in need of sustained humanitarian assistance. This includes tens of thousands of Palestinians who are trapped in areas of active conflict, with severely constrained access to humanitarian assistance.⁹²

As of March 2016, 3,180 Palestinians have died in Syria because of the crisis, while detainees were estimated at 1,083 persons and the disappeared at 282.⁹³ Yarmouk Refugee Camp (RC) was among the areas affected, as a result of the siege imposed in July 2013 in addition to water and electricity outages, which led to the death of 185 persons under the siege.⁹⁴ The control of ISIS group over Yarmouk RC, on 1/4/2015, led to the failure of talks that were underway to neutralize it.⁹⁵ Thus, it was again targeted by the regime’s barrel bombs, which led to the destruction of the Red Crescent’s Palestine Hospital, the only hospital in the RC.⁹⁶

b. Syrian-Palestinian Relations

The Syrian crisis limited Syrian-Palestinian relations within the scope of stances of different Palestinian forces towards the crisis and its repercussions on Palestinian refugees in Syria.

The rift between the Syrian regime and Hamas continued based on the latter's refusal to support the regime's military response to the Syrian revolution and choosing to withdraw its leadership from Damascus. In contrast, the relationship between the regime and Fatah witnessed further development as shown in the Syrian decision, on 14/8/2015, to reopen the office of Fatah in Damascus 33 years after its closure and to authorize Samir Rifa'i as representative of the Movement in Syria.⁹⁷ A move complementary to the improvement that started in 2013, when President Bashar al-Assad received 'Abbas Zaki, Fatah Central Committee member, in his capacity as the personal envoy of Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas.⁹⁸ It seemed, thus, that the Syrian regime had chosen a similar position to the traditional, official Arab positions, which perceive the leadership of the PLO and the PA as the gateway to relations with the Palestinians. This was further confirmed in the meeting of Syrian Interior Minister Muhammad Sha'ar in May 2014 with a delegate from the PLO Executive Committee chaired by Zakariya al-Agha at the Interior Ministry headquarters in Damascus to discuss Yarmouk RC crisis.⁹⁹

In parallel, Damascus maintained its relation with the loyal Palestinian factions, whose leadership is basically headquartered in the Syrian capital, mainly the PFLP-GC and Fatah al-Intifadah. These factions, however, were criticized over the participation of their members in battles to the benefit of Syrian regime regular forces, which was perceived as involving Palestinians in Syria's internal crisis.

Contrary to issues directly related to this crisis, no official Syrian action was noted concerning the Palestinian issue or the internal Palestinian conflict.

c. Relations with Israel

No change was noted, in 2014 and 2015, in the position of the Syrian regime towards Israel, as it continued to accuse the latter of supporting the "terrorist groups" and of being a party to the "conspiracy" targeting Syria and the "Refusal Front." Yet, it maintained its policy of non-escalation or military retaliation against any Israeli aggression, and on maintaining calm on the Golan Heights.

As for the Syrian opposition forces, they did not show any rapprochement with Israel, except for the position by Syrian opponent Kamal Labwani who called for an alliance with Israel to bring down the regime in Syria. The Syrian National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, the main political opponent group and of which Labwani was a member, expressed its rejection of Labwani's orientations, while reiterating commitment to the principles adopted by the Syrian people for decades regarding the relationship with Israel. The Coalition also repudiated Labwani's visit to Israel in September 2014 to participate in a conference on "fighting terrorism."¹⁰⁰

Labwani again visited Israel in February 2016, where he was hosted by the Knesset and met also Deputy Minister of Regional Cooperation Ayoob Kara and expressed his gratitude for Israel's "humanitarian efforts" towards the Syrian people, calling on Israel to establish a secure zone in south Syria and provide Syrians with field facilitations.¹⁰¹

At the same time, the two sides to the conflict condemned the Israeli aggression on GS in summer 2014 and expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people in a rare, or only, point of intersection between the two sides.

Nonetheless, the indicators of the development of the relationship of one party to the conflict with Israel appeared from the Syrian north, from the Kurdish National Council (KNC) in Syria. Its chairman Sherko Abbas welcomed Israel's support for the Kurdish state saying, "We have never had any hatred for the Israelis" and that "Kurds are the engine of democracy in the Middle East, and they need to be supported."¹⁰²

For its part, Israel's interference in Syria remained limited. Direct gains were when Syrian refugees were treated in Israeli hospitals, and when dealing limited strikes on specific "threatening" targets in Syria. But in general, Israel considered its strategic interests to be in the prolongation of the war. Thus, neither intervening to bring down the regime, which has for a long time maintained calm on the Golan Front, nor helping it gain victory, which would end the conflict and the exhaustion of Syria as a whole.

In the context of Israel's playing on contradictions, Israeli media outlets focused on the provision of treatment to wounded Syrians and the visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to a field hospital providing treatment to the wounded in the occupied Golan in February 2014. This was described by the opposition National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces

as a “show,” they accused Netanyahu of an attempt to imply the presence of a relationship between the Syrian revolution and Israel.¹⁰³

In parallel, Israel sought to benefit from the weak Syrian military capacities to launch limited strikes on several occasions that went without any Syrian retaliation. Regime military bases in south Syria were hit on 21–22/6/2014 by Israeli warplanes and tank shells, killing four and injuring nine, in addition to the damage caused in the sites and equipment.¹⁰⁴ Also, Battalion 90 in al-Qunaitra received aerial strikes on 15/7/2014¹⁰⁵ and 4/9/2014,¹⁰⁶ which led to the deaths of regime troops. In addition, Israeli jets launched two strikes on two sites in Rif Dimashq on 7/12/2014 without human losses recorded.¹⁰⁷

These strikes continued in 2015 targeting military sites of the Syrian Air Defense Forces near Homs on 26/3/2015;¹⁰⁸ and in April 2015, several strikes targeted sites of regime forces and Hizbullah in al-Qalamoun.¹⁰⁹ An Israeli strike on 18/1/2015 targeting al-Qunaitra led to the assassination of Hizbullah leader Muhammad ‘Issa and five Party members,¹¹⁰ and on 19/12/2015 another Israeli strike targeted a residential building in Jaramana, south of Damascus, leading to the assassination of Samir Kuntar.¹¹¹

President al-Assad said the strikes were in support of the opposition forces and that Israel represented the “aerial force” of those groups. However, the limited scope of the strike targets, and Israeli declarations about preferring al-Assad regime to remain in power, as it has maintained the calm on that front for around 40 years, indicated that the strikes were meant to strategically weaken Syria rather than disrupt the balance of opposing forces. This analysis is supported by the fact that Israel supported the international coalition against ISIS group, as it imposed a threat to Israel. It warned that al-Assad’s remaining in power was preferable to the rise of “Sunni” Jihadi forces that would be difficult to control on the borders, and would thus generate an experience similar to Hamas in GS.

Noteworthy in this respect were declarations by Lieutenant General Dan Halutz, former Chief of Staff, who said that the issue did not need much explanation as al-Assad regime has maintained calm on the borders with Israel for 40 years, but the situation changed once the stability of the regime was in danger. In the same sense, former Israeli Minister of Defense, Yitzhak Mordechai, said that despite the strong relation between the Syrian regime and both Iran and Hizbullah, its danger remains less than that posed by Sunni Jihadist movements.¹¹²

4. Lebanon

a. Impact of Internal Changes on the Palestinian Issue

In 2014 and 2015 Lebanon continued to be seriously affected by the crisis in Syria, especially in light of Hizbullah's involvement there, and the ongoing flow of refugees into the country. These formed an additional pressure on the political, economic and living conditions in a country suffering collapse in its political system as well as in its infrastructure and network of basic services.

The main repercussions of this file on the Palestinian issue were the depletion of military and human resources of Hizbullah, the main force of resistance on Israel's northern front, the transformation of war in Syria into a main confrontation front for the Party, and the increased tension between Hizbullah and most regional Arab countries.

Hizbullah insisted that its defense of the regime in Syria was a defense of the "Refusal Front" and necessarily supported the Palestinian issue and the confrontation with the Zionist project. However, this did not prevent its loss of a major part of popular support it has enjoyed for its resistance against Israel, whether internally or in the Arab world. This was a result of change in the perception of Hizbullah; from a resistance movement to a militia defending a regime suppressing a popular revolution, or to an Iranian arm in the region. For in each case, the party commented on its events or took sides, it would have an overlapping sectarian and political dimensions, such as the crisis in Bahrain and Yemen, in addition to the crisis in Syria.

Besides losing Arab popular support, Hizbullah's intervention in Syria has deepened the rift between the Party and its political opponents in Lebanon while increasing polarization and popular frustration between the Party's supporters and allies on one hand and its rivals' public on the other hand. Consequently, the perception of the Party as an internal armed threat increased while its intervention was considered a factor in importing a foreign threat into Lebanon.

The increased tension between Hizbullah and the Arab regimes opposed to al-Assad regime, especially KSA, led to the labeling of the Party as a terrorist organization by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and LAS in March 2016.¹¹³

At the same time, negative positions towards Hizbullah in the region made things complicated for the Palestinian Resistance. For its supporters condemned

the relationship with Hizbullah, even when it was restricted to the confrontation with Israel, without adopting any of the party's stances towards the crises in the region. Notably, the relation between Hizbullah and Hamas improved in 2014 and 2015 as implied by Hizbullah Secretary General Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah who said that the relationship was being reconstructed aside from the Syrian file the discussion of which had led nowhere.¹¹⁴

Ultimately, these changes meant the formation of an environment hostile to Hizbullah within its strategic environment and on its internal front, without increasing any threat to Israel's strategic environment. In fact, since the main threat sources to Israel, on its northern front, are preoccupied with confrontations with other internal (or external) sides, Israel considers it a self-exhaustion of all those sides. Hence, it didn't mind the continuation of the war as long as that would prevent the establishment of any stable entity, which would form a threat on the northern front.

b. Lebanese-Palestinian Relations

The continued crises in Lebanon on the political, economic and services level diminished the opportunities for improving Lebanese-Palestinian relations. No president was elected or parliamentary elections held despite being overdue by two years, in addition to continued differences between Lebanese constituents, which caused disruption in government work, even when talking about the simplest basic needs.

Thus, not only did these crises impede its foreign diplomatic relations, but they also prevented the government from dealing with any file related to the rights of refugees in Lebanon and improving their living and economic conditions. It failed to deal with the problems of its citizens in the first place, and the file of Syrian refugees was prioritized over that of Palestinians in Lebanon.

This was despite that fact that the Palestinian factions presented a unified initiative to protect the Palestinian presence in Lebanon and enhance Lebanese-Palestinian relations. The initiative was blessed by the PA and Hamas leadership, thus forming a rare case of national consensus that overcame one of the most remarkable obstacles, which the Lebanese government and political forces demanded the Palestinians resolve.¹¹⁵

The initiative aimed at protecting the Palestinian refugee camps, supporting Lebanon's security and stability, and enhancing Lebanese-Palestinian relations. It confirmed Palestinians' neutrality and non-intervention in Lebanese internal affairs. Also, the initiative called on not allowing refugee camps to be used as a springboard for any acts that would compromise Lebanon's security, while refusing to receive or house any person involved in security acts.¹¹⁶

However, since there was a Lebanese political discord, the initiative was not embraced. Lebanese Interior Minister Nuhad Mashnuq who said that Palestinian weapons inside and outside refugee camps were not justified, considered that their withdrawal needed political agreement that was not available, which undermined the Lebanese government's ability to finish this mission. When asked about adopting social and economic rights for the Palestinians, Mashnuq said that these rights were included in the Labor Code, but the Palestinians did not know how to interpret the law and the Lebanese did not know how to apply it.¹¹⁷

As evidence of the failure of the initiative to prompt any actual change, the security issue in refugee camps remained the major issue in discussions about the Palestinian presence in Lebanon on the political and media levels. This was clear when talking about security incidents inside the camps or accusing members living there of involvement in schemes or acts that infringe on Lebanese security.

In April 2015, the Lebanese Marwan 'Issa, a Hizbullah member, was assassinated in 'Ein al-Hilweh RC. Following this assassination, there were warnings to Palestinians to not import Syria's Yarmouk RC's experience in to 'Ein al-Hilweh as expressed in declarations by Lebanese Military Intelligence Director in the South General Ali Chahrour,¹¹⁸ and Deputy Head of Hizbullah Executive Council Nabil Qaouk.¹¹⁹ The killing of Mujahid Bal'us, the Palestinian recruit in the Hizbullah affiliated Lebanese Resistance Brigades, shortly after the first incident exacerbated the situation as the Palestinian Joint Security Force failed to arrest the person accused of killing the two men.¹²⁰

On a different level, the visit by the Maronite Patriarch Boutros al-Rahi to the WB and the 1948 occupied territories in May 2014 was one of the important developments in Lebanese-Palestinian relations. President 'Abbas awarded the Patriarch the Star of Jerusalem, the highest Palestinian Order, upon his visit to Bethlehem where al-Rahi perceived the award as an honor for the Church and the Lebanese people.¹²¹ However, al-Rahi visited Israel and met with former members

of the South Lebanon Army (Lahad militia) despite Arab and Lebanese criticism. He refused to consider the militiamen traitors or collaborators and discussed their return to Lebanon.¹²²

c. Lebanon and Israel

The general prevalence of calm on the Lebanese front with Israel in 2014 and 2015 was interrupted with limited escalations, which appeared to have been carefully carried out by both sides to avoid a large scale confrontation that would work against their interests at that stage. The continued hostility between Israel and Lebanon, especially with Hizbullah, was clear from field developments and as political statements.

Israel escalated the situation on several occasions, most remarkably detonating a spying device in the southern Lebanese town of Adloun on 5/9/2014, after it had been detected by a Hizbullah member who was killed by the explosion. Hizbullah retaliated with an operation against an Israeli military patrol in Shab‘a Farms on 7/10/2014 after which Israel struck two Hizbullah sites in the South.¹²³ Israel also assassinated Hizbullah leaders and members whom it labeled as a direct threat, including the assassination of leader Muhammad ‘Issa and five other members among whom was Jihad ‘Imad Mughnieh, on 18/1/2015, and the assassination of the dean of liberated detainees from Israeli prisons Samir Kuntar on 19/12/2015. *Haaretz* newspaper’s military commentator Amos Harel mentioned, around a month before the assassination, Israeli intelligence assessments talking about Hizbullah’s formation of a military network in the Golan Heights led by both Mughnieh and Kuntar.¹²⁴

As for political stances and declarations, the Hizbullah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah stressed that fighting in Syria has not weakened the Party or its combat readiness to counter any Israeli aggression. Nasrallah said that Party members had the capacity to shift the field battle into the northern borders of occupied Palestine, reiterating the development of Hizbullah’s missile power. He also confirmed that Palestine was still the central issue and main concern for the Party.¹²⁵

In addition, Nasrallah stressed his support for the Palestinian Resistance in the GS during the Israeli aggression in summer 2014. However, his declarations came more than two weeks after the attack began, while negative mood spread among Hizbullah’s support towards Hamas during this time, which urged Nasrallah to call for putting aside all differences and sensitivities regarding other issues.¹²⁶

5. KSA and the Gulf Countries

a. Impact of Internal and Regional Changes on the Palestinian Issue

The interaction of Gulf countries with different developments in the Arab world in 2014 and 2015 showed further distraction from the Palestinian issue since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011, which led to the reshaping of the geopolitical regional map. Thus, the political conduct of the Gulf countries in general, and KSA in particular, prioritized the conflict with Iran and its allies for regional influence, and the danger of “terrorism” represented currently in ISIS, over the Arab-Israeli conflict. This granted priority to the crises in Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Lebanon.

An alliance of ten Arab countries led by KSA launched Operation Decisive Storm in March 2015 to strike the Houthis in Yemen after their gaining control over the capital San‘a. Hizbullah was labelled a “terrorist organization” by the GCC in March 2016. These were the main indicators of the priority given by the KSA and other Gulf countries to facing Iran and its allies in the region.

Qatar was again the Gulf country which made more effort than the other Gulf countries to strike a balance between its concern with the Palestinian issue and its other regional preoccupations, particularly in terms of supporting GS and its relationship with the PA and Hamas.

b. The Position Towards the Palestinian Internal Conflict

The GCC countries maintained their relations with the Palestinians along the same lines, which is generally closer to the stance of the PA leadership and Fatah Movement, whether regarding the Palestinian internal conflict or the peace process with Israel. However, Qatar maintained a special relationship with Hamas alongside its relationship with the Ramallah based PA.

The Gulf countries welcomed, through their Ministerial Council, the Palestinian reconciliation agreement signed in GS in April 2014 as well as the formation of the unity government.¹²⁷ Qatar again showed highest interaction with this file and prior to signing the agreement it had expressed its readiness to host an Arab summit to cement the reconciliation;¹²⁸ however, Egypt’s persistence to maintain control of this file prevented Qatar from having a direct or decisive role. Nonetheless, Emir of the State of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad received President ‘Abbas and Khalid Mish‘al, head of Hamas political bureau, in a joint meeting to congratulate them for signing the agreement.¹²⁹

The most remarkable development in the relations between the Gulf countries and the Palestinians was the improvement in relation between KSA and Hamas after King Salman bin ‘Abdulaziz Al Saud assumed power in January 2015. Apparently, he sought to mitigate tension between KSA and Hamas and the MB movement, in the context of containing differences with the “Sunni” sides to prepare for escalating the confrontation with Iran.

After this development, Hamas announced its support for Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen in a declaration that was balanced to prevent renewed deterioration in its relations with Iran.¹³⁰

Also, a Hamas delegation headed by Mish‘al visited KSA in July 2015 and met with the Saudi King, the Crown Prince and the Head of Intelligence.¹³¹ Following this meeting, the Saudi authorities released a number of Hamas members held in its prisons since December 2014 (the last days of King ‘Abdullah) in financial cases related to raising money and sending it to support the Palestinian people in occupied Palestine and the Resistance without official permit. Yet, the Saudi media’s lack of interest in the visit¹³² and the declarations by the Saudi Foreign Minister, ‘Adel al-Jubeir, that the visit was intended for *Umrah* (minor pilgrimage)¹³³ showed Riyadh’s reluctance to afford the visit important political dimensions.

c. The Stance on the Peace Process

The Gulf countries maintained their position towards the peace process in 2014 and 2015, as they clung to the Arab Peace Initiative launched by KSA at the Arab Summit in Beirut in 2002. At the same time, they supported the actions of the PA leader in the UN and Security Council to challenge Israel in light of the stalemate in the peace process.

Notably, most of these positions were issued by the LAS, while the GCC countries did not provide any special initiatives outside this context, whether on collective or individual levels. Stances issued by the GCC leaders and their joint meetings remained within the traditional line, supporting Palestinian rights and condemning Israeli violations against the Palestinian people and its Judaization measures in Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

d. Financial Support

Financial support remains one of the fields for GCC countries interaction with the Palestinian issue. They supported the PA budget, the GS reconstruction

projects, and the UNRWA, in addition to funding charitable projects supporting Palestinians in the WB, GS and countries of refuge.

However, despite the LAS decisions to provide a financial security net for the PA budget at \$100 million per month, reports by the Palestinian Finance Ministry regarding the income from foreign aid show that KSA was almost the only country that regularly fulfilled this commitment in 2014 and 2015. It paid around \$439 million in both years. For its part, Qatar provided \$146 million in 2014 and no aid in 2015 while Oman paid around \$36 million.¹³⁴

Also, KSA was the largest source of Gulf support to the UNRWA budget where reports published by the Agency about governmental and non-governmental support for 2014 showed that KSA directly provided around \$103.5 million, and \$1.54 million through NGOs.¹³⁵

The UAE government provided \$16.8 million, but the largest part of Emirati aid was provided via different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), especially the Emirates Red Crescent, with a total sum estimated at \$46.4 million. Kuwait, for its part, provided \$17 million in direct aid and \$70 million through Kuwait Red Crescent Society; Qatar provided \$2.1 million in the form of governmental aid and \$350 thousand through the Qatar Red Crescent; Oman participated with \$742 thousand; and Bahrain \$50 thousand in addition to \$5.76 million through the Royal Charity Organization.¹³⁶

Participation by the Gulf countries was the largest in the GS reconstruction conference, which was hosted by Egypt in Sharm el-Sheikh in October 2014. Total commitments reached \$5.4 billion, of which Qatar committed to provide \$1 billion, KSA \$500 million, while both UAE and Kuwait pledged to provide \$200 million each.¹³⁷

6. Other Arab Countries

The continuation of the crisis in a number of countries that are farther from Palestine had clear implications as to their interaction with the Palestinian issue in 2014 and 2015. This was clear in the case of Iraq, Yemen and Libya, which were consumed with their internal crises both on the official and popular levels.

As for the Arab Maghreb countries, their stances towards the Palestinian issue did not change and they maintained interaction with the Palestinian issue through the LAS. The aggression on GS was the most remarkable direct interaction, where

political stances supported Palestinians in GS and aid and medical staff headed to the Strip through official and popular initiatives.

In Tunisia, however, the deterioration of the Palestinian issue in the official discourse was clear with the end of President Moncef Marzouki's term and the election of President Beji Caid Essebsi in 2014. In contrast to Marzouki, who was concerned with the Palestinian issue and always interacted with its developments and demonstrated clear support for the Palestinian Resistance, Essebsi was closer in his stances to the traditional Arab official positions.

Sudan did not witness any change in its position towards the Palestinian issue and maintained its relationship with Hamas, although Khartoum's positive relations with the MB movement put it in a position to be accused by a number of Gulf countries and its relations with them were threatened.

Sudan was again a target of strikes for which Israel was accused where a site in Omdurman in north Khartoum was hit by an air strike on 5/5/2015, which was suspected to have targeted a long-range missiles factory.¹³⁸

Notably, in October 2012 Sudan accused Israel of responsibility for a strike that led to the destruction of Yarmouk ammunition factory in south Khartoum,¹³⁹ and while Israel refused to comment on the issue, Israeli websites claimed that the 13th Battalion of Israeli Air Force launched the raid claiming the factory provided Hamas with weapons and missiles.¹⁴⁰

In March 2014, Sudanese security apparatuses announced the arrest of an Israeli espionage network involved in the raids that targeted the east of the country in January 2009 and April 2011.¹⁴¹

Third: Developments of Normalization

The setback of the Arab revolutions, particularly in Egypt, was the main transformation affecting Arab normalization with Israel in 2014 and 2015. This transformation re-allowed the gap between official and popular positions to exist, and made the popular anti-normalization stance a weak factor affecting the ruling powers' approach.

While no major breakthroughs were witnessed in Israeli-Arab relations, economic ties increased, especially when Israel became an energy exporting

country. Most Arab-Israeli dealings in 2014 and 2015 were in this field, particularly with Egypt and Jordan.

The participation by the Israeli Energy Minister in the Abu Dhabi International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) Fourth Assembly, in January 2014, was a part of this context and led at that time to Kuwait's announcement that it was boycotting the conference as a result.¹⁴²

In Egypt, official rejection of dealing with Israel dissipated in 2014 and 2015, having been on the rise after the 25/1/2011 uprising and under ousted President Muhammad Morsi. The change was a continuation of the course that started with the July 2013 coup, where the popular anti-normalization stance weakened. "Hatred against Israel has been moderated," said retired Director of Policy and Political-Military Affairs at the Israeli Ministry of Defense Major General Amos Gilad, who was assessing the map of strategic dangers facing Israel.¹⁴³

During the preparatory stage for the 2012 presidential elections, Egypt witnessed negative positions towards Israel, such as rejecting normalization and the determination to decrease the level of relations and "strangulate" Camp David or amend some of its provisions, or to maintain "cold peace."¹⁴⁴ Whereas, stressing the stability of the agreements with Israel was clearly present in the positions of the 2014 presidential candidate who became Egypt's president, 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Security coordination between Egypt and Israel in order to arm and increase the presence of the Egyptian Army in Sinai and coordinate its military operations to control the security situation in the Peninsula, increased. In June 2015, the Egyptian ambassador returned to Tel Aviv after a three year hiatus. These two were the most remarkable indicators of the return of the Egyptian-Israeli relation to its former status.

In Jordan, and despite the continued popular campaigns and parliamentary positions against normalization as well as the political tension between Amman and Tel Aviv, normalization continued on the official level focusing mainly on the economic and security fields. This was revealed in an earlier section in this chapter, which addressed the development of the relation between Jordan and Israel.

As for economic relations between Israel and the Arab countries in general, there was an increase in the trade volume between Israel and its three most prominent Arab partners (Egypt, Jordan and Morocco) estimated at 20% in 2014 and 2015

(compared to the end of 2013) according to Israeli figures. The more remarkable growth was in 2014, with a 19% growth while the growth did not exceed 1% in 2015 (see table 1/3). This was in contrast to the track of exchange in 2012 and 2013 and which witnessed 28% deterioration as compared to 2011.¹⁴⁵

**Table 1/3: Volume of Trade Between Israel and Some Arab Countries
2012–2015 (\$ million)¹⁴⁶**

Country	2012	2013	2014	2015
Egypt	266.3	169.7	206.2	167.7
Jordan	359.5	365	485.9	510
Morocco	29	60.7	17.2	38.6
Total	654.8	595.4	709.3	716.3

This increase was basically a result of the increase in trade volume with Jordan, which amounted to 39.7% between 2013 and 2015. Jordan's share of the total trade volume among the three mentioned countries and Israel increased progressively from 55% to 71% during the period. This growth was mainly focused in import volume from Jordan which increased by 54% from \$266.5 in 2013 to \$410.5 million in 2015, while the Israeli export volume to Jordan remained within the same limits with a slight increase estimated at 1% (see table 2/3).¹⁴⁷

Over six years (2010–2015), the general trend of trade volume between Israel and Jordan served to enhance the importance of Israel as a market for Jordanian exports, with an annual growth average of 56%. Jordanian exports to Israel increased from \$94.1 million in 2010 to \$410.5 million in 2015. This was in concurrence with a reduction in the level of Israeli exports to Jordan in general where it decreased from \$185.6 in 2010 to \$99.5 million in 2015.¹⁴⁸

The Israeli trade volume with Egypt and Morocco deteriorated by the end of 2015 by 1.2% and 36.4% respectively compared to 2013.¹⁴⁹

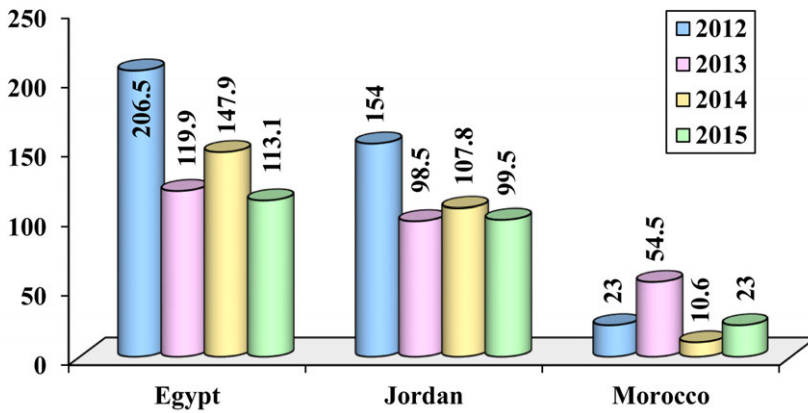
Regarding Egyptian trade, Israeli exports retreated from \$119.9 million in 2013 to \$113.1 in 2015, while Israeli imports from Egypt increased by 9.6% from \$49.8 million in 2013 to \$54.6 million in 2015.¹⁵⁰

In Morocco, the size of Israeli exports deteriorated by 57.8% where it decreased from \$54.5 million in 2013 to \$23 million in 2015, while Israeli imports from Morocco increased significantly by 151.6% from \$6.2 million in 2013 to \$15.6 million in 2015.¹⁵¹

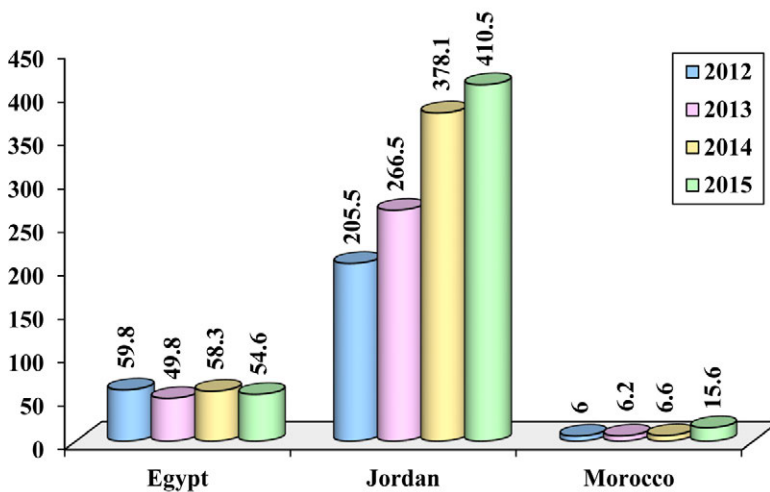
Table 2/3: Israeli Exports and Imports to/ from Some Arab Countries 2012–2015 (\$ million)¹⁵²

Country	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2012	2013	2014	2015
Egypt	206.5	119.9	147.9	113.1	59.8	49.8	58.3	54.6
Jordan	154	98.5	107.8	99.5	205.5	266.5	378.1	410.5
Morocco	23	54.5	10.6	23	6	6.2	6.6	15.6

Israeli Exports to Some Arab Countries 2012–2015 (\$ million)



Israeli Imports from Some Arab Countries 2012–2015 (\$ million)



However, the overall decrease in Israeli exports to Egypt and Jordan is likely to assume a completely contradictory trend if Israel starts exporting gas to them by virtue of preliminary agreements signed with five companies in both countries. Preliminary agreements were signed with three Jordanian companies in 2014 to import Israeli gas for 15 years, most importantly the National Electric Power Company (NEPCO) which signed a memorandum of understanding to import 45 billion cubic meters of gas at a total of \$15 billion,¹⁵³ in addition to two agreements signed by the Arab Potash Company (APC) and its unit the Jordan Bromine Company (JBC) to import gas from Tamar field, in a \$771 million deal.¹⁵⁴

In Egypt, Spanish Union Fenosa Gas (UFG) and British Petroleum (BP) signed agreements, the largest of their kind on the Arab level, to import Israeli gas for their liquefying facilities in Egypt for 15 years. The first deal with UFG includes importing 67.5 billion cubic meters of gas from Tamar field at around \$20 billion¹⁵⁵ while the other deal stipulates for exporting 105 billion cubic meters of gas from Leviathan field at around \$30 billion.¹⁵⁶

In addition to expected Israeli revenues from the gas deals with Egypt and Jordan, its proximity to these two countries makes it a more suitable and a competitive economic choice for buying gas, especially with it establishing a network of gas pipelines.

Fourth: Arab Public's Position and its Directions

The political crises in a number of Arab countries continued to impact the grassroots activities in support of the Palestinian issue in 2014 and 2015. This was more so with the crises in two of the most influential countries on the strategic environment around Palestine: Egypt and Syria.

Comparing the track of popular action during these two years with that in 2012 and 2013 reveals that the position of the Palestinian issue among priorities had retreated compared to the prevalence of internal affairs in different Arab countries, although the Palestinian issue was still able to generate mobilization and support and attract Arab public opinion regarding critical developments. This change could be seen in the following:

1. The setback of the Arab Spring revolutions and their transformation into long-term crises have exhausted popular action, which lost its ability to interact with developments that are not related to people's daily needs. In addition, freedoms were reduced and a security approach adopted in facing popular demonstrations, where support for the Palestinian issue had overlapped with opposition to regime policies in these countries.

2. The Arab street actually interacted with major developments regarding the Palestinian, issue such as the Israeli offensive on GS in summer 2014, the Israeli attempts to divide *al-Aqsa* Mosque temporally and spatially, and the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, which broke out in October 2015. However, the size of interaction was generally less than that witnessed in 2012 and 2013.

3. Among the surrounding Arab countries, the most notable popular interaction with the Palestinian issue was the Jordanian street. Its reaction to the developments in Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque urged the Jordanian decision maker to stand up to Israeli aggression, given that *al-Aqsa* Mosque is a direct Jordanian responsibility. Also, popular Jordanian solidarity was clear during the Israeli offensive on Gaza.

But in contrast, in Syria, internal preoccupation with the civil war led to an almost complete absence of popular interaction with the Palestinian issue. In Lebanon, the position regarding the Palestinian resistance, especially Hamas, given its stance towards the crisis in Syria, affected the level of popular protest against the Israeli aggression on GS. Also, the Egyptian stance towards Hamas and the security approach pursued towards the Strip have negatively affected the level of solidarity expressed regarding the Israeli blockade and offensive. The regime completely ended Arab partisan, syndicate and popular visits to GS which were significant in 2012.

4. The Arab Opinion Index of 2015, a periodic public opinion poll conducted by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) in 12 Arab countries in 2015, showed the decrease in Arab respondents who believed the Palestinian issue to be an Arab cause; decreasing from 84% in 2012/2013 poll to 75% in 2015 poll. Those who believe that the Palestinian issue is only for Palestinians increased from 8% to 18%. Notably, the results in each country support previous remarks that the prominent change was in the opinions of the Egyptian and Lebanese people, in addition to the Palestinians themselves in the WB and GS where around a quarter

of the respondents said that the Palestinian issue was only a Palestinian concern (25% in Egypt and Palestine and 28% in Lebanon).¹⁵⁷

However, this change in the perception of the Palestinian issue was not coupled with an improvement in the view of Israel, where 85% of respondents in 2015 expressed their rejection of their countries' recognition of Israel, and this is almost concurrent with the findings of the 2012/2013 poll (87%).¹⁵⁸

Conclusion

The last five years (2011–2015) were predominantly characterized by the conflict between the change and counter-change forces have shown that the Arab world can change the role and strategic position of Arab countries in their conflict with Israel. This was clear in the short-lived experience of governance, which was based on popular will in a number of countries during the rise of revolutions, particularly in Egypt.

However, the setbacks of the revolutions revealed the difficulty of completing the change course through nominal changes in the head of the political pyramid without deep changes in society and state apparatuses.

For the time being, regional conflicts contain both opportunities and dangers for the Palestinian issue, and they mostly make the Palestinians responsible for grasping the opportunities and avoiding the dangers in order to permeate the balance of regional powers.

A search for the largest possible area of agreement with the conflicts' parties is necessary, along with seeking to minimize the impact of areas of contention on the Palestinian issue through avoiding involvement in Arab internal crises. This issue is so far the main card the Palestinians could depend on where its strength could be enhanced as the Palestinian issue still maintains its position as the main important point of consensus between most of the conflicting forces in the region. It is even the best way to redirect the compass towards a unifying revival project, which returns the conflict with the Zionist project to the center of attention.

In light of the data, and the slim possibilities of attaining integrated solutions, whether on the Palestinian or the Arab level, it might be possible to recourse to common, albeit limited, areas of interest which can be later expanded and

enhanced. This remains the most logical option at the current stage as it allows the Palestinians to overcome the stalemate in the peace process and resistance and allows them to accumulate steps on the ground.

As for the priorities, it seems that confronting Israel's measures in Jerusalem could be the most important point of consensus on the Arab, Islamic and Palestinian levels. Thus, seeking to prioritize this file for all parties might be the most likely area for common interest.

Also, there is the option of pursuing serious maintenance of the truce in GS, alleviating the GS blockade, and allowing the Gazans to improve their economic and living conditions without connecting this to any political exchange in the WB or to the stance towards the parties in the internal crisis in Egypt. This approach could be a boost for the resilience of the Gazans in the long run, while at the same time allowing a focus on Jerusalem at the current stage.

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Chapter Four

The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

Introduction

The Arab revolutions and counter-revolutions in the region, and the subsequent state of flux and instability, had a profound impact on the levels of interest and support in the Muslim world for the Palestinian issue in 2014 and 2015. Muslim countries, particularly Turkey, were deeply preoccupied with the reconfiguration of the regional landscape.

Internal Turkish issues were also a burden, where elections forced the ruling party to give priority to domestic issues, particularly mounting security tensions. For its part, Iran, despite its repeated affirmations in 2014 and 2015 regarding its support of the Palestinian resistance, was occupied with the Syrian issue, which took a significant amount of its potential and resources. Added to this was negotiations over Iran's nuclear program with Western powers, and its fluctuating relations with Hamas.

In this chapter we will analyse the most prominent roles played by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) during the years 2014–2015. We will also review the stances and roles of Turkey and Iran vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue, public and official action in Malaysia and Pakistan, and the economic relations maintained by some Muslim countries with Israel.

First: Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

Despite the state of weakness and disunity in the Muslim world, and the preoccupation of most its countries with their local issues, the Palestinian issue in 2014–2015 remained a focus of attention in the Muslim world. This was most notable during the Israeli assault on GS in the summer of 2014 and repeated attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque with attempts to divide it between Muslims and Jews. Despite the intensity of the war launched by Israel over more than 50 days, the efforts made by the OIC were not commensurate with the extent of the catastrophe visited upon GS. Furthermore, it was not the efforts of the OIC that put a halt to the division

scheme for *al-Aqsa* Mosque, but the efforts of the Palestinian youths and their so-called *Intifadah of Knives* in late 2015, which is still ongoing at the time of writing.

The OIC's condemnations, denunciations, and praise continued, but such a policy did not have a tangible effect on the Palestinian issue. Nor did it appear that the OIC, as a representative of its member states, could bypass the latter's respective foreign policies or their political ceilings vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue. They support negotiations with Israel for the establishment of a Palestinian state along the borders prior to the 1967 war. This was reflected in the speeches of the OIC Secretary General Iyad Madani. In his speech welcoming al-Shati' Agreement signed on 23/4/2014, in which Hamas and Fatah agreed to form a National Consensus Government, he said that all the efforts for restoring legitimate Palestinian rights and establishing an independent state along the borders of 1967 with its capital in Jerusalem must be based on having a unified Palestinian polity with unified visions, policies, and goals. Here, we must observe that we have not seen serious efforts by the OIC to push forward Palestinian reconciliation, which continues to stall at the time of writing.

In May 2014 the OIC called on Muslims to go to Jerusalem and pray at *al-Aqsa* Mosque,¹ contradicting an edict issued by the IUMS. It explained the pros and cons based on Shariah law, and then stated that visiting Jerusalem under the brutal Israeli occupation, which seeks to eliminate all Islamic and Christian features and render Jerusalem its eternal capital, and its desperate attempts for full political, economic, cultural, and social normalization, entail massive harm and dire consequences. It stated that Muslims must not take part in this crime, but must prepare to liberate *al-Aqsa* Mosque by all possible means.²

The OIC went further than calling for visiting Jerusalem, and chose Jerusalem as the capital of Islamic tourism in 2016, in the context of what it considered support for the city of Jerusalem.³ However, the OIC did not specify the standards that would help prevent turning visits to Jerusalem into acts of normalization. The OIC call was consistent with calls made by the PA and PLO leaderships to commit to the Oslo Accords with Israel.

The OIC Secretary General Iyad Madani visited Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque in January 2015. In a statement he made upon entering the mosque, he said: "This is a right that no occupation authority must deny us, no matter what obstacles,

violations, pitfalls, or difficulties it may place before us. This is a right we must reassert by exercising it, namely, by coming here to visit and pray in *al-Aqsa* Mosque.”⁴

As for the repeated Israeli assaults on the Palestinian people and their Muslim and Christian holy sites, the OIC continued issuing condemnations in 2014 and 2015. Iyad Madani reaffirmed support for the Palestinian people, in his address delivered at the extraordinary session of the OIC ministerial-level Executive Committee, held on 10/7/2014, to discuss the developments of the Israeli aggression on GS. Madani also called for exposing the Israeli government as a “racist government” pursuant to the international definition of the term, which would entail international sanctions against this government. Madani also called on the Palestinian government to sign up to join the ICC, to make it possible to prosecute Israeli politicians involved in war crimes, collective punishment, and human rights violations in the Palestinian territories.⁵

In summary, in 2014–2015, the OIC did not break the previous decades-long patterns of its activity concerning the Palestinian issue, which has not deviated from the policies of its member states. This meant that the OIC’s actions vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue was below the level needed to support the rights of the Palestinian people, and the weight of the organization itself as a representative of Muslim countries. It does not seem that the OIC’s work on the Palestinian issue in the near future can be elevated to the desired level, unless fundamental changes in the strategic policies of its influential member states take place.

Second: Turkey

The period 2014–2015 saw a decline in the Turkish presence in the Palestinian issue for a number of reasons: Most notably, regional transformations following the demise of the first wave of the Arab Spring revolutions and the victory of the counter-revolution, and the implications this had on various countries. Furthermore, Turkey’s foreign policy failed to induce significant gains in regional issues, notably in Syria, which prompted calls for a reassessment of Turkish policy. Turkey then became preoccupied with its internal issues including elections, and the military escalation with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*—PKK), all as the Palestinian issue dropped in importance regionally

and internationally behind other issues. Turkey also lost the ability to influence other players amid estrangement with Cairo and Tel Aviv, not to mention the crisis with Russia after Turkey shot down a Russian jet, which curtailed Turkey's role in Syria.

Therefore, despite Turkey maintaining the general features of its policy towards the Palestinian issue and Palestinian factions, the changes mentioned above prevented Ankara from being able to have much influence in 2014–2015 with regard to the Palestinian issue. This also altered, in various ways, Turkish behaviour, which was clear during the GS assault in 2014 and then during the Jerusalem *Intifadah* in late 2015, with Turkish support and influence being markedly reduced when compared to the GS assault in 2012.

Relations with the Palestinian Side

Turkish relations with the PLO and PA leadership on one hand, and Hamas on the other, continued as before. Turkey dealt officially with the PLO, PA, President Mahmud 'Abbas and the Palestinian embassy in Ankara, and it also dealt with Hamas as an elected political entity and one of the most important actors in Palestine.

Official Turkish-Palestinian relations in 2014–2015 saw continued growth and cooperation at the international level, based on the significant Turkish role regarding the accession of Palestine to the UN as an observer, non-member state. In June 2014, the then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan congratulated President Mahmud 'Abbas on the consensus government, stressing the importance of unity in the Palestinian ranks.⁶ In July 2014, 'Abbas visited Turkey during the Israeli assault on GS, meeting with then-President Abdullah Gül, who called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and urgent aid to the Strip.⁷ 'Abbas also met with Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. 'Abbas visited Ankara in January 2015, and was the first visitor Erdoğan received as president-elect. The reception ceremony was grandiose. During the press conference Erdoğan criticized Netanyahu's participation in a march in Paris against terrorism, urging the Israeli prime minister to "give an account for the children, women you massacred," adding, "How can you see this individual, who carries out state terrorism by massacring 2,500 people in Gaza, waving his hand?"⁸

Turkey also had an interest in the ceremony of raising the Palestinian flag at the UN in September 2015. Erdoğan telephoned his Palestinian counterpart to

congratulate him on the achievement, after sending then-Prime Minister Davutoğlu himself to participate in the flag-raising ceremony. He said that the raising of the Palestinian flag represented served as upholding of the flag of human dignity, pride, freedom and honour, adding that he prays to God that one day the Palestinian flag would be flying over the city of Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque.⁹

For his part, Khalid Mish'al, head of Hamas's political bureau, visited Turkey several times, albeit with less fanfare than his visits in previous years. Some of these visits took place away from the media or were not announced in advance. The decreased attention may be attributed to the regional shifts explained earlier, as well as Western pressures prompted by Israeli accusations against Ankara of aiding and abetting terrorists.¹⁰ One indication of this, for example, was the delay in the visit of Mish'al to Ankara to congratulate Erdoğan on winning the presidential elections.

Mish'al visited Turkey in February 2014 and again in December 2014, to participate in the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*—AKP) Conference in the city of Konya. Mish'al delivered a speech, saying that a strong Konya and a strong Turkey mean a strong Palestine and a strong Jerusalem. A democratic, stable, and developed Turkey is a source of strength for all Muslims, he said.¹¹ Mish'al met with both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu in August 2015 in a private visit. In September, he attended the fifth AKP regular congress in Ankara, meeting with Erdoğan on its side-lines, without making statements.¹²

Mish'al visited Turkey in December 2015 in a visit that was not arranged in advance, following Israeli press reports that claimed an agreement was imminent between Israel and Turkey for normalizing relations. Nothing was leaked about the visit, but Turkish officials were keen afterwards to say that any détente with Tel Aviv would not be at the expense of the Palestinians, and even said the latter would have to first agree to the terms of the agreement.¹³

Phone contacts continued between the Turkish and Palestinian sides, particularly those that have a protocol aspect such as for congratulating Erdoğan for his electoral victory, AKP's success in the general election in June and in the second round, in addition to contacts over certain events such as the ones between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu on one hand, and 'Abbas and Mish'al on the other, to condemn Israeli attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the immolation of the Dawabsheh family.

The 2014 Assault

Events in the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories deteriorated rapidly after settlers burned alive the Palestinian child Muhammad Abu Khdeir, as part of several escalations leading up to direct confrontations, which began on 8/7/2014, lasting for more than 50 days. Israel dubbed the ensuing war Operation Protective Edge, while Hamas dubbed it Operation the Eaten Straw (*al-‘Asf al-Ma’kul*).

Despite the short length of time that elapsed between the 2012 and 2014 wars, Turkish action and influence underwent significant changes, albeit not in the levels of its interest and interaction, because of the regional shifts mentioned earlier. Of particular importance, however, was the military coup in Egypt that impacted two key aspects: the hostility towards GS and the Palestinian resistance compared to the period under President Muhammad Morsi; and the deterioration of relations with Turkey, meaning that the latter soon lost its ability to engage and influence events, coupled with Ankara’s deteriorating relations with Tel Aviv. Thus, Turkey could not exert pressure towards achieving a rapid ceasefire, as it had done during the 2012 war, and was unable to put forward a Turkish initiative (or Turkish-Qatari) one for a ceasefire against the Egyptian one, which was strongly weighted in favor of Israel.

Turkey, at the official and popular levels, followed the war on a daily basis. Official reactions were marked by a high political ceiling. Erdoğan said he would not remain silent about what was happening in GS, criticizing the West’s defense of Israel, the world’s silence, and accusing Israel of being a “terrorist state.”¹⁴ While statements were issued condemning the Israeli assault by Turkish opposition parties,¹⁵ then-Foreign Minister Davutoğlu led an active political campaign in cooperation and coordination with Qatar, covering the United Nations and the United States, to try to find a formula for a ceasefire.¹⁶

In tune with this political position, the Turkish government declared a three-day mourning period for those killed in the Israeli assault.¹⁷ The Turkish government called for a donation campaign for the benefit of the Palestinians, supervised by the Presidency of Religious Affairs.¹⁸ A memo circulated by the government in the Turkish official gazette said the Republic of Turkey would provide all forms of support and assistance to the brotherly and friendly people of Palestine, in light of the demands of the population. The campaign raised nearly \$21 million, according to a statement by the Deputy Prime Minister Emrullah Isler.

At the grassroots level, dozens of protests were held in Turkish cities, condemning the aggression, especially in front of the Israeli diplomatic missions in Ankara and Istanbul. Up to 40 Turkish television channels worked together to broadcast live programs in solidarity with GS.¹⁹

Turkey delivered batches of aid to Gaza, beginning on 13/8/2014, sending 68.5 tons (68,500 kg) of humanitarian aid. A Turkish medical delegation visited GS to treat patients, and Turkey hosted hundreds of wounded Palestinians for treatment through an aerial corridor established with GS.²⁰ Ankara also sought to send a floating plant to generate electricity to GS, but this was met with Israeli rejection. Turkey then pledged \$200 million to contribute to the GS reconstruction during the Cairo Conference,²¹ in addition to donations pledged by the Turkish Red Crescent to all war orphans.

The Jerusalem Intifadah

Following Israeli attempts to expedite its plans for the temporal and spatial division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and subsequent assaults on female worshippers camped in the mosque, its crackdown on Palestinian protesters, events in Jerusalem and WB steadily escalated as part of what was later called the Jerusalem *Intifadah*. The Turkish interaction with the *Intifadah* differed radically from the interaction with the assault on GS in the previous year, despite the fact that *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Jerusalem have represented, along with the humanitarian situation in GS, two main foundations of Turkish policy on Palestine over the past few years.

One of the key reasons for this was the large difference between the sight of the Israeli bombardment killing hundreds in GS, and the near-daily peaceful confrontations between Palestinian youths and occupation forces. The Turkish public were extremely moved by the scenes of carnage and destruction in GS, and had a less emotional reaction to what was happening in WB and Jerusalem. Another reason was the preoccupation of the Turkish street and Turkish decision-makers with the country's internal situation. The *Intifadah* began during the transitional period in Turkey, following the elections in June, in which the AKP lost its parliamentary majority. As a result, no stable government was formed, and economic uncertainty followed, and then a wave of unrest and military confrontations with the PKK.

At the official level, Turkish President Erdoğan condemned Israel's storming of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in phone calls with both 'Abbas and Mish'al.²² He said in a

subsequent press conference that Israel's assaults was barbaric and that necessary steps should be taken at the international level, otherwise reactions to the assault would not be confined to Palestine.²³ Prime Minister Davutoğlu also condemned the “illegal practices” of the Israeli security forces against Palestinian civilians,²⁴ and the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a strongly worded statement that condemned Israel's use of excessive force in WB and Jerusalem.²⁵

President Erdoğan met with Palestinian leaders during the Jerusalem *Intifadah* and the previous attacks carried out by the occupation forces on worshippers at *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The most important of these visits were by former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine ‘Ikrima Sabri, and Raed Salah, the head of the Islamic Movement in the 1948 occupied territories.²⁶ As for trade unions, grassroots, and civil society, there were few mass demonstrations in Turkish cities, and actions were limited to symbolic activities that were not commensurate with the seriousness of the event.

Turkish-Palestinian communication through Turkish civil society groups continued as usual. The President of Turkish Religious Affairs, Mehmet Görmez, visited WB in May 2015, and delivered the Friday sermon at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, where he was welcomed warmly by Palestinians. Religious Affairs also announced the re-introduction of the Ottoman system with regard to *Umrah* (minor pilgrimage) trips, whereby the convoys of pilgrims would stop first in Jerusalem before heading to Mecca.²⁷ In addition, Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı*—TİKA) provided grants to premier league football clubs in GS, worth \$180 thousand.²⁸

Turkish humanitarian aid and relief continued at roughly the same pace as during previous years, with some decline attributed to the higher priority occupied by the Syrian crisis for various aid groups. The Turkish charity Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (*İnsani Yardım Vakfı*—IHH) distributed Eid clothes to a thousand orphans in GS. The Turkish Red Crescent organized a mass *Iftar* (breaking the fast after sunset) for 200 orphans in the Strip. The Turkish Religious Endowment (*Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı*) distributed Ramadan care packages to the poor, and also provided scholarships to forty students from GS. Late in the year, IHH and the Qatari Sheikh Thani Ibn Abdullah for Humanitarian Services (Raf) distributed food parcels to thousands of families in the Strip.²⁹

Relations with Israel

There were few notable developments in the official bilateral relationship between Ankara and Tel Aviv in 2014–2015. The official diplomatic estrangement continued, despite several meetings held between the two sides in an attempt to bridge the gap between them, but trade relations continued nonetheless to grow and expand. However, the political and media rhetoric between the two sides went through two contradictory phases: one of tension, bickering, and incitement, lasting until mid-2015; followed by a phase of calm and talk of a possible agreement and détente between the two sides.

During the Israeli assault on GS in 2014, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Beşir Atalay announced his country's support for prosecuting Israel before the ICC.³⁰ The Turkish Foreign Ministry also supported Palestine's accession to the tribunal.³¹ Then during his participation in an event on the anniversary of the Holocaust, the Turkish parliament speaker reminded the audience that Israel killed two thousand women and children in GS.³² The Turkish foreign minister cancelled his attendance at a security conference in Germany in February 2015 because of Israel's attendance.³³ Turkey condemned the construction of hundreds of settlement units in Jerusalem, saying the move flouted international law.

For its part, the Israelis stepped up their campaign against Ankara, filing an official complaint with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) because of the presence of Hamas leaders on Turkish soil.³⁴ The Israelis accused Turkey of hosting Ezzedein al-Qassam Brigades activities,³⁵ and even held Ankara responsible for some military operations in the WB on this account. During the anniversary of the "Armenian crisis of 1915," several calls were made in Israel to recognize the "Armenian Genocide" to pressure Turkey. Tel Aviv has so far refused to recognize the call.

Israeli leaders, led by Shimon Peres, did not conceal their joy at the setback suffered by the AKP in the elections of 7/6/2015, considering it an opportunity to decrease regional support for Hamas.³⁶ By contrast, there was Palestinian concern with the results; the Palestinian issue (and Jerusalem specifically) had in fact been a topic in the election campaigns of Turkish parties.³⁷

The sharpness in the political discourse between the two sides quietened down gradually and noticeably after June 2015, amid reports of meetings aimed

at normalizing relations. Turkey was keen to emphasize that there had been no change to its position, which is based on three conditions for normalizing relations with Israel: That Israel must apologize for the killings on the Mavi Marmara in 2010 (the apology was made in 2013); compensate the families of the killed; and lift the GS siege.³⁸ In August, a Turkish newspaper close to the government, interviewed the Chargé D'affaires of the Israeli Embassy in Ankara, Amira Oron, who reaffirmed Tel Aviv's keenness on improving relations with Ankara, saying there was a real opportunity to open a new chapter in relations. This was in fact the first time a Turkish media outlet close to the government had hosted an Israeli official since the Israeli assault on the Mavi Marmara Ship.³⁹

In December 2015, the Israeli press ran a report claiming an agreement "had been reached" between Ankara and Tel Aviv to normalize relations once and for all, including an agreement on some clauses such as reducing the level of the Turkish relationship with Hamas and "expelling" some of its leaders from Turkey.⁴⁰ The Turkish position appeared somewhat confused. Statements from Turkey were contradictory, ranging from admitting the presence of talks and denying an agreement had been reached,⁴¹ to affirming the constancy of Turkish positions on Israeli policies while considering the Israeli people "friends of the Turkish people."⁴² Turkish statements also said reconciliation between the two countries was in the interest of "both of them and the region,"⁴³ all while boasting that Turkey was the only country to have "forced Israel to apologize"⁴⁴ and affirming the three conditions—sometimes with the wording "reducing the blockade" rather than "lifting the blockade."⁴⁵

This shift was not arbitrary or surprising. Several contexts and causes paved the way for it, including:

First: The June elections and the transitional period in which two messages were made clear to the Turkish decision-makers, one internal from the voters and the second external from Turkey's "allies," namely, that change was imperative. Several statements were made by officials in the ruling party and government in Ankara, calling for the restoration of pragmatism and realism to Turkish foreign policy.

Second: The crisis with Russia, which prompted Ankara to look for new allies, and de-escalate with some regional countries (Israel, Egypt, the UAE) at political and economic levels.

Third: The ongoing wave of escalation since July 2015 with the PKK, which Turkey believes is supported by some regional countries including Israel. This is a top priority issue for Turkey, for which reason Ankara believes normalization with Israel could help rein in the armed PKK.

Fourth: The multitude of dossiers of common interest and common threats between the two sides, beginning with the developments of the Syrian crisis, the ISIS group, the international coalition against ISIS, and Iranian expansionism and Russian military presence in the region.

Fifth: The Israeli decision to reactivate normalized relations with Ankara. In principle, Turkey did not change its three declared conditions and there have been no developments since the last round of negotiations. However, Netanyahu was betting on another setback for the AKP in the elections of November 2015. When the party won a parliamentary majority, allowing it to establish a stable government until 2019, it seems Tel Aviv understood there was no point postponing the issue any further.

Economic Relations

As in previous years, economic relations between Turkey and Israel grew steadily, despite deteriorating political and diplomatic relations since the Israeli assault on the Mavi Marmara in international waters, in 2010.

The apparent contradiction is due to a number of reasons, most notably: The quest by Turkish foreign policy under AKP rule to subject politics to economic factors in normal times, and detach them in times of crisis.⁴⁶ The role of the Turkish private sector, which is independent from government decisions, was key in strengthening economic ties with Israel. Israel was keen to maintain and upgrade these ties in the hope this would help in the restoration of diplomatic ties.

Thus, trade volume between the two sides increased from approximately \$4.04 billion in 2012 to \$5.068 billion in 2013, and then rose to \$5.832 billion in 2014, then decreased to \$4.371 billion in 2015 (see table 1/4). In addition to the large trade volume, the trade balance between the two is almost even, which gives both sides a sense of security and encourages them to develop their trade relations.

Chemicals and derivatives used in manufacturing, generators and electrical transformers top the list of Turkish exports to Israel, and cars, racing cars, iron and steel top the list of Turkish imports from Israel.⁴⁷

Following reports of possible reconciliation between Turkey and Israel, there were renewed discussions regarding Israeli gas and the possibility its export to Turkey at discounted prices. This would both allow Israel to engage a promising new market like Turkey, a transit hub for Israeli gas to Europe, and would allow Turkey to reduce its reliance on Russian natural gas amid the crisis with Russia in Fall 2015, for Turkey imports 55% of its gas from Russia.

Table 1/4: Volume of Trade Between Turkey and Israel According to Turkish and Israeli Statistics 2012–2015 (\$ million)⁴⁸

Year	Turkish exports to Israel		Turkish imports from Israel		Trade volume	
	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics
2015	2,698.3	2,446	1,672.5	1,713.6	4,370.8	4,159.6
2014	2,950.9	2,683.6	2,881.3	2,755.6	5,832.2	5,439.2
2013	2,649.7	2,354.1	2,418	2,515.6	5,067.7	4,869.7
2012	2,329.5	2,082.7	1,710.4	1,421.4	4,039.9	3,504.1

Trade relations between Turkey and the PA continued to grow, but not to the level of Turkish-Israeli relations. The trade volume between them did not exceed \$100 million in 2014, with exports from Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 to Turkey reaching \$2.502 million, compared to \$90.945 million in Turkish exports to Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. In 2015, Palestinian imports were \$2.343 million, while Turkish exports to the occupied Palestinian territories in 1967 amounted to \$82.224 million.⁴⁹ The trade balance between the two countries is significantly tipped in favour of Turkey, despite the exemption of Palestinian industrial products from customs fees in Turkey. Food items, sweets, tobacco and derivatives top the list of Turkish exports, while dates, figs, and other fruits top the list of Palestinian exports to Turkey.⁵⁰

As part of efforts to strengthen Palestinian-Turkish relations, and as part of the Turkish contribution to supporting the Palestinian economy and opening up international markets to it, two conferences were held in Turkey in 2014 and 2015 under the title Turkey is the Gate for Palestine to the World, attended by the two countries' ministers of economy and hundreds of businesspeople, including

Palestinians from the interior and the Diaspora. Several bilateral agreements were concluded between the two sides in the areas of tourism, food processing, and textiles.⁵¹

As for Turkish official and grassroots donations to Palestinians, they did not stop, including those mentioned above, such as the contributions from Turkey's civil society, and governmental or private-public contributions. These include Turkey's donation of \$0.5 million to buy fuel for GS's power plant;⁵² the visit by a Turkish economic delegation to GS, who met deputy Hamas leader Isma'il Haniyyah and a number of Palestinian officials and businesspeople to discuss Turkish support for Palestine;⁵³ and a grant to the tune of \$1.5 million from Turkey to cover the costs of hospital fuel in GS.⁵⁴ The total amount of Turkish aid to GS in 2015 could well have exceeded \$100 million, according to official Turkish estimates,⁵⁵ but no final numbers had been issued at the time of writing this Report.

Conclusion

In 2014 and 2015, the main foundations of Turkish foreign policy on the Palestinian issue did not change. These included acting within the international system, committing to the political settlement of the Palestinian issue in accordance with the two-state solution and the Arab Peace Initiative, and dealing with the Palestinian issue through the PA and President 'Abbas, while not exceeding the ceilings of political, media, and financial support in the relationship with Hamas to avoid damaging Turkish interests and relations with the West.⁵⁶

However, these two years saw a number of important developments concerning Turkey, both internally and externally. These included the general elections and the repeat elections; the crisis with Russia; and the deepening regional crises led by Syria. This led to a temporary lessening of Turkish interest in the Palestinian issue, while estrangement with Tel Aviv and Cairo led to weakened Turkish role there.

These multiple changes, and the growing common threats, in addition to Turkey's desire to pacify a number of its foes, pumped new blood into Turkish-Israeli reconciliation negotiations. Although these are yet to reach their conclusions at the time of writing, it is likely a compromise agreement will materialize involving some "re-interpretation" of Turkey's condition regarding lifting the blockade on GS in a way Turkey can market as having eased the blockade, while not breaking Israel's red line of actually lifting the blockade. On the other hand, failure to reach

an agreement would only postpone something that will happen inevitably, given that its objective conditions are largely satisfied, not to mention the two sides' desire to conclude an agreement, each for its own calculations.

Thus, despite large Turkish support and sympathy for the Palestinian issue officially and popularly, the years ahead will carry a rapprochement between Ankara and Tel Aviv. While this is unlikely to restore relations to the level of strategic cooperation seen in the 1990s, it will no doubt have an impact, albeit indirectly, on Turkish-Palestinian relations, especially as regards the Palestinian resistance factions led by Hamas. On the other hand, the Palestinian issue is not expected to jump to the top of the list of Turkish foreign policy priorities in light of the developments of the Syrian crisis and its regional repercussions, and in light of the counter-revolutionary wave the region is witnessing against Islamic movements.

Third: Iran

The Western-Iranian nuclear deal led to further regional and international focus on this issue, following negotiations, which lasted nearly 12 years. For this reason, the deal received unprecedented political and media attention in 2014 and 2015. There was keen interest in learning its implications for regional balances of power, and its effects on Iran's foreign policies and positions on regional dynamics, including Israel and the Palestinian issue. Furthermore, the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* in 2015 refocused the limelight on occupied Palestine and the resistance of the Palestinian people. During 2014 and 2015, Iran continued to stress its consistent policy of supporting the Palestinian resistance and refusing to recognize Israel.

Relations with the Palestinian Forces

Iran supported Palestine's accession to the UN and Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Abbas Araghchi criticized the obstacles placed by some members of the UN Security Council to the full accession of Palestine to the UN. He also criticized the unilateral policies of the US administration towards the issue of Palestine. During the meeting of the Ministerial Committee for the State of Palestine, which was held on the side lines of the 17th Ministerial Conference

of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Algeria, Iran's Al-Alam News Network quoted Araghchi saying that the acceptance of Palestine as a non-member observer state in the UN was the first step to full integration with this organization, and to the sovereignty of the Palestinian people over the entire historical land.⁵⁷ Iran also announced its support for the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, and the Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mohammed Fathali announced that Iran would grant financial assistance to the families of Palestinian who were killed during the Jerusalem *Intifadah*. The ambassador announced that every family would receive \$7,000, while families whose houses were demolished would receive of \$30 thousand.⁵⁸

Fatah sought to open up to Iran and build new diplomatic channels. On 28/1/2014, PA President Mahmud 'Abbas sent the Fatah Central Committee Deputy Secretary Jibril Rajoub to Tehran, carrying a message to President Hassan Rouhani, which explained the Palestinian situation at the internal level and developments concerning US-brokered negotiations with Israel. Sources in Tehran said that the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, confirmed his country's readiness to support the Authority and Fatah in particular, referring to the historical relations between the founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Ayatollah Khomeini, and late Palestinian leader Yasir 'Arafat.⁵⁹ Rajoub's visit was the first by an official from the Fatah movement at this level. No Palestinian official from the leadership of the PLO and Fatah had visited Iran since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, except for the presence of Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas in the NAM Summit in 2012 in Tehran.⁶⁰ Although some consider this visit to be a sign of new openness on the part of the Iranian leadership vis-a-vis the PLO leadership and Fatah, no invitation was made to the Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas to visit Iran.⁶¹

Rajoub said that Iranian officials had confirmed their great appreciation for the historic role played by the Fatah movement in the leadership of the Palestinian national work and the Palestinian people's aspirations for freedom and independence, and their support for the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people. Rajoub said that a new page in bilateral relations had begun, based on mutual respect and absolute support for the rights of the Palestinian people. He added that the parties had discussed the role of the Fatah movement in ending the Palestinian division, and mechanisms for supporting the steadfastness of the Palestinian.

On 3/2/2014, the Fatah Central Committee released a statement stressing the importance of establishing equal relations with Iran based on the highest interests of Palestinian people and service to their just cause, following a meeting in Ramallah headed by Mahmud ‘Abbas.⁶² On 15/8/2015, ‘Abbas Zaki, member of the Fatah Central Committee, declared that the development of the relationship with Iran was a mandatory step towards confronting the Israeli occupation. For his part, Fatah leader Mohammad Shtayyeh confirmed a plan to arrange a visit by ‘Abbas to Iran,⁶³ after the visit of a delegation headed by PLO Executive Committee member Ahmad Majdalani to Tehran at the beginning of August 2015. Majdalani stressed that relations with Iran were continuous and evolving.⁶⁴ He said he discussed with Foreign Minister Javad Zarif the strengthening the relationship between the PA and Iran, which he considered an important step given Iran’s increasingly important political and diplomatic weight.⁶⁵

Two delegations from Hamas visited the Iranian capital in the context of the restoration of warmer relations between the two parties, following the lukewarm phase that has prevailed between 2012 and 2015 on the back of the different positions taken over the crisis in Syria. Tehran also received Ramadan ‘Abdullah, secretary general of the PIJ. Remarkably, the latter’s Deputy, Ziad Nakhleh, who was designated on the US terror list a few days before visiting Iran, attended the meeting with President Rouhani.⁶⁶

The visit by the Fatah official to Tehran did not indicate any strategic change in relations, because their rapprochement would remain limited. Iran had nothing to offer to the PA, and vice versa. The PA cannot extend its relationship with Iran without the blessings of Israel and the US, while the fact that the Authority operates under occupation makes a strong relationship with Iran a source of embarrassment for the Iranian regime.⁶⁷

Iranian officials stressed that the relationship with Hamas remained a strategic one, the latter being a resistance movement first and foremost, as Shura Council Speaker Ali Larijani has said. He stressed that Iran’s relationship with Hamas was good, noting that the relationship was back to its previous level, and there are no problem with Hamas. He explained that Iran considered Hamas a resistance movement and support it from this standpoint. Larijani did not mention Iran’s reservations over Hamas’s position on the Syrian crisis. He acknowledged that there are some problems with regard to their stances, but said that it was still

considered Iran's Islamic duty to support the resistance. Regarding the relationship with Fatah, Larijani said that Iran had relations with Fatah at the time of the late Yasir 'Arafat. And of course, because of the positions of the PLO after the Oslo Accords, the level of those relations declined because Iran believed the Oslo Accords were a strategic mistake. He confirmed that Iran had no animosity with Fatah but considered some actions futile, such as peace negotiations.⁶⁸

In the same context, Head of Hamas's Political Bureau Khalid Mish'al received a phone call from the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, in which he expressed Tehran's support for the Palestinian resistance facing Israeli aggression in GS. IRNA news agency also said that Javad Zarif contacted PIJ Secretary General Ramadan 'Abdullah for the same purpose.⁶⁹

The Shura Council Speaker also sent a cable congratulating Mish'al on the victory of the Palestinian people and resistance fighters against the "Zionist entity" during the Israeli aggression on GS. Larijani stressed Iran's comprehensive support for the Palestinian people and the liberation of all occupied Palestinian territory from the sea to the river.⁷⁰ The Iranian Foreign Ministry also issued a statement on the occasion of the killing of three leaders of the Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas.⁷¹

Reflecting the gradual turning of the page on the controversy with Hamas, the Iranian FARS news agency quoted Hussein Sheikh al-Islam, adviser on International Affairs to the Iranian Shura Council speaker, as saying that Iran's relations with Hamas were strategic relationships. He stressed that Iran and Hamas had set aside their differences concerning the position over the Syrian crisis and that Iran continued to support the resistance axis. In response to linking this relationship to the return of financial support to its former level with the movement, Sheikh al-Islam confirmed the reduction of Iranian financial support to some resistance factions, referring to PIJ. He explained that the budget reduction was true, but said this was due to the financial hardship experienced by his country, saying that the issue was not political, and that Iran would continue its support in the future.⁷²

In the wake of the Israeli aggression on GS, which lasted 51 days, General Commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, issued a statement concerning the people of GS and the leadership of the resistance, confirming that Iran would stay with them until the end, in defence of their principles, faith, pride and independence, and until the

liberation of their land. He stated that the Palestinians' sovereignty should cover the entire territory of occupied Palestine. He stressed that the organizational capacity of the factions, their infrastructure and defensive capabilities must be strengthened, and also expanded to WB in accordance with the recommendations of "our imam," and the strength, range and accuracy of missiles must also be increased.⁷³

Reflecting the quest to restore relations, a high-level delegation from Hamas visited Tehran. It was led by Muhammad Nasr, member of the Hamas political bureau, and comprised of Maher 'Obaid, Jamal 'Isa, Usama Hamdan and Khalid al-Qaddumi, Hamas's representative in Tehran. Head of Hamas's International Relations Usama Hamdan told Safa news agency that the movement's official visit to Tehran on 8/12/2014 achieved its goals, pointing out that the relationship between the two sides was, "much better than many people imagine."⁷⁴

A second visit to Iran took place within less than a month. The Hamas delegation, headed by Jamal 'Isa, member of the political bureau, met with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian, who affirmed the "strategic" and "excellent" relationship with Tehran and stressed that the Palestinian issue and Jerusalem were top priorities for Iran. For his part, Jamal 'Isa confirmed the "excellent" relationship between Hamas and Tehran, describing Iran's role in developments in the region and its support for the aspirations of the Palestinian people as "unmatched," adding that the Palestinian factions were proud of their strategic relations with it. 'Isa pointed out that "Iran's support for the Palestinian resistance is an incentive for the Palestinian people," explaining that "Hamas was able to stand its ground despite the pressures and conspiracies." He added that Hamas hoped for continued Iranian support, as well as support from other countries until the Palestinian people achieve their full rights. He stressed that all components of the Muslim nation must set aside their differences and unite against the common enemy through a truly Islamic stance in support of Palestine and its holy sites.⁷⁵

It was inevitable that Tehran would criticize the Egyptian decision to designate Hamas a "terrorist movement." The Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian denounced the Egyptian court's decision, saying that "the Zionist entity is a terrorist and not Hamas." Abdollahian said in a statement made to the official news agency of Iran that the MB movement

is part of the reality in Egypt, and political opposition groups and terrorist groups should be separated based on a realistic view of the situation.⁷⁶

Confirming the positive stance vis-à-vis Hamas, there were several statements made in support of the movement and its role in the resistance against Israel. Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Brigadier General Massoud Jazayeri said that the relationship with Hamas was “solid, and we are partners in the resistance, and we are working on one project, and we must all march together along the road of resisting the Zionist entity and America... the rest are secondary issues, things we can overcome, and we will soon.”⁷⁷

The experience of the past years in the relationship between Hamas and Iran has shown that it is difficult to have a full estrangement between the two sides because of their shared strategic objectives in facing Israel. Hamas and Iran intersect in many ways. Hamas is a liberation movement seeking to rescue historic Palestine from the Zionist project using an Islamic ideology and strategy that are compatible with the vision of the Iranian regime, which considers the liberation of Palestine a matter of religious creed. According to Mahmud al-Zahhar, a senior Hamas leader, in his remarks to the Palestinian Information Center (PIC), Iran believes that the Israeli enemy is its enemy, and that it has the right to defend itself. In this it has intersecting interests with Hamas, in addition to the fact that both see Israel as an alien entity that does not belong to the Muslim nation. Al-Zahhar believes that the Iranian position goes beyond mere policy issues with regard Palestine; since its revolution Iran has been part of the axis confronting the US and Israel, and it is unlikely that it would abandon the resistance in the region and leave it to face the political and cultural invasion alone.⁷⁸

In this context, Hamas openly declared that its visit to Iran was part of its vision for the need to mobilize the energy and potential of the Muslim nation to support the Palestinian resistance. It added that it was keen to build upon historical relations with Iran, this desire stemming from a realization among the parties regarding the importance of communicating and working hard to overcome the delicate circumstances facing the region, which could serve the Palestinian issue.⁷⁹

But perhaps the most important thing to be said about Hamas’s role and the role of other Palestinian resistance factions during the visit of the Palestinian delegation to Tehran and its participation in the 28th International Islamic Unity Conference was the statement made by the Secretary General of the World Forum

for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, Ayatollah Mohsen Araki: “The Palestinian resistance, Hamas, and Hizbullah can unite the Islamic Nation on the basis of supporting occupied Jerusalem and the *al-Aqsa* Mosque.” Araki “called on all Muslims; Sunnis or Shias, scholars or parties to ramp up efforts to support the Palestinian people and its resistance.”⁸⁰

It appears that the neutral PIJ stance regarding events in Syria and Yemen had an adverse impact on Iran’s financial support to the movement. The features of this financial crisis began to appear after the closure of the office of Palestine Today TV in occupied Jerusalem, which the PIJ runs from outside Palestine, due to its “financial crisis.”⁸¹ PIJ then adopted an austerity policy, cutting jobs in its TV channel in Ramallah, closing the offices of its affiliate associations, and reducing budgets and expenses.⁸² Perhaps the absence of PIJ Secretary General Ramadan ‘Abdullah and his Deputy Ziad Nakhleh from the IRGC iftar in Beirut on 30/6/2015⁸³ indicated some kind of resentment by the movement over the reduction of Iranian support. This was despite the fact that Khodr Habib, leader of the movement, had denied any financial crisis in his movement’s institutions and offices, saying instead that what was happening was “a difficulty of transferring funds amid recent Arab developments and what is happening in the countries of the region, but the talk of a crisis is baseless.”⁸⁴ The PIJ Secretary General later downplayed the impact of the financial issue on the relationship between the two sides, saying PIJ’s ties with Tehran were good, and adding, “The Palestinian issue for Iran is not linked to circumstantial matters, and it has been a fundamental since the days of Imam Khomeini, affirmed by Sayed Ali Khamenei on every occasion.”⁸⁵

Iran’s support for the Al-Sabireen Movement for Supporting Palestine (HESN) in 2014, formed by PIJ splinter leader Hisham Salem, caused tensions between PIJ and Iran and the latter’s aid was diverted in part to the new movement. PIJ expressed its resentment at this publicly.⁸⁶ Al-Sabireen Movement receives support from Iran as confirmed by the movement’s leaders, who consider themselves part of the national fabric. The movement is inspired by Hizbullah in Lebanon, and has similar flags and insignia.⁸⁷

Iran’s Position Towards Israel After the Nuclear Deal

Israel considered the nuclear deal a historic mistake by the US. For this reason, Netanyahu attacked the deal, making direct threats to Iran to bomb its facilities. Some analyses and forecasts predicted that Iran, after the nuclear deal with the

West, would change its policy on the Palestinian issue and resistance movements, to be more reconciled with Western policies. In response to this, Iranian officials at all levels, military and political, responded to Israeli threats while the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stressed several times that Iran would continue to support the Palestinian issue and resistance movements. In an interview with CNN, President Hassan Rouhani, answering a question about Iran's response in the event of an Israeli assault on Iranian nuclear facilities, said, "Israel knows very well what the response would be. Israel knows well our regional capability," and added, "When it comes to practice, the Israelis cannot do that. If they do such a crazy thing, our response will make them rue the day."⁸⁸

Adviser to the Iranian Supreme Leader's Representative at the IRGC, Mojtaba Zolnour, in response to threats by Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman of targeting Iran's nuclear reactors, threatened to destroy Tel Aviv in less than ten minutes, if Israel made a mistake. He added, "The Zionists are cowards, and they could not even fight Hamas," explaining that the strength of Hamas and Hizbullah, is equal to a small part of Iran's military power and "the Zionists" could tackle the Islamic resistance. He said that the Israelis made such statements in order to raise the morale of the settlers, because the reverse migration of settlers threatens the "Zionist presence."⁸⁹

Many experts and analysts raised questions about the future of Iran's relations with resistance movements in Palestine, especially Hamas, in addition to making predictions about Iran's future position on Israel after the nuclear deal with the West. No doubt, Iran faces two main challenges in this regard in the next phase: The Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Iran's role in the region, on the geopolitical level. Domestically, the challenge could be the emergence of new liberal economic classes that shape the Iranian economy as it rejoins the international market. This could reflect into a change in its regional and foreign policies, especially in the direction of normalization with the West.

Iran, which resorted to "political pragmatism" in some of its positions and taking into account its interests, both in the relationship with the Russians and with other countries in the region and the world, continued to hold on to the maxims of its ideology regarding Israel. Its positions appearing radical and not subject to change with regard to recognition or making any contact with Israel.⁹⁰

It is noted that the positions of Iranian leaders and their statements, as well as the positions of Hamas leaders and their statements during 2015, reflect the keenness of both sides to maintain and develop this relationship. The focus of both sides was on strategic convergences, namely resisting Israel without binding any side by the positions of the other.

The importance of restoring warmth to these ties in the current stage lies in the seriousness of what is happening in the Arab region, in terms of expanding contacts with Israel to include Gulf countries, sometimes publicly. Iran has continued to stress, even after the nuclear deal with the West, its enmity with Israel and its support for resistance against it. In the context of affirming this support after the nuclear deal, Khamenei said that Iranian policy vis-à-vis the US and “global arrogance and the forces of evil” would not change. Iran would not stop supporting oppressed peoples in the region, regardless of the fate of the nuclear deal with the major powers.⁹¹ Khamenei also said “After nuclear negotiations, the Zionist regime said that they will not be worried about Iran in the next 25 years,” adding, “I am telling you, first, you will not be around in 25 years’ time, and God willing, there will be no Zionist regime in 25 years. Second, during this period, the spirit of fighting, heroism and jihad will keep you worried every moment.”⁹²

Even President Rouhani himself waged a strong campaign on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying that Israel is the most murderous “terrorist entity,” which is talking about peace and future dangers, when it itself constitutes the greatest threat to the region.⁹³ Rouhani also said that the current state of Israel is not legitimate.⁹⁴

When the Jerusalem *Intifadah* erupted in WB, Iran expressed its support. Khamenei said Iran would support the Palestinian *Intifadah* against Israel in any way it can, and rejected US accusations that the new wave of stabbings and ramming attacks by Palestinians were “terrorism.”⁹⁵

Khamenei had addressed a letter to young people in the West, the second of its kind in 2015, in which he referred to Israeli brutal conduct, saying:

If the people of Europe have now taken refuge in their homes for a few days and refrain from being present in busy places- it is decades that a Palestinian family is not secure even in its own home from the Zionist regime’s death and destruction machinery. What kind of atrocious violence today is comparable to that of the settlement constructions of the Zionists regime?

He continued:

This regime—without ever being seriously and significantly censured by its influential allies or even by the so-called independent international organizations—everyday demolishes the homes of Palestinians and destroys their orchards and farms. This is done without even giving them time to gather their belongings or agricultural products and usually it is done in front of the terrified and tear-filled eyes of women and children who witness the brutal beatings of their family members who in some cases are being dragged away to gruesome torture chambers.⁹⁶

The above positions of Iranian leaders, even after the nuclear agreement, towards Israel, accusing it of “terrorism,” and affirming resistance as a strategic choice to confront it, means that the likelihood of a change in Iranian policy on Palestine remains very distant. Furthermore, the *Intifadah* in WB, and the discovery and collapse of tunnels in GS, means that the possibility of the resistance escalating against Israel is possible, despite various statements suggesting there remains no desire for escalation. It is therefore inevitable that the resistance is seeking to get all manner of support from any forces that can contribute to the promotion of this confrontation, or in preparation for war, which may come at any time. This requires resistance movements in Palestine to seek to heal the rift in the Arab countries, to contribute to the promotion of political solutions to the current crises, and to ensure a solid and strong relationship with Iran, which has previously provided all kinds of support for resistance movements, as expressed explicitly by the leadership of Al-Qassam Brigades.

Fourth: Malaysia

Despite Malaysia’s internal crises and political and economic instability, triggering protests that demanded political reform, the policy of supporting the Palestinian issue continued in 2014 and 2015. Both Malaysian officials and the public interacted with the Palestinian people in the two-year period, confirming the importance of the Islamic dimension of the Palestinian issue. UNRWA received an urgent assistance from the Islamic Relief Malaysia Organization to the tune of \$900 thousand for Palestinian refugees in the Yarmouk RC in Syria. The organization made the donation two days after an appeal by the Commissioner General of

UNRWA Filippo Grandi, regarding the deprivation and acute malnutrition among men, women and children in Yarmouk.⁹⁷

Politically, the Malaysian Prime Minister Mohammad Najib repeatedly confirmed his support for the Palestinian cause. Najib, in a phone call with Khalid Mish'al following the 2014 Israeli assault on GS, expressed his sympathy with the Palestinian people and those confronting it. This was while former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad pointed out that the atrocities by Israel against the Palestinians could be stopped if the United States stopped its support for Israel. Mahathir was also quoted as saying that "For as long as Britain and the US continue to support Israel, it (the war) will not end."⁹⁸

Malaysians expressed their solidarity with the Palestinian people and GS by launching a campaign under the title "The Month of Ummah's (Nation's) Wrath." The campaign included a number of events in support of the Palestinian people against the Israeli aggression on Gaza.⁹⁹ In January 2015, a campaign was launched out of the city of Cyberjaya in Malaysia for the GS reconstruction after the Israeli aggression, under the auspices of Mahathir Mohamad, with the slogan "One Billion Dollar Donation Campaign To Rebuild Gaza." In his speech, Mahathir said that the reconstruction of GS would not be easy, but it was a challenge that must be tackled and overcome. He also noted previous experiences when Israel had prevented the entry of assistance and intercepted ships and convoys trying to break the siege, despite their humanitarian nature. He said such Israeli actions were illegal and went contrary to international norms and human values.¹⁰⁰

In December 2015, Khalid Mish'al accepted an invitation from the ruling party United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) to visit Malaysia, leading a delegation from Hamas, to take part in the annual general congress of the party as an observer. The delegation met with a number of politicians and officials, and took part in youth events organized to welcome the delegation in Malaysia,¹⁰¹ reflecting the extent of popular and official solidarity in Malaysia with the Palestinian people.

Fifth: Pakistan

Pakistan's supportive policy for the Palestinian issue continued in 2014 and 2015, as expressed by the positions of the Pakistani government during the 2014 Israeli assault on GS. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif,

condemned the aggression as unacceptable and a violation of all human rights. Sharif pointed out that the Israeli government had always used brutal force against unarmed Palestinian citizens to a degree amounting to a war crime. He also stressed that the people of Pakistan would stand by the people of GS, and support the right of the Palestinian people to a free and independent state.¹⁰²

In a statement in July 2014 the Pakistani government announced days of mourning in solidarity with the Palestinian people, and called for lifting the GS blockade and allowing humanitarian access to the population. Pakistan donated \$1 million to help meet the urgent appeal by the UN to alleviate the suffering of Gazans.¹⁰³

The Pakistani parliament issued a unanimous resolution describing the Israeli assault on Gaza as a “war crime and act of genocide.” The resolution condemned the lack of an appropriate response by the international community to the “barbaric” Israeli attack, calling on the UN to act urgently to rescue the innocent children of GS.¹⁰⁴

The Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai, meanwhile, granted the Children of the World prize she won for defending children’s rights to the schools of Gaza. She said in a press conference when receiving the prize that the full amount (\$50 thousand) would be allocated to rebuild an UNRWA school.¹⁰⁵

In July 2015, Pakistan and KSA submitted a draft resolution that was adopted at the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), they called:

upon all states to promote compliance with human rights obligations and all High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to respect, and to ensure respect for international humanitarian law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, in accordance with article 1 common to the Geneva Conventions.

The resolution called “upon all duty bearers and United Nations bodies to pursue the implementation of all recommendations contained in the report of the commission of inquiry.”¹⁰⁶ The Pakistani delegate to the UN Maliha Lodhi urged, “Security Council to fulfill its responsibility and summon political courage to adopt a resolution with timelines for ending occupation,” and added that “that humanitarian assistance was necessary but not sufficient to address the ongoing tragedy of the Palestinian people.”¹⁰⁷

Sixth: Trade Exchange

The year 2014 saw a rise in the trade volume between Turkey and Israel. The value of Israeli exports to Turkey in 2014 rose to \$2,755.6 million, an increase of 9.5% compared to 2013. Israeli imports rose by about 14%. In 2015, the trade volume between Israel and Turkey decreased by 23.5%. Israeli exports to Turkey in 2015 decreased by 38% compared to 2014, while Israeli imports decreased by 9% compared to 2014. Perhaps the 2014 Israeli assault on GS had a toll on economic relations in 2015.

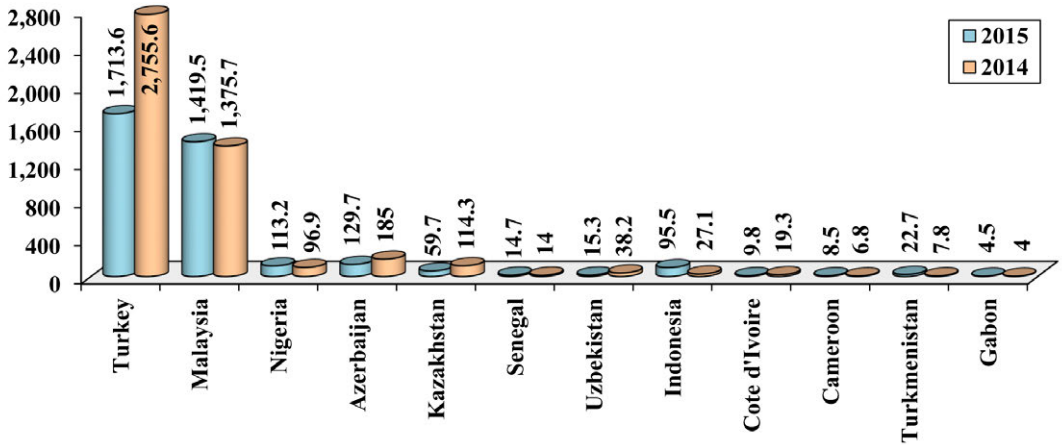
Concerning Malaysia, 2014 saw a slight decrease in trade volume with Israel, by 6.7% percent, while it remained steady in 2015 with an increase of nearly 0.5% compared to the previous year. It should be noted that no diplomatic ties exist between the two countries, and it is likely trade takes place through intermediary states. Trade between Israel and other Muslim countries remains limited.

Table 2/4: Israeli Exports and Imports to/ from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2012–2015 (\$ million)¹⁰⁸

Countries	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2015	2014	2013	2012	2015	2014	2013	2012
Turkey	1,713.6	2,755.6	2,515.6	1,421.4	2,446	2,683.6	2,354.1	2,082.7
Malaysia	1,419.5	1,375.7	1,457.1	763.3	15.3	52	72.9	74
Nigeria	113.2	96.9	155.1	367	2.9	1.4	2.1	2.8
Azerbaijan	129.7	185	106.2	129	2.4	1.1	0.4	1.1
Kazakhstan	59.7	114.3	87.3	77.2	1.6	3.9	1.5	1.7
Senegal	14.7	14	61.7	25.3	4.7	2.9	5	4.8
Uzbekistan	15.3	38.2	27.8	13	1.2	1.2	1	2.2
Indonesia	95.5	27.1	24.8	19.8	52.2	68.7	91.5	110.9
Cote d'Ivoire	9.8	19.3	20.8	8.9	0.4	1.1	0.3	1.6
Cameron	8.5	6.8	8.7	8.2	0	0.1	0.4	0.2
Turkmenistan	22.7	7.8	3.9	6	0	0	0	0
Gabon	4.5	4	1.9	11.7	0	0	0	0

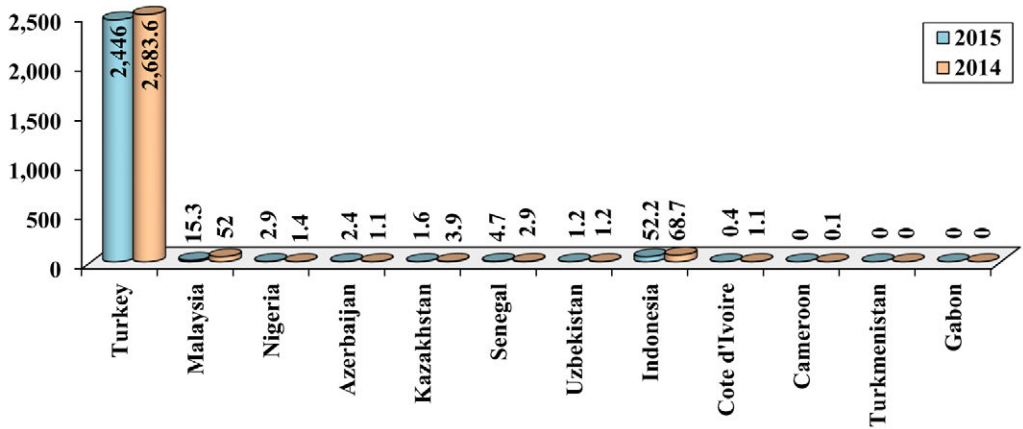
Israeli Exports to a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2014–2015

(\$ million)



Israeli Imports from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2014–2015

(\$ million)



Conclusion

The Palestinian issue in 2014 and 2015 suffered from a decline in interest from the Muslim world, especially at the official level. The state of flux in the region in this period as a result of revolutions and counter-revolutions, and the preoccupation with the issue of “extremism” and sectarian-ethnic conflicts, in addition to internal concerns for both Turkey and Iran, gave priority to these dossiers at the expense of the Palestinian issue. For this reason, there was a lack of any development in support of the Palestinian issue, whether in terms of internal Palestinian relations to end the division, or in terms of confronting the Israeli assaults (2014 summer war, the Judaization of Jerusalem, and attempts to temporal and spatial division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque). This revealed OIC’s weakness in going beyond traditional approaches to address major Islamic issues, keeping the largest Islamic framework confined to a ceremonial bureaucratic role, instead of investing its economic and political weight (not to mention the military weight that it refuses to use) to achieve the goals for which it was established, led by the defence of Islamic holy sites including *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Despite Turkey’s preoccupation with internal and regional issues, especially the internal security issue that took up a significant part of its resources and energy amid escalating hostilities inside, its public and official approach toward the Palestinian issue did not change. Turkish policy has continued, under the leadership of the AKP, to balance its Palestinian-Turkey relations through communication with PLO leaders and the PA on one hand, and with the leaders of the Hamas movement on the other.

Concerning Israeli attempts to restore relations with Turkey, these efforts did not lead to any significant progress. Turkey stressed on more than one occasion that rapprochement with Israel would not come at the expense of the Palestinians, insisting that normalizing ties with Tel Aviv would only take place after the lifting of the blockade on Gaza. While there is a possibility Turkey might show leniency with regard to the interpretation of the conditions and meaning of lifting the blockade, and in light of the many issues preoccupying Turkey, and with the possibility of a relative breakthrough in Turkish-Israeli ties, it does not appear likely in the coming period that Turkey will be able or willing to change its traditional policy vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue, whether in terms of supporting the peace process and two-state solution, or supporting Palestinian resistance.

Iran continued affirming its support for the Palestinian resistance. In 2014–2015, it sought to play a balanced role in its relations with Palestinian factions. There were also efforts to restore warmth to the relationship with Hamas, focusing on joint enmity with Israel and support for resistance. However, differences over the position on the Syrian revolution and crisis, and the way Iran is handling some regional issues, continue to cast a shadow over the relationship between the two parties.

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Chapter Five

*The Palestinian Issue and the
International Situation*

The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

Introduction

The years 2014 and 2015 reinforced the idea of the presence of a close relationship between Palestinian resistance in all its forms, and the nature and extent of regional and international diplomatic efforts to resolve the long-standing Palestinian issue. Indeed, the less momentum the resistance has in any period of time, the less of a priority the Palestinian issue becomes, falling behind other less important regional and international issues. This is while noting that international diplomatic efforts sometimes increase for other reasons, linked to the quest by Israel and major powers led by the US, to capitalize on Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic weakness to impose a settlement on their own terms.

While the Palestinian resistance was able to impose the Palestinian issue on the international agenda with the first *Intifadah* in late 1987, and *al-Aqsa Intifadah* in 2000, international preoccupation with major developments, revolutions, changes, conflicts, and attempts to draw new maps in the region led to a declining interest in the Palestinian issue. The Palestinian issue was thus dealt with in a temporary and limited manner, as long as it posed no serious threat to major powers and their allies, and could be contained by “friendly” regional powers.

International diplomatic efforts in 2014, as we will explain in the report, up until the conflict erupted in GS on 8/7/2014, decreased significantly. Then efforts began to arrange a ceasefire and the reconstruction of GS. An international conference convened in Egypt for the purpose, following previous efforts for a ceasefire between the Palestinian resistance and Israeli occupation forces.

After the Gaza conflict, the Palestinian issue faded away behind a series of regional and international issues, to the extent that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that the lack of international diplomatic interest in the Palestinian issue was “deliberate,” despite it being the central issue of the region. Lavrov’s remarks in 2014 indicate that Russia has “held a clear-cut line on preventing new

crises in the Middle East from putting into the background old conflicts, primarily the one between Palestine and Israel.”¹ This is consistent with what Lavrov said before the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy in November 2014:

The Arab-Israeli conflict is dead in the water. It’s hard to play on several boards at a time. The Americans are trying to accomplish this, but it doesn’t work for them. In 2013, they took nine months to sort out the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I will not go into the reasons, they are known, but they failed at this as well. Now, they asked for more time to try to achieve some progress before the end of 2014, so that the Palestinians wouldn’t go to the UN and sign the Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), etc. Suddenly, it transpired that negotiations on Iran are underway. The US State Department dumped Palestine to focus on Iran.²

Lavrov’s conclusions are consistent with the fact that the speech delivered by US President Barack Obama in the UN General Assembly in October 2015 contained no reference to the Palestinian issue, focusing instead on other regional and international problems.

When identifying the “new” crises that Lavrov referenced in 2014–2015, impacting the priority assigned to the Palestinian issue, we find that they were as follows:

1. The repercussions of political unrest in the Arab countries, or the so-called Arab Spring. First in Syria, where international efforts in 2014 and 2015 focused on the regional and international political and military convergence in Syria, especially the dismantling of the chemical weapons arsenal in 2014. Second, there arose the issue of the rise of the so-called caliphate state or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Third, the continued fighting in Libya and the unrest in Egypt. Then in March 2015, KSA led a military intervention against Houthi rebels in Yemen, allied to forces loyal to former President ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Saleh. On 30/9/2015, Russia launched a military intervention in Syria, with Russia trying to coordinate with Israel in light of the prospects for conflict between Russian and Israeli air operations above Syria, especially in the Golan Heights.

2. The influx of Arab migrants (including Palestinians) to Europe, an issue that has preoccupied much of diplomatic effort and media coverage at the

expense of the Palestinian issue. Especially so when the financial support for Palestinians—including for the reconstruction of Gaza—was affected by the allocations given to migrants. To establish this, it suffices to compare the level of European aid to Palestine between 2011 and 2015, to see that there is a decline.³

3. The nuclear deal with Iran: World powers reached a deal with Iran in July 2015 regarding the latter's nuclear program. The deal led to differences and tensions in the region that influenced the level of attention afforded to the Palestinian issue. Indeed, the major powers assigned great importance to the nuclear issue, in a way that pushed the Palestinian issue to the margin of diplomatic activities. This continued until the *Intifadah* in Palestine erupted in October 2015, as Israeli assaults on *al-Aqsa* Mosque and projects to divide it spatially and temporally increased.

4. The crisis in Ukraine: In February 2014, Russian forces seized the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine, triggering an international crisis that has preoccupied the world up to the time of writing. This reinforced the marginalization of the Palestinian issue.

5. Energy issues in the region: The fluctuation then collapse in oil prices has had global economic repercussions, triggering mutual accusations among producers regarding the causes of the collapse. Furthermore, the emergence of large reserves of natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean close to Arab shores (not to mention plans to transport gas through pipelines from production areas to consumers, especially in Europe) has drawn attention to a new arena of conflict. Masood Ahmed, director of Middle East and Central Asia Department at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), said in a press conference that “the export earnings of the oil-exporting countries in the Middle East and North Africa have gone down by \$360 billion in 2015 compared to 2014.”⁴ This impacted the level of support for the Palestinian people by oil-producing nations, especially with respect to the reconstruction of GS.

6. The Israeli elections in March 2015: Diplomatic efforts become “temporarily” paralyzed in countries preparing for legislative or presidential elections, both before the elections and during the formation of new governments, especially

in the case of coalition governments like the ones that govern in Israel. International efforts for dialogue with Israel slowed down before, during, and after the election period.

However, it is necessary to point out that the focus of the changes in Russia's security principles, towards increasingly considering North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) a "major foreign threat" as stated on 26/12/2014, and Russia's attempts to curb NATO's attempts to expand into areas Russia considers to be of vital importance after losing its control over important areas in Eastern Europe, increased the strategic value of Western Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean area, which no doubt has an impact on the attention afforded to the Palestinian issue.

The landscape changed drastically, however, as the Palestinian *Intifadah* erupted in October 2015. The international diplomatic corps came back to life, as the media focused the spotlight once again on what is arguably the root cause for all Middle Eastern issues. This confirmed once again that resistance is the most effective method to force international interest in the Palestinian issue, regardless of the fact that the US and some major powers are constantly seeking to undermine the demands of the Palestinian people and support Israel, its occupation, and its crimes. After the success of the Palestinian resistance in repelling Israeli aggression on GS in 2014, the UN recognized Palestine as a non-member state. Later on, the Palestinian flag was hoisted at the UN, and Palestine joined the ICC and started filing documents to investigate Israeli war crimes in the occupied territories, which will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

First: The Quartet

If the Quartet on the Middle East represents the so-called "international will" (or more precisely the will of the major powers) for settling the Arab-Israeli conflict, the indications of the decline of this entity have increased every year since its inception in 2002, both in terms of the number of its statements and the extent of its diplomatic efforts and achievements on the ground.⁵ In truth, the Quartet has played a negative obstructionist role against the Palestinian people's quest

to fulfill its aspirations for freedom, liberation, and independence. Its presidency represented by Tony Blair has been biased in favor of Israel for years, and it disrupted the democratic choice of the Palestinian people in WB and GS and gave cover to the Israeli blockade of GS when it set its three impossible conditions for Hamas, which had won the 2006 election.

Perhaps the fact that in 2014 the Quartet issued almost no statements, with only four issued in 2015, is further evidence of the decline of its diplomatic efforts on the Palestinian issue. A review of the four Quartet statements shows that the one issued on 27/5/2015, was merely a protocol statement of praise, focused on the role of the Quartet representative Tony Blair after his announcement he would leave his post, which he took up in 2007. The second statement issued on 8/2/2015 reaffirmed the same issues tackled by previous statements, such as: calling for the resumption of the negotiations on the basis of UN resolutions; land for peace; guaranteeing Israeli security; emphasizing the importance of the Arab peace initiative; calling on the parties not to undertake any unilateral actions affecting mutual confidence; emphasizing the importance of providing financial support to the Palestinians; and calling on donor parties to fulfill their previous pledges, particularly those made in the Cairo Conference in October 2014, in relation to GS.

The third statement, which followed the Quartet's meetings in New York on 30/9/2015, focused on expanding consultations with regional and international parties. The Quartet reaffirmed its traditional positions stated in previous statements, and "noted with deep concern recent violence and escalating tensions surrounding the holy sites in Jerusalem and called upon all parties to exercise restraint... and preserve unchanged the status quo at the holy sites in both word and practice."⁶ The fourth statement, issued on 23/10/2015, under pressure of the eruption of a new *Intifadah* in WB, expressed the Quartet's profound concern regarding the escalation of the violence, and condemned "all acts of terror and violence against civilians." The statement encouraged "Israel to work together with Jordan to uphold the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem in both word and practice, recognizing the special role of Jordan as per its peace treaty with Israel." The statement reaffirmed previous agreements and international resolutions and their implementation on the basis of the two-state solution and ending the occupation that began in 1967, and said the "Quartet Envoys will travel to the region in the coming period and engage directly with the parties."⁷

This means that between September 2013 and February 2015 the Quartet did not issue any non-protocol statement. In the following year (after Blair stepped down), the Quartet met in Cairo (June), Amman (July), and Riyadh (September) without any notable impact on the peace process. This reinforces the conclusions reached by expert studies that addressed the “ineffectiveness” of the role of the Quartet in most of the tasks entrusted to them, as evident in the following points:⁸

1. The weakness of its role regarding PA reform, which is evident in the high levels of corruption, according to Transparency International indices.⁹
2. The failure of the road map, which was the central task entrusted to the Quartet.
3. The inability to separate the two sides, which was evident in the continuing confrontations and the overlap of the administrative and security agencies and public life of the two parties.
4. Its conditions for Hamas to recognize Israel and renounce “violence,” and ratify the agreements signed by the PLO so that it could take its natural role in the PA. This supported the Israeli vision for Hamas, and sought to isolate and marginalize one of the largest Palestinian political forces. Consequently, the internal Palestinian situation and GS siege were aggravated.
5. Poor diplomatic performance and weak mediation efforts, which we have pointed out above, with the decline in its international activity and decline in its statements, both in terms of quality and quantity.
6. The US monopoly over the attitudes of the Quartet, which was almost the central weakness of the Quartet’s work. The Quartet sought in its three meetings in Cairo, Riyadh, and Amman to expand the circle of participants in its works, especially the Arab League, because of Russian demands and because of the slow work of the Quartet that Tony Blair has contributed to. Delegates from Jordan, Egypt, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and the Arab League were invited to take part in the Quartet’s work in its conference held in September 2015. The influences of the US role in the Quartet’s paralysis is clear in the American refusal to support the French proposal to submit a draft resolution at the UN Security Council specifying the parameters for achieving the two-state

solution in support of the Quartet's work.¹⁰ This shows that the Quartet did not comply even with the bare minimum agreed upon by the Palestinian pro-peace faction.

7. The weakness of the Quartet's work in the context of international efforts is also clear in the parties' failure to comply with its appeals to implement the pledges presented at donor conferences for the reconstruction of GS, most recently the donor conference in the first week of October 2014. In that conference, donors pledged \$5.4 billion, but available information suggests these pledges will meet the same fate as previous pledges made at the Paris donor conference in December 2007, where 87 countries and organizations pledged around \$7.4 billion, little of which has materialized.¹¹

The decline in the role and influence of the Quartet since its inception in 2002, which we also analyzed in our previous Palestinian Strategic Report,¹² became more marked in the past two years (2014–2015). In 2014, actual activity on the ground was non-existent, and the Quartet's activity in 2015 was confined to issuing four statements, one of them a protocol statement unrelated to the conflict. This reflects the choice of international forces to marginalize any interest in the Palestinian issue, in favor of other regional changes and upheavals.

Second: The United Nations (UN)

The key issues with regard to Palestine are tackled mainly at UN level by three entities: The General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This doesn't mean that other UN special agencies are not important, though their involvement in the Palestinian issue is smaller and their decisions are mostly consistent with the decisions of the three aforementioned bodies.

What is remarkable about the vote on resolutions related to the Palestinian issue is the huge discrepancy in support. Out of 13 resolutions at the UN General Assembly in 2014, the "average" number of votes in favor of Palestine was 145 countries (out of 193), while the average of votes against was 6–7 countries (the rest absentees or abstaining). Moreover, more than six countries voted against

resolutions in favor of the Palestinians, which include in addition to Israel, the US, Canada, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau and Nauru.¹³ If we exclude the US and Canada, the remaining four states are “micro-states” with no actual weight in the international community. What this confirms is that the legitimacy of Palestinian rights is a given for the international community, despite the disparity regarding the extent of these rights between states, something that Israel has started to take seriously.

1. The General Assembly

On 10/9/2015, the UN General Assembly agreed to raise the Palestinian flag at the UN, recognizing Palestine as a non-member state. The event had symbolic and political connotations. The other resolutions in the 69th and 70th session essentially covered the following:¹⁴

- a. Called on donor countries to meet the commitments they promised at the Cairo Conference in October 2014 for GS reconstruction. The Assembly also welcomed the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD), which was held in March 2014, in addition to the efforts of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians.
- b. In the same session (December 2014), the Assembly stressed the right of the Palestinian people to its natural resources and the need for Israel to cease their exploitation, and the right of Palestinians to compensation for the Israeli exploitation of their resources, emphasizing the illegality of settlements and the Separation Wall, including in and around East Jerusalem.
- c. The rest of the resolutions tackled the following issues:
 1. Supporting the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.
 2. Rejecting Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.
 3. The illegality of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan.
 4. The application of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (dated 12/8/1949), to the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and other occupied Arab territories.

5. Supporting the work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the occupied territories.
6. Reaffirmation of the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and that they have the right to their properties and income derived therefrom, in accordance with the principles of fairness and justice.
7. Supporting the operations of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).
8. Settlement of the question of Palestine by peaceful means, and the continuation of the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP), and the continuation of the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine of the UN Department of Public Information.

2. Security Council

The Palestinian issue did not see a significant effort from the UN Security Council in 2014 and 2015. The only draft resolution proposed on this issue came on 30/12/2014, related to determining the timeframe (until 2017) for ending the Israeli occupation of all the territories occupied in 1967 through negotiations. However, the resolution failed, as it was opposed by the US and Australia, and the support from eight states was not enough as it was less than the required quorum of nine. The rest of the efforts of the Security Council on Palestine focused on receiving reports from UN agency or secretary-general representatives. These reports do not trigger any voting, meaning they do not include any executive measures or decisions. There were 17 such reports in the 69th session and 12 in the 70th session, all covering events or special activities concerning the Palestinian issue.¹⁵

3. ECOSOC

The resolutions of the council in 2014 and 2015 focused on two key issues: Palestinian women's conditions and consequences of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian economic and social life, and called for:¹⁶

- a. Provision of assistance to Palestinian women.
- b. Full opening of border crossings into GS.

- c. The need to preserve the territorial integrity of the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.
- d. A demanding that Israel comply with the Protocol on Economic Relations Between the Government of the State of Israel and the PLO, representing the Palestinian people, which was signed in Paris on 29/4/1994.
- e. Israel to repair civilian property and vital infrastructure, as well as agricultural lands and governmental institutions that were damaged or destroyed as a result of military operations in the occupied Palestinian territories, and return them to their original state.
- f. Israel, as the occupying power, to cease its destruction of homes, properties, economic institutions, agricultural lands, and orchards in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.
- g. The Council reaffirmed that the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements and related infrastructure in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan are illegal.
- h. The Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly through the ECOSOC, a report on the implementation of the settlements resolution, and to update the report of the UN Special Rapporteur with any emerging information on the living conditions of the Palestinian people, in collaboration with the UN agencies concerned.

There was clear weakness in the resolutions, especially with regard to condemning the Israeli position and Israel's lack of compliance with previous decisions and appeals. This reflected the weakness of the Arab and Muslim countries, and also the policy of the organization's representatives in drafting statements that would not antagonize the US and that are consistent with the peace settlement.

4. ICC

Between January and April 2015, the PA launched efforts to sign up for the ICC and other international treaties. Ultimately, it signed up for the Rome Statute, becoming the ICC's 123rd member. On 1/1/2015, the UN-affiliated tribunal announced that the Government of Palestine lodged a declaration under article 12(3) of the Rome Statute accepting the jurisdiction of the ICC over alleged crimes committed in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, since

13/6/2014.¹⁷ That period covered the Israeli assault on GS in July 2014, and Israel's wide-scale crackdown in WB following the disappearance of three settlers on 13 June of the same year.

The ICC is a permanent independent judicial body that tries persons accused of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. However, accepting the court's jurisdiction does not automatically trigger an investigation into a complaint filed. The prosecutor at the ICC requires conditions stated in the Rome Statute to initiate an investigation, including the need for the case not to be on the table before other judicial bodies, and a permission from ICC judges.

Although Israel and the US are not ICC members, their citizens may be tried for war crimes. Article VIII of the Rome Statute, which governs the work of the ICC, considers the transfer, deportation, or fining of individuals under occupation illegally to be "war crimes." But the problem that may face the Palestinian party in the ICC is the potential for Israel to request a third party, such as human rights groups, to file complaints against Palestinian parties of committing war crimes, which could invite international pressure against the Palestinians.

The US opposed Palestine's accession to the ICC. The US State Department said at the time that "The United States does not believe that the state of Palestine qualifies as a sovereign state and does not recognize it as such and does not believe that it is eligible to accede to the Rome Statute."¹⁸ The US built on this by threatening to cut off aid from Palestine should the PA continue its quest to prosecute Israel, a position also adopted by Canada. John Baird, then-Canadian Foreign Minister, told the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) his country would suspend humanitarian aid to Palestine if it headed to the ICC to prosecute Israel.¹⁹ This reminds us of the conditions imposed on the PA in return for aid, which had become a restriction on its movements even within international organizations, making efforts in this regard ineffective as the PA needed to take into account the strings attached to aid.

If we add to this the fact that the court lacks the mechanisms to compel Israel to cooperate, we see that the issue will entail extensive deliberation, obstacles, and pressure on the Palestinian side. This means that threatening to resort to the ICC ultimately has little prospect of influencing Israeli policies.

5. UN Human Rights Council (HRC)

On 23/7/2014, HRC issued a resolution calling for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to “urgently dispatch an independent, international commission of inquiry, to be appointed by the President of the Human Rights Council, to investigate all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law” in the 1967 occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, particularly in GS, after clashes broke out there on 13/7/2014. This was “to identify those responsible, to make recommendations,” and to report to the Council at its 28th session, in March 2015.²⁰

The mission, formed in August 2014, comprised William Schabas, from Canada, who resigned from his job in February 2015 after Israeli accusations of “bias”²¹ made against him and the Council; and Mary McGowan Davis, a US judge who served on the commission that investigated human rights violations during the Israeli assault on Gaza in December 2008–January 2009, along with Doudou Diène from Senegal. However, the main obstacle that the committee faced was Israel’s refusal to cooperate and allow its members to enter, according to a statement issued by the mission in December 2014. This prompted the commission to travel to Jordan to interview witnesses. At the end of its mission, the commission issued a report that concluded:²²

- a. The commission expressed concern “about Israel’s extensive use of weapons with a wide kill and injury radius.”
- b. “The indiscriminate firing of thousands of rockets and mortars at Israel appeared to have the intention of spreading terror among civilians there.” “The idea of the tunnels traumatized Israeli civilians who feared they could be attacked at any moment by gunmen bursting out of the ground.”
- c. The commission expressed concern at “what appears to be the increasing use of live ammunition for crowd control by the Israeli Security Forces, which raises the likelihood of death or serious injury.”
- d. “Impunity prevails across the board for violations allegedly committed by Israeli forces,” both in WB and GS.
- e. The Commission of Inquiry is concerned by Israel’s decision to close the criminal investigation into the murder of four children on a beach in GS on 16/7/2014.

- f. The Israeli authorities did not respond to repeated requests by the Commission for information and permission to enter Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The council has adopted a number of resolutions²³ on the affirmation of the responsibility for the achievement of justice and on violations of international law in the occupied Palestinian territories on 3/7/2015 (41 endorsed the resolution and 1 objected). It also adopted a number of resolutions in its session held on 27/3/2015, reaffirming the Palestinians' right to self-determination (supported by 45 and opposed by one) and the illegality of Israeli settlements (43 to one), and criticized the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories (supported by 43 to one). In 2014, the Council adopted three resolutions regarding the same themes it addressed in 2015 (each one had 46 votes in favor and one against).²⁴

Based on the above, it is possible to summarize the activities of the UN and its related bodies, during 2014–2015, with the following:

- a. Affirming Palestinian rights in all UN bodies, with varying support for Palestine between one body and another, especially the extreme weakness of the role of the UN Security Council, because of the US position, which uses the veto or influences the vote by various means to alter legal texts or modify draft resolutions before submission to the Council, undermining Palestinian aspirations.
- b. International support for Israeli policies at the UN is limited and weak, as reflected by the voting trends. The average proportion of votes in favor of Palestine exceeds 75%, compared to 3% for Israel, while the rest are absentees and abstainers.

Third: Major International Powers

1. The United States of America (US)

US policy can be addressed through the following points:

a. The Decline of the Palestinian Issue in the Priorities of American Diplomatic Efforts

We previously referred to the speech of US president Obama in the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, in which he did not make any mention of the

Palestinian issue. This suggests the US is preoccupied with other international issues it considers more urgent. Another benchmark is the number of official visits made by US Secretary of State John Kerry in 2014 and 2015. In this regard, we should take into account the emergence of tensions in US-Israeli relations, with the US government unable to pressure Netanyahu's government, and thus unable to propose new initiatives.

Table 1/5: Official Visits by US Secretary of State 2014–2015

Year	Official meetings abroad	Visits to Arab countries	Visits to Palestine (Ramallah)	Proportion Palestine received from total visits
2014	54	25	3	5.5%
2015	26	7	0	0%

The above table shows the extent of US diplomatic efforts on the Palestinian issue, which is marginal, sometimes occurring only on the sidelines of visits to other states to discuss other issues.

Although the US is committed to its traditional policy on the Palestinian issue, what is particularly striking is the loss of any form of credibility in American pledges. From the promises made by George W. Bush down to Obama's timetables for negotiations and the fulfilment of the two-state solution, no progress was made on any track—although the Palestinian president has met with Kerry 25 times since the latter assumed his post in February 2013. Furthermore, analysis the 2014–2015 statements of the US State Department or its spokesperson, confirms that no change took place in the US position, both at the level of word and or deed.²⁵ In December 2015, some media outlets also quoted the US president saying that “Washington has no tools with which to fight efforts to isolate Israel internationally,” after a failed visit by Kerry to the region.²⁶ The US had become increasingly convinced it was unable to make any progress as long as Netanyahu and his far-right allies were governing Israel.

b. The Political Discourse of the Obama Administration on the Arab-Zionist Conflict

One of the features of this discourse was clear during the Israeli assault on GS in July 2014. At the time, the US adopted its traditional stance of justifying Israeli military actions. During the war, Obama said:

As I've said many times, Israel has a right to defend itself against rocket and tunnel attacks from Hamas. And as a result of its operations, Israel has already done significant damage to Hamas's terrorist infrastructure in Gaza. I've also said, however, that we have serious concerns about the rising number of Palestinian civilian deaths and the loss of Israeli lives. And that is why it now has to be our focus... to bring about a cease-fire... I've instructed him [Kerry] to push for an immediate cessation of hostilities based on a return to the November 2012 cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.²⁷

It is noticeable that Obama's discourse does not go beyond polite criticism of Israeli violations. By contrast, the Obama administration describes the resistance's capture of an Israeli soldier during the war (July 2014) as a "barbaric" action, and the US president said that the "soldier needs to be unconditionally released."²⁸ At the same time, his delegate refused to approve a UN Security Council resolution that would have set a timetable for ending the occupation of Palestine, which is nearly half a century old [1967 lands].

The visit by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to the US to deliver a speech before Congress in March 2015, at the invitation of the Speaker of the US House of Representatives John Boehner (Republican) without any consultation with the US president, drew the ire from President Obama and his administration, increasing tensions between the Israeli and US governments. Netanyahu visited the United States specifically to convince the US Congress to reject the adoption of the Iranian nuclear deal, while the US administration was engaged in the final arrangements for the agreement. This was considered a significant and unprecedented encroachment by Netanyahu in putting pressure on the American presidency.²⁹

Observers have noted that Netanyahu did not succeed in achieving his goal. Many Democratic deputies boycotted his speech or expressed annoyance at his behavior. Netanyahu's popularity, it was said, declined in the US following his speech in Congress. Nevertheless, the US administration continued its usual support for Israeli policies, taking no measures against Netanyahu, who enjoys the backing of the Israeli lobby in the US.³⁰

c. The US Quest to Extend the PA's Security Reach to GS

After 15 days of fighting in GS (July 2014), on 23/7/2014 John Kerry held a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas in Ramallah. The substance

of the US efforts was how to capitalize on Israeli military pressures on GS to extend the PA's powers, particularly its security forces, to GS and the crossings there between GS, Israel, and Egypt.³¹ In September 2014, Kerry returned to Cairo to discuss several issues, including strengthening the ceasefire, which Egypt was able to broker on 26/8/2014 with Arab, French, Turkish, and Qatari support. Kerry pushed the idea of the PA extending its security activities to GS, which was one of the themes revealed by US officials.

The US bid to extend the authority of Ramallah to GS at the expense of resistance movements was reinforced by statements made by US officials in October 2014, including Kerry during his attendance at the Cairo conference on the GS reconstruction. In his speech, Kerry said that “the Palestinian Authority and President Abbas must be empowered in all that we do in order to define and determine Gaza’s future...We can and should see Palestinian Authority customs officials at Gaza’s borders. We can and should help the PA to expand its control in Gaza.” He added that “this is absolutely essential, because as long as there is a possibility that Hamas could fire rockets on Israeli civilians at any time, the people of Gaza will remain at risk of future conflict.”³²

The US bid to strengthen one side at the expense of another in the Palestinian arena can be sensed through the US position on the formation of a “technocratic” national unity government in Palestine. On 4/6/2014, Kerry answered at a press conference:

In answer to the terminology you used in your question, the United States does not recognize a government with respect to Palestine, because that would recognize a state and there is no state. This is not an issue of recognition of a government. This is an issue of whether or not, under the terms of our law, there would be any kind of contact or work with that government in some form or another...President Abbas made clear that this new technocratic government is committed to the principles of nonviolence, negotiations, recognizing the state of Israel, acceptance of the previous agreements and the Quartet principles, and that they will continue their previously agreed upon security cooperation with Israel.

He added that ‘Abbas “has formed an interim technocratic government that does not include any ministers who are affiliated with Hamas,” which the US considers “a terrorist organization.”³³

d. The US Position on Israeli Violations Against *al-Aqsa* Mosque

What was remarkable about the statements of the US Secretary of State regarding *al-Aqsa* Mosque was his commitment to using the dual term “Haram al-Sharif/ Temple Mount,” which suggested the US had begun to deal with the mosque as a “joint property,” which constitutes a change in the interpretation of international resolutions concerning Jerusalem. Kerry said in his statements in November 2014³⁴ that he agreed the parties should not alter the status quo at the “Haram al-Sharif/ Temple Mount” and respect the Jordanian role as custodian of the mosque. The US official also said, after meeting with the PA president in Amman following clashes in Jerusalem over Israeli violations against *al-Aqsa* Mosque, that president ‘Abbas “pledged his full commitment to non-violence, and said he will do all he can to restore calm and prevent incitement to violence.” Kerry’s notion of stopping violence essentially equates to stopping resistance to the occupation.

With the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* in the occupied territories in October 2015, the US issued a statement read by the State Department spokesman,³⁵ condemning in the strongest terms the “terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, which resulted in the murder of three Israelis and left numerous others wounded.” It also stressed “the importance of condemning violence and combating incitement,” urging “all sides to take affirmative steps to restore calm and prevent actions that would further escalate tensions.”

John Kerry arrived in Jordan on 24/10/2015, after meeting with Netanyahu to follow up the developments of the *Intifadah*, meeting with ‘Abbas and the Jordanian king there. Kerry summed up the meeting by saying that all the parties “expressed their strong commitment to ending the violence and restoring the calm as soon as possible,” that the “Haram al-Sharif/ Temple Mount is obviously important to the peoples of all three monotheistic faiths; Jews, Muslims, and Christians,” and that he is “pleased that Prime Minister Netanyahu has reaffirmed Israel’s commitment to upholding the unchanged status quo of the Temple Mount/ Haram al-Sharif both in word and in practice.” Kerry said Netanyahu was keen to emphasize certain points including:³⁶

1. Israel’s respect for “the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as reflected in their 1994 peace treaty.”
2. Israel would “continue to enforce its longstanding policy on religious worship, religious worship at the Temple Mount/ Haram al-Sharif, including the

fundamental fact that it is Muslims who pray on the Temple Mount/ Haram al-Sharif and non-Muslims who visit.”

3. Israel had no intention of dividing the “Haram al-Sharif/ Temple Mount”.
4. Israel “welcomes increased coordination between Israeli authorities and the Jordanian Waqf, including to ensure that visitors and worshippers demonstrate restraint and respect for the sanctity of the area in accordance with their respective responsibilities. In fact, they plan to meet soon to strengthen security arrangements on the Haram al-Sharif/ Temple Mount.”

Kerry welcomed the Jordanian proposal to install cameras at the mosque for 24-hour surveillance, to ensure transparency and to inform all sides of what is taking place there.

Analyzing US rhetoric reveals that US diplomacy was seeking to reinforce the idea of a “special status of East Jerusalem” and the special status of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in a way that detached them from the status of the 1967 occupied territories. Likewise, the PA appeared to be dealing with *al-Aqsa* Mosque on the basis that it was an “annex” rather than part of the occupied Palestinian territories. This change in the US position was not met with Palestinian, Arab and Islamic indignation for identifying with the Zionist plans for the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and for contradicting previous US policies. The Obama administration, despite strained relations with Netanyahu, has made many concessions on the Palestinian issue and adopted the Zionist narrative, beyond that of previous US administrations in this regard, and the “Haram al-Sharif/ Temple Mount” is part of this narrative.

e. The Political Objectives of US Aid to Palestine

A study submitted by the US Congress about US aid to the Palestinians suggested “how aid, either alone or in concert with other policies, has influenced”:³⁷

1. Overall Israeli-Palestinian relations;
2. Approaches to preventing or mitigating “terrorism” patterns and threats;
3. The preparation of Palestinians for self-reliance in security, political, and economic matters;
4. The promotion of regional stability; and
5. The addressing of humanitarian needs.

From the Palestinian point of view, American aid is used to influence the Palestinian political decision making process, striking the resistance and trying to prevent the escalation of the uprising, blocking Palestinians from going to international organizations and supporting the security forces and security coordination.

The value of US aid to the PA in 2014 and 2015 was around \$801 million, comprising \$440 million in 2014 and \$361 million in 2015.³⁸ During the World Economic Forum in Jordan, Kerry referenced a group of business experts who studied the Palestinian economy, and who concluded that unemployment could be reduced from 21% to 8% within three years by focusing on investment and private sector development.³⁹

The political objectives of the aid become clear when we see how the US conditioned aid provision on the specifications of the national government to be formed after the Hamas-Fatah agreement in April 2014. US institutions placed conditions for the continuation of the aid that included:⁴⁰

1. Ensuring that aid in part or in whole does not go to Hamas or any other party that engages in “terrorism.”
2. That aid to the Palestinians stops in the event they obtain full membership of the UN or any of its specialized agencies (with the exception of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO) unless as a result of an agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.
3. Cutting off assistance for the PA if “the Palestinians initiate an International Criminal Court judicially authorized investigation, or actively support such an investigation, that subjects Israeli nationals to an investigation for alleged crimes against Palestinians.”
4. Ensuring that no aid is permitted for PA personnel located in GS (although the PA pays the salaries of civil servants in GS).
5. No aid is permitted for the PLO or the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation.
6. No funds may be provided to support a future Palestinian state unless the Secretary of State certifies that the governing entity of the state:
 - a. has demonstrated a firm commitment to peaceful coexistence with Israel.
 - b. is taking appropriate measures to counter “terrorism” and “terrorist financing” in WB and GS in cooperation with Israel and others.

- c. is working with other countries in the region to “vigorously pursue efforts to establish a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East that will enable Israel and an independent Palestinian state to exist within the context of full and normal relationship.”

f. US Voting Record at the UN

If we assume that the UN General Assembly is the closest to reflecting international trends among other UN institutions because of its broad membership, an American study submitted to Congress on voting trends at the UN General Assembly during the 69th session in 2014 indicates the coincidence rate with the United States on anti-Israel votes was 3.9%. The irony is that the congruence even with major European powers is very low on the Arab-Israeli conflict. For example, the coincidence rate with France, Germany, or Britain did not exceed 7.7% (by contrast, the coincidence rate with Australia was 63.6%, and 100% with Canada).⁴¹

2. The European Union (EU)

European studies are in agreement over a number of shortcomings in modern European policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict:⁴²

- a. The extent of European influence on the parties to the conflict is minimal compared to US influence.
- b. The European political role is not commensurate with the fact that the EU and its member states together have long been by far the largest donors to the PA.
- c. The internal differences in the orientations of the main European powers (Germany, France, Britain) make the ability for adopting a comprehensive unified strategy less likely. It seems this has made the European role go from trying to settle the conflict to managing the crisis by keeping alive negotiations for negotiations' sake. One example of these internal differences is a decision by the EU Court on 17/12/2014 to annul the decision to keep Hamas on a list of “terrorist groups.” This prompted the EU to appeal the decision in January 2015, criticizing the foundations adopted by the court to make its decision.⁴³
- d. European aid to the PA with the goal of supporting the institutions of the promised state did not bear fruit, amid European reports indicating corruption, excessive bureaucracy, and a lack of performance indicators.⁴⁴

The strategy adopted by the EU as part of the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) in 2006 and renewed in March 2014, in the wake of unrest in the Arab countries, determines the features of Europe's new policy vis-à-vis the European neighborhood (which includes 16 Arab Mediterranean countries, the Palestinian territories included, and former Soviet republics). This policy is based on Article 8 of the EU Treaty. The objectives of the EU focus on progressive economic integration, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, promoting people-to-people contacts, promoting capacity-building in science, education, and technology, ... and enhancing sub-regional, regional and European Neighborhood-wide collaboration as well as cross-border cooperation.⁴⁵

It is notable that these fields covered by the neighborhood policy restrict the concept of security to dimensions that do not include the occupation. This observation was made by the European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), Johannes Hahn, who said that “‘First, we need to stabilize the neighborhood more effectively,’ with a greater focus on security issues, but recognizing that the causes of instability often lie outside the ‘classic’ security domain.”⁴⁶

Therefore, we can identify the general features of European policy during the years 2014–2015 as follows:

- a. Seeking to revive the role of the Quartet and the Arab League by re-floating the Arab Peace Initiative. This was the desire expressed by Fernando Gentilini, the EU's new Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process.⁴⁷ The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini visited Israel and WB in May 2015 to meet with officials from the two countries, after what appeared to be Netanyahu's shirking of his commitment to the two-state solution, announced during the Israeli election campaign in 2015.
- b. The constancy of the traditional European position, as evident in the statement of the European Council on 20/7/2015 reaffirming European positions stated in a previous communique by the council on 31/8/2014, including the following:⁴⁸
 1. Two states living in peace, side by side, with the warning that some practices affect the possibility of the implementation of this solution.
 2. Giving the grave humanitarian situation in GS priority and expressing concern over UNRWA's severe lack of funds.

3. Welcoming steps taken by Israel to ease restrictions in GS, and criticizing the launching of rockets from GS against Israel.
4. Allowing the socio-economic development of WB including East Jerusalem.
5. Emphasizing the illegality of settlements, the EU opposition to the Separation Wall, the demolition and confiscation of property, and stating that Israeli measures in Jerusalem jeopardize the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both states.
6. Commitment to ensuring that all agreements between Israel and the EU must unequivocally and explicitly indicate their inapplicability to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967.
7. Reiterating the council's call for the establishment of an international and regional support group to support peace efforts, as set out in the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of July 2014.

Regarding the Israeli aggression on GS in July 2014, the European Council issued a statement that included:⁴⁹

- a. A call on the parties to halt fighting and return to the ceasefire agreement of November 2012, commending Egyptian efforts to arrange the cease-fire.
- b. Condemning the firing of rockets by Hamas and others against Israeli population centers “indiscriminately,” deeming these actions “criminal and unjustifiable.”
- c. Disarmament of all “terrorist” groups and demanding a stop to the use of civilians as “human shields.”
- d. While the council recognized Israel's right to defend itself, it said Israel must use proportionate force in line with international humanitarian law.
- e. The need to take into account the economic and social needs of the residents of the Gaza Strip.
- f. Condemnation of the abduction and brutal murder of teenagers from both sides.
- g. The events in Gaza were deemed to be threatening to the security of the EU and its immediate neighbors.
- h. Calling for the implementation of international resolutions related to the conflict in the Middle East.

As for the executive dimension of the European policy of achieving progress in the peace process, this started emerging in the political sphere with European

parliamentary recognitions of the Palestinian state. Until 2015, the number of countries that recognized Palestine was 136 out of 193 at the UN, including 96 that had recognized Palestine before the Oslo Accords. For their part, European countries started symbolically recognizing Palestine in their parliaments, most recently Greece in December 2015. The number of European nations whose parliaments recognize Palestine rose to nine.⁵⁰

In July 2015, the European Council prolonged the EU police mission headed by Rodolphe Mauget to 30/6/2016. The mission had started its work in 2006 to support efforts for building the institutions of a Palestinian state, and a budget of €9.175 million (about \$10.097 million) was allocated for the purpose. The Council also extended the mandate of the EU border assistance mission for the Rafah crossing point (EU BAM Rafah) until 30/6/2016.⁵¹

The EU continued to consult with the PA regarding human rights, women's issues, law enforcement, and the issue of executions in GS, especially after the Palestinian president signed up to 20 international human rights agreements in 2014. In January 2014, the PA signed the Guidance on Human Rights Integration into National Development Plans.⁵²

The European position on the Jerusalem *Intifadah* was expressed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, who in a statement on 28/10/2015 called on Palestinian and Israeli leaders to contain the violence harming civilians (in reference to the *Intifadah*). Federica Mogherini attributed the violence to the lack of "a political horizon," saying it was undesirable for the old conflict to mix with new conflicts in neighboring countries (in reference to the Arab Spring). She also pointed to her invitation for other parties to participate in the meetings of the Quartet, such as Egypt (given its ties to Gaza) and Jordan (given its ties to the Holy sites) and KSA (linked to the Arab Peace Initiative).⁵³

The EU also condemned the burning of Palestinian toddler Ali Dawabsha, at the end of July 2015, calling for an investigation and the need for Israel to take measures to protect Palestinian civilians.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the British government through Under Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Tobias Ellwood stated that since 26/8/2014 (the date of the ceasefire agreement) and up until 4/9/2015, Israeli forces had violated the cease-fire in GS on at least 696 occasions.⁵⁵

Regarding EU funding in 2014, this included: the provision of €309.5 million (\$334.8 million) to the PA, where the indicative financial bilateral allocation under the ENI for the period 2014–2015 would be in the range of €508–€621 million (\$549.53–\$671.76 million).⁵⁶ The UNRWA and the EU signed a joint declaration for 2014–2016 that foresaw a core EU contribution during these years of some €246 million (\$266.11 million).⁵⁷

Concerning trade, the European Commission adopted a decision in November 2015 to label goods produced in Israeli settlements in the WB, East Jerusalem, and the occupied Golan Heights. The decision affected 146 trademarks. Netanyahu responded by labeling the decision “hypocritical and a double standard.” The EU said the labelling was meant to identify the point of origin of products produced in settlements and did not entail sanctions or boycotting of Israel. This circumvents a European parliament resolution in September 2015 that advocated a distinction between Israel and its WB settlements, and the labeling of settlement produce, which received 525 votes in support and 70 against. Although the resolution has political value, its economic value is slight. Indeed, the value of products affected by the European decision does not exceed \$50 million according to Israeli estimates, of \$250 million worth of goods produced in settlements. It becomes even less important when compared to \$30 billion in annual trade between Israel and the EU.⁵⁸

It is important to pause at the vision proposed by a number of prominent European figures on 11/5/2015, when 19 of The European Eminent Persons Group on Middle East issues, who served previously in senior political posts, issued a statement addressed to officials in the EU. They reaffirmed what they previously called for in an April 2014 statement, including the following themes:⁵⁹

- a. Urgent action by the European Union to resolve the Palestinian issue, after the re-election of Netanyahu in March 2015.
- b. The failure of the Palestinians to form a national unity government and the continuation of Israeli settlement activities were an indicator that the Madrid-Oslo process was effectively defunct.
- c. Netanyahu had little intention of negotiating seriously for a two-state solution within the term of this incoming Israeli government. And low confidence that the US Government would be in a position to take a lead on fresh negotiations with the vigor and the impartiality that a two state outcome demands.

- d. That the Palestinian issue had received less attention than other issues in a very disturbed region, but conditions in the Occupied Territories remained high on the list of the world's worst crises not just in terms of political flammability, but also the denial of international justice, human rights and humanitarian standards. Israel's long-term security would be severely compromised by the current trend of events, as well as its international reputation. The continued illegal expansion of settlements in area and population only reinforce this trend.
- e. "It is time for the European Council of Ministers to construct a policy on Israel-Palestine that both reflects the nature of the threat to European interests of a totally collapsed peace process and meets the EU's responsibility to take a comprehensive, independent and effective position on this primary foreign and security policy issue."
- f. "It has been a serious flaw in previous attempts at negotiations for a comprehensive settlement that the Israeli and Palestinian parties have been so unequal in international status. This was never addressed with any objectivity by American negotiating teams."
- g. Criticism of the financial and political assistance given by the US and Europe to the PA, and Israel's control of key aspects of this income.
- h. Pointed out how seriously European public opinion takes Israel's contraventions of international law, the perpetration of atrocities and the denial of established rights.
- i. Called on the UN Security Council to adopt positions that help to modify the imbalance in the international positioning of the negotiators, through the recognition of the Palestinian government, and the setting of a deadline for the negotiation of a two-state solution.
- j. "Europe should engage with the Palestinians on responsible use of the ICC, recognizing that its powers will be applicable to Palestinian just as much as to Israeli actions. Indeed, the existence of the ICC could be a primary channel for constraining abuses of human rights and war crimes on both sides in future."
- k. The group identified a number of factors that weakened the European role on the Palestinian issue, including:

1. The lack of consensus among European countries.
2. European “focus on newer and apparently more urgent Middle East crises.”
3. European “reluctance to get out in front of the United States in an area where Washington has always insisted on prime ownership.”

The group called for adopting the Arab peace initiative as one of the pillars of a new EU approach, following the failure of the two-decade-old US policy. The group proposed the elements of European policy as follows:

- a. The development of relations between the EU and the parties to the conflict would depend on their attitude to progress towards a two-state solution.
- b. The EU supports a UN Security Council resolution “that either i) calls for new negotiations and sets a mandatory deadline for the completion of an agreement to establish a two-state solution; or ii) creates a greater equivalence between the Israeli and Palestinian parties, including through recognition of a Palestinian state and strong support for Palestine accession to international treaties and organizations.”
- c. “The preparation of a new approach to comprehensive negotiations for a settlement that would accompany recognition of the equality of the parties. This would be fully discussed with the United States, but with a view to it being taken forward by the EU alone if the US proved unable to support it.”
- d. Calling on Hamas to pursue a peaceful approach to resolving the conflict.
- e. A much stronger insistence, backed up by implementable actions to promote accountability, on violation of human rights by both sides.
- f. Pushing for an end to settlement expansion, and including existing ones in final-status negotiations.
- g. Ensuring full and equal rights for all citizens within Israel regardless of their ethnic background (a reference to the Palestinians in the lands occupied in 1948 and Bedouins in the Negev).
- h. Emphasizing the contents of the letter sent to the High Representative of the Union by EU Foreign Ministers on 13/4/2015, regarding taking tougher measures to contain settlement expansion and steps to operationalize the EU’s policy of non-recognition of Israeli sovereignty beyond the 1967 borders across the full range of EU-Israeli relations.

- i. Linking European funding to the Palestinians to commitment to “international norms.”
- j. Supporting civil society efforts to meet the needs of the occupied territories.

Key European Countries

a. UK

The election of the leftist Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the opposition Labour Party in Britain was a positive development for the Palestinian issue. That is, compared with former Labour leaders, this politician takes fairer positions. This matter was regarded negatively by Israeli politicians, as Corbyn was considered “empathetic” to Hamas and Hizbullah.⁶⁰

The second development in the British position was the voting of the British parliament in October 2014 in favor of a motion (symbolic but that could have international implications) that recognized the state of Palestine. The motion was put forward by a Labour MP, and received a vote of 274 to 12, which was considered an evolved position in comparison with previous British positions. However, the Conservative government led by David Cameron abided by its stand. Moreover, Cameron did not participate in the voting and called upon his MPs to do the same.⁶¹ It was also noted that less than half of MPs took part in the vote.

The stance of the UK parliament eventually contributed to persuading the EU Parliament (in December 2014) to vote on a resolution that supports “in principle recognition of Palestinian statehood.” The resolution was passed by Parliament as a whole, by 498 votes to 88, with 111 abstentions.⁶²

b. France

The French Parliament vote in December 2014 in favor of recognizing the Palestinian state (339 to 151) was a significant political development. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said, “The Parliament has the powers to decide, and it will do so, but under our Constitution, the executive—and only the executive—is judge of the political expediency,” which is in line with the positions of the Socialist Party on the Arab-Israeli conflict. He added:

Alone, or with the United States’ assistance, both parties always managed to negotiate successfully, however, they failed to come to an agreement... Therefore, we need to re-evaluate this method. We need to engage with both

parties. Some suggest pressure from the international community will help the two sides reach the indispensable final consensus...

He then called for an international conference and for setting a two-year time frame for reaching a settlement.⁶³

The French socialist party has long been the closest to Israel on the French political scene. The statements made by French President Francois Hollande during the Israeli aggression on GS in July 2014 confirmed this point. He expressed his full support of “Israel’s right to defend itself,” confirming his solidarity with Israel.⁶⁴

c. Germany

German Chancellor Angela Merkel rushed to call Netanyahu at the beginning of the Israeli aggression on GS and “condemned without reservation rocket fire on Israel,” considering it an unjustified action.⁶⁵ On the other hand, Germany is one of the largest donors to Palestine among European countries, where its contribution constitutes 20% of the overall European contribution. In 2014, €215 million (\$241.47 million) was donated, with €61 million (\$68.51 million) allocated for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction measures in GS.⁶⁶ This reinforces the description provided by the group of European figures we mentioned earlier regarding European policy.

General Summary of US and European Stances

American and European politicians consider the occupation of the WB and GS and the settlement construction to be illegal. They adopt what they call the two-state solution. But they condition this upon negotiations, without much focus on the necessary practical implementation. They also use financial aid to pressure the PA, insisting on security coordination for the sake of paralyzing any Palestinian resistance that deviates away from the negotiations approach. That is in addition to the staunch opposition to any form of armed or violent resistance.

They insist on this policy despite the fact that 23 years have passed since the Oslo Accords, US-sponsored negotiations, Quartet efforts and bilateral negotiations began. In this context, negotiations are futile and that the two-state solution cannot be reached, especially in light of the increasing racist activities of Israel, along with settlement construction and the Judaization policy. Therefore, US and European stances regarding the illegality of the occupation and the settlements

only serve to provide further political cover for the policies adopted by successive Israeli governments, including Netanyahu's government in 2014 and 2015. In brief, US and EU policies during 2014 and 2015 have effectively contributed to the continuation of the occupation and settlement construction.

3. BRICS Countries

Despite the fact that this international group (Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa) issued political statements during 2014–2015, specifying its stance on the Israeli-Arab conflict, the political distance between these countries and Israel or the Palestinian forces does not match the sentiment in the statements.

The statements of the BRICS Summit in July 2014 and July 2015 included the traditional positions towards the Palestinian issue, such as the importance of settling the Arab-Israeli conflict using international references and the Arab Initiative, in addition to the idea that resolving the conflict will contribute to the settling of other conflicts in the region. Therefore, the BRICS countries called for the resumption of “negotiations leading to a two-state solution with a contiguous and viable Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with Israel within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders based on 1967 lines with East Jerusalem as its capital.”

Following the commendation of the Quartet efforts, the statements confirmed the following:⁶⁷

- a. Opposition to ongoing Israeli settlement construction because it threatens the concept of the two-state solution and violates international law.
- b. Encouragement of all initiatives aimed at achieving intra-Palestinian unity and urging different Palestinian parties to fulfil international pledges made by Palestine.
- c. A call on donor countries that participated in “the 2014 International Donors Conference on Reconstruction of Gaza Strip in Cairo to fulfill their pledges,” and a call on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides to take necessary measures “for channeling international aid to the people of Palestine.”
- d. A call on the international community to further support UNRWA and welcome the accession of Brazil to UNRWA's Advisory Commission.

e. Reassurance of the necessity of holding a summit in which all Middle Eastern countries participate, aimed at ensuring the early establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction.⁶⁸

a. The Russian Federation

Perhaps what the Russian geo-strategic thinker Aleksandr Dugin said in his debate with Olavo de Carvalho “The USA and the New World Order” is an important reference for understanding the Russian strategic approach. It is especially relevant since most researchers admit that Dugin has a deep intellectual influence on President Vladimir Putin with his geo-political theory of Eurasianism which is based on three levels: multipolarity in international relations, the regional convergence of Western Asian countries, particularly former soviet republics, and the local level via the merging of the liberal and nationalistic character in the relationship between the state and the community.⁶⁹

The coordination between China and Russia in the Security Council regarding the Syrian crisis is a manifestation of the first level, while the coordination with Iran is a manifestation of the second level. That is, Dugin sees that the ideal manner in which to deal with the conflict of the strategic interests of Russia and Iran is to create a strategic alliance between the two countries. Further, the regime structure in the two countries (which is besides our subject here) is a manifestation of the third level. And as for his vision of Western Asia that extends to the Mediterranean shores, Dugin sees Israel as nothing more than a tool for the US. As a manifestation of this strategic perspective, Russia has interacted with the developments in the Palestinian matter in the following manner:

1. Considered the failure to resolve the Palestinian issue a major source of extremism in the region: that is, through the statements and discussions of the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, it is clear that Russian officials believe there is a strong connection between the Palestinian issue and extremism. Lavrov believes that extremist organizations take advantage of the fact that the Palestinian issue has not been resolved to recruit new members.⁷⁰ He says that not reaching a settlement “for almost 70 years is one of the major arguments for those who recruit extremists into their ranks.” The Russians believe that extremism has its influence on internal

Russian matters reflected in the Chechen issue among others. This conviction was the motivation for the direct Russian intervention in Syria on the side of the regime.

2. The Russians considered that the creation of a national unified Palestinian government a necessary condition for achieving political results that contribute to reaching Palestinian aspirations. On 10/10/2014, the Russian government expressed its support for forming a national Palestinian government, considering it “an important event and a necessary step on the way of ensuring the cohesion of actions of Palestinian state bodies in the territory of the West bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip.” It also considers that “without the consolidation of Palestinians on the platform of the UN and the Arab Peace Initiative it is impossible to achieve the implementation of legal expectations of the Palestinian people.” The Russian government “will actively interact with the Palestinian national unity government in the interests of development and reinforcement of traditionally friendly Russian-Palestinian relations in different areas.”⁷¹

3. The Russians believe that marginalizing the Palestinian issue in favor of new causes is an American policy, a position that was explicitly stated by Lavrov as mentioned above.

In the field of executive politics, the Russians held several meetings with Palestinian officials at which they confirmed Russian support for the two-state solution. This was also confirmed in the trilateral statement issued by the Russian, Chinese and Indian foreign ministers in Beijing in February 2015. The statement called for the same stands adopted by the BRICS, mentioning that East Jerusalem will be considered the capital of the suggested Palestinian state.⁷²

President Putin confirmed this stand once again in a letter he sent to the Arab League Summit on 28/3/2015. That statement was included in the discussions between the Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat and Lavrov in Moscow in December 2014. They discussed the attempts to resume the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and the impact of the tensions in the region on the Palestinian issue.⁷³

During the meeting between Lavrov and Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas in the 69th session of the UN General Assembly, Russia stressed the necessity of respecting the ceasefire by both the Palestinian and Israeli sides which was reached in GS on 26/8/2014.

4. Russian policies seem to be close to the European approach discussed earlier including the necessity to increase the number of participants in the Quartet committee. Russia proposed some suggestions in this regard, seemingly an attempt to balance out the US role in this committee.⁷⁴

b. People's Republic of China

Some researchers believe⁷⁵ that the State Council (the highest executive branch in China) have issued White Papers on the country's foreign policy regarding a large number of issues, not including the Middle East. This motivated some people to say that China works within "general values" in its Middle Eastern policies that fall short of being a clear strategy. Chinese officials deal with the Middle East via two departments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The Department of West Asian and North African Affairs, and the Department of European-Central Asian Affairs.

Despite the fact that China is not a member in the Quartet committee for the Middle East, it has appointed a special envoy in the region ever since the committee started its work. Wang Shijie was appointed as envoy from 2002 to 2006, followed by Sun Bigan who was envoy till 2009. Wu Sike has been the envoy since 2009 until the time of the writing of this report.

Wu Sike held a series of meetings with Palestinian officials; meeting President 'Abbas in 2014, and meeting a number of Palestinian officials and journalists in July 2014.⁷⁶

In May 2013, the Chinese president Xi Jinping presented an initiative, then Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi repeated the initiative again in August 2014, adding one point to it related to the call to stop the fighting in GS that had erupted in July. Below are the other points:⁷⁷

1. An independent and sovereign Palestinian state to be established within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and "Israel's right to exist and its legitimate security concerns should also be fully respected."
2. Negotiation is "the only way to peace." "The two sides should... show mutual understanding and accommodation, and meet each other half way. The immediate priority is to take credible steps to stop settlement activities, end violence against innocent civilians, lift the GS blockade and properly handle the issue of Palestinian prisoners, in addition to the necessity of comprehensive internal reconciliation."

3. Working on the land-for-peace basis, in reference to international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.
4. The international community should “increase assistance to Palestine in such fields as human resources training and economic development.”
5. Ceasing construction of settlements, which was a point that the Chinese Foreign Ministry repeated in a statement issued in June 2015.

China sought to adopt a policy that reconciled the Palestinians’ right to an independent state and evolving its relationship with Israel. This is evident via the following indicators:

China participated in the Second Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD II), held in Jakarta in March 2014. Many countries and international organizations participated in the conference such as the World Bank, the UNRWA and the Islamic Development Bank, etc. The conference statement called for the following:⁷⁸

1. Supporting the building of a Palestinian state on the 1967 territories, including capacity development and reinvigorating the business environment towards the realization of the two-state solution based on the relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.
2. Affirming the importance of supporting the Palestinian private sector, and enabling it to benefit from the economic developmental expertise of East Asian countries, and to donate financial aid that includes support for the refugees.
3. Participating with the national Palestinian Authority in its effort to provide the Palestinian people with all services, and to support the process of building the Palestinian state seeing as that is a major step to finding a suitable atmosphere for achieving peace.

However, the Chinese stand from the Israeli aggression on GS in July 2014 was quite diplomatic towards both parties. The Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei said:

We believe that to resort to force and to counter violence with violence will not help resolve problems other than pile up more hatred. We urge relevant parties to bear in mind the broader picture of peace and the lives of the people, immediately realize a ceasefire, stick to the strategic choice of peace talks and strive for an early resumption of talks.⁷⁹

Meanwhile, the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) represents an economic and political step in the management of its international relations. Israel rushed to join that bank in April of 2015.⁸⁰ If we relate the nature of this bank with the literature published on Israeli-Chinese cooperation in the field of railroads in Israel—infrastructure—we can identify the evolution of the relationship between the two countries. That is, a report was published in July of 2012 in the *Winnipeg Review* stating that a discussion was held between China and Israel for building a railroad that connects the Port of Eilat to the Ashdod and Haifa ports. This would allow ships to anchor in port of Eilat and of transporting goods directly via the railroads to the Ashdod and Haifa ports.

The distance between the two locations is 180 kilometers. Then the goods would be transported from there to Europe, which would mean avoiding the Suez Canal by reducing the time needed and decreasing the cost of transport and transit fees. Moreover, Chinese companies submitted competitive bids for the development and construction of new deep-water private ports in Haifa and Ashdod.⁸¹ Delegations from the Chinese companies visited Israel in mid-2015 for the sake of developing the relationship between the two sides in this regard.⁸²

The commercial ties between Israel and China developed to more than \$11 billion during 2014, a significant increase from \$50 million when their diplomatic relationship was established in 1992. Added to that, Chinese investments in Israel tripled between 2012 and 2015.⁸³

c. India

The win of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Narendra Modi in the Indian elections and the appointment of Modi as Prime Minister of India in May 2014 was an important detour in favor of Israeli-Indian relations against the traditional politics that are closer to the Palestinian stand which were adopted by the Indian National Congress party. This party never established a diplomatic relationship with Israel except in 1992, despite the fact that India recognized Israel in 1950.

BJP calls for abandoning the Non-alignment policy and for increasing cooperation with the US. It has also been accused of murdering Muslims in the Indian provinces in 2002, particularly in the province that was headed by Modi. That is why he only received 8% of Indian Muslim votes.⁸⁴ The changes in Indian politics are apparent in the following aspects:

1. The first meeting between India and Israel was held in October 2014; the first in a decade. Researchers explain this change from the Congress Party policies to the BJP policies with ideological and religious motivations, as well as the animosity towards what is called “Muslim Terrorism.” It was also considered a token of appreciation for Israel for its support of India in 1999 against Pakistan.

2. An agreement was made for India to purchase Israeli weapons worth \$662 million during the middle of the first year of Janata’s rule, exceeding the amount of Indian purchases during the previous three years.

3. The Indian government refused to pass a resolution to condemn the Israeli aggression on GS in July of 2014. Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj justified this matter by saying that “we fully support the Palestinian cause while maintaining good relations with Israel.” Also, the government supported the Egyptian ceasefire offer. This caused an eruption of protests against her in India (27/7/2014).⁸⁵

4. In July 2015, India withheld its vote on a resolution by the Human Rights Committee for forming a committee to investigate Israeli crimes during the 2014 GS war. It justified this decision by pointing out that the report called for Israel to appear in front of the ICC, which India considered an “intrusive” action.⁸⁶ Indian researchers had previously expressed that India was most likely going to withhold its vote in the UN concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict. This pushed the Palestinian ambassador in India to express his “shock,” relating the Indian stand to growing cooperative military relations between India and Israel.⁸⁷

As for the Palestinian-Indian relations, they have deteriorated since BJP’s win. With the exception of Nabil Sha’th’s visit, as representative of the Palestinian president, to India in November 2014, the official Indian diplomatic activity to Palestine included the last visit of the Minister of State for External Affairs Shri E. Ahamed, in 2013. Moreover, during the Cairo Conference for donor countries, India pledged to donate \$4 million⁸⁸ and to build a vocational training center for Palestinians.

BJP policies towards Palestine were opposed by some Indian authorities and intellectuals such as the “From India to Palestine” group. This is a group that includes Indian intellectuals who publish articles and hold sessions for supporting

Palestine, explaining what Palestinians go through. They started working in 2010, and during 2015 moved towards encouraging an Indian Boycott of Israel.⁸⁹

Finally, it is hard to identify the differences between the official positions of the BRICS countries (especially Russia, China, and India) and those of European countries especially regarding the main issues such as the position of the PA, the two-state solution or the peace process. The Israeli government has confronted these stands by developing relations on the economic, military and technological levels. That is, the relations of Russia, China and India with Israel evolved greatly, after being characterized with aversion and indifference prior to Oslo Accords. Therefore, the Palestinian issue lost a lot in regards to the relations between these countries and Israel. And that is why it is incorrect to consider the recognition of the Palestinian State is a criterion of evolution in international stands, or lack thereof.

d. Japan

All the data of the Japanese government relating to Japan's role in the Israeli-Arab conflict point to the fact that the Japanese Corridor for Peace and Prosperity Initiative (a project for developing the area of Jericho and Jordan Valley, a cooperation between Japan, Palestine, Jordan and Israel) is the mainstay of Japanese politics in this regard. Within the scope of the initiative, in September 2015, 21 tenants signed an agreement to run the industrial zone. Indeed, the factories were set up for operation.

Japan had participated in CEAPAD II in March 2014 in Jakarta, which focused on the development of Palestinian human resources. In 2014, the Japanese government donated \$45 million to UNRWA, in addition to donating \$12 million to United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF). It donated \$52.5 million via various UN agencies as emergency donations for the GS in March 2014. It also donated \$10 million to the PA in 2014, towards economic and social development goals.⁹⁰

The most significant Japanese positions during 2014 and 2015 are the following:⁹¹

1. Condemnation of the kidnaping and killing of the three Israeli "students" in June 2014 and calling on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides to cooperate.

2. Condemnation of rocket shooting from GS to Israel and expressing deep concern over Israeli airstrikes that cause many civilian casualties (July 2014).
3. The Japanese government expressed its deep regret regarding the Israeli strikes on the UN schools which were being used as shelters for civilians, which resulted in civilian casualties (July 2014).
4. The Japanese government expressed its regret regarding the Israeli government decision to confiscate lands in WB and to build settlements in eastern Jerusalem (September and November 2014).
5. The Japanese government expressed regret concerning the clashes in *al-Aqsa* Mosque in November 2014, and condemning the killing of a number of members in one of the synagogues in western Jerusalem (November 2014).
6. In 2015, the Japanese government was occupied with the repercussions of the kidnapping and murder of a Japanese hostage by ISIS. This motivated Japan to allocate \$200 million to fighting “terrorism.”
7. Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe in January 2015, and the Japanese official confirmed the commencement of the “Corridor for Tourism,” part of the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” that Japan advocates.

A Japanese study shows⁹² that Japan realized the importance of reinforcing its political independence from the US especially in regards to the Middle East. This entails eventually activating Japanese diplomacy more broadly in the region for the below reasons:

1. Japanese awareness of the gradual decline of western influence globally.
2. Increasing competitiveness from East Asian importers of energy to Japan.
3. The limited “hard power” (military power) of Japan which calls for additional concentration on soft power in international relations, especially via the UN.

Fourth: International Public Opinion

An international opinion poll indicated that Israel continued to be one of the most negatively viewed nations in the world. Most countries surveyed, viewed Israel negatively including western countries. Below is the table:⁹³

Table 2/5: Views of Israel's Influence by Country 2013–2014 (%)

Country	2013		2014	
	Significantly positive	Significantly negative	Significantly positive	Significantly negative
US	51	32	52	36
Canada	25	57	30	55
Brazil	15	58	21	58
Peru	16	40	19	41
Mexico	13	53	13	45
Argentina	–	–	12	35
France	21	63	21	64
UK	14	72	19	72
Spain	4	70	14	61
Germany	8	67	11	67
Russia	23	32	28	23
Turkey	8	81	17	44
Ghana	44	32	54	27
Kenya	42	15	47	27
Nigeria	35	38	33	48
South Korea	23	56	29	50
Australia	16	69	24	67
India	16	26	22	34
Pakistan	12	65	16	60
China	32	33	13	49
Indonesia	12	70	7	75
Japan	3	54	4	50
Poland	15	44	–	–
Greece	15	46	–	–
Chile	29	41	–	–
Egypt	1	96	–	–
Global average	20	52	23	49

The most unfavorable views towards Israel are found among European countries, as opposed to the positive viewpoint of African countries in comparison with other regions of the world.

During his lecture on 23/4/2015, the former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) David Petraeus warned that Israel is facing a strategic threat in the form of the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) Campaign.⁹⁴

This is a campaign initiated by Palestinians in 2005. Then civil organizations, universities and international organizations joined in. In March 2014, the National University of Ireland, Galway joined. In 2014, US Presbyterians church and the Dutch pension fund PGGM joined, in addition to the Danish Danske Bank that boycotted the Israeli Bank Hapoalim because of its violations of international humanitarian law, and the Sodastream company for soda drinks that closed its factory in the WB (2015). In October 2014, around 500 academics joined; they have written to the EU's head of Foreign Policy, urging the EU not to water down its new guidelines preventing EU funding from being awarded to Israeli projects and entities in WB, including East Jerusalem.

In that same month, 500 anthropologists signed a call for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. Spain joined the boycott campaigns when it froze arms and military technology exports to Israel. Also, some British ministers called upon their government to halt arms export to Israel, until the achievement of peace in the Middle East. And in the art field, Norwegian musician Pål Moddi Knutsen cancelled his music concert in Tel Aviv in January 2014. American author Grace Lee Boggs and American actor Danny Glover, along with dozens of other actors, joined the boycott movement. In February 2015, 700 English artists announced their cultural boycott of Israel.⁹⁵ A number of universities and American academics gradually joined the campaign.⁹⁶

Amnesty International

Amnesty International is one of the major international non-governmental organizations in the field of monitoring international performance. Following the Israeli aggression on GS in July/ August 2014, the organization issued a report, that stated the following:⁹⁷

1. Israeli forces committed war crimes and violations of human rights during the 50-day military attack on GS.
2. The Israeli attack caused mass emigration and destruction of properties and critical facilities.

3. Israel imposed a land, sea and air blockade on around 1.8 million people.
4. Israel committed illegal murdering of captives in WB, including children.
5. Israeli forces imposed enforced restrictions on the free movement of people.
6. Israel detained thousands of Palestinians and tortured some of them. Around 500 of those were put under administrative detention with no trial.
7. Israel continued to encourage the construction of settlements and to allow settlers to attack the Palestinians and to destroy their belongings.
8. Israel destroyed the homes of Palestinian Bedouins in Negev and evicted them.
9. Some Israelis who object to Israel's policy in the 1967 occupied territories were arrested.
10. Some armed Palestinian groups launched rockets on Israeli civilian regions.

The organization issued a report on the Israeli reaction to the ignition of the Palestinian *Intifadah* in October 2015. It noted the following:⁹⁸

1. Israeli forces illegally and unjustifiably killed a number of Palestinians.
2. Israeli forces intentionally killed four Palestinians, even though they did not pose any threat to those forces.
3. Israeli forces let a Palestinian bleed without offering him any medical help.
4. Israeli forces shoot with the excuse that the wounded was planning to stab Israelis, while in reality they shoot without any indications that the person is planning to stab anyone.

Fifth: Prospects for 2016

Extrapolating the data on the international behavior vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue to 2016 allows us to make the following projections:

1. The US Presidential Elections

From early 2016 until November 2016, the US will become preoccupied with preparations for the presidential elections. Every candidate, especially from the Democratic and Republican parties following primaries and nominations, will rush to make statements that appease the pro-Israel lobby. It will also become

difficult for the sitting US president to adopt a strategic position that influences the chances of his party in the elections, even though he is free from the pressures of lobby groups in his second term. This might make the Palestinian issue a factor in the electoral debates within the scope of the candidates' statements, without any meaningful measures materializing. Perhaps Obama's statements on 9/11/2015 during Netanyahu's visit to Washington following the eruption of the *Intifadah* suggests something of this. Obama said that Israel's security "is one of my top foreign policy priorities," and he condemned "in the strongest terms Palestinian violence against its [Israel's] innocent Israeli citizens." He added, "It is my strong belief that Israel has not just the right, but the obligation to protect itself."⁹⁹

2. Arab Internal Developments Continue to Dominate International Agenda, Overshadowing the Palestinian Issue

It is not likely that the Arab countries experiencing severe unrest (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Egypt, and Bahrain) will be able to contain international interferences in their internal problems in the coming year. This means that wider Arab problems and other international issues will remain the focal point for international interest, at the expense of the Palestinian issue.

3. The Implications of the Continuation of *Intifadah*

The current US Secretary of State John Kerry, in an interview with Israeli television in 2013, warned that the continuation of settlement building and failure to reach a political settlement between the Palestinians and Israelis would lead to a new round of violence.¹⁰⁰

The Palestinian *Intifadah*, especially in Jerusalem and Hebron, continued after summer 2015. It is clear that the prospects of the *Intifadah* stopping are low in the near future, albeit the uprising has seen some fluctuations in terms of its effectiveness and intensity. This means that one of the ways the Palestinian issue could be returned to the top of international priorities would be to sustain the *Intifadah*, with a view to repelling the occupation. However, the PA leadership and Arab and international parties may seek to contain it through political initiatives that merely "suggest" hope in reaching political settlements.

Israel, the US, and perhaps European countries may seek to exploit attempts to designate "terror groups" in the region—given the violence in the region that has spread to Europe—to designate Palestinian resistance groups such as Hamas and

PIJ and Hizbullah as “terror groups” that the international community must tackle. In other words, exploit the repercussions of the Arab Spring to take action against the Palestinian resistance.

4. Expanding the Quartet

It is clear from the overview of European and some Arab positions as well as Russia that there is a tendency to expand the number of participants in the Quartet. Thus, 2016 may witness some diplomatic efforts in this direction. The US might judge that this is not worthwhile, in order to maintain its weight in the decisions of the Quartet and influence over its statements. Or Washington could accept expansion of the Quartet if it can guarantee this would expand the legitimacy of its decisions, which could entail further pressure on the Palestinian side and more gains for the Israeli side.

In the same context, this effort could take another path: instead of expanding the Quartet, an International Support Group could be established to support its work, with different results than those that would be otherwise achieved through its expansion.

5. Escalation of the Bid to Activate the Work of the ICC

Perhaps the Palestinian negotiator, especially the PA, is carefully approaching the issue of activating the ICC role. No doubt, the US and Israel and some European countries are seeking to undermine any effort in this regard. This could open the door to diplomatic battles, where international financial aid could be used as one of the weapons of confrontation to pressure the PA. For this reason, no hopes should be pinned on these ICC efforts.

There is a strong possibility that Israel and the US, who are not members of the ICC, could push certain parties to raise the possibility of prosecuting leaders of Palestinian resistance commanders in GS under the pretext of war crimes, based on the report of the International Commission of Inquiry that we mentioned earlier.

6. The Continuation of the PA’s and UNRWA’s Financial Problems

The donor countries, as we indicated, did not fulfill the bare minimum of their pledges during the period studied here. Furthermore, the continuation of the deficit in UNRWA’s budget to the tune of \$101 million by August 2015 will cast a shadow on the agency’s work, as confirmed by UNRWA Deputy Commissioner-

General Sandra Mitchell, in August 2015 in GS.¹⁰¹ This will be accompanied by the continuation of economic difficulties for the Palestinian economy, due to the decreasing level of international support and failure to fulfill donor pledges to GS. Perhaps monitoring the amount of international aid to the Palestinian economy would clearly show the total value of international aid that has been steadily decreasing between 2009 and 2015. (See Foreign Aid Section of Chapter Seven)

This means that economic pressure on WB and GS, and on UNRWA, will continue. Particularly so when economic growth in Europe (the top source of aid) will not exceed 0.3% in 2016 according to forecasts.¹⁰² Furthermore, the collapse in oil prices will mean Arab states could be in a more difficult position to provide aid, not to mention the preoccupation of restive Arab states with their internal situations at the expense of interest in the Palestinian issue.

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Chapter Six

The Land and the Holy Sites

The Land and the Holy Sites

Introduction

Over one decade, Israel has done what it did not dare do during the first four decades of its occupation of Jerusalem. For despite its demolition of the Moroccan Quarter in 1967 and parts of the Khanqah al-Fakhriyya in 1969, and despite its causing systematic destruction in the vicinity of the Umayyad palaces, over those four decades, Israel was still in the demolition phase in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and had not entered the construction and building phase. Even when it did enter this phase in 1996, it started with a series of arches, the height of which did not exceed that of a single floor. However, the fifth decade of occupation witnessed the start of the construction of structures close to the mosque; some of which are no more than 20 meters away from its walls, and some with a height of four floors. This phase is about to take its complete and final form in a celebration that Israel plans on the fiftieth anniversary of its occupation of the city's eastern part.

First: Islamic and Christian Holy Sites

1. *Al-Aqsa* Mosque

a. Developments in the Political, Religious and Legal Stances Towards *al-Aqsa* Mosque

The believers in the idea of building the “temple” on the site of *al-Aqsa* Mosque constituted a small bloc within the national-religious Zionist movement. Yet considering that this movement has been on the opposition benches for decades, before and after the founding of the state, those “temple societies” have developed marginal weight and political influence.

The idea of building the “temple” has witnessed a slow, steady rise; its supporters formed their first movement during the 1980s. In 2003, they forced a decision that allowed Jews to enter *al-Aqsa* Mosque; then in 2005, they forced another decision that allowed them to enter in groups “in non-Muslim prayer time.” Thus,

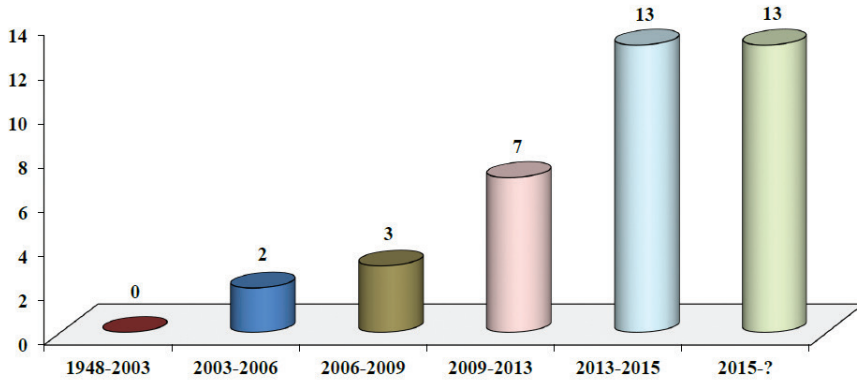
they have effected a fundamental amendment to the rules of accessing *al-Aqsa* Mosque, revealing a gradual agenda, commensurate with the steady growth of their capabilities, which then had a ceiling of temporal division of the mosque.¹ And with a further push, in 2003 this movement was able to get two of its members elected to the Knesset. Its bloc grew to three members of Knesset (MKs) in the 2006 elections, seven in 2009, 13 in 2013 and 13 again in the 2015 elections.² Thus, they began to have representation in more influential coalitions, such as the Jewish Home Party (*HaBayit HaYehudi*), and later the Likud. This led to their participation in the third Benjamin Netanyahu government, formed in 2013, with two ministers holding four ministerial portfolios, in addition to five deputy ministers, posts that are symbolic in nature.

The Knesset elections of March 2015 and the subsequent government formed in May 2015 witnessed a new rise of the “temple” associations at the governmental level, as they got eight of the 32 ministerial portfolios, including those of Justice, Agriculture and Rural Development, Education, Tourism, Interior Security, Culture and Sport, Construction and Housing, Diaspora Affairs, Immigrant Absorption, and Jerusalem Affairs. Thus, they gained a quarter of this government’s portfolios and a seat in the Israel’s Security Cabinet occupied by the Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked. This gave them the biggest political clout they had enjoyed since Israel’s inception.

Table 1/6: Developments in the Representation of the “Temple” Associations in the Israeli Knesset

Period	Knesset	Number of MKs	% of Knesset seats
1948–2003	1–15	0	0
2003–2006	16	2	1.7
2006–2009	17	3	2.5
2009–2013	18	7	5.8
2013–2015	19	13	10.8
2015 (Current Knesset)	20	13	10.8

Developments in the Representation of the “Temple” Associations in the Israeli Knesset



Proceeding from this historic path and the new leap that came about with the formation of Netanyahu’s fourth cabinet in May 2015, the following can be concluded:

1. The gradual political rise of the idea of building a “temple” in place of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and over its entire area came in the context of a greater social and political trend, which can be seen as a general shift to the right. This explains the gap between the theoretical support that the idea enjoys in opinion polls and the limited number of those who actually answer the call to storm the mosque, which does not exceed tens in any incursion. It can be said that the idea of the “temple” finds those who embrace it; however, those who believe it is a priority remain few in number.
2. From its formation, the Netanyahu government was expected to take the struggle over *al-Aqsa* Mosque farther, regardless of security diagnoses, and take the temporal and spatial partition agenda into practice, using various available means; the government will not easily abandon this agenda or back down from it.
3. It seems that the popular trend of the “temple” associations is effective and ongoing; from 2002 until 2015, they were able to make progress in each election, whether at Knesset level or later at that of the government. This progress is likely to develop further, albeit at a slower pace because it has already reached advanced levels, as long as the shift to the right continues.

There is an upward trend in power and influence that has political effects no less important than its effects on the grounds, which is the growing buildup in the capabilities of the “temple” associations that have become larger and more numerous, and joined the “Coalition of the Temple Movements” formed in 2013.³ This coalition holds an annual conference to discuss progress towards achieving the common agenda of its members.⁴ In view of this progress, these associations divide roles and specialties among themselves; as they seem to be, to a great extent, in agreement as to the space that each must fill in order to achieve their common goal.

Today, the Ir David Foundation assumes the responsibility for the rehabilitation and development of the southern excavations of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and opening the site for visitors. As for Ateret Cohanim, it undertakes the task of acquiring the maximum possible amount of real estate in the vicinity of the mosque. It also participates in financing the excavations in its western part, along with the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, the basic governmental part of this group. The Temple Institute takes on the responsibility of promoting the idea of the “temple” in Israeli society and in global Zionist circles at the level of culture and public information. As for the Haliba movement, it concentrates its efforts on calling for the “right of Jews” to pray in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and to enter it at any time. Some of these associations have reached unprecedented levels of financial and administrative capabilities; thus Ir David Foundation has begun paying the accumulated debts of Israel’s state corporations; as on 2/3/2014, the Israeli court upheld an agreement whereby the management of the excavations in the southwestern corner of *al-Aqsa* Mosque would be turned over to Ir David Foundation, in exchange for its paying the debt owed by East Jerusalem Development Company, an Israeli government-owned company that used to operate the site.⁵ As for the Ateret Cohanim organization, it has expanded its capabilities, which allowed it to operate on multiple fronts within two years. It acquired part of the central post office building, some properties in ‘Aqabat al-Khalidiya, and more than 47 residential units in Batn al-Hawa neighborhood in Silwan. It also funded works of rehabilitation and inauguration of the excavations underway in the western side of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Table 2/6: The Most Prominent “Temple” Associations⁶

Associations	Nature	Scope of Work
Western Wall Heritage Foundation	Governmental	Rehabilitation and development of the excavations on the western side of <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque/opening Judaization centers in the same vicinity.
Ir David Foundation	Non-governmental (NG)/partial government funding	Seeking to build the City of David in the location of the Silwan neighborhoods near <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque, rehabilitation and development of the excavations on the south side of <i>al-Aqsa</i> , opening Judaization centers in the same vicinity.
Ateret Cohanim	NG	Reacquisition of all that was owned or rented by Jews of real estate in and around Jerusalem’s Old City before 1948, contributing to the rehabilitation and development of excavations, opening Judaization centers in the Old City and its vicinity.
The Temple Institute	NG/ partial government funding	Promoting the idea of removing <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque and building the “temple” on cultural and cognitive levels, organizing touristic and informational tours, completing the conceptions and preparations for building the “temple.”
Temple Mount Heritage Foundation	NG	Its tasks are similar to those of The Temple Institute.
Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful Movement	NG	Endeavor to lay the cornerstone of the “temple,” drawing detailed engineering and devotional concepts of the “temple”’s construction.
The Haliba movement	NG	Working to secure the “right to enter” <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque at all times for Jews, the freedom to walk around it and perform their devotional rituals in it, and turn the temporal and spatial division into an Israeli popular demand.
Women for the Temple	NG	Sister movement and a branch of Haliba. Active in the women’s sector, particularly in religious-nationalist circles.
Students for Temple Mount	NG	Sister movement and a branch of Haliba. Active in student circles, tries to establish branches in all Hebrew universities.
Yishai Association	NG	The most recent of these associations, focuses on targeting the eastern squares of <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque, and seeks to build a Jewish synagogue in them.

At the legal level, the “temple” associations continued to profit from their legal activities to modify the rules of entry to the mosque; benefiting from having one of their own, Miri Regev (a representative of the “temple” associations in the Knesset) at the head of the Knesset Internal Affairs and Environment Committee. During its deliberations in March 2014, this committee decided to form a subcommittee headed by MK David Tsur, to discuss “facilitating the entry of Jews into *al-Aqsa*.” Following numerous meetings and visits, the Tsur’s subcommittee made recommendations to preserve the status quo by keeping the administration of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in the hands of the Islamic Endowments (waqf), closing access to Muslims in case of rioting and facilitating Jewish incursions on Saturdays. It also recommended opening dialogue with Jordan to enhance the power of what it called “moderate elements.”⁷ Miri Regev foresaw the commission’s recommendations by proposing a bill to divide *al-Aqsa*, reminiscent of the conditions in place at the Ibrahimi mosque, and to punish all who impede the entry of Jews, even by “raising their voice.”⁸ And although the bill was not debated in a general session, its recommendations were put into effect, particularly with regard to imposing punishment for merely shouting *Allahu Akbar* (God is [the] Greatest) at Jewish incursions.

At the religious level, the series of operations that took place in Jerusalem shortly before the start of the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, especially the assassination attempt on the life of a prominent rabbi in the “temple” organizations, Yehuda Glick, at the hands of Mu’taz Hijazi on 29/10/2014, caused real shock in religious circles. Thus the official chief rabbinate, the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic, reiterated their stand of refusing the entry of Jews into *al-Aqsa* Mosque (for reasons related to ritual purity) twice: on 7/11/2014,⁹ and 23/10/2015.¹⁰

b. Excavations and Constructions Under *al-Aqsa* Mosque and in Its Vicinity

Excavations

Since 2012, the number of excavations has reached 47, and there is no indication that this has changed, in spite of the insistence of Arab and Palestinian press sources on headlining their news about the excavations by using the word “disclosure” of new excavations. In fact, all the sites that have been rehabilitated, opened and advertised during 2014–2015 were previously recognized, but their status has changed from being excavations under construction and rehabilitation,

to becoming open to visitors for multiple purposes. The following are the most prominent excavations that were opened to the public during the period covered by this report:

1. Behind Our Wall Hall (*Ahar Kotlenu*): is located on the site formerly known as “the diggings of Hammam al-Ayn”, as it became clear that the work of unloading rubble and dirt from inside Hammam al-Ayn Synagogue was in preparation for the opening and fortifying of this big hall. It was originally an arched Mamluk hall, above which Hammam al-Ayn and the surrounding real estate were built. A report was published about it on 16/7/2015, estimating its area to be 400 square meters.¹¹ Israeli sources indicate that the hall will be used as an educational center to address the genealogy of the Jewish nation and their heritage. The cost of its rehabilitation was \$20 million, entirely funded by the Ukrainian Jewish billionaire Zvi Hirsch Bogolyubov.¹²

Behind Our Wall Hall as published by QPress



2. The center “From Jerusalem to Jerusalem”: was opened in the excavations of the western side of *al-Aqsa* Mosque; it is accessed through a bridge on the northern side of Western Wall Plaza. A visitor entering the center will face a hall of Islamic architectural style; inside it there is a room equipped with tens of computers and iPads, where the visitor can choose a track of Jewish history in Jerusalem according to the biblical narrative, through their Diaspora then their return once again.¹³

Constructions in the Vicinity of the Mosque¹⁴

These constructions have witnessed a marked increase in activity; for it seems that the “temple” associations are taking advantage of their political clout and

growing financial capabilities to change the landscape above ground in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, in a manner that complements the ongoing work under the ground, and the ongoing attempts to partition the mosque itself. In 2012–2013, there were additions to Jerusalem’s Old City Project “Kedem Yerushalayim” that included the plan to build Strauss House, Beit Haliba (Heb. Core House), the third prayer plaza for egalitarian services proposed by Natan Sharansky, and the Kedem Center. All these projects are going forward in the stages of planning, approval and implementation, with the following variations in their progress:

1. The Strauss House: its blueprints were approved in 2010; while work on it began on 6/2/2013 by demolishing newly-built stone archways.¹⁵ This was in preparation for the establishment of an expansion of three floors to the adjacent Mamluk building, and adding a fifth floor to the building itself. The expansion is now complete; as public baths in it were inaugurated on 9/2/2015¹⁶ and a police station was opened on 19/5/2015,¹⁷ and only additions to the original Mamluk building remain.

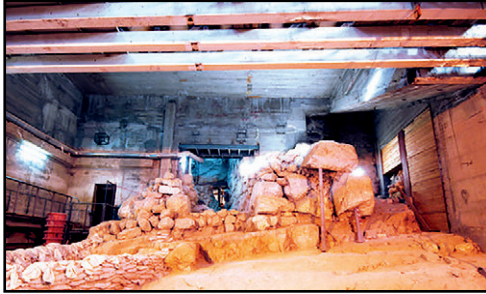
Strauss House Building from Outside After Its Completion



2. Spring House:¹⁸ is a visitors’ center being built above a block of relics that the excavations in Wadi Hilweh in Silwan have revealed. Its construction site has an area of 1,200 square meters, in addition to facilities that are expected to increase the area to 5,000 square meters; it is used as an entrance to active excavations. On 18/2/2014, the Jerusalem municipality handed notifications to the area’s residents (on whose land the project’s facilities will be built) to submit their objections

to the project within 60 days, in preparation for its implementation. Noting that Ir David Foundation, which is in charge of the site, made good progress toward its completion;¹⁹ while al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage announced that the “Spring Castle Tunnel” accessible from this site was officially open.²⁰

Spring House From the Inside and Its Completed Parts From the Outside



3. Tiferet Yisrael Synagogue:²¹ talk began about rebuilding this Synagogue in 2010, in the wake of the inauguration of the Hurva Synagogue, and in the context of a policy of reconstructing historic synagogues in Jerusalem’s Old City that tries to give the impression that there was an old Jewish presence there, and that the Arab armies destroyed it in the war of 1948. This applies to the Hurva Synagogue, Tiferet Yisrael Synagogue, and to some extent, Ohel Yitzhak (Tent of Isaac) Synagogue, which was opened above the Hammam al-Ayn endowments (Waqf), facing the Chain Gate.

As was the case with the Hurva Synagogue, political considerations continued to make the plan of this synagogue teeter between cautious progress and suspension; in fear of anticipated popular Palestinian reactions as well as external pressures. However, it seems that the political ascent of the “temple” associations has given momentum to going forward with this plan. Thus, on 29/11/2012, the Jerusalem municipality announced its approval of the Synagogue’s plan; pointing out that it will consist of three levels and a dome, on 275 square meters of constructed space, with a height of 23 meters.²² There will be land annexed to it to be used for utilities. The Israeli Minister of Housing and Construction, Uri Ariel, one of the “temple” associations’ symbols, laid the foundation stone of this synagogue on 27/5/2014, in a ceremony attended by other leaders of this movement, such as Deputy Minister of Religious Services Eli Ben-Dahan, Founder and Head of The Temple Institute Rabbi Yisrael Ariel, and Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat.²³

The Remains of the Tiferet Yisrael Synagogue, Which was Built in 1872 and Demolished in 1948



4. Beit Haliba (Core House):²⁴ at the time of writing, this is the largest declared Judaization building in the vicinity of Western Wall Plaza. It was initially planned to be four stories high, but the Jerusalem District Planning and Construction Committee asked for the plan to be modified; in order to absorb Palestinian anger towards it. It discussed the modified alternatives that reduce its height to two floors (of 4.7 meters each) and its construction area to 2,800 square meters. And despite Netanyahu's announcement on 12/10/2015 that work had ceased on this project, among a bundle of measures aimed at absorbing the Jerusalem *Intifadah* at its outset,²⁵ the district committee approved the plan on 30/11/2015,²⁶ indicating that the steps to grant license to the building were still going ahead on schedule.

Despite the fact that this building carries the name of the movement headed by Rabbi Yehuda Glick (Haliba), which advocates freedom of worship at *al-Aqsa* Mosque for Jews, this building will be built and managed by the Western Wall Heritage Foundation to be a center for education and guidance. It features a hall for historical exhibits and a tourist center for promoting the “Western Wall heritage,” in other words, it promotes the idea of the “temple.”

The Lateral Section of the Approved Beit Haliba Plan



5. Kedem Center:²⁷ This center represents an extension of Beit Haliba in the direction of Silwan. It stands on a land with an area of 5,420 square meters, known as “Givati parking lot,” which was expropriated from its owners in 2003 to be used as the main entrance for the development and rehabilitation of the excavations in Wadi Hilweh. Its initial blueprint was that of a four-story building with a total construction area of 16,032 square meters, making it the largest planned Judaization landmark so far in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque from all four sides.²⁸

As had happened with Beit Haliba, the Jerusalem District Planning and Construction Committee tried to give this scheme legitimacy by seeming to accept people’s views and objections; after the approval of the original scheme on 4/4/2014,²⁹ it accepted the appeals of residents and left-wing associations on 7/6/2015. The National Planning and Building Appeals Committee demanded the reconsidering of the scheme and that changes be made to its blueprint, which provides that the center’s roofline will sit below the Old City walls, and that it will not be higher than Wadi Hilweh Street (which is above it) by more than one floor.³⁰ The Israeli planning committees adopted the scheme in its altered form on 23/3/2016.

An Artist's Image of the Altered Scheme of the Kedem Center



6. “The Upper Plaza” at the Western Wall (known as the Sharansky Plan): of all the projects aimed at changing Jerusalem’s landmarks, this scheme is the closest to *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Through it, the occupation authorities intend to build an extension to the Jewish prayer area in front of the Western Wall, which extends from the Morocco Gate to the end of the southwest corner of the mosque. It is to be elevated above the level of the northern plazas by a number of arcades and would be reached by climbing a stone staircase, based on the biblical imagination of how the area was. This project came out into the open in the context of what was called the “legal struggle” of non-Orthodox Jewish groups who demanded a space of their own for co-ed prayer services, where men and women pray side by side; for the traditional rabbinate impose gender segregation in prayer at Western Wall Plaza; and for its part, the state imposes heavy fines on those who violate this rule.

Netanyahu charged Natan Sharansky, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, with the task of finding a solution to this dispute. On 30/4/2013, Sharansky suggested building new prayer plazas as a “creative solution” to this problem. It seems that the Israeli government wanted to give prominence to this scheme, but in a context that gave it justification, since it is the gravest plan and the closest to *al-Aqsa* Mosque. On 30/1/2016, the Israeli government approved the plan despite objections from the religious orthodox ministers who voted against it;³¹ which helped reduce significantly the attention given to this scheme and its gravity.

If its implementation proceeds as planned, it will have serious implications for the Moroccan Hill issue. As, according to this plan, a 900 square meters wooden or stone courtyard³² will be erected above the Moroccan Hill and the adjacent Umayyad palaces area, which can be reached by climbing large steps and terraces.

It seems that the Jerusalem municipality is trying to speed up work on the Judaization centers in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and throughout Jerusalem, so that it would be inaugurated as part of the “50th anniversary of Jerusalem’s reunification celebration.” It is Israel’s celebration of completing its occupation of the city that it intends, as announced, to organize. This means that there will be major political impetus for completing these centers; perhaps also to start new projects during the next two years. If the Jerusalem municipality succeeds in that endeavor, the overall cityscape of Jerusalem, and its Old City in particular, will see the greatest change it has undergone for over a decade. For when previously an onlooker would barely see any landmark that alluded to a Jewish identity or historical or religious Jewish presence in the Old City, its skyline will feature a number of landmarks in which Jewish presence is thrust into view.

The Moroccan Hill Issue

The Moroccan Hill arose from the demolition of the Moroccan Quarter to its north and the Khanqah al-Fakhriyya to its south. What remained standing is the corridor that connects the Moroccans’ Gate (*Bab al-Magharibah*) in the city’s wall to the Morocco Gate situated above it in the wall of the mosque. And although it is a corridor that rests on Mamluk and Ayyubid arches, getting covered with dirt earned it the name of “Moroccan Hill.” In 2003, Israeli authorities installed iron umbrellas above the hill, the Jews’ main entrance for their incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque; and they poured concrete foundations for them. This archeological structure could not withstand this added load and it collapsed under the weight of the snow, during the storm that hit Jerusalem on 15/2/2004. The Jerusalem municipality closed the site to visitors and fenced its periphery. Then on 20/4/2005, they replaced it with a wooden ramp, extending from the Western Wall Plaza to the Morocco Gate.

On 6/2/2007, the Jerusalem municipality began demolition works on the hill using heavy machinery, with the aim to wipe it out of existence and open the lower gate leading to al-Buraq Mosque, a small structure to the southwest of *al-Aqsa*. This was done according to a plan named “Kedem Yerushalayim,” which was prepared by the Jerusalem City Engineer. But following successive popular and

official protests, the Israeli authorities stopped the demolition works with the heavy machinery. On 28/11/2011, they tried to raze the hill to the ground, arguing that the temporary wooden ramp was flammable; but they were forced to retreat under pressure from great popular movements in Egypt and Jordan in the environment of the Arab revolutions prevalent then which resulted in official pressure from these countries to stop the scheme.³³ However, starting May 2012, the Israeli authorities resumed the demolition works on the hill, but with axes and hoes.³⁴

On 12/8/2014, Israel tried to erect a new additional wooden ramp over the remnants of the Mamluk arches on the Moroccan Road.³⁵ But on 3/9/2014, “at the request of Jordan,” the Israeli government ordered the removal of the new structure, explaining that the party responsible for its construction had no authority to do so, and did not coordinate with the Prime Minister’s office.³⁶ However, on 25/6/2015, press sources spotted the setting up of a wooden addition, forty meters long, connecting the Moroccans’ Gate in the city’s wall to the beginning of the bridge built in 2005.³⁷ This expansion still exists, enabling an increase in the numbers of Jews who storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque through the Morocco Gate.

c. Jewish Presence Inside the Mosque and Interference in Its Administration Systematic Escalation of Jews’ Demands Regarding Their Entry into the Mosque

During 2014, three key figures led the Jewish incursion movement into *al-Aqsa* Mosque: Housing and Construction Minister Uri Ariel, former Deputy Speaker of the Knesset Rabbi Moshe Feiglin, and Leader of the Haliba movement Rabbi Yehuda Glick. The three of them worked, jointly with other leaders of the “temple” associations, on escalating to unprecedented levels the idea of Jews storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Thus, the two rabbis established semi-weekly incursions that mobilized the associations’ followers year round. However, they were unable to raise the number of intruders to more than 200 in any incursion. The security presence of Israeli forces remained more prevalent than the civil presence of the Jewish intruders. They tried to enter areas the sanctity of which was never violated by incursions; thus Moshe Feiglin tried to enter the Dome of the Rock shrine on 7/4/2014.³⁸ While Housing and Construction Minister Uri Ariel was able to maintain a frequent presence, benefiting from the security afforded to him to

enable his companions to perform Jewish rituals in the mosque, a matter that used to be forbidden. It was noticeable that he and his companions insisted on walking around the eastern courtyards of the mosque and rubbing themselves with the swept debris stacked in it, as though it was holy dust that has religious significance for Jews. This debris gathers from opening the giant portals of the Marwani prayer area.

In short, and without describing the details of each incursion, the clear goal sought by the incursion movement is to achieve progress in quality and quantity in terms of the numbers of incursions, those participating in them, the places they reach, and the rituals they perform. All of these are in the context of a rolling strategy that considers temporal division a short-term goal; but it does not stop there, it paves the way for the next step, which is the spatial division, by trying to focus on two points in the mosque, the eastern courtyards and the southwest ones. In the year 2015, Rabbis Feiglin and Glick did not continue in their roles, as the assassination attempt on Yehuda Glick caused him to be absent starting on 29/10/2014, and he did not storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque again until 2/3/2016. As for Moshe Feiglin, elections kept him absent from March 2015, in addition to his failure to win an advanced position in the primaries of the Likud Party. The role of Minister Uri Ariel continued even as he retained his ministerial position in the government formed following the 2015 elections.

Upon examining the documentation that has been available since 2005, and published by Al Quds International Institution in its annual report entitled *Eye on al-Aqsa*, trends in the escalation of the incursions have become clear. They can now be predicted, anticipated, and prepared for by popular organized movements and media pressure. These seasons are synchronous with the peak of three main Jewish festivals: “Passover,” the three weeks commemorating the destruction of the Holy “temple,” the season of the Jewish New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*), and then the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). This means that the recurring escalation seasons are in March or April of the A.D. calendar year, July or August, and September or October, relative to the changes in the Hebrew calendar. It has also been noted that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu takes advantage of the naturally quiet period that occurs between October and March of the following year due to the spacing between Jewish holidays. This spacing gives leverage to the “temple”

associations in their incursions and allows Netanyahu to declare that he is reining in these incursions and that Israel is committed to the status quo; and thus he absorbs Palestinian, Arab and Muslim rage. This matter was repeated over three years, starting in 2013; while he also repeatedly declared, at the end of the festive seasons in October 2014 and October 2015, that he was barring Knesset members from entering *al-Aqsa* Mosque.³⁹

Continued Restrictions on the Entry of Worshipers

Limiting Muslims' access to *al-Aqsa* Mosque is a central prerequisite for achieving the temporal division of the mosque; it has become a declared objective of the Israeli government, clear in its behavior and in statements made by its ministers who belong to the "temple" associations. During 2014, in conjunction with the public outrage that followed the kidnapping and burning of the child Muhammad Abu Khdeir, and the GS war that took place after that incident, Israeli forces imposed strict measures around the mosque and in Jerusalem's Old City. They were able, for the first time, to face the influx of worshipers and limit their numbers in the mosque to levels unseen in Ramadan since the occupation began; as in the first week of Ramadan, the number of worshippers did not exceed 10 thousand.⁴⁰ A report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-occupied Palestinian territories (OCHA-oPt) has documented the number of arrivals to *al-Aqsa* Mosque from outside the city; this number was 545 thousand in 2013 and it fell to 45 thousand in 2014, meaning that the mosque's visitors in 2014 constituted 8% of those who visited the previous year.⁴¹

Members of the *Murabitat* (Muslim female defenders of their land) took upon themselves the task of defending *al-Aqsa* Mosque around the clock; in return, Israel formed a special female police unit to prosecute, attack and torture them. This unit started its activities on 5/5/2015.⁴² Starting in September 2015, Israel started to apply more stringent entrance procedures on women than on men. They announced on 10/8/2015 what was called a "black list" that contained the names of about 100 Palestinian women barred from entering the mosque; this list has become known as the "golden list." The ban remains in effect at the time of writing of this report (March 2016). On 7/10/2015, the Israeli authorities took advantage of the beginnings of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* to erect an electronic gate on the road leading to the Chain Gate in the western wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.⁴³

The Attempt to Execute the Temporal Partition and Prepare for the Spatial One

The tension around *al-Aqsa* Mosque reached its peak on 13–15/9/2015; the Israeli government apparently saw, given regional and local conditions, a favorable opportunity to impose the temporal division and start preparing for the spatial one. Thus, it declared a final closure of the mosque to Muslim worshipers and its opening to Jews; on the grounds that the mosque was open to the followers of each of the two religions in their respective events and closed to the followers of the other. Jerusalemite youth anticipated this declaration by remaining in the Qibli Mosque. On the morning of 13/9/2015, Israeli forces stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque, throwing sound and smoke bombs. The courtyard adjacent to the mosque southward caught fire, the historical gypsum windows broke as well as their glass, and the carpets of the Qibli mosque caught fire. Occupation forces attacked the Murabitat on the gates, while Netanyahu declared the Mercy Cemetery, east of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, closed to burials; in a deliberate message to announce that the temporal division had become a *fait accompli*. He was also paving the way to the idea of giving the eastern courtyards to the Jews and opening the Mercy Gate, sealed with a cement slab, to make it their gateway to the mosque from outside the Old City through the Mercy Cemetery; this was the scheme that had already been unveiled on 11/10/2013.⁴⁴ Two weeks later, Netanyahu repeated the attempt (on 27–30/9/2015) in a warped reading of the balance of powers and of his ability to pass such a resolution in the current environment. This became a direct cause of the expansion of the resistance toward what became known as the Jerusalem *Intifadah*; in addition to other accumulated reasons that paved the way for it, forcing Netanyahu to present a scene of retreat from the temporal division that remains a fundamental objective of his government, in anticipation of another favorable opportunity.

The partition attempt was preceded and accompanied by systematic measures aimed at breaking the back of the *Ribat* (Defense of Islamic land) movement as the main obstacle standing in its way. Thus, Israeli forces announced on 3/9/2014 a ban on al-Aqsa Revival Foundation (*‘Imarat al-Aqsa*), the former sponsor of Murabitat movement. Then on 13/1/2015, they announced a ban on the following societies: Al-Aqsa Heroes, Muslim Women for al-Aqsa, and al-Fajr for Culture and Literature, founded by the Islamic movement to take over the sponsorship

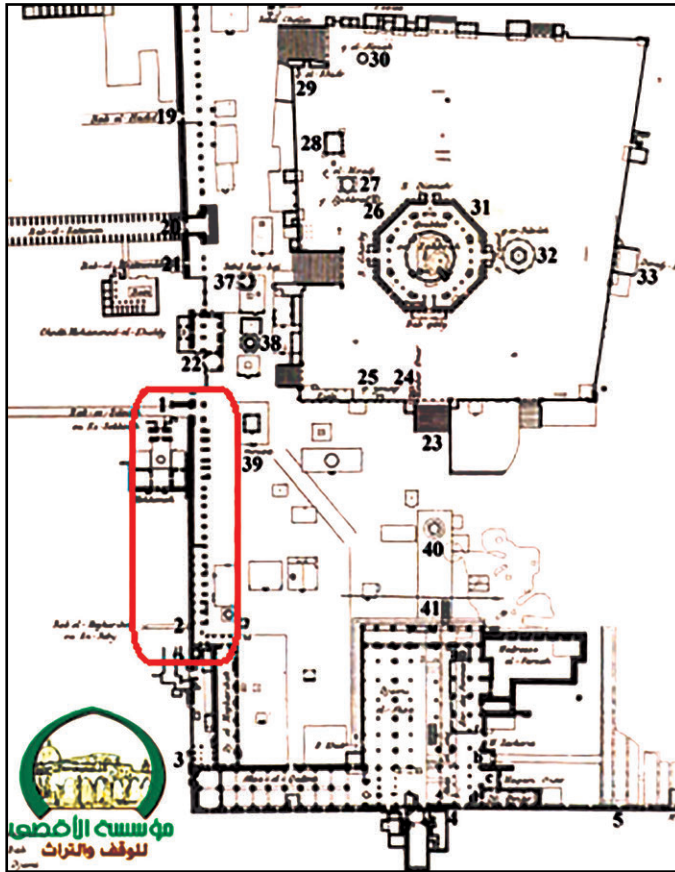
of the Ribat movement. On 9/9/2015, they went further and banned the Ribat movement; and on 17/11/2015, it was the turn of the Islamic Movement to be banned in its entirety to stop its role in protecting the human shield around *al-Aqsa* Mosque. These moves led to confusion in the Ribat movement and decline in the number of its male and female participants and in its efficacy. It can be said that *al-Aqsa* Mosque is facing today the real possibility of temporal division passage and its imposition as a *fait accompli*. This was the case at the end of 2010, before the emergence of the Murabitat movement that constituted a protective new ring around it. This means that the protection of the mosque today needs a creative and effective alternative that can face the looming challenge.

A new development worth noting has been the emergence of the Yishai Association that has devoted itself to the application of spatial division; on the grounds that imposing temporal division is a matter of time in the eyes of the “temple” associations. On 13/1/2015, this association tried to register *al-Aqsa* courtyards as an Israeli public property⁴⁵ in preparation for designing plans for their development and construction. Upon its founding in August 2013, Yishai published an initial concept for the construction of a synagogue in the mosque’s eastern courtyards; then on 30/3/2014, it sent a letter to the Prime Minister demanding the construction of a synagogue in the southwest part of the mosque.

Yishai Association Initial Concept for Building a Synagogue in the Eastern Courtyards of *al-Aqsa* Mosque



**Scheme Attached to the Letter Sent to the Israeli Prime Minister by the
Yishai Association Demanding the Establishment
of a Synagogue Southwest of the Mosque**



2. Jerusalem’s Islamic Holy Sites

By their nature, cemeteries extend over large open spaces, tempting the occupation to grab more land. Their locations in Jerusalem add to their importance. Thus, the Mamilla Cemetery forms the basin linking the Jewish center of west Jerusalem and the Old City to the east; while the Mercy and Yusufiyah Cemeteries form the eastern extension of Lion’s Gate, the Old City’s main gate to the east.

a. The Mamilla Cemetery

Over a long period of time, the Mamilla Cemetery was subjected to gradual chipping away at its land that spared less than one tenth of its area. During 2014, the project Center for Human Dignity-Museum of Tolerance Jerusalem (MOTJ)

that was being built on this cemetery's lands by the US based Simon Wiesenthal Center, advanced from planning and approval to the initial stages of implementation. On 22/1/2014, al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage documented the start of laying massive concrete bases for the museum; while the center announced on 17/4/2014 the launch of a recreation park project on part of the cemetery's remaining land. Furthermore, the Israeli coffee chain, Landwer Café, announced its plan to open a branch on the cemetery's grounds, which it inaugurated on 2/8/2015.

b. The Cemeteries in the East of Jerusalem's Old City

Unlike the Mamilla Cemetery, Israel is trying to keep the Mercy and Yusufiyah cemeteries from expanding without actually chipping away at their lands, even though it had announced that it had plans to that effect, such as the plan of Kedem Yerushalayim. On 22/9/2014, Israeli authorities demolished 20 graves in the Martyrs' Cemetery, which is part of the Yusufiyah Cemetery grounds, claiming that they were placed within confiscated land; while on 16/8/2015, it confiscated a plot of seven donums (seven thousand square meters) adjacent to the Mercy Cemetery, to prevent its expansion in that direction.

3. Jerusalem's Christian Holy Sites

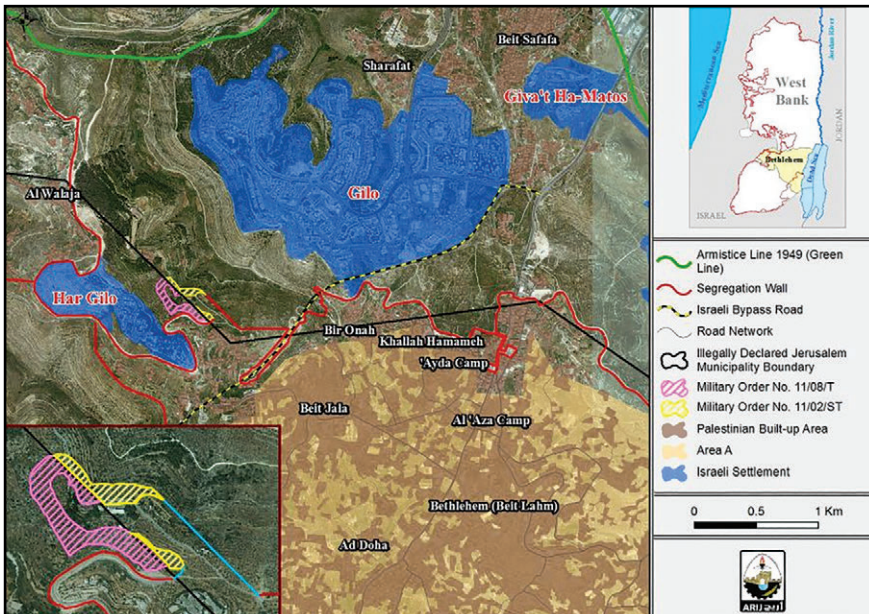
a. The Wall in the Vicinity of the Cremisan Monastery

The issue of the Cremisan came about when the Israeli army published the final path of the Separation Wall on its website on 30/4/2007, which showed its intention to build a special wall around the Etzion settlement bloc, west of Bethlehem, to annex it to Jerusalem. It also showed that it plans to annex the territories of the Cremisan Valley, situated between Beit Jala and Walaja to Jerusalem; in such a way that the Salesian Monastery will be on the Bethlehem side of the Wall, while the Salesian women's Monastery, its school, and the agricultural lands of the monastery and local residents, will be isolated on the side annexed to Jerusalem. On 13/10/2011, the Beit Jala municipality received an order from the head of the Israeli Central Command to the effect that 373 donums (373 thousand square meters) in the Cremisan Valley would be confiscated to by the Wall, along the announced track. So the municipality, the monastery and the local citizens affected by the order went to court hoping to stop the construction of the wall in their region. The army refused to cancel the construction of the Wall or to alter its course. On

4/2/2014, the court asked the army to clarify the reason for its refusal to modify the track of the Wall. On 4/8/2014, it ruled that the army must offer an alternative path that would keep the monastery, the nuns' order, the school, and the houses of local Palestinians on the side annexed to Bethlehem. On 4/9/2014, the army presented a modified plan within these conditions, in addition to opening agricultural gates for the area's residents and the monks, in the direction of the land that is to be annexed to Jerusalem that will most likely not be of benefit to them. On 29/1/2016, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled to reject all appeals, paving the way to the army to start work on the Wall on the designated site, causing the monastery to lose its geographical connection to its land located behind the wall.⁴⁶

It is noteworthy that most of the moves to postpone the construction of the wall and to try to alter its path were undertaken by the Beit Jala municipality and the affected citizens. And with the exception of a "Statement by the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries in the Holy Land on Cremisan" issued on 5/12/2014, calling on the international community to take immediate action to protect the lands of the Cremisan valley, no media or public activity was initiated directly by the monastery or the Salesian Order to prevent the loss that the monastery will suffer.⁴⁷

Map 1/6: The Israeli Separation Wall Plan in the Cremisan Valley-Beit Jala⁴⁸



b. Attacks on Churches and Monasteries

The years 2012–2013 witnessed three attacks that included arson and writing offensive graffiti on the walls of churches and monasteries in Jerusalem. The years 2014–2015 witnessed the same number of attacks; thus on 5/5/2014, statements hostile to Christianity were “daubed on an outer column of Office of the Assembly of Bishops at the Notre Dame Center in East Jerusalem.” On 9/6/2014, some religious Jews expelled monks and Christian worshippers from the “Last Supper” hall in Mount Zion. And on 26/2/2015, “a fire broke out in a Greek Orthodox seminary for the study of Christianity next to Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem.”

c. Selling Beit El Baraka Presbyterian Church Compound in Bethlehem

On 11/6/2015, the Arab MK Basel Ghattas addressed a protest letter to the Swedish ambassador⁴⁹ after Israeli settlers resumed the refurbishment of the compound that used to be Beit El Baraka Presbyterian Church. 20 years ago, it was turned into a hotel, but this business venture failed; it was later put up for sale. This church compound is made up of eight buildings, including a large central structure and several smaller ones, in addition to a piece of land that has an area of 38 donums (38 thousand square meters). It is located in the vicinity of the Aroub refugee camp between Hebron and Bethlehem in the West Bank; and the buyers intend to turn it into a residential area and make it part of the Gush Etzion settlement. In the details that were published later, a Swedish company, Scandinavian Seamen Holy Land Enterprises, presented itself to the American Presbyterian Church as a company affiliated with a Swedish Presbyterian Church group. It offered to buy Beit El Baraka Church and its land, which were put up for sale after going through a financial crisis and announced its dissolution. After the transaction was concluded, the assets of the Swedish company were diverted to an institution sponsored by the Jewish American Irving Moskowitz.⁵⁰

The church was built in the 1940s by an American missionary and the buildings attached to it were used as a hospital where chest diseases and tuberculosis were treated. On 6/1/2016, the Israeli Defense Minister, Moshe Ya‘alon, officially announced final approval of the annexation of Beit El Baraka’s land and buildings to the Gush Etzion bloc.⁵¹

Reverend George ‘Awad, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Palestine, had declared on 26/6/2015 that his church rejected this transaction and that it had nothing to do with this sale. He called on the Palestinian people to support him in reclaiming these properties.⁵² Despite what Rev. ‘Awad has declared, he did not deny that the sale had already been made by the Presbyterian Church in the United States; and that, faced with the lure of money, the church did not adequately investigate the identity of the buyer of a property this size and of such sensitivity, and it did not consult with the church in Palestine or with its pastor. This reminds us of past experiences with Greek clergy and their numerous deals to sell the properties of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem; and the failure of the Italian clergy of the Salesian Order to defend the lands of the Cremsan Monastery in the face of the Wall. It is also reminiscent of the chronic Palestinian dilemma regarding the role of foreign clerics, who control the fates of huge church properties on important and critical sites; and who dispose of them as they please with disregard for the interest of their parishioners who are waging a struggle over land and their very existence with the occupier to whom these churches sell their lands. This matter again raises the need to adopt a unified national strategy regarding church properties that does not allow dealing with them as if they were a purely internal matter that belongs to each of these churches, and does not allow a limited class of foreign clergy to be solely in charge of their Palestinian parishes and their vast tracts of land.

The Main Building of the Beit El Baraka Church Sold to Settlers



4. Islamic and Christian Holy Sites in the Rest of Palestine

In past years, this title used to refer to an annual report issued by the Solidarity Foundation for Human Rights, based in Nablus. On 25/2/2014, this foundation suffered a mass arrest campaign that included almost all of its employees, and its website is no longer available on the internet. Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage offered an alternative count of violations against the holy sites in Palestine, with the exception of the attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, their report for 2014 presented the following results:

Table 3/6: Violations of Holy Sites in Historic Palestine for 2014⁵³

Violations not during war		Violations during GS war	
Attacks on mosques	30	Mosques completely destroyed	73
Attacks on Islamic graves	21	Mosques partially destroyed	197
Attacks on Christian holy sites	6	Churches completely destroyed	0
Miscellaneous attacks	29	Churches partially destroyed	1
Total	86	Total	271

Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage was not able to issue a report on the violations of holy sites for the year 2015, as on 17/11/2015, it was outlawed along with the rest of the Islamic movement institutions operating in the 1948 occupied territories.

The project of monitoring Israeli Colonization Activities in the Palestinian Territories has documented 226 attacks carried out by settlers in 2014, on mosques, churches and monasteries, including those on *al-Aqsa* Mosque; while in 2015 there were 265 such attacks.

Second: Jerusalem's Population

Estimates indicate that the number of East Jerusalem residents reached 324 thousands at the end of 2015. Israel has continued with its policy of turning Jerusalem into a city of expulsion for its Palestinian population, confiscating and demolishing Jerusalemites' homes and isolating their neighborhoods. In 2014–2015, settlers controlled 54 residential apartments and two plots of land, all of which used to be owned by Palestinians. Of these, 53 apartments were in the

Silwan neighborhood, gathered in two main blocks: Wadi Hilweh neighborhood in which Ir David Foundation seized 32 apartments and two plots of land, and the Batn al-Hawa neighborhood in the middle, in which the far-right settlement organization Ateret Cohanim seized 21 apartments.

Moreover, the hotbeds of confrontation continued with the Ateret Cohanim, which is trying to grab a number of properties in Jerusalem's Old City. The most prominent confrontation was over the property of Nora Ghaith in 'Aqabat al-Khalidiyya, the property of al-Sidawi family and those of another group of families in 'Aqabat al-Saraya. These properties witnessed takeover attempts by settlers and judicial progress in their favor, which until March 2016, did not reach the stage of evacuation.

Israeli authorities demolished 96 properties in 2014, and 98 in 2015, thus returning to the peak levels of demolition that started in 2000; for the average rate of demolition did not come close to these numbers except at the peak of *al-Aqsa Intifadah* in 2003. Thus, the total number of homes demolished in the period 2000–2015 came to 1,085 homes, blighting the lives of 5,637 Jerusalemites.⁵⁴ The following table shows the evolution in demolition operations during that period:

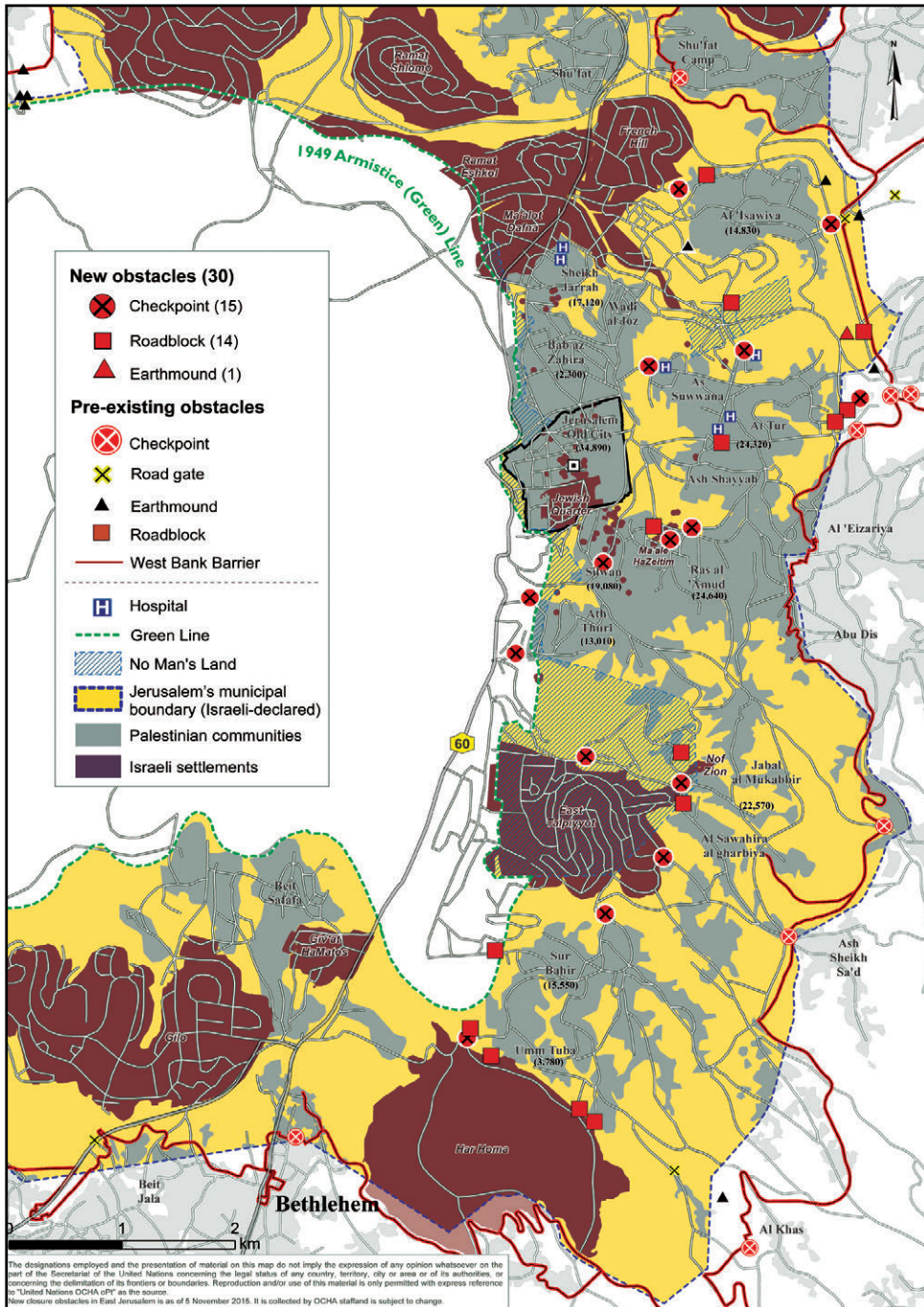
Table 4/6: Home Demolition Operations in Jerusalem During the Period 2000–2015⁵⁵

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Number	21	51	63	94	80	78	44	59

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number	83	81	39	41	61	95	96	98	1,084

Furthermore, the inclination to isolate Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods by a series of roadblocks and checkpoints began to be reinforced following the furor that accompanied the burning of the child Muhammad Abu Khdeir. Furthermore, with the outset of the *Intifadah* at the end of September 2015, Israeli authorities started using this method as one of their basic tools in preventing operations against them, thus they began isolating the Arab population from the city, while keeping the city open and available to the Jewish population. On 5/11/2015, OCHA-oPt published a map that showed Israeli forces setting up 30 roadblocks in the vicinity of Jerusalem's Arab neighborhood, in a way that greatly hindered the citizens' movement and ability to communicate.⁵⁶

Map 2/6: New Checkpoints and Concrete Barriers in Jerusalem on 5/11/2015⁵⁷



As for the situation on the ground in Jerusalem, the Oslo Accords imposed a geographic reality in which most of the Palestinian population is kept away from direct contact with Israelis. Contact remained confined to three main points: the city of Jerusalem, the center of the city of Hebron, and Area C, which include most of the WB territories but with a limited number of the residents of small villages and the nomadic population. This meant that the largest Palestinian human mass that remained in direct contact with the occupation was in Jerusalem. Perhaps this, coupled with the intensification of the conflict over *al-Aqsa* Mosque, contributed to the launch from Jerusalem of the last three popular confrontations in the history of the conflict during 1996, 2000 and 2015.

The last “Palestinian Strategic Report” gave the diagnosis that Jerusalem was constantly on the verge of eruption; however, this situation remained isolated and reached its limits. Thus, in 2012, Jerusalem witnessed 78 confrontations, 6 stabbings and 21 other incidents;⁵⁸ in 2013, it witnessed repeated escalations at the times of incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its siege, and with the Palestinian outbursts of resistance. 2014 saw the launch of the “Ramadan furor” that followed the burning of the child Muhammad Abu Khdeir on 4/7/2014, which soon moved to the GS front in the form of a fierce 52-day war. It also saw the launch of individual resistance operations such as the running over operation carried out by ‘Abdul Rahman Shaludi on 22/10/2014; the assassination attempt on the life of Yehuda Glick at the hands of Mu‘taz Hijazi on 29/10/2014; running over operation by Ibrahim al-‘Akari on 5/11/2014; and shooting incident carried out by Ghassan and ‘Uday Abu Jamal on 18/11/2014.

The challenge for the ongoing confrontation in Jerusalem during those three years was how to spread beyond the Jerusalem borders to become an all-inclusive national uprising, despite the PA’s political will to prevent it and its continuous intensive security coordination with Israel. The continuous coordination of resisting youth and the presence of creative individual initiatives, played an important role in overcoming the challenges posed by the PA, right up to the launch of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* at the end of September 2015 with most of the operations being in Jerusalem; such as the stabbing incident carried out by Muhannad al-Halabi on 3/10/2015; shooting in an Israeli bus carried out by Bahaa Elayyan and the prisoner Bilal Abu Ghanem on 13/10/2015; in addition to the clashes centered in Jerusalem during the first months of the *Intifadah*.

It should be noted here the prominent role of settlers as a colonialist tool that, during recent years, preceded the state and its army in their confrontations. Thus, the burning of the child Muhammad Abu Khdeir was carried out by settlers and led to the Ramadan furor in Jerusalem, which became an all-out war in GS in 2014. The crime of burning the Dawabsheh family in July 2015; and the successive incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque in September 2015, which ended with the launch of the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, all came at the initiative and incitement of settlers. The state's role here ranged from protection of the status quo to engaging in confrontation at a later date.

Third: Judaization and Settlement in Jerusalem

1. Developments in the Building on the Separation Wall Around Jerusalem

During 2014 and 2015, no reliable update on the development of the construction of the Wall was published. Reports were issued by OCHA-oPt, but its last update was published in 2013. Field reports show that the development in the work on the Wall in 2014 centered on three key points, all of which were positioned in the south; the first in the vicinity of Beit Jala; the second in the vicinity of the Walaja village and the crossing to the Cremisan monastery that connects them; and the third in the eastern limit of the Etzion settlement bloc, southwest of the town of Artas in Bethlehem.⁵⁹

2. Settlement Consolidation

Settlement policies continued at their usual pace, as the priorities of the settler movement remained the same during the period 2014–2015. Jerusalem had primacy and was allocated more than half the settlement units; Salfit came next, where there was focus on what was known as the “Ariel Finger,” which includes a bloc of settlements surrounded by a fence that follows the limits of the 1948 occupied territories. It cuts the WB horizontally up to the northeast of Salfit. Then there was Ramallah, where the focus is on the southern settlements sector, which reinforces its separation from Jerusalem and the southern WB in general.

The consolidation of the settlements' southern sector has succeeded in attracting large numbers of settlers due to its contact with the Jewish Center of the city in the west of Jerusalem, as well as the scarcity of Arab neighborhoods that are in direct contact with it. This has encouraged the Israeli government to try planning a similar sector in the north; and so it began pushing strongly in that direction starting in 2012. Thus, it adopted a more realistic and conservative expansionist approach, more likely to attract the Jewish population than the approach of ring-shaped settlements that used to be prevalent.

Table 5/6: Total Number of Approved Residential Units in the Settlements of Jerusalem 2014–2015

Residential Units	Number	Percentage (%)	Expected household capacity ⁶⁰
Approved residential units in the southern sector	7,890	55.3	26,826
Approved residential units in the northern sector	4,098	28.7	13,933
Approved residential units in the rest of Jerusalem settlements	2,282	16	7,759
Total	14,270	100	48,518

Approved Residential Units in the Settlements of Jerusalem 2014–2015 (%)

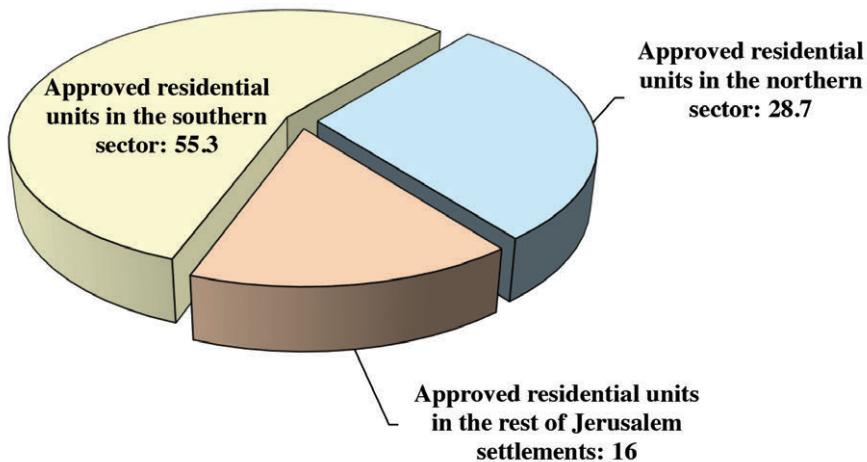
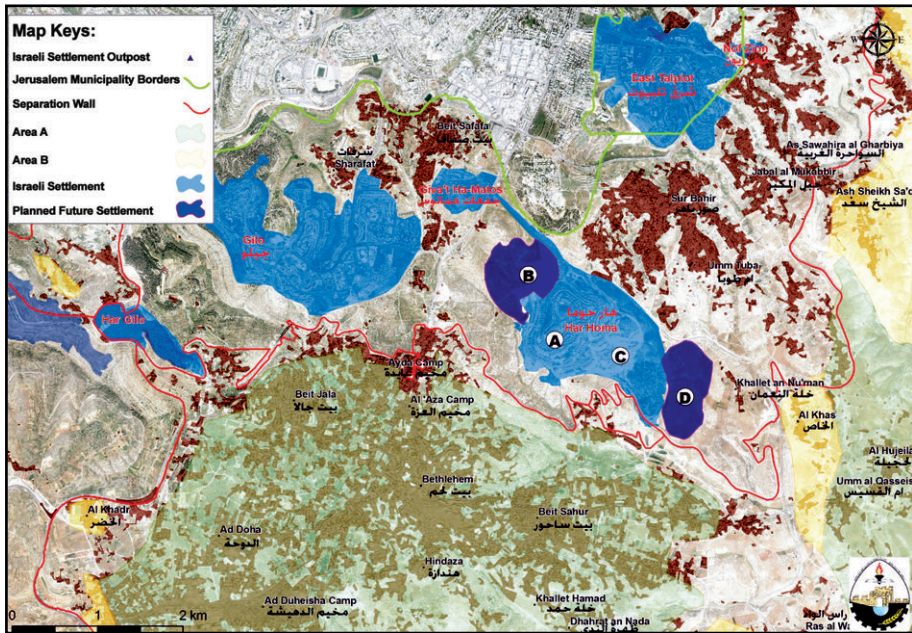


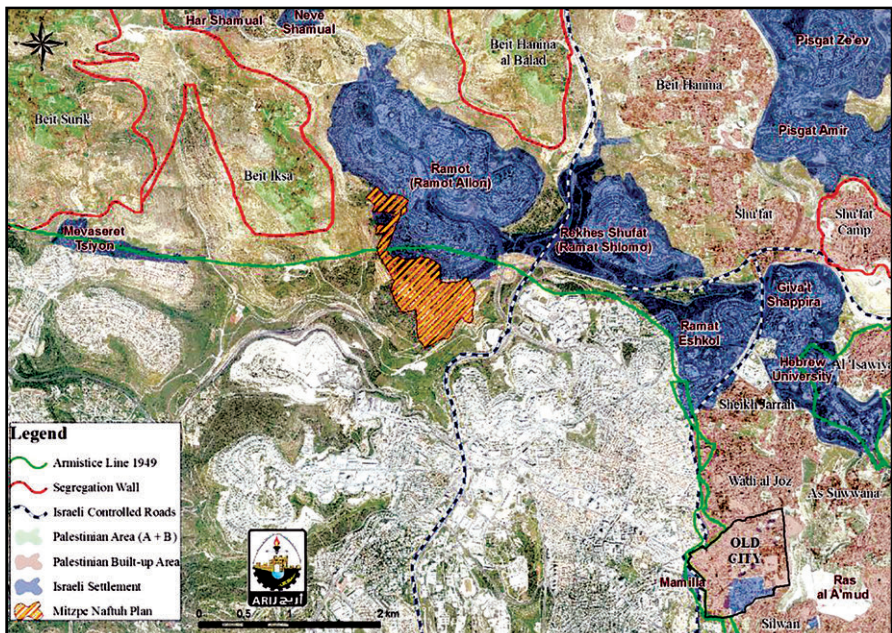
Table 6/6: Residential Units Approved or Proposed for Construction in the Settlements of Jerusalem 2014–2015⁶¹

Location	Settlement	2014		2015		Total
		No. of approved or proposed units for construction	Total no. of residential units in each government	No. of approved or proposed units for construction	Total no. of residential units in each government	
Jerusalem	Ramat Shlomo	1,000	10,848	1,531	3,422	14,270
	Ramot	1,249		318		
	Gilo	708		691		
	Giv'at Hamatos	2,561				
	Har homa	1,761		19		
	Talpiot	1,800				
	East Talpiot	350				
	Ma'ale Adumim			112		
	Kfar Adumim	19				
	Nofei Prat	256				
	Pisgat Ze'ev	259		115		
	Neve Ya'akov	238		26		
	A settlement neighborhood near Herod's Gate			12		
	Giv'at Ze'ev	647		576		
	Giv'on HaHadasha			22		
The rest of WB areas	5,856	6,245	4,151	5,016	11,261	
Total	17,093		8,438		25,531	

Map 3/6: Southern Sector Settlements That Show the Expansions of Har Homa Settlements⁶²



Map 4/6: Northern Sector Settlements That Show the Expansions of the Ramot Settlement in the Direction of West Jerusalem⁶³



Hotbeds of Judaization in Palestinian Neighborhoods

The Israeli authorities reinforced their settlement and new neighborhoods policy with a parallel policy of deliberately changing the character of Palestinian neighborhoods and establishing Judaization centers within them, in particular the central neighborhoods surrounding the Old City; and to achieve that they relied on the settlement organizations' prominent role. During 2014–2015, Judaization projects focused on three key areas: Salah Ad-Din Street, Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan.

- a. The Yeshiva School in the central post office building: on 13/3/2014, the Ateret Cohanim Organization announced that it had acquired a part of the central post office, an area that exceeds one thousand square meters. This post office was built by the Jordanian government in Salah Ad-Din Street.⁶⁴ The Israeli government took control of it and turned part of it into a police station. On 3/9/2014, Ateret Cohanim announced the opening of a Jewish seminary in the location, which it called Otzmat Yerushalayim.⁶⁵
- b. Ohr Somayach Yeshiva Plan: In February 2014, The Jerusalem Planning and Building Committee approved the 12-story building, three floors of which will be underground in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, for which it will allocate appropriated land with an area of 9,600 square meters. On 28/8/2014, the project was submitted to the Jerusalem municipality for approval.⁶⁶
- c. More phantom graves: there is an increase in the activity of planting fictitious graves in Silwan and at the foot of the Mount of Olives facing Ras al-'Amoud. This exaggerated spread of graves has the aim to close off the area available for the expansionist needs of the most populated neighborhood in Jerusalem.

3. Infrastructure that Reinforces the Jewish Presence

As settlement expansion is focused on the northern and southern sectors, infrastructure works are also focused on improving these two sectors, strengthening the connections between them and bolstering their communication with the city's Jewish center in the west of Jerusalem. Concerning building connections between the settlements and the west of Jerusalem, the Israeli government pushed ahead with the second line of Jerusalem Light Rail, in spite of the controversy about the real feasibility of its first phase, and in spite of its frequent breakdowns and stops during the Jerusalem *Intifadah* when it came under successive attacks.

Road 4 Aims to Promote the Southern Sector

A road connects Har Homa settlement with the Gush Etzion settlement bloc; intersecting with Highway 50 that connects the southern sector settlements with the city's Jewish center in the west of Jerusalem. This road causes additional fragmentation of Beit Safafa's neighborhoods; separating them, one from the other, and of the suburb of Sharafat, which has become encircled on all sides by settlements and settlement bypass roads. The implementation of this road was begun after an Israeli court approved its scheme and all objections submitted against it have been rejected.⁶⁷

Development of Road 21 (Begin Highway)

On 21/1/2013, Israeli bulldozers began work on Road 21, which connects the northern sector settlements with each other, and continues on its way to the west of Jerusalem. In April and August 2014, during work on this road, several olive groves in the vicinity of Shu'fat were razed.

Fourth: Israeli Settlement Expansion in WB

The Israeli occupation continued its race against time in its measures and practices on the ground in the Palestinian territories, seeking to Judaize it and alter its Arab identity, in order to annex it and implement Israeli civil law on it. For a while now, Israeli authorities have worked to implement a plan prepared in the 1970s, to dismember the WB governorates by creating ghettos and cantons as the final stage of occupying and controlling the entire WB.

In 2014 and 2015 the systematic expansion of Jewish settlements in WB continued. According to statistics, the number of Israeli settlers living in settlements rose from 240 thousand in 1990 to approximately 750 thousand in 2015, living in 196 Israeli settlements and 232 settlement outposts throughout WB, including East Jerusalem.⁶⁸

An official Palestinian report by the National Bureau to Defend the Land and Resist Colonial Settlements–PLO stated that more than 90% of WB lands seized by the Israelis were allocated to the expansion of Jewish settlements. The report said that the “Blue Line team,” who works for the Israeli Army's “Civil Administration” agency, is demarcating Palestinian lands that have been seized in order to initiate planning and construction of settlements.⁶⁹

Israeli settlement activity and confiscation of Palestinian land from the territories occupied in 1967 continued along the same quickened pace in 2014. In that year, Israel issued 18 orders to confiscate land, citing either security pretexts or declaring them “state land.” Through these orders, 7,262 donums (7.3 square kilometers) of land owned by Palestinians were seized, for the sake of expanding settlements.⁷⁰

Israel also seized four thousand donums (four square kilometers) to build a new settlement west of Bethlehem and Hebron, from the villages of Nahalin, Husan, Wadi Fukin, al-Jaba‘a, and Surif. Another decision was issued to seize another one thousand donums (one square kilometer) of the land of western and southern Bethlehem, according to the information center, The Committee to Resist the Wall and Settlements. Yoav Mordechai, then-Israeli coordinator of operations in WB, said the measures were taken according to a decision by the Israeli government, following the kidnapping and killing of three settlers in Hebron. Some Palestinian experts believe, however, the goal is to create contiguity between the settlements of Gush Etzion and Bethlehem on one hand, and the settlements and Jerusalem on the other. Furthermore, Israel seized another one thousand donums (one square kilometer) in Jerusalem; and handed out dozens of notices to Palestinians in southern Jenin and Tulkarem in the northern WB for the confiscation of thousands of donums of their farmlands.⁷¹

In December 2014, *Haaretz* published details of an Israeli plan to expand settlements at the expense of 35 thousand donums (35 square kilometers) of WB land. The newspaper report said the plan would turn land considered by the Israeli government to be “state land” into settlements. According to *Haaretz*, 99% of these state lands have been allocated to settlers. *Haaretz* said plans had been developed for 260 thousand donums (260 square kilometers) of WB, comprising settlement plans especially in the Jordan Valley and the borders of the territories occupied in 1948.⁷²

According to data from the Palestinian Monitoring Group of the Palestinian Negotiations Affairs department, nearly 11,933 settlements were approved in 2014 in WB. Tenders were posted for the construction of another 5,057 units, in addition to schools, synagogues, malls, and infrastructure for Jewish settlers.⁷³ Around 13,537 settlement units were built in 2014, after licenses requested in previous years were obtained.

Table 7/6: Residential Units in Israeli Settlements in WB 2014⁷⁴

Settlements	Residential units	Land property/ Governorate
Giv'at Hamatos	2,600	Jerusalem
Har Homa	1,970	Abu Ghuneim Mount/ Jerusalem
Ramat Shlomo	1,887	Jerusalem
Ariel	1,015	Salfit
Giv'at Ze'ev	736	Jerusalem
Gilo	708	Jerusalem
Leshem	694	Salfit
Beitar Ilit	508	South west Jerusalem
Efrat	450	Bethlehem
Elkana	452	Nablus
Shvut Rachel	350	Nablus
Talpiot	350	Jerusalem
Beit El	290	Jerusalem
Nofei Prat	256	Jerusalem
Ofra	250	Ramallah
Ramot	216	Jerusalem
Pisgat Ze'ev	178	Jerusalem
Neve Ya'akov	136	Jerusalem
Karnei Shomron	108	Nablus
Immanuel	102	Nablus
Alfei Menashe	78	Qalqilya
Adam	75	Jerusalem
Shavei Shomron	65	Nablus
Geva Benjamin	38	Jerusalem
Almog	31	Jericho
Distributed in various Jerusalem settlements	500	Jerusalem
Total	14,043	

In 2015, settlement building and expansion, legalization of settlement outposts, and the construction of new settlements accelerated. The Israeli authorities approved plans, posted tenders, and issued permits for the construction of 17,376 residential units, 72% of which were in the Jerusalem area. Israel confiscated 3,670 donums (3.67 square kilometers) in total.⁷⁵ By the end of 2015, the number

of units had jumped to 19,822 (see table 8/6), some built and others being built or pending permits, including 2,560 hotel rooms. The distribution of residential units was as follows.

Table 8/6: Distribution of Residential Units in WB Settlements Including Jerusalem, 2015⁷⁶

Settlements	Residential units	Land property/ Governorate
Ramat Shlomo	3,391	Shu'fat/ in Jerusalem
Jerusalem	2,200	Arab al-Sawahira
Giv'at Ze'ev	455	Shu'fat/ in Jerusalem
West Jerusalem	1,400	Lifta/Jerusalem
Ramot	382	Jerusalem
Har Homa	515	Abu Ghuneim Mount/ Southern Jerusalem
West Jerusalem	330	Sheikh Jarrah/ Jerusalem
Neve Ya'akov and Adam	114	
Nof Zion	300	Near Mukabbir Mount
West Jerusalem	192	Mamilla cemetery/ Jerusalem
West Jerusalem	480 (Hotel rooms)	Mamilla cemetery/ Jerusalem
Pisgat Ze'ev	156	Eastern Jerusalem
Jerusalem	25	Silwan
Jerusalem	21	Herod's Gate
Ramat HaNatziv/ Jerusalem	2,080 (Hotel rooms)	Hill of Evil Counsel/ Mukabbir Mount
Gilo	961	Near Bethlehem
Elkana	156	Salfit Governorate
"Secluded" settlements	886	WB
Kiryat Arba	102	Hebron
Ma'ale Mikmas, Rimonim and Kokhav HaShahar	2,200	WB
Modi'in	96	Ramallah Governorate
Alfei Menashe	78	Qalqilya Governorate
Beitar Ilit	70	Bethlehem Governorate
Ariel	32	Nablus Governorate
Ma'ale Adumim area	3,200	East Jerusalem
Total	19,822	

In 2015, the Israeli authorities issued military orders to confiscate a total of 3,670 donums (3.67 square kilometers) of Palestinian land in various parts of WB under various pretexts, but all serving to advance Israel's settlement agenda in the occupied territories.⁷⁷

In the Hebron Governorate, Israeli authorities confiscated a total of 853 donums (853 thousand square meters) under various pretexts, including military and security pretexts; for the wall; state lands; military zones; and other illegitimate claims.⁷⁸

In Ramallah and al-Bireh, Israeli authorities announced the seizure of a total of 820 donums (820 thousand square meters). Israel seized 790 donums (790 thousand square meters) of Palestinian lands in Bethlehem Governorate as part of its wider WB seizure policy.⁷⁹

It is also worth noting that the occupied Jordan Valley area continues to see repeated assaults on Palestinian villages there. Assaults have included the demolition of entire villages and housing communities, forcing their populations to evacuate, and seizing their lands for the purpose of settlement and establishing security zones, as claimed, as well as roads and streets. In addition, Arab rural communities in eastern Jerusalem saw assaults on their tents and villages, and forced expulsion, as well as detention and banishment from the lands where they had lived for decades.

Fifth: Israel's Demolition of Palestinian Homes

Israel implements a policy of demolishing Palestinian homes and structures as a means of collective punishment against Palestinians. The goal is to prevent them from expanding to accommodate natural population growth in some Palestinian areas, especially those designated to Area C according to the second Oslo Accords signed in 1995 between the PLO and Israel. These areas remain under the full control of the Israeli authorities, which claim that homes and structures targeted for demolition are "unlicensed" by the Israeli civilian administration. Up to 488 Palestinian homes and structures were demolished by the Israeli authorities in 2014 throughout WB, including Jerusalem. Around 851 homes and structures received notices of demolition.

**Table 6/9: Distribution of Demolition Operations and Orders
in WB Governorates**

Governorate	Demolition Operations	Demolition Orders
Jerusalem	159	120
Nablus	39	34
Jericho	32	45
Hebron	69	328
Bethlehem	16	109
Tulkarem	10	6
Tubas	117	64
Jenin	3	31
Qalqilya	5	28
Ramallah	4	54
Salfit	4	32
Total	488	851

In 2015, Israeli bulldozers demolished a total of 482 homes and structures in WB, including 281 homes and 194 other structures including animal barns, agricultural structures and commercial buildings. The largest number of demolitions took place in Tubas Governorate and the northern Jordan Valley, where occupation bulldozers levelled 115 homes and 37 other structures.⁸⁰ In the same year, Israeli authorities issued demolition orders against a total of 629 Palestinian homes and structures. The demolition orders were mostly in Hebron: 211 homes and structures; followed by Jerusalem, with 180 homes and structures; and Bethlehem, with 64 homes and structures.⁸¹

In 2011, the Israeli army declared its intention to fully depopulate the eastern surroundings of Jerusalem, home to a Bedouin population starting from the Mukhmas area north via Khan al-Ahmar and eastern mountains to al-‘Ayzariyah in the south (mostly in the area allocated by the occupation to the Adumim settlement bloc and the E-1 project linking it to Jerusalem), where Bedouin communities are estimated to number 2,300 people.⁸² The goal is to push them towards either al-Nuway‘imah in Jericho or al-Jabal near al-‘Ayzariyah landfill.

In 2012 and 2013, Israel carried out repeated demolitions that continued into 2014 and 2015, demolishing several homes and agricultural structures on 17/12/2014 and 12/3/2014,⁸³ and again on 14/1/2015, when the area of Maghair

al-Dair near Mukhmas was targeted for the demolition of three barns for sheep husbandry for the first time in three decades.⁸⁴ In Khan al-Ahmar and al-Za'im, 15 homes, 5 barns, and 4 public facilities were demolished on 17/8/2015, affecting 95 people.⁸⁵ Barracks housing 34 Jahalin Bedouins were demolished in the Abu Nawwar community near the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim on 6/1/2016.⁸⁶

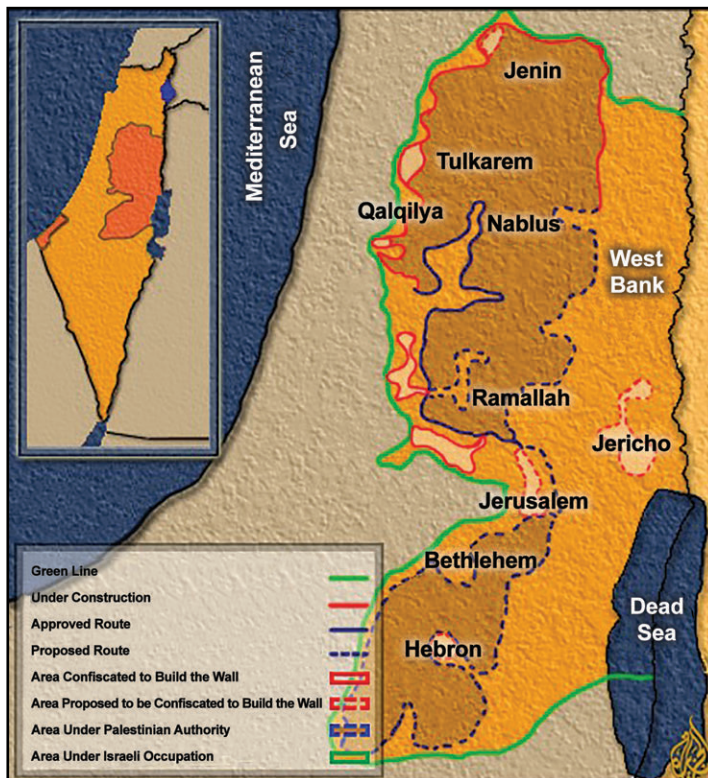
In the territories occupied in 1948, the Israeli authorities demolished hundreds of homes in various areas, in the Galilee, The Triangle (*al-Muthalath*), and Negev. The demolitions targeted homes in cities like Umm al-Fahm, Baqa al-Gharbiyyeh, Taybeh, Kafr Qasim, Lod, Rahat and Lakiya. Villages in the Negev were repeatedly demolished, including al-Araqib, which was demolished by the occupation more than 95 times, as well as other Arab villages in the Negev that Israel describes as "unrecognized."⁸⁷

Sixth: The Separation Wall: Development of its Building and its Impact on the Palestinian Situation

The Separation Wall added a new and major burden for Palestinians in WB, turning the lives of many of them into a living hell. Indeed, the barrier has isolated entire villages and neighborhoods from their natural surroundings, separated families, and impeded the freedom of movement. According to Israeli sources, the total length of the Wall is 790 km. Up to 60% of it has already been built. 10% is being built, and the remaining parts are planned and poised for implementation, according to Israeli authorities.

The Wall has now gone beyond the borders of the city of Jerusalem. Palestinian sources say that in August 2015, the Israeli authorities placed new markings in Palestinian territories in the area of Bir 'Onah in the city of Beit Jala, to resume construction of the Separation Wall in the area. This took place nearly a month after Israel's Supreme Court ruled on 6/7/2015, giving a green light to the Israeli occupation government to resume construction of the wall in the Cremisan Valley area to Tunnel's Road in the city of Beit Jala, after years of legal battles against the decision of the Israeli government to build the wall in the area. On 29/1/2016, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled to reject all appeals, paving the way for the army to start work on the Wall in the designated site, causing the monastery to lose its geographical connection to its land, which is located behind the wall.⁸⁸

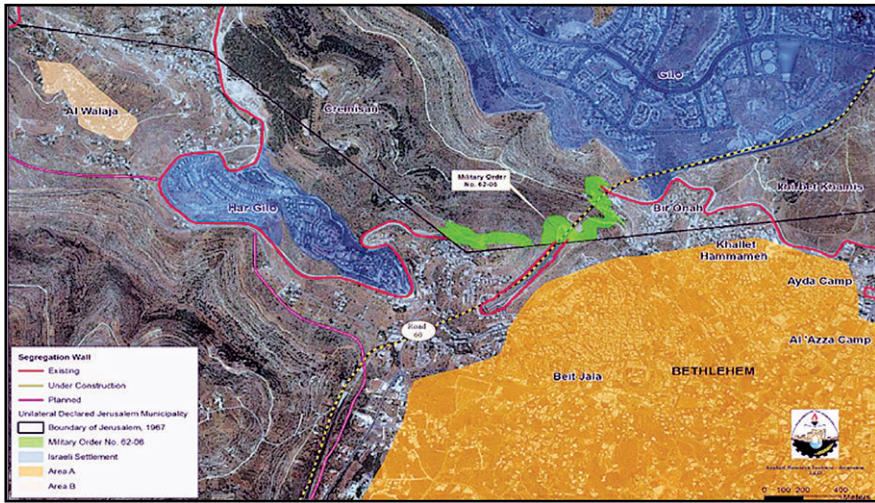
Map 5/6: The Separation Wall Route⁸⁹



In the same context, many marks were spotted placed by the Israeli authorities in the area known as Highway 60 (the Tunnel’s Road) linking the Jerusalem settlements. These settlements are part of the Gush Etzion settlement bloc, passing through the land of Beit Jala.⁹⁰

The Israeli authorities intend to continue the construction of the Separation Wall in the town of Beit Jala in line with Israeli military order No. 62/60 issued on 16/3/2006. The maps attached to the military order show a section of the wall extending from the area of Cremisan Valley through the Tunnel’s Road near the settlement of Gilo.

It is worth noting that if Israel completes the construction of this section of the Wall, it will complete the siege of Palestinian landowners in the town of Beit Jala, and isolate the Cremisan Valley area from the town despite it being their only outlet. The closure and isolation of the area will bring about serious economic losses to the Palestinians there, as this area provides livelihoods for dozens of Palestinian families in Beit Jala and nearby villages.⁹¹

Map 6/6: The Separation Wall Route in the Lands of Beit Jala⁹²

Israel claims that the construction of the Separation Wall in Beit Jala is needed to protect Israeli settlements from “terrorist threats.” It considers this section of the Wall to be a “front line,” especially since it falls in an area Israel considers to be the “borders of the Jerusalem municipality,” which was unilaterally and illegally redefined in 1967 following the Israeli occupation of the remaining Palestinian territories.⁹³

Israel also razed lands east of Jerusalem for the construction of another segment of the Wall to isolate it from al-‘Ayzariyah town. US Secretary of State John Kerry proposed to add the Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem behind the Wall to what would become the capital of the future Palestinian state. Local sources reported however that Israeli forces began building the remaining part of the Wall near al-Zaytuna crossing, thus isolating al-‘Ayzariyah from al-Tur. The segment in question would be the last one before all of east Jerusalem becomes isolated from WB; it would become isolated from Bethlehem to the south, Ramallah to the north, and Abu Dis and al-‘Ayzariyah to the east, while it would be connected to Israeli-annexed west Jerusalem. Israel considers all of Jerusalem its eternal capital.⁹⁴

Seventh: Bypass Roads

The Israeli planned bypass roads in WB are aimed at bolstering settlements there, while undermining the peace process and the two-state solution. They violate international laws and ostensible Israeli commitments to the peace process.⁹⁵

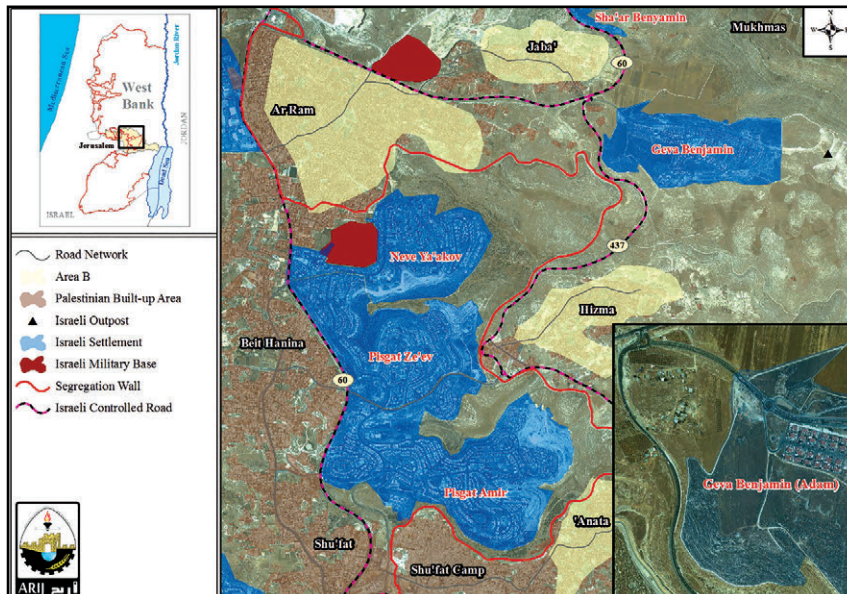
By the end of 2015, bypass roads covered 770 km.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, Israel continued to impede the freedom of movement for Palestinians in WB through checkpoints, numbering 514 with the beginning of 2015 and 607 by the end of the same year.⁹⁷

On 1/10/2014, the Israeli press reported that the Israeli civilian administration in WB was planning to seize 5.4 square kilometers of private Palestinian land to the west of the Israeli settlement of Adam, northern Jerusalem Governorate, to build a road only for use by Israelis.⁹⁸ A few days later, *Haaretz* published a detailed report on the new bypass roads along with a map detailing its path.⁹⁹

Some of the bypass roads in WB are used by both Israelis and Palestinians, others by Jews only. One of these roads is Route 437, north of Jerusalem Governorate, linking Israeli settlements in the Jerusalem municipal area such as Pisgat Ze'ev and Neve Ya'akov settlements to the settlement of Adam (Givat Binyamin Israeli), and to the Israeli settlements built on the territory of the Ramallah Governorate, such as Beit El settlement. This road is also used by Palestinians, being the only road that links northern Palestinian governorates to southern ones.

Route 437 terminates at the western entrance of the settlement of Adam, linking to settler Highway 60 (northern highway) that accesses Israeli settlements to the north of the West Bank¹⁰⁰ (See map 7/6).

Map 7/6: Bypass Road Network North of Jerusalem¹⁰¹



On 13/6/2014, the Subcommittee on Settlements of the Supreme Planning Council of the Israeli Civil Administration posted an announcement in *al-Quds* newspaper about the deposit of four detailed master plans of a road network that only serves the Israeli settlements east of Jericho.¹⁰² According to the plans, the main purpose is to organize roads linking Israeli settlements in the area to serve different expansion works.¹⁰³

Table 10/6: Plan Numbers of Deposited Plans and the Targeted Locations¹⁰⁴

Plan no.	Type & road no.	Blocks no./ location	Beneficiary settlement
1/936	Regional road/ No. 449	Blocks 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26 & 44, of al-‘Auja, north of Jericho	Mevo’ot Yericho and Rimonim
2/822	Local road/ No. 4499	Blocks 4, 17, 19, 20, 41, 43 of al-‘Auja, north of Jericho	Yetav
2/936	Regional road/ No. 449	Nu‘eima-Jericho lands within block no. 1	Na‘omi
1/934	Regional road/ No. 460	Blocks 20, 25 & 44 of al-‘Auja	Na‘omi

Israeli authorities also built a bypass road in the northern side of the town of Salfit, to link the Ariel settlement to the Israeli power plant near Salfit built near bypass road no. 05. The road in question is two kilometers long, cutting through the land of the town of Salfit in the area known as al-Fraise northwest of the town.

Eighth: Israeli Attacks on Palestinian Agriculture and Water Resources

The Israeli authorities continued to seize Palestinian farmlands, inflicting severe damage on the livelihoods of Palestinian farmers. An Israeli press report revealed that thousands of donums seized by the Israeli army in WB for “military purposes” as “firing zones,” were actually handed over to settlers to cultivate or use for cattle grazing, while preventing their original Palestinian owners from approaching them. According to the report, military zones 903 and 904 in the Jordan valley were allocated to settlers under official agreements. For example, the lands allocated to the settlements of Ro’i, Beka’ot and Gitit in the Jordan valley are defined as “firing zones,” part of them being private Palestinian property. According to the report, in

2014 Israeli authorities made 169 expulsions of Palestinians who attempted to farm their lands, and issued 105 evacuation and cessation orders regarding agricultural activities.¹⁰⁵

In GS, the minister of agriculture in the Palestinian government of national consensus, Shawqi 'Issa, stated that the total agricultural losses during the 2014 Israeli war on GS was about \$500 million in value, excluding losses to livestock or fisheries. Israel bombed more than 70% of the farmed land, claiming they were positions used by the Palestinian resistance to fire rockets. The Ministry of Agriculture in GS said that the total value of agricultural, animal stock, and fish stock losses as well as losses to factories that use crops as raw material was \$780 million.¹⁰⁶

The Israeli occupation also adopted a scorched-earth policy. According to Palestinian sources, on 19/5/2015 the Israeli army set fire to grazing lands in Khamat al-Ras al-Ahmar, east of the town of 'Atouf in Tubas Governorate, in the northern West Bank. Citizens and civil defense crews were prevented from putting out the fires. In the same context, more than two square kilometers of pasture were burned in Umm al-Qaba near al-Maleh.¹⁰⁷

The goal behind this policy of the occupation is to cut off the livelihood of Palestinians and force them to leave their land and allow settlers to replace them. Furthermore, Israeli officers and settlers routinely uproot fruit trees and olive trees, which are the main source of livelihood for thousands of Palestinian families.

The Israelis carried out dozens of assaults on Palestinian farmers and their crops. In 2014, Israeli forces and settlers uprooted 10,596 fruit trees, mostly in Ramallah (5,325); 2,059 in Bethlehem; 1,332 in Hebron. In 2015, 13,671 trees were uprooted. The Israeli authorities also systematically seized underground water in WB, consuming most of the water resources of the Palestinians there, while denying them their basic needs. Israel even sells back stolen water to Palestinians.¹⁰⁸

In January 2015, Israeli forces uprooted 5,655 trees located in various parts of WB. The most affected governorate was Ramallah, where more than 5,120 trees were uprooted, followed by Hebron with 4,150 trees. In Tubas Governorate, Israeli authorities uprooted more than 1,500 trees that were serving as a nature reserve there.¹⁰⁹

Many WB villagers faced problems and irregular delivery of drinking and irrigation water because of Israeli policies and racist laws. Israel previously seized all water aquifers in the occupied territories, preventing farmers from digging water wells and destroying others.

As a result of Israel's depletion of Palestinian groundwater aquifers, and because of restrictions on Palestinian construction and repair of wells, the water extracted by Palestinians decreased to less than the levels stated in the Oslo Accords. In 1999, the Palestinians extracted 138 Million Cubic Meters (MCM) of groundwater in WB, compared to 103.8 MCM in 2014.¹¹⁰

In the coastal aquifer, the water extracted in Gaza was 100.8 MCM in 2013, compared to 88.5 MCM in 2014. This quantity is considered an over-extraction, because the basin's sustainable yield should not exceed 50–60 MCM a year, meaning that more than 90% of water pumped from the coastal aquifer does not satisfy the water quality standards of the World Health Organization (WHO).¹¹¹

A February 2014 report by B'Tselem—The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, confirmed the existence of discrimination when it comes to the quantities of water allocated to Palestinians per capita compared to those allocated to Israelis. According to the Israeli National Water Company (Mekorot), the average household water consumption in Israel is between 100 and 230 liters per person per day, compared to the average daily consumption among Palestinians connected to a running-water network, which is about 73 liters. Additionally, 113 thousand Palestinians living in 70 communities (50 thousand in Area C) are not connected to the water supply network. The report also said that the average consumption per capita in GS is 70–90 liters per day, but that the water quality was extremely poor.¹¹²

In GS, 70% of water facilities have been disrupted as a result of Israeli targeting or because of fuel shortages caused by the Israeli blockade, leading to a 70–80% shortage, exacerbating water, environmental and health conditions in the Strip.¹¹³ Furthermore, the Israeli assault on GS in the summer of 2014 led to the destruction of sewage systems, causing waste water to flood into the clean water networks and the natural environment, worsening the risks to public health. This compounded the fact that the Strip was already discharging 98 thousand cubic meters of waste water a day into the sea.¹¹⁴

As for WB, the Israeli authorities draw their water and supply their own cities while selling the surplus to the Palestinians. The quantity of water purchased in 2014 from Mekorot was 63.5 MCM (with the exception of the parts of Jerusalem annexed by Israel after 1967), compared to 57.4 MCM in 2009.¹¹⁵

This is not to mention the unequal distribution of water between Palestinians and Israelis, all in the context of a surplus of water in Israel, according to *Haaretz*.¹¹⁶ According to the PA in Ramallah, Israel deliberately impeded more than 120 Palestinian strategic projects in 2010–2014 related to waste water treatment plants, water well drilling, and water infrastructure systems.¹¹⁷

Ninth: Military Checkpoints in WB

Israeli military checkpoints have turned large areas of WB into ghettos. Their numbers increased following the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* from 514 in early 2015 to 607 by the end of the year.¹¹⁸

According to OCHA-oPt data, Israeli forces intensified their presence and checking procedures at WB checkpoints. 16 out of 25 checkpoints across WB, which were previously only occasionally staffed, became regularly staffed and additional ad-hoc (flying) checkpoints were deployed in 152 locations.¹¹⁹

Observers and analysts say that Israeli forces never abandoned any of their checkpoints even at the height of negotiations progress with the Palestinians. Military checkpoints were kept in place near towns and villages, sometimes without stationing forces and others with soldiers who do not intercept the movement of citizens, while keeping the infrastructure of checkpoints and watchtowers.¹²⁰

At the end of 2015, the Israeli army operated 27 permanent staffed checkpoints, conducting mandatory inspection of Palestinians, many of whom are stopped and delayed. It operates 26 checkpoints that are the last checkpoint between WB and Israel. Some of these checkpoints are situated on the Green Line, and some are gates in the Separation Wall. Meanwhile, there are 12 checkpoints in Hebron at places where there is friction between settlers and Palestinians. These checkpoints are permanently staffed, and persons who cross are checked.¹²¹

Conclusion

Over the years considered in this report, we can see in Jerusalem, the central arena of the conflict, many trends directly linked to the more general trends of the conflict. These include the change in the Israeli political system towards the religious-nationalist camp; increased Israeli adoption of Jewish religious rhetoric and prophecies as a motive for political action; the increasing importance of the status of Israeli settlers as a colonial arm that is now the spearhead of the expansion of the Israeli state. Indeed, it is the settlers that are pushing forward an agenda of division and organizing raids at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, where they are funding and operating excavations. Settlers are leading the battle to seize the homes of Palestinian Jerusalemites in the old town and the surrounding neighborhoods. They are leading assaults on these residents too, triggering an uprising in 2014 with the murder of the child Muhammad Abu Khdeir, which evolved into a full scale war on GS in the summer of that year.

These extremist settlers triggered another popular Palestinian uprising in 2015, the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, following attempts to divide *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Israeli authorities protected and supported this agenda by deploying its forces to take part in the clashes settlers had instigated and then to steer events from that point forward. Although the Jerusalem *Intifadah* disrupted the agenda of dividing *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Judaization projects continue apace, aimed at altering the cultural and visual identity of Jerusalem.

During the period covered by this report, Israeli authorities continued their aggressive policies, confiscating Palestinian lands in WB and expanding settlements with the construction of thousands of residential units, continuing the construction of the Wall, and continuing the construction of bypass settler roads to dismember WB. In addition, hundreds of checkpoints were established, impeding the freedom of movement of Palestinians and their economic and political activities. Israeli authorities also continued their policies of consolidating their hold on most parts of WB under Area C, while stealing Palestinian water resources and selling the surplus back to Palestinians.

Thus, the Israeli side is actively working to alter the identity of the land and the population, without regard to the peace accords it signed and its commitments to the PA, let alone international laws and conventions. This will lead to the death of the peace process and the two-state solution and make the return of Palestinians to resistance in a broader and stronger manner likely.

Endnotes

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- ² Members of this bloc were identified according to their ideological positions and political conduct concerning al-Aqsa Mosque. They do not introduce themselves as an intact group, however, they behave as one. They form a trans-party bloc. Such identification became easier and clearer when there were public discussions in the Knesset Internal Affairs Committee concerning the cancelation of Jordan's sovereignty over al-Aqsa Mosque, starting February 2014. For more on the Israeli government formation, see The Knesset, http://www.knesset.gov.il/govt/eng/GovtByNumber_eng.asp
- ³ See Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012–2013*, p. 271.
- ⁴ The assassination attempt by Mu'taz Hijazi of Rabbi Yehuda Glick, one of the most prominent leaders of this coalition, was on 29/10/2014, while Glick was returning from an annual conference of the Coalition of the "Temple" Movements.
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- ⁶ Based on the observation of the author during the period 2006–2016, and by studying the literature of these movements published on their websites.
- ⁷ Hisham Ya'qoub et al., *'Ain 'ala al-Aqsa: Taqrir Tawthiqi Yarsud al-I'tida'at 'ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa fi al-Fatrah bayna 1/8/2013–1/8/2014* (Eye on al-Aqsa: Documentary Report Monitoring Aggressions on al-Aqsa Mosque During the Period 1/8/2012–1/8/2013), Eighth Report (Beirut: Al Quds International Institution, 2014), p. 43.
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- ¹⁰ Arabi21, 23/10/2015.
- ¹¹ See detailed report in: The Israeli Occupation Plans to Build an Underground Large Jewish Synagogue West of al-Aqsa Mosque, site of QPress, <http://bit.ly/1WQ0AxS> (in Arabic); and for more on the history of revealing this excavation, al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 16/11/2014, <http://bit.ly/1YeleGT>
- ¹² *The Jerusalem Post*, 1/6/2014, <http://www.jpost.com/International/14th-century-grand-hall-discovered-underneath-the-Kotel-Tunnels-355027>
And Hirsch is known by the media as Gennadiy Bogolyubov, who is living in London and is considered one of the richest Ukrainians.
- ¹³ Site of Daily 48, 23/6/2015, <http://daily48.com/?mod=articles&ID=1199724#.VtXCfUCJeSo>
- ¹⁴ The researcher of this chapter would like to thank Researcher Hanady Qawasmeh for her valuable assistance in editing the Hebrew–Arabic translation, and for explaining the meaning and connotation of the names of the Judaization centers listed in this part, in addition to explaining the reason for choosing them.
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- ¹⁷ Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 19/5/2015, <http://bit.ly/1NmzfBV>
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It should be noted here the tendency of the Palestinian media to exaggerate any step taken by the Israeli planning committees towards the major Judaization projects, such as the Kedem Center and Core House, and present it as great achievements. While these are mere changes that affect the form and not the essence, made to allow them to pass within the ceilings politically acceptable to the government; yet they may not appeal to the Temple Societies that aspire for more. This trial was repeated in the cases of Strauss House, Core House, Kedem Center and Spring House; all of which, in the end, were executed or are on their way to be executed, with slight alterations in the form. For example, see: site of Albyader, 8/6/2015, <http://www.albyader.net/mod=Articles&fullid=13147>; and Alray-Palestinian Media Agency, <http://bit.ly/272faqY>.

In spite of the fact that the content of the news itself says that what has happened is an alteration and not a rejection of the plan.

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Chapter Seven

*Demographic, Economic and
Educational Indicators*

Demographic, Economic and Educational Indicators

Introduction

Statistical studies on Palestinian people face real difficulties, which stem from the dispersion of Palestinians inside their country and in exile (half of the Palestinians live outside their historic land); occupation of their land, exploitation of their resources and disruption of their potential. In this chapter, we do our best to achieve the highest possible levels of accuracy concerning data related to the Palestinian people. The economic and educational data in this chapter are only of those of WB and GS, which are provided mainly by official PA sources.

First: Demographic Indicators

1. The Palestinian Population Worldwide

The Palestinians worldwide were estimated by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) at 12.366 million in 2015 compared to around 12.096 million in 2014, an increase of 2.23%. In 2014, the increase was by 2.44%, compared to 2013, where the total number of Palestinians was estimated as 11.807 million.¹ This means that the total number of Palestinians has increased nine fold since 1948.

Based on place of residence, Palestinians are categorized into Palestinians living in historic Palestine, which includes the territories occupied in 1948 and 1967, and those in the Diaspora. Palestinians in historic Palestine are estimated at 6.221 million representing 50.3% of the Palestinians worldwide. Of these, 4.75 million Palestinians, amounting to 38.4% of Palestinians worldwide, live in territories occupied in 1967, while 1.471 million Palestinians live in territories occupied in 1948 (Israel), forming around 11.9% of Palestinians worldwide (see table 1/7).

Palestinians in the Diaspora were estimated to number 6.145 million at the end of 2015, amounting to 49.7% of the Palestinians worldwide. These Palestinians are mostly concentrated in neighboring Arab countries, notably Jordan, which was home to around 3.892 million Palestinians at the end of 2015, 31.5% of

Palestinians worldwide. Palestinians in other Arab countries are estimated at 1.568 million, thus forming 12.7% of Palestinians worldwide, and they are mostly present in neighboring Arab countries including Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and the Gulf countries. Palestinians in foreign countries total an estimated 685 thousands, 5.5% of Palestinians worldwide (see table 1/7).

At the end of 2014, Palestinians worldwide were estimated to number 12.096 million, of whom 4.616 million were living in the WB and GS, in addition to around 1.463 million Palestinians in territories occupied in 1948, compared to 6.017 million living abroad; 3.775 million in Jordan and 1.567 million in other Arab countries. Their number in foreign countries was estimated to be 675 thousands (see table 1/7).

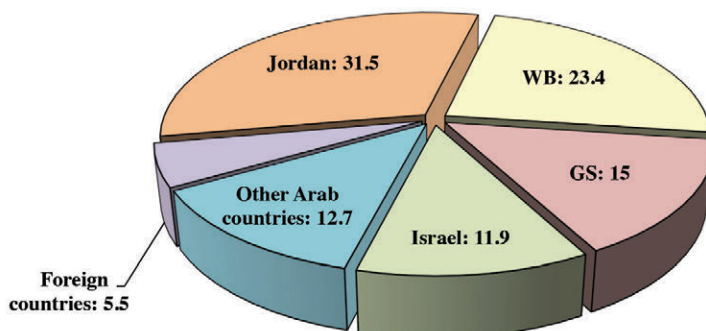
Table 1/7: Palestinian Population Worldwide Estimate According to Place of Residence at the End of 2014 and 2015 (thousands)²

Place of residence		2014		2015	
		Population estimate	Percentage (%)	Population estimate	Percentage (%)
Palestinian territories occupied in 1967	WB	2,826.4	23.4	2,898.9	23.4
	GS	1,790	14.8	1,850.6	15
Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 (Israel)*		1,462.5	12.1	1,471.2	11.9
Jordan**		3,774.9	31.2	3,891.9	31.5
Other Arab countries		1,566.6	12.9	1,567.8	12.7
Foreign countries		675.3	5.6	685.4	5.5
Total		12,095.7	100	12,365.8	100

* For the Palestinian population in the 1948 occupied territories; the number does neither include the Palestinians in the 1967 occupied territories, including Jerusalem, nor does it include Arab Syrians, Lebanese or non-Arab Christians or those classified as “Others.” In contrast, Israeli statistics have shown figures different from those of the PCBS, as the Israeli CBS estimated the number of Arab Palestinians in the 1948 occupied territories at around 1.757 million in 2015. If we deduct the number of citizens in East Jerusalem, that is 324 thousands (based on 2014 statistics) and the number of citizens in the Golan Heights, which is about 25 thousands, then the number of 1948 Palestinians totals 1.41 million.

** The number of Palestinians in Jordan are based on PCBS statistics in 2009 which were 3,240,473, and on the 3.1% annual growth rates during the period 2009–2015, issued by the Jordanian Department of Statistics (DoS), http://census.dos.gov.jo/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/02/Census_results_2016.pdf

Palestinian Population Worldwide Estimate According to Place of Residence at the End of 2015 (%)



2. The Demographic Characteristics of Palestinians

a. The WB and GS

The number of Palestinians in the WB and GS at the end of 2015 was estimated at 4.75 million of whom 2.899 million lived in the WB (61%) and 1.851 million in the GS (39%).

Estimates for 2015 show that 42.8% of Palestinians in the WB and GS were refugees descending from the territories occupied in 1948, a total of 2.033 million refugees. Around 787 thousand refugees were found to be living in the WB, thus constituting 27.1% of total WB Palestinians, while in GS their number reached 1.246 million refugees, 67.3% of the total Gazan population.

Table 2/7: Palestinian Total and Refugee Population in the WB and GS 2014–2015³

Year	Place of residence	Total population		Refugee population	
		Estimate	Percentage (%)	Estimate	Percentage (%)
2014	WB	2,826,408	61.2	772,208	27.3
	GS	1,790,010	38.8	1,216,759	68
	WB & GS	4,616,418	100	1,988,967	43.1
2015	WB	2,898,927	61	787,059	27.1
	GS	1,850,559	39	1,245,796	67.3
	WB & GS	4,749,486	100	2,032,855	42.8

The Palestinian community in the WB and GS is young, with those aged under 15 estimated to constitute 39.4% of the population at the end of 2015. However, there is stark difference between the WB and GS, as 37% of the population in the former is aged under 15 years compared to 42.8% in the latter. Conversely, the elderly (65 years and over) constitute only a small percentage of the total population, estimated at 2.8%, with 3.2% in the WB and 2.4% in the GS (see table 5/7).

Males in the WB and GS were estimated at 2.413 million at the end of 2015 compared to 2.336 million females, with a sex ratio 103.3 males per 100 females. In the WB, there were 1.473 million males compared to 1.426 million females with a sex ratio 103.3. In the GS, males amounted to 940 thousands compared to 910 thousand females, with a sex ratio of 103.3.⁴

Data showed that the dependency rate (number of dependent persons per 100 individuals at work age, 15–64 years) in the WB and GS decreased from 100.6 in 2000 to 73 in 2015. However, the dependency rate in the WB is lower than that in the GS and it decreased in the former from 94.3 in 2000 to 67.4 in 2015, whereas in the latter it decreased from 112.8 in 2000 to 82.7 in 2015.⁵

Data also showed a slight increase in median age (age that divides the population into two numerically equal groups, i.e., half the population is below that age and half above it) in the WB and GS during 2000–2015, where it ranged between 16.4 years in 2000 and 19.8 years in 2015. Comparing WB and GS figures during the same period shows a difference in median age, which increased in the WB from 17.4 years in 2000 to 20.9 years in 2015, and in the GS from 14.9 years in 2000 to 18.2 years in 2015.⁶

Demographic estimates also show that the Crude Birth Rate (CBR) in the WB and GS will decrease from 31.9 births per thousand population in 2015 to 29 births in 2020. In 2015, CBR in the WB was estimated at 29 births compared to 36.6 in GS.⁷

Available data shows that the Crude Death Rate (CDR) in the WB and GS is relatively low when compared to the rates in other Arab countries. CDR is also expected to decrease in the WB and GS from 3.6 deaths per thousand population in 2015 to 3.4 deaths in 2020. In addition, a slight difference is noted when comparing CDR in the WB and GS. Thus, while CDR is expected to decrease from 3.7 deaths per thousand population in 2015 to 3.5 deaths in 2020, in the WB, it is expected

to decrease from 3.4 deaths per thousand population in 2015 to 3.1 deaths in 2020 in the GS. This shows an improvement in the quality of life and access to medical care in addition to improved health awareness and development of health services.⁸

The natural population growth rate in the WB and GS was 2.9% in 2015 with 2.6% in the WB and 3.4% in the GS. Growth rates are expected to maintain the same level in the coming years. This is because the continued improvement in health levels, the decrease in the mortality rate, and the high fertility rates will lead to an increase in the natural population growth rate, which would necessitate suitable economic and social policies to accommodate the expected increase. Fertility in the WB and GS is considered high compared to fertility rates in other countries given early marriage, especially for females, and the desire to have children as part of the customs and traditions prevailing in Palestinian society.⁹

There are indicators that the fertility rate of Palestinian women has decreased, especially since the 1990s. Based on the results of the Palestinian household survey in 2014, there was a decrease in the total fertility rate in the WB and GS where there were 4.1 births per woman over 2011–2013 compared to 6 in 1997. Comparing WB with GS shows an increased fertility rate in the GS compared to the WB during 1997–2013; where in the WB there were 3.7 births per woman over 2011–2013 compared to 5.6 births in 1997, while in GS there were 4.5 births per woman over 2011–2013 compared to 6.9 in 1997.¹⁰

The total fertility rate is noted to be high in the WB and GS when compared to Arab countries. In 2014, the fertility rate in Jordan reached 3.5 births per woman compared to 3.5 in Egypt and 2.1 in Tunisia. Thus, the WB and GS are considered to have high fertility rates.¹¹

Due to the decreased mortality rate in the WB and GS, life expectancy has increased reaching 73.5 years in 2015 (72 years for males and 75 years for females). However, there was a difference between WB and GS figures where life expectancy in the WB reached 73.9 years in 2015 (72.4 years for males and 75.3 years for females) compared to 72.9 years in the GS (71.5 years for males and 74.4 years for females). The increase in life expectancy is due in part to improved health levels and a gradual decrease in mortality rates among infants and children.¹²

Available data for 2014 showed a decline in the average household size in the WB and GS compared to 2000, where it decreased from 5.2 persons in 2014 compared to 6.1 persons in 2000. In the WB, average household size decreased

to 4.9 persons in 2014 compared to 5.7 in 2000, while in the GS it decreased to 5.7 persons in 2014 compared to 6.9 in 2000.¹³

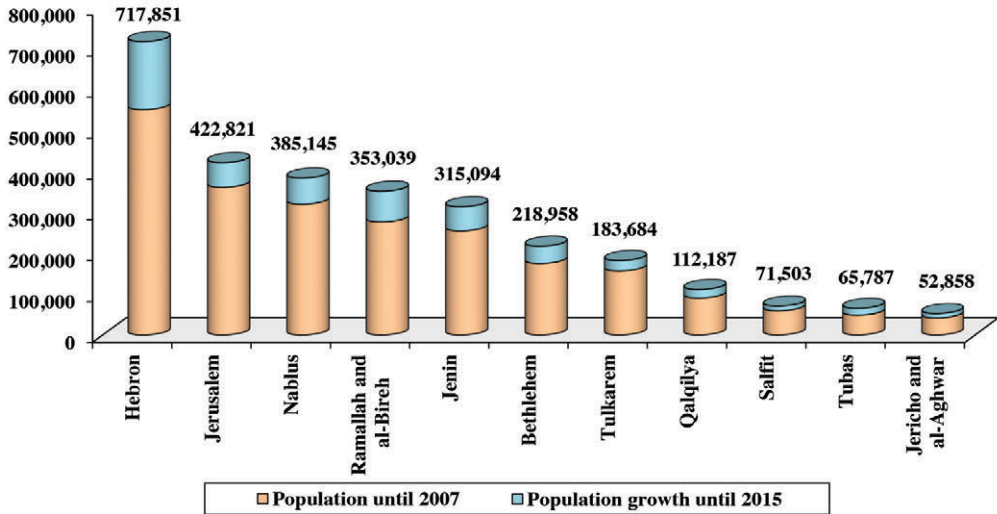
It is noted that the annual growth rate is high in all GS governorates compared to the WB. The highest is in North Gaza governorate, then in Rafah followed by Dayr al-Balah, whereas the highest annual growth rate in the WB is in the Tubas and Hebron governorates.

The Palestinian population is distributed into 16 governorates, 5 of which are in GS and 11 in the WB. Figures for 2015 show that Hebron is the largest governorate in terms of population, estimated at 15.1% of the total population in the WB and GS combined, followed by Gaza governorate with 13.4% and Jerusalem governorate with 8.9%. Figures also show that Jericho and al-Aghwar is the least populated governorate with 1.1% of the total population in the WB and GS. The following table shows the estimated population count in the WB and GS governorates based on PCBS figures.

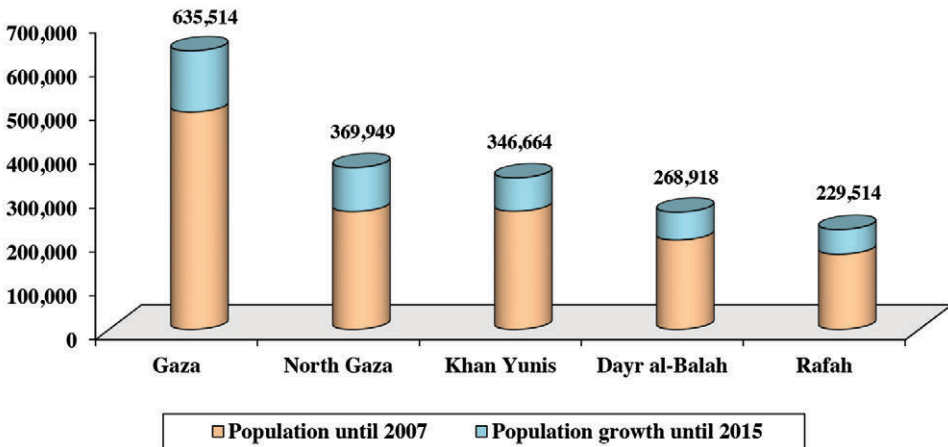
Table 3/7: Estimated Population Count by Governorate, 2007 and 2015¹⁴

Governorate	2007	2015	Annual growth rate 2007–2015
WB	2,345,107	2,898,927	2.7
Jenin	256,212	315,094	2.6
Tubas	48,771	65,787	3.8
Tulkarem	158,213	183,684	1.9
Nablus	321,493	385,145	2.3
Qalqilya	91,046	112,187	2.6
Salfit	59,464	71,503	2.3
Ramallah and al-Bireh	278,018	353,039	3
Jericho and al-Aghwar	41,724	52,858	3
Jerusalem	362,521	422,821	1.9
Bethlehem	176,515	218,958	2.7
Hebron	551,130	717,851	3.4
GS	1,416,539	1,850,559	3.4
North Gaza	270,245	369,949	4
Gaza	496,410	635,514	3.1
Dayr al-Balah	205,534	268,918	3.4
Khan Yunis	270,979	346,664	3.1
Rafah	173,371	229,514	3.6
Total (WB & GS)	3,761,646	4,749,486	3

Estimated Population Count in WB Governorates 2015



Estimated Population Count in GS Governorates 2015



The Demographic Impact of the 2014 Israeli War on GS

According to the PCBS survey on the demographic impact of the 2014 Israeli war on GS, about 9% of GS families were displaced due to the Israeli aggression.¹⁵ Moreover, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor reported that 100 thousand Palestinians became shelterless due to the destruction of their homes.¹⁶ Over 300 thousand Palestinians were displaced due to Israeli shelling.

b. The Palestinian Territories Occupied in 1948 (Israel)

There were an estimated 1.471 million Palestinians in Israel at the end of 2015 compared to around 1.463 million in 2014. Available data regarding Palestinians residing in Israel in 2014 shows that those aged under 15 years totaled 34.8%, while those aged 65 years and over amounted to 4.2%.¹⁷

Available estimates for 2014 show the total fertility rate for Palestinians residing in Israel at 3.2 births per woman, which is higher than the general fertility rate in Israel of 3.1 births per woman. Available data also shows that the average Palestinian household size in Israel reached 4.7 persons in 2014. Moreover, CBR and CDR were estimated at 23.8 births and 2.8 deaths per thousand respectively, while the infant mortality rate was 6.3 deaths per thousand live births. However, these figures do not include Arab citizens in the Syrian Golan Heights or citizens in J1 of Jerusalem governorate. They also exclude Lebanese Arabs who moved to live temporarily in Israel. The Israeli authorities consider all these categories within its population and within the Arab population as a whole.¹⁸

c. Jordan

Palestinians living in Jordan were estimated at 3.892 million at the end of 2015 compared to 3.775 million at the end of 2014, and most of them hold Jordanian citizenship, i.e., Jordanians citizens of Palestinian descent (see table 1/7).

According to 2010 data, the average Palestinian household size in Jordan was 4.8 persons, while the annual growth rate reached 2.2%. The total fertility rate among Palestinian women in Jordan was 3.3 births per woman, and CBR was 29.2 births per thousand people. The infant mortality rate in Palestinian refugee camps (RCs) in Jordan was 22.6 deaths per thousand live births, while mortality rate among children aged under 5 years was 25.7 deaths per thousand live births for the same year.¹⁹

Based on UNRWA figures, the total Registered Persons (RPs) in Jordan was 2,212,917 as of 1/1/2015 compared to 2,154,486 as of 1/1/2014. The RPs in Refugee Camps (RPCs) as a percentage of the total RPs was around 17.4% as of 1/1/2015.²⁰

d. Syria

According to UNRWA figures, the total RPs in Syria was 591,780 as of 1/1/2015 compared to 569,645 as of 1/1/2014. Worthy of mention is that these figures do not include the Palestinians who were displaced to Syria in 1967 and 1970, since most of them are not registered with UNRWA.²¹

The suffering of Palestinian refugees in Syria has increased as a result of the ongoing crisis there. In March 2016, UNRWA estimated that 280 thousand Palestinian refugees were internally displaced.²² In addition, around 114 thousand Palestinian Refugees From Syria (RPS) had to go abroad, as follows:

Table 4/7: UNRWA's Figures of RPS Abroad March 2016 (thousands)²³

Country	Lebanon	Jordan	Egypt	Gaza	Turkey & Europe	Total
RPS	42	17	4	1	50	114

According to UNRWA, 95% of refugees registered with UNRWA in Syria are in need of sustained humanitarian assistance, meaning 430 thousand refugees kept depended on the food and cash aid offered by UNRWA to meet their basic needs.²⁴

Most Palestinian RCs in Syria have been damaged or destroyed, especially those lying in areas witnessing armed clashes. This led to the displacement of residents to more secure areas. Those who stayed in RCs suffered from siege and lack of services and basic food needs. The most prominent of these was Yarmouk RC, and according to UNRWA, its population declined to 18 thousand Palestinians, and this number is likely to decrease due to the siege and the military battles inside. When casting light on the numbers of victims, detainees and missing people, the amount of suffering and targeting of Palestinians in Syria becomes clear. Up to 12/5/2016, 2,912 Palestinian victims were documented, 258 missing and 945 detained.²⁵

According to the most recent available data regarding Palestinian refugees in Syria, those aged under 15 years amounted to 33.1% of the total, while those aged 65 years and over amounted to 4.4% in 2009. Data shows that in 2010 the average Palestinian household size in Syria was 4.1 persons, while the annual growth rate was 1.6%. The total fertility rate among Palestinian women in Syria reached 2.5 births per woman in 2010, whereas CBR was 29.2 births per thousand population. The infant mortality rate for Palestinians in Syria was 28.2 deaths per thousand live births, while the mortality rate among children aged under 5 years reached 31.5 deaths per thousand live births in 2010.²⁶

e. Lebanon

According to UNRWA figures, the total RPs residing in Lebanon was 493,134 as of 1/1/2015 compared to 483,375 as of 1/1/2014, with a 2% annual growth rate. The RPCs as a percentage of the total RPs was 50.6% as of 1/1/2015. At the time of writing, UNRWA has not published any data concerning the refugees in 2016, however, if we consider the same annual growth, total RPs would be 502,997.²⁷ It should be noted that the actual number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is much fewer than the number of UNRWA RPs. Field studies indicate that it is just under 300 thousand only; as many Palestinians immigrated to different countries especially to western Europe and the Gulf states, keeping their UNRWA IDs and records.

Available data regarding Palestinians in Lebanon in 2011 show that 31.1% of refugees are under 15 years of age while 6.1% are 65 years and over. The sex ratio was estimated at 98.2 males per 100 females. Data also estimates unmarried Palestinian females in Lebanon (12 years and over) at 43.7% of the Palestinian population, those married at 52.2%, divorced at 2.3% and widowed at 1.7%.

According to PCBS figures, the average household size was 4.4 persons in 2011, while the fertility rate among Palestinian women in Lebanon reached 2.8 births per woman. Infant mortality rate for Palestinians in Lebanon was 15 deaths per thousand live births, while the mortality rate among children aged under 5 years was 17 deaths per thousand live births for the same year.²⁸

f. General Comparisons Among Palestinians

By comparing some of the major demographic indicators summarized in table 5/7, the following can be discerned:

- The percentage of Palestinians aged under 15 years is highest in GS and lowest in Lebanon.
- The dependency rate in Jordan is highest, followed by that of the Palestinian population in GS, then Israel and then the WB. Syria and Lebanon see the lowest dependency rate.
- The percentage of Palestinians aged 65 years and over is highest in Lebanon, then Jordan and lowest in GS.
- CBRs are highest in GS, then in Jordan and Syria, followed by the WB then Lebanon, and the lowest are in Israel. This rate is consistent with the general

trend of births in the past years, where GS remained the area with the highest rate of the CBRs, which leads to demographic pressure on the besieged GS, which has a limited capacity.

- CDRs remained high in the WB and GS, reaching 3.6 deaths per thousand in 2015. This was due to Israel and its racist policies pursued over decades, especially the killing of Palestinians.
- The natural population growth rate (the difference between birth and death rates) remained the same in the PA territories, yet it remained high in the GS as compared to the WB.

Table 5/7: Selected Demographic Indicators of Palestinians by Residence²⁹

Indicator	WB 2015	GS 2015	WB & GS 2015	Israel 2014	Jordan 2010	Syria 2010	Lebanon 2011
% of individuals under 15 years	37	42.8	39.4	34.8	35.9 (2007)	33.1 (2009)	31.1
% of individuals 65 years and over	3.2	2.4	2.8	4.2	5.2 (2007)	4.4 (2009)	6.1
Dependency rate (per 100 individuals 15–64 years)	67.4	82.7	73	77.9 (2007)	84 (2007)	59.7 (2007)	62.1 (2007)
Sex ratio (males per 100 females)	103.3	103.3	103.3	102.7	–	100.4 (2009)	98.2
CBR (births per 1,000 population)	29	36.3	31.9	23.8	29.2	29.2	25.8 (2010)
CDR (deaths per 1,000 population)	3.7	3.4	3.6	2.8	–	2.8 (2006)	–
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	3.7 (2011–2013)	4.5 (2011–2013)	4.1 (2011–2013)	3.2	3.3	2.5	2.8
Natural population growth rate	2.6 (mid 2015)	3.4 (mid 2015)	2.9 (mid 2015)	2.2	2.2	1.6	2.2 (2010)
Average household size (individuals per house)	4.9 (2014)	5.7 (2014)	5.2 (2014)	4.7	4.8	4.1	4.4

3. The Palestinian Refugees

It worth noting that Palestinian refugees are not only those living outside Palestine, they also include around 1.989 million refugees living in Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, in addition to 150 thousand refugees who were

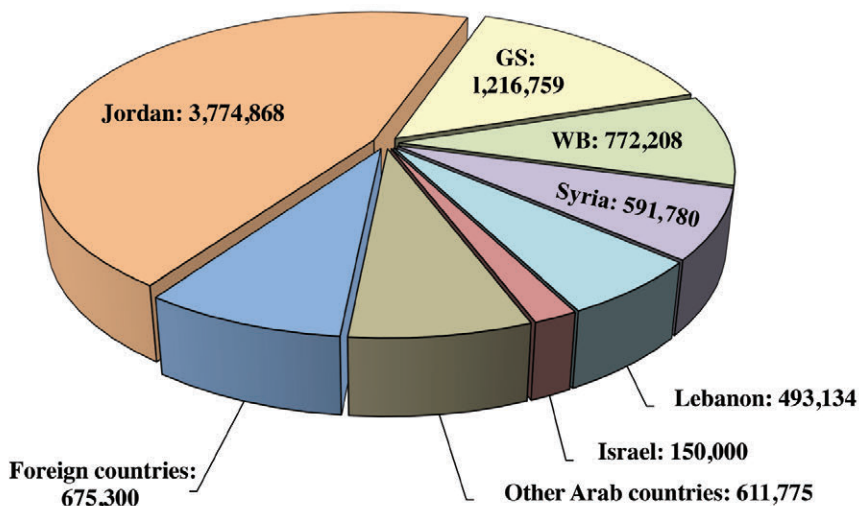
expelled from their lands but remained living in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 (Israel). According to 2014 estimates, the total number of Palestinian refugees is 8.286 million, 68.5% of the total Palestinian population. There is a lack of reliability in calculating some figures due to changes of country of residence or citizenship; however, this will be of marginal impact due to the large overall number of Palestinian refugees.

Table 6/7: Palestinian Refugees Worldwide; Population Estimates in 2014³⁰

Region	WB	GS	Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 (Israel)*	Jordan	Lebanon	Syria	Other Arab countries	Foreign countries	Total
Refugee population estimates	772,208	1,216,759	150,000	3,774,868	493,134	591,780	611,775	675,300	8,285,824

* Approximate number.

Palestinian Refugees Worldwide; Population Estimates in 2014



It should be noted that UNRWA estimates were limited to Palestinians who have registered as refugees in UNRWA’s five areas of operation: WB, GS, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Thus, these estimates do not accurately reflect the actual number of Palestinian refugees worldwide. Moreover, these estimates do not include many residents of UNRWA’s five areas, who have no need to register and benefit from UNRWA’s services. They also exclude 330 thousand Palestinians who fled after

the 1967 war. In addition, some refugees have been forced to leave Palestine under various conditions (other than war) and were prevented from returning later on. Therefore, UNRWA estimates are incomplete, and we should deal with these numbers as the actual figures.

In 2013, UNRWA provided updated statistics regarding the number of refugees in the areas of its operation where recent digitization of UNRWA's registration records enables it "to present more detailed beneficiary statistics." UNRWA classified those registered with it into two categories, labeling them "Registered Refugees (RRs)" and "Other Registered Persons (RPs)." The latter category includes those eligible to receive the Agency's services according to the UNRWA website. It is likely that these include beneficiaries who do not qualify for UNRWA's definition of the Palestinian refugee, which is a limited definition that does not cover all categories of refugees.

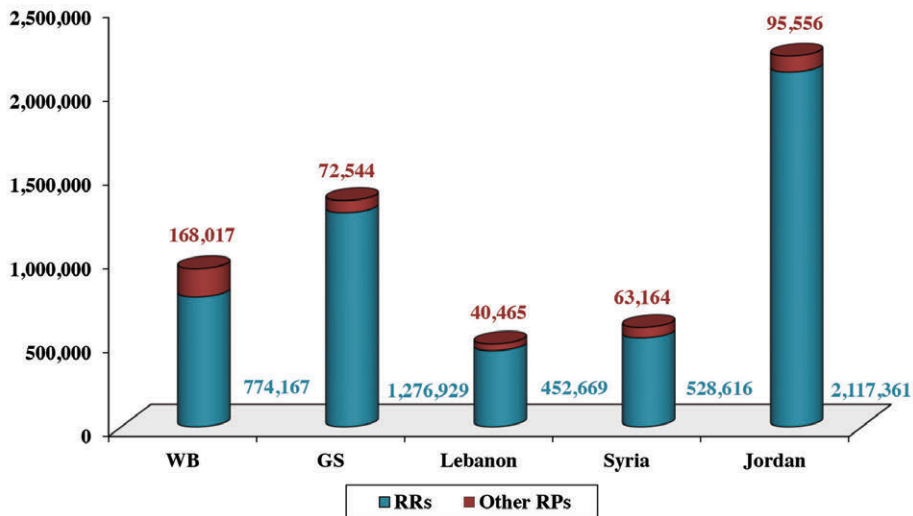
The total RPs in UNRWA's five regions of operation are estimated at 5.589 million as of 1/1/2015, 2.213 million (39.6%) of whom live in Jordan, 2.291 million (41%) in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 (1.349 million (24.1%) in GS and 942 thousand (16.9%) in WB), in addition to 1.085 million (19.4%) in Syria and Lebanon. The total of RPCs has reached 1.603 million (28.7%), and it is noted that the percentage of RPCs in Lebanon and the GS is the highest of all the regions.

**Table 7/7: UNRWA-RPs According to Their Area of Operation
as of 1/1/2015³¹**

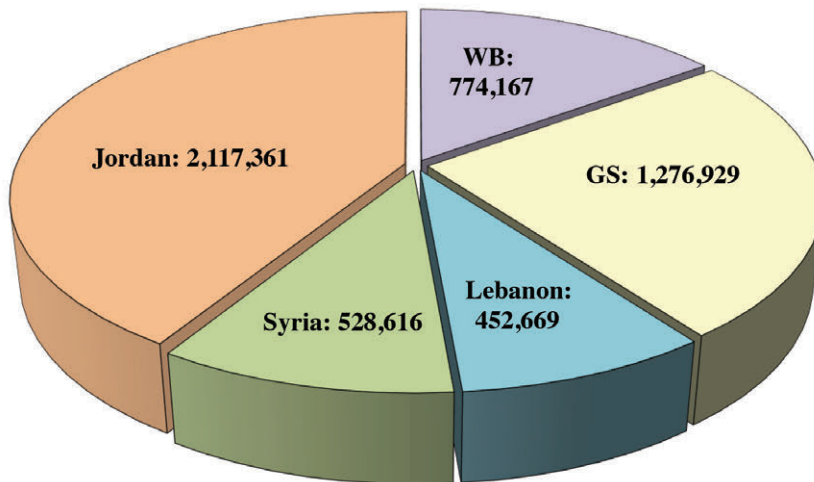
Area	RRs	Other RPs	Total RPs	Official camps	RPCs	RPCs as % of RPs
WB	774,167	168,017	942,184	19	228,560	24.3
GS	1,276,929	72,544	1,349,473	8	560,964	41.6
Lebanon	452,669	40,465	493,134	12	249,410	50.6
Syria*	528,616	63,164	591,780	9	178,666	30.2
Jordan	2,117,361	95,556	2,212,917	10	385,418	17.4
Total	5,149,742	439,746	5,589,488	58	1,603,018	28.7

* All Syria figures represent a working estimate as the situation in Syria remains volatile.

UNRWA's Figures as of 1/1/2015



UNRWA-RRs by Area as of 1/1/2015



The results of the Labor Force Survey in 2014 showed that the participation rate in labor force among refugees aged over 15 years, who live in WB and GS was 45.7% against 45.8% for non-refugees.

Female participation of refugees living in the WB and GS reached 20.9% against 18.4% for non-refugees.³²

There is a clear difference in unemployment rates between refugees and non-refugees, as unemployment rate among the former reached 33.7% while the latter was 22.3%.³³

4. Demographic Growth Trends

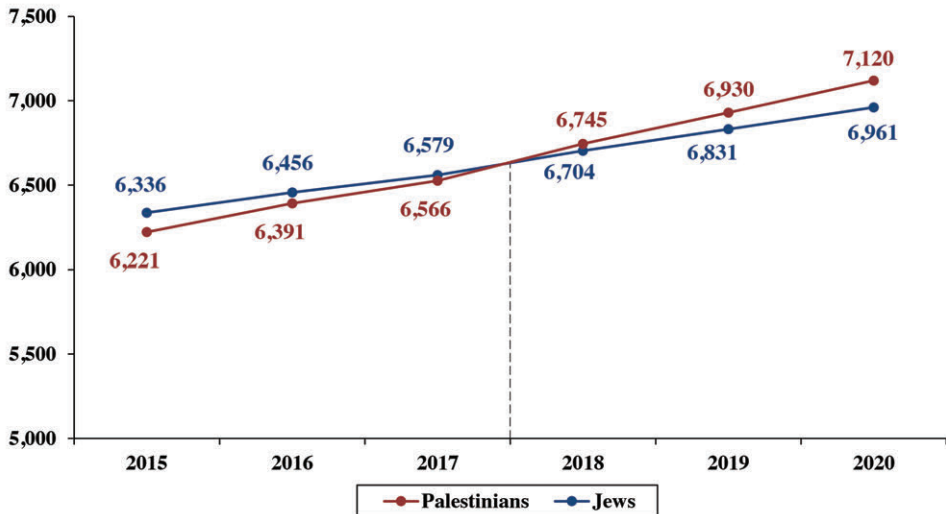
Despite the relative decrease in the natural growth rate among the Palestinian population, this rate remains high when compared to other populations including the Israelis. Based on PCBS estimates, Palestinians in historic Palestine amounted to around 6.22 million at the end of 2015, while Jews reached 6.34 million according to Israel's CBS estimates.

Based on annual growth rates which amount to 2.9% for Palestinians in the WB and GS, 2.2% for Palestinians in territories occupied in 1948 (Israel), and 1.9% for Jews, the number of Palestinians and Jews in historic Palestine will be equal in 2018; where each will number around 6.7 million should growth rates remain unchanged. Jews living in Palestine will comprise 49.4% of the population in 2020, where they will amount to 6.96 million compared to 7.12 million Palestinians.

Table 8/7: Estimated Population Count of Palestinians and Jews in Historic Palestine 2015–2020 (thousands)³⁴

Year	Palestinians			Jews
	WB & GS	Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 (Israel)	Historic Palestine	
2015	4,750	1,471	6,221	6,336
2016	4,887	1,504	6,391	6,456
2017	5,029	1,537	6,566	6,579
2018	5,175	1,570	6,745	6,704
2019	5,325	1,605	6,930	6,831
2020	5,479	1,640	7,120	6,961

Estimated Population Count of Palestinians and Jews in Historic Palestine 2015–2020 (thousands)



5. Palestinians Outside Palestine and the Right of Return

Palestinians outside Palestine continued to hold events and activities that assured their inalienable historical rights of Palestine, the importance of preserving the right of return, and that reminded younger generations of the importance of clinging to their lands and right of return.

The 13th Annual Palestinians in Europe Conference entitled “The Palestinians of Europe and their National Project,” convened in Berlin, Germany on, 25/4/2015. Thousands participated in the conference, where delegations came from across Europe and further afield. This conference was held during the 67th anniversary of the Palestinian *Nakbah* (catastrophe), in the presence of Palestinian leaders and public figures from Palestine and abroad, in addition to the presence of Arab, Muslim, and European public figures, and representatives of institutions and sectors who are in solidarity with Palestine. The conference was organized by General Secretariat of the Palestinians in Europe Conference, the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC), and the Palestinian Assembly in Germany in cooperation with Palestinian organizations from Germany and Europe.

The conference issued a final statement, which asserted all Palestinian rights, especially the right of return and stressed that “Palestinian people will not accept any compromise or a political resolution that does not guarantee their full

inalienable rights.” In addition, the conference called on European countries to comply with their policies that support justice and human rights, and “to cancel all trade, commercial, cultural cooperation with Israel.” Moreover, the conference urged parties “to craft a Palestinian strategy that employs all legal and possible tools and mechanisms to expose the Israeli occupation and its inhuman practices against the innocent civilians in Palestine.”³⁵

Despite the suffering of the Palestinian refugees in Yarmouk RC in Syria, the remaining refugees there marked *Nakbah* day on 15/5/2015 by marching through the streets of the camp. The rally was attended by hundreds of people who raised Palestinian flags and Palestinian cities, towns and RC names, asserting their right to return.³⁶

In Lebanon, the Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition conducted its 14th meeting in Beirut on 17–20/3/2016 in Mar Elias RC. This meeting was the product of an initiative of the Center for Refugee Rights (Aidoun) in cooperation with the members of the Coalition from Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Europe, where all participants asserted their right to return.³⁷

Moreover, Gathering of Palestinians in Diaspora in Europe commemorated the 40th anniversary of Land Day in Berlin, Germany, where the Chairman of the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel Muhammad Barakeh, participated.³⁸

The UN granted the PRC, special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1/6/2015. The PRC managed to attain its membership after five years of Israel hindering its membership, under the false pretext that PRC supported violence and “terrorism.” The Centre was granted its status by a recorded vote of 12 in favor to three against (Israel, the US and Uruguay) with three abstentions (Greece, India, Russian Federation) and one absent member (Burundi).³⁹

Second: Economic Indicators in the WB and GS

Palestinians in WB and GS live in difficult conditions because of complex local and international circumstances, impacting both directly and indirectly daily life in the Palestinian territories. Myriad restrictions, obstacles, and barriers

exist, including the blockade, geographical and political division, and stalled reconstruction amid signs of global recession and instability as a result of the collapse of oil prices, wars in the region, and shifting global alliances and conflicts. Faced with these conditions and the overlap of scenarios shaping the Palestinian economy, flexible policies are required to tackle as many potential developments as possible.

1. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in PA Territories (WB and GS)

GDP is one of the most widely used indicators to measure overall economic activity over the year, to infer growth or contraction. Accuracy of this benchmark requires it to be calculated on a real—rather than nominal—basis.

a. Average GDP Growth

According to PCBS data, GDP decreased in 2014, a year marked by exceptional developments and circumstances led by the Israeli war on GS. The war inflicted extensive damage to infrastructure, public facilities, housing, and productive institutions, while the blockade and destruction of border tunnels continued. Thus, GDP decreased by 0.18% compared to growth of 6.3% and 2.2% in 2012 and 2013 respectively. This was the first contraction registered since 2006 after two years of slowing growth⁴⁰—taking into account the difference in growth between WB and GS.

For 2015, GDP rose to \$7,721.7 million at a rate of 3.5%. The first quarter (Q1) was an extension of the exceptional circumstances of 2014, but the three subsequent quarters saw reconstruction programs kick-started representing a step towards a cautious economic recovery. However, the new uprising later in 2015 hit the Palestinian economy to the tune of \$1.3 billion in losses between October 2015 and January 2016.⁴¹

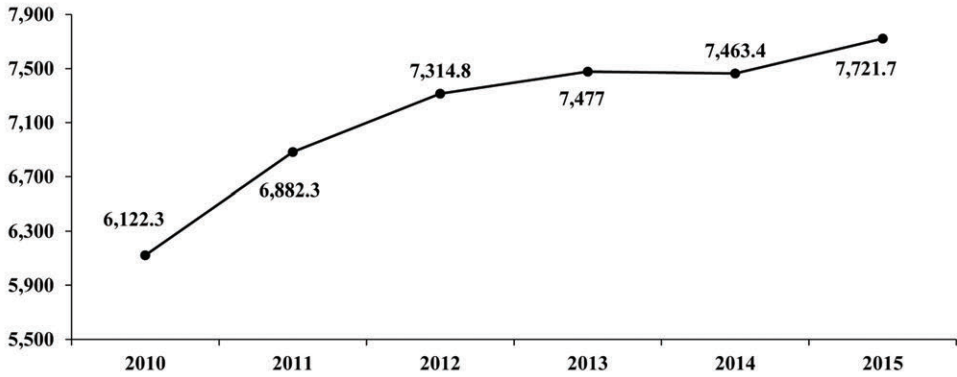
Table 9/7: GDP in PA Territories 2010–2015 at Constant Prices (\$ million)⁴²

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015*
GDP	6,122.3	6,882.3	7,314.8	7,477	7,463.4	7,721.7
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+8.1	+12.4	+6.3	+2.2	-0.18	+3.5

Note: The data excludes those parts of Jerusalem, which were annexed by Israel in 1967. The base year is 2004. This will be applied to all the following tables in this chapter.

* Preliminary estimates.

GDP in PA Territories 2010–2015 at Constant Prices
(\$ million)



Forecasts for 2016–2017 were estimated based on the general trends of growth in 2010–2015 with an average growth of 3.4%. This is consistent with the predictions of the Palestine Monetary Authority (PMA) for the year 2016, mainly supported by increased private consumption, bringing its contribution to GDP to 92.3%.⁴³ This is also in line with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasted growth of the Palestinian economy at weak levels, hovering around only 3.5% over the medium term.⁴⁴

b. GDP Growth in the WB and GS

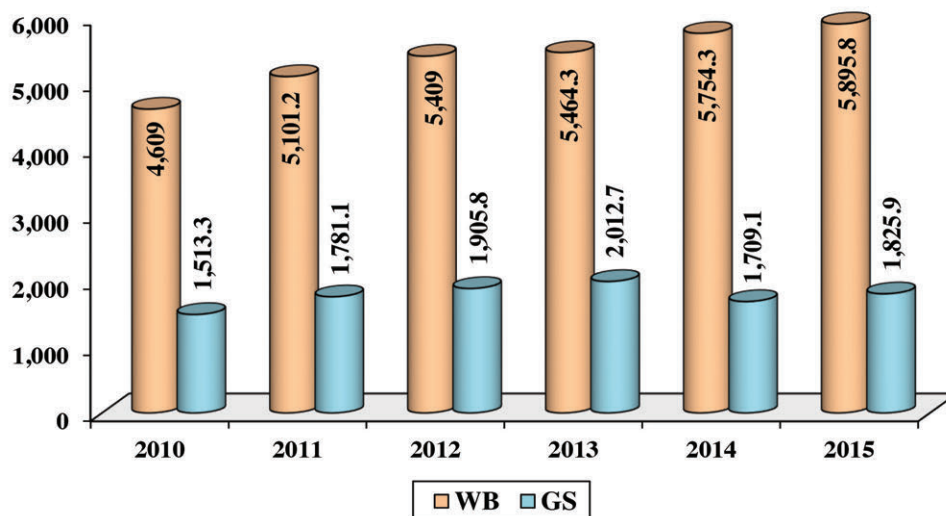
There was a significant divergence in GDP growth rates between WB and GS in 2014 and 2015. In the latter, GDP decreased by 15.1% in 2014, then grew by 6.8% in 2015, compared to an increase in WB of 5.3% and 2.5% in the two years respectively (see table 11/7). Regarding the contribution of the WB and GS to the Palestinian GDP, the WB share was high compared to the GS share (see table 10/7), taking into account the size of the population. The WB population constituted 61% of the total population of WB and GS in 2015.⁴⁵ This factor, coupled with the large area of WB compared to GS, and the tight Israeli blockade on Gaza, helps explain why the WB's share of GDP is higher than that of the GS.

Table 10/7: GDP in the WB and GS 2010–2015 at Constant Prices
(\$ million)⁴⁶

Year	WB		GS		WB and GS	
	GDP	Percentage (%)	GDP	Percentage (%)	GDP	Percentage (%)
2010	4,609	75.3	1,513.3	24.7	6,122.3	100
2011	5,101.2	74.1	1,781.1	25.9	6,882.3	100
2012	5,409	73.9	1,905.8	26.1	7,314.8	100
2013	5,464.3	73.1	2,012.7	26.9	7,477	100
2014	5,754.3	77.1	1,709.1	22.9	7,463.4	100
2015*	5,895.8	76.4	1,825.9	23.6	7,721.7	100

* Preliminary estimates.

GDP in the WB and GS 2010–2015 at Constant Prices (\$ million)



**Table 11/7: GDP Growth in the WB and GS 2010–2015 at Constant Prices
(\$ million)⁴⁷**

Year		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015 [*]
WB	GDP	4,609	5,101.2	5,409	5,464.3	5,754.3	5,895.8
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+7	+10.7	+6	+1	+5.3	+2.5
GS	GDP	1,513.3	1,781.1	1,905.8	2,012.7	1,709.1	1,825.9
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+11.4	+17.7	+7	+5.6	-15.1	+6.8

* Preliminary estimates.

c. Comparison of GDP Between PA Territories and Israel

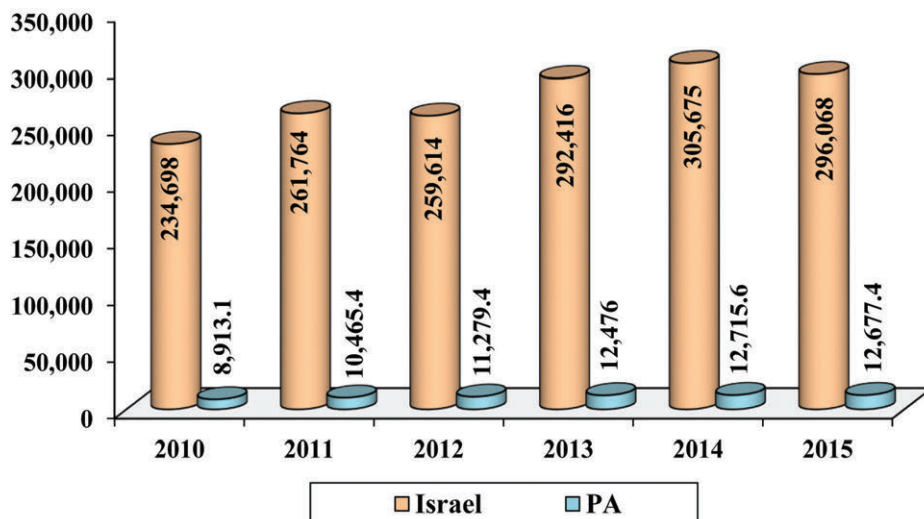
When examining Israeli GDP at current prices, \$305.675 billion in 2014 and \$296.068 billion in 2015, we note that Israeli GDP was approximately 23 fold (2,335%) that of its Palestinian counterpart in 2015. This is a clear indication of the impact of Israeli occupation on the Palestinian economy and of the impact the occupation's exploitation of Palestinian resources, while preventing Palestinians from using their energies and potentials freely and efficiently.

**Table 12/7: GDP in PA Territories and Israel 2010–2015 at Current Prices
(\$ million)⁴⁸**

Year	PA	Israel	% Palestinian GDP of Israeli GDP
2010	8,913.1	234,698	3.8
2011	10,465.4	261,764	4
2012	11,279.4	259,614	4.3
2013	12,476	292,416	4.3
2014	12,715.6	305,675	4.3
2015	12,677.4 [*]	296,068	4.3

* Preliminary estimates.

GDP in PA Territories and Israel 2010–2015 at Current Prices (\$ million)



2. GDP per Capita in PA Territories

This indicator shows the approximate per capita share of the GDP, representing rough measurements of living standards or social wellbeing as a reflection of actual economic performance on citizens’ income.⁴⁹

a. Average Growth of GDP per Capita

Based on the available data, GDP per capita was \$1,737.4 and \$1,745.9 for 2014 and 2015 respectively, marking a decrease of 3.1% in 2014 and a growth of 0.5% in 2015, and an average annual of –1.3%. It should be noted that these figures are calculated at constant prices, where 2004 is the base year (see table 13/7).

In 2010–2011, GDP per capita increased at a rate of 7.1% on average. In the period 2012–2013, the rate of growth dropped to 1.2%, reflecting the linkage between local GDP and per capita income. In 2014–2015, we note a decline in the per capita income of –1.3%.

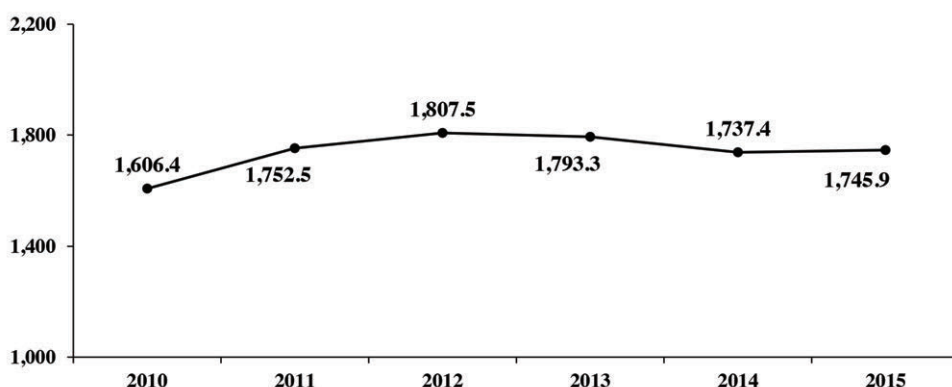
In general, the per capita GDP remained subpar, declining after 2013, raising concerns and increasing the state of anxiety and uncertainty about the Palestinian economy and its future prospects.⁵⁰

**Table 13/7: GDP per Capita in PA Territories 2010–2015
at Constant Prices (\$) ⁵¹**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015*
GDP per capita	1,606.4	1,752.5	1,807.5	1,793.3	1,737.4	1,745.9
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+5	+9.1	+3.1	-0.8	-3.1	+0.5

* Preliminary estimates.

GDP per Capita in PA Territories 2010–2015 at Constant Prices (\$)



To preserve a minimum level of living standards, GDP per capita should exceed the rate of population growth as well as inflation, which rose rapidly again in the second quarter of 2015, hitting 2.8 % and exceeding the rate seen two years earlier. Inflation is largely imported, as it is very sensitive to global prices, especially food and fuel.⁵²

Forecasts for 2016–2017 remain subject to potential scenarios. The most likely one is limited growth at a rate of 1% annually, based on general trends. This rate is below the requirements of the citizens, especially those with a low income.

b. GDP per Capita in the WB and GS

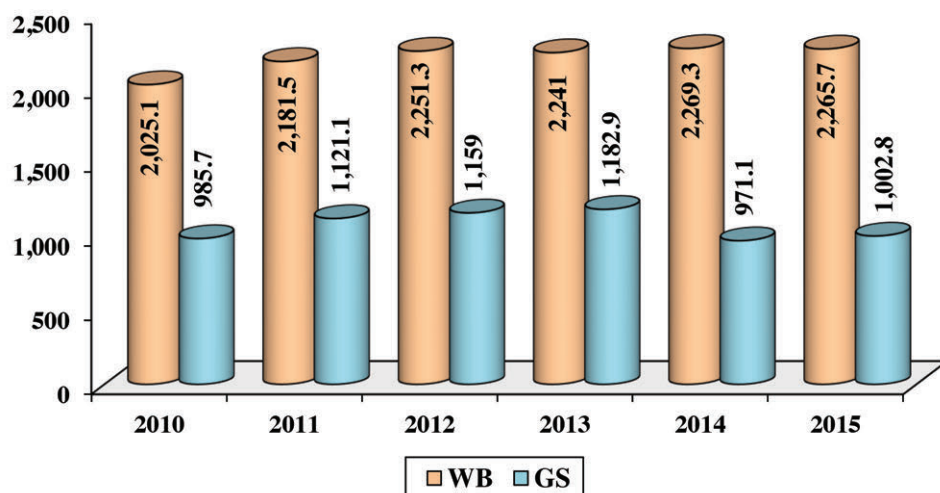
Despite the meager Palestinian gross income reflected by GDP and GDP per capita, there remained significant differences in the GDP per capita between WB and GS, which reached \$2,265.7 and \$1,002.8 respectively in 2015. This reflected the poor income distribution and large differences between the governorates of WB and GS.

**Table 14/7: GDP per Capita in the WB and GS 2010–2015
at Constant Prices (\$) ⁵³**

Year		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015*
WB	GDP per capita	2,025.1	2,181.5	2,251.3	2,241	2,269.3	2,265.7
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+4.2	+7.7	+3.2	-0.5	+1.3	-0.2
GS	GDP per capita	985.7	1,121.1	1,159	1,182.9	971.1	1,002.8
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+7.8	+13.7	+3.4	+2.1	-17.9	+3.3

* Preliminary estimates.

GDP per Capita in the WB and GS 2010–2015 at Constant Prices (\$)



c. Comparison of GDP per Capita Between PA Territories and Israel

There remains a large gap between GDP per capita in PA territories and Israel. At current prices, it was in PA territories \$2,960 and \$2,866 in 2014 and 2015 respectively, while in Israel, it was \$37,222 and \$35,343 for the same period. This makes the latter 12 times more than the former. This is essentially due to the Israeli occupation and its practices, which prevent natural economic growth in Palestine, reducing the level of the Palestinian GDP at a time when Palestinians have a

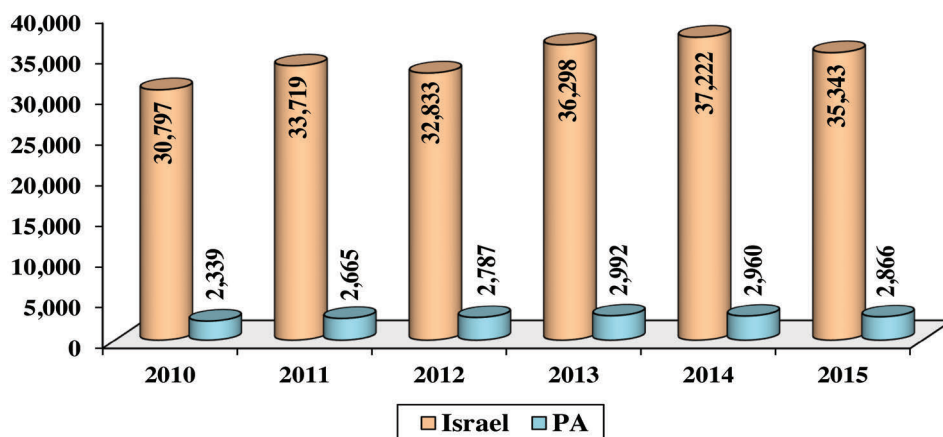
higher population growth rate compared with the Israelis, amid tough working conditions, under an occupation that undermined wages, living standards, and savings. Furthermore, the huge gap between the two sides that has allowed Israeli individuals to live in better standards compared to Palestinians.

Table 15/7: GDP per Capita in PA Territories and Israel 2010–2015 at Current Prices (\$) ⁵⁴

Year	PA	Israel	% Palestinian GDP per capita of Israeli GDP per capita
2010	2,339	30,797	7.6
2011	2,665	33,719	7.9
2012	2,787	32,833	8.5
2013	2,992	36,298	8.2
2014	2,960	37,222	8
2015	2,866*	35,343	8.1

* Preliminary estimates.

GDP per Capita in PA Territories and Israel 2010–2015 at Current Prices (\$)



3. General Government Debt

As the PA sought to increase services to its citizens, it was forced to increase spending despite its inability to match this with an increase in revenues at the same rate. Thus, the PA is forced to borrow, adding to public debt and debt servicing.

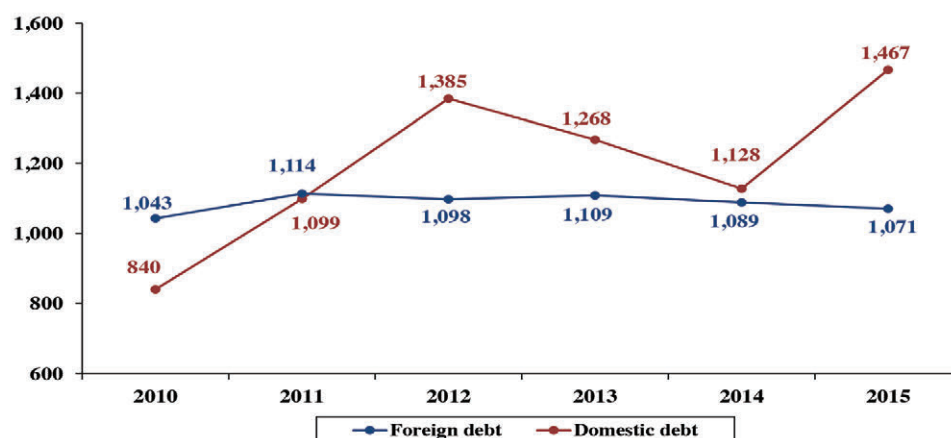
a. Public Debt: by definition, this is what the government commits to pay in accordance with the contractual terms agreed with creditors, and includes foreign (external) and domestic (internal) debt. In general, Palestinian debt has increased, reaching \$2,217 million in 2014 and \$2,537 million in 2015, with a proportion of 17.4% and 20% of the GDP in these two years respectively (see table 16/7), amid a lack of an effective policy to curb or reduce the debt. While the debt achieves a balancing purpose, it adds increasing burdens when it is not repaid on time. Although the proportion of the public debt to the GDP is relatively low, compared to some neighboring countries, this does not accurately reflect the government's ability to repay its debts or continue to borrow.⁵⁵

Foreign debt meanwhile declined to 42.2% of the public debt in 2015, compared to 49% the previous year. However, domestic debt increased from \$1,128 million in 2014 to \$1,467 million in 2015, representing 57.8% of the public debt (see table 16/7).

Table 16/7: Public Debt in PA Territories 2010–2015 (\$ million)⁵⁶

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Domestic debt	840	1,099	1,385	1,268	1,128	1,467
Foreign debt	1,043	1,114	1,098	1,109	1,089	1,071
Public debt	1,883	2,213	2,483	2,376	2,217	2,537
Per capita public debt (\$)	494	564	614	570	516	534

Public Debt in PA Territories 2010–2015 (\$ million)



b. Arrears of Public Debt: These arise because of the government's inability to fully fulfil its obligations in a timely manner, forcing it to postpone the payment of its debt. Examining developments in this regard shows that public debt arrears reached 2,779 million shekels (\$777 million) in 2014. The total arrears of previous years were 10,074 million shekels (\$2,816 million). The figure can be broken down to: Operational arrears (54.7%); social contributions (39.7%); transfer arrears (2.8%); capital arrears (1.1%) and miscellaneous.⁵⁷ The arrears have many repercussions. They hinder the activities of creditors, who are forced to borrow and cut jobs, negatively impacting production and growth. To address the delay in debt payments, the government announced that it would transfer \$2.5 million a month to the Palestinian Pension Fund and pay all dues to the private sector in 2016.⁵⁸

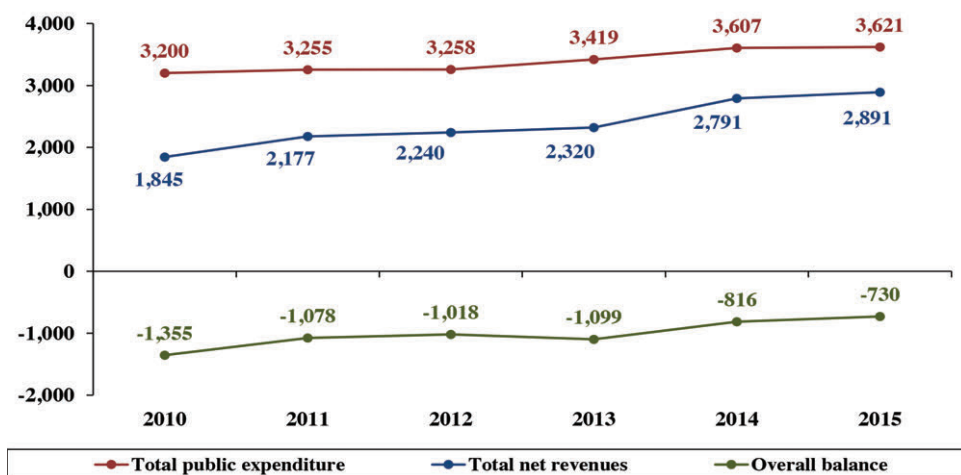
4. The PA's General Budget

The PA general budget includes both revenues and expenditures showing the balance between them, and how deficits can be addressed and surpluses can be invested. The following table sums up the budget development:

Table 17/7: Fiscal Operations of the PA (Cash Basis) 2010–2016 (\$ million)⁵⁹

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 Budget
Current expenditure and net lending	2,927	2,960	3,047	3,251	3,446	3,445	3,901
Development expenditure	273	295	211	168	161	176	350
Total public expenditure	3,200	3,255	3,258	3,419	3,607	3,621	4,251
Total net revenues	1,845	2,177	2,240	2,320	2,791	2,891	2,869
Overall balance (including development expenditures)	-1,355	-1,078	-1,018	-1,099	-816	-730	-1,382
% Overall balance of total public expenditure	42.3	33.1	31.2	32.1	22.6	20.2	32.5

Fiscal Operations of the PA (Cash Basis) 2010–2015 (\$ million)



The general trend of the years 2010–2015 indicates revenue growth by 56.7% in 2015 compared to 2010 at an average annual cumulative rate of 9.4%. As for expenditures, the general trend of the years 2010–2015 indicates growth of 13.2% in 2015 compared to 2010 at an annual cumulative rate of 2.5%.

If we examine the PA finances in 2014 and 2015, we find that the overall public expenditures in both current and development categories rose at a rate of 5.5% and 0.4% respectively, at an average of 3%, reflecting a move towards austerity (see table 17/7).

As for total net revenues, which include tax and non-tax domestic revenues, besides clearance revenues and tax refunds, these achieved a growth of 20.3% and 3.6% in 2014 and 2015 respectively, at an average rate of 12% (see table 17/7). The continued growth of revenue in 2014 and 2015, resulting essentially from higher clearance revenues carried out by Israel on behalf of the PA, is clear. The growth also reflects the growing trend among GS merchants to import via Israel, especially after the destruction of border tunnels.⁶⁰

Despite the relative improvement in performance at the level of collection and spending, the deficit remained in place. Thus, the deficit continued amid instability and volatility. The deficit was not new, however, as the finances of the PA moved from one crisis to another, accompanied by a shortfall in investment.⁶¹

The PA has sought the help of donors to plug the deficit and cover some of its development expenditures, while being forced to borrow from local and foreign creditors when needed, without adopting a policy to limit this gap despite repeated criticisms against the Finance Ministry locally and internationally, as it failed to implement financial regulations and legislations and mishandled corruption issues.⁶²

As for the 2016 budget, the IMF predicted public finances would continue to improve for that fiscal year. The Palestinian government prepared a budget based on more controls regarding the mobilization of revenues and rationalization of expenditures.⁶³ Experts believed this budget reflected the PA crisis that had continued since its establishment in 1994. They stated that there is nothing new in the figures and implications, as the Palestinian government has no discernible economic policies.⁶⁴ The budget, as usual, was prepared amid complex and changing economic and political circumstances.⁶⁵

5. General Budget of the GS Dismissed Government

The government has prepared annual budgets for GS since 2008, including wages, salaries, and operational and development expenditures. Revenues had achieved significant increases between 2010 and 2012 in light of the use of border tunnels for meeting the majority of the needs of GS residents, thus generating revenues for the government. Starting from mid-2013, the Egyptian authorities stepped up their activities to destroy these tunnels, bringing revenues down to \$214 million in 2014 compared to \$228 million in 2012. The last approved budget was in 2014, which had elements not that different from those applicable in WB. Both were marked by deficits and reliance on foreign aid.⁶⁶

The estimates of general expenditures for 2014 put them at \$679 million, compared to \$195 million in revenues, meaning a deficit of 71.3% and \$484 million. This was while actual expenditures in 2014 reached \$526 million and revenues \$124 million, underscoring the large differences between estimates and actual numbers. The deficit is too high to plug from conventional sources, therefore GS relies on various forms of aid coming to the Strip, while reducing expenditures whenever possible, especially since the work of the GS government is hostage to the threat of Israeli war, blockade, and embargo.

Although the formation of the National Consensus Government on 2/6/2014 transferred official responsibilities to it, amid hopes that the budget would be

modified and a new unified one would be adopted after 2015, this did not happen. GS continued to suffer from the failure of the new government to take over its responsibilities. Meanwhile, the crisis of the failure of the government to reinstate civil servants appointed by the caretaker government in GS remained a major obstacle to full reconciliation, as well as one facet of the economic hardship suffered by thousands of families there.⁶⁷

Table 18/7: Revenues and Public Expenditures of GS 2008–2015 (\$ million)⁶⁸

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total net revenues	57	66	103	189	228	214	124	207
Total expenditures and arrears	245	330	298	406	482	460	526	477
Deficit before grants and foreign aid	-188	-264	-195	-217	-254	-246	-402	-270
Grants and foreign aid	158	206	145	67	117	120	118	147
Deficit after grants and foreign aid	-30	-58	-50	-150	-137	-126	-285	-123

Note: There are limited differences in some numbers necessitated by the need to remedy discrepancies.

It is clear from the table above that the GS government relied heavily on foreign aid and grants, which are irregular or non-guaranteed, and on limited local banking facilities. This came amid a reduction in public expenditures, led by wages and fees that represented 84.2% of expenditures in 2015; followed by Transfers (11.9%); operational expenditures (3.8%), totaling 99.9%. The remaining percentage covers development and capital expenditures.⁶⁹

With the year 2015 weighed down by the same factors marking 2014 in GS, efforts focused on shoring up local revenues to tackle commitments like civil servants' wages and operational costs, amid a reduction in public expenditure.

6. Work and Unemployment

The labor force is an important economic and human resource. It contributes in producing goods and services, to meet the needs of domestic and foreign markets.

The total labor force in the Palestinian territories was about 1.325 million in 2015, including 844 thousand in WB at a participation rate of 46.4%, and the rest or 481 thousand in GS with a participation rate of 45.7%. In other words, more than half of the adult population are dependents who do not participate in the production cycle, including students, housewives, the sick, elderly, and disabled people. The participation rate, though higher in WB compared to GS, is markedly low rate compared to other countries.⁷⁰

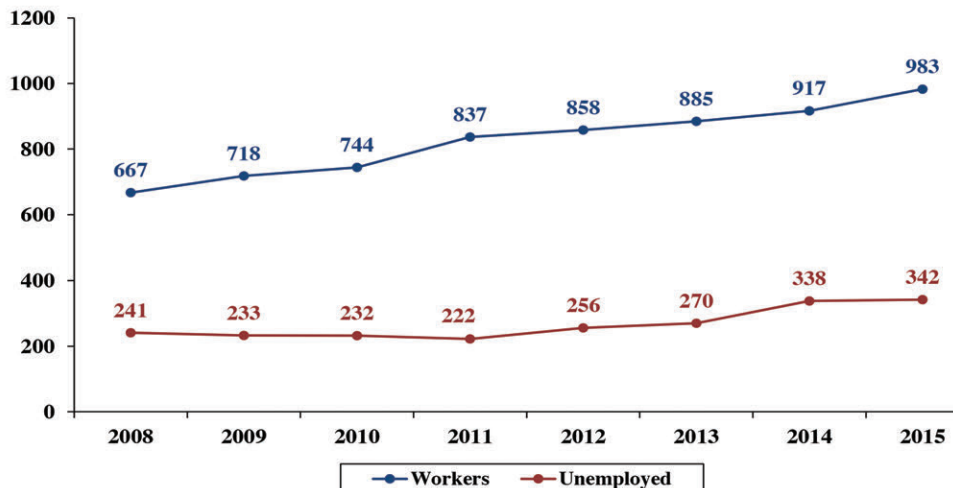
The number of actual workers reached 983 thousand at the end of 2015, including 687 thousand in the WB (69.9%), and 296 thousand in GS (30.1%). Workers working in Israel and Israeli settlements in WB are part of this workforce. They number 112,700 representing 11.5% of the total number of workers. According to the PCBS, the number of workers in Israeli settlements in WB was 26,300, reflecting the PA's failure to find alternatives, whether for those working in Israel or those working in settlements.

We find that the service sector accommodated the highest number of workers (34.9% in WB compared to 53.6% in GS). The public sector absorbed 22% of workers (16.7% in the WB and 34.4% in GS), highlighting the limited employment opportunities in the private sector in GS.⁷¹

Table 19/7: Distribution of Palestinians Aged 15 Years and Above in the WB and GS by Labor Force and Unemployment 2008–2015 (thousands)⁷²

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Labor force	908	951	976	1,059	1,114	1,155	1,255	1,325
Workers	667	718	744	837	858	885	917	983
Unemployed	241	233	232	222	256	270	338	342
% of unemployment	26.6	24.4	23.7	20.9	23	23.4	26.9	25.8
Workers in Israel and settlements	75.1	73.2	78.1	83.5	83.2	99.4	107.3	112.7

Distribution of Palestinians Aged 15 Years and Above in the WB and GS by Labor Force and Unemployment 2008–2015 (thousands)



The unemployment rate increased in 2015 to 342 thousand in WB and GS, 158 thousand and 184 thousand respectively. These figures are likely to increase because of the population growth. While the unemployment rate in Palestine remains very high, there is a huge disparity between WB and GS (18.7% and 38.4% respectively). This reflects a fundamental imbalance in the structure of the labor market, as a result of the Palestinian division, blockade, and isolation of WB from GS, as well as the ban on Gazans from working in Israel.

There is also a disparity in unemployment rates between males (22.3%) and females (39.7%); and among age groups, with the highest unemployment rate seen in the age group 20–24 (41.7%), a category that includes new entrants to the job market.⁷³ According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), this requires urgent measures to allow the movement of people and goods, and to render aid to an area where four-fifths of the population depends on humanitarian aid.⁷⁴ The lost production capacity of the unemployed represents a significant loss of GDP, which can be estimated on the basis of the numbers of the unemployed and the minimum wage.⁷⁵

On the other hand, there is a market gap represented in low skills compared to the needs of enterprises. Government vocational training centers are seeking to plug this gap, especially as the Palestinian society has started to change its perception of training in a more positive direction. However, the allocations given to these centers are low, forcing them to seek partnership with private sector institutions.⁷⁶

There are other issues perhaps specific to Palestine. For example, Gaza's civil servants continued to do their jobs without regular pay or clear legal status, while others were being paid without showing up at their workplace.⁷⁷

There have been various initiatives to create jobs, for example by supporting start-ups, developing youth and women's skills, and stimulating private sector investment in businesses with high potential with funding from the World Bank Group.⁷⁸

For the purpose of encouraging new jobs, a Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection was created by the Ministry of Labour.

The fund seeks to support youth-led business projects that are more suited to market demands. The fund aspires to fund new projects with loans of up to €200 million (\$222 million), and employ 50 thousand currently unemployed people in 2016–2017. However, achieving this goal requires huge efforts, thorough preparations, and extensive studies. There is also the Deprived families' Economic Empowerment Program (DEEP), which is seeking to help fresh graduates and unemployed people, as well as women, entrepreneurs, and people with disabilities, and to develop infrastructure to help farmers.⁷⁹

7. Development of Industrial Activity

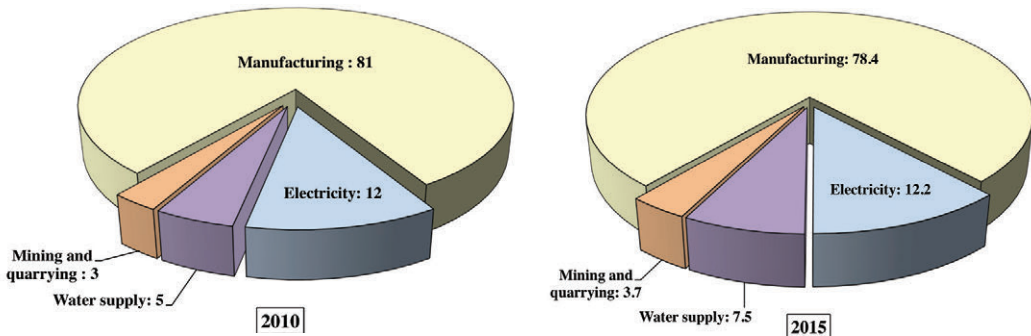
Industrial activity is one of the key productive sectors that allow the exploitation of available resources to meet consumer demands. It includes four identifiable categories as follows:

Table 20/7: Industrial GDP in PA Territories 2010–2015 at Constant Prices (\$ million)⁸⁰

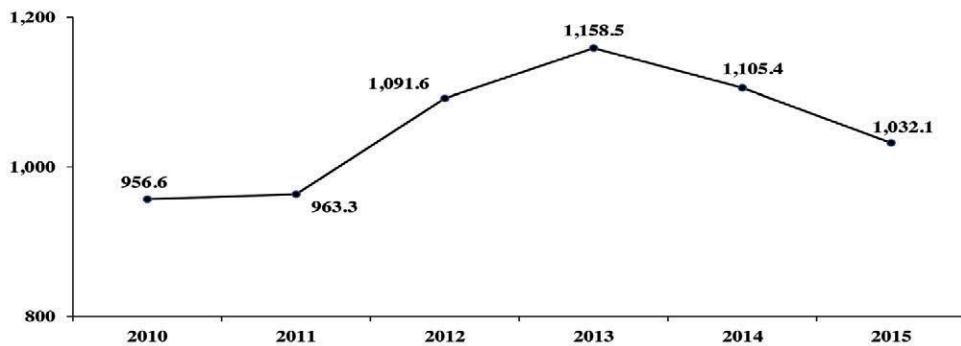
Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015*
Mining and quarrying	24.3	50	25.9	48.3	41.9	37.8
Manufacturing	775.8	757.5	890.9	929.1	878.5	810.6
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	111.7	109.1	115	120.7	127.5	124.9
Water supply, sewerage, waste management	44.8	46.7	59.8	60.4	57.5	58.8
Total	956.6	963.3	1,091.6	1,158.5	1,105.4	1,032.1
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	–	+0.7	+13.3	+6.1	–4.6	–6.6
% of GDP	15.6	14	14.9	15.5	14.8	13.4

* Preliminary estimates.

% Industrial Sector Activities of GDP, 2010 and 2015



Industrial GDP in PA Territories 2010–2015 at Constant Prices (\$ million)

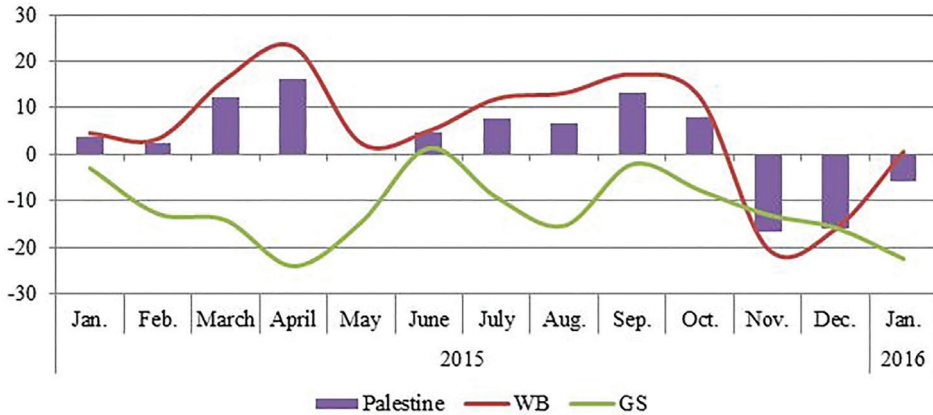


Evidently, manufacturing (metallic industries, textiles, fabrics, food processing and beverages, furniture, etc.) remained the leading industrial activity, accounting for 78.5% of total industrial output in 2015. Manufacturing growth fluctuated, improving relatively compared to 2010. The second largest sector was electricity, accounting for 12.1% of output, but which also fluctuated strongly in the period in question. Water supply came third at 5.7%, followed by mining at 3.7%. The strong volatility reflected Israel’s arbitrary practices and high costs, despite the international recognition of Palestinian stone products, one of the leading Palestinian exports.

It is also possible to note that industrial growth was slow and that the sector’s contribution in the GDP has decreased to 14.1% on average in 2014 and 2015. This can be attributed to the tough competition with Israeli and imported products, requiring strict policies to promote national products and substitute imports.

There was also a disparity in industrial growth between WB and GS. For example, the PMA Business Cycle Index⁸¹ of January 2016 picked up sharply to around -5.9 points compared to -16 points in the previous month, as a result of improving conditions in WB and deteriorating ones in GS, reflecting the large differences in the industrial performance there, as the figure below shows.⁸²

Monthly Business Cycle Index for WB and GS in 2015 (Points)



8. Development of Agricultural Activity

Agricultural activity, alongside industrial activity, remains a key sector despite its sharp decline over the preceding decades. The sector meets many of the local market’s needs, employs large numbers, supplies raw materials for manufacturing especially food processing industries, and contributes to exports thus reducing the trade deficit. However, agriculture in the Palestinian territories faces numerous challenges, led by the decrease in arable land with an increase in irrigation areas, amid water shortages.⁸³

Observing the developments of this sector in 2014 and 2015 reveals that agricultural GDP amounted to \$286.4 million in 2014, with a 7.6% fall compared to 2013, and constituting only 3.8% of GDP at constant prices. Agricultural GDP decreased to \$253.8 million in 2015 at 11.4% compared to 2014, and with an average deficit for the two years of 9.5%. This means agricultural contribution to GDP decreased to 3.3% (see table 21/7).

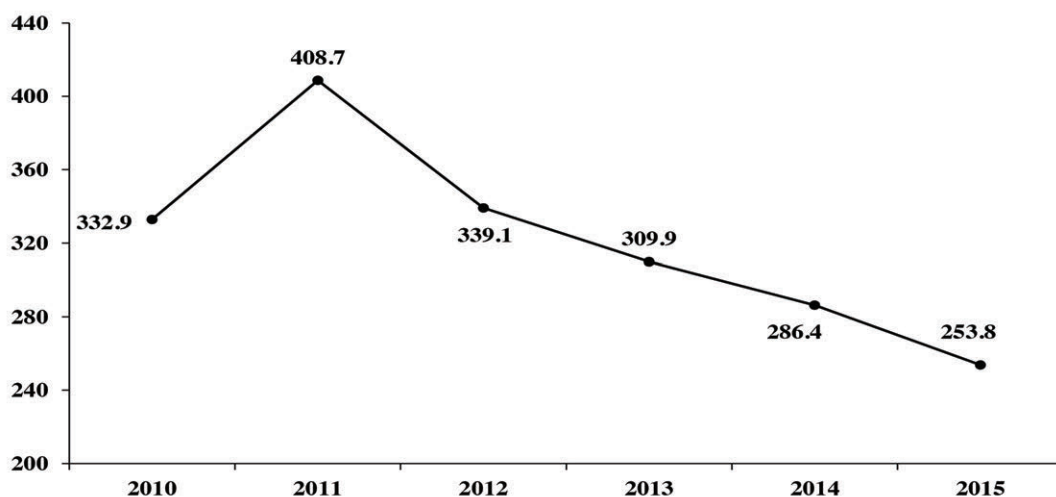
**Table 21/7: Agricultural GDP in PA Territories 2010–2015
at Constant Prices (\$ million)⁸⁴**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015*
Agricultural GDP	332.9	408.7	339.1	309.9	286.4	253.8
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	-4.2	+22.8	-17	-8.6	-7.6	-11.4
% of GDP	5.4	5.9	4.6	4.1	3.8	3.3

* Preliminary estimates.

Forecasts for 2016 and 2017 are an extension of the general trend for growth in 2010–2015, and are closer to representing a pessimistic scenario.

Agricultural GDP in PA Territories 2010–2015 at Constant Prices (\$ million)



From the above, it may be noted that the relative importance of agricultural output has been in decline despite the presence of elements that favor production expansion, underlying the structural weakness of the sector. If we add to this the weak contribution of the industrial sector to GDP, we realize that services dominate Palestine's economy.⁸⁵ This in turn requires analyzing agricultural census data in detail as a starting point for PA programs to develop agricultural resources.⁸⁶

As for Israel's continued control of Area C, which represents 61% of WB's area, it deprives Palestinians of facilities that could otherwise be offered to them, although this area is supposed to be part of the future Palestinian state.⁸⁷ Israel's aggressive practices against GS, meanwhile, extend to isolating its highly productive agricultural lands near the border zone, banning farming activities there and often assaulting farmers in the area. The occupation repeatedly sprays the border farmlands with pesticides.⁸⁸ Israel uses the northern coastal areas of GS for military exercises and missile tests. At the same time, there have been increasing assaults on GS fishermen as fishing zones has been reduced from 20 miles (around 32 km) opposite GS shore based on the Oslo Accords to around three miles (around 5 km) in 2012, an area that is increased or decreased according to Israeli pressure and blockade policies, causing severe harm to fishing activities and fishermen. This is while bearing in mind that the Israeli authorities increased the fishing zone allowable for GS fishermen to six miles (around 10 km) and then nine miles (around 15 km) in April 2016.⁸⁹

9. Trade

Trade represents one form of international economic relations and is reflected each year by the trade balance. The PA has consistently relied heavily on the outside world to obtain the majority of its consumer, intermediary, and capital needs in tandem with growing internal demand and population growth, and slow growth in local industrial and agricultural output. Other important trade-related issues include competitiveness and export of surplus production.⁹⁰

In 2014, the total imports of the PA reached \$5,683 million at a 10.1% increase compared to 2013. Exports reached \$944 million at a 4.8% increase. Thus, the trade deficit in 2014 increased at 11.2% compared to the previous year. The deficit was \$4,739 million or 83.4% of total imports (see table 22/7).

In 2015, exports decreased to \$912 million, a decline of \$32 million relative to the previous year at a rate of 3.4%. Imports also dropped to around \$4,942 million, a drop of \$741 million, a 13% decrease. Thus, the deficit reached around \$4,030 million, dropping around \$709 million compared to the previous year, a 15% decrease. The deficit relative to total imports was 81% in 2015 compared to 83.4% in 2014, a positive trend of trade deficit reduction (see table 22/7).

**Table 22/7: Commodity Trade Balance in PA Territories 2010–2015
at Current Prices (\$ million)⁹¹**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Trade volume	4,534	5,119	5,480	6,065	6,627	5,854
Export	576	746	782	901	944	912
Import	3,959	4,374	4,697	5,164	5,683	4,942
Deficit	-3,383	-3,628	-3,915	-4,263	-4,739	-4,030
% Deficit to GDP	38	34.7	34.7	34.2	37.3	31.8

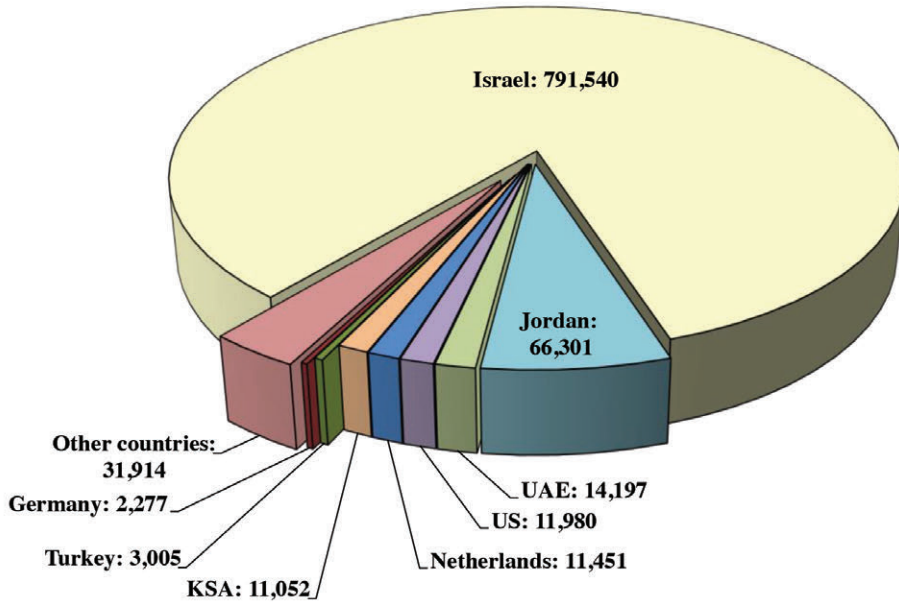
Concerning PA trade with Israel: PCBS surveys showed a high proportion in both exports and imports. Palestinian exports to Israel were \$791.54 million in 2014 or 83.9% of total Palestinian exports, while imports from Israel amounted to \$3,958.3 million, 69.6% of total Palestinian imports. Both figures confirm the Palestinian dependency on Israel, at least in trade (see table 23/7).

It is worth mentioning that Israel's CBS provided different somewhat figures regarding trade with the PA for the year 2014. According to these figures, Palestinian imports from Israel reached around \$3,257 million, about \$701 million less than Palestinian official figures, while Palestinian exports to Israel accounted for \$631 million, again, \$161 million less than Palestinian official figures.⁹²

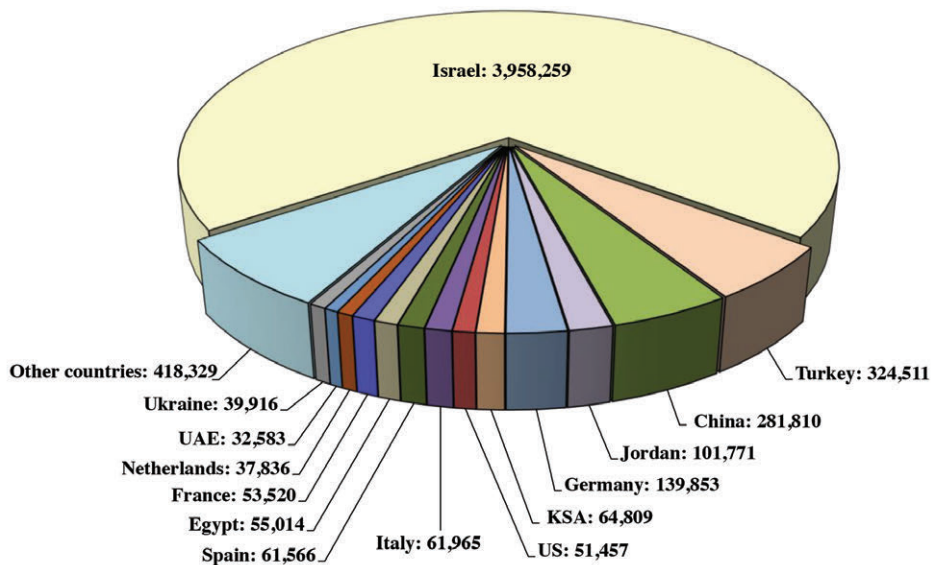
Table 23/7: Volume of Palestinian Trade, Exports and Imports in Goods in PA Territories to/ from Selected Countries 2013–2014 (\$ thousand)⁹³

Country	Trade volume		Palestinian exports to:		Palestinian imports from:	
	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013
Israel	4,749,800	4,481,177	791,540	786,356	3,958,259	3,694,821
Turkey	327,516	292,158	3,005	2,988	324,511	289,170
China	281,854	236,601	44	–	281,810	236,601
Jordan	168,073	146,903	66,301	55,399	101,771	91,504
Germany	142,130	125,903	2,277	1,750	139,853	124,153
KSA	75,861	52,419	11,052	8,422	64,809	43,997
US	63,437	52,045	11,980	10,294	51,457	41,750
Italy	62,602	62,310	637	1,155	61,965	61,155
Spain	61,574	60,609	8	1	61,566	60,608
Egypt	55,341	43,705	327	204	55,014	43,501
France	54,158	52,179	638	550	53,520	51,629
Netherlands	49,287	25,817	11,451	2,992	37,836	22,825
UAE	46,780	23,237	14,197	7,402	32,583	15,835
Ukraine	39,996	22,190	80	12	39,916	22,178
Other countries	448,508	387,262	30,180	23,093	418,329	364,170
Total	6,626,917	6,064,515	943,717	900,618	5,683,199	5,163,897

Palestinian Exports in Goods in PA Territories to Selected Countries 2014
 (\$ thousand)



Palestinian Imports in Goods in PA Territories from Selected Countries 2014
 (\$ thousand)



10. PA's External Financing

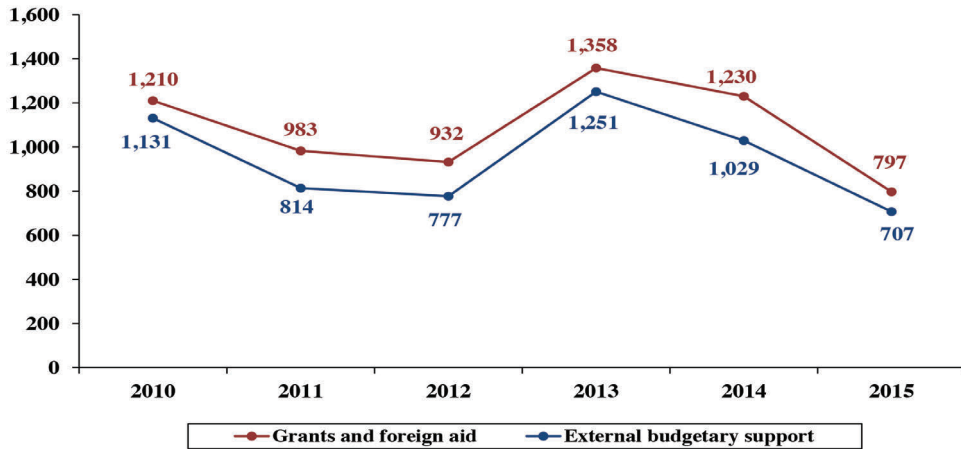
External financing to the Palestinians is an important stream of revenue that helps plug the budget deficit and cover part of development expenditure. Its value in 2010–2015 was around \$6,510 million, at an annual average of \$1,085 million. Given its importance, fluctuation of its value and delays in its delivery impeded economic activity, especially in light of the large budget deficit and high level of debt. Over the past several years, grants and foreign aid were used almost exclusively for consumption spending, and the PA has been unable to limit its reliance thereon despite the lack of anything that could guarantee the regularity and sustainability of aid, putting the Palestinian economy at risk. From time to time, a debate emerges on the adverse effects of foreign aid, which is often politicized. This is in addition to the overreliance on the aid and its lack of regularity and efficiency. Indeed, part of it is wasted on consultative services. The following table highlights the size of this aid and the volatility in its value.

Table 24/7: PA External Budgetary Support and Development Financing 2010–2016 (\$ million)⁹⁴

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 Budget
External budgetary support	1,131	814	777	1,251	1,029	707	750
External financing for development expenditures	79	169	155	107	201	90	245
Grants and foreign aid	1,210	983	932	1,358	1,230	797	995
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	-13.7	-18.8	-5.2	+45.7	-9.4	-35.2	+24.8

The developments in foreign aid show a trend of decrease, especially in 2015 when aid fell sharply.

PA External Budgetary Support and Development Financing 2010–2015 (\$ million)



In 2015, donors were headed by KSA with \$242.3 million, followed by the Mécanisme Palestino-Européen de Gestion et d’Aide Socio-Economique (PEGASE) with \$223.4 million, and then the World Bank with \$131.7 million. International community funding for the PA dropped by 39% in 2015 compared to 2014.

World Bank funding dropped in 2015 by 48.4% compared to 2014. The numbers of the Palestinian Finance Ministry do not indicate the presence of any US support for the PA budget in 2015, but mention that US support was \$106.5 million in 2014.

These figures conflict with the Congressional Research Services (CRS) report on the US Foreign Aid to the Palestinians, which said the US gave the Palestinians \$440 million in 2014 and \$361 million in 2015. Perhaps part of the inconsistency can be explained by the fact that part of the US support does not go to the PA budget. However, the issue raised questions and requires clarifications.

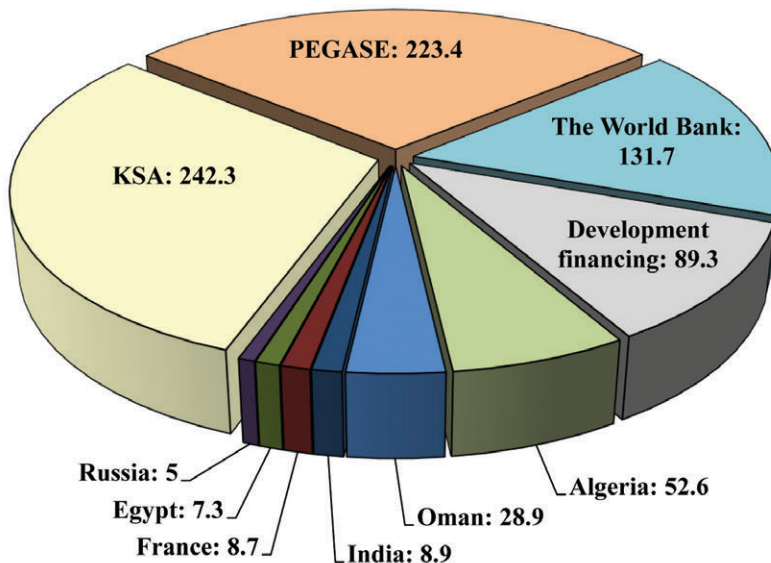
Despite the drop in Arab financing in 2015 compared to the previous year, its proportion of international financing rose in 2014–2015. The value of Arab funding became almost equal to total international support, representing 87.7% of this support in 2015, and 66.2% in 2014, compared to 44.2% of total international support in 2013.

It should also be noted that development financing in 2015 also dropped by 56% compared to 2014.

Table 25/7: Sources of External Financing for the PA 2012–2015
(\$ million)⁹⁵

Donor	2012	2013	2014	2015
Arab donors	272.7	385.7	410	331.1
KSA	103.8	261.3	197.3	242.3
UAE	84.3	48.7	–	–
Algeria	25.9	27.3	51.6	52.6
Qatar	29.5	8.9	146.3	–
Egypt	3.2	6.4	7.5	7.3
Oman	–	5.1	7.3	28.9
Iraq	26	28	–	–
International donors	502.7	873.1	619.7	377.7
PEGASE	212.3	249.7	246.7	223.4
The World Bank	266.1	238	255.1	131.7
US	–	349.4	106.5	–
France	24.3	25.2	10.4	8.7
Russia	–	9.8	–	5
Malaysia	–	–	1	–
India	–	1	–	8.9
Development financing	156.2	106.5	203.4	89.3
Total	931.6	1,365.3	1,233.1	798.1

Sources of External Financing for the PA 2015 (\$ million)



11. Economic Outlook for the PA Performance

Forecasts for the PA performance up to 2017 were based on two main perspectives: the general trend on the one hand, and the forecasts of the PCBS and PMA, as well as the forecasts of stakeholders such as the IMF. These forecasts are governed by the internal situation such as blockades, checkpoints, the Palestinian division, Israel's practices that hinder economic growth, in addition to the PA's bid to correct government performance. The external situation, meanwhile, is governed by events, developments, conflicts, and alliances, at the Arab, regional, and international levels.

The forecasts follow three paths. The first with the current situation continuing as it is. The second an optimistic one based on the possibility of positive developments. And the third an approach based on presumed pessimistic events. These scenarios come amid the absence of a clear political horizon regarding the peace process and reconciliation, creating an unsustainable economic situation.⁹⁶

The government's forecasts for its performance are as follows:

- a. Slow growth of the GDP in the range of 3.5%, resulting in low per capita income growth in the range of 1%, with a large difference between WB and GS reflecting poor income distribution, with the rich getting richer at the expense of the poor.

- b. Continued reliance on internal and external debt, with a decrease in arrears amid a commitment to honor them.
- c. Continued deficit in the PA budget with continued reliance in GS on foreign aid and internal borrowing, and increasing revenues at rates higher than increasing spending.
- d. Limited improvement in labor force indicators and limited decrease in unemployment, amid a large gap between WB and GS.
- e. Agricultural and industrial performance will remain limited and so will its contribution to the GDP with limited improvement in industrial output.
- f. Improvement in the value of exports with a relative decrease in import growth, leading to a limited reduction in trade deficits.⁹⁷

Accordingly, the improvement of the current situation is subject to the government's performance, which depends on these trends becoming reality. This can only happen if the division ends and the Palestinian economy is re-adapted towards ending the occupation.

Third: Educational Indicators in the WB and GS

Despite the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation, education remains one of its concerns and it is pursued as one of the tools of steadfastness and expression of national identity in a creative and positive way. This section of the chapter casts light on the most important Palestinian educational indicators in WB and GS in 2014 and 2015.

1. The General Educational and Cultural Situation

Palestinians in the WB and GS represent one of the most educationally advanced groups in the Arab world, with an illiteracy rate of 3.6% and 3.3% and a literacy rate that reached 96.4% and 96.7% in 2014 and 2015 respectively. The latter is the second highest in the Arab world after Qatar. The educational attendance of individuals in the age group 6–11 years from both sexes reached 98.9% in 2013.⁹⁸

As for tools of information and communications technology at home, 2014 figures show that 97.8% of families in the WB and GS have mobile phones,

39.8% have telephone lines, 97.1% have TV sets, 99.8% have satellite dishes, 78.2% have computers, 51% have smart phones while 48.3% have access to the internet.⁹⁹

In addition, 2014 figures show that there are 2,859 mosques in the WB and GS (1,892 in the WB and 967 in GS). Moreover, according to 2015 figures there are 596 cultural centers in the WB and GS (515 in the WB and 81 in the GS), 31 museums and 12 theaters.¹⁰⁰ It is important to remember here that the Palestinians are people living under occupation and suffering the destruction of their infrastructure and the inability to develop their capacities, except within the conditions set by the occupation authorities. Based on this context, the above figures highlight the keenness of the Palestinian people to learn and achieve including through media and cultural exchange. The figures also reveal Palestinian success in the educational battle of wills within such a destructive, frustrating environment.

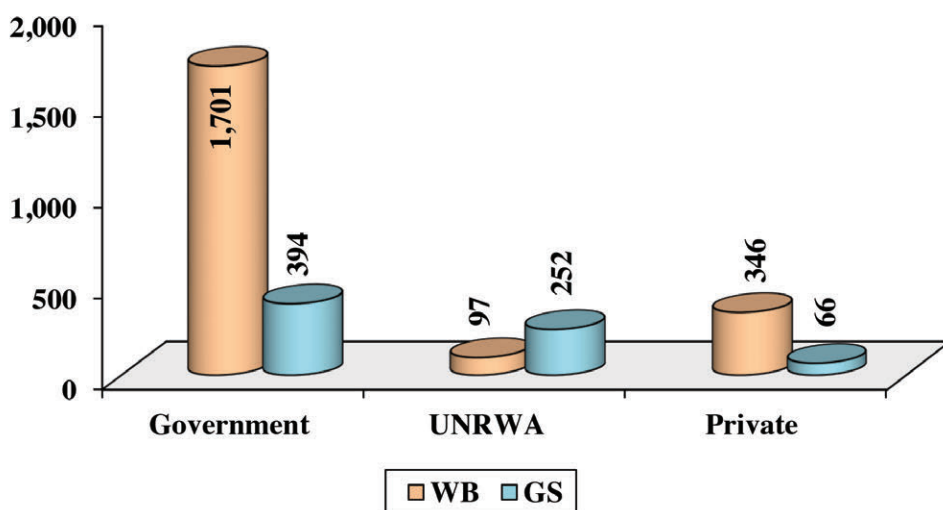
2. Basic and Secondary Education

There were 2,856 Palestinian schools covering basic (elementary and intermediate) and secondary education in the academic year 2014/2015, including 2,144 schools in the WB and 712 schools in the GS, i.e., around 75.1% of schools are in the WB and 24.9% in the GS. Most government schools are in the WB, which is home to 1,701 schools comprising 81.2% of government schools compared to 394 schools in the GS comprising 18.8%. The scarcity of government schools in the GS is relatively compensated for by the presence of UNRWA-run schools that amount to 252 schools compared to 97 similar schools in the WB. Taking into consideration the fact that there are 2.899 million people in the WB, compared to 1.851 million in the GS (i.e., 61% in the WB compared to 39% in the GS), the number of schools in the WB is higher than the number of schools in GS when compared to their populations. This is probably because the population in the WB is distributed over a larger area of land and among more cities and villages, and thus requires more schools. In addition, the higher number of UNRWA schools in the GS reflects the high level of poverty suffered by most of the population in GS (see tables 1/7 and 26/7).

Table 26/7: Basic and Secondary Schools in the WB and GS by Supervising Authority 2010/2011–2014/2015¹⁰¹

Statement		Government	UNRWA	Private	Total
2010/2011	WB	1,573	98	304	1,975
	GS	399	238	40	677
	WB & GS	1,972	336	344	2,652
2011/2012	WB	1,609	99	311	2,019
	GS	396	244	48	688
	WB & GS	2,005	343	359	2,707
2012/2013	WB	1,639	99	321	2,059
	GS	399	245	50	694
	WB & GS	2,038	344	371	2,753
2013/2014	WB	1,668	97	329	2,094
	GS	395	245	50	690
	WB & GS	2,063	342	379	2,784
2014/2015	WB	1,701	97	346	2,144
	GS	394	252	66	712
	WB & GS	2,095	349	412	2,856

Basic and Secondary Schools in the WB and GS by Supervising Authority 2014/2015



Students in basic and secondary schools in the academic year 2014/2015 numbered 1.172 million, including 581,095 males and 590,501 females, a 1.7% increase when compared to 2013/2014. The number of teachers in these schools amounted to 65,175 in the academic year 2014/2015 compared to 63,017 in 2013/2014. Teachers were comprised of 26,155 males and 39,020 females in the academic year 2014/2015 compared to 25,756 males and 37,261 females in 2013/2014. There were an almost equal number of male and female student sections amounting to around 15 thousand sections for each in the academic year 2014/2015, while mixed sections for the same academic year reached 8,331 (see table 27/7).

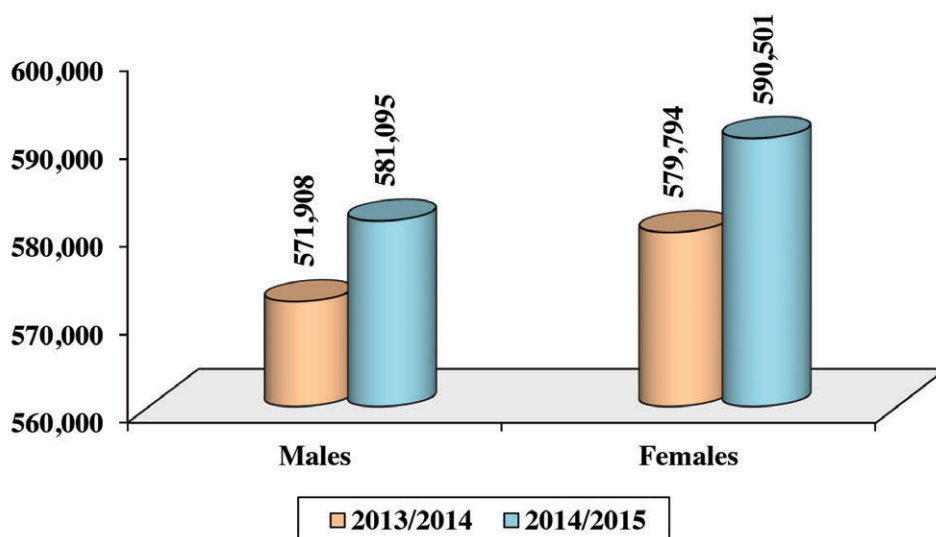
Table 27/7: Number of Schools, Students, Teachers and Sections in PA Territories by Sex 2013/2014–2014/2015¹⁰²

Sex	Schools		Students		Teachers*		Sections	
	2013/2014	2014/2015	2013/2014	2014/2015	2013/2014	2014/2015	2013/2014	2014/2015
Males	992	1,015	571,908	581,095	25,756	26,155	15,053	15,279
Females	933	945	579,794	590,501	37,261	39,020	15,355	15,535
Mixed**	859	896					7,756	8,331
Total	2,784	2,856	1,151,702	1,171,596	63,017	65,175	38,164	39,145

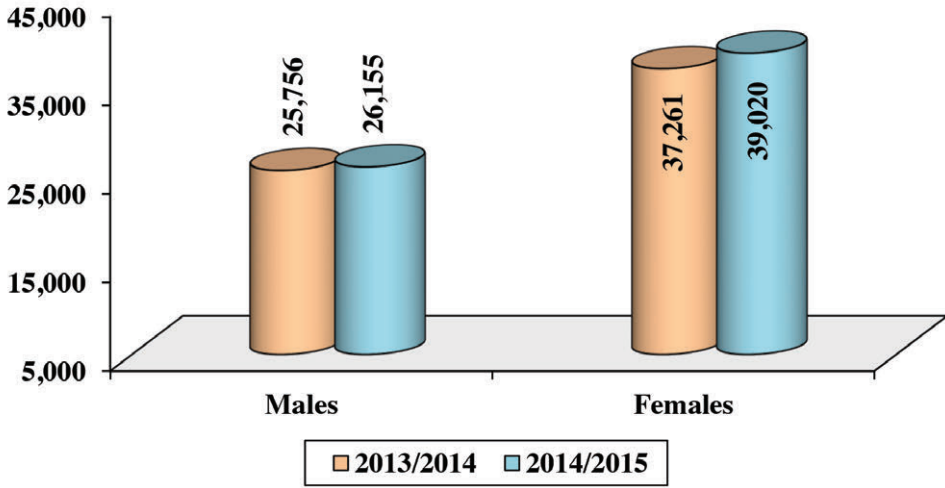
* Teachers: All teaching and non-teaching staff in school except employees and janitors.

** The number of students and teachers in mixed schools is added to the males and females numbers.

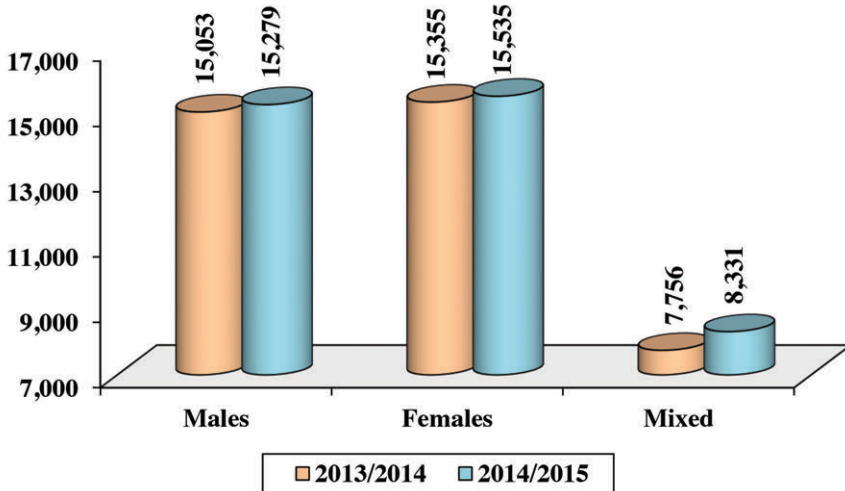
Number of Students in PA Territories by Sex 2013/2014–2014/2015



Number of Teachers in PA Territories by Sex 2013/2014–2014/2015



Number of Sections in PA Territories by Sex 2013/2014–2014/2015



Reports of academic year 2014/2015 show that government schools, which numbered 2,095, represented 73.4% of total schools in the WB and GS. Students in government schools, who amounted to 772,929, represented 66% of total students in the WB and GS. Government school teachers numbered 45,519, constituting 69.8% of WB and GS teachers. Sections in government schools amounted to 26,326 representing 67.3% of total sections in the WB and GS. These indicators showed that education by the government comprised more than two thirds of the educational process in basic and secondary schools. If we take into account

the UNRWA-run schools, we notice that most students depended on low-costing education provided by these schools compared to limited number of students who received private education (see tables 27/7 and 28/7).

Table 28/7: Number of Schools, Students, Teachers and Sections in Government Schools in PA Territories 2010/2011–2014/2015¹⁰³

Academic year	Schools	Students	Teachers*	Sections
2010/2011	1,972	766,234	42,339	25,223
2011/2012	2,005	761,691	42,961	25,323
2012/2013	2,038	762,499	43,814	25,679
2013/2014	2,063	764,219	44,391	25,933
2014/2015	2,095	772,929	45,519	26,326

* Teachers: All teaching and non-teaching staff in school except services employees and janitors.

3. University Education

Several Palestinian universities in the WB and GS provide traditional education to their students. An-Najah National University in Nablus is the largest among these universities and had 21,859 students in the academic year 2014/2015. It was followed by Al-Aqsa University in Gaza with 20,081 students, then the Islamic University of Gaza with 19,432 students. There were a total of 132,449 university students in the same academic year in the WB and GS, including 74,453 students in the WB and 57,996 in the GS. This meant that students in GS represent around 43.8% of total students in the WB and GS, taking into account that Gazans represent 39% of total population in the WB and GS (see tables 2/7 and 29/7).

In addition, female students outnumber their male counterparts, as they reached 78,874 in universities providing traditional education compared to 53,575 male students in the academic year 2014/2015, which meant that female students constituted 59.6% compared to 40.4% male students.

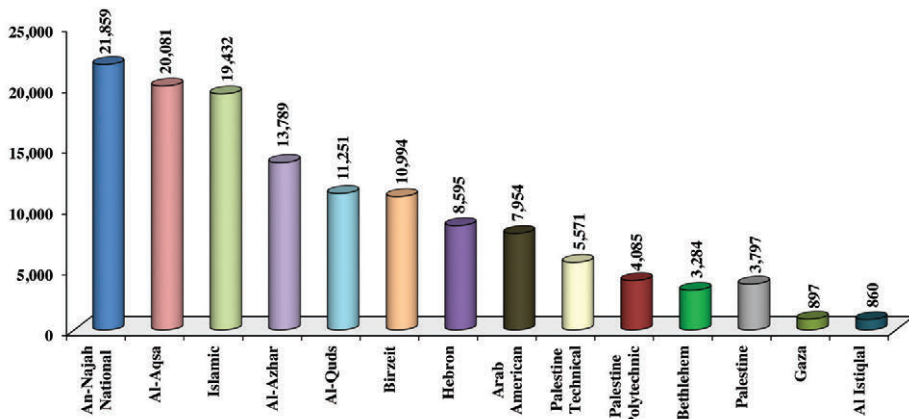
This phenomenon is no longer deemed strange in the Arab world and, while there is no room to analyze it here, it shows in some of its aspects the success of the Palestinian woman in assuming her position side by side with her male peers. It also shows that Palestinian female students have better chances to finish their university education while male students generally have to leave school and join the job market to help their families with the struggle to afford the costs of living, or even leave home to pursue higher education abroad (see table 29/7).

It should be noted here that male faculty members still outnumbered their female counterparts, with 5,269 male teachers (78.8%) compared to 1,414 females (21.2%) in the academic year 2014/2015. This means that it is still too early for the high percentage of female students in universities to be reflected in faculties. The number of faculty members includes all teachers in universities and colleges other than community colleges. Ultimately, quite a large number of female university graduates do not join the labor market and work instead as housewives, which explains the high percentage of males in labor market.¹⁰⁴

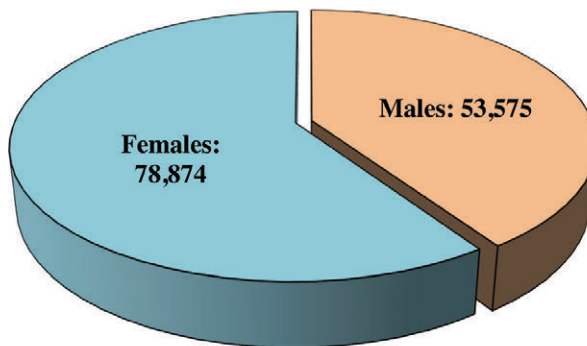
Table 29/7: Number of Students in Traditional Universities in PA Territories by Sex 2013/2014–2014/2015¹⁰⁵

University	Enrolled students 2013/2014			Enrolled students 2014/2015		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
An-Najah National	9,042	12,681	21,723	8,816	13,043	21,859
Al-Quds	5,494	6,012	11,506	5,292	5,959	11,251
Birzeit	3,147	5,835	8,982	3,902	7,092	10,994
Hebron	2,063	6,039	8,102	2,157	6,438	8,595
Arab American	3,566	3,616	7,182	3,717	4,237	7,954
Palestine Technical-Kadoorie	2,255	2,297	4,552	2,859	2,712	5,571
Palestine Polytechnic	2,194	1,802	3,996	2,237	1,848	4,085
Bethlehem	791	2,442	3,233	761	2,523	3,284
Al Istiqlal (The Palestinian Academy for Security Sciences)	644	149	793	697	163	860
Islamic-Gaza	7,632	11,641	19,273	7,644	11,788	19,432
Al-Aqsa-Gaza	5,398	13,329	18,727	5,541	14,540	20,081
Al-Azhar-Gaza	6,825	7,628	14,453	6,326	7,463	13,789
Palestine-Gaza	2,562	585	3,147	3,080	717	3,797
Gaza	340	284	624	546	351	897
Total	51,953	74,340	126,293	53,575	78,874	132,449

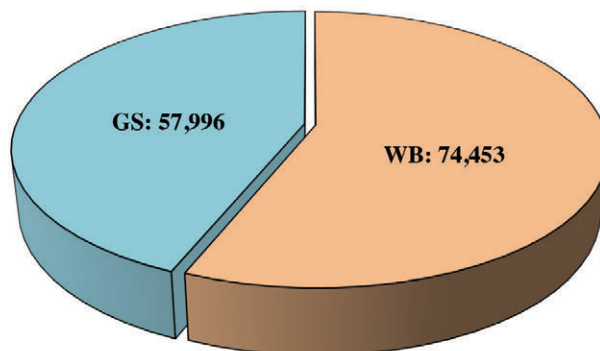
Number of Students in Traditional Universities in PA Territories 2014/2015



Number of Students in Traditional Universities in PA Territories by Sex 2014/2015



Number of Students in Traditional Universities in the WB and GS 2014/2015



Al-Quds Open University provided open education for 60,230 students in the academic year 2014/2015 including 20,262 males and 39,968 females. This university has 17 centers in the WB and 5 in the GS.¹⁰⁶

Table 30/7: Number of Students Seeking Open Education in PA Territories by Sex 2013/2014–2014/2015¹⁰⁷

University	Enrolled students 2013/2014			Enrolled students 2014/2015		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Al-Quds Open University	20,747	40,184	60,931	20,262	39,968	60,230

4. University and Community Colleges

There are 37 university and community colleges in the WB and GS (19 college universities and 18 community colleges). According to figures available from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, there were 35 university and community colleges providing education for 28,716 students in the academic year 2014/2015, including 17 college universities attended by 16,446 students, which award bachelor's degrees, and 18 community colleges attended by 12,270 students, which award intermediate diplomas.¹⁰⁸

Table 31/7: Number of Students in University and Community Colleges in PA Territories by Sex 2013/2014–2014/2015¹⁰⁹

Colleges	2013/2014				2014/2015			
	Number of Colleges	Males	Females	Total	Number of Colleges	Males	Females	Total
University	17	7,723	8,481	16,204	17	7,783	8,663	16,446
Community	17	5,691	5,432	11,123	18	6,413	5,857	12,270
Total	34	13,414	13,913	27,327	35	14,196	14,520	28,716

Conclusion

The general track of the Palestinian population has remained consistent over the past few years. Palestinians are distributed almost equally between historic Palestine and the Diaspora. Despite the fact that the natural growth rate of the Palestinian population remains high when compared to other populations, and the fact that the Palestinian community is considered to be young, there has been a gradual decrease in the natural growth rate in the past few years.

The analytical reading of the Palestinian economy in WB and GS does not reflect the true potential of the Palestinian people. Israel, which imposes a suffocating siege on GS and prevents its natural growth, waged a brutal war on GS in the summer of 2014, destroying its infrastructure and thousands of homes and means of production. At the same time, Israel continues its occupation of the WB and strangles its economy through the control of its borders, Judaization, settlement expansion, and through the checkpoints and Separation Wall. By these means, Israel has managed to make the Palestinian economy dependent on foreign grants and taxes collected by Israel. Moreover, most Palestinian trade is exchanged with Israel.

The educational arena reflects Palestinian steadfastness and fortitude, where education is a tool to face challenges, and a means to leverage liberation and independence. Consequently, the Palestinian people is considered one of the most educated Arab peoples and one of the most scientifically advanced.

Endnotes

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Note: According to available data, published by PCBS, population growth of Palestinians in the Diaspora was -2.1% in 2011, while in 2012 it became 3.1% , then in 2013 it decreased to 1.6% , while it settled in 2014 and 2015 to be 2.1% . These numbers confuse researchers, for it is impossible for the number of Palestinians to decrease in one year by 2.1% , and then in the next year to increase by 3.1% . It seems that the PCBS can be efficient with high precision in the WB and GS, while in the Diaspora numbers are provided by host countries or are estimated by researchers. Discrepancies and confusion are manifested when PCBS re-estimated the numbers of recent years without adapting the estimates for the years that preceded, thus the growth did not take its gradual logical form. As for the Palestinian population in Jordan, their estimation is a dilemma for researchers, and statistics vary drastically.

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Index

A

- ‘Abbas, Mahmud (Abu Mazen), 29–31, 36–38, 41–59, 63, 66, 126, 128–129, 132–134, 155, 162, 166, 169–170, 176, 181, 183, 204–205, 207, 213, 215–216, 251–253, 267–268, 273
- Abbas, Sherko, 177
- Abdel Ghaffar, Magdy, 164
- Abdollahian, Hossein Amir, 218
- ‘Abdullah II (King of Jordan), 168–174
- ‘Abdullah, Ramadan, 48–49, 60, 216–217, 220
- Abe, Shinzō, 273
- Abed Rabbo, Yasser, 45
- Abou Shamla, Majed, 47
- Abou Zaydah, Sufyan, 47
- Abu al-‘Aynayn, Sultan, 48
- Abu Amr, Ziad, 44
- Abu Dhabi, 130, 187
- Abu Dis, 88, 329
- Abu Ein, Ziad, 37
- Abu Ghanem, Bilal, 315
- Abu Ghuneim Mount, 323–324
- Abu Jamal, Ghassan, 315
- Abu Jamal, ‘Uday, 315
- Abu Khdeir, Muhammad, 85, 206, 304, 313, 315–316, 335
- Abu Marzuq, Musa, 35–36, 43, 48, 50, 60–61
- Abu Yusuf, Wassel, 45
- Abu Zuhri, Sami, 61
- Adam, 323–324, 330
- Adnan, Khodor, 121
- Adumim, 326
- ‘Adwan, ‘Atif, 35
- Africa, 114, 239, 265
- Agudat Yisrael Party, 78
- Ahamed, Shri E., 271
- Ahmed, Masood, 239
- Al-Agha, Zakariya, 176
- al-Aghwar, 350
- Al-Ahmad, ‘Azzam, 36, 41, 44–45, 47, 49, 52
- Al-‘Akari, Ibrahim, 315
- Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 297, 308, 312
- Al-Aqsa Heroes, 305
- Al-Aqsa Mosque/ Haram al-Sharif, 30, 40, 45, 51–52, 84–85, 88, 104, 125, 137, 168–169, 171–174, 184, 191, 201–203, 205, 207–208, 220, 228, 237, 239, 253–254, 273, 289–296, 298–306, 312–313, 315–316, 335
- Al-Aqsa Revival Foundation (‘Imarat al-Aqsa), 305
- Al-Araqib, 327
- Al-Assad, Bashar, 176, 178–179
- Al-Attar, Ra’ed, 164
- Al-‘Ayzariyah, 326, 329
- Al-Bireh, 325, 350
- Al-Damiri, Adnan, 34, 48
- Al-Fajr for Culture and Literature, 305
- Alfei Menashe, 323–324

- Algeria, 215, 387
- Al-Ghannushi, Rashid, 47
- Al-Ghoul, Muhammad Faraj, 43
- Al-Halabi, Muhannad, 315
- Al-Hassayna, Mufeed, 60, 62–64, 124
- Al-Hayyeh, Khalil, 43, 45, 60
- Al-‘Issawi, Samer, 121
- Al-Jaba‘a, 322
- Al-Jubeir, ‘Adel, 184
- Alkabetz, Roi, 167
- Al-Khudaira (Hadera), 125
- ‘Allan, Muhammad, 121
- Al-Maliki, Riyadh, 34, 38, 48
- Almog, 323
- Al-Nunu, Tahir, 61
- Al-Nusra Front, 107
- Aloni, Nimrod, 105
- Al-Qaddumi, Khalid, 218
- Al-Qalamoun, 178
- Al-Qaq, Zakaria, 88
- Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf, 164
- Al-Qawasmi, Usama, 47, 51
- Al-Qiq, Muhammad, 121–122
- Al-Qunaitra, 178
- Al-Rahi, Boutros, 181
- Al-Rishq, ‘Izzat, 61
- Al-Sabireen Movement for Supporting Palestine (HESN), 53, 220
- Al Saud, Salman bin ‘Abdulaziz, 184
- Al-Shati’, 31–32, 41, 126, 202
- Al-Shatir, Khayrat, 164
- Al-Sisi, ‘Abdul Fattah, 37, 157–159, 162, 165–168, 187
- Al Thani, Tamim Bin Hamad, 169, 183
- Al-Tur, 329
- Al-Wazir, Jihad, 39
- Al-Zahhar, Mahmud, 163–164, 170, 219
- American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), 247
- Amman, 169–173, 187, 242, 253
- Amnesty International, 275
- ‘Amr, Taysir, 124
- Ankara, 204–207, 209–211, 214
- An-Nahda (Renaissance) Party, 47
- Ansar Bait al-Maqdis, 163
- Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ), 90–91
- Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS), 191
- Arab League, 242, 257, 267
- Arab Movement for Renewal, 79
- ‘Arafat, Yasir, 35, 43, 49, 129, 132, 215, 217
- Araghchi, Abbas, 214–215
- Araki, Ayatollah Mohsen, 220
- Argentina, 93, 274
- Ariel, 323–324, 331
- Ariel, Uri, 172, 297, 302–303
- Ariel, Yisrael, 297
- Aroub (Refugee Camp), 310
- Arviv, Menashe, 106
- Ashdod, 270
- Asia, 114, 239–240, 266
- Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), 270
- Atalay, Beşir, 209
- Ateret Cohanim, 292–293, 313, 320
- Attia, Wael, 162
- Australia, 93, 245, 256, 274
- ‘Awad, George, 311
- Azerbaijan, 226

B

Badi', Muhammad, 164
 Bahar, Ahmad, 62
 Bahrain, 179, 185, 277
 Baird, John, 247
 Bal'us, Mujahid, 181
 Baqa al-Gharbiyyeh, 327
 Barakat, Hisham, 164
 Barakeh, Muhammad, 361
 Bardawil, Salah, 44, 49, 61
 Barhum, Fawzi, 61
 Barkat, Nir, 297
 Behind Our Wall Hall (Ahar Kotlenu), 295
 Beijing, 267
 Beirut, 44, 184, 220, 361
 Beit El, 323, 330
 Beit El Baraka (Presbyterian Church), 310–311
 Beit Haliba (Heb. Core House), 296, 298–299
 Beit Jala, 308–309, 316, 327–329
 Beit Safafa, 321
 Beitar Ilit, 323–324
 Beka'ot, 331
 Belgium, 100–101
 Ben Baruch, Mishel, 113
 Ben-Dahan, Eli, 297
 Ben-David, Nir, 105
 Ben-Eliezer, Binyamin, 76, 86
 Ben Lulu, Asher, 105
 Berlin, 360–361
 Berri, Nabih, 44
 Bethlehem, 181, 308–310, 316, 322–326, 329, 332, 350, 395
 Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (India), 270–271
 Bigan, Sun, 268

Bin Zayed, Mohammed, 130
 Bishara, Shukri, 39
 Blair, Tony, 51, 61, 128, 241–242
 Boehner, John, 251
 Bogolyubov, Zvi Hirsch, 295
 Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS), 275
 Brazil, 101, 265, 274
 BRICS, 265, 267, 272
 Britain, 61, 136, 224, 256, 263
 Bseiso, Ihab, 34
 B'Tselem—The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 333
 Bulgaria, 87
 Burundi, 361
 Bush, George W., 250

C

Cairo, 33, 36, 40–42, 50, 59–60, 130, 156, 161–163, 166, 204, 207, 213, 241–242, 244, 252, 265, 271
 Cameron, 226
 Cameron, David, 263
 Camp David, 131, 165, 187
 Canada, 93, 244, 247–248, 256, 274
 Cast Lead/ Battle of al-Furqan (operation), 123
 Center for Human Dignity–Museum of Tolerance Jerusalem (MOTJ), 307
 Center for Refugee Rights (Aidoun), 361
 Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 90–92, 97, 346, 359, 382
 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 275
 Chahrour, Ali, 181
 Chain Gate, 297, 304

Chile, 274
 China, 100–101, 265–266, 268–270, 272, 274, 383
 City of David, 293
 Coalition of the Temple Movements, 292
 Cohen, Kobi, 106
 Cohen, Yoram, 88, 129
 Cohen, Yossi, 105
 Commission Against the Separation Wall and Settlements, 37
 Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs, 120–121
 Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD), 244, 269, 272
 Congressional Research Services (CRS), 104, 386
 Corbyn, Jeremy, 263
 Cote d’Ivoire, 226
 Cremisan (Monastery/ Valley), 308–309, 311, 316, 327–328
 Cyprus, 101

D

Dahlan, Muhammad, 52–53, 129–130
 Damascus, 176, 178
 Davis, Mary McGowan, 248
 Davos, 165
 Davutoğlu, Ahmet, 204–206, 208
 Dawabsha, Ali, 259
 Dawabsheh (Family), 57, 85, 205, 316
 Dayr al-Balah, 350
 Dead Sea, 173
 De Carvalho, Olavo, 266
 Decisive Storm, 50, 183–184
 DellaPergola, Sergio, 93

Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash) Party, 79
 Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), 42–43, 49–50, 54
 Deprived families’ Economic Empowerment Program (DEEP), 377
 Deri, Aryeh, 77
 Diène, Doudou, 248
 Directorate of Military Intelligence (AMAN), 105
 Dubai, 129
 Dugin, Aleksandr, 266
 Duma, 85

E

East Talpiot, 318
 Efrat, 323
 Egypt, 30, 33, 37, 44, 47–48, 63, 123, 130, 153–154, 156–169, 183, 185–190, 192–193, 206, 210, 219, 237–238, 242, 252, 259, 274, 277, 302, 346, 349, 353, 383, 387
 Eilat, 167, 270
 ‘Ein al-Hilweh (Refugee Camp), 181
 Eisenkot, Gadi, 105, 107–109
 Elayyan, Bahaa, 315
 Elkana, 323–324
 Ellwood, Tobias, 259
 Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip, 204–208
 Erekat, Saeb, 45, 58, 129, 267
 Essebsi, Beji Caid, 186
 Etzion, 308, 310, 316, 321–322, 328
 Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 116, 124, 351
 Europe, 46, 90, 92, 114, 175, 212, 222, 238–240, 257, 261, 270, 277, 279, 353–354, 360–361

European Union (EU), 38, 161, 256–263, 265, 275
 – European Commission, 260
 – European Council, 257–259, 261

F

Fabius, Laurent, 263
 Faraj, Majid, 57–58, 129
 Fatah, 29, 31, 33–35, 37, 40–53, 59, 65, 119, 126, 157, 162, 176, 183, 202, 215–217, 255
 – Central Committee, 36, 44–45, 48–49, 51–53, 57–58, 176, 215–216
 Fatah al-Intifadah, 176
 Fathali, Mohammed, 215
 Feiglin, Moshe, 302–303
 Finkelman, Yaron, 105
 Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (İnsani Yardım Vakfı—IHH), 208
 France, 24, 38, 92–93, 100–101, 129, 136, 156, 166, 256, 263, 274, 383, 387
 From Jerusalem to Jerusalem (Center), 295
 Fu'ad, Abu Ahmad, 54

G

Gabon, 226
 Galilee, 327
 Gantz, Benny, 105
 Gaza Strip (GS), 29–37, 39, 41–44, 46–55, 59–66, 75, 78, 83, 89, 104–105, 107–111, 113–114, 116–120, 122–129, 132, 135, 139, 153–155, 157–164, 166–169, 177–178, 182–186, 191, 193, 201, 203–204, 206–210, 213, 217, 223–226, 228, 237, 239–245, 247–248, 250–252, 255, 257–259, 264–265, 267–269, 271–273, 275, 278–279, 304, 312,

315–316, 332–333, 335, 345–351, 353–359, 361–365, 367–368, 372–377, 379, 381, 388–391, 393–394, 396–398

Geneva, 133, 225, 244

Gentilini, Fernando, 257

Germany, 93, 100–101, 110, 113, 136, 209, 256, 264, 274, 360–361, 383

Geva Benjamin, 323

Ghana, 274

Ghattas, Basel, 310

Gideon Plan, 107, 109, 114

Gilad, Amos, 123, 187

Gilo, 318, 323–324, 328

Gitit, 331

Giv'at Hamatos, 318, 323

Giv'at Ze'ev, 318, 323–324

Giv'on HaHadasha, 318

Glick, Yehuda, 55, 172, 294, 298, 302–303, 315

Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition, 361

Golan, Yair, 105

Golan Heights, 90–91, 94, 176–177, 182, 238, 244, 246, 260, 346, 352

Gordin, Uri, 105

Görmez, Mehmet, 208

Grandi, Filippo, 224

Greece, 259, 274, 361

Green Line, 88, 137, 334

Gül, Abdullah, 204

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), 179, 183–184

H

Habib, Khodr, 220

HaCohen, Amos, 105

Hahn, Johannes, 257

- Haifa, 113, 125, 270
- Hajbi, Liran, 106
- Halevi, Herzi, 105
- Haliba Movement, 292–293, 298, 302
- Halutz, Dan, 178
- Hamas, 29–53, 55–56, 58–65, 108–110, 123–124, 126–129, 154–155, 157–158, 161–165, 167, 169–170, 175–176, 178, 180, 182–184, 186, 191, 201–202, 204, 206, 209–210, 213–214, 216–222, 224, 228–229, 241–242, 251–252, 255–256, 258, 262–263, 277
- Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades, 37, 163, 209, 217, 223
 - Political Bureau, 35, 41, 43, 45, 163, 183, 205, 217–218
- Hamdallah, Rami, 29–31, 33–36, 38, 42–45, 60, 63, 126
- Hamdan, Usama, 45, 61–62, 218
- Hamman al-Ayn, 295, 297
- Haniyyah, Isma‘il, 31–33, 36–37, 41, 44, 47, 51, 54, 61, 126, 213
- Har Homa, 318–319, 321, 323–324
- Hawatmeh, Nayef, 42, 49, 54
- Hayman, Tamir, 105
- Hazan, Oren, 87
- Hazot, Guy, 105
- Hebron, 39, 55, 105, 119, 277, 310, 315, 322, 324–326, 332, 334, 350
- Herod’s Gate, 318, 324
- Herzliya, 123
- Hijazi, Mu‘taz, 294, 315
- Hizbullah, 107–108, 153, 164, 168, 175, 178–183, 220–221, 263, 278
- Hollande, Francois, 264
- Homs, 178
- Hong Kong, 100–101
- Houthis, 50, 183, 238
- Hurva Synagogue, 297
- Husan, 322

I

- Ibrahim, Muhammad, 164
- Ifrah, Tomer, 105
- Immanuel, 323
- India, 100–101, 113, 265, 270–272, 274, 361, 387
- Indian National Congress Party, 270
- Indonesia, 226, 274
- Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations (Mossad), 105
- Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), 167
- International Criminal Court (ICC), 38, 50, 134–135, 137, 203, 209, 238, 240, 246–247, 255, 261, 271, 278
- International Defense Cooperation Directorate (SIBAT), 113
- International Islamic Unity Conference, 219
- International Labour Organization (ILO), 376
- International Monetary Fund (IMF), 239, 363, 373, 388
- International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUMS), 164, 202
- INTERPOL, 38
- Ir David Foundation, 292–293, 297, 313
- Iran, 53, 104, 168, 174, 178, 183–184, 201, 214–223, 228–229, 238–239, 266
- Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), 217, 220–221
- Iraq, 39, 154, 173, 185, 277, 387
- Ireland, 275
- ‘Isa, Jamal, 218
- Islamic Development Bank, 269

Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ),
30, 39, 41, 43, 46, 48–50, 53, 55–56, 65,
216–217, 220, 278

Islamic Movement (1948), 87–88, 208, 305–306

Islamic Relief Malaysia Organization, 223

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), 39,
107–108, 159, 163, 173, 175, 178, 183,
211, 238, 273

Isler, Emrullah, 206

Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), 112

Israel Security Agency—ISA (Shabak), 56,
88, 116–117, 124, 129

Israeli National Water Company (Mekorot),
333–334

‘Issa, Marwan, 181

‘Issa, Muhammad, 178, 182

‘Issa, Shawqi, 332

Istanbul, 207

Italy, 100–101, 383

J

Jafari, Mohammad Ali, 217

Jakarta, 269, 272

Japan, 101, 272–273, 274

Jaramana, 178

Jazzayeri, Massoud, 219

Jein, 57, 322, 326, 350

Jericho, 272, 323, 326, 331, 350

Jerusalem/ al-Quds, 29–30, 38, 40, 46, 51–54,
57, 59, 75, 78, 83–85, 87–88, 90–91, 94,
110, 114, 116–121, 125, 130, 137, 165,
168, 171–173, 181, 184, 191, 193, 202,
204–205, 207–209, 214–215, 218, 220,
222, 225, 228, 241, 244, 246, 248, 253–254,
258–260, 265, 267–268, 273, 275, 277,
289–290, 292, 294–301, 304–305, 307–330,
334–335, 346, 350, 352, 362

– Old City, 293, 296–297, 299, 301,
304–305, 307–308, 313, 320

Jerusalem Center for the Studies of Israeli and
Palestinian Affairs, 125

Jewish Agency for Israel, 300

Jewish Home (HaBayit HaYehudi) Party,
78–79, 82, 87, 132, 172, 290

Joint List, 77–79, 81–82, 88

Jordan, 40, 109, 128, 130, 132, 156, 168–175,
187–190, 241–242, 248, 253, 255, 259,
267, 272, 294, 302, 322, 325–326, 331,
345–346, 349, 352–357, 361, 383

Jordanian Department of Statistics (DoS), 346

Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve
Kalkınma Partisi—AKP), 205, 207, 209,
211, 228

K

Kadima Party, 76, 79, 81

Kafr Qasim, 327

Kahlon, Moshe, 76–77, 81

Kara, Ayoob, 177

Karm Abu Salem, 160

Karnei Shomron, 323

Kazakhstan, 226

Kedem Center, 296, 299, 300

Kedem Yerushalayim, 296, 301, 308

Kenya, 274

Kerry, John, 75, 130–131, 133, 156, 170,
172–173, 250–255, 277, 329

Kfar Adumim, 318

Khamenei, Sayed Ali, 220–222

Khan al-Ahmar, 326–327

Khan Yunis, 350

Khanqah al-Fakhriyya, 289, 301

Khartoum, 186

Khatib, Kamal, 88

Khomeini, Ayatollah, 215, 220

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), 44, 60, 64, 161, 179, 183–185, 225, 238, 242, 259, 383, 386–387

Kirshenbaum, Fania, 86

Kiryat Arba, 324

Knesset, 57, 76–84, 87, 89–90, 94, 98, 114, 171–172, 177, 290–291, 294, 302, 304

Kochavi, Aviv, 105

Kokhav HaShahar, 324

Konya, 205

Koren, Haim, 130

Kulanu (All of Us) Party, 76, 78–79, 81–82

Kuntar, Samir, 178, 182

Kurdish National Council (KNC), 177

Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê—PKK), 203, 207, 211

Kuwait, 64, 154, 156, 161, 185, 187

L

Labor Party, 76–77, 79, 81, 86, 132

Labour Party (Britain), 263

Labwani, Kamal, 177

Lakiya, 327

Landau, Uzi, 76

Lapid, Yair, 76, 161

Larijani, Ali, 216–217

Latin America, 114

Lavrov, Sergei, 237–238, 266–267

League of Arab States (LAS), 41, 63, 154–156, 179, 184–185

Lebanon, 107–108, 153–154, 175, 179–183, 191–192, 215, 220, 346, 353–357, 361

Lei, Hong, 269

Leshem, 323

Leviathan, 190

Levy, David, 77

Libya, 185, 238, 277

Lieberman, Avigdor, 76–77, 81, 84–85, 88, 127, 129, 221

Likud Party, 76–79, 81–82, 86–87, 89–90, 138, 290, 303

Livnat, Limor, 76

Livni, Tzipi, 76–77

Locker Committee, 107, 114

Lod, 327

Lodhi, Maliha, 225

Lotan, Nadav, 105

M

Ma'ale Adumim, 318, 324, 327

Ma'ale Mikmas, 324

Madani, Iyad, 202–203

Madrid, 260

Magal, Yinon, 87

Majdalani, Ahmad, 30, 216

Malaysia, 100–101, 201, 223–224, 226, 387

Malley, Robert, 132

Mamilla Cemetery, 307–308, 324

Maqboul, Amin, 44

Mar Elias (Refugee Camp), 361

Marshall Islands, 244

Martyrs' Cemetery, 308

Marzouki, Moncef, 186

Mashnuq, Nuhad, 181

Mauget, Rodolphe, 259

Mavi Marmara, 83, 210–211

Mécanisme Palestino-Européen de Gestion et d'Aide Socio-Economique (PEGASE), 386–387

Mecca, 208

Mediterranean Sea, 103, 111, 239–240, 257, 266

- Melman, Yossi, 111, 167
 Mercy Cemetery, 305, 307–308
 Meretz Party, 78–79, 82
 Meridor, Dan, 77
 Merkel, Angela, 133, 264
 Mesika, Gershon, 86
 Mevo'ot Yericho, 331
 Mexico, 274
 Micronesia, 244
 Middle East, 51, 60–61, 132, 135–136, 174, 177, 238–240, 256–258, 260, 262, 266, 268, 273, 275
 Milo, Roni, 77
 Misezhnikov, Stas, 86
 Mish'al, Khalid, 45, 48, 51, 61, 169, 183–184, 205, 207, 217, 224
 Mitchell, Sandra, 279
 Mlough, 'Abdul Rahman, 54
 Modi, Narendra, 113, 270
 Modi'in, 324
 Mofaz, Shaul, 76
 Mogherini, Federica, 257, 259
 Mohamad, Mahathir, 224
 Molho, Isaac, 129
 Mor, Nissim, 106
 Mordechai, Yitzhak, 178
 Mordechai, Yoav, 128, 322
 Moroccan Hill, 301
 Moroccan Quarter, 289, 301
 Moroccan Road, 302
 Moroccans' Gate (*Bab al-Magharibah*), 301–302
 Morocco, 187–189
 Morocco Gate, 300–302
 Morsi, Muhammad, 33, 158, 161, 163–164, 187, 206
 Moscow, 267
 Moskowitz, Irving, 310
 Movement (Hatnua) Party, 77, 79, 81
 Mubarak, Hosni, 161, 165
 Mughnieh, Jihad 'Imad, 182
 Muhanna, Rabah, 49, 56
 Muheisen, Jamal, 49
 Murabitat Movement, 304–306
 Muslim Brothers (MB), 47–49, 154, 157, 162–165, 169, 184, 186, 218
 Muslim Women for al-Aqsa, 305
 Mustafa, Muhammad, 62
- ## N
- Nablus, 30, 57, 85, 312, 323–324, 326, 350, 394
 Naffa', Said, 87
 Naftali, Menny, 87
 Nahalin, 322
 Najib, Mohammad, 224
 Nakhaleh, Ziad, 216, 220
 Na'omi, 331
 Nasr, Muhammad, 218
 Nasrallah, Hassan, 180, 182
 National Democratic Assembly (Balad) Party, 79
 National Insurance Institute of Israel (NII), 94
 Nauru, 244
 Nawfal, Ayman, 164
 Negev, 82, 262, 276, 327
 Netanyahu, Benjamin, 48, 75–78, 81–84, 88–89, 104–105, 112–113, 126–129, 131–132, 138, 165–167, 170, 172, 177–178, 204, 211, 220, 222, 250–251, 253–254, 257, 260, 264–265, 277, 290–291, 298, 300, 303–305
 Netanyahu, Sara, 87
 Netherlands, 100–101, 383

Neuman, Dan, 105
 Neve Ya'akov, 318, 323–324, 330
 New Delhi, 113
 New York, 113, 241
 Nigeria, 134, 226, 274
 Nof Zion, 324
 Nofei Prat, 318, 323
 Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), 215
 North America, 92, 114
 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO),
 130, 209, 240
 Norway, 161
 Nu'eima, 331

O

'Obaid, Maher, 218
 Obama, Barack, 78, 112, 132, 238, 249–251,
 254, 277
 Odeh, Ayman, 88
 Ofra, 323
 Ohel Yitzhak (Tent of Isaac), 297
 Olmert, Ehud, 76, 85, 132
 Oman, 185, 387
 Omdurman, 186
 Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC),
 201–203, 228
 Oron, Amira, 210
 Oslo, 41, 47, 51, 58, 65, 119, 131, 137, 202,
 215, 217, 259–260, 264, 272, 315, 325,
 333, 381
 'Oweida, Hatem, 63

P

Pakistan, 201, 224–225, 271, 274
 Palau, 244

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), 29,
 33, 41, 44–46, 51, 55, 65, 119, 129, 133–134,
 137–138, 155, 162, 176, 202, 204, 215,
 217, 228, 242, 246, 255, 321, 325
 – Central Council (PCC), 29, 38, 50, 56,
 58, 133, 156
 – Executive Committee, 45, 55, 58, 176,
 216
 Palestine Monetary Authority (PMA), 363,
 379, 388
 Palestinian Authority (PA), 29, 31, 33–39,
 44, 47, 49–52, 54–60, 62–66, 84–85,
 116, 126–129, 133, 135, 137, 155–157,
 159, 161–162, 169, 176, 180, 183–185,
 202, 204, 212–213, 215–216, 228, 242,
 246–247, 251–256, 259–261, 264, 269,
 272, 277–278, 315, 334–335, 345, 355,
 362–363, 365–373, 375, 377–378,
 380–389, 392–398
 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey
 Research, 47, 65
 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
 (PCBS), 345–346, 350–351, 354, 359,
 362, 375, 382, 388
 Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social
 Protection, 377
 Palestinian Information Center (PIC), 219
 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), 35–36,
 43, 55, 62, 121, 138
 Palestinian National Council (PNC), 45–46,
 138
 Palestinian People's Party (PPP), 43
 Palestinian Prisoner Club, 121
 Palestinian Prisoners Center for Studies,
 118–120
 Palestinian Return Centre (PRC), 360–361
 Pardo, Tamir, 105
 Paris, 129, 204, 243, 246
 Pedatzur, Reuven, 110
 Peres, Shimon, 166, 209

- Peru, 274
- Petraeus, David, 275
- Pillar of Defense/ Stones of Baked Clay (Operation), 123, 155
- Pisgat Ze'ev, 318, 323–324, 330
- Poland, 274
- Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), 41, 43–44, 46, 49, 50, 52, 54, 56
- Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), 46, 49, 176
- Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association—Addameer, 119, 121
- Protective Edge/ Eaten Straw (al-'Asf al-Ma'kul) (Operation), 112, 116, 123–124, 126, 154, 206
- Putin, Vladimir, 266–267
- Q**
- Qalqilya, 323–324, 326, 350
- Qaouk, Nabil, 181
- Qasra, 30
- Qatar, 34, 61–62, 128, 154, 161, 169, 183, 185, 206, 387, 389
- Quartet on the Middle East, 51, 61, 65, 135–136, 240–243, 252, 257, 259, 264–265, 268, 278
- R**
- Radwan, Isma'il, 43, 61
- Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Company, 113
- Rafah, 37, 50, 52, 122, 126, 158–160, 162, 259, 350
- Rahat, 327
- Rajoub, Jibril, 57, 215
- Ramadan, Ibrahim, 57
- Ramallah, 29–31, 37, 50, 57–58, 162, 183, 216, 220, 250–252, 316, 323–326, 329–330, 332, 334, 350
- Ramat HaNatziv, 324
- Ramat Shlomo, 318, 323–324
- Ramot, 318–319, 323–324
- Red Sea, 173
- Regev, Miri, 294
- Ribat Movement, 306
- Rif Dimashq, 178
- Rifa'i, Samir, 176
- Rimonim, 324, 331
- Rivlin, Reuven, 84, 89
- Riyadh, 184, 242
- Ro'i, 331
- Rome Statute, 38, 134, 246–247
- Rouhani, Hassan, 215–216, 221–222
- Russia/ Russian Federation, 90, 93, 101, 174, 204, 210, 212–213, 237–238, 240, 265–268, 272, 274, 278, 361, 387
- Russo, Tal, 105
- S**
- Sa'ar, Gideon, 77
- Sabri, 'Ikrima, 208
- Sa'dat, Ahmad, 54
- Sadat, Anwar, 165
- Salah Ad-Din Street, 320
- Salah, Raed, 88, 208
- Saleh, 'Ali 'Abdullah, 238
- Salem, Hisham, 53, 220
- Salfit, 316, 323–324, 326, 331, 350
- San'a, 183
- Sarhan, Naji, 64
- Savir, Uri, 56

- Scandinavian Seamen Holy Land Enterprises, 310
- Schabas, William, 248
- Senegal, 226, 248
- Separation Wall, 37, 244, 258, 308–309, 316, 327–329, 334, 398
- Serry, Robert, 60–61
- Sha'ar, Muhammad, 176
- Shaked, Ayelet, 290
- Shalabi, Hanaa, 121
- Shalit, Gilad, 120
- Shalom, Silvan, 86, 88
- Shaludi, 'Abdul Rahman, 315
- Sharafat, 321
- Sharansky, Natan, 296, 300
- Sharawneh, Ayman, 121
- Sharif, Muhammad Nawaz, 224–225
- Sharm el-Sheikh, 154, 185
- Sharon, Ariel, 76, 132
- Shas Party, 77–79, 82
- Sha'th, Nabil, 271
- Shavei Shomron, 323
- Shefer, Nimrod, 168
- Sheikh al-Islam, Hussein, 217
- Sheikh Jarrah, 320, 324
- Shijie, Wang, 268
- Shtayyeh, Mohammad, 44, 216
- Shu'fat, 321, 324
- Shukri, Sameh, 161
- Shvut Rachel, 323
- Sike, Wu, 268
- Silwan, 85, 292–293, 296, 299, 313, 320, 324
- Simon Wiesenthal Center, 308
- Sinai, 48, 157–159, 162–164, 166–168, 187
- Solidarity Foundation for Human Rights—Tadamon, 119, 312
- South Korea, 101, 274
- Soviet Union, 90, 257, 266
- Spain, 101, 274–275, 383
- Spring House, 296–297
- Stein, Bruno, 106
- Steinitz, Yuval, 127
- Strauss House, 296
- Students for Temple Mount, 293
- Sudan, 186
- Suez Canal, 270
- Surif, 322
- Svetlova, Ksenia, 57
- Swaraj, Sushma, 271
- Switzerland, 61, 100–101
- Syria, 53, 87, 104, 109, 137, 153–154, 173–179, 181–183, 190–191, 203–204, 213, 216, 220, 223, 238, 267, 277, 346, 352–357, 361

T

- Talpiot, 318, 323
- Tamar, 103, 190
- Taybeh, 327
- Tehran, 104, 215–220
- Tel Aviv, 85, 104, 110–111, 125, 166–167, 171–172, 187, 204–206, 209–211, 213–214, 221, 228, 275
- Temple Mount, 84, 173, 253–254
- Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful Movement, 293
- Temple Mount Heritage Foundation, 293
- The Temple Institute, 292–293, 297
- The Triangle (*al-Muthalath*), 82, 327
- Tiferet Yisrael Synagogue, 297–298

- Toledano, Eliezer, 105
- Topolanski, Hagai, 106
- Tsur, David, 294
- Tubas, 326, 332, 350
- Tulkarem, 322, 326, 350
- Tunisia, 186, 349
- Turkey, 61, 100–101, 123, 127–128, 161, 174, 201, 203–207, 209–213, 226, 228, 274, 353, 383
- Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı—TİKA), 208
- Turkmenistan, 226
- U**
- Ukraine, 239, 383
- Umm al-Fahm, 327
- United Arab Emirates (UAE), 130, 161, 185, 210, 383, 387
- United Arab List, 79
- United Kingdom (UK), 93, 100–101, 263, 274
- United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), 224
- United Nations (UN), 60, 128, 133–134, 136, 170, 184, 204, 206, 214–215, 225, 238, 240–241, 243–246, 248–249, 255–256, 259, 267, 269, 271–273, 361
- Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP), 245
 - General Assembly, 38, 51, 171, 238, 243–244, 246, 249, 256, 267
 - Human Rights Council (HRC), 225, 248
 - Security Council, 38, 49, 134, 136, 155–156, 170, 172, 184, 214, 225, 242–243, 245, 249, 251, 261–262, 266
 - United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 243, 245–246, 361
 - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 133, 255
 - United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), 272
 - United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-occupied Palestinian territories (OCHA-oPt), 304, 313, 316, 334
 - United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 60, 64, 175, 185, 223–225, 245, 257, 260, 265, 269, 272, 278–279, 352–354, 356–358, 390–391, 394
 - United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), 63
- United States of America (US), 38, 54, 61, 64–65, 75, 78, 93, 95–96, 100–101, 104, 109–112, 125, 130–134, 136, 156, 161, 168, 170, 172, 174, 206, 214–216, 219–220, 222, 224, 237–238, 240, 242, 244–256, 260–266, 268, 270, 273–278, 308, 311, 329, 361, 383, 386–387
- Congress, 111, 251, 254, 256
 - House of Representatives, 111, 251
 - Pentagon, 112
- United Torah Judaism (Yahadut Hatorah) Party, 78–79, 82
- Uruguay, 361
- Uzbekistan, 226
- V**
- Vinter, Ofer, 105
- Virov, Itai, 104
- W**
- Wadi 'Ara, 84
- Wadi Arabah, 171
- Wadi Fukin, 322

Wadi Hilweh, 296, 299, 313

Walaja, 308, 316

Washington, 46, 112, 134, 172, 250, 262,
277–278

West Bank (WB), 30–31, 33, 39–42, 47,
50–53, 55–59, 62, 65–66, 78, 84–85,
90–91, 104, 109, 114, 116–119, 122, 125,
127–129, 132, 135, 139, 169, 181, 185,
191, 193, 207–209, 218, 222–223, 241,
247–248, 255, 257–258, 260, 264, 267,
273, 275–276, 279, 310, 315–316, 318,
321–327, 329–335, 345–351, 354–359,
361–365, 367–368, 373, 375–376, 379,
381, 388–391, 393–394, 396–398

Western Wall, 300

– Plaza, 295, 298, 300–301

– Upper Plaza (Sharansky Plan), 300

Western Wall Heritage Foundation, 292–293,
298

Women for the Temple, 293

World Bank, 269, 377, 386–387

World Customs Organization (WCO), 38

World Economic Forum, 165, 255

World Health Organization (WHO), 333

Y

Ya‘alon, Moshe, 59, 84–85, 90, 110, 112–114,
125, 127–128, 310

Yaghi, ‘Alaa, 47

Yarmouk (Refugee Camp), 175–176, 181,
223–224, 353, 361

Yemen, 53, 154, 179, 183–185, 220, 238, 277

Yesh Atid (There is a Future) Party, 78–79

Yetav, 331

Yi, Wang, 268

Yishai Association, 293, 306–307

Yishai, Eliyahu (Eli), 77

Yisrael Beitenu Party, 76, 78–79, 81–82, 86

Yousafzai, Malala, 225

Yusufiyah Cemetery, 307–308

Z

Zaki, ‘Abbas, 51, 176, 216

Za‘noun, Salim, 46

Zarif, Mohammad Javad, 215–217

Zionist Camp, 77–79, 81–82

Zoabi, Hanin, 83

Zolnour, Mojtaba, 221

List of Publications for al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

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