

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2008



Edited by
Dr. Mohsen Saleh



The Palestinian Strategic Report 2008



**Al-Zaytouna Centre
For Studies & Consultations
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The Palestinian Strategic Report 2008

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List of Abbreviations

AIPAC	The American Israel Public Affairs Committee
ALF	Arab Liberation Front
B'Tselem	The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories
CBR	Crude Birth Rate
CDR	Crude Death Rate
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Fatah	Palestinian National Liberation Movement
Fida	Palestinian Democratic Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GS	Gaza Strip
Hamas	Islamic Resistance Movement
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ISESCO	The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
JCSER	Jerusalem Center for Social and Economic Rights
JNF	Jewish National Fund
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PA	Palestinian Authority
PCAS	Popular Committee Against Siege
PCHR	Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
PECDAR	Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP-GC	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command
PIJ	The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine

PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PNC	Palestinian National Council
PNS	Palestinian National Security
PPP	Palestinian People's Party
PPSF	Palestinian Popular Struggle Front
PRDP	Palestinian Reform and Development Plan
QIZ Agreement	Qualified Industrial Zone Agreement
Shabak	Israel Security Agency
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
USA	United States of America
USAID	USA Agency for International Development
Wafa	Palestine News & Information Agency
WB	West Bank

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Compass and
the Partial
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**Chapter Eight:
The Economic
Indicators in the
WB and GS**

The editing team of al-Zaytouna Centre.

Introduction

This is the fourth annual Palestinian Strategic Report, which covers the year 2008 (PSR 2008). And as usual it traces the events' major track, and it combines the latest up to date detailed information, analysis and general vision, and the attempt to foresee the track of events.

We are so pleased with the remarkable success and the great attention that the Report is getting, in particular in the academic circles, and among those interested in and concerned with the Palestinian issue; for it became an important reference in learning institutions, universities, and research centers, and to graduate students, writers, and specialists. Hence, in order to benefit the greatest number of people and to make it available to those who otherwise cannot get it, especially inside Palestine, we resorted to publishing it online on our website, hoping it would contribute to filling an important gap in Palestinian studies and to gratifying the need for serious up to date academic studies in this field.

The year 2008 had started a heated start and it had a fiery end in the Gaza Strip, due to the intensification of the siege and the escalation of the Israeli aggression. The Palestinian schism has continued between Fatah and Hamas, between the governments of Ramallah and Gaza, and between the settlement and resistance tracks. The attempts to put the Palestinian house in order, as well as that of the Fatah movement, have failed. The "Legitimacies" have represented deficient models for each other and for the outside world. Perhaps the performance of the resistance in its repulsion of the aggression against GS in late 2008 has pushed toward more seriousness in the efforts to seek solutions, put the Palestinian house in order, and end the schism. But if the measures of building genuine trust were not adopted, and outside pressure was not transcended, and unless the national priorities and considerations are put forth, these efforts will remain susceptible to frustration and deterioration.

We sadly noticed, throughout our study of the year 2008, the continuous suffering of the Palestinian people under the Israeli occupation and in the Diasporas. We also noticed how Israel takes advantage of the local, regional, and international circumstances to entrench its occupation and go farther in "Judaizing and Israelizing" the Land, man, and the holy sites, and how it tries to invest in the

Palestinian schism to acquire more political benefits, and to tarnish the image of the Palestinian national effort. But at the same time, we took notice of the potential of the Palestinian to be steadfast and to succeed, with his limited resources, in repulsing the Israeli aggression against GS, to thwart its objectives, and to force its withdrawal. We also noticed more work and public events to give support to the Palestinian cause all over the world.

Ten professors and specialized experts participated in writing PSR 2008. The Report discusses in eight chapters the internal Palestinian situation, the Israeli-Palestinian scene, the Arab, Islamic, and international stances on the Palestinian issue. It also discusses the developments of the Land and the holy sites, and of the demographic and economical indicators.

We commend the efforts of our distinguished professors, the report consultants, particularly Dr. Anis al-Sayigh and Mr. Munir Shafiq. Al-Zaytouna Centre also welcomes our dear friend Mr. Ahmad Khaleefa who joined the consultants' team. We also thank our dear colleagues Drs. Basheer Nafi' and Walid Muhammad 'Ali for their remarks and suggestions. There is no doubt that our colleagues, the co-editors, and the staff of the Archive and Information Department at al-Zaytouna had exerted exceptional effort to put out this report in an appropriate form. Hence, this report is the product of a collective integrated effort of this distinguished team.

As for the English version, we express our deep gratitude to all our wonderful team of translators and assistant editors. However, special thanks and regards should go to our senior translator Prof. Hassan Ibrahim and to our assistant editor Rana Sa'adah for their exceptional contribution to this version.

The PSR 2008 has lost a great distinguished scholar of Israeli Studies, Dr. 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Misiri, who was a consultant for the Report throughout the last three years, May God shower His mercy on him.

In the end, we thank everyone who supported this report and encouraged its continuation, and everyone who benefited us with his remarks and suggestions. Undoubtedly, we are always open to advice, guidance, or constructive criticism.

**The Editor,
Dr. Mohsen Saleh**

Chapter One

The Internal Palestinian Scene: The Missing Compass and the Partial Legitimacies



The Internal Palestinian Scene: The Missing Compass and the Partial Legitimacies

Introduction

The 2008 internal Palestinian scene continued to be characterized by, so to speak, “the misery of the full brothers”. Hence, was the deepening of the schism between The Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) and The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and consequently the governments of Ramallah and Gaza. All attempts to put the Palestinian house in order, and that of Fatah too, had drastically failed.

The Palestinian “legitimacies”, were partial experiments vis-à-vis each other and the world at large, be it that of the emergency government in Ramallah or Isma‘il Haniyyah’s government in Gaza. Meanwhile, the executive and the legislative institutions of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), including its Executive Committee, the Central Council, and Palestinian National Council (PNC), were legally overdue for about a decade. Hence, it no longer reflected the Palestinian status quo or the represented Palestinian forces on the ground.

This state of “confusion” and the “loss of the compass” had its impact on Fatah-Hamas dialogue. No breakthrough was achieved in both the political settlement and resistance path. However, this state of “perplexity” was not necessarily a loss of vision, and, likewise, the crisis of the national project was not merely a struggle for power. In fact, the core and underlying factor for these developments was a drastic and ongoing difference between two methods to address the national project and to achieve the national liberation goals and independence. Up to now, the two approaches failed to reconcile over some basic issues related to the settlement process, resistance and the recognition of Israel and its “right” over the 1948 occupied lands. Additionally, the two sides has not yet built reciprocal confidence that justly and effectively accommodates all parties in the PLO and in the Palestinian national institutions. While this tragic national crisis continues, the Palestinian people pay its costly repercussions: occupation, siege, confiscation of lands, Judaization of the sanctuaries and extension of the settlements. However,

the heroic steadfastness of the people and the resistance during the war on Gaza (27/12/2008-18/1/2009) coupled with immense Arab, Islamic and international support, led to the failure of the Israeli objectives, and gave an impetus to the hope of putting the Palestinian house in order according to specific national agenda.

First: The Caretaker Government in Ramallah

The support of President Mahmud ‘Abbas (Abu Mazin) and the implicit, but probably reluctant, cover of Fatah, coupled with the Arab and international recognition, enabled Salam Fayyad’s caretaker government to administer the affairs of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank (WB). Fayyad’s government sailed through with Oslo Accords and the Road Map and restored security coordination with Israel. It opened the gate to the American Lieutenant General Keith Dayton to pursue the so-called “development” and “building” of its security forces in line with the provisions of the Road Map and the assigned security role of the self-rule administration.

Fayyad’s government argued that this was the only practical policy to be pursued at that difficult time when Palestinian, Arab, and international support for the Palestinian cause dwindled, and the resistance had practically failed to achieve the national goals, though the heroic resistance that failed the Israeli aggression on Gaza had immensely shaken these convictions. Hence, Fayyad’s government strove to undertake its obligations under the Road Map and the Quartet in the hope that this would compel the Israeli side to observe its commitments, and to surrender the Palestinian rights, or at least part of them, during the settlement negotiations. Fayyad’s government concentrated on improving the economic and living conditions of the Palestinians on the assumption that this policy would have “a philosophical and political resistance dimension, namely, to enable the Palestinian citizens to stick to their land.”¹

However, this “philosophy”, which “imposed inactivity” on the Palestinian side, did not lead to a likewise undertaken from the Israelis to stop their policies of settlement, confiscation of land, Judaization, arrests, and assassinations. Meanwhile Fayyad’s government and its security forces were preoccupied with the disarming of Hamas as well as the resistance fighters, and dismantling the movement’s infrastructure, including its societies and philanthropic institutions. In

accordance with the Palestinian democratic system, Fayyad's government derives its legitimacy from the Palestinian presidency, but it does not enjoy legitimacy from the Hamas led Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). It is ironic for this supposedly representative government to fight the party that represents the majority of the people and is entitled to represent them!²

Hence, practically, the underlying and major factor for the continuation of Fayyad's government was the paralysis of the PLC and the detention of most of its members in the WB (specifically the Hamas supported Reform and Change Bloc) in Israeli prisons. In other words, the Israeli-American factor was the prime mover of the Palestinian decision through the imposition of certain processes that favored one side against the other.

Making use of the absence of the legislative authority, President 'Abbas and Fayyad's government restructured the economic, social, and security laws. During the period June 2007 - June 2008, President 'Abbas and Ramallah government issued 406 decrees that covered almost all aspects of the political and legal system.³ To many, the accusation by the presidency and Fayyad's caretaker government to Hamas action in Gaza as an illegitimate coup does not really ring true as they had by these actions done exactly the same, and in cooperation with the occupation forces.

Fayyad's government worked hand in hand with President 'Abbas in dealing with Gaza Strip and Isma'il Haniyyah's dismissed government. Hence, Fayyad said that the restoration of Ramallah's control over GS is "a primary political objective that we are strongly and consistently committed to." He called for a temporary deployment of Arab forces in the Strip to help uniting it with the WB.⁴ This meant the direct involvement of Arab forces in the internal Palestinian affairs in favor of one side against the other, and in a risky operation, particularly so after Hamas' rejection of this intervention and the failure of all Ramallah's measures as well as the Israeli aggression and siege. On its side, Hamas argued that if there is to be any necessity for Arab intervention, it should rather be in the WB where there is a direct Israeli occupation. Moreover, what the Palestinians really need is protection from the Israeli occupation, and not from the resistance fighters.

The notion of declaring Gaza a "rebellious province" provoked tremendous uproar in the Palestinian scene. 'Azzam al-Ahmad, the president of Fatah parliamentary bloc, revealed on 28/7/2008 that the institutions of the PA had for

some weeks been seriously considering a proposal that consider Gaza a rebellious province controlled by “a military gang that undertook a military rebellion.” He continued to say, “It is the right of legitimate governments to use force to crush a military rebellion in any of its provinces, and to request help from whoever wishes to do so,” but he quickly added, “We are keen not to be dragged into using force to end the rebellion.”⁵ However, Ahmad ‘Abd al-Rahman, Fatah’s spokesman and ‘Abbas’ media advisor, categorically denied any intention by the President or the PLO Executive Committee to declare Gaza as a rebellious province, and assured that they are still committed to dialogue to end the schism and to resolve the crisis.⁶ Nonetheless, according to a report by the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* on 17/12/2008, Abu Mazin emphasized that Gaza is a “rebellious province” that Hamas controlled by force.⁷

Fayyad’s government called for concentration of all effort to secure the success of the dialogue and the formation of a transitional government as a prelude to presidential and parliamentary elections.⁸ It declared its readiness to administer Gaza passages in a way that guarantees the lifting of the siege, but refused the initiative of Haniyyah’s government of a joint administration of these passages.⁹

Second: The Dismissed Government in Gaza

The year commenced with a heated confrontation with Haniyyah’s government and Hamas, and ended by an outright explosion. At its outset, clashes with the supporters of Fatah coincided with the acceleration of the tight Israeli siege, which led to the bypassing of the frontiers with Egypt and the flow of hundreds of thousands of the Gazan people for a few days to purchase their necessities. The year ended with the Israeli aggression on Gaza. Meanwhile, between the beginning and the end of the year, Haniyyah’s government found itself swimming against the tide in a divided Arab front and a hostile, antagonistic or apathetic international environment.

The success of Haniyyah’s government was essentially in its ability to survive in almost impossible circumstances. But it paid a huge price for this survival, namely a strangling siege for more than a million and a half Palestinian, destruction of the infrastructure and total preoccupation with providing just fuel, food and medicine. But it did not have many alternatives, as its failure would mean revival of the

security chaos, the eradication of Hamas and the resistance program from Gaza, the end of the Palestinian drive for change and the restoration of Oslo path, the Road Map, and Annapolis theme, with all their drawbacks and liabilities. Those who asked Haniyyah's government to "descend from the tree" did not provide a ladder because they wanted it to fall on its head, or to submit in a humiliating manner. For the conditions provided for the formation of a new Palestinian government could not, by any means, lead to the building of confidence or guarantee a true partnership to administer the Palestinian house and make its decisions.

Throughout the year 2008, Haniyyah's government faced two difficult alternatives: either slow death, represented by the siege and the abortion or distortion of the experiment, or the alternative of downfall, marginalization, and eradication, as represented by a return to the options of Oslo, the Road Map, and Annapolis. It was overwhelmed during this difficult year with making the vital military preparations for the expected Israeli aggression, and the heavy responsibility of providing a decent living for the people. Hamas and Haniyyah's government did not see in their surrender of Gaza a mere and ordinary political step, rather, they viewed the political and economic siege a means to break the will of the Palestinian people and secure their humiliating submission, hence to impose on them the Israeli-American conditions.

Haniyyah's government managed throughout the year 2008 to tighten its grip over the Strip, and all the attempts to secure its downfall -through incursions, the siege, and the security hazards- had failed. It maintained reasonable popularity in the Strip, notwithstanding strong opposition, particularly from Fatah, which had by then reorganized itself. The tunnels on the Egyptian frontiers, which increased from 24 to more than 500, provided a partial solution for providing some of the necessities to the Strip. The government continued to provide cover to the resistance movements, and the transportation and "smuggling" of weapons continued, while others were locally made whenever possible. In these circumstances, the role of Hamas and the resistance was essentially defensive in nature and orientation, while that of the government machinery was primarily connected with maintaining law and order, providing the absolute necessities and fighting corruption. Thus, the environment was not by any means conducive for undertaking any developmental or economic projects. Furthermore, on the contrary the application of the Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) and the implementation of many other Hamas patronized Islamization programs were postponed.

The directives issued by the Palestinian presidency and Fayyad's government to the Authority's officials in Gaza led to an odd situation. For the officials were told not to pursue their duties, except in some ministries and institutions, that are directly linked with the health and welfare of the people, such as the Ministries of Health and Education, and in the governorates and the Central Statistics Bureau. This meant that the Authority in Ramallah paid those who stayed at home and suspended the salaries of those who worked, except in the cases of the above specified exemptions. According to the statistics of the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR), which is affiliated to the Authority in Ramallah, the number of GS officials totaled 78 thousands, of whom 31,350 were military personnel and 45,650 civilians. Amongst those, 17,750, i.e. 22.7%, pursued their careers mainly in the Ministry of Education (12,300 officials), and the Ministry of Health (5,000 officials). The wages and salaries paid for those who worked constituted 14.2% of the total paid to the Authority's officials in GS, which means that about 86% of the total salaries transferred by Ramallah's Authority were allocated for those who stayed at home, and who observed, or were compelled to observe, its directives. The amount paid to the latter idle group was \$386 millions*.¹⁰

Moreover, news and reports issued by human right organizations indicated that the salaries of many officials were suspended for political reasons, including many employees of the Ministries of Health and Education. Sa'di al-Karnaz, The Secretary-General of Ramallah's government, had himself admitted that salaries of certain officials who "worked with biased quarters that did not abide by the Palestinian legitimacy," were suspended. However, some reports indicated that salaries were sometimes suspended on the basis of wrong and malicious reports sent to Ramallah.¹¹ According to a report issued in April 2008 by Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, the salaries of 3,615 officials were suspended, of whom 1,549 and 693 were respectively employees of the ministries of health and education.¹² 'Ala'adeen al-Battah, the head of the Palestinian Civil Servant's Union, mentioned the suspension of the salaries of two thousand employees in the Ministry of Health, three thousand in the Ministry of Education and two thousand in other ministries and departments.¹³

The policy of the presidency and the government of Ramallah towards government posts in GS weakened and politicized the public sector in the Strip,

* The term \$ used through out this book is the US\$.

and endangered a new form of disguised unemployment. Moreover, this policy revealed contradiction and confusion in defining national conduct, whereby the work of the Palestinians in Israeli institutions had become a normal pattern while those who worked in Palestinian institutions were penalized, and those who sat idly in their homes were remunerated.

In any case, Haniyyah's government acclimatized with this condition, and was able to provide salaries for more than 18 thousand of its employees,¹⁴ who met its minimum need of officials. For example, those who were affiliated to its security forces were 13,600, a significant reduction from the previous figure of 56 thousands.¹⁵ The government filled the vacant posts with those who supported its political orientation, endorsed its program or accepted to work under the status quo in the Strip, and, whenever needed, sought the support of al-Qassam Brigades to maintain law and order. This opened the gate to accuse both Haniyyah's government and Hamas of favoritism and politicization of the government sector.

In accordance with the Palestinian constitution, Haniyyah's government had considered itself since its dismissal by President 'Abbas a legitimate caretaker government. Notwithstanding the withdrawal of the ministers of Fatah, other Palestinian factions and the independents, the government continued to function. In April 2008, Haniyyah's government declared its intention to broaden the cabinet, which was dismissed by Fatah as a dangerous step that deepen schism and dissension among the Palestinians.¹⁶ Nonetheless, by the end of June, Isma'il Haniyyah appointed several ministers: Muhammad 'Asqul for education, Usama al-'Aysubi for transportation, Talib Abu Sha'r for religious affairs and endowments (*al-Awqaf*), Ahmad al-Kurd for social affairs, and Ahmad Shuwaydih for justice, and he confirmed Sa'id Siyam in the Ministry of Interior,¹⁷ who was later assassinated during the Israeli aggression on Gaza.

By the end of summer 2008, Haniyyah's government managed to overcome a major strike undertaken by the teachers and the doctors, which was masterminded by Fatah and largely implemented by its supporters. About four thousand out of ten thousand teachers went on strike in protest of some transfers ordered by the government and against its control of the previously Fatah controlled General Union of Palestinian Teachers. The government took decisive measures to end the strike. It warned the teachers of suspending their salaries, and appointed some volunteers in their place. Since one third of the striking doctors were specialists,

whose absence from work would lead to serious repercussions such as the delay of surgical operations, the government compelled them to return to work. It told them that it is unbecoming to indulge in strike actions at a time when the Strip was confronting a suffocating siege and experiencing immense hardship. By ending the security chaos and suppressing the strikes, Haniyyah's government tightened its control over the Strip, which convinced many of its adversaries of the difficulty, if not the improbability, of securing its collapse or changing it from within.

Third: The Dialogue and the Placement of the Palestinian House in Order

The dialogue between Fatah and Hamas, and the placing of the Palestinian house in order had been a hotly debated issue during most of the year 2008. But what appeared to be "quarrelsome partners" failed to confront each other on one table to resolve their differences. Mutual accusations, lack of trust and preconditions dominated throughout the year. Of course, the issue was not a mere "quarrel", but a profound difference around the political program and the strategic goals.

Both of the conflicting parties, Fatah and Hamas, appeared to have believed that time would prove to be a healer, or on their part against the other side, though time may complicate matters and leads to realities on the ground that make resolution of a problem more difficult. The Palestinian presidency and the Authority betted on the following in Facing Hamas:

1. The suffocating siege and the possibility of an Israeli invasion of the GS.
2. The operations of suppression and eradication of Hamas and its supporters in the WB.
3. The waning of the resistance.
4. Security chaos, strikes, and riots.
5. The official Arab and international deadlock.

They expected that these developments would lead to the failure and collapse of Hamas government, hence the presidency and Fatah would impose their conditions on the movement and its government.

But Hamas and the supporters of Haniyyah's government had, on the other side, betted on the following:

1. The willingness and ability to continue the steadfastness.
2. The organizational discipline of Hamas versus the flabbiness, organizational disintegration, and corruption in Fatah.
3. The stumbling of the peace settlement process and the improbability of an eventual solution acceptable to the Palestinian people.
4. The popular democratic legitimacy, and the probability of the resumption of the role of the PLC as a result of a prisoners' exchange deal, which would facilitate the downfall of Fayyad's government by democratic means.
5. The imminent end of 'Abbas' presidency, while the PLC will continue to function.
6. The failure of the American project and its stumbleness in the region.
7. The acceleration of the Arab-Muslim support to the besieged Strip.

Hence, the two parties have been engaged in a joint operation of "finger biting", awaiting the cry of one before the other. But this would exhaust the Palestinians and delay their national project, and give ammunition to those fishing in troubled waters to distort the image of the Palestinian cause and struggle due to the schism.

President 'Abbas conditions for initiating a dialogue with Hamas may be summarized as follow:

1. Retraction from the coup in Gaza and apologizing to the Palestinian people.
2. To recognize the PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and undertake to recognize the agreements that the PLO had signed and the legitimacies that it accepted.

Meanwhile President 'Abbas viewed the basis of an agreement with Hamas as follows:

1. To strike an agreement that would not isolate the leadership or the Palestinian government, or restore the siege on the Palestinian people.
2. To conduct an early presidential and legislative elections.

While refusing bilateral dialogue with Hamas, the presidential trend preferred to give itself a wider legitimacy and a propaganda stunt through sending a PLO delegation to dialogue with Hamas, or to conduct the dialogue session in the presence of representatives of all the Palestinian factions. But Hamas maintained that the core of the problem is between Fatah and Hamas, hence they should dialogue directly to resolve the basic issues, and subsequently extend the forum of the negotiations.

Hamas insisted that there should be no preconditions for the dialogue and that all issues should be put on the negotiation table. However, for the sake of having a fruitful dialogue, Hamas felt that all the standing issues be discussed in one bloc, and all political prisoners be released. Just before the assembly of the Cairo dialogue conference, scheduled in November 2008, Hamas elevated the latest condition of releasing the detainees into a pre-condition, hence was its decision not to attend and the consequential postponement of the dialogue session. This infuriated Fatah which came to the dialogue without a prior insistence on the above listed conditions.

Hamas did not view what it did in Gaza as a coup against the legitimacy, but a necessary step to confront those who exploited the security chaos to suppress the real legitimacy that was elected by the Palestinian people. In the words of Khalid Mish'al, "We are the legitimacy. How come that we rise against ourselves."¹⁸ Hamas had no objection to the proposal of forming a credible and impartial committee to determine the responsible side and who should apologize.¹⁹ But it rejected to recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people before its reform and activation, and only after Hamas joins its institutions. Hamas also declared that it would not be bound by the agreements concluded by the PLO, particularly those that contradict the Palestinian fundamentals and the resistance course, specifically recognition of Israel and its right in the 1948 occupied lands, or any other permanent deals. With these conditions, the dialogue was practically not feasible.

For those who called for retraction from "the coup" and the return of the status quo ante 14/6/2007, this inherently meant the acceptance of President 'Abbas' legitimacy, and to surrender to him power as well as the civil and security headquarters in Gaza; besides the reactivation of the official security services and the punishment of the architects of "the coup". But these quarters did not entertain Hamas' interpretation that the return of the status quo meant the re-establishment of the national government under Haniyyah's premiership, retraction of all the decrees and laws issued by 'Abbas in the absence of the PLC, the resumption of normal duties by all of Hamas' institutions and societies in the WB and the stoppage of security coordination with Israel as well as the Dayton plan that strove to restructure the security forces and destroy the infrastructure of the resistance movements.

Meanwhile, no serious measures were taken during the year 2008 to build bridges between the two sides in preparation for a meaningful dialogue. On the contrary, mutual accusations and hostile media campaigns continued, hence an uncondusive environment of mistrust prevailed. However, this does not negate the fact that some genuine attempts were made by both parties and at all levels to bypass the crisis.

President ‘Abbas and some of Fatah leaders accused Hamas of being a satellite of Iran in the region, of having contacts with al-Qa‘idah, and of harboring plans to establish “a reactionary emirate” in Gaza. On its part, Hamas accused ‘Abbas and Ramallah’s government of implementing the American-Israeli agenda, and of suppressing the resistance drive. Moreover, the Hamas maintained that the leadership in Ramallah was reluctant to pursue the dialogue because of the American veto against any reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas.

President ‘Abbas appeared to be contradictory in his speeches and addresses. For he drifted between a call to open a new page and engage in dialogue and a bitter, violent, and sarcastic criticism of the other party. His speech on the 43rd anniversary of Fatah called for “opening a new page” and a “cordial brotherly understanding,” but at the same time accused the resistance of doing nothing but “inflicting misery on Gaza and its patient people.” He added, “It is very well known that when subjected to direct danger, the pretenders of resistance call for a disgraceful truce to protect their lives and privileges.”²⁰ However, ‘Abbas probably knows that speaking of a disgraceful truce and the protection of lives and privileges was futile and would seriously backlash on the leadership in Ramallah, particularly so as Hamas consider the Authority in Ramallah to be more fragile in this respect.

In an interview with *al-Hayat* newspaper, published on 27/2/2008, Abu Mazin bluntly described the resistance rockets as “futile”, and added, “The activities of Hamas revealed to the world that it is, to say the least, a reactionary movement that strives to establish an emirate in Gaza, but does not care a bit for the rest of the national project which has become under imminent danger because of what it did.” He continued to claim, al-Qa‘ida is in Gaza and it is an ally of Hamas, and that he will not allow “duality in armament [in the WB].... The claim that this armament belongs to the resistance is a flagrant lie that nobody entertains.”²¹

In the fourth anniversary of the demise of Yasir ‘Arafat, ‘Abbas held Hamas squarely responsible for the “delay of the Palestinian dialogue in the service of

some regional agenda.” While the Authority in Ramallah pays the salaries of 77 thousand officials in Gaza, he continued to say, the others “deal in money, arms and drugs”!²² This accusation of engaging in drugs is a strange and cheap charge that President ‘Abbas himself knows its falsity.

Some of Fatah leaders, like ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, Abdullah al-Efrangi and Qaddoura Faris, admitted that there is an American veto against any dialogue between Fatah and Hamas, but they argued that their movement is not bound by this veto, and would opt for dialogue whenever it feels that this is in the national interest.²³ ‘Abbas repeatedly denied his submission to such a veto, saying, “We will not accept any veto, be it regional, international, or local, that becomes a stumbling block in the way of national reconciliation.”²⁴

Some of Hamas’ leaders, like Muhammad Nazzal, Fawzi Barhoum, ‘Izzat al-Rishq, Khalid Mish‘al, Isma‘il Radwan and Mahmud al-Zahhar, considered the American veto a formidable obstacle in the way of reconciliation.²⁵ Hamas saw in the speech of ‘Amr Mussa in the conference of donor nations, held in Berlin on 24/6/2008, an evidence for this conviction. For Mussa had said that the international community should be up to its responsibility to lift what he called the veto on national reconciliation. In fact, Mussa was engaged in a heated debate on the issue with Condoleezza Rice, the American Secretary of State, who responded by saying that it is not possible “to achieve peace without having a peace partner.”²⁶

In a memo, dated 6/1/2008, Hamas presented its vision to resolve the Palestinian schism, which emphasized that it harms national, Arab, and Muslim interests, serves no side but the Israeli, and weaken the Palestinian political stand and the ability of any Palestinian leadership to restore the Palestinian rights. The memorandum added that the solution lies in an unconditional and transparent dialogue that addresses the core issues and distance itself from foreign intervention, and which should be preceded by the stoppage of the smear media campaigns and the release of the detainees. Hamas specified ten basic fundamentals for the dialogue, including unity of the WB and GS and their political systems, respect for the option of democracy and all the components of the Palestinian legitimacy, respect for the basic law re-establishing the security forces on national and professional basis, the establishment of a government of national reconciliation, adherence to the Cairo Agreement 2005, National Consensus Document 2006, and Mecca Agreement 2007, abiding by the right of Palestinian people to the resistance of occupation and the restructuring, and reactivation of the PLO. Hamas maintained

that the PA, irrespective of who controls it, is not able or qualified to administer the resistance project. Hence, it is wrong to associate the resistance, its factions, and armament with the Authority, which, consequently, should not monopolize the arms or disarm the resistance. Moreover, there should be coordination between the resistance factions to administer the conflict with Israel, and with the government of the PA through a suitable mechanism.

Muhammad Nazzal, Member of Hamas Political Bureau, revealed that Khalid Mish'al presented to the Saudi leadership a memo of six principles that was along the lines of the above memorandum.²⁷ The call for dialogue was once more renewed when the Palestinians were compelled to lift the siege along Rafah passage, and hundreds of thousands of them crossed the Egyptian frontier. The dismissed government had then suggested joint administration of the Rafah passage with Ramallah, but the latter refused. Nimr Hammad, President 'Abbas' Political Adviser, said in this respect, the presidency will not debate with Hamas any issue unless and until "it retracts from its coup," and Hamas should "immediately depart from the passage and declare its failure to manage the affairs of the Gazzan people."²⁸ Some observers felt that these declarations had revealed the desire of the Authority in Ramallah that the siege continues to secure the failure of Hamas government through a popular uprising masterminded by the one million and a half or so Gazzans in protest of the tremendous hardship that they suffered as a result of this suffocating embargo.

Under the pressure of the above emergency that led to the infiltration of hundreds of thousands of the Gazzan inhabitants into Egyptian territory, President Mubarak offered to host a dialogue between Fatah and Hamas to end the fiasco,²⁹ which was initially welcomed by both movements.³⁰ But President 'Abbas insisted on his preconditions,³¹ and consequently the meeting did not take place. Ramadan Shallah, the Secretary-General of The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ), opined that the Authority in Ramallah constitutes the major obstacle for the dialogue, and that Abu Mazin had on each occasion insisted on a condition that he knew very well and beforehand that it will be rejected by Hamas.³²

The Yemeni Initiative

'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh, the Yemeni president, presented on 9/8/2007 a six-point initiative to resolve the Palestinian conflict, which was welcomed by Hamas but declined by President 'Abbas.

However, after a visit by President ‘Abbas to Yemen on 9/2/2008, he added to the Yemeni initiative a new condition that he insisted to be the most important prerequisite for a dialogue. It became the first item of the revised version and read as follows: “The return in Gaza to the status quo ante 13/6/2007, to abide by the obligations of the PLO and to conduct early presidential and legislative elections.”

The six other items were:

Second: Resumption of dialogue on the basis of the Cairo and Mecca Agreements, respectively of 2005 and 2007, on the basis that the Palestinian people constitute a united and indivisible block, that the Palestinian Authority is composed of the elected presidency and parliament, and an executive authority represented by a national unity government, and that the Palestinian legitimacy with all its components be adhered to.

Third: Absolute respect by all parties to the Palestinian constitution and law.

Fourth: Restructuring of the security forces on national basis, whereby they should be under the top authority and the government of national unity, and no faction should have any authority on them.

Fifth: To form a coalition government of national unity where each faction should be represented according to its weight in the Legislative Council, which would be able to exercise all its responsibilities.

Sixth: The formation a committee from the Arab League composed of relevant states like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Jordan, to execute the above item. Yemen declared its readiness to join this committee if invited.

Seventh: All the Palestinian institutions would be formed without any factional prejudice or preference, and they should submit to the top authority and the government of national unity.

We the representatives of Fatah and Hamas agree that the Yemeni initiative be the framework for a dialogue between the two movements to return to the status quo ante Gaza incidents, in emphasis of the unity of the Palestinian land, people, and authority.

President ‘Abbas hastily welcomed the revised Yemeni initiative, while Hamas asked for explanations around the added item, and refused the logic of preconditions, though it agreed to include all the items of the initiative in the agenda of the national dialogue for further explanation and discussion. On the basis of the Yemeni invitation, Hamas sent a delegation to Sana’a, while President ‘Abbas sent a PLO, not an exclusively Fatah, delegation. Hamas viewed this as lack of serious commitment on the part of Abu Mazin because, in its judgment, the PLO delegation speaks neither on behalf of Fatah nor the other Palestinian

factions. It was evident during the four-day dialogue (19-23/3/2008) that the core difference was around the first item of the revised initiative, from which, after a long debate, the following statement was finally deleted, viz “to abide by the obligations of the PLO.”

How to deal with the initiative was yet another source for discussion, where Hamas saw that it was a framework for the dialogue rather than for the implementation. Finally, the two sides agreed to issue, separately from the Yemeni initiative, “Sana’a declaration” of 23/3/2008, which was signed by ‘Azzam al-Ahmad and Musa Abu Marzuq, on behalf of Fatah and Hamas respectively. The declaration recorded that both Fatah and Hamas agreed that the initiative be “a framework for the resumption of dialogue between the two movements to return to the status quo ante Gaza incidents, in emphasis of the unity of the Palestinian land, people, and authority.”

The representatives of Fatah and Hamas were evidently exposed to extreme pressure by the Yemeni leadership to reach an understanding, which the Yemeni president aspired to take to the Arab summit scheduled in Damascus a few days later.

On its propagation, Sana’a declaration and ‘Azzam al-Ahmad were brutally criticized by the advisors of President ‘Abbas, and a bitter controversy erupted between al-Ahmad and Yasir ‘Abd Rabbuh. Nimr Hammad claimed that al-Ahmad did not contact the presidency before signing the declaration,³³ while ‘Abd Rabbuh dismissed the declaration as a deceptive dead agreement, and that the initiation of dialogue on its basis is “politically futile”.³⁴ Al-Ahmad responded by insisting that he was in contact with the presidency which authorized him to sign on behalf of Fatah. He accused Hammad of all around ignorance, whereby he does not know his (i.e. al-Ahmad) status in Fatah, not even that he was a member of the movement.³⁵ However, President ‘Abbas supported the position of his advisors, refused to consider the initiative as a framework for the dialogue and insisted on its implementation.³⁶ However, a few days later, al-Ahmad retracted by declaring that “the initiative was verbatimly agreed to, that it does not allow any explanation or interpretation, and that the purpose of dialogue is its implementation, which should start immediately after the declaration of the end of the coup in Gaza,” emphasizing that it is not subject to dialogue but for implementation on the ground.³⁷ He added, “There would be no dialogue before Haniyyah departs to his house.”³⁸

The stumbling of the Yemeni initiative and Sana'a declaration demonstrated that the environment was not yet conducive for a Palestinian reconciliation; and that the insistence on preconditions robbed its emotive force and "broke its oars". Moreover, it became clear that some betted on the weakness of the other side to score points at its expense. However, the heated controversy whether the Yemeni initiative was for debate or implementation continued for the rest of the year 2008.

The tense atmosphere between Fatah and Hamas prevailed. In response to Mish'al invitation to 'Abbas to visit Gaza, the latter renewed his demand that Hamas "retreat from its coup, declare its adherence to the Palestinian-Arab-international legitimacy, and that they go together for an early election."³⁹ 'Azzam al-Ahmad commented on this development by saying that Mish'al "is not qualified to make such a demand," and that Gaza is in a state of "rebellion," i.e. it is a "rebellious" province.⁴⁰

Egyptian Custodianship

On 7/4/2008, Osama Hamdan declared that Hamas had officially requested Algeria to mediate for a Palestinian reconciliation, and that the latter positively responded.⁴¹ Likewise, Mahmud al-Zahhar spoke on 29/5/2008 of Qatari attempts of mediation between Mahmud 'Abbas and the dismissed government in Gaza.⁴² But these efforts were apparently unsuccessful.

In his capacity as the president of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the Senegalese President Abdullah Wad had also tried to activate the reconciliation process. During the first week of June 2008, two delegations, representing Hamas and Fatah, arrived in the Senegalese capital. Each of them met the President and his aides, and the two delegates met together under the patronage of the President. But the differences between them were too deep to be bridged, and the final communiqué declared the failure of the dialogue. The Senegalese felt that Fatah was not sufficiently serious, its delegation did not have the necessary authorization, and that the whole move was more of a gesture to Senegal than a desire to give it an effective role in the reconciliation process. Apparently, President 'Abbas was keen to initiate a new call for dialogue in which Egypt would hopefully play a major role in its success, particularly so as he knew that the Egyptian regime supports Fatah's political orientation and that Egypt had a heavy weight on the Palestinian and Arab fronts. During a meeting with the Executive Committee of the PLO, which was attended by representatives of the Palestinian factions, he had actually renewed

in 5/6/2008, in an unusually conciliatory and accommodative language, the call for dialogue. He even formed a follow up committee composed of Hikmat Zaid, Nimr Hammad and Ahmad ‘Abd al-Rahman from Fatah, ‘Abd al-Rahim Mallouh from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Mahmud Isma‘il from the Arab Liberation Front (ALF) and Mustafa al-Barghuthi, representing the independents.

Shortly afterwards, President ‘Abbas asked President Husni Mubarak for Egypt to patronize, host and work for the success of the Palestinian dialogue. Quoting Nabil ‘Amr, the Palestinian Ambassador in Egypt, *al-Hayat* newspaper reported that Mubarak informed ‘Abbas of Egypt’s consent and willingness.⁴³ Hamas welcomed both the dialogue and the manner in which President ‘Abbas proposed it, though it did not notice any change in his previous conditions. It added that it had not then received any invitation, and cautioned that for the dialogue to take a serious path it should be between Fatah and Hamas.⁴⁴

However, President ‘Abbas’ call for dialogue did not materialize either because it was not enthusiastically supported in “Ramallah camp” or it was just a tactical move to caution the Israelis of the extensive disillusionment resulting from the stumbling of the settlement path, and of Hamas’ continued control of GS. Another possible reason for the dragging of the dialogue was ‘Abbas’ fury because of a message that Khalid Mish‘al sent on 8/6/2008 to the Secretary-General of the Arab League and a number of Arab leaders in which he welcomed the dialogue but blamed “the American and the Israeli vetoes” for the formidable difficulties that it confronted, and called for a genuine dialogue, otherwise the reconciliation would be for “other agenda such as being a cover up for expected treaties... or a diplomatic move preceding a harbored incursion or total aggression on GS.”⁴⁵

The Egyptian call for a dialogue continued to be on the air throughout the summer of 2008, and some of Hamas leaders related ‘Abbas’ waning enthusiasm for the subject to the American pressure and the conditions of the Quartet. But Nabil ‘Amr claimed on 4/7/2008 that Egypt will soon invite 14 Palestinian factions to conduct the dialogue. Simultaneously, *Asharq al-Awsat* newspaper published on 7/7/2008 a paper embodying Hamas’ vision on the principles of the dialogue and reconciliation, which were similar to the ones mentioned above. The slowness in Egypt call for dialogue seemed to have partly been motivated by its keenness to make good preparations for the event. In an attempt to reach to a prior common

ground, the Egyptian government sent exploratory questions to all the factions,⁴⁶ with a preliminary working paper to be the basis for investigation and discussions. On the other hand, the finger-pointing between Fatah and Hamas, Hamas' control of the security square of the Hillis' family and its decisive action against the strike of the teachers and doctors, the continuation of political detention by Ramallah Authority of Hamas and PIJ supporters along with resistance activists, and the claim of some of 'Abbas' senior aides that Gaza was nothing but a rebellious province..., had all contributed to the stumbling of the dialogue path.

The other Palestinian factions, particularly those under the umbrella of the PLO had also tried to give their vision of ending the Palestinian schism. On 21/7/2008, Saleh Zaidan, a Member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) Political Bureau, maintained that some respected organizational personalities prepared a memorandum that aimed at the launching of a national dialogue to end the conflict between Fatah and Hamas.⁴⁷ About a month and half later, some top leaders of the PLO spoke of a drive by the organization's factions to form a "caretaker government" to end the fiasco of the two governments in the Strip and the WB, and that the PFLP and DFLP as well as the Palestinian People's Party (PPP), the Palestinian Democratic Union (Fida) and the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF) support this orientation. But the PLO top leadership itself felt that Fatah's influence over the government was extremely limited because of the European and American support to Salam Fayyad, and their linkage of the financial aid to the continuation of his personal premiership, besides the fact that Fayyad was not a member of Fatah, and thus not obliged to submit to its decisions.⁴⁸

By the end of September 2008, it was reported that Cairo prepared a document of five themes to be presented to the Palestinian dialogue. Four of them were reportedly almost unanimously endorsed, viz discard of violence, formation of a national consensus government, rehabilitation of the security forces, and restructuring of the PLO, while the fifth spoke of fixing a date for presidential and legislative elections.⁴⁹ Moreover, the Egyptian proposal had embodied 14 measures to restore confidence between Fatah and Hamas, such as the stoppage of provocative campaigns, release of the prisoners, and the uplifting of the embargo on the societies and institutions. It also included some other broadly agreed clauses such as those related to the reformation of the PLO and the formation of a transitional government. However, other issues were still a

source of difference, e.g. the deployment in GS of Arab forces under Egyptian leadership and the abidance of all the factions by the international agreements concluded by the PLO and the PA.⁵⁰ On 8/10/2008, a Hamas delegation arrived in Egypt and had meetings with ‘Omar Suleiman and his aides, in which it was consensually agreed to the formation of a government of national consensus, restructuring of the security forces on national and professional bases, and the formation of a committee to rebuild the PLO within two months from the launching of the national dialogue. Moreover, all the issues should be agreed upon as one package and Cairo should patronize a bilateral dialogue between Fatah and Hamas (scheduled by Egypt on 25/10/2008) before the comprehensive national dialogue commences in 9-11/11/2008.

Hamas made some observations of the Egyptian paper, in which it emphasized the necessity of separation between the requirement of the reconciliation and the end of the schism, and between the topics related to the administration of the conflict and the negotiations with the occupation, besides the importance of the simultaneous implementation of the agreement in the WB and GS, and the resolution of all the issues in one package.

The overwhelming majority of Fatah was for the success of the dialogue, but it also aspired for the formation of a consensus government capable of lifting the siege and to deal with the international community. Besides, the establishment of ‘Abbas’ legitimacy and the conduct of early presidential and legislative elections.⁵¹

By late October 2008, tension was resumed, whereby Fatah excused itself from attending the proposed meeting scheduled on 25/10/2008, while Hamas accused the Authority in Ramallah of detaining during the month of October 170 of its members.⁵² With great dissatisfaction, Hamas took note of Egypt’s failure to include in its paper any of the movement’s proposals. It increasingly felt that the ongoing arrangements would not lead to a viable reconciliation but would concentrate on the needs of one side at the expense of the other, and that the whole exercise would focus on providing a cover to extend ‘Abbas’ presidency. Hence, in its meeting of 4/11/2008 with ‘Omar Suleiman, Hamas expressed serious concern that the campaign of arrest in the WB would poison the environment, and it asked for concrete measures to release all political detainees and guarantee the participation of Hamas’ delegation from the WB. The Egyptian promised to mediate on the issue. Hamas resubmitted its observations on the Egyptian paper, and the

Egyptians promised to present a new paper in the meeting of the comprehensive dialogue. However, the Egyptians informed Hamas that President ‘Abbas would be seated during the opening session of 10/11/2008 on the platform beside ‘Omar Suleiman, the Secretary-General of the Arab League and the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia, and that he will leave the hall with them after they deliver their speeches. By then, the leaders of the rest of the factions would ascend to the stage to sign what they presumably had agreed upon the day before the opening session, namely the formation of the committees and their functions and the final communiqué.

The denial of the Authority of the existence of political detainees⁵³ provoked Hamas’ anger, and according to Muhammad Nazzal, the movement reacted to this development by submitting a list of 500 of its cadre and supporters detained in jails in the WB.⁵⁴ Hamas’ requests of equal treatment by the patron with the conflicting parties, and that ‘Abbas attends all the dialogue sessions, by virtue of his position as the president of Fatah and a key partner of the conflict and not as the patron for the conference, were also turned down. Hence, Hamas, supported by three of the resistance factions, PIJ, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP-GC) and al-Sa‘iqa, declined to attend Cairo meeting, and officially handed this decision to the Egyptian side on 8/11/2008.⁵⁵ This provoked the detestation and anger of both the Egyptian and Fatah and Authority leadership in Ramallah and some of Fatah leaders accused Hamas of aborting the dialogue and of being associated with some regional agenda.⁵⁶ On its part, Hamas responded by saying that those who speak of regional intervention do so to cover the association of their own decisions with agreements with Israel and the American administration.⁵⁷ Hamas conditioned its immediate attendance of a dialogue with the release of the detainees, the arrival at Cairo of its delegation from the WB and the participation of ‘Abbas in all the sessions.⁵⁸ Besides, the dialogue should be serious and not a ceremonial session of signature.⁵⁹ The Israelis read the Egyptian anger as lifting of the Arab cover from Hamas and its government, and felt that the time was opportune for an immediate and extensive aggression on Gaza.

The Palestinian factions within the PLO criticized Hamas’ boycott of the dialogue sessions. A declaration issued by the Palestinian Leftist Front, composed of the Popular and Democratic Fronts and the PPP, maintained that the launching of the dialogue was feasible on the fixed time, where all issues could be placed on the negotiation table. However, concurrently, the Leftist Front refused political

detention and suppression of all freedoms in the WB and the GS.⁶⁰ Rabah Mhana, Member of PFLP Political Bureau, used the word “wrong” in his description of the boycott decision.⁶¹ Hence, the Popular Front used mild and diplomatic language in its criticism of Hamas boycott. While the DFLP held Hamas, in the words of a member of its political bureau, Taysir Khalid, “squarely responsible for the abortion of the efforts of the Egyptian leadership to end the status of schism”; Khalid had even maintained that by these unconvincing pretexts, Hamas intended to hide its real position towards the dialogue, and added that Hamas who accused others of submitting to the external veto against the dialogue had itself surrendered to this veto. By this stand, Khalid concluded, “it opted for narrow partisan interests at the expense of the supreme Palestinian national interests.”⁶²

In a joint communiqué, the Palestinian Arab Front, the Palestinian Liberation Front, the People’s Struggle Front, Fida and ALF, held Hamas responsible for the delay of the national dialogue and demanded that it reconsiders its decision. The communiqué rejected political detention, but added that it should not be used as a pretext to delay the dialogue.⁶³

Obviously, Hamas’ repeated rationale for not attending the dialogue, namely political detention, was not sufficiently convincing. The movement seemed not willing to reveal its strong feeling, shared by other factions, that the dialogue, as structured, was a “political trap” that primarily aimed at legitimizing an extension to ‘Abbas’ presidency, while delaying or postponing the other pressing and urgent issues, for which no guarantees were given that they will be discussed and settled in the conference itself.

On the failure of the Cairo national dialogue, the relations between Fatah and Hamas on one side and Ramallah and Gaza on the other went back to square one; while the sensitivity of the internal situation sharply increased with the imminent end of both ‘Abbas’ presidency, as viewed by Hamas and its supporters, especially with the imminent end of the ceasefire (*tahdi’ah*) period between the resistance and Israeli in Gaza. But the Israeli aggression on Gaza that started on 27/12/2008 represented a major turning point, as there were then calls within Fatah and across all the national parties that the differences should be sidelined in order to confront the enemy.⁶⁴ Though some had initially betted on the collapse of Hamas’ rule in Gaza as a result of the Israeli aggression, the heroic steadfastness of the people and the resistance coupled with the support that they had from the Palestinian,

Arab, Islamic, and international public impelled them to reconsider their position, and to realize that it would not be possible to control Gaza through the Israeli tank. Meanwhile, Hamas felt that the time was not opportune to declare the end of ‘Abbas’ presidential term, and to temporarily appoint the president, or his deputy, of the PLC in the presumably vacant presidential position. Thus, the widespread support that Hamas got in the Gaza battle, the new drive that the resistance program earned, the failure of the settlement path, the end of the presidency of Bush and the premiership of Olmert, and the need for a consensus on the reconstruction of Gaza had all contributed in paving the way for a new and serious national dialogue which culminated in the Cairo meetings of national dialogue during March 2009.

Fourth: The Predicament of ‘Abbas’ Presidential Term

The conflict over the expiry of ‘Abbas’ presidential term provoked a heated and growing controversy in the Palestinian scene, particularly during the second half of 2008. Fatah advocated that it should be extended until the date of the legislative elections, i.e. 25/1/2010, on the basis of article 9 of the 2005 Law of the General Elections, which stipulates that the presidential and legislative elections should be simultaneously conducted, and the presidential decree no. 1 on the general elections.

On the other hand, Hamas and its government adopted the view of several experts in Constitutional Law, especially Dr. Ahmad Mubarak al-Khalidi, a Professor of Constitutional Law and the Deputy Chair of the Constitution Committee and the head of the Drafting Committee. He and others argued that the four-year term of the president, specified by article 36 of the Basic Law, should be observed and upheld, hence ‘Abbas’ presidency, which started on 9/1/2005, should end on 8/1/2009. As for article 2/1 of the General Law of elections no. 9 for 2005, which provides for the simultaneously running of the presidential and legislative elections, it, in their view, explicitly contradicts article 36 and 47/3 of the Basic Law. Legal principles require that the constitution (the Basic Law) should supersede Ordinary Law, and not otherwise, otherwise this would be an illegal endeavor. Moreover, it is impossible to change the constitution by a provision of the Ordinary Law, which makes such a practice “null and void.”⁶⁵

We have elaborated on these legal backgrounds because it was the source material for the political controversy. But this should not distract us from the fact that the whole debate was essentially political. If there was a consensus between Fatah and Hamas, this issue would have been resolved quietly and without finger-pointing. This actually took place when Hamas had previously decided in the national interest to keep silent on the overdue of the presidency during the Israeli war on Gaza, but that didn't mean that it officially endorsed the extension or forfeited its right to subsequently oppose it.

The debate about 'Abbas' presidency had particularly intensified during the second half of 2008. By the end of June, 'Abd al-Karim Abu Saleh, head of the Fatwa and Legislation Bureau of the PA, reiterated that 'Abbas' presidency would expire with the end of the duration of the PLC,⁶⁶ a claim to which Faraj al-Ghul, Chairman of the PLC Legal Committee, immediately responded by emphasizing that 'Abbas' term ends on 9/1/2009, and that Hamas would recognize Ahmad Bahr, the Acting Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, as the president of the PA unless its President 'Aziz Dweik is released from prison before this date.⁶⁷

The debate accelerated after the publication by al-Zaytouna Centre of Ahmad al-Khalidi's memorandum in early September 2008, and his hosting, with other experts, by Aljazeera and other television network to discuss the issue.⁶⁸ Meanwhile 'Abbas seemed to have sought the advice of other Palestinian and Arab legal experts who justified the extension.⁶⁹ Hamas position on the issue remained persistent and unified as voiced by its internal and Diaspora leaders, including Khalid Mish'al, Isma'il Haniyyah, 'Aziz Dweik, Ahmad Bahr, Musa Abu Marzuq, al-Zahhar and others. However, the steps that Hamas would take after the expiry of 'Abbas' term remained unclear. The movement did not specify a clear and unified measure to be taken if al-Duweik was released, and the method that it will adopt to implement its promise of conducting presidential elections within sixty days, particularly so if a prior consensus between it, Fatah and other factions is not achieved on this issue and the time for the elections, and no suitable measures were taken on the ground in the WB and GS.

The Ramallah Authority was curious to know the steps that Hamas may take in the WB, and whether it would be inclined to repeat its Gaza measure. Though the realities on the ground in the WB, which was under Israeli occupation, made such a "coup" undesirable and improbable, Israel propagated such a development

to encourage the Authority in Ramallah to take further security measures against Hamas. A senior Israeli military source spoke of measures taken by Israel and Fatah to confront the possibility of a Hamas exploitation of a probable political instability just before the end of 'Abbas' term "to control cities, towns and villages in the WB." In language that is not void of instigation, the same Israeli officer said, "No doubt, we support that Fatah shoulders the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the WB, which, of course, requires the trailing of Hamas."⁷⁰

Evidently, Hamas made use of the predicament of the expiry of 'Abbas' term of the presidency, as an element of pressure against Fatah and Ramallah Authority. Probably this was one of the factors behind Fatah's decision to participate in the supposedly forthcoming Cairo national dialogue, scheduled in November 2008. Moreover, Hamas' moderate language left a room for a deal on the issue in the light of some agreeable political measures and national consensus between the two parties.⁷¹ This means that the subject has not been conclusively determined, but there is room for a political exit from these legal complications.

Fatah and Ramallah Authority took some precautionary measures to consolidate President 'Abbas' position. Fatah Central Committee extended his term by a period to synchronize his election with the legislative elections,⁷² while the Executive Committee and the Central Council of the PLO, which is dominated by Fatah, endorsed the extension. In 23/11/2008, the Central Committee elected 'Abbas to the presidency of the Palestinian state, which was meant to be a message to his opponents that his authority supersede any other one of the Palestinian political system, though there was no Palestinian state per se and on the ground.⁷³ 'Abbas provided an Arab umbrella for his claim through an emergency meeting of the Arab ministers of foreign affairs that he called for in Cairo, which called him "to continue shouldering his responsibility as the president of the Palestinian National Authority" until the conclusion of the national reconciliation and fixing of a date for the new presidential and legislative elections.⁷⁴ But Hamas refused the decisions of the Executive Committee and the Central Council on the ground that they are legally overdue, and thus disqualified to take such decisions.⁷⁵

The PFLP viewed the subject as political in its essence, and should be discussed over the table of comprehensive national dialogue. Moreover, to allow the issue of the duration of 'Abbas' term to drag on without an imminent political solution would deepen the Palestinian crisis.⁷⁶ But the endorsement of Hamas' position may

lead to presidential elections in Gaza only, thus there would be two presidents and the schism will be consolidated and the crisis exasperated.⁷⁷ However, the PFLP was unable to specify the date of ‘Abbas’ presidency.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the Democratic Front viewed the whole scenario as a futile political controversy to cover up the tragic problem of schism, and that there is no legal or constitutional problem over ‘Abbas’ presidency in 9/1/2009.⁷⁹

Mustafa al-Barghuthi felt that irrespective of the legality of the extension, ‘Abbas would emerge weaker, “which Israel aspires to exploit.”⁸⁰ Meanwhile Faruq Qaddumi, a member of Fatah Executive Committee and the president of PLO Political Department, sarcastically and bitterly commented on the election of ‘Abbas to the Palestinian presidency by saying that he (Qaddumi) “does not recognize the PA, and that the election of ‘Abbas to the presidency requires a decision from the PNC.” Moreover, Barghuthi added, “there is no authority, no state or whatnot, we are under occupation.”⁸¹ As for the approach of PIJ, it was nearer to the position of Hamas, as, in the words of its representative in Lebanon, Abu ‘Imad al-Rifa‘i, if ‘Abbas’ presidency is legally extended, the conflicts and tension in the Palestinian scene would sharply increase.⁸²

However, the aggression on Gaza and the subsequent dialogue in Cairo impelled Hamas to deal with the issue of ‘Abbas’ term as if it is a de facto matter, to be discussed, within a bundle of already concluded or adjourned consensuses, after the Palestinian presidential and legislative elections in January 2010.

Fifth: Fatah and its Sixth Congress

There was a lot of talk during the year 2008 on and about Sixth Fatah General Congress. The movement’s first three congresses were respectively held in 1967, 1968 and 1971. But the fourth convened in 1980 and the fifth in 1989. It was evident that Fatah suffered from a profound state of flaccidness and disintegration that required its Sixth Congress to be speedily held to put its house in order.

In September 2004, the Fatah Revolutionary Council called for holding the Sixth Congress, and a preparatory committee was formed for this purpose, which dragged on in its mission for different reasons. Admittedly, many of the Fatah’s cadre betted on the congress to make the necessary change. Nonetheless, the most

important representative and legislative institution in Fatah, namely the General Congress, had been neutralized and marginalized since 1971, as throughout a period of 37 years it was held twice only. Thus, decision-making remained practically and consecutively in the hands of the president of the movement, the Central Committee and, to a lesser degree, the Revolutionary Council. Since the elections of these leading institutions can only be done via the general congress, they remained in office for many years without any change.

After the lapse of 19 years since the last congress, it became absolutely necessary for the Fatah that led the Palestinian national struggle to hold its Sixth Congress. For during this period, Fatah had witnessed and experienced great and grave incidents and developments: changes in the path of the national Palestinian action, and the patronization by its leadership of new ideas, agreements and undertakings that were not compatible with its program of action, orientation and the previous decisions of its congress, in addition to the forceful emergence of Hamas which defeated Fatah in the elections. It was necessary to reorient the compass and the path, restore organizational discipline, equip the leading institutions with young blood, cure the flaccidness and extensive corruption and to restore the confidence of the Palestinian street in its national project and shaky path. Besides, there was an Arab and international interest in the reorganization of Fatah and the restoration of its solidarity and capability to initiate, being more acceptable and compatible with Arab and international policies towards the Palestinian issue, and as the movement that shouldered the burden of authority, the settlement path and Oslo Accords. Moreover, its disintegration and retraction would lead to the rise of Hamas who will take up the Palestinian leadership with all its negativism to the official Arab regimes and the international community, especially the obstruction of the peace settlement path and the totally objectionable assumption of power by the Islamists.

Throughout the year 2008 specific dates were repeatedly fixed for holding the congress to be subsequently deferred to another date, hence the year ended without having this long awaited function. This was due to a number of factors, of which the most important were:

1. The 19 year failure to assemble the congress endangered major and complex political and organizational issues that required a prior minimum consensus within the ranks of Fatah, otherwise the congress will drastically fail, which may result in further deterioration and retraction.

2. The status of flaccidness and organizational disintegration had sometimes opened the way for the infiltration of some members into the movement, which had become, so to speak, “an organization for the one who had no organization.” Hence, Fatah became a loose organization that had no criteria for discipline and loyalty. Many opportunists joined the movement to achieve personal gains related to Fatah leadership of the PLO and the PA. The status of flaccidness had, moreover, weakened the organization’s ability to hold its leadership accountable and to punish them whenever necessary. This led to cases of corruption within the top brass who were difficult to dislodge, and to the emergence of different factions that revolved around certain senior leaders and personalities, of whom some sought the support of outside forces. In these circumstances, the mere holding of the congress may lead to extensive polarization and bitter divisions that may result in the failure of some and the rise of others to the movement’s executive posts. Faced with the likelihood of such repercussions, Fatah leadership preferred that the congress be held only when everything is satisfactorily prepared in advance and lead to “calculated” or “under control” results.
3. The problem of the generation gap, whereby the youngsters aspired to the top positions, and the old guard were concerned that they lose their positions and privileges as well as the movement’s orientation and spirit that they cultivated and pursued for a long time.
4. The difficult equation of endorsing the political report and taking actions related to Fatah’s vision and the peace settlement path. For many of the movement’s rank and file and some of its symbols opted for the resistance and criticized the settlement process, while the “moderate trend”, under the leadership of Abu Mazin himself, was perplexed and “embarrassed” by the undertakings that it gave to the Israelis, the Americans and the international community. Hence, they strove to avoid such a probable crisis by rescheduling the congress until they arrange for a suitable majority that supports their orientation. Some had even tried to enlist the support of some of the cadres through “political money”, but many of Fatah’s members proved to be too principled to yield to such incitements.
5. The absence of the popular historical leadership, particularly after the demise of ‘Arafat, which was adequately firm and decisive to set policies

and convene a congress when it opted to do so. Nonetheless, this very leadership is largely responsible for the Fatah's flabbiness and structural and institutional weakness, as well as its inclination towards individuality and the marginalization of the general congress.

6. The problem of fixing a venue for the congress with its consequential and inherent political and organizational significance was another predicament. Should it be in Jericho where there was the PA and the Israeli occupation, and the ability of the Fatah's domestic faction to assemble cadres and supporters, or should it be in Jordan or Egypt where Fatah is likely to have better chances, and the host countries may have an impact on the Congress' orientation and outcome.
7. The predicament related to the numbers of conferees and the criteria for their selection. Should they be 1,200 or 1,500 as desired by many of the old guard, or around 3,500 as wanted by most of the youngsters, and what is the quota for the military? Moreover, who of Fatah's members are eligible for nomination or voting? The latter predicament had been standing at various degrees, for it will determine in advance the form and personnel of Fatah's leadership, its Central Committee and Revolutionary Council.

Since the beginning of 2008, the efforts to convene the congress continued. Nasr Yusuf and 'Azzam al-Ahmad left to Tunisia to meet and discuss with a number of the historical leadership the necessary arrangements, and there had been talk about the venue to be in Egypt or Jordan.⁸³ While the discussion was ongoing over the venue and the number of the participants, the Central Committee formed many sub-committees amongst which one was for drafting the political program and to submit it to the congress.⁸⁴ However, as reported by *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, Nasir al-Qudwah soon relinquished his membership from the preparatory committee and the presidency of the drafting committee because of some major differences with the Central Committee.⁸⁵

Nasir al-Qudwah had twice, and in writing, suggested that Fatah be transferred from a national liberation movement to a civil movement or a political party. But some major trends within Fatah managed to discard these ideas.

The preparatory committee formed four sub-committees; namely the political program, membership, discipline, and planning, and policies committees, which had all submitted their reports that were endorsed by the preparatory committee.⁸⁶

In its meeting of 26/5/2008, Fatah Revolutionary Council decided that the congress be held before the opening of September 2008. By 12/6/2008, the preparatory committee concluded its session in Amman by endorsing the drafts of Fatah's political and national programs which dealt with its political strategies and economic, social, developmental, and youth plans. It also endorsed the draft of the new internal law, the criteria of membership and for selecting the representatives of the organization to the congress. Thus, according to Nabil Sha'ath, nothing remained except to fix the venue and date of the congress, on the basis of which the number of the participants will be decided.⁸⁷

By the end of July, some Fatah "heavy weight" leaders had reportedly advocated that the congress be shelved until the end of the Palestinian schism and "the restoration" of Gaza from Hamas' control.⁸⁸ Other news spoke of acute differences within the preparatory committee on the venue of the conference. Five members of the Central Committee and the provisional leaders in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon were said to have demanded that the congress be held outside the Palestinian territories, while the remaining members of the Central Committee, including Mahmud 'Abbas, insisted that it be in the interior.⁸⁹

In an extended meeting of the preparatory committee, held in 3-4/8/2008 under the presidency of Abu Mahir Ghneim and attended by sixty members half of them from the Diaspora, the "hawkish trend" and the old guard dominated the discussion at the expense of the wishes of President 'Abbas, who intentionally absented himself though he was at the time in Amman. The committee endorsed a recommendation to revise the political program and its documents in a way that maintains the national fundamentals of the movement and its principles. The meeting also rejected some vague and general statements that Nabil Sha'ath suggested for inclusion in the political program, which dropped the option of resistance, and kept conspicuously silent on the principle of a prolonged people's liberation war, and confused between the civil and military resistance. The meeting called for the reconsideration of the settlement process, revival and consolidation of the Arab-Islamic support to the Palestinian issue, and to explicitly and directly record the resistance. Some discussants of the program from among Fatah leaders "launched a violent campaign against what they called Dayton's path in the movement."⁹⁰

Efforts were made in mid August 2008 to make Mahmud 'Abbas and Faruq Qaddumi meet in order to reach a consensus on the major issues before setting

the time and venue for the congress.⁹¹ In 23/10/2008, Fatah Central Committee decided that the eligible participants to the congress from both the interior and the Diaspora be 1,200.⁹²

The preparatory committee fixed for itself a meeting during 11-15/11/2008, to be followed by an extended one to discuss six almost finalized documents. Amongst them was the ninety page political paper which emphasized Fatah's rejection of the Israeli project and the reiteration of the principles that it advocated since its inception. But the paper did not corner itself into a specific political decision, but left the door slightly open for further deliberations on the movement's future orientation. Another paper is on the organizational structure which dealt with the relationship between Fatah on one side and the PA and its institutions on the other side, and emphasized the organizational separation between them. The third paper, the administrative paper, addressed the issue of the organization, its administration and the terms of reference. Besides, there were the membership and the financial papers. The sensitivity and confidentiality of the contents of the latter paper triggered some to suggest limiting its circulation and discussion to the presidency of the congress and some selected would-be members of the Central Committee, as an open and wide discussion might provoke accusations and finger-pointing. The sixth paper was the paper of the Central Committee on the current situation.⁹³

Apparently, the prolonged and tedious effort of the preparatory committee failed to bridge the gap in the cases of conflicts, polarization, and delay. It became clear that it was unlikely that the congress be held before the end of 2008. In an interview with *al-Hayat* newspaper, published on 13/12/2008, a top Fatah leader assured that the Sixth Congress had been indefinitely postponed "lest the differences between wings lead to dissensions." He added that it's holding on time "tantamount to exploding the movement," the relevant leaders know this but are embarrassed to announce it, that "whoever thinks that the congress will be held in these circumstances is insane," and that the nominated participants were not more than 1,500 while those who wanted to participate totaled ten thousand.

Meanwhile talk was resumed on the resolution of GS problem before holding the Sixth Congress,⁹⁴ and of delaying the congress because of the concerns of some members of the Central Committee that they may lose the elections.⁹⁵ Up to December 2008, Ahmad Qurei (Abu 'Ala') kept talking that the membership file had not yet been completed, and that the time and venue of the congress were still not determined.⁹⁶

During the year 2008, the conflict between the so-called old guard and the youth movement had demonstrated itself through various incidents and developments of which the most prominent was, as noted above, the delay of the Sixth Congress, notwithstanding its importance and necessity to all. Another reflection of the crisis was in the conflicting orders and on the terms of reference, as was the case with regard to some Fatah appointees in Syria. Faruq Qaddumi appointed Muhammad Dawud (Abu Dawud) and his deputy Anwar ‘Abd al-Hadi to fill two posts there, but, in his capacity as the leader of Fatah, Mahmud ‘Abbas totally ignored these appointments, and instructed the movement’s provisional representative to do likewise to all of Qaddumi’s appointees.⁹⁷ The accusations and counter accusations between some of Fatah leaders were another feature of the crisis. Notably was the war of words between Hakam Bal’awi and Muhammad Dahlan. In a communiqué issued in the name of Fatah Central Committee, the former accused the latter of irresponsibility, exhibitionism, insubordination, negligence, and deceit.⁹⁸ Dahlan responded by telling his adversary that his most important contribution was to plant spies in Yasir ‘Arafat office in Tunis. He dismissed the communiqué as sheer “media fabrication” to “pursue personal grudges,” and called upon the Central Committee to “distance itself from this odd and cheap behavior of Bal’awi.”⁹⁹

Abu ‘Ali Shahin, a member of the Revolutionary Council, launched an attack on the Central Committee and President ‘Abbas whom he dismissed as a “failure”. Other reports spoke of the opposition of several members of the Central Committee and the Revolutionary Council to the inclination of Dahlan to win a seat in the Central Committee, adding that Dahlan group is comparatively weaker versus its adversaries in the movement, notably Hani al-Hassan, Bal’awi, ‘Abbas Zaki, ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, Ahmad Hillis and others.¹⁰⁰

Hatim ‘Abd al-Qadir, a Fatah leader, minuted that the movement “reached a very difficult status.”¹⁰¹ while Sa’ib ‘Uraiqtat admitted that Fatah “is experiencing unprecedented problems and internal conflicts.”¹⁰² To add insult to injury came the scandal of the mobiles smuggling in which Rawhi Fattuh, the former Speaker of the PLC and an Advisor of President ‘Abbas, was accused, which revealed the extent of the corruption charges against top Fatah leaders.¹⁰³ Rafiq al-Natsha, head of the Fatah Court, commented, “Corruption and corrupted people continue to control Fatah movement,” but he hoped that they will be expelled by the Sixth Congress.¹⁰⁴ Marwan al-Barghuthi held Fatah leadership responsible for the failure

in the elections and the corruption of several of its leaders, and called for a genuine change in the leadership, the election of new faces and symbols who had no connection with “corruption, paralysis, and failure.”¹⁰⁵ Towards the end of 2008, there were reports of verbal exchanges and rupture of relations between ‘Abbas and Qurei’ over their roles in the negotiations with Israel, and the attitude towards Fayyad’s government.¹⁰⁶

Hence, Fatah movement carried over its crisis to the next year, and the advocates of the delay and postponement of the Sixth Congress overcame their counterparts. Apparently, the congress will be subjected to further rescheduling unless and until a delicate deal is concluded, which will, at least, guarantee the concerns and interests of the big fishes and the influential trends in the movement.

Sixth: The Palestinian Liberation Organization

Though the PLO established the PA and gave it a legal cover, the latter progressively enlarged while the former was increasingly marginalized and weakened to eventually appear as one of the instruments of the Authority. The sidelined PLO whose institutions had been void of any content and influence was placed, so to speak, in the “intensive care unit” to be a rubber stamp that the Authority refers to whenever necessary to give it a cover up or to pass a resolution. The PNC, whose last meeting was 12 years ago, was not called for a meeting throughout the year 2008. As was the case with this institution, the legal duration of the Executive Committee and the Central Council expired since 1999. Nonetheless, the latter two continued to convene, and Abu Mazin depended on them to support his legal and political position and that of his government in Ramallah versus Hamas and its government in Gaza.

Evidently, the activation of the PLO and the restructuring of its institutions were associated with the subject of Palestinian comprehensive reform, and the placing of the Palestinian house in order, a development that could not materialize without a dialogue between Fatah, Hamas and the other factions, and a consensually agreed joint national program. Though a major item of the Cairo agreement of March 2005, the reform of the PLO stumbled because of the serious concerns of some Palestinian, Arab, and international sides that Hamas may dominate the PLO, especially after its victory in the 2006 legislative elections in the WB and GS. Both the National

Consensus Document of 2006 and the Mecca Agreement of 2007 provided for the activation and reform of the PLO, but no serious steps were taken in this direction. No doubt, the 2007 Fatah-Hamas conflict over the issue of legitimacy played a role in delaying the reform, but it should not be exclusively blamed for this. For the weakening and the marginalization of the PLO had been a major consequential feature of the settlement path and the Oslo Accords, and the individual style of leadership and the non-institutional conduct of the Palestinian leadership. If the PLO was healthy enough to accommodate all sectors of the Palestinian people, and to be an umbrella for all its factions, forces and professionals, the issues of the security chaos, and the “coup” against the legitimate institutions may have been addressed in a better and easier manner.

In his dialogue with Hamas in Yemen, President ‘Abbas preferred to wear the PLO hat, hence he included in his delegation Salih Ra’fat, the secretary of Fida Party, and Qays ‘Abd al-Karim of the leadership of the Democratic Front, a development that reflected, in Hamas’ view, lack of seriousness on the part of ‘Abbas, as the core of her problem is specifically with Fatah. Similarity, the President presented his June 2008 call for dialogue in the name of the PLO, and the latter’s Central Committee held Hamas “totally responsible” for the failure of the November 2008 Cairo dialogue, even before its started, because it excused itself from participation.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, notwithstanding the reservations on its functions, the Central Council of the PLO elected ‘Abbas on 23/11/2008, just before the expiry of his term, as president of the Palestinian state, and gave him the ammunition that he may need in future confrontation with Hamas and other opponents.

Taking advantage of their positions in the PLO leadership, some politically and popularly insignificant groups and personalities had, on the other side, assumed for themselves magnified roles in the Palestinian scene. Amongst them was Yasir ‘Abd Rabbuh, a former leader of Fida Party, who took the senior position of Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the PLO, though his party was hardly represented in the PLC. ‘Abd Rabbuh was widely criticized for his negative role in the Fatah-Hamas relationship, and Salim al-Za’nun, the president of the PNC, had specifically criticized his attempt, which was supported by President ‘Abbas, to convene an illegal meeting of the PNC to restructure the leading institutions of the PLO.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, President ‘Abbas appointed Saleh Ra’fat, the Secretary-General of Fida Party, as head of the PLO Military Department.¹⁰⁹ To give such a senior and sensitive post to such a weak party that has no military wing and does

not participate in the resistance or the *Intifadah* reflected, in the view of many, that ‘Abbas was not serious to reactivate the institutions of the PLO.

Faruq Qaddumi, the president of the PLO’s Political Department, was the most outspoken of all Fatah and the PLO leaders in his criticism of the performance of ‘Abbas and his aides. In 25/2/2008, he criticized the ‘Abbas’s decision to terminate the services of many of the officials of the political department, or to send them to pension, and he challenged the legality and legitimacy of the Executive Committee itself.¹¹⁰ Moreover, he asserted more than once that it had already lost the quorum.¹¹¹ He also invited Hamas and other Palestinian forces to unconditionally join the PLO, and called for the holding of a new PNC, the election of a new Executive Committee, and to enact mechanisms for the reform of the PLO.¹¹² Moreover, Qaddumi submitted a program that argued for the separation between the Authority and the PLO and their two presidencies, the adherence to the option of resistance and to the right of return and to respect the Palestinian plurality.¹¹³

Meanwhile, Hamas continued to emphasize throughout the year 2008 the urgency of restructuring the PLO on sound political basis that allow the participation of all forces, the importance of political plurality, and that the PNC be constituted through direct elections whenever possible. Hamas refused to recognize that the PLO, as it stands, be the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, especially as Hamas is not represented in it and has important institutional, ideological, and political reservations to it. PIJ took almost the same stand on the PLO.

Hamas failed to enlist the support of some important factions in the PLO, specifically PFLP & DFLP, to its call to accelerate the organization’s process of reform, though the political program of these two Fronts, which rejected Oslo Accords, opted for the resistance and asked for reform within the PLO, were nearer to the vision of Hamas than that of the organization’s leadership and the dominant trend in Fatah. However, the above theoretical position of these Fronts was contradictory to some of their actual practices, viz their behavior in the Executive Committee and their participation in the Central Council, which some critics view as a cover up to the policies of Mahmud ‘Abbas. Some had, however, attributed this apparent incompatibility, to the common secular orientation between these leftist Fronts and Fatah that made them to be on the same boat with the latter versus the Islamic trends of Hamas and PIJ. Others argue that Hamas did not exert sufficient effort to find common grounds with these factions, and to assure them

that its leadership of the national project would absorb the others, respect their role, and never exclude them. Moreover, Hamas had not endorsed the program of the PLO where Fatah and these factions saw eye to eye, and President ‘Abbas was in agreement with the vision of the latter that patronized complete proportional representation in the elections of the PLC and the PNC, to which Hamas was not in favor. Others felt that Fatah’s control of the financial resources of the PLO, from which it allocated budgets to these factions and salaries to their full time cadres, played a role in their decision-making process.

Many personalities and national bodies pressed towards the activation of the PLO and the restructuring of its institutions, the formation of an elected PNC and the emphasis on the right of return. Amongst them were a group of Palestinians, of whom the most prominent was Shafiq al-Hout, Sulaiman Abu Sittah, and Bilal al-Hassan, which was formed in May 2007 and continued its drive during the year 2008.

Seventh: Internal Security and the Problem of Security

Admittedly, the security laxity had largely retracted during the year 2008. Both Gaza and Ramallah governments tightened their grips, which had, however, exposed them to criticism by the human rights groups over their practices of torture, political detention, and arbitrary use of power, though in different degrees.

The security measures undertaken by Fayyad government against Hamas continued under the pretexts of prohibition of illegal armament and to check Hamas presumed strive to overthrow the legitimate authority in the WB, as they did in Gaza. Apparently, the government of Ramallah was not in a mood to distinguish between the weaponry used in *al-Aqsa Intifidah* and defended the Palestinians for years, and that possessed by the tribes or used to foment the security hazards. Moreover, the claim of a possible Hamas coup was a mere guise to implement the dictates of the Road Map and Dayton’s plan, as the conditions in the WB were completely different from those in Gaza, whereby the Israeli occupation was practically in charge of everything and everywhere in the WB.

Salam Fayyad maintained that the Authority “is keen to upkeep and maintain the political pluralism, but it refuses security multiplicity,”¹¹⁴ but he also revealed his

government's policy towards Hamas by saying, "as long as the status quo in Gaza continues, the government will continue to view Hamas as an anti-Authority [PA] organization."¹¹⁵ Subsequently, Riyad al-Maliki, the minister of Information and Foreign Affairs, revealed that his government decided, in its meeting of 5/5/2008, to take the arms from the militias, his nomenclature for the resistance, and from every person who is not part of the security forces,¹¹⁶ which, in fact, was a literal implementation of the first item of the Road Map.

It seems that the PA did not distinguish between the resistance fighters on one side and the drug traffickers and robbers on the other side, Brigadier General Samih al-Saifi, the Military Commander of Hebron (*al-Khalil*) Region, openly said, "We are crystal clear, we work against the outlaws, drug traffickers, thieves, and armed military groups affiliated to any side," and added, "Any armament except that of the security forces is illegal."¹¹⁷ Two days after their deployment in Hebron, the general's forces had actually arrested 53 so-called "wanted persons" in the towns al-Sammu' and Yatta, of whom 35 were Hamas members. This definition of "outlaws" may explain the persistent denial of the Authority of the existence of political detainees, i.e. the arrest of the resistance men is not viewed by Ramallah as political detention, which violates the principles and program of Fatah and the PLO.

The Israelis admirably viewed the activities of the Authority's security forces. A report by the Israeli Security Agency (Shabak), published in early 2008, commended the seriousness of these forces, that it confiscated 120 pieces of weaponry, disclosed a laboratory for manufacturing explosives, and dismissed directors of a number of philanthropic societies.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Brigadier General Yaov Mordechai, the head of the Civil Administration in the WB, indicated that security coordination with the PA in the WB is progressively increasing, joint meetings are ongoing between Israeli and Palestinian officers, and that the Palestinian security agencies returned fifty Israelis who crossed into territories under the Palestinian control.¹¹⁹ Subsequently, Mordechai explicitly spoke of the nature of the war conducted by the Israeli authorities in coordination with the PA in Ramallah by saying, "We are engaged in a real battle with the civil and social institutions of Hamas movement, we are doing our utmost best and with all strength to fight all Hamas institutions in the WB: the military and the civil," and emphasized the direct Israeli-Palestinian coordination in this respect.¹²⁰

In a meeting of the Israeli government, Yuval Diskin, director of Israeli Security Agency said, “The security cooperation with the PA in the WB is very good, particularly in fighting terrorism and in the closure of institutions.” On his side, Riyad al-Maliki did not deny this, emphasizing that “there is no reason to prevent the security cooperation,” which is, in his words, “very important.”¹²¹

The minutes of a meeting between Israeli and Palestinian officers, disclosed by Nahum Barnea, the senior analyst of *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper, shows the extent of the security cooperation between the Authority in Ramallah and the Israeli security forces. If to be believed, this report requires deep reflection on the extent of the hostility of the security forces in Ramallah to Hamas, and whether it is at all possible to rebuild the security forces on national and professional basis whereby the significantly strong Hamas be part of this operation. It is worth noting that Barnea quotes from the minutes the following remark made by Dhiab al-‘Ali (Abu al-Fatah), the Chief of the Palestinian National Security Forces in WB, to the Israeli officers, “There is no hostility between us, we have a common enemy, Hamas movement.” The minutes also quote the following statement by Majid Farraj, the head of the Palestinian Military Intelligence Service, “We are confronting a very difficult battle... We decided to fight to the end. Hamas is the enemy, we decided to launch a war against it, and I say to you: There will be no dialogue with them. You should kill beforehand he who wants to kill you. You have concluded a truce with them but we have not.” Farraj assured his Israeli counterparts that his group is properly doing the job that they have been asked to do, by minuting, “We deal with every Hamas institutions that you send to us. You have lately given us the names of 64 institutions, and we finished the job with 50 of them, some were closed down, while in the others we changed the administrative staff. We confiscated their capital.” Farraj boasted in front of the Israelis that the Palestinian security can burst into the mosques and the universities, but the Israelis cannot!! As for Major General Hazim ‘Atallah, Chief of the Palestinian Police, he said, “By the end of the year, we will be engaged in a confrontation with Hamas. I am speaking of a comprehensive plan.”¹²²

A report by the Israeli Ministry of Interior, dated 1/12/2008 and published in the *Jerusalem Post*, expressed the extent of the Israeli satisfaction with the security cooperation with the Authority in Ramallah by recording, “The security coordination is unprecedented through a sincere effort on the part of the Authority.”

The report indicated that the coordination reached to high levels, as 247 meetings were held between the Palestinian and Israeli officers since the beginning of the year 2008 and until the publication of this report Israel permitted the opening of twenty Palestinian police centres in the WB.¹²³

Within the framework of rebuilding the Authority's security forces in WB a special battalion of 620 soldiers underwent a four-month training program in Jordan, and returned on 28/5/2008, this was part of the plan drawn up by Lieutenant General Keith Dayton, United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority.¹²⁴ According to a report by *Haaretz* newspaper, these trainees were carefully selected, received special training and that they were the first battalion of five assigned to maintain law and order in the WB. The report recorded that the first Palestinian National Security (PNS) "battalion to undergo training under an American program and Jordanian guidance - the first supposedly elite unit of what used to be viewed as the PA army" and added that senior PA officials have dubbed the battalion as "Dayton's baby".¹²⁵

With the Israeli consent, the Authority deployed security forces in the districts of Jenin, Nablus, Hebron, and Bethlehem. They succeeded in dismantling some of the resistance cells, and aborted explosive operations against Israel. Though its primary target was the dismantling of the civil and military infrastructure of Hamas, the force also strove to hit and dismantle all the military wings of the resistance factions, including the *al-Aqsa* Martyrs Brigades of Fatah, Saraya al-Quds of PIJ and others.¹²⁶ Their duty extends, in the words of Major General Hazim 'Atallah, Chief of the Palestinian Police in the WB, "Everyone who has connections with weaponry and explosives, i.e. military action, and it's not important against whom this action will be, as this occurs in Palestinian land, we will arrest him."¹²⁷

Torture and political detention was a source for violent verbal exchanges and finger - pointing between Hamas and Fatah and between the two authorities in Ramallah and Gaza. Normally, the two sides consider the numbers of the detainees and the charges against them confidential, and there is presumably deliberate confusion between charges, what is political and what is criminal.

According to a report by the Shabak, the Palestinian security forces arrested during a period of five days only, 28/11-2/12/2007, 250 Hamas activists. And during the last week of 2007, they arrested fifty Hamas activists.¹²⁸ Amongst the tragic incidents that incited the Palestinian public opinion was the death of the

pro-Hamas Majd ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Barghuthi who was tortured till death in the Palestinian intelligence headquarters in Ramallah, on 22/2/2008. The people’s disapproval was aggravated when the intelligence, depending on a fabricated medical report, denied that he died under torture. However, the torture charge was later confirmed by an independent investigation committee that President ‘Abbas was compelled to form under public pressure.¹²⁹

According to statistics released by Hamas on 12/11/2008, 616 of its supporters were detained by the Authority, including 94 university students, 35 liberated detainees, 15 Imams, 13 members of municipality and village councils, and nine journalists. Hamas claimed that during the period 10/6/2007-11/11/2008 the number of its detainees in the WB totaled 2,921.¹³⁰ Hamas information office issued in August 2008 a 369 page book, entitled in English rendering “The Black Book”, which enumerated hundreds of alleged torture and punishment cases that its members and those of the resistance movements were exposed to in the WB by the Authority security forces. Some Palestinian legal institution emphasized the existence of political detention in both the WB and GS. Sha‘wan Jabarin, the general director of the Ramallah-based Al-Haq human rights organization, reported 270 detainees in the WB, adding that the phenomenon has become wide spread and that all the security forces were involved in this practice and in all districts of the WB. Meanwhile, the Authority in Ramallah imposed information ban, whereby journalists were harassed by the security forces if they dared to report news about the subject. According to a prominent journalist in *al-Ayyam* newspaper, “We are totally prohibited to write on this subject. We will be arrested as soon as the article is published, even before that, and the media institutions pressure the journalists to ignore the subject issue.”¹³¹ The Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizen’s Rights (PICCR) (established by Yasir ‘Arafat) recorded 28 cases of torture and cruel treatment in November 2008 only.¹³² It is worth mentioning that there are in the prisons of the Authority about ninety detainees, members of PIJ and other resistance cells.

The security forces in Ramallah continued to deny the existence of political detainees, at a time when they threatened Hamas activists not to speak to the media.¹³³ While many has kept talking about Hamas’ detainees in Ramallah prisons, giving their numbers and names and demanding that a conducive environment be provided for launching the Palestinian dialogue, al-Maliki, the minister of Information and

Foreign Affairs, declared, “We do not have any political detainees,”¹³⁴ which was reiterated by Mahmud ‘Abbas himself.¹³⁵

On another vein, protests were voiced by certain quarters in Fatah against the way Fayyad was running the government, especially his discard of some Fatah members from the security forces and the civil service or sending them to pension, recruitment of many of his cronies or those who abided by his policy, his unacceptable conduct of controlling the financial resources of the Authority and his relations with the United States of America (USA). Bitter criticism was also launched against a number of his ministers. But Fayyad government was supported by President ‘Abbas, who had intentionally given it direct support in a cabinet session that he had personally presided, by saying, “This government is my government, it has my full support, I have absolute confidence in this government.”¹³⁶

Nonetheless, increasing criticism was launched against the government. During the 25th term of Fatah Revolutionary Council that concluded, in the presence of ‘Abbas, its meeting agenda on 26/5/2008, Salam Fayyad and his government were subjected to violent attack. The change of some ministers, specially the ministers of Foreign and Interior Affairs, respectively Riyad al-Maliki and ‘Abd al-Razaq al-Yahya, was openly and loudly demanded. ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, the leader of Fatah Parliament bloc, accused Fayyad government of hegemony over everything and in every institution. Most of the members of the Revolutionary Council voted for the immediate restructuring of the government, and some had even dismissed Fayyad as another Paul Bremer (the first US Administrator of Iraq after the American occupation of the country) because of his disbandment of Fatah’s military units, and on the assumption that his government was an American government imposed on the Palestinian people.¹³⁷ Nonetheless, supported by ‘Abbas and endorsed by Israel, USA, and regional countries, the government continued to function.

Haniyyah’s government was not free from accusation of violation of human rights. Some reports indicated that it placed eighty persons under political detention,¹³⁸ and accused it of practicing torture in its prisons. But the government in Gaza found an excuse for itself in the presence of cells and other institutions that were particularly affiliated to Fatah, and who allegedly strove to foment trouble and security hazards to topple the government there. However, as a gesture for the encouraging news of a forthcoming dialogue in Cairo, Haniyyah’s government

declared on 30/10/2008 the release of 17 of Fatah's cadres and claimed that by this move it has released all the political detainees.¹³⁹

The bloody incidents that occurred on 31/12/2007 during the 43rd anniversary of Fatah, in which eight were killed and more than one hundred wounded,¹⁴⁰ triggered accusations and counter accusations on the responsibility for this incidents. An official committee, formed by the government of Isma'il Haniyyah, held some elements in the police and the leaders of Fatah jointly responsible for the events, and it declared that it imposed punishments on nine senior officers and 29 of the members of the security forces which ranged from reduction of salary or position to change of the workplace.¹⁴¹ Hamas held Fatah leadership in the Strip responsible for the assassination in the evening of 31/12/2007 of four citizens, including a security man.¹⁴² Haniyyah's government and Hamas movement accused Fatah leaders of conspiring to assassinate Premier Haniyyah during the 12/1/2008 festival for the returnee pilgrims, and it published photographed admissions of the arrested culprits, where they reportedly mentioned that they had been directed from Ramallah, specifically by al-Tayyib 'Abd al-Rahim, but the Authority in Ramallah denied any involvement in the conspiracy.¹⁴³

On 25/7/2008, an exploded bomb caused the death of five members of al-Qassam Brigades (including a leader) and a child. The Ministry of Interior accused some of Fatah members living in the security square of the Hillis family. Attempts were made to arrest them in coordination with the notables of this family, but they failed, thus the security forces forcefully penetrated the square on 2/8/2008 causing the death of 11 persons, eight from the Hillis family, two policemen and a member of Marshoud family, while 107 were wounded, of whom seven were serious cases. The Israeli authorities allowed 188 members of the Hillis family to enter Israel, but only after it fired at them killing four and wounding others, including Fatah leader Ahmad Hillis.¹⁴⁴

Some betted on the family security squares to be quagmires for further security chaos that would lead to the collapse of the government, but they were taken by the decisive and suppressive capability of Haniyyah's government. The operation of controlling the square of the Hillis family coincided with a widespread campaign against Fatah in GS, where 400 persons were arrested and all of Fatah institutions and societies were placed under government control. This was the heaviest blow that Fatah suffered in the Strip. For, unlike Fatah, Hamas did not take after its

decisive operation of 2007 any sweeping measures against Fatah presence in Gaza. On the contrary, it allowed its leaders and institutions to function, including the five Fatah provisional governors appointed by President ‘Abbas. All the offices of the PLO, Fatah, and the pro-Fatah Palestinian popular organizations remained open. Moreover, work remained as usual in the Palestine News & Information Agency (WAFA) and the Palestine television, which were both controlled by President ‘Abbas. While the correspondents of *al-Aqsa* television were not allowed to operate in the WB and the Gaza newspapers were denied access to the WB, their counterparts, in the WB, which were largely affiliated to Fatah, were allowed entry and circulation in Gaza.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, the dismissed government released most of the detainees, and returned to Fatah more than twenty of its institutions and societies.¹⁴⁶

After a security campaign against the district controlled by Dughmush family in al-Sabrah square of Gaza city, the government of Haniyyah suppressed in September 2008 the last security square in the Strip. However, the battle led to casualties: 11 dead of the Dughmush family, including a boy and a child, as well as a policeman, and 42 were wounded of whom ten were policemen. The security men had reportedly used excessive power, committed transgressions that lead to the death of the nursed child, and they executed some members of the family while under detention, which was, however, denied by the spokesman of the police. The latter added that 15 were arrested because of criminal charges, and that the campaign was launched only after the wanted refused to surrender themselves.¹⁴⁷

We do not have detailed statistics on the casualties of the security chaos during the year, and the figures provided by some institutions need to be scrutinized, as the definition of “security laxity” vary from one place to another. Nonetheless, some data indicate 28 dead and 70 wounded, of whom 19 dead and 53 wounded were from Gaza, and 9 dead and 17 wounded were from the WB.¹⁴⁸ However, we should note that the casualties of the security laxity in 2006 were 260 dead and 1,239 wounded, while in 2007 they totaled 482 dead and 2,371 wounded.¹⁴⁹ Thus, all in all, the phenomenon of security laxity had subsidized in 2008 compared to 2007.

Eighth: The Impact of the Israeli Aggression on GS on Internal Conditions

The suffocating siege and the barbaric aggression were two of the Israeli primary instruments to pressure Hamas and the dismissed government into failure and downfall, to prove their paralysis in providing the daily needs of the Palestinian people and to exhaust their energy in finding bread and medicine. Israel strove to impress upon the Palestinians that what Hamas, the Islamic trend and the resistance trend are doing is futile and will lead to nothing but daily hardship and political retreat. Moreover, it tried to persuade the Palestinians to put their humanitarian needs ahead of their national aspirations. Thus, Israel tried to be a major, if not the primary, player in making the Palestinian internal decision where it defines the Palestinian maximum national demands, and who should represent the Palestinian people according to its rules of the game.

The Israeli (as well as the Arab and international) siege of Gaza continued at varying degrees throughout the year 2008, and the Strip suffered from two extensive aggressions (27/2-5/3/2008 and 27/12/2008 to 18/1/2009). The war took a turn of being, so to speak, “a struggle of wills”, and not merely infliction of casualties on human beings, trees, and stones. When one of the strongest armies in the world attacks a resistance movement with limited capabilities and in one of the most populated areas in the world, and without any moral or legal deterrent or fear from punishment, the outcome in terms of casualties should be known in advance. Thus, breaking the will of the Palestinians was, and still is, the most important achievement to the Israelis. Having this in mind, the Israeli policy failed to achieve its objectives throughout the year 2008, it even had negative consequences following the major aggression on the Strip towards the end of the year.

The six-month period of ceasefire, which expired on 19/12/2008, was negatively assessed by the resistance factions in a meeting that they had just before its end. For Israel had violated it 185 times, continued its siege and killed 21 Palestinians. Hence, Hamas and the resistance factions refused to renew it unless and until the siege is lifted, and they resumed their launching of bombs and rockets on the Israeli site. Several factors had triggered the Israelis to believe that the time was opportune to reap the fruits of their long military preparations, namely the desire of the Israeli government parties to consolidate their positions in the forthcoming elections, the failure of Cairo dialogue, the frustration of the Egyptian regime with

Hamas, the concern of the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah of probable steps by Gaza on the eve of the almost expired presidency of ‘Abbas (only few days to go), and the transition period just before the end of the presidency of George Bush and the beginning of his successor Barack Obama.

The Israeli aggression continued for 22 days. The suffering was huge and the destruction was colossal, but the resistance was heroic and the Palestinian support to it was extensive and increasing. The casualties were heavy: 1,326 killed including 417 children and 108 women, 5,450 wounded of whom half were children and women. The invaders totally destroyed four thousand houses and 16 thousand others were partially damaged, and the cost of the loss totaled two billion dollars. Official Israeli statistics gave their death toll as ten soldiers and four civilians; though we know that the Israelis imposed strict restrictions on the media, and some oral Israeli sources gave their dead as about seventy.

The leaders of the aggression did not spell out the objectives of their campaign. However, there was a debate whether it should end by the downfall of Hamas government in the Strip, and to provide the suitable environment for the resumption there of the rule of the Authority in Ramallah and Fatah. Even if this was a desirable Israeli objective, its vivid announcement may lead to negative consequences among the Palestinians who were keen to have the prerogative of their independent national decision, and who object to the imposition of Israeli conditions on them. Others argued that the continuation of the Palestinian schism was in the interest of Israel as long as the Gaza Authority is “tamed” and weakened to perform the role of a policemen that nibs in the bud any resistance movement in Gaza, if, of course, it wanted to remain and continue in power. However, there was an Israeli consensus that the launching of rockets and the smuggling of weapons should stop, and there was a talk on truce for several years (if Hamas continued in power). But no concrete commitments were offered by Israel to discard playing with the siege card even if the truce materialized. No doubt, Israel aimed at inflicting on the resistance and its infrastructure the maximum possible damage, and to punish and terrorize the inhabitants for their selection of Hamas and the resistance trend in the hope that this would weaken the grip of Hamas on the affairs of Gaza and incite the inhabitants to rise against it.

The extensive study on the Israeli military plan, the duration of the aggression, the extensive bombardment, the mobilization of the reserve forces, the

entrenchment of the tanks in areas void of resistance, and the repeated attempts to probe and break through most of the confrontation lines cannot possibly be interpreted militarily except as an attempt to explore extending the declared ceiling to achieve an overwhelming invasion, even a temporary one, to impose surrender on the resistance and to break the will of the people. This explains why the invasion continued for such a long period -22 days- during which the Israeli leaders resisted and bore formidable pressure to stop the aggression. They also intentionally used prohibited weapons, and shouldered immense deterioration in the credibility and status of Israel. If they had the opportunity, they would not have hesitated to undertake an invasion and occupation operation that would enable them to arrest and/or kill the leaders of the resistance and to impose their conditions. Hence, the unconditional stoppage by Israel of its aggression, its total evacuation of the Strip, and the failure of its declared and non-declared objectives should be read as a victory for GS, its people, and resistance, which is of no less significance than al-Karama and other heroic battles.

On the commencement of the aggression, Khalid Mish'al called for unity and the organization of the resistance versus the aggression, and for the initiation of a third *Intifadah* in the WB. Admittedly, Hamas did not forecast the first strike, hence its initial losses, particularly in the police force, were huge. But it quickly absorbed the strike, and managed to administer the internal situation without experiencing troubles and chaos as many had expected. Within its limited means, the interior and Diaspora Hamas' leadership administered the military, political, and media battles wisely and steadfastly. Hamas, PIJ and other resistance factions continued to fire rockets and to a wider range throughout the battles' days, which demonstrated the great effort that al-Qassam Brigades and Saraya al-Quds had exerted in armament and preparations for the battle. Hamas succeeded to secure wide Palestinian, Arab and Islamic support to its decision to stand firm and to defend the Strip, and it rallied PIJ and other resistance movements behind its line of policy. Some of the PLO factions, particularly the PFLP, had also favorably responded to Hamas' strategy,¹⁵⁰ and there were calls amongst these factions for a unified leadership in the battlefield to confront the aggression.

Hamas and its government had consistently insisted throughout the duration of the aggression on the following conditions to stop the fighting, which received wide popular and factional support: the stoppage of the Israeli aggression, withdrawal

of the Israelis outside the Strip, the end of the siege, and the opening of all the crossings, including Rafah. This persistence coupled with Hamas' resistance to all kinds of pressure and the courage and sacrifices of the fighters won the movement the trust of the Palestinian street. Notwithstanding the violent targeting of the civilians in the hope that they turn against Hamas and its government, the people patiently bore the hardship, continued the culture of resistance and increased their support to the movement. When the Israelis were obliged to stop their aggression and withdrew from the Strip without achieving their declared objectives of stopping the rockets and "the smuggling" of weapons, Hamas declared its victory against the Israelis in the battle of breaking the wills. Hence, Hamas performance during the aggression belied the expectations of its enemies and adversaries, and won it immense popular, political, and media support. While the circle of those who betted on Hamas' downfall or marginalization had sharply narrowed, the movement won considerable supporters for its absorption in the Palestinian political system, and to ease its Arab and international isolation. Khalid Mish'al maintained, "This is the first real and big war in which our people achieved victory in their land," and he viewed it as "a watershed in the conflict with the Zionist enemy," and added, "with its implications, achievements, timing, and greatness, this battle lay the foundation for a serious and effective strategy for liberation that starts in Palestine, and, with the support of the Ummah, extends everywhere."¹⁵¹

PIJ stood side by side with Hamas in rejecting the ceasefire period and in confronting the aggression. Ziyad Nakhala, the Deputy Secretary-General of PIJ, said, "We are now nearer to Hamas than anytime before... Israel will never ever achieve its primary goal of this war, namely, to overthrow the system and to surrender to the Israeli will, and to restore Abu Mazin."¹⁵² Ramadan Shallah, the Secretary-General of PIJ, criticized the position of the PA and some Arab regimes, which, in his opinion, superseded the limit by giving the occupation the green light to execute its massacres in Gaza, at least by keeping conspicuously silent.¹⁵³ Practically, PIJ effectively participated in repelling the Israeli aggression; it continued firing the rockets and 35 of its resistors died in combat.

The political reaction of a number of Fatah leaders was supportive to the resistance and its steadfastness versus the Israeli aggression. The movement cancelled the festivals that it planned to have on the occasion of its 44th anniversary. Qaddura Faris called upon all the Palestinians, particularly those in Fatah, to supersede their political differences, and to unite in one front against the

aggression.¹⁵⁴ ‘Abbas Zaki said, “Gaza will never come to its knees, the resistance will be victorious,” and added that all the members of Fatah are potential martyrs.¹⁵⁵ On the end of the aggression, Hani al-Hassan congratulated Hamas and the resistance for “the victory that they achieved in repelling the Zionist occupation of GS.”¹⁵⁶

Notwithstanding the positive language during the war and the consensus of proceeding towards the national dialogue after its end, a number of influential critics raised their voice again, which had partially resumed an environment of verbal exchanges between the two sides. Ahmad ‘Abd al-Rahman bitterly criticized Hamas’ “claim” of victory, and added, “They talk of illusionary victories, they should come out of their holes to see what happened in Gaza.”¹⁵⁷ ‘Azzam al-Ahmad accused Hamas of exploiting the people’s needs for ulterior political objectives, while Fatah accused Hamas of liquidating some of its members, and it distributed a list of 17 names allegedly killed by Hamas.¹⁵⁸ But Hamas denied this accusation, and said that the ones who were sentenced to death were convicted spies, trouble makers or agents who guided the occupation planes to bombard the resistance sites.

The military wings of Fatah, the PFLP and DFLP, the Committees of Popular Resistance, and the PFLP-GC had all participated in resisting the aggression, each within its capabilities. This indicated that the resistance of the occupation is the focal point that unites all the Palestinians, and that whenever a high sense of responsibility prevails, all problems, real or imaginary, will vanish.

The performance of the PA in Ramallah at the beginning of the aggression was perplexed and vague, and the war tantamount to a “political catastrophe” to it.¹⁵⁹ By the beginning of the war, some of the influential symbols of the Authority held Hamas more responsible than Israel. Nimr Hammad, an advisor of President ‘Abbas, said that the leaders of Hamas are “participants” in the Israeli crime against Gaza, and that “Hamas should know what it means to undertake reckless adventurism...,” while al-Tayyib ‘Abd al-Rahim, the Secretary-General of the Presidency, called upon the inhabitants of Gaza to be patient, emphasizing that the “legitimacy” will return to Gaza.¹⁶⁰ But the colossal damage of the civilians and their steadfastness as well as that of the resistance triggered the symbols of the Authority to be more expressive and frank in condemning the Israeli aggression, and in their call to initiate the dialogue and to put the Palestinian house in order. The

Authority also froze the settlement negotiations with Israel.¹⁶¹ President ‘Abbas said, “We will not accept the destruction of Hamas in order to replace it, our main concern is to stop the aggression against the Palestinian people, the only means to end the schism is dialogue and dialogue only.”¹⁶² But the Authority in Ramallah did not take practical measures to compel Israel to soften its intransigence, such as allowing demonstrations and sit-ins in the WB, release of the resistance’s detainees, reopen the societies and the institutions that it closed down, and others.

Though the Egyptian initiative and the Security Council resolution 1860 included some loopholes that led Hamas and the resistance factions to voice reservations on them, the Authority in Ramallah viewed the resolution positively, being “an important step.”¹⁶³ President ‘Abbas called upon Hamas to accept the Egyptian initiative “without any hesitation,” adding that the party which rejects it should “bear the responsibility of the cataract of blood.”¹⁶⁴ But this initiative did not condemn the Israeli aggression, did not distinguish between the aggressor and the victim of aggression, and neither clearly demanded the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Strip nor dealt directly with the Palestinian partner that administered and defended Gaza i.e. Hamas and its government.

The inability of the people of the WB to demonstrate and to organize popular reactions demonstrated the extent of the tight grip of the Authority’s security forces, and the destruction that they caused in the popular and social institutions. The extensive security measures had, furthermore, revealed the extent of the fear of the Authority from any widespread protest movements against it, and its concern that they reflect the popularity of Hamas and the resistance trend in the WB.

The confusion of the Authority was also clearly seen in its last minute apology to attend Doha summit that discussed on 16/1/2009 the Israeli aggression on Gaza. President ‘Abbas admitted that the pressure that he was exposed to prevented him from participation, and added that if he came to the summit, he will “slain himself from the artery to the artery.”¹⁶⁵ However, Hamas filled this vacuum, and Khalid Mish‘al delivered in the opening session the speech of Hamas and the resistance, which was viewed as a political and media victory to Hamas.

Hamas administered the battle by itself and in cooperation with the resistance factions in Damascus. However, despite the capability and wisdom that it demonstrated, the movement had not sufficiently and in details coordinated with the movements and the factions that rallied for its support. Moreover, it did not

capitalize on the positive transformation in the position of the PFLP in order to consolidate the partnership that emerged with it and other factions in order to meet the needs related to the confrontation of the aggression, lifting the siege and the reorganization of the Palestinian house.¹⁶⁶ We should note here that the PFLP was crippled by some internal scuffles and, in one way or another, by the positions of its pro-Authority deputy secretary-general. However, after the war, Hamas seemed to have provoked the fears of these factions by its call for finding an alternative legitimacy to the PLO, which had drained some political gains achieved during the aggression.

An outcome of the aggression on Gaza was the acceleration of the pace of the Egyptian patronized internal Palestinian dialogue. It held several sessions in Cairo during the months of February and March 2009, which succeeded in bridging the gap on several questions, though there are still many primary standing issues, which, God willing, may be discussed in the next Strategic Report.

Conclusion

The year 2008 was the year in which, so to speak, the Palestinian camel carried the water on its back, but without being able to drink it!! The schism continued throughout the year, but it was not a mere struggle for power, rather it essentially reflected a deep political conflict and a difference between two paths and visions for the Palestinian national struggle, which may take time to be reconciled or to be decisively settled one way or the other. The adversaries failed to sit on the same negotiation table, and an environment of finger-pointing, lack of trust, and preconditions prevailed.

The government of Salam Fayyad harmonized with Oslo Accords and the provisions of the Road Map. It held the Palestinians' hand and tracked the resistance, but it was unable to get the least guarantees from the Israelis to stop the settlements, confiscation of land, Judaization, detention and assassinations.

As for Haniyyah's government it survived between two alternatives, either the siege and slow death, or the downfall and marginalization, even uprooting if the course of Oslo program or the Road Map is destined to take up the administration of Gaza. Its success was in its ability to survive in almost impossible circumstances

and at a high cost of siege and destruction for one and a half million Palestinians. Its continuation in arming itself and preparing to confront the Israeli penetration was a testimony of determination to stand firm and secure the success of the resistance option that it patronized.

The Palestinian “legitimacies” were examples of partial legitimacies in relation to each other and to the outside world, be it the legitimacy of Salam Fayyad or Isma‘il Haniyyah. By the end of 2008, the legitimacy of President ‘Abbas itself has become questionable, as Hamas does not recognize his presidency which it considers to have legally expired on 8/1/2009, a development that had complicated the internal Palestinian scenario. However, due to the Israeli aggression on the Strip and its consequential complexities, and in the light of the subsequent conducive environment for national conciliation, Hamas preferred not to be dragged into a new phase of “breaking the bone”. On another vein, the executive and legislative institutions of the PLO, including the Executive Committee, were legally a decade or so overdue, and the organization no longer reflected the Palestinian reality or the Palestinian forces on the ground. This crisis of “legitimacies” indicates the urgent need for the reorganization of the Palestinian house, which should be placed at the top of the priorities of the national program.

The “loss” of both the “direction” and “the compass” of the Palestinian national path coupled with the contradiction in the programs and style of leadership of Ramallah and Gaza had catastrophic consequences on the Palestinian national program which, sadly, is viciously revolving around itself. This state of “perplexity”, which the Palestinian internal scene had experienced throughout the year 2008, had its repercussions on the dialogue between Fatah and Hamas. The play of “finger biting” between Fatah and Hamas continued, each waiting for the other to cry first, or for time to play in its favor. However, practically, the Israeli-American conditions had in advance fixed a ceiling for any Palestinian dialogue, whereby Hamas should “undertake” to recognize the agreements that the PLO had signed and the legitimacies that it accepted. The inherent condition for the formation of a government that lifts the siege was the acceptance of these undertakings. Thus, the Israelis and Americans were instrumental in making the Palestinian decision, though they are not physically present in the dialogue sessions, which Hamas had appropriately called the American veto. Therefore the crux of the matter lies in the response to the following question: How far are the Palestinians ready to shoulder

the consequences of their insistence to freely choose their path and to have their historical and legitimate rights, or will they offer concessions in line with “the reality” of the situation, the balance of power and the available capabilities, and to rescue whatever may be rescued?

Hence, it is necessary to liberate the Palestinian will, not to bet on the aids of the donor states, and to refuse the conditions laid in return for the Israeli-American recognition. There should also be a consensus on the opening of Rafah crossing and the other crossings and on the reconstruction issue, to refrain from using the question of the siege in internal politics, and to consolidate the steadfastness and resistance of the Palestinian people. Equally important is the urgency of forming a government to confront the siege, Judaization, Jewish settlements, the racial wall, and other issues.

Despite some serious attempts and after 19 years of impatient waiting, Fatah failed to convene its Sixth Congress, and the internal crisis is ongoing. The arguments for postponement and delay will continue to be effective unless a “magic” deal is concluded that will address the previous considerations, and observe the interests of the “big shots” and the effective trends in the movement.

Notwithstanding the killing and destruction resulting from the Israeli war on Gaza, the courage and perseverance of the resistance and the wisdom and steadfastness of its leadership, coupled with Palestinian, Arab, Islamic, and even international rally behind it and its victory in the battle of “breaking the wills” through failing the Israeli attack, were all instrumental in gaining Hamas and the resistance trend increasing political and media popularity. This victory created a status of apathy and disillusion among the enemies and the adversaries that it is unlikely to fail and eradicate Hamas; thus has been the drive towards dialogue and reorganization of the Palestinian house. However, there are still a number of formidable predicaments in its way, which requires immense determination and a high sense of responsibility, and to place the supreme interests of the Palestinian people ahead and above foreign pressure and narrow personal and partisan interests.

Endnotes

- ¹ Statement of Fayyad published by *al-Hayat al-Jadidah* newspaper, Ramallah, 11/11/2008.
- ² Although we emphasize the unity of the country and the rejection of schism, 47 members of the PLC in the WB are from Hamas, and 29 are from Fatah. While Premier Fayyad represents a bloc in the PLC that has only two members (1.5%).
- ³ *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 30/8/2008.
- ⁴ Reuters News Agency, 7/7/2008, see: <http://ara.reuters.com>; and *al-Hayat* newspaper, London, 2/8/2008.
- ⁵ *Asharq al-Awsat* newspaper, London, 28/7/2008.
- ⁶ *Al-Khaleej* newspaper, al-Shariqa (United Arab Emirates), 11/8/2008.
- ⁷ *Felesteen* newspaper, Gaza, 18/12/2008.
- ⁸ *Al-Hayat*, 2/8/2008; *al-Khaleej*, 8/8/2008; and *Annahar* newspaper, Beirut, 10/8/2008.
- ⁹ *Al-Khaleej*, 14/3/2008; and *Alghad* newspaper, Amman, 31/8/2008.
- ¹⁰ See the study of the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR) on the financial situation in Gaza, in: www.pecdar.ps/pdfs/emp.%20report.pdf
- ¹¹ See Amad for Information report, 18/6/2008, in: <http://amad.ps/arabic/?action=detail&id=13095>
- ¹² See *Ibid.*; and see The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), 7/4/2008, in: <http://auhri.net/palestine/mezan/2008/pro407-2.shtml>
- ¹³ The site of Aljazeera.net, 14/4/2008, see: www.aljazeera.net
- ¹⁴ *Al-Hayat*, 6/2/2008.
- ¹⁵ *Al-Khaleej*, 24/6/2008.
- ¹⁶ See the statement of ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, London, 29/4/2008; and the statement of ‘Abdullah ‘Abdullah, *Okaz* newspaper, Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), 29/4/2008.
- ¹⁷ *Al-Khaleej*, 5/6/2008.
- ¹⁸ The Palestinian Information Center, 15/1/2008, see: <http://www.palestine-info.info/ar>
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ *Al-Hayat*, 1/1/2008.
- ²¹ *Al-Hayat*, 27/2/2008.
- ²² *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 12/11/2008.
- ²³ See the statement of ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 20/9/2008; and the site of Arabs48, 23/8/2008, see: www.arabs48.com; and *Alghad*, 5/11/2008; and the statement of al-Efrangi, *al-Khaleej*, 6/11/2008; and the statement of Qaddura Faris, Quds Press International Agency, 29/9/2008.
- ²⁴ *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 1/8/2008; and see *Albayan* newspaper, Dubai (United Arab Emirates), 12 and 24/11/2008.
- ²⁵ See the statements: Muhammad Nazzal, Aljazeera.net, 27/4/2008; Fawzi Barhum, *Asharq al-Awsat*, 6/7/2008; ‘Izzat al-Rishq, The Palestinian Information Center, 6/7/2008; Khalid Mish‘al, *Annahar*, 16/7/2008; Isma‘il Radwan, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 22/7/2008; Mahmud al-Zahar, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 13/8/2008; and Sa‘id Siyam, *al-Khaleej*, 27/10/2008.
- ²⁶ Aljazeera.net, 25/6/2008.
- ²⁷ *Asharq al-Awsat*, 5/1/2008.
- ²⁸ *Al-Ahram* newspaper, Cairo, 24/1/2008; *Addustour* newspaper, Amman, 24/1/2008.
- ²⁹ *Al-Hayat*, 26/1/2008.
- ³⁰ *Al-Watan* newspaper, Abha (Saudi Arabia), 26/1/2008.
- ³¹ *Al-Hayat*, 27/1/2008.
- ³² *Al-Hayat*, 28/1/2008.
- ³³ Aljazeera.net, 24/3/2008.

- ³⁴ *Al-Khaleej*, 25/3/2008.
- ³⁵ Aljazeera.net, 24/3/2008; and *Asharq al-Awsat*, 25/3/2008.
- ³⁶ *Al-Hayat*, 24/3/2008.
- ³⁷ *Al-Ayyam* newspaper, Ramallah, 30/3/2008.
- ³⁸ *Alarab* newspaper, Doha, 4/4/2008.
- ³⁹ *Asharq al-Awsat*, 1/4/2008.
- ⁴⁰ *Asharq al-Awsat*, 1/4/2008.
- ⁴¹ *Addustour*, 8/4/2008.
- ⁴² *Alghad*, 30/5/2008.
- ⁴³ *Al-Hayat*, 10/6/2008.
- ⁴⁴ See for example: Sami Abu Zuhri statement, The Palestinian Information Center, 8/6/2008; and Muhammad Nazzal statement, Quds Press, 11/6/2008.
- ⁴⁵ Nabil 'Amr reported to say that Mahmud 'Abbas did not intentionally meet Khalid Mish'al during the former visit to Damascus because of Mish'al's "provoking" letter to some Arab leaders. See *al-Hayat*, 10/7/2008; and see a comment of 'Abbas in the same sense in *al-Hayat*, 30/7/2008.
- ⁴⁶ See *al-Khaleej*, and *al-Sharq* newspaper, Doha, 10/8/2008. Hamas has sent its responses to the Egyptian questions according to the broad outlines that had been published by *Asharq al-Awsat* on 7/7/2008.
- ⁴⁷ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 22/7/2008.
- ⁴⁸ *Al-Khaleej*, 7/9/2008.
- ⁴⁹ *Okaz*, 30/9/2008.
- ⁵⁰ *Okaz*, 6/10/2008.
- ⁵¹ See for example: Qaddura Faris statement, Quds Press, 12/10/2008; and Mahmud 'Abbas statement, *al-Khaleej*, 21/10/2008.
- ⁵² See Sami Abu Zuhri statement, *al-Khaleej*, 29/10/2008; and 'Izzat al-Rishq statement, Arabs48, 3/11/2008.
- ⁵³ See Nabil Sha'ath Statement, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 5/11/2008; and Mahmud 'Abbas statement, *Asharq al-Awsat*, 8/11/2008.
- ⁵⁴ *Alghad*, 9/11/2008.
- ⁵⁵ *Al-Hayat*, 9/11/2008.
- ⁵⁶ See 'Azzam al-Ahmad statement, *Okaz*, 9/11/2008; and Mahmud 'Abbas address on the anniversary of 'Arafat demise, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 12/11/2008.
- ⁵⁷ See the statement of Musa Abu-Marzuq, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 11/11/2008.
- ⁵⁸ See the statement of Khalil al-Hayyah, *Felesteen* newspaper, 12/11/2008.
- ⁵⁹ See Khalid Mish'al statement, *al-Hayat*, 24/11/2008.
- ⁶⁰ *Alquds* newspaper, 9/11/2008.
- ⁶¹ *Alghad*, 9/11/2008.
- ⁶² *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 10/11/2008.
- ⁶³ *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 12/11/2008.
- ⁶⁴ See for example: the statement of Ahmad 'Abd al-Rahman, *al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 28/12/2008.
- ⁶⁵ See Ahmad al-Khalidi, *al-Tada'iyat al-Qanuniyyah li-Intiha' wilayat al-Ra'is Mahmud 'Abbas* (The legal ramifications for the end of the President 'Abbas' term), al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, Beirut, 6/9/2008, in:
http://www.alzaytouna.net/arabic/data/attachments/ReportsZ/Legal-Implications-Abbas-Term-End-Khalidi_9-2008.pdf
- ⁶⁶ *Okaz*, 30/6/2008.
- ⁶⁷ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 30/6/2008.
- ⁶⁸ Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations has published the memorandum of al-Khalidi, along with other four contributions on the same subject written by: Walid 'Abd al-Hayy, 'Abd al-Sattar Qasim, Shafiq al-Masri and Muhammad Sa'id Idriss. See the articles in the Website of al-Zaytouna: <http://www.alzaytouna.net/arabic/>

- ⁶⁹ See Wasil Abu Yusuf statement, *al-Hayat*, 23/9/2008; and the statement of Mahmud ‘Abbas, *Albayan*, 21/10/2008.
- ⁷⁰ *Al-Akhbar* newspaper, Beirut, 6/10/2008, quoting *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper, 5/10/2008.
- ⁷¹ See Fawzi Barhum statements, *al-Khaleej*, 12/10/2008; and Salah al-Bardawil, Ma’an News Agency, 13/12/2008; and ‘Aziz Dweik, *al-Hayat*, 17/12/2008.
- ⁷² *Almustaqbal* newspaper, Beirut, 20/10/2008.
- ⁷³ See *al-Hayat*, *Annahar*, and *Alghad*, 24/11/2008.
- ⁷⁴ *Alarab*, 27/11/2008.
- ⁷⁵ See for example: The Palestinian Information Center, 23/11/2008; and *al-Hayat*, 24/11/2008.
- ⁷⁶ *Arabs48*, 12/10/2008, see: <http://www.arabs48.com>
- ⁷⁷ *Alghad*, 26/10/2008.
- ⁷⁸ *Al-Khaleej*, 3/12/2008.
- ⁷⁹ See the statement of Hisham Abu Ghosh, the member of PFLP, *al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 23/11/2008.
- ⁸⁰ *Assafir*, 5/12/2008.
- ⁸¹ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 20/12/2008.
- ⁸² *Addustour*, 30/9/2008.
- ⁸³ *Asharq al-Awsat*, 6/1/2008.
- ⁸⁴ *Alarab*, 24/2/2008.
- ⁸⁵ See: *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 5/4/2008.
- ⁸⁶ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 22/4/2008.
- ⁸⁷ *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 13/6/2008.
- ⁸⁸ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 25/7/2008.
- ⁸⁹ *Albayan*, 31/7/2008. The same reference reported that the five leaders of Fatah who opposed to the convention of the congress in the West Bank are: Faruq Qaddumi, Hani al-Hassan, Muhammad Jihad, Abu Mahir Ghneim and Salim al-Za’nun.
- ⁹⁰ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 4/8/2008.
- ⁹¹ Quds Press, 17/8/2008.
- ⁹² *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 25/10/2008.
- ⁹³ See Ma’an News Agency, 9/11/2008; and see about the sensitivity of the financial paper: *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 9/8/2008.
- ⁹⁴ *Alghad*, 15/12/2008.
- ⁹⁵ *Al-Khaleej*, 16/12/2008; and see a statement of Hani al-Hassan quoted him in *Felesteen* newspaper on 26/12/2008. Al-Hassan was said to say that the members of the Central Committee are paid \$25 thousand per month, thus some of the committee members is no willing to lose such a salary by leaving his.
- ⁹⁶ *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 16/12/2008.
- ⁹⁷ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16/1/2008.
- ⁹⁸ Ma’an News Agency, 14/2/2008.
- ⁹⁹ *Asharq al-Awsat*, 16/2/2008.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Al-Hayat*, 17/2/2008.
- ¹⁰¹ *Alarab*, 24/2/2008.
- ¹⁰² *Al-Akhbar*, Beirut, 13/10/2008.
- ¹⁰³ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 20/3/2008.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 21/3/2008.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 7/4/2008.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Al-Hayat*, 19/12/2008.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Annahar*, 13/11/2008.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Al-Sharq*, Doha, 10/8/2008. Although ‘Abd Rabbuh was dismissed from Fida party after several years of his appointing in the Executive Committee of the Organization, he kept his position in the latter.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Al-Sharq*, Doha, 27/8/2008.

- ¹¹⁰ *Alhaqaeq* newspaper, London, 15/3/2008, in: <http://www.alhaqaeq.net/?rqid=9&secid=3&art=84643>
- ¹¹¹ *Al-Sharq*, Doha, 10/8/2008; and *al-Hayat*, 17/10/2008.
- ¹¹² *Al-Hayat*, 17/10/2008.
- ¹¹³ Quds Press, 23/11/2008.
- ¹¹⁴ *Al-Khaleej*, 23/4/2008.
- ¹¹⁵ *Addustour*, 8/8/2008.
- ¹¹⁶ *Al-Khaleej*, 6/5/2008.
- ¹¹⁷ *Asharq al-Awsat*, 28/10/2008.
- ¹¹⁸ *Al-Hayat*, and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 8/1/2008.
- ¹¹⁹ *Al-Sharq*, Doha, 24/1/2008.
- ¹²⁰ *Addustour*, 13/9/2008.
- ¹²¹ British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 19/10/2008, in: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/middle_east_news/newsid_7678000/7678733.stm
- ¹²² *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 22/9/2008.
- ¹²³ Ma'an News Agency, 2/12/2008.
- ¹²⁴ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, and *Albayan*, 28/5/2008.
- ¹²⁵ *Haaretz* newspaper, 6/4/2008.
- ¹²⁶ See: *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 8/1/2008 and 28/10/2008; *Addustour*, 8 and 24/10/2008; and *Asharq al-Awsat*, 28/10/2008.
- ¹²⁷ BBC, 19/10/2008, in: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/middle_east_news/newsid_7678000/7678733.stm
- ¹²⁸ *Arabs48*, 7/1/2008, in: <http://www.arabs48.com/display.x?cid=6&sid=6&id=51249>
- ¹²⁹ See: al-Dameer Association for the Human Rights-Gaza, 23/2/2008: <http://www.addameer.org>
- ¹³⁰ Site of Albian Center for Information, 13/11/2008, in: <http://www.albian.ps/ar/portal/01942ed0-9740-47f1-beef-0577d59f78d3.aspx>
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- ¹³² Reuters, 4/12/2008; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 5/12/2008.
- ¹³³ BBC, 19/10/2008, in: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/middle_east_news/newsid_7678000/7678733.stm
- ¹³⁴ *Al-Khaleej*, 16/10/2008; and see Nimr Hammad statement, *Aljazeera.net*, 30/10/2008; and the statement of Sa'di al-Karnaz, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 2/8/2008.
- ¹³⁵ *Asharq al-Awsat*, 8/11/2008.
- ¹³⁶ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 15/4/2008.
- ¹³⁷ *Asharq al-Awsat*, 27/5/2008; *al-Quds al-Arabi*, and *al-Watan*, Saudi Arabia, 28/5/2008.
- ¹³⁸ BBC, 19/10/2008, in: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/middle_east_news/newsid_7678000/7678733.stm; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 12/11/2008.
- ¹³⁹ *Al-Khaleej*, 31/10/2008; and *al-Hayat*, 31/10/2008.
- ¹⁴⁰ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 1/1/2008; and Sama News Agency, 1/1/2008.
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- ¹⁴² The Palestinian Information Center, 1/1/2008.
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- ¹⁴⁵ See *al-Sharq*, Doha, 1/8/2008.
- ¹⁴⁶ See *al-Khaleej*, 8/8/2008.
- ¹⁴⁷ See *al-Hayat*, 17/9/2008; and Human Rights Watch Report about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories for the year 2008, in: <http://www.hrw.org/en/world-report/2009-5>

- ¹⁴⁸ See the report of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights in:
http://www.pchrgaza.org/PCHR/a/campaigns_field.html
- ¹⁴⁹ Palestine News & Information Agency (Wafa), 13/1/2008; and Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, in: http://www.mezan.org/site_ar/insecurity/insecurity_statistics.php
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<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/49FB5319-C422-4491-889C-88F8A1D1BC69.htm>
- ¹⁵¹ The Palestinian Information Center, 21/1/2009.
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- ¹⁵⁴ Quds Press, 27/12/2008.
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- ¹⁵⁶ *Asharq al-Awsat*, 25/1/2009.
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http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/middle_east_news/newsid_7848000/7848888.stm
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Chapter Two

The Israeli - Palestinian Scene

The Israeli - Palestinian Scene

Introduction

The year 2008 witnessed change in the leadership of the Israeli governing party Kadima. Ehud Olmert, the Prime Minister and Kadima's Leader, was sacked because of some corruption scandals which led Tzipi Livni, the minister of Foreign Affairs, to be elected the new party's leader. By the end of the year, the forces of the Israeli right, under the leadership of the Likud and Yisrael Beitenu parties, were on the rise, as demonstrated in the 10th Knesset elections of early 2009.

Israel commenced the year 2008 with the report of Winograd Commission on the Israeli military and political performance during the war that it launched on Lebanon in the summer of 2006. The repercussions of this war triggered the Hebrew state to wage towards the end of the year a comprehensive aggression on Gaza by which it aimed to restore the "deterrence power" of its military establishment.

Though numerous international and regional parties betted on a breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations based on Annapolis understandings, the year 2008 was characterized by the total freezing of the political settlement process. The repercussions of the global economic crisis on the Israeli economy were also another major feature of this year.

This chapter attempts to give a resume of the Israeli-political scene with regard to the Israeli political map, the Israeli population, economic and military affairs, and the interaction of Israel with the internal Palestinian scene and the settlement path.

First: The Israeli Internal Scenario

By the beginning of the year, the Israeli political scene was preoccupied with the report of Winograd Commission, which comes under the title of the "defect" of the military and political performance in the war with Hizbullah's fighters, July-August 2006. Though affirming that the Second Lebanon War represented

“a major and dangerous failure” in the military and political administration of the war, which led to the failure in achieving victory over a “para-military” small organization, the report avoided mentioning Premier Ehud Olmert in name, and released him from the charge of narrow motives behind approving the land operation during the last days of the war. Nonetheless, the year was catastrophic to Olmert, as his corruption scandals came to the forefront, and finally led to his downfall from both the leadership of the party and the premiership. Tzipi Livni, the minister of Foreign Affairs, was elected to the leader of the party, but she failed to form a governing coalition, and formally told the Israeli president of her inability to do so. Hence, it was agreed that an early parliamentary elections to be conducted on 10/2/2009. During the last ten days of December 2008, Israel was confronted by the reality of the expiry of the ceasefire period and the refusal of the Palestinian resistance factions to renew it except with new conditions, namely lifting the siege and opening the crossings, a development that culminated in the Israeli comprehensive aggression on Gaza on 27/12/2008.

1. The Government Coalition

The year started with the withdrawal of Yisrael Beitenu Party on 18/1/2008, led by Avigdor Lieberman, from the governing coalition,¹ which reduced its parliamentary seats from 78 to 67. Hence, this withdrawal was not a make or break problem to the coalition, and this party had originally been allowed to join the government to limit the repercussions of Winograd Commission on Olmert’s government. However, due to Olmert’s insistence to continue and his adamant refusal to quit the premiership, his maintenance of the superficial contact with the Palestinians based on Annapolis understandings and the ascendancy of the right in the polls, led by the Likud Party, at the expense of the left and centre camps, Shas Party, which represents the religious among the Sephardim (the Eastern Jews), started to grumble and threaten that it will quit the coalition, which practically meant the reduction of its seats from 67 to 55. In fact, its leader, Eliyahu “Eli” Yishai openly cautioned that Shas will quit the coalition if an agreement is concluded with the Palestinians, saying, “We will never be part of a ruling coalition that shrinks the land of the state of the Jewish people, and fill it with the refugees.”² When the rightist parties initiated a draft law to dissolve the Knesset, Premier Ehud Olmert quickly moved on 25/6/2008 to persuade Ehud Barak, the Labor Party Leader and the minister of Defense, not to support the opposition suggestion on

the undertaken that he -Olmert- will arrange for elections by 25/9/2008 to choose a new president for Kadima Party.³ Meanwhile, with the continuation of investigating the corruption charges against Olmert and his admittance that he was involved in some, the tendency within Kadima Party to have a new leader accelerated. Tension and conflicts in the party aggravated, and Avraham (Moshe) Dichter, the minister of Internal Security and a candidate for the party leadership, called upon Olmert to resign from the premiership once a new party leadership is elected.⁴

The continuation of the investigation on Olmert's corruption charges triggered Ehud Barak, in a press conference held on 28/5/2008 in the Knesset headquarter, to publicly call upon the prime minister to resign by saying, "The president of the Israeli government should resign or shelve his duties," and added:

In view of the challenges that face Israel and the phase it is passing through, I do not think that the prime minister has the ability to concurrently administer the affairs of the government and his own affairs. Thus, Olmert should distance himself from administering the affairs of the state. He may do this by any means available to him: to freeze his work, shelve his duties, go on holiday, resign, we are not the ones to decide on this.

Barak warned to opt for early elections if Olmert refused to relinquish the premiership and the leadership of the party. He asked Kadima Party to work for the appointment of a new leader to replace Olmert.⁵ But Olmert refused to resign, saying, "I do not work according to the time table set by Barak."⁶ Next day, Tzipi Livni, the minister of Foreign Affairs and one of the aspirants to replace Olmert, called upon the prime minister to resign and to conduct elections on the presidency of the party, and asked Kadima to select a successor to Olmert. In a forum held in Jerusalem, she said, "Kadima should be prepared for any possible scenario, including early elections. I strongly support early elections" inside the party. She added, "The majority of the party's base is concerned with the elections. This will enable us to restore confidence in the party."⁷

Despite his opposition to elections on the presidency of the party, Olmert finally submitted to this demand, and Kadima officially started to prepare for preliminary elections. In a session of the party's committee on 16/6/2008, it was decided to amend the constitution of the party, and to allow setting a date for early preliminary elections, even if this date was not near the one of the general elections. It was also decided to close the lists of the electorates of Kadima members on 30/6/2008, which is the last date for party membership registration.⁸ Subsequently, conflicts in

the party started to be visible. The premier's intention to bypass the agreement with the Labor Party provoked disapproval within certain quarters in the party. While Tzipi Livni appealed for restraint, Avi Dichter, the minister of Internal Security and candidate for the leadership of the party, openly opposed Olmert, and asked that he quits once an alternative is elected, arguing that his continuation would be disastrous to the nation and the party. In a radio broadcast on 4/7/2008, Olmert indicated that he will keep his post, and added that it is likely that he will be a candidate in the party's preliminary elections, emphasizing that he will study this at the opportune time.

In a televised speech on 4/7/2008, Dichter said, "Olmert tries to prolong his premiership through trickery and exploitation of the party's constitution." He maintained, "The replacement of Olmert is an obligation we undertook to the public," and added, "I believe that the agreement between Kadima and the Labor party on the date for the preliminary elections and the viewpoint of values of the whole matter, within Kadima, makes it necessary for us to replace Olmert."⁹

At the same time, the Israeli rightist parties started to ask Olmert to quit and to conduct elections to select a new leader for the party, as this, in their estimate would lead to new parliamentary elections, an event that they favored because the opinion polls suggested that they, lead by the Likud, will be in the forefront. Having this in mind, MK Gideon Sa'ar, Likud faction chairman, demanded on 12/7/2008 the resignation of Premier Olmert immediately, as the investigation suspected his involvement in new charges. He added that the government lost its credibility completely, and that the problem is not confined to Olmert alone, but extends to the ministers who adhere to their posts at the expense of "good governance in a democratic state." Sa'ar said that the discard of Olmert is prevalent among all parties and among the people of all inclinations.¹⁰ On 21/7/2008 the Kadima Party Council agreed that the preliminary elections be rescheduled to an earlier date, September 2008. The motion to amend the internal party regulations won 91 votes out of 180.¹¹

While the battle of succession was gaining momentum, Tzipi Livni accelerated the tone of her criticism to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, whom she hoped to succeed, and held him responsible for the huge dwindling popularity of the party. In a party meeting in occupied Jerusalem, she said, "The optimism, which was the driving force for the establishment of Kadima, is lost." The second channel of

the Israeli television mentioned that three of the former advisors of Ariel Sharon joined the camp of Livni as advisors to her, and that they supported her strife to take up the leadership of Kadima.¹²

On 30/7/2008, the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared that he will resign when the ruling party Kadima selects a new leader in the internal elections scheduled 17/9/2008, and in which he will not nominate himself. Olmert admitted that he committed a number of mistakes during his political career, which he strongly regrets, and is prepared to pay the price.¹³

2. Kadima: Election of a New Leadership

On the approach of the party's presidential elections, Shaul Mofaz, the minister of Transportation who competed with Tzipi Livni, the minister of Foreign Affairs, over the leadership of Kadima and therefore the premiership, launched bitter criticism against Livni, describing her "a weak, inexperienced, and hesitant" political figure, and added that peace with the Palestinians "could not be achieved through concessions." In response to some positive views that Livni expressed on her negotiations with the Palestinians, Mofaz campaign issued a statement which claimed:

Livni had glaringly explained what the members of Kadima will decide in this preliminary elections... Whom do you trust to negotiate with the Palestinians? A strong and experienced leader like Mofaz, or a weak and inexperienced political figure who has a history of extremely bad decisions like Livni?

In an address to his supporters, Mofaz said, "We have been negotiating with the Palestinians for more than two years, and did not achieve anything," adding, "Israel pursues the path of concessions without getting anything in return. This is a dangerous matter. It weakens us and strengthens our enemies."¹⁴

On her part, Livni tried to present herself to the public as a strong personality that the Israeli project needs at this stage, that she is not accused of corruption, and does not submit to blackmailing, that she is more capable of adjusting to the international reality and with the new American administration. She launched a bitter campaign against Mofaz which implicated the Sephardim. 48 hours before the opening of the ballot boxes to elect a new leader for Kadima Party, a close aide of Tzipi Livni reportedly said, "The riffraff [the Sephardim] will elect [the minister of Transportation Shaul] Mofaz," in an implicit indication to Livni's main

competitor Mofaz, who descends from Persian roots versus the “Ashkenazi” Livni, who, according to an opinion poll conducted by *Yedioth Ahronoth*, will be elected by the majority of the “Ashkenazim” in Kadima.

Faced with the prediction of the opinion polls that Livni will get resounding victory over him on 17/9/2008 elections, Mofaz fired the “last bullet” of his campaign by bitterly attacking Livni and her aides for the description “riffraff” that one of them had reportedly given to the Sephardim. Incidentally, thirty years ago, this word was used in the same context by an Israeli artist of Ashkenazi decent, and had then instigated most of the Sephardim to support the Likud Party, under Menachem Begin, which won the elections, though the opinion polls had nominated the Labor Party for victory.¹⁵

Tzipi Livni won the leadership of Kadima by a margin of 43.1% of the votes versus 42% for her main competitor Mofaz, while the Ministers Meir Sheerit and Dichter got 8.5% and 6.5% respectively. According to the party’s central election committee, the percentage of the voting amongst Kadima members was 53.7%.¹⁶ Following this defeat, Shaul Mofaz declared his relinquishment of political life. In a press conference, held in the Kadima’s headquarter of the town Petach-Tikva, he told his followers, “I will relinquish political life for a while, I want to reflect on my future, I will remain a member of Kadima, I will work according to my ability.”¹⁷

3. Corruption Scandals Trailing Olmert

The Israeli political life is dominantly characterized by corruption, a subject that preoccupied the Israeli public opinion. Most of the Israeli government was accused of financial and moral charges, and some resigned in disgrace like the former Presidents Ezer Weizman and Moshe Katsav. But Olmert was the first prime minister who was accused in person of being involved in financial corruption and over a period of 12 years. According to a statement by State Prosecutor Moshe Lador, issued on 19/5/2008, Olmert was formally accused of receiving monetary bribes over a period of 12 years, when he was the Mayor of Jerusalem and subsequently Minister of Industry, Trade and Labor in Sharon’s government. This announcement was made before a session of the Supreme Court, and in what is described as a historic event, as this was the first time in the history of Israel when a prime minister appeal to the judiciary against the state, and the State Prosecutor appear personally in court to file such a serious charge against a prime

minister.¹⁸ The main witness of this fifth charge of corruption against Olmert, the Jewish American businessman Morris “Moshe” Talansky, who admitted that he handed cash to Olmert without having receipts of the sum of \$150 thousand over a period of 15 years (1991-2005), of which some were loans that he used for personal expenditure, and not for financing his election campaigns. He added that the Prime Minister did not return any of these loans, even evaded paying them, emphasizing that he received nothing in return, and that he expected nothing. He added that Attorney Uri Messer, whom Olmert delegated to run the affairs related to donations, exploited his (Talansky) companies to transfer \$380 thousand to cover Olmert’s debts to The United Jerusalem foundation which ran his election campaign for mayor of Jerusalem.¹⁹

In a main heading, *Maariv* newspaper, reported that Olmert admitted during the investigations that he received money from Talansky, but claimed that the amount was several hundred dollars that were used to cover the expenses of his several visits to the USA. But further investigations casted “new suspicions” around him related to some “deception operations”, specifically charging more than what his trips actually costed on various sources, in 2006, while he was the mayor of Jerusalem and subsequently Minister of Industry, Trade and Labor. This new corruption file was added to five other previous files in which police investigated Olmert for suspicion of “fraud”, “breach of trust” and campaign funding violations.²⁰

On 7/9/2008 the police recommended that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz files two cases against Olmert which accuse him with several charges including “bribes, breach of trust and money laundering.” The charges indicated that Olmert deposited the money that he got from Talansky with a travel agency to finance his private visits and those of his family.²¹

4. Changes in the Israel Partisan Map

The Israeli partisan map witnessed several changes during the course of the year 2008, which started on 18/3/2008 with the election of the member of the Knesset Haim Oron, one of the founders of the anti-settlement movement Peace Now, head of the political party New Movement-Meretz, for whom he serves as a member of the Knesset. Following his election, Barak, the leader of the Labor Party, invited Oron to join the governing coalition “to help in the attempt to conclude a political deal.” But Oron refused, dismissing Barak as one “who competes with the most extreme parties that reject peace,” and added that his movement would increase its

strife to defend the weak social sectors, and to support the peace process.²² It became evident that the Labor Party had lost its left-wing identity and became oriented towards the right, which emphasized the notion of the Israeli public opinion that the party no longer represented the Israeli left. An opinion poll suggested that 55% of the Israeli public believes that the left is no longer visible on the ground, and 67% were of the opinion that the Labor Party could not be considered a left-wing party. Another opinion poll, conducted by Geocartography Institute, suggested that 10% of the Israeli populace believed that the leftist political ideas were still effective, and only 3% saw them to be necessary more than any time before. The poll also showed that 22% of the Israeli public believed that the Labor Party had no specific political orientation, 8% saw it as an outright rightist party, and only 14% considered the Labor Party to still be the leader of the leftist camp.²³

While the investigations with Olmert were ongoing, a dissension took place in the Pensioners Party (Gil). A member of the Knesset of this party, Elhanan Glazer, informed on 3/5/2008 the president of Gil, Rafael “Rafi” Eitan, that he and two colleagues, Sarah Marom-Shalev and Moshe Sharoni, will leave the party to establish the Justice for the Elderly faction, thus only four members of the Knesset remained in the original party. With this split among the ranks of the Pensioners, the party of the billionaire businessman Arcadi Gaydamak started to take shape. *Haartez* newspaper reported a deal between the above Knesset members and Gaydamak that they represent in the Knesset the latter’s party, Social Justice party, which will approach the party registrar to change its name to Social Justice - Justice for the Pensioners.²⁴

5. The Failure of Livni and an Early Parliamentary Election

Delegated by the Israeli President Shimon Peres, Livni, Kadima Chairwoman, reached a draft coalition agreement with the Labor Party to form a new coalition government under her premiership. She agreed that Barak would be named a senior deputy prime minister in a Kadima-led coalition and would also play a significant role in negotiations with Syria. It was also agreed that Kadima would acquiesce to Barak’s condition that Justice Minister Daniel Friedmann’s initiative to limit Supreme Court powers be curbed except in the case of consensus on the issue between Livni and Barak.²⁵ But Livni failed to finalize the formation of the coalition during the four-week period that she was initially granted, and she was given another two weeks, starting from 20/10/2008.²⁶ On the directive of its spiritual

leader, Ovadia Yosef, and after deliberations that he had with the “Council of Torah Wise Men”, the supreme institution of the party, Shas, which had 12 seats in the Knesset, refused to join Livni’s government because she rejected two of the party’s main demands: to support the poor sectors and to guarantee that Jerusalem would not be subject to negotiations with the Palestinians. In this respect, Eli Yishai, Shas Party Chairman, said, “It is impossible to purchase Shas which will never sell Jerusalem,” and added, “Shas took its decision on the basis of its fundamentals, and if our demands are accepted we will join.” He denied the rumors that Shas had any undertaken from the Likud, emphasizing that the party’s decision is final. Livni responded by saying that she is not prepared to pay any price for the sake of forming a government under her premiership.²⁷

Having failed to conclude with the parties a coalition that would have more than sixty members in the Knesset, Livni decided to call for early elections. In a meeting with the Israeli President Shimon Peres, Livni said, “The people will choose their leaders.” She emphasized that she took this position because she was not willing to be blackmailed by the parties whom she negotiated with, in a hint to Shas, which, according to her, demanded to increase child welfare payments. She added, the interest of the state is at the top of my priorities, and “when I had to decide between continued extortion and bringing forward elections, I preferred elections.” She emphasized that Shas’ demands to increase child welfare payments and keep Jerusalem off the negotiating table with the Palestinians “superseded all limits”, and that “it is not logical to participate in the negotiations and to say that we cannot discuss a certain subject.” Livni defended her failing efforts by saying, I wanted to form a government and exerted effort, but matters reached an insane position... and I will not capitulate to extortion. I will never give any undertaken that will explode the Middle East, and will not bypass the general budget at a time of an economic crisis.²⁸

6. The Formation of a New Movement for the Israeli Left

In November 2008 a new-wing bloc was formed, and in the same month Ami Ayalon, Minister without Portfolio and a member of the security cabinet of state for strategic affairs, declared his withdrawal from the Labor Party and joined this bloc. Being essentially an attempt to form a grand coalition for the leftist forces, this movement included 200 celebrities in various fields: intellectual, political and military. They included Uzi Baram, the former Minister and former Secretary-

General of the Labor Party, the internationally renowned literate Amos Oz who was known for his support to the Labor Party and then in the 90s went left to Meretz, Avraham Burg, the former Speaker of the Knesset and former Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Yassi Kochik, Director General of the Prime Minister's Office under Ehud Barak, Gilad Sher, Barak's Chief Negotiator with the Palestinians, and Tzali Reshef and Mordechai Kremnitzer, the former two leaders of Peace Now.²⁹ But this movement has not thus far transformed into an effective political party in the Israeli partisan map. Thus it did not participate in the 18th Knesset elections of 10/2/2009.

7. The Israeli Public Opinion Swings between Kadima and the Likud

The opinion polls revealed a swing of the Israeli electorates between Kadima and the Likud, though the latter had been in the forefront most of the time. However, under the leadership of Tzipi Livni, Kadima strongly competed with the Likud and they were more than once of equal weight.

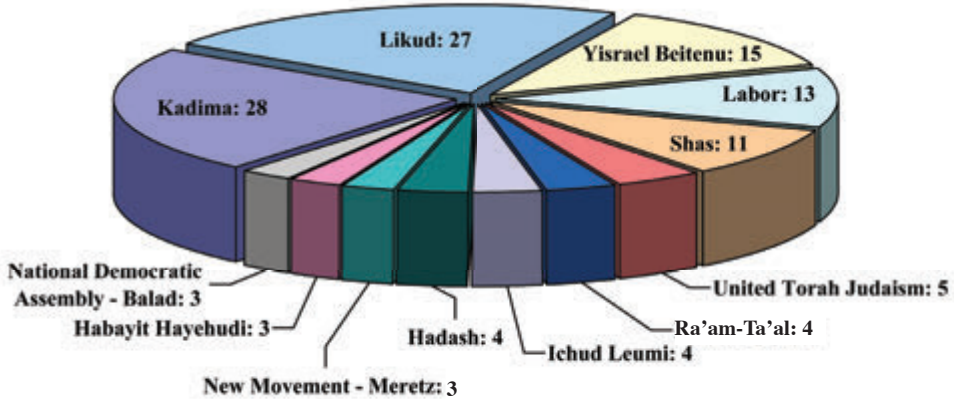
In the opinion polls conducted throughout the year 2008, the Likud was ahead, and it was expected to win 30-35 seats in the Knesset, while the estimate for Kadima, which had been negatively affected by the war in Lebanon and the corruption and maladministration of its president Ehud Olmert, sharply dwindled to 15 seats only. But Kadima's popularity increased during the second half of 2008, particularly after the resignation of Ehud Olmert and the assumption of Livni for the party's leadership, as its estimated seats rose to be between 24 and 30. On the other hand, the Labor Party, which was extremely retreating, was expected to win 8-12 seats. As for Yisrael Beiteinu, the party's popularity immensely increased. The governing coalition hoped that its war on Gaza, towards the end of 2008, would be instrumental in increasing the popularity of its parties, particularly Kadima and the Labor Party, and consequently their seats in the forthcoming elections, which was partly achieved, though the invasion failed to achieve tangible results.

The number of eligible voters in the 18th Knesset elections of 10/2/2009 totaled 5,278,985, and the voter turnout was 65.2%. 34 party lists were submitted, but only 12 of them were able to attain the 2% of the total vote cast (Qualifying Threshold) and consequently win a Knesset seat.³⁰ The following table shows the results of the 18th Knesset elections:

Table 1/2: Results of General Elections to the 18th Knesset 2009³¹

Name of list	Number of valid votes	Number of seats
Kadima	758,032	28
Likud	729,054	27
Yisrael Beitenu	394,577	15
Labor	334,900	13
Shas	286,300	11
United Torah Judaism	147,954	5
Ra'am-Ta'al	113,954	4
Ichud Leumi	112,570	4
Hadash	112,130	4
New Movement - Meretz	99,611	3
Habayit Hayehudi	96,765	3
National Democratic Assembly - Balad	83,739	3

Results of General Elections to the 18th Knesset 2009



The final results of these elections, and their impact, as well as the formation of the new Israeli government will be explained and analyzed in the next strategic report.

Second: The Most Prominent Population, Economic, and Military Indicators

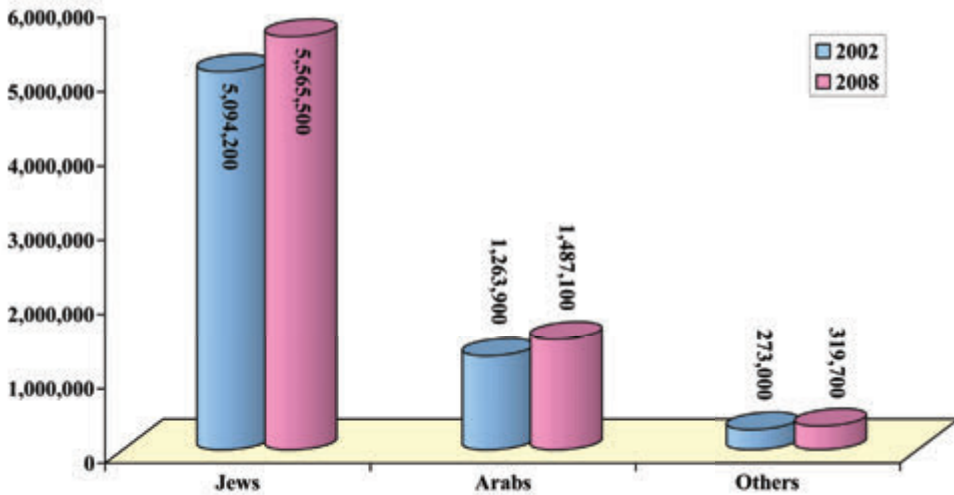
1. The Population Indicators

According to official statistics, the population of Israel by the end of 2008 totaled 7.37 million, amongst whom approximately 5.57 million, i.e. 75.5%, are Jews, while 319,700, i.e. 4.3%, did not disclose their religions, who are mostly immigrants from Russia, countries of the former Soviet Union and East Europe whose Judaism was not established, or non-Arab Christians. The Arab population, including those in Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, totaled 1.49 million, i.e. 20.2% of the whole population.³² If we subtract the population of the latter, about 281 thousand, then those who are known as the 1948 Palestinians are about 1.21 million, i.e. 16.4% of the whole population.³³ About 480 thousand Jewish settlers stay in the WB,³⁴ including 190 thousands in East Jerusalem alone (see table 2/2).

Table 2/2: Population of Israel 2002-2008³⁵
(Population estimates do not include foreign labor)

Year	Total population number	Jews	Arabs (including the population of East Jerusalem and in the Golan Heights)	Others
2002	6,631,100	5,094,200	1,263,900	273,000
2003	6,748,400	5,165,400	1,301,600	281,400
2004	6,869,500	5,237,600	1,340,200	291,700
2005	6,990,700	5,313,800	1,377,100	299,800
2006	7,116,700	5,393,400	1,413,300	310,000
2007	7,243,600	5,478,200	1,450,000	315,400
2008	7,372,300	5,565,500	1,487,100	319,700

Population of Israel 2002-2008



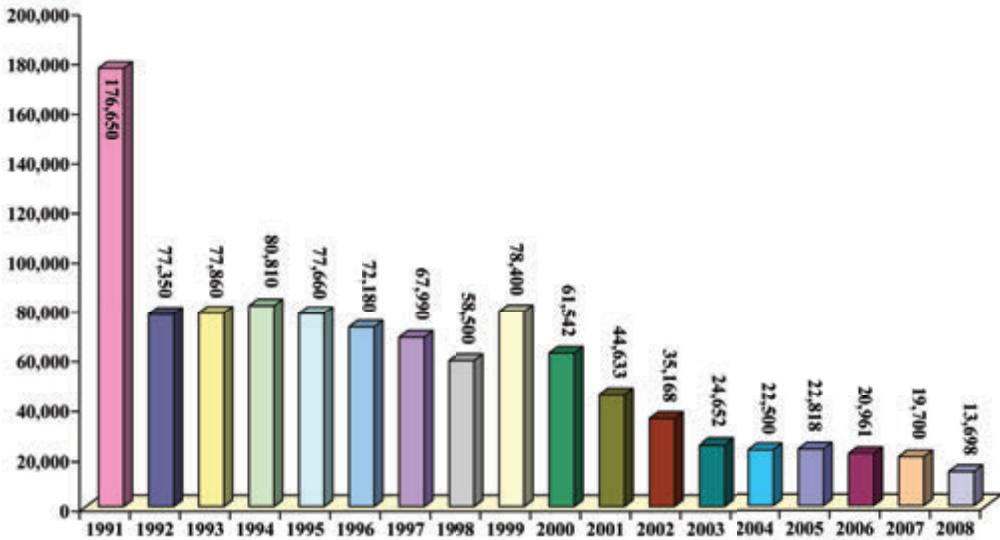
During the year 2008, the immigrants to Israel totaled 13,698 compared to 19,700 in 2007. This marked reduction in immigration, 30.5%, is compatible with the descending rate of immigration to Israel since 2000, which triggered the Jewish Agency to declare, early in 2008 and on the request of some of its major donors, its intention to close the Agency’s immigration department³⁶ (see table 3/2). In the same context, based on statistical data, the Palestinian Central Statistic Bureau declared that the Jewish and Palestinian inhabitants of historical Palestine will be equal in number by 2016,³⁷ as the latter, according to the Bureau’s statistics, reached by the end of 2008 about 5.1 million.

Table 3/2: Number of Jewish Immigrants to Israel 1991-2008³⁸

Year	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
No. of immigrants	176,650	77,350	77,860	80,810	77,660	72,180	67,990	58,500	78,400

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
No. of immigrants	61,542	44,633	35,168	24,652	22,500	22,818	20,961	19,700	13,698	1,033,072

Number of Jewish Immigrants to Israel 1991-2008

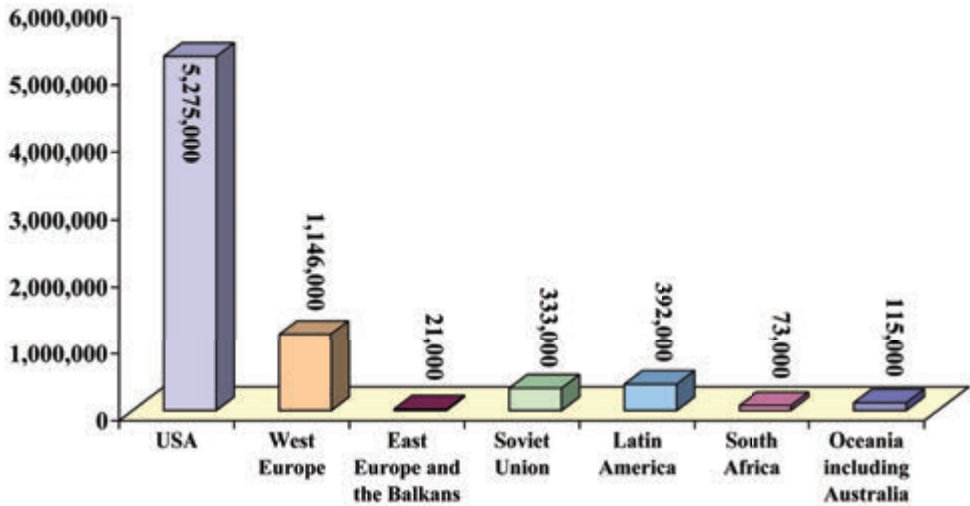


In another opinion poll conducted by Dahaf Institute on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the “establishment of Israel”, 52% of the respondents indicated that they do not rule out immigration from Israel if means are provided, 24% of the respondents said that what may impel them to depart is their lack of confidence in the future of the state of Israel or their concern about the future of their children, while 12% attributed this possible desire to the deteriorating security conditions and their fear of a probable war, and 10% said that an offer of a lucrative job abroad will be the factor for their possible quitting. Meanwhile, 30% of the respondents said that they feel ashamed of being Israelis, but 70% maintained that they are not at all ashamed of being so. 32% of the ashamed attributed this feeling to the standard of the Israeli politicians, while 20% and 13% respectively related this to the spread of violence and racism in the society, and 5% emphasized that they are ashamed of being Israelis because of the occupation.³⁹

According to statistics of the Jewish agency, as summarized in the annual report of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute (JPPPI), the Jewish world population in early 2008 totaled 13.225 millions, an increase by 70 thousands over 2007. They included 5.275 million Jews in the USA, 1.146 millions in West Europe, 21 thousands in East Europe and the Balkans, 333 thousands in the countries of

the former Soviet Union, 392 thousands in Latin America, 73 thousands in South Africa and 115 thousands in Oceania including Australia. Across the world, the Jews suffer from family disintegration, mixed marriage and integration in western societies, which would all negatively affect worldwide Jewish population growth.⁴⁰ This dwindling, estimated by the Jewish Agency to be as low as 3% by 2020 despite an expected 15% increase in the Jewish population in Israel alone, will be instrumental in reducing the world Jewish population.⁴¹

Numbers of Jews in Selected Countries (Beginning of 2008)



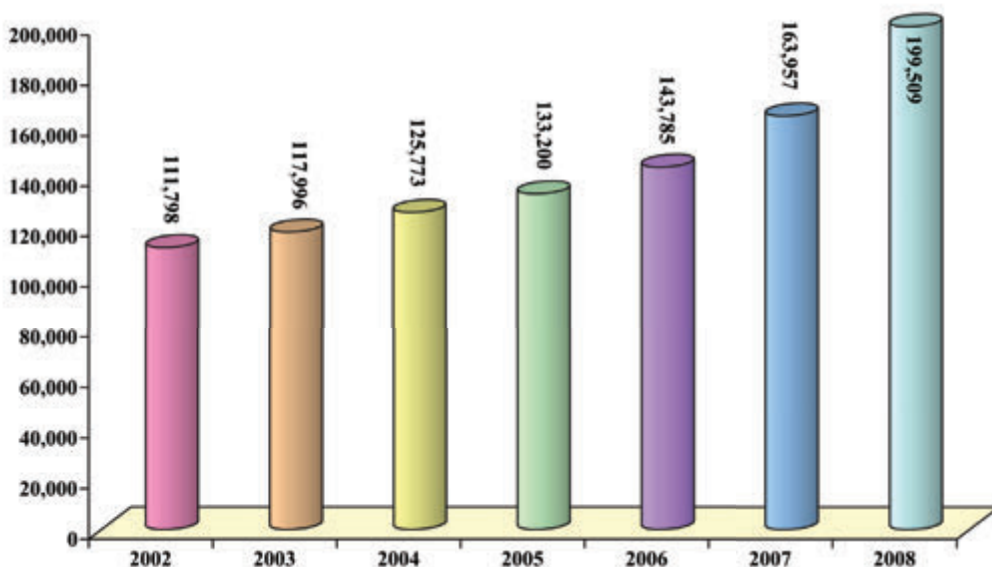
2. The Economic Indicators

Official Israeli statistics record an increase in the percentage of change in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) compared to the previous year in 2008, i.e. 6.3% compared to 5.1% in 2007.⁴² The GDP rose in 2008 to 715.8 billion shekels (\$199.51 billion, according to the exchange rate of the dollar in 2008) compared to 673.55 billion shekels in 2007 (\$163.96 billion, according to the exchange rate of the dollar in 2007).⁴³ We should note that the information that is given here is derived from official statistics that are updated from time to time, and that an important factor for this significant rise in the GDP is the decrease in the dollar's rate of exchange versus the shekel, from 4.1081 shekels per dollar in 2007 to 3.5878 shekels in 2008.

Table 4/2: Israeli Gross Domestic Product and Gross National Income (GNI) 2002-2008⁴⁴

Year	GDP		Less: Net income paid abroad		GNI		Shekel exchange rate (according to Bank of Israel)
	Million shekels	\$ Million	Million shekels	\$ Million	Million shekels	\$ Million	
2002	529,675	111,798	20,256	4,275	509,419	107,522	4.7378
2003	536,680	117,996	18,946	4,166	517,734	113,830	4.5483
2004	563,713	125,773	16,470	3,675	547,243	122,098	4.482
2005	597,773	133,200	7,027	1,566	590,746	131,634	4.4878
2006	640,776	143,785	-422	-95	641,198	143,879	4.4565
2007	673,552	163,957	133	32	673,419	163,925	4.1081
2008	715,800	199,509	2,579	719	713,221	198,791	3.5878

Israeli Gross Domestic Product 2002-2008 (\$ million)

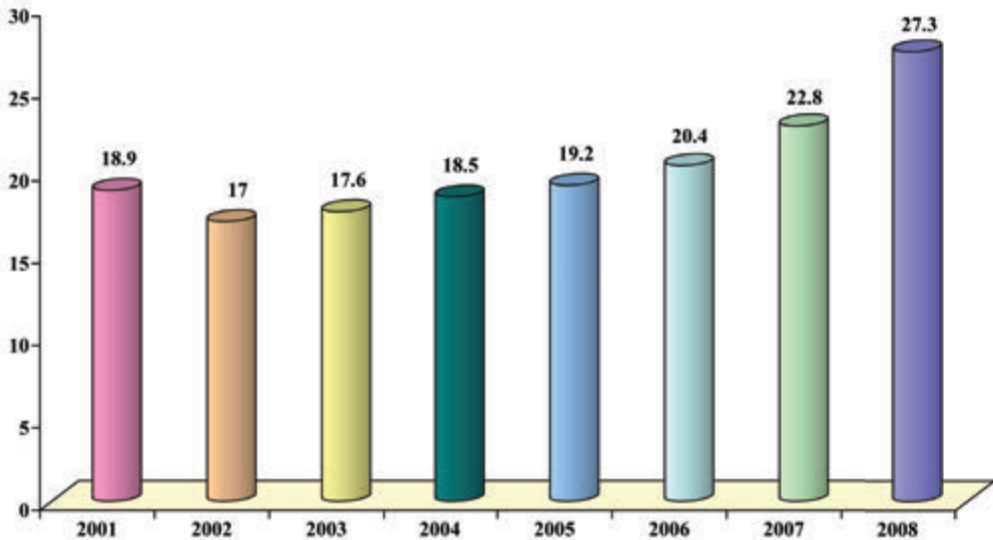


According to the statistics of Bank of Israel, the per capita income rose from \$22,800 in 2007 to \$27,300 in 2008 (see table 5/2).

Table 5/2: Israeli GDP per Capita 2001-2008 (\$ thousand)⁴⁵

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
GDP per capita	18.9	17	17.6	18.5	19.2	20.4	22.8	27.3

Israeli GDP per Capita 2001-2008 (\$ thousand)



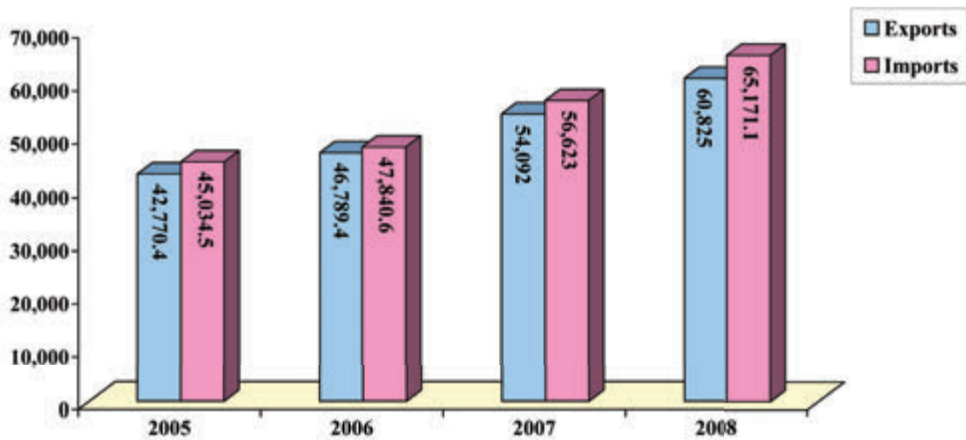
The general expenditure for the year 2008 totaled \$86.387 billion, i.e. 43.3% of the GDP,⁴⁶ while the external Israeli debt was \$89.529 billion by the end of the third quarter of 2008.⁴⁷

The Israeli exports for the year 2008 totaled \$60.83 billion compared to 54.09 billion in 2007, i.e. an increase of 12.4%. As for the 2008 imports, it was \$65.17 billion compared with \$56.62 billion in 2007, i.e. an increase of 15.1%. Hence, 2008 witnessed the usual deficit in the Israeli balance of trade (see table 6/2).

**Table 6/2: Total Israeli Exports and Imports
2005-2008 (\$ million)⁴⁸**

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008
Exports	42,770.4	46,789.4	54,092	60,825
Imports	45,034.5	47,840.6	56,623	65,171.1

Total Israeli Exports and Imports 2005-2008 (\$ million)



The USA continued to be Israel's first trading partner. For its exports to USA in 2008 totaled \$19.98 billion, i.e. 33% of the total Israeli exports. As for the Israeli imports from the USA during the same year, they totaled \$8.03 billion, i.e. about 12% of the total Israeli imports. To a large extent, Israel compensates its trade deficit with most of its trade partners through its trade surplus with the USA, approximately \$12 billion, which constitutes a formidable support to the Israeli economy (see table 7/2).

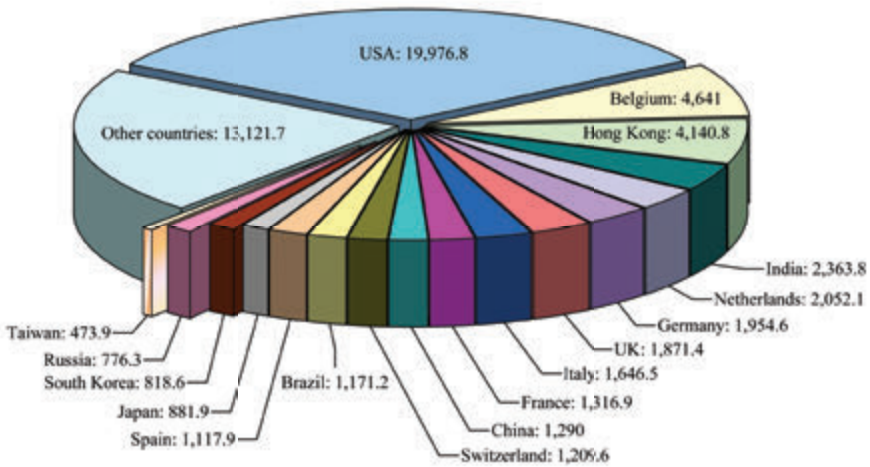
Belgium continued to be Israel's second best trade partner, as its exports to Belgium totaled \$4.64 billion, while its imports from Belgium was \$4.25 billion. This advance status of Belgium was apparently due to the trade in diamond and other precious minerals.

Besides the USA and Belgium, the most prominent countries that received Israeli exports in 2008 were in descending order Hong Kong (\$4.14 billion), India (\$2.36 billion), Netherlands (\$2.05 billion), Germany (\$1.95 billions), Britain, Italy, France and China. As for the most prominent exporting countries to Israel in 2008, they were in descending order China (\$4.24 billion), Switzerland (\$3.97 billion), Germany (\$3.94 billion), Italy (\$2.55 billion), Britain, Netherlands, Japan and France (see table 7/2). The rise in the size of Israeli exports to India is apparently closely associated with trade in armament, while that of Hong Kong is attributed to the fact that Hong Kong constitutes a centre for re-exporting Israeli goods to different part of the world.

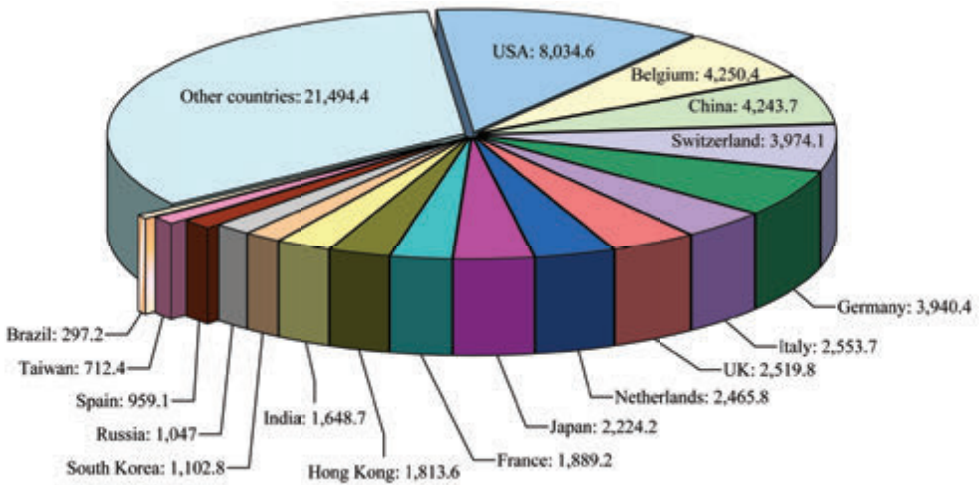
**Table 7/2: Israeli Exports and Imports with Selected Countries
2005-2008 (\$ million)⁴⁹**

Countries	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2008	2007	2006	2005	2008	2007	2006	2005
USA	19,976.8	18,906.8	17,957.2	15,500.1	8,034.6	7,848.9	5,919.5	6,042.1
Belgium	4,641	4,070.8	3,068.4	3,679.5	4,250.4	4,454.9	3,936.9	4,557.7
Hong Kong	4,140.8	3,118.4	2,776.1	2,373.6	1,813.6	1,747.5	1,527.5	1,277.7
India	2,363.8	1,613.7	1,289.4	1,222.8	1,648.7	1,689.6	1,433.7	1,276.2
Netherlands	2,052.1	1,609.3	1,312.2	1,259.7	2,465.8	2,090.3	1,786.8	1,626.7
Germany	1,954.6	1,913	1,757.9	1,345.9	3,940.4	3,484.3	3,201.4	2,986
UK	1,871.4	1,938.1	1,601.7	1,649.9	2,519.8	2,681.4	2,458.6	2,552.1
Italy	1,646.5	1,284.4	1,072.7	897.8	2,553.7	2,302.1	1,839.4	1,733.7
France	1,316.9	1,313.2	1,092.2	882.6	1,889.2	1,480.9	1,301.5	1,203.8
China	1,290	1,040.6	958.8	747.9	4,243.7	3,476.9	2,427.7	1,888.3
Switzerland	1,209.6	1,036.1	809	900.3	3,974.1	2,882.3	2,805.9	2,464.7
Brazil	1,171.2	671.6	465.7	467.3	297.2	270.7	209.4	166.5
Spain	1,117.9	1,106	903	687.8	959.1	811.9	749	613.7
Japan	881.9	769.6	792.8	799.1	2,224.2	1,882.1	1,292.3	1,238.1
South Korea	818.6	746.1	650	449.8	1,102.8	945.4	893.6	852.7
Russia	776.3	611.5	524.6	417.6	1,047	1,398.8	1,141.6	1,055.7
Taiwan	473.9	563	589.8	602.3	712.4	708.7	617	553.4
Other countries	13,121.7	11,779.8	9,167.9	8,886.4	21,494.4	16,466.3	14,298.8	12,945.4
Total	60,825	54,092	46,789.4	42,770.4	65,171.1	56,623	47,840.6	45,034.5

Israeli Exports to Selected Countries 2008 (\$ million)



Israeli Imports from Selected Countries 2008 (\$ million)



Manufactured goods, including electronics and machinery, top the list of Israeli exports, followed by diamond. As for the imports, the most important products are raw materials, rough and polished diamond and fuels (see tables 8/2 and 9/2).

Table 8/2: Israeli Exports by Commodity Group 2007-2008 (\$ million)⁵⁰

Year	Agricultural	Manufacturing	Diamonds		Others	Total
			Polished	Rough		
2007	1,326	34,028.6	7,116.9	3,373.2	71.8	45,916.5
2008	1,253.8	39,871.1	6,299.2	3,318.2	64.3	50,806.6

Table 9/2: Israeli Imports by Commodity Group 2007-2008 (\$ million)⁵¹

Year	Consumer goods	Raw materials	Investment goods	Fuels	Diamonds rough and polished net	Others	Total
2007	6,851.9	21,394.9	8,691.6	8,935.4	9,642.5	589	56,105.3
2008	8,118	24,099.8	10,434.2	12,847.7	8,835.3	194.4	64,529.4

In its 2008 report, the Bank of Israel admitted that the repercussions of the international recession on the Israeli economy have become tangible by the end of the year. This impact was expressed in steep declines in exports and tax revenues and a decline in private consumption. Employment stopped rising, wages dropped, and unemployment started to climb.⁵²

Some Israeli economic experts estimated the damage resulting from the world crisis on the 2008 budget by three billion dollars. According to the Chief Scientist of the Research and Development Department of the Israeli Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor, the most damaged were the small businesses because of the dwindling consumption of and demand for their products.⁵³

Since the recession had adversely affected the wealthy American, European and other Jews, some Israeli officials and the Jewish Agency officials expressed their concern of the probability of a sharp drop in the donations of American Jewish organizations and other Jewish organizations of the world to Israel. Besides this considerable retraction in donations, the sufferings of Israel from the crisis is, in their view, also attributed to the devaluation of the dollar versus the shekel and other world currencies. *The Marker* newspaper, which is of the group of *Haaretz* newspaper, published a long report on the anxiety caused by this development among thousands of Israeli philanthropic societies whose budgets reach 80 billion shekels, approximately \$21.7 billion according to the dollar exchange rate of

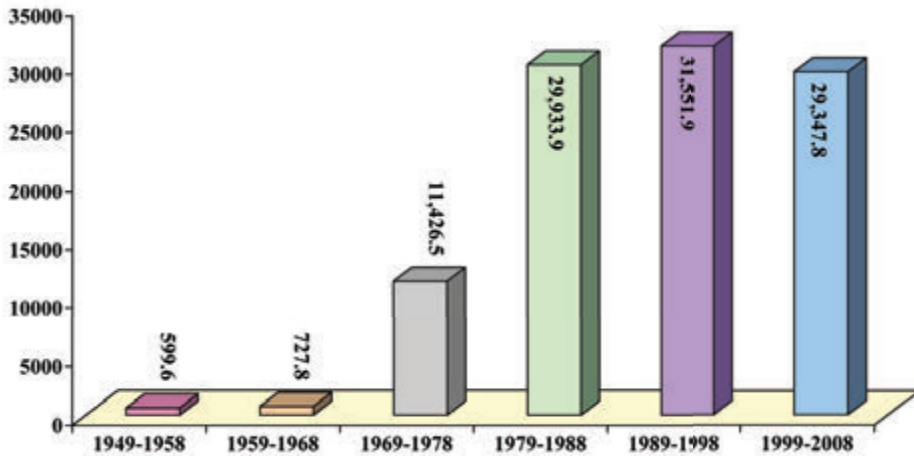
October 2008. For these donations constitute 10% of their total budgets, and some of the societies depend largely on them. According to the report, rich Jews declared the reduction of their donations by more than 50%, which meant a serious blow to the hundreds of societies whose budgets depend on these donations.⁵⁴

Though Israel is considered a rich and developed country, it still receives a US foreign annual assistance. The military assistance that it received in 2008 amounted to \$2.4 billion, compared to \$2.34 billion in 2007, out of the total aid of \$2.5 billion that it received in the same year. The American military aid to Israel is expected to increase to \$2.55 billion in 2009. Hence, the aid that America extended to Israel during the period 1949-2008 reached, according to the report of Congressional Research Service (CRS), \$103.59 billion (see table 10/2).⁵⁵

Table 10/2: American Aid to Israel 1949-2008 (\$ million)

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	29,347.8

American Aid to Israel 1949-2008 (\$ million)



American aid to Israel totaled \$1.18 billion and \$11.533 billion, respectively during the periods 1949-1967 and 1968-1978. Since Camp David Accords of 1979 and until Oslo Accords of 1993, Israel received American aid of \$45.93 billion, and the total American aid to Israel during the period 1994-2008 totaled \$44.903 billion.⁵⁶

Due to the considerable improvement in the Israeli economy in the midst 1990s, the justification for the huge American subsidy to Israel had become less convincing. Hence, with the prior consent of the Hebrew state, USA decided in 1998 to gradually eliminate the \$1.2 billion economic aid, by cuts of approximately \$120 million per annum and over a period of ten years. In return, military aid to Israel would increase during the same period by \$60 million, i.e. from \$1.8 billion to \$2.4 billion. In August 2007, USA announced that it would increase US military assistance to Israel by six billion dollars over the next decade, thus the incremental annual increase will reach three billion dollars a year by 2018.⁵⁷

Some Israeli analysts maintain that the global economic crisis is bound to have important impact on the American aid to Israel, for the Hebrew state would ultimately be compelled to relinquish a sizeable part of this aid. In case of a probable dangerous recession, many Americans will lose their jobs, houses and savings, hence Israel could not possibly insist to have the same level of aid from the USA. Thus, these analysts argue, Israel is advised to voluntarily relinquish part of this aid, though they are well aware that the significance of this aid is not essentially in burdening the American tax payers with part of the security cost of the Hebrew state, but rather in the clear and unequivocal American commitment to strengthen the Israeli army and maintain its qualitative superiority. Thus, the aid is viewed as part and parcel of the Israeli deterrent power, rather than just a source of income. According to this logic, it is essential that Israel be at the top of those countries that receive American aid.⁵⁸

3. The Military Indicators

During the year 2008, the Israeli military establishment continued to experience the repercussions of its war on Lebanon in summer 2006. Early in the year, Winograd Commission submitted its final report on the events of this war, which minuted “the inability of the strongest army in the Middle East to defeat a semi-military organization [Hizbullah].”⁵⁹ However, the Israeli army tried to draw lessons from this war, which had seriously questioned the Israeli military theories and war tactics on the ground. Meanwhile, Israel continued during the year preparations for a possible war against Hizbullah, Syria and GS, besides its probable participation in a strike against the Iranian nuclear project. The end of 2008 witnessed an Israeli war on Gaza, which appeared to be an attempt to restore the credibility of the “deterrent power” of the Israeli military establishment, which had been seriously shaken by the outcome of its war on Lebanon.

In this respect, it worth mentioning that the Knesset's committee of foreign affairs and security issued in December 2007 an interesting report that enumerated the failures of the Second Lebanon War in the summer of 2006. The report indicated that the Hebrew state had superseded in its war against Hizbullah "the engagement theory", as it was engaged in a battle in which the party was able to stand firm, and the war ended without a victory to Israel, notwithstanding its huge resources. The report demonstrated that the Israeli deterrent reputation had been seriously shattered by this war, and it also expressed concern about the very existence of Israel, and its role in the map of the new Middle East.⁶⁰

In a special conference, held in December 2007 in the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) of Tel Aviv University, Gabi Ashkenazi, the Chief of Staff of the Israeli army, summarized the efforts to rebuild and enlarge the Israeli army in the coming years as follows: to maintain the size and forms of the present forces, to consolidate the power of deterrent, alertness and long endurance, to develop the ability of land maneuvering, to consolidate the elements of strength, leadership and the defensive capability, to invest on the fighting capabilities and to maintain the qualitative superiority.⁶¹

Military analysts observed a qualitative transformation during the year 2008 in the Israeli military combat doctrine. Gadi Eizencout, General Officer Commanding (GOC) Northern Command, emphasized that the Israeli army will continue to give priority to excessive firing capability, though its chosen targets will be different from those in previous conflicts. The general revealed the so-called "Dahiya Doctrine", saying that what happened to the Dahiya neighborhood of Beirut in 2006 will happen to each village from which Israel is fired on.⁶² Major-General Giora Eiland, former head of the National Security Council, reiterated the necessity of depending on the firepower capability and of selecting qualitative new targets. He warned that Israel failed in the Second Lebanon War (and may also fail in a subsequent encounter) because it targeted the wrong enemy. Israel fought against Hizbullah instead of fighting against the Republic of Lebanon.⁶³ According to a report issued by the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies, reserve Colonel Gabriel Siboni repeated the same convictions, namely the necessity of depending in a future war on heavy firing and careful selection of the qualitative targets.⁶⁴ It is worth noting here that this combat doctrine was crystal clear in the Israeli war on Gaza of late 2008, where the Israeli army fired barrages of artillery causing the

death of thousands of Palestinians and wide-scale destruction of institutions and infrastructure in Gaza.

In this respect, it should be noted that reliance on barrage of fire was not a new Israeli practice, as it was employed previously and long before the aggression on Lebanon and Gaza, namely in Deir Yasin, Isma'iliya, Suez, Port Said and in al-Nabatiyyah and Jenin camps, which demonstrates that it has been a systematic and consistent Israeli conduct.

Within the lessons drawn from the Second Lebanon War, Israel held, during the period 6-10/4/2008, the largest ever emergency civil defense drill, known as Turning Point 2 (*Nekudat Mifne 2*), which assumed the exposition of Israel to Syrian and Iranian rocket attacks accompanied by a Syrian land attack to restore the Golan Heights. During these exercises, sirens sounded nationwide, medical teams treated presumable victims of chemical weapons, firemen contributed also, teams rushed to the rescue of survivors from a collapsed building and hospitals prepared to treat tens of wounded. Presumed scenarios were also made to involve the government, where the prime minister was to conduct situation reviews and to make decisions based on the various scenarios as they unfold.⁶⁵

Based on lessons acquired from the latest war on Lebanon, the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee approved a bill in July 2008 that will permit expanding the scope of operation of the National Security Council, which from here on will be called the National Security Headquarters (NSH); while Dani Arditi, head of the NSH, will be given more jurisdiction. The NSH is to advise the government on matters regarding foreign and security affairs and to have direct access to the prime minister and the government and its mission would be presenting alternatives to the positions of the army on the political level.⁶⁶

During 2008, the Israeli military establishment continued to implement Tefen 2012 plan which had been drawn in 2007 after the war on Lebanon. It concentrated on steps to be taken to strengthen the army and to improve the capabilities of training, ammunition reserves, arms purchase, combat means, and armament. The plan had particularly addressed the issues of human resources, land forces, and reserve forces. All this was in response to the controversy that the 2006 war had provoked on the character and form of the army, and on the phenomenon of military desertion, its scale, extent and real motives.⁶⁷

Within this plan, the American Ministry of Defense informed the congress in August 2008 that Israel wants to buy \$1.9 billion worth of nine C-130J Hercules planes.⁶⁸ By the end of September, the Pentagon has approved an Israeli request to 25 stealth technology enabled F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, with an option for the purchase another 50. Each plane is estimated to cost between \$70 million to \$80 million.⁶⁹

The peak of the American military aid to the Hebrew state, which was received on 24/8/2008 and installed in al-Naqab (the Negev) Desert, was an advanced radar system linked to the JTAGS deterrent system to intercept surface-to-surface missiles. According to some Israeli military experts, quoted by the Israeli National Radio, this radar, whose range was two thousand kilometers, was installed in the military base Nevatim in southern Israel, and operated by a permanent staff of 120 American officers. According to American sources, this radar system would give a few more minutes lead time for the Israel's Arrow-2 Missile Interceptor System (Hetz) in the Iranian Shahab-3 missiles interception pushing it out beyond Israel itself and into neighboring atmospheres.⁷⁰ The Israeli newspaper *Maariv* mentioned on 3/10/2008 that the Israeli army would also install in al-Naqab Desert two massive radar antennae to bolster its defense measures against the "Iranian missile threat". The 400 meter-high antennae will be erected near the no-fly zone of Dimona.⁷¹

The American Defense Ministry also approved to provide Israel with one thousand "smart bombs" of the brand GBU-39 and their related equipments to the value of \$77 million. These bombs are capable of penetrating 1.5 meters of steel-reinforced concrete, and their explosive ability is similar to the Israeli one-ton bombs (bunker buster bombs). They will strengthen the Israeli defense capabilities, and would make each plane carry four times as many bombs.⁷²

The American Ministry of Defense also approved a deal to upgrade the Israeli Patriot anti-aircraft missiles, and to supply Israel with 28 thousand LAW (Light Anti-Tank Weapon) tube launchers for land forces.⁷³ By the end of 2008, some officials in the Israeli ministry of defense called upon the American Congress to end export ban of the F-22 stealth fighters and to allow Israel to buy sixty of them.⁷⁴

Within the drive to strengthen the Israeli missile power, it was said that Israel had successfully fired from Palmahim air force base, south of Tel Aviv, "Jericho III" surface-to-surface missile. The Israeli missile is capable of carrying both conventional and non-unconventional warheads from a land base and towards a long range land

target.⁷⁵ In April 2008, Israel tested its Arrow anti-ballistic missile system. It simulated an interception of a mimic joint Iranian-Syrian-Hizbullah missile attack on occupied Jerusalem and Tel Aviv that by a trained unit of the Israeli air force using Arrow-2 Missile Interceptor System (Hetz).⁷⁶

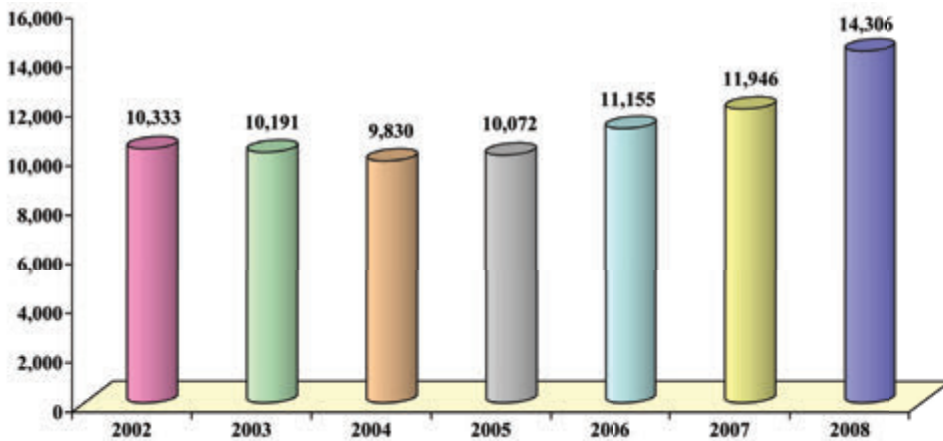
In the same context some Israeli sources reported an agreement concluded between Lieutenant General Henry A “Trey” Obering, Director of the Missile Defense Agency, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and senior officials of the Israeli security agencies on that the United States government’s department of Defense supports the development of Hetz-3 anti-ballistic missiles. According to the agreement, the manufacture of Hetz-3 missile, which is developed by the Israeli aerospace industries, would be divided between the aerospace industries and the Boeing aerospace corporation. The estimated cost is 700-800 million dollars, and the time duration is three years.⁷⁷ The Israeli radio reported an Israeli-German agreement to develop a joint radar system that detects ballistic missiles with nuclear war heads through sensors and infrared rays that feed into the system deployed for intercepting the ballistic missiles.⁷⁸

Within the effort to strengthen Israel with a powerful spy satellite, the 10th channel of the Israeli television reported on 20/1/2008, that the TecSar satellite which has an advanced radar was sent into orbit by an Indian rocket from the Sriharikota launching range in south-east India, it includes an advanced imaging system based on Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) technology. It enables Israel to track Iran’s nuclear activities. This technology is able to transmit highly accurate pictures at night and in cloudy weather.⁷⁹ On 28/4/2008, some Israeli media sources reported the launching from a centre in Kazakhstan of the Israeli satellite Amos-3 that was designed and constructed by the Israeli Aerospace Industries to replace Amos-1 that was launched earlier in 1996.⁸⁰

It is very difficult to know the exact figure of the Israeli military budget, as many of its confidential aspects are not revealed and some of the purchasing or selling deals are concluded in secret. In addition, the budget itself is subject to some revisions during the fiscal year, which may increase or decrease it. However, according to the Israeli central statistics office, the military expenditure for 2008 totaled 51.33 billions shekels (\$14.31 billion).

Table 11/2: Official Israeli Military Expenditure 2002-2008⁸¹

Year	Million shekels	\$ Million
2002	48,957	10,333
2003	46,351	10,191
2004	44,060	9,830
2005	45,199	10,072
2006	49,711	11,155
2007	49,074	11,946
2008	51,328	14,306

Official Israeli Military Expenditure 2002-2008 (\$ Million)

The global economic crisis is expected to have wide range impact on the Israeli security policy. In fact, following this crisis, the Hebrew state is exploring the possibility of introducing some amendments on the deal of purchasing F-35 American planes.⁸² Moreover, in a piece published in *Haaretz* newspaper, an Israeli researcher, Aluf Benn, alerted that the Israeli defense establishment and treasury need to prepare for the aid reduction, or at least for a halt in its gradual increase. In addition, Benn called the Israeli army to pull long-term projects and put off equipping new planes and ships. Some creative thinking will be also necessary to consider alternatives to the US aid, like a long-term loan of equipment or an expansion of American deployment in Israel beyond the US radar system in the Negev. In this respect, Benn indicated that withdrawal from the WB or Golan Heights could justify American compensation in the form of increased aid or special grants to fund security arrangements. But at the moment, no such deals are on the table. Maintaining the relationship with the United States during its time of

crisis requires Israel to take into consideration the problems of its friends, and to relinquish some of the financial aid it had expected to receive.⁸³

Though still enjoying a high status in the hierarchy of the Israeli state and society, the army suffered in this year, as during previous years, from the problem of having suitable soldiers. According to a report by *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper, published in mid 2008, that 2008 draft encountered the smallest age group set for military service in twenty years, which is the peak of the 12% decline in the Israeli army recruits.

Moreover, data released by the human resources department of the Israeli army maintained that 44% of women do not recruit in the army, and the percentage of women who seek an exemption based on religious observance is on the rise, 33.1% by mid 2008.⁸⁴ Other Israeli data indicated a significant 50% reduction in the percentage of Bedouin Arab recruits in the Israeli army, i.e. from 400 recruits in 2004 to 222 in 2007.⁸⁵ Besides, there are indicators of a noticeable rejection of recruitment in the Israeli army by the Arab Druz.⁸⁶ On another vein, the 10th channel of the Israeli television maintained, on the 2nd anniversary of the Second Lebanon War, that one third of the participants in military operations suffer from psychological trauma. According to data revealed by the Israeli army, 800 soldiers are victims of persistent war hallucinations, and that most of them are, in the army's terminology, "psychologically handicapped".⁸⁷ In an article published by *Haaertz* newspaper, Yagil Levy, a political sociologist at the Open University, maintained that the extent of the infiltration of the settlers and the graduates of yeshivas in the army units deployed in the WB is significant that the Israeli army lost control over them. Hence is the widespread saying, "soldiers must not examine the deeds of the settlers through the eyes of the law, since the settlers are carrying out a Zionist act in building the outposts, although it is illegal," which shows that the army lacks any real ability to carry out the evacuation of the settlements in the WB.⁸⁸

Third: Aggression and Resistance

Israel capitalized on the Palestinian schism to continue its aggression on the Palestinian people during the year 2008. Meanwhile, the resistance operations were, as in the previous year, essentially defensive, though more precise and wider in range missile attacks continued. By mid 2008, a six month calm period between

Israel and the resistance factions was concluded. But the Hebrew state violated this truce many times, which had finally culminated by the end of the year in its extensive aggression on GS. Besides tightening the siege and the aggression on Gaza, the Israeli forces continued their occupation of the WB and enhanced in 2008 their security coordination with the PA.

The conflicting figures of the dead and wounded given by different sources, including the Palestinian sources themselves as well as the Israeli sources, had obliged us to finally opt for particular figures.

During the year 2008, 910 Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire of whom 844 dead were from Gaza and 66 from the WB, including Jerusalem. Amongst the killed were 144 minors (i.e. of less than 18 years old). The highest number of killed was in December (422), followed by March (121), while 2,258 Palestinians were wounded.⁸⁹

Under the code name “Hot Winter”, the Israeli army launched on 27/2/2008 a military operation focused on Jabalia Camp and al-Shuja‘iyyah suburb in Gaza. It continued until 3/3/2008, and left behind 107 killed of whom 27 were children.⁹⁰

Figures released by the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (B’Tselem) record 21 Israeli dead by Palestinian operations during 2008 (with the exception of those killed during the aggression on Gaza). Eight of them were killed in the 6/3/2008 attack at the religious institute Mercaz Harav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, and three were killed, on 2/7/2008, on an attack by a tractor driver in the centre of Jerusalem. Seven other Israelis and one foreign citizen were killed by rocket and mortar attacks launched from Gaza. In addition, ten members of the Israeli security forces were killed, seven in the Occupied Territories and three inside Israel. The latter were killed during an exchange of gunfire with Palestinians who had approached the perimeter fence near the Kerem Shalom kibbutz.⁹¹

In 2008, 2,048 rockets and more than 1,672 mortar shells were fired (except those fired during the late aggression on Gaza) by the Palestinian resistance factions into Israel from the Gaza Strip (according to the Shabak). Five Israelis were killed by this fire (up to 26 December), and 464 were wounded.⁹² During 2008, Hamas continued the detention in Gaza of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and pledged not to release him except with a deal by which about one thousand Palestinian detainees be released from Israeli prisons.

1. The War on Gaza

About a week after the expiry of the calm period on 19/12/ 2008, Israel launched on 27/12/2008 a 22 day extensive aggression on Gaza, codenamed “Cast Lead”. The casualties were 1,334 killed, amongst who were 417 children, 108 women, 120 elderly people and 14 of the medical staff, and 5,450 wounded of whom half were children.⁹³ The direct economic cost of this aggression was \$1.9 billion,⁹⁴ and that inflicted on Gaza infrastructure was \$1.2 billion.⁹⁵

By this war on Gaza, Israel aimed at restoring the deterrent power of its military establishment that was seriously shaken after its late war on Lebanon. In the Gaza aggression, the Hebrew state sought to apply the “Dahiya Doctrine”, whereby the Israeli army heavily depended on extensive and widespread firing, which killed and wounded thousands of Palestinians and caused massive destruction, in order to impose a major change in the Palestinian resistance cost and effect formula.⁹⁶

Israel successfully targeted a number of the Palestinian political and military symbols. Due to the first day surprise air attacks on the security and police headquarters, Major-General Tawfiq Jabr, the Commander of the Police Force in Gaza, and Lieutenant Colonel Isma'il al-Ja'abari, the Commander of the Security and Protection Service, along with 230 civil policemen, killed. Amongst the killed were the Hamas prominent leader Nizar Rayyan with 13 members of his family, and Sa'id Siyam, Hamas minister of the Interior in the deposed Hamas-led government.⁹⁷ 48 fighters of al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas of whom the most prominent was Abu Zakariya al-Jamal, also slain.⁹⁸ Though al-Qassam Brigades are reputed for the accurate statistics of their casualties, they seemed to have been this time too much in a hurry to wait to know who killed in the advanced battle fronts or under the rubble during their resistance of the aggression. Subsequent statistics showed that their death were much more than they originally gave, i.e. 175 were killed. Saraya al-Quds, the military wing of (PIJ), *al-Aqsa* Martyrs Brigades of Fatah, and the National Resistance Brigades, the military wing of (DFLP), announced their killed, respectively 34,⁹⁹ 32 and 13.¹⁰⁰

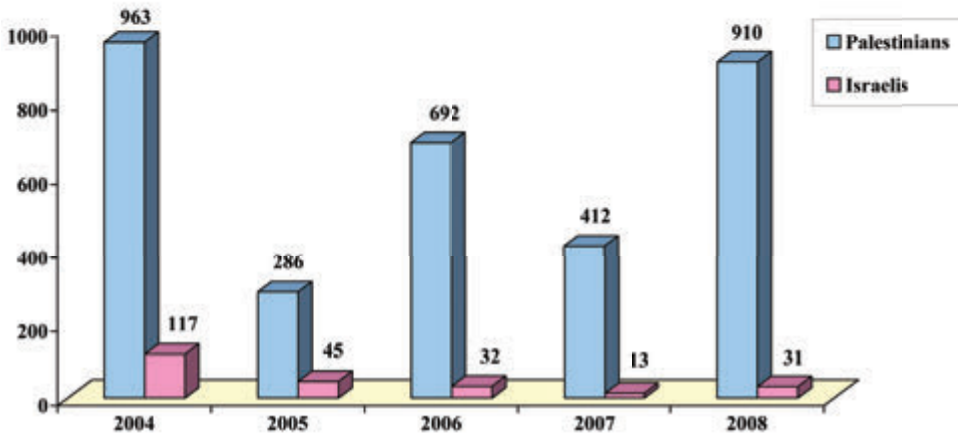
During the last war on Gaza, the Palestinian military wings, particularly al-Qassam Brigades, launched 571 missiles and 205 mortar shells that killed four Israelis and wounded 367 others, besides hundreds who suffered from shock and trauma.¹⁰¹ However, Israel admitted that its death toll was 13 only, of whom 10 were soldiers.¹⁰² On their part, these military wings extended their targets to the

towns and settlements in southern Israel in an operation codenamed by al-Qassam Brigades “Operation Oil Stain”, where the Palestinian missiles reached as far as Beersheba (40 km east of the Strip), Ashdod (30 km north of Gaza), Ashkelon (*‘Asqalan*) (20 km north of the Strip), Netivot settlement (25 Km east of Gaza), the town of Sderot (10 km north east of Gaza), and al-Majdal (25 km north of the Strip), as well as Western Negev (*al-Naqab al-Gharbi*) and other settlements such as Zakeem, Yavne, Mivtahim, Kiryat Gat, Kiryat Malachi, and Ofakim, besides the Hatzerim Airbase, the army base Zeelim and other strategic locations.¹⁰³ The spokesman of al-Qassam Brigades emphasized that the Brigades had twice tried to abduct Israeli soldiers, but the Israeli army had in both cases waged bombardments that killed the Palestinian fighters and the kidnapped Israeli soldiers.¹⁰⁴ On their part, some Israeli media sources admitted that such attempts were made and that strict orders were given to all Israeli soldiers to avoid arrest whatever the circumstances may be.¹⁰⁵ Lt. Col. Shuki Ribak, a battalion commander in the Golani Brigade, told his soldiers at the beginning of Operation Cast Lead, “No fighter from battalion 51 gets captured. You blow up a grenade on the kidnappers and you don’t get taken.”¹⁰⁶ which gives credibility to the Palestinian story versus the official Israeli denial. Al-Qassam Brigades also announced that they confronted the Israeli tanks with 98 shells and anti-tank missiles, some of the anti-tank missiles was used for the first time, exploded 79 explosive devices, executed 53 sniping and 12 ambush operations, besides engaging in 19 direct clashes with the Israeli forces and one self-immolation operation. Al-Qassam also stressed that it totally or partially destroyed 47 tanks, bulldozers and troop carriers, hit four helicopters and destroyed one reconnaissance aircraft.¹⁰⁷

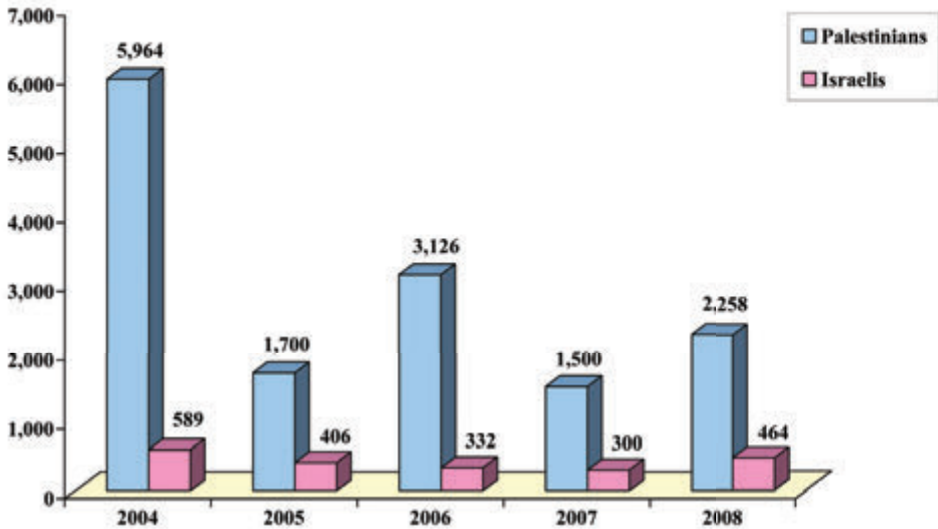
Table 12/2: The Killed and Wounded among the Palestinians and the Israelis during 2004-2008¹⁰⁸

Year	Killed		Wounded	
	Palestinians	Israelis	Palestinians	Israelis
2004	963	117	5,964	589
2005	286	45	1,700	406
2006	692	32	3,126	332
2007	412	13	1,500	300
2008	910	31*	2,258	464*

The Killed among the Palestinians and the Israelis 2004-2008



The Wounded among the Palestinians and the Israelis 2004-2008



2. Prisoners and Detainees¹⁰⁹

Like its predecessor, the year 2008 was one of the worst years for the detainees in Israeli jails, who totaled by the end of the year nine thousand detainees, including 75 women, 265 children, 41 members of the PLC and former ministers. The detainees from the WB (including Jerusalem) were 7,730, Gaza 1,050, and the 1948 Occupied Palestine 140.¹¹⁰ In addition, there were many detainees from various Arab countries; from the Golan Heights 13, around 30 Jordanian, one Saudi, and tens others from

Egypt and the Sudan who crossed the borders for various reasons.¹¹¹ Out of the 3,338 of the sentenced detainees 750 were sentenced to one life imprisonment or more, 3,870 are awaiting trials and 800 are held in administrative detention.¹¹²

The rate of detention in 2008 was 24% less than its predecessor 2007. For detainees in 2008 totaled 5,818 of whom 4,927 were from the WB and 891 from GS, while the Palestinians detained by the Israeli occupation forces in 2007 were 7,612 i.e. an average of 16 cases daily in 2008 compared to 21 in 2007. In 2008 Israeli courts charged and imprisoned a number of the elected members of the PLC, of the Change and Reform Bloc, for 30-40 months period, of whom the most prominent was Dr. ‘Aziz Dweik, the president of the PLC, who was imprisoned in mid December 2008 for 36 months. Meanwhile, the military court at ‘Ofar Prison tried and imprisoned Ahmad Sa‘dat, the MP and Secretary General of the PFLP, for thirty years. No doubt, the Israeli kidnapping and detention of Palestinian PLC members and ministers constitutes a gross violation of international norms and conventions, and is a flagrant aggression on the Palestinian legitimate institutions, human rights and diplomatic immunity of PLC members and ministers. The verdicts against them are indeed predominantly politically motivated.¹¹³

Table 13/2: The Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Jails 2008

No. of detainees on 1/1/2008	No. of detainees on 31/12/2008	Detainees during 2008		No. of women by the end of 2008	No. of children by the end of 2008
		WB	GS		
11,500	9,000	4,927	891	75	265

Table 14/2: The Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Jails According to Geographic Locations by the End of 2008

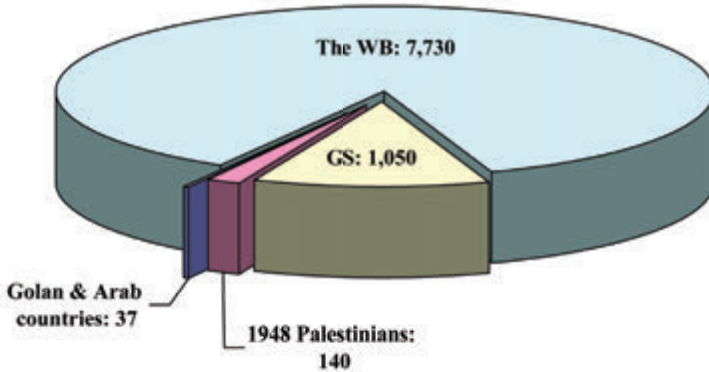
WB	GS	1948 Palestinians	Golan & Arab countries	Total
7,730	1,050	140	37	9,000

Table 15/2: The Prisoners and the Detainees in Israeli Jails According to their Legal Status by the End of 2008

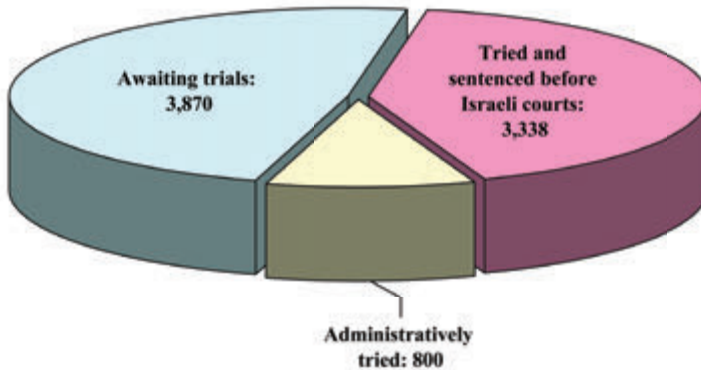
Tried and sentenced before Israeli courts	Administratively tried	Awaiting trials	Total
3,338	800	3,870	8,008*

* The Ministry of Detainees was unable to specify the legal status of 992 detainees.

The Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Jails according to Geographic Locations by the End of 2008



The Prisoners and the Detainees in Israeli Jails according to their Legal Status by the End of 2008



Israel released many of the 2008 detainees after a few days or months of their detention or by the end of the duration of their imprisonment. In the same year, the Hebrew state released, but unilaterally and selectively, 425 Palestinian detainees under what it called “good-will gesture”, and in two groups: the first, dated 25/8/2008, was composed of 198 detainees, including two of the longest-serving prisoner in Israeli custody, Sa’id al-‘Atabah and Abu ‘Ali Yattah, as well as the former M.P. Husam Khadir, and the second group, dated 15/12/2008, included 227 detainees. Thus, what remained of the 2008 detainees were 1,400.¹¹⁴

The year 2008 witnessed two prisoner swaps between Israel and the Lebanese party Hizbullah. The first was on 8/6/2008 on which Israel released and returned

to Lebanon the Lebanese prisoner Nassim Nisr in return for receiving from Hizbullah the remains of five Israeli soldiers who were killed in the July 2006 war. In the second operation, dated 16/7/2008, Israel released the dean of the Arab prisoners the Lebanese Samir al-Kuntar who was detained since 1979 and four other Lebanese prisoners detained in 2006, and handed over the remains of 199 Palestinian and Lebanese fighters. Subsequently, Israel released five Palestinian children, whose imprisonment periods were about to expire, as a good-will gesture to the secretary-general of the United Nations. In return, it got the remains of the two Israelis detained by Hizbullah since 12/7/2006, namely Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev.¹¹⁵

Though the rate of detention in 2008 retracted compared to the previous year, 2007, the living conditions of the detainees were not improved by any means. On the contrary, the occupation authorities escalated their suppressive measures against the prisoners, vis-à-vis medical negligence, torture, and prohibition of individual visitation under the guise of the so-called “security prohibition”, or even collective visitation as is the case with the relatives of Gaza detainees; besides poor food, shortage of clothes and covers and confiscation of detainees’ money. With the help of special units, Metzada and Nahshon, the prison authorities increased their sudden daily and night searches of the detainees’ rooms and tents, and used excessive force against them.¹¹⁶ In this respect, the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* disclosed on 21/11/2008 a “top secret” memorandum issued by the Israeli security organs, which allowed the investigators to use various unconventional physical and psychological methods with the Palestinian detainees. This document was given legal and judicial cover and was endorsed by the Knesset, which demonstrates that torture was a regular and institutional policy in Israeli jails, which was supported by political and judicial authorities.¹¹⁷ In 2007 two Palestinian detainees, Fadl ‘Udah ‘Atiyyah Shaheen (47 years) and Jum‘ah Isma‘il Musa (66 years), were killed in Israeli prisons in Jerusalem because of medical negligence. The Israeli authorities violently suppressed the detainees’ protest movements that demanded their human rights, of which the most brutal was what happened in ‘Ofar prison on 20/12/2008,¹¹⁸ where 28 Palestinian prisoners suffered wounds due to Israeli suppressive actions.¹¹⁹

Fourth: The Israeli Position Towards the Internal Palestinian Scene

There was no substantial change in the Israeli stance towards the internal Palestinian scene during the year 2008; it remained basically the same as in the preceding year 2008. This was mainly because the situation on the Palestinian level continued to drift as before, particularly with regard to the ongoing and deepening Palestinian political schism, the continuation of Hamas' control over GS, and the stagnation of the peace process over issues of the final status. The following is a resume of the major Israeli policies during the course of the year 2008 vis-à-vis the Palestinian file:

1. To encourage the Palestinian schism, and to support the Palestinian presidency and Fatah movement in its confrontation with Hamas in the WB and GS.
2. To consolidate the security coordination with the caretaker government in Ramallah, and to shut down all the pro-Hamas philanthropic and civil institutions in the WB under the guise of destroying the infrastructure of terrorism. In return Israel continued its previous policies in the WB, where the separation wall and military roadblocks obstructed the movements of the inhabitants, and the raids, infiltrations and arrests continued as strong as ever.
3. The continuation of the policy of economic asphyxiation and military pressure towards GS, and to strive by all means to secure the downfall of Hamas government, and to strangle and humiliate the people of Gaza in order to compel them to accept the Israeli political options.
4. To continue paralyzing the PLC through imprisoning its president and some of its members and arresting others. Moreover, there is a rising tendency in Israel to prohibit future presidential and legislative elections lest Hamas dominates them.
5. To make use of the internal Palestinian conflict to tarnish the image of the Palestinian struggle and resistance, separate between the WB and the GS, and to weaken the Palestinian negotiation position in order to get as much concessions as possible and to continue the policies of settlement and judaization in the occupied territories.

Israel continued, of their policies of economic asphyxiation and military pressure on GS, the Israeli leaders used “firm” language when describing these policies towards Hamas. At the beginning of the year 2008, the Israeli premier Ehud Olmert said, “As far as I’m concerned, the residents of Gaza can walk if they don’t have gasoline for their cars, because they have a murderous terrorist regime.” Similarly, Defense Minister Ehud Barak said in addressing the annual Herzliya Conference, “We must put more and more pressure on Gaza. What is important to us is that the residents of the western Negev and Sderot live in peace. If this ‘peace’ means ‘war’ on the other side, then there will be war.”¹²⁰ On 18/1/2008, Barak ordered “the closure of all the crossings” with Gaza,¹²¹ and Israel had a complete closure of Gaza to all fuel supplies causing power blackout, as Gaza power plant shut down of fuel shortage on 20/1/2008.¹²²

On 23/1/2008 and as a result to the Israeli policy, the Palestinians forcefully crossed the Palestinian-Egyptian border wall in southern Gaza, and thousands of them reached the towns of Rafah and al-‘Arish. However, the Egyptian regime had no viable option except to allow them to cross and buy their necessities from these towns. On their part, the Israeli political circles were amazed and perplexed by this daring and defiant action. Their real fear was that these borders may continue to be open, thus GS may become out of the Israeli control, the negotiating position of the deposed government is likely to get stronger on the issue of operating Rafah crossing, and arms could be easily smuggled to Gaza.

Within its alteration between the policies of economic strangling and military pressure versus Hamas’ dominance in Gaza, and under the guise of stopping the resistance missiles on the Israeli towns near Gaza, Israel launched between 27/2/2008 and 3/3/2008 a military campaign on the Strip that was code-named “Hot Winter”. But politically the operation proved the difficulty of eradicating Hamas by military means, being not only a political but also a social movement. In other words, the option of a decisive military action against Hamas and the status quo in Gaza had retracted, at least temporarily, in the Israeli agenda.

Following operation “Hot Winter”, Israel continued its economic siege and the almost complete closure of all crossings. On 27/5/2008, some defense officials indicated that the army is drawing up plans to move the Gaza crossings away from Israel’s border and move some several kilometers deeper into Israel territories in order to create a buffer zone the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the crossings.¹²³

In an attempt to stop missile attacks on Sderot and Ashkelon as well as the settlements surrounding GS, and under the patronage of Egypt, Israel concluded in mid 2008 a Calmness Agreement with Hamas and the Gaza resistance factions that provided for a six-month calm period (19/6/2008-19/12/2008). This was a de facto, though indirect, Israeli recognition of Hamas' control over Gaza and as a party that is "possible to live with". By this agreement, Israel was obliged to stop its aggressions in the GS, lift the siege and reopen the border crossings, in return for Hamas and the Factions to stop firing rockets and conducting military operations. It was also agreed that the Calmness Agreement would be implemented at a later stage in the WB.

Though the agreement had obliged Israel with rather specific undertakings, the Hebrew state insisted right from the beginning on the application of the principle "calm in return for calm", ignored the lift of the siege, and refused to open Rafah and other crossings as these economic measures provided Israel with an essential tool to press for the realization of two central objectives: the collapse of Hamas government and to have a strong say in the formulation of a presumably new political future for the Strip.

According to the statistics of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, the crossings were indiscriminately closed for the greater part of the calm period. Rafah was closed for 163 days, and partially opened for 20 days only, while Erez (*Bayt Hanun*) crossing was completely closed throughout this period. No cargo imports or exports were allowed to pass through Karni (*al-Mintar*) crossing for 149 days, and only limited amounts were granted transit via this exist and for 34 days only. As for Nahal Oz crossing, which was allocated for supplying Gaza with fuel, it was totally closed for 78 days, and was allowed to function for 105 days and for limited amounts of fuel. Kerem Shalom (*Karam Abu Salim*) goods crossing was totally closed for 127 days, though opened for 56 days.¹²⁴ The People's Committee to face the Siege emphasized that throughout November 2008 Israel allowed the opening of the Strip's crossings once, and that only 10% of the essential foodstuffs were allowed to enter to the Strip on that date. The committee added that the crossings opened during the six-month calm period by less than 35% of their capacity.¹²⁵ Moreover, Israel had violated the terms of the calm agreement more than 195 times, and the number of killed during the calm period totaled 22 people dead.¹²⁶ Interestingly, by mid November 2008, the

Shabak cautioned that the calm period between Israel and Hamas in Gaza was about to collapse, and it recommended that effort should be exerted “to cause the collapse of Hamas rule.”¹²⁷

On 27/12/2008 the Israeli army launched a wide aggression on Gaza. The objective of this operation was a source of difference in Israeli official circles.¹²⁸ While some wanted to occupy the Strip, others wanted the army to impose a long term calm period and then to withdraw from the Strip.¹²⁹ However, the year ended without the stoppage of the aggression, and during its 22 day war, Israel committed crimes against humanity that provoked world organizations and the international public opinion. The repercussions of this war are expected to be a source of concern to Israel during the forthcoming year, 2009.

Israel continued its instigation against Hamas throughout the year 2008. In its website, the *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper published a warning by the Israeli minister Ami Ayalon that President Mahmud ‘Abbas could lose his authority in the WB to extremist Islamic elements like al-Qa‘idah and Hamas, as was the case in Gaza.¹³⁰ Ehud Barak maintained that the good-will gestures that Israel extend to the Palestinians may backfire if Hamas controlled the WB, as the organization would then acquire better arms that it would direct against Israel.¹³¹ The Israeli leader of the opposition Benjamin Netanyahu had reportedly warned against what he called the establishment of a Hamas base in the WB if Israel withdrew from it. He told the Condoleezza Rice, the American Secretary for State, that he will not sign a declaration of principles that have the basis of dividing Jerusalem and returning to pre-1967 borders.¹³² Meanwhile, Haim Ramon, Vice Prime Minister, called upon “moderate” Arab states to end Hamas rule in Gaza, and to replace it by an Arab force.¹³³ Ehud Olmert maintained that a peace agreement with the Palestinians would be farfetched if Hamas do not accept the principles that the international community and the Quartet agreed upon.¹³⁴ In a meeting in Washington with Ban Ki-Moon, Tzipi Livni, the minister of Foreign Affairs, bluntly told the Secretary-General that from an Israeli point of view, based on what is going on in Gaza, she would say that there is no hope for peace as long as Hamas controls the Strip.¹³⁵

In an obvious instigation to the Authority in Ramallah, Brigadier General Yoav Mordechai, the head of the Civil Administration in the WB, cautioned the PA that Hamas had been for many years a government within the government. Quoting Mordechai, the Israeli Radio reported that Hamas’ civil infrastructure is the basis

of its military infrastructure. He assured that Israel confronts the military and civil infrastructure of Hamas in the WB to prevent Hamas from doing what it did in Gaza.¹³⁶

Some Israeli leaders revealed an inclination within official circles to ban any forthcoming Palestinian presidential or legislative elections lest that Hamas emerges victorious in them. The Israeli President Shimon Peres emphasized on barring Hamas from taking part in any future elections unless and until it abandons what he called “the terrorism track”, by which he meant the resistance.¹³⁷ A paper prepared by the Israeli National Security Council warns that after PA President Mahmud ‘Abbas term ends, he might “disappear” from the political arena. That could cause the PA to disintegrate, which would increase the risk of the two-state solution being taken off the table. Hence the document recommended “preventing elections in the PA, even at the cost of a confrontation with the U.S. and the international community.”¹³⁸

Meanwhile Israel consistently linked the continuation of the negotiations with the internal Palestinian reconciliation. After San‘a declaration of March 2008, an Israeli official said that ‘Abbas “should choose between the continuation of the negotiations with Israel or to ally itself with Hamas again, as he could not have them both.”¹³⁹ In the same vein, in an annual report of the Israeli Security Agency, the Shabak’s director Uval Diskin expected that as long as there are Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, the probability of conciliation between Fatah and Hamas is negligible.¹⁴⁰

Israel had also consolidated security coordination with the caretaker government in Ramallah, who, according to the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, formed, with the prior consent of Israel, Jordan, and the USA, a special Palestinian battalion “to maintain law and order in the WB.” The newspaper’s report added that 620 officers and soldiers of the Palestinian National Security (PNS) forces underwent a four-month training program in Jordan under an American program and Jordanian guidance, and part of the plan drawn up by Lieutenant General Keith Dayton, United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority.¹⁴¹ By October 2008, most of the members of this force were deployed in the town of Hebron (*al-Khalil*) in the WB.¹⁴² In March 2008, Israel has given its final consent to allow Russia to supply the PA security services in the West Bank with 25 Russian-made armored vehicles on condition that the vehicles not be mounted with

machine guns. Israel also agreed that an additional shipment of 25 vehicles will be temporarily stored in Jordan. Depending on the quality of security coordination with the Palestinians, Israel will decide when to transfer the remaining vehicles to the PA at a later stage.¹⁴³

The security campaigns of the PA, during which tens of the activists of Hamas and other Palestinian resistance faction's activists were arrested and many philanthropic and civil institutions were closed, coincided with a three-day Israeli campaign in July 2008 that shut down 37 societies and civil institutions in Nablus and Ramallah.¹⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the caretaker government was not rewarded for these efforts by any Israeli initiative. On the contrary, the Hebrew state refused a suggestion by 'Abbas and Fayyad government to transfer the responsibility for the Gaza crossings to the PA. In this respect Livni, claimed that such a transfer would practically mean that Hamas will handle the crossings, which Israel would never accept.¹⁴⁵ Along this direction, Brigadier-General 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Yahya, the minister of Interior of the caretaker government, declared that Israel banned the import of the needed arms for the security forces to operate.¹⁴⁶ In addition, Israel increased the peoples' hardship, and no improvement was ever made in their living conditions because of the increased checkpoints, incursions and the separation wall. Due to this Israeli insensitivity, the Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas hinted on 22/7/2008 that the police force will be withdrawn from the Palestinian cities if these repeated incursions continue in the Palestinian territories.¹⁴⁷

Fifth: The Path of the Political Settlement

The year started with repeated talks on the political settlement, and controversy around the possibility of implementing the vision of President George W. Bush on the establishment of a Palestinian state before the end of his second term. Despite the fact that the Palestinian-Israeli relations had no indications of any concrete progress towards a political settlement; on the Palestinian side, the squabbling between Fatah and Hamas and the separation between the WB and Gaza continued as strong as ever, while on the Israeli side the Premier was fully engaged in the corruption charges and the political elite was bitterly competing for power. And despite the reach of a calmness agreement on 19/6/2008, through Egyptian

mediations, between Hamas and Israel, the latter continued its siege, closure of the crossings and retraction from the understandings of the agreement. During the year 2008, many peace deals were said to be on the verge of success, but they all failed, and the year ended with a massive Israeli attack on the Palestinian people in Gaza, in which many war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed.

1. Talks about the Political Settlement

The year started with noisy utterances that 2008 will be the year of peace, a claim that both the PA in Ramallah and the Israeli government persistently reiterated. The Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert repeatedly emphasized that Israel needs to internalize that even its supportive friends on the international stage conceive of the country's future on the basis of the 1967 borders and with Jerusalem divided... He added that he hopes that the start of the year will yield a permanent Israeli-Palestinian peace accord and that reality requires Israel to compromise on parts of Eretz Yisrael (The Land of Israel) in order to maintain its Jewish, democratic nature. At the same time, he made clear that he did not envisage a permanent accord along the '67 lines, describing Ma'ale Adumim as an "indivisible" part of Jerusalem and Israel.¹⁴⁸ Based on a joint meeting on 7/1/2008 between the Palestinian and Israeli negotiation teams, that was attended by their heads, respectively Ahmad Qurei' and Tzipi Livni,¹⁴⁹ the former said, "The negotiation with the Israeli side resulted in some achievements."¹⁵⁰ On the next day, and just before the arrival of the American president George W. Bush to Israel and the WB, the Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas and the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert agreed to "immediately resume the final status negotiations." Sa'ib 'Uraiqat, who attended the meeting, said that 'Abbas and Olmert agreed that the heads of the two negotiation teams Ahmad Qurei' and Tzipi Livni should immediately start negotiating the six final status issues, namely Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders, water, relations and cooperation with other neighbors, in addition to the security and prisoners issue. He added that 'Abbas informed Olmert that he will not sign any final agreement between the two sides if it does not include the release of all prisoners. 'Uraiqat also said that Olmert informed 'Abbas that no contract for building settlement units will be advertised without the latter's consent, and added, "Olmert informed us that he will not take any step that adversely affects the issues of the final status."¹⁵¹ He added that Olmert and 'Abbas agreed to conduct the negotiations at three levels. First negotiations of the major issues -Jerusalem,

the refugees, and the borders- which should be within the top negotiating team headed by 'Uraiqat and Tzipi Livni. And what they agree upon should be referred to subsidiary negotiation teams to discuss the details, and what they do not agree upon should be referred to the two Presidents, 'Abbas and Olmert, to look into it. It was also agreed that sub-committees be formed for these and other issues, however, without having specific names "The Jerusalem committee", "The Refugees committee" and others. The Palestinian side accepted this arrangement on the request of Olmert who wanted to allay the fears of his allies in the Yisrael Beiteinu Party, who threatened to withdraw from the coalition if such committees were specifically formed. A member of the Palestinian negotiation team said in this respect, "we want to reap the grapes not to kill the guard." The agreement clearly specifies that all the major issues of the conflict should be discussed, and this is what is important. It may even be better that these issues be discussed at the highest level and not at the level of intermediate negotiators.¹⁵²

In a further hint of a progress in the efforts for political settlement, the Israeli President Peres asked the two delegations not to stop the negotiations under any circumstances, and that they should keep going on. He added, "There is not much time to make peace. I am not surprised that the Palestinians insist on their demands and we do so. I do not expect to agree during this year, because time is short, but we should not stop for a moment."¹⁵³

Obviously, the about to take place visit of President Bush to the region was behind these optimistic talks about a political settlement. This was emphasized by the Palestinian president Mahmud 'Abbas who said on 24/1/2008 that the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations had not yet achieved anything and that the issue of Jewish settlement is one of the most important predicaments of the peace process. He added, "The issues of the final status are on the negotiation table, but we do not know when we may reach a conclusion, but we will reach it this year." He told the Israelis, "You should grasp this historic opportunity, which will never be repeated," saying that "fifty-seven Arab states are ready to establish relations with you if you withdraw and the Palestinians took their rights. I do not know what deters you from giving us these rights."¹⁵⁴

On its part through extensive attacks on GS and by accelerating the pace of the settlements, Israel strove to embarrass the PA and force it to freeze the negotiations. This was what had been actually declared on 1/3/2008 by Ahmad

Qurei', the head of the PA delegation to final status negotiations, who said that the Palestinian leadership had unanimously agreed "to stop the negotiations with the Israeli side after the massacres committed by the Israeli government in Gaza and the continuation of the Israeli settlements in Jerusalem." He emphasized, "What is going on in Gaza are massacres, there is no discrimination among the civilians between women, children and elderly people. There is a mass killing in the shape of genocide, it is unbearable, and it does not give credibility to the peace process nor to the negotiations." He indicated that the synchronization of this Israeli escalation few days before the visit of Rice, the US Secretary of State, raises eyebrows, and said, "United States should exert pressure on Israel to stop its crimes in Gaza and to stop the settlements."¹⁵⁵ In this respect, Sa'ib 'Uraiqt used more clear expressions by saying, "the negotiations are buried under Gaza's rubble, the peace process is destroyed by the aggression and the committed crimes." He added, "President 'Abbas urged the international community to stop these attacks, and he continues his day and night contacts with the American administration, the European Union and the Arabs, but, alas, all these appeals fell on deaf ears."¹⁵⁶ However, Tzipi Livni, did not care, as she said, this stance will not affect the Israeli decision to continue at the same pace the ongoing operations. If need be and in the case of intensified missile attacks, they will be escalated.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, the Israeli premier said that Israel wants to continue the negotiations, but he said, as we explained earlier, this will not be at the expense of defending our citizens against terrorism. He added that the whole world knows that the suppression of Hamas stimulates the continuation of the peace process with the moderates, with whom we are currently negotiating. It is clear to us that the Palestinian leadership with which we want to negotiate understands this very well. And added, the more we hit Hamas, the more there will be a viable opportunity for peace.¹⁵⁸

The Israeli government diligently worked to deepen the gap between "the National Authority" and the Hamas movement. It strove that they be at loggerheads, and that their conflicting relationship be, so to speak, a Zero Sum Game. The Israeli president Shimon Peres declared that the negotiations with Hamas will kill the PA, emphasizing that, it is impossible to negotiate with the PA, and, at the same time, strike it.¹⁵⁹ On her part, Tzipi Livni, the minister of Foreign Affairs, declared in the Knesset that Palestinian terrorism is not the reason for the suspension of the bilateral negotiations between the Jewish state and the PA, but added that these negotiations do not grant any Palestinian terrorist immunity, and that Israel will

continue tailing the “Palestinian terrorists”. She maintained that the war of Israel on “terrorism” will continue, but the negotiations with the Palestinians should not be affected by the Israeli operations.¹⁶⁰

On his part, the Palestinian president Mahmud ‘Abbas emphasized that the negotiations is the only option, by saying that the only open option to us is the negotiations, there is time constraint, we must reach a conclusion before the end of the year. And Following the failure of the American administration to pressure Israel to stop the settlement process, ‘Abbas appointed the Authority’s next step as follows, “Contacts are ongoing with the concerned parties, we do not have any other option except to continue the negotiations.”¹⁶¹

2. Confidential Negotiations for a Final Settlement

By the end of March 2008, there was plenty of talk about secret Palestinian-Israeli negotiations to reach a political solution for the final status issues. “Hush hush: Intensive final-status talks quietly underway” reads the banner of the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* of 30/3/2008. The article revealed the intensive negotiations, “the most serious since Oslo”, that were held in complete confidentiality to discuss the final status issues. The negotiations were between the heads of the two delegations, the Palestinian Ahmad Qurei’ and the Israeli Tzipi Livni who met in hotel rooms and safe houses at least fifty times in the past months, two to three times a week.¹⁶² Nonetheless, the Israeli side denied the possibility of reaching to a settlement before the end of the year, and placed the blame squarely on the Palestinian schism. Ehud Olmert, the Israeli premier, declared in Kadima headquarters of Petach-Tikva that he sees no hope in implementing a peace settlement with the Palestinians until the end of the year, but some understandings between the two parties may be reached. And if they reach an understanding, Israel will insist on all Palestinian obligations in the road map being met, especially stopping terror, as a condition for implementing the agreement. Olmert added that the issue of Jerusalem will be addressed within the framework of the negotiations with the Palestinians. In response to the opposition, he said, in his own words, “No one can teach me or the Kadima ministers about the importance and the symbolism of Jerusalem for the people of Israel.”¹⁶³ In an interview with the *Financial Times*, dated 15/4/2008, Israeli President Shimon Peres blamed “weak” and divided Palestinian factions for holding up a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. He added “I am in doubt we can get a political agreement (by the

end of the year)” and said, “The problem is that the Palestinians are split. They are weak and they are getting weaker.” On the establishment of a Palestinian state, Peres said, “In order to have a state, they have to make sure that a state will not become a base for attacking Israel. If we give back land we have to be sure that the land will not become the base for firing on us. The main problem is security.”¹⁶⁴ Though the Authority in Ramallah had more than once declared the suspension of the negotiations, and denied the existence of secret negotiations, Livni emphasized that there are non-publicized negotiations with the PA, and that they are achieving some progress. However, Livni reiterated that any peace settlement with the Palestinians should provide better security for Israel.¹⁶⁵

3. Olmert and the End of the Israeli Dream of a Greater Israel

Following the charges of corruption filed against him, his decision to resign from his position and the call for elections to elect a new president for the Kadima party, the Israeli premier Ehud Olmert gave, in his weekly cabinet meeting on 14/9/2008, what was described as a historical and farewell address because of the issues it raised. He said that Israel followed wrong policy towards the Palestinians during the last forty years, and that he was one of the first wrongdoing leaders. He declared that the dream of the Israeli right of “the greater land of Israel to the Jews” is over. He attacked the extremist settlers who mastermind barbaric attack on the Palestinians and called for an immediate and comprehensive peace with the Palestinians and the Syrians. Olmert added, for forty years we kept innovating arguments and pretexts to justify our negligence to undertake any step for peace with the Palestinians on the basis of “two states for two peoples”. This policy, he argued, is not in the interest of Israel. For the alternative is a bi-national state, which started to be endorsed by many Palestinians who were fed up of the futile negotiations, and by many in the West, including some of our friends there, even in the United States. Olmert added:

I admit that I didn't always have this opinion. I thought and I also said to [Defense Minister] Ehud Barak that the concessions he offered at Camp David were exaggerated. I believed that the land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean was all ours since in every place there which is excavated, there is evidence of Jewish History. But finally, after a lot of suffering and misgivings, I came to the conclusion that we need to share the land... if we don't want to become a bi-national state.

Olmert continued among the amazement of his ministers, “We are strong like no other country in the region, no entity can overcome us,” he said. “The strategic

threats don't come from questions of where the borders are. We can argue over every small detail but we will then have no peace partner and no international backing" while today we have on the ground pragmatic peace partners, whether among the Palestinians or the Syrians. We frankly say the two state solution will not stop the danger or end the threats that face Israel from the Palestinian side. There are Palestinian and Arab terrorist forces that do not want peace under any condition, but the confrontation with such forces will be stronger and more successful if we conclude peace with the overwhelming majority of the Palestinians.

Olmert emphasized that the settlement which he strives for with the Palestinian leadership and believes he is able to get before the end of his term is supported by the overwhelming majority of the Israeli citizens, including a high percentage of the settlers.¹⁶⁶

But the declaration of Ehud Olmert, i.e. the necessity of speeding up the peace process and paying the price of complete withdrawal from the WB and East Jerusalem to the borders of 4/6/1967, provoked wide rejection among the leadership of the Israeli parties, particularly the right-wing opposition, and also from within Kadima and the ruling coalition. Livni, Kadima's Leader and the minister of Foreign Affairs, disassociated herself and the party from these declarations, which, she insisted, represent just the personal views of Olmert. She added that the party's political program, which was the basis for the last elections and will be the basis for the next election, is the only binding principles to her. In an interview with the Israeli radio, she emphasized that this program prefers direct negotiations with the Palestinians but in a slow and steady manner and without any rush. She added that she wants for the peace process a natural delivery, and not a birth under artificial and difficult labor.¹⁶⁷

It is worth noting that the expectations of progress in the peace process waned by the end of the year. This appeared in a declaration by Shimon Peres, the Israeli President, which he gave on the fringe of the United Nations General Assembly. In response to a question whether the American mediated negotiations on a Palestinian state would lead to an agreement by the end of the year, Peres said, "We have hoped it will be by the end of year... Apparently, we shall not conclude it by the end of the year but we do believe we made a little progress, and there is a very fair chance to conclude it during the next year."¹⁶⁸

With the ascending of the popularity of the Israeli right by the end of 2008, the leader of the Israeli right-wing Likud Party, Benjamin Netanyahu, declared his intention to divide the WB into a collection of disconnected economic zones and emphasized that reaching a peace settlement with the Palestinians is not a priority for him. But he added, in an interview with the *Financial Times*, that he would shift the emphasis away from a comprehensive settlement aimed at the creation of a Palestinian state towards practical steps designed to bolster living standards in the West Bank. “It is not so much that peace brings prosperity - it is that prosperity brings peace.” Resolving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians -the focus of both Mr. Olmert’s and Ms. Livni’s attention- is a second-order issue for the Likud leader: “The issue for me is not the Palestinian problem. I think that conflict has been replaced by the battle between radical Islam and the western world,” he says. The Palestinians, Mr. Netanyahu adds, would be allowed to hold on to their population centres. Other parts of the West Bank, such as the Judean desert and the Jordan Valley, should not leave Israeli control: “These areas are very significant for us because they are our strategic security belt,” he says. These ideas, which were anyhow rejected by the PA, will in effect transfer the occupied lands into isolated regions that are partially ruled by self-government, exactly like the bantustans of South Africa’s apartheid regime.¹⁶⁹

We should note that Netanyahu had defined the basic political guidelines to his agenda concerning the final settlement; no withdrawal from the Golan Heights and large parts of the WB, no discussion of the case of Jerusalem or refugees, no return to the 1967 borders, or giving up security control.¹⁷⁰

4. Resumption of the Talk about the “Transfer”

Being uttered on the verge of his disgraceful downfall, the declarations of Olmert on the end of the dream of “greater Israel” had almost tantamount to an admission. As for his successor in the leadership of the Kadima party, Tzipi Livni called in a speech, on 11/12/2008, for transfer of 1948 Palestinians, within a comprehensive transfer plan, designating that they must leave Israel in order to build the Jewish State. In a meeting with the pupils of Hadash high school in Tel Aviv, she said, “The Arabs in Israel should transfer to the lands of the Palestinian state after its establishment,” and added, “My solution for maintaining a Jewish and democratic state of Israel is to have two nation-states with certain concessions and with clear red lines... And among other things, I will also be able to approach

the Palestinian residents of Israel, those whom we call Israeli Arabs, and tell them, your national solution lies elsewhere.” Livni dismissed the Arab peace initiative by saying, “I do not need new peace initiatives, either Arab or French. Instead, I want to present it by myself.” Livni indicated that Israel will continue its political and military drive against Hamas, alerting that the “Long term objective of Israel is to secure the collapse of Hamas rule in Gaza, this will not happen tomorrow morning, but we will never yield to an Islamic state that rejects our existence.” She also emphasized, “We can deviate from the Calmmness Agreement if the violations continued in the Strip.”¹⁷¹

Conclusion

The year 2008 witnessed a noticeable and profound change in the Israeli political hierarchy. The numerous corruption scandals led to the disgraceful downfall of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, the Leader of Kadima Party. Tzipi Livni, his successor in the leadership of the party, was, however, unable to assemble a new ruling coalition, which dictated the call for early legislative elections early in the year 2009. Meanwhile, the popularity of the right-wing forces in Israel, under the leadership of the Likud Party, sharply increased during the course of the year 2008, which was reflected in the opinion polls and proved by the outcome of the subsequent general elections.

The Israeli military establishment experienced throughout the year 2008 the repercussions of its 2006 war on Lebanon. Early in the year, Winogard Commission presented its final report on the events of this war. Meanwhile, Israel continued during the year 2008 its military preparations for a possible war against Syria, Hizbullah and GS, and a probable participation in striking the Iranian nuclear plants. By the end of the year, and in an attempt to restore the “deterrent power” of the Israeli army that had been seriously tarnished by the 2006 war on Lebanon, Israel launched an all-out war on GS.

The global recession had by the end of 2008 its glaring impact on the Israeli economy. Revenue from exports and taxes sharply decreased, and the local consumption significantly retracted. Moreover, the crisis was instrumental in a tremendous loss of job opportunities, which consequently, led to the shrinking of wages and the rise of the rates of unemployment.

The Israeli position during the year 2008 towards the internal Palestinian scene remained essentially the same as that of the previous year. This was basically because of the continuation of the circumstances that directed the Israeli policy on the Palestinian front. Prominent among those was the ongoing and deepening Palestinian schism, the continuation of Hamas' control of GS, and the stagnation of the peace process due to final status issues. But two important developments had particularly distinguished the year 2008, namely the Calmness Agreement between Israel and Hamas which continued until 19/12/2008, and the subsequent massive Israeli aggression on Gaza, which led to thousands of Palestinians dead and wounded, and to colossal damage of the Strip's infrastructure.

During the year 2008, there were repeated talks and controversy on the possibility of the implementation of the vision of the American President George W. Bush regarding the establishment of a Palestinian state before the end of the year, which coincided with end of his second and last term. But the year ended without a breakthrough on the peace track, in addition to the Israeli aggression on GS and the rise of the Israeli right-wing forces which reject even the principle of the two-state solution.

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Chapter Three

The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

Introduction

In 2008, Hamas control over GS was reflected on the political scene in the Arab-Palestinian relations. The Arab countries dealt with the Palestinian cause, according to each country's attitude towards Hamas movement and the PA, and towards Hamas control over Gaza and the subsequent developments including the truce between Hamas and Israel with Egyptian mediation and ending with the Israeli aggression on Gaza by the end of the year, and the disagreements that arose amongst the Arab countries between the moderate and the opposing countries.

This year was marked by diverged official and public Arab attitudes towards the Palestinian cause, and by the Arab officials' enticements according to the attitudes of their countries or regimes towards Hamas, PA, and Israel.

Similarly, those disagreements were reflected in the Arab attitudes on Arab joint action demonstrated mainly in the failure of some Arab countries to participate in the Arab Summit Conference held in Damascus, and the lack of a unified Arab position on the inter-Palestinian disagreements. The diverged official and public attitude was also towards the calling for lifting the siege on Gaza, the suspension of the truce between Hamas and the Israeli occupation authorities, and the Israeli aggression on Gaza at the end of the year.

There is no doubt that the disagreements between Fatah and Hamas had an impact on the inter-Arab relations. Accordingly, the disagreements increased between "moderate" Arab states and the Arab "refusal front" states (*al-mumana'ah*). Though disparately, the moderate Arab states supported the PA, led by Mahmud 'Abbas, on the grounds that he represents the Palestinian legitimacy, while the Arab "refusal front" states supported Hamas and the Palestinian resistance.

Demonstrations erupted throughout the Arab States in support of the Palestinian resistance during the Israeli aggression on the GS, denouncing the official Arab silence that is incapable of ending the aggression. The Israeli aggression revealed the Arab failure to confront the Israeli military machine, and defend the Palestinians.

In spite of the siege and the closing of crossings before the Palestinians in the GS, the Arab League failed to hold a summit meeting to find solutions and support

for the Palestinians. Only one meeting was held by the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers of the Arab League, and it failed to take decisions to lift the siege and reopen the crossings.

The Arab official responses were much below the level of the suffering in which a million and a half Palestinians live in the GS under the Israeli siege and closed crossings. The suffering began in 2008 with the siege and the crisis of closing the crossings in the GS, and was escalated by the Israeli aggression on the GS.

First: The Attitudes of the Arab League and the Arab Summit

The interest of the Arab League in the Palestinian cause continued, despite the apparent impotence and loss of credibility in making applicable decisions, and effectively implementing them on the ground. ‘Amr Musa, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, has been concerned with the Palestinian cause as the central Arab cause in the Arab world, but the complexities brought to light the official Arab regime incapacity to adopt a unified stance on its implications.

This had an impact on the Arab Summit Conference held in Damascus, which was boycotted by some Arab countries. In its meetings, the Arab League has been calling for lifting the siege on the GS, reopening the crossings, and achieving national reconciliation between Hamas and the PA in Ramallah, without achieving any of these objectives.

The failure of the Arab official regime to play an active role in supporting the Palestinian cause led the Secretary-General of the Arab League to say, “I call upon all Arabs, at least, to speak out; in order to stop the siege on Gaza, and to supply its people -as much as they can- with money, medications, and food; especially that Gaza is under a complete blockade and daily aggression, this must not pass without an Arab stand.”¹

However, it seems that the Arabs’ voices were disparate in criticizing the Israeli practices against the Palestinian people. Some Arab States stood by the PA in Ramallah, criticizing Hamas in Gaza and holding it responsible for the failure to lift the blockade, other Arab countries stood together with Hamas, without directly criticizing the practices of the PA, but rather attributing the failure in the peace

process to Israel and not to Hamas. The Arab League held Israel responsible for the explosion of the situation in the GS, forcing thousands of Palestinians to storm the Egyptian-Palestinian borders for food, without blaming Arab leaders, not even indirectly for such events.

1. Mediation to Resolve Inter-Palestinian Disputes

Arab League attempted to play a role in the convergence of views between Hamas and the PA. The Secretary-General of the Arab League called for launching a dialogue between these two parties. However, it is noted that the Arab League, represented by the Secretary-General, has taken a position closer to the position of the PA in Ramallah than the position of Hamas. Despite 'Amr Musa's denial and saying that the Arab League is at equal distance from all the Palestinian factions, and there is no differentiation between Hamas, Fatah or others.

'Amr Musa, also said that Hamas is not intended by the Arab foreign ministers' decision to penalize whoever hampers the Egyptian efforts of reconciliation, which applies to whoever hampers these efforts. Hampering is an issue that we would consider, it's not decided in advance, and this decision is not a menace, it is the position of attempting to save the Palestinian cause. When asked about his meeting with some Palestinian factions -not including Hamas- during their presence in Cairo recently, he said that Hamas may have a point of view, but I think that Hamas is a major faction, and it is important to know their point of view, and I am interested in knowing the views of the different Palestinian factions. He added that his position will not change with or without their attendance. Like Fatah, Hamas has a particular position, and these positions are taken into account in the path of Egyptian-brokered reconciliation.²

The Arab League linked its mediation with the Egyptian mediation, which has not hid their aligning with President 'Abbas and his government in Ramallah. 'Amr Musa emphasized that Egypt will continue mediation with the Palestinian factions, noting that the Arab League supports this mediation, and that it must succeed and that all the gaps that have affected the effectiveness of the Palestinian position must be closed. He stressed that there would be no tolerance for any faction trying to thwart the inter-Palestinian reconciliation. He pointed out that everyone should take part in this reconciliation; because it is for the Palestinian people's benefit and not for the benefit of one faction over the other. He added that all Arab citizens

believe that the time has come to reconsider one Palestinian stand; in order to meet the challenges ahead.

In order to resolve the disagreements between the Palestinian factions and to stop the Israeli practices, the Arab League proposed sending Arab forces to the GS to separate the factions. Musa described the inter-Palestinian fighting that is taking place in the occupied Palestinian territories as being “the curse that was put on the Palestinians and hit all of us hard,” warning that if the fighting did not stop immediately, it will put an end to the whole Palestinian cause.³

2. The Arab Summit in Damascus

The 20th Arab Summit Conference held on 29-30/3/2008 in Damascus reflected the inter-Arab disagreements. Eleven Arab leaders participated in the summit, i.e. two leaders fewer than the number of participants in the 2006 Khartoum Summit.

The summit had a low level of representation on the part of many Arab countries, especially Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, in spite of the statements by Walid al-Mu‘allem, the Syrian Foreign Minister, that the level of representation at the Damascus summit will be higher than it was in the previous Arab summits. The Saudi King ‘Abdullah Bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and the Egyptian President Husni Mubarak were absent. The Jordanian delegation was led by Jordan’s permanent delegate to the Arab League, as King ‘Abdullah II was absent.

Whether in its conclusion or resolutions, the Damascus summit statement was in the framework of the overall outcomes in the previous Arab summits, such as the political support of the Palestinian cause, condemning settlements and Israel’s intransigence in accepting the Arab initiative as the basis of a historical comprehensive settlement, and calling for the Security Council to play its role; fulfilling obligations to lift the siege on the GS.

The final statement of the Arab Summit, entitled “Damascus Declaration”, reaffirmed maintaining the Arab peace initiative. “The continuation by the Arab side to present the Arab peace initiative is tied to Israel executing its commitments in the framework of international resolutions to achieve peace in the region,” the Damascus Declaration said. The Arab leaders expressed their support and appreciation for Arab efforts, especially those exerted by the Yemeni leadership, in achieving Palestinian reconciliation. The statement warned against Israel’s policies of imposing siege, closure of all crossings, and the increasing violence

especially in the GS, adding that Israeli crimes were crimes of war that required necessary action.

The statement called on Israel to immediately cease its aggressive practices against civilians, as well as its practices in the occupied Jerusalem. The statement called on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities regarding this situation, and urged all the parties concerned to work on lifting the siege and reopening the crossings to provide the Palestinian people with humanitarian requirements. The summit called on action towards a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East; based on the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, and the Madrid terms of reference.⁴

Second: The Attitudes and Roles of Some Key Countries

1. Egypt

There is no doubt that Egypt was the major player regarding its relationship with the Palestinian case during 2008 and early 2009. Egypt dealt with Hamas, the consequences of the blockade on the GS, the closure of the Rafah crossing, the course of settlement and the PA, the mediation between Fatah and Hamas, the truce between Hamas and Israel, and the recent Israeli aggression on the GS.

This indicates the extent to which Egypt feels the existence of a burden or a “problem” entitled Hamas governing beside its borders; making Egypt appear as if supporting the current PA, led by Fatah against Hamas. This has an impact on its mediator role as it tries to play on two fronts; the first is between the Palestinian organizations, particularly the Palestinian resistance movement in the GS and the PA in Ramallah. The second is between Hamas and Israel; to establish truce and finalize the prisoner exchange deal between the two parties.

Regarding the dispute between Fatah and Hamas, the Egyptian government tried to strike a happy medium, but it was not practically possible. Egypt had relations with Israel and the USA, and is committed to the path of peaceful settlement. The Egyptian secular regime is sensitive regarding the Islamists, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is an extension, and which the Egyptian regime considers as a threat or as a potential substitute for its current ruling regime.

Therefore, the Egyptian government is closer to the path represented by Fatah, President ‘Abbas and the PA in Ramallah. However, Egypt is aware that its national security and its weight in the Arab world and the region dictate to keep an equal distance from all of the Palestinian parties, and to remain a key player in influencing the Palestinian decision. Egypt is also aware that the Hamas takeover of the GS and its relative popularity in the Palestinian arena will leave no choice for the Egyptian government but to deal with Hamas, regardless of its attitude towards it.

a. The Egyptian Role in Establishing the National Reconciliation

Egypt has made no secret of its discontentment with the winning of Hamas in the Palestinian legislative elections and its following control over the GS located near the borders with Egypt. With the continuing differences between Hamas and its dismissed government in the GS on one hand, and President ‘Abbas and his government in Ramallah, on the other hand. Egypt tried to play the role of an honest mediator between the two parties to establish national reconciliation. The Egyptian official stance in dealing with Hamas was affected by the existence of its leadership in Syria and its distinguished relationship with the Syrian regime, at a time when the relations between Cairo and Damascus were tense. It was also affected by its concern over the presence of an Islamic government on its borders, and reflection of this situation on the inside and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

Egypt wanted the PA to continue being the one that negotiates with the Israelis, speaking on behalf of the Palestinian people, and controlling the borders with the GS; on the grounds that there is only one PA which is the one based in Ramallah, while the authority of Hamas “is in Damascus and not in Gaza”.

As for Hamas, they called on Egypt to stand at equal distance from them and Fatah, especially after Egypt has refused to allow a parliamentary delegation of Hamas MPs headed by Ahmad Bahr, the Acting Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, to visit a number of Arab and Muslim countries.

Cairo was receiving delegations of the Ramallah-based PA, who met with senior Egyptian political leaderships, while the delegations of Hamas and the Government of Isma‘il Haniyyah, only meet with officials of the Egyptian intelligence, in particular General ‘Omar Suleiman, director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Services (EGIS).

Egypt held Hamas mainly responsible for the Palestinian disagreements, for not supporting the Egyptian efforts in putting an end to the crisis in the WB and GS, and in consolidating the Palestinian ranks, and for the failure of the inter-Palestinian dialogue, which was expected to be achieved in Cairo. Egypt also accused Hamas of not giving the Egyptian efforts the opportunity to succeed.

An Egyptian diplomatic source said that while they move towards reconciliation, the source of risk in the recent events in Gaza is that Hamas is saying that there was difficulty in co-existence on the ground between them and Fatah in Gaza. Surprisingly, the practice of violence from the part of Hamas cadres against Fatah cadres in the GS started after about five weeks of reaching a truce agreement between Hamas and Israel. This also raises doubts.

The diplomatic source pointed out that Hamas has not dealt with the bloody seashore incident as a security or criminal matter. Its response was rather marked by retribution against Fatah leaders. Such a response, in turn, reverberates in the WB.⁵

In spite of the sensitive relationship between Egypt and Hamas, Egypt has continued to play the role of mediator between Fatah and Hamas. Egypt wanted to enable the PA to negotiate with Israel confidently and from a solid ground. Meanwhile, the Egyptian mediation between Hamas and Israel focuses on reopening the Rafah crossing in accordance with the 2005 crossings agreement, and on settling the issue of the captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and the Palestinian prisoners, in order to completely lift the siege on the Palestinian people in Gaza. Hamas has insisted on not waiving its direct role in the management and conduct of action on the Rafah crossing and the lifting of the siege on Gaza, and not confining its role to securing the passage from the outside, which what Hamas considers “a derogation of its legal and administrative role, which was ascribed to it by law as it was the winner in the last parliamentary elections. Thus, Hamas sees that it is entitled to form a government to run the country, while this view clashes with the law of the PA and the agreements of its establishment.”⁶

Concerning the Palestinian national dialogue, the Egyptian government was closer to the Authority in Ramallah and President ‘Abbas. Egypt supported ‘Abbas in his demand to form a government to lift the siege (i.e. a government compatible with the conditions of the Quartet), and that Hamas should “be committed to”, not only “respect” all the agreements and commitments that the Palestine Liberation

Organization (PLO) is committed to. That meant, for Hamas, to abolish its Islamic and resistance framework, and to recognize Israel and the Oslo accords, which Hamas rejects entirely. The Egyptian government refused to recognize the realities created by Hamas on the ground following its control over the GS. The Egyptian point of view was summarized in the following four points:

First: formation of a transitional technocratic caretaker government of national figures not affiliated to the Palestinian factions in order to lift the blockade on the GS. This government has two missions: the preparation for the agreed upon legislative and presidential elections, on one hand, and to address the security issue on the other hand.

Second: the agreement on a Palestinian Charter that includes ending the Israeli occupation of the territories occupied in 1967, bring a solution to the refugee issue, and ending the internal division and fragmentation.

Third: delegating Mahmud ‘Abbas and the PLO to conduct negotiations with Israel on the basis of the Palestinian National Charter, which is supposed to be agreed upon.

Fourth: Building the Palestinian security services on a professional basis, and providing Arab support, whether in the form of intervention forces, or in using the Arab security expertise, or through financial and material support.⁷

On the other hand, Egypt has shown no interest in the involvement of Arab parties in its mediation between Fatah and Hamas. The Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait, stressed that Egypt could manage alone the mediation, and that “one who wants another force has to prove whether he will be allowed to do so or not.” He added that, “Whoever that will be will not be able to bring another force that would accept to intervene with Hamas, such game will be very open, and whoever considers offering an alternative to Egypt is rather thinking of the US dollar, there are those who could be given more dollars to be taken to the a certain direction of policies.”⁸

Egyptian initiative for the Palestinian dialogue states the following points:

1. Stop all forms of inflammatory media campaigns.
2. The release of all prisoners from Hamas and Fatah, at the same time and under the aegis of an Arab committee led by Cairo.

3. To allow the return of the citizens who left the GS without arresting them.
4. The abolition of the ban on a number of associations and institutions in the West Bank and Gaza.
5. Commitment to the PLO as the sole legitimate and representative of all the Palestinian people. In this context it will be achieved through (a) starting the reform and restructuring of the PLO (when the dialogue starts), which are to be completed within four months. According to Palestinian sources, Fatah rejected this paragraph. As for paragraph (b), it offers a suggestion to adopt general electoral, institutional, and survey standards to determine the rate of representation in the organization's institutions.
6. Hamas movement should vacate its existence and cadres from the Authority's political and security headquarters and institutions in the GS, and the return of these sites to the legitimate authority.
7. Freezing the work of the Executive Force of Hamas.
8. Maintaining the work of the police under temporary supervision of an unbiased Arab committee.
9. The Arab security team to be led by Egypt for the supervision of the arrangement and resolving contentious issues relating to security institutions. (This point has not been approved by Hamas and other Palestinian factions).
10. Sending an Egyptian-led Arab force of three thousand persons to the GS to contribute in maintaining security. (Rejected by Hamas and other factions).
11. Formation of a transitional government to prepare for legislative and presidential elections before March 2009, based on the commitment to the program of the PLO. (Rejected by Hamas and other factions).
12. The commitment of all factions to international agreements signed and committed by PA. (Rejected by Hamas and other factions).
13. The commitment of the factions to the political solution through negotiations, and in case of failure of this option there will be consultation and agreement on adopting and pursuing another option.
14. The invitation to join the institutions of the PA, which denotes commitment to its program, while the political parties, outside the framework of the PA, are entitled to oppose peacefully.

As a result of the disagreements between the PA and Hamas, Egyptian mediation has failed to convene the Palestinian national dialogue, which was scheduled to be held in Cairo on 9/11/2008. It was Hamas who refused to launch the dialogue before releasing Hamas Palestinian prisoners in the prisons of the PA in the West Bank. Cairo has criticized Hamas for its last minute apology to participate in the dialogue, which has increased tension in the relationship between Egypt and Hamas. Mustafa al-Faqi, head of the Egyptian Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee, held Hamas responsible for failure of the dialogue, saying that Egypt “wouldn’t tolerate an Islamic state on its eastern border”⁹ (See the part of dialogue and reorganizing the Palestinian home in the first chapter of this book).

b. Egypt and the Release of Shalit

Egypt has continued to mediate between Hamas and Israel for the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, in return for the release of the captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in Gaza. Egypt insisted not to share this mediation by any other parties, but the year 2008 ended without reaching a solution. The meetings were taking place under the supervision of Minister ‘Omar Suleiman, the director of the EGIS; General Amos Gilad, head of the Defense Ministry’s Diplomatic-Security Bureau; Ofer Dekel, the Israeli in charge of the file of prisoners; and delegations from Hamas.

Hamas insisted that the exchange of prisoners must include the exchange of about one thousand Palestinian prisoners, of which 450 identified by Hamas, of those who were sentenced to imprisonment for long years. Hamas also demanded to include the release of the Legislative Council members and a number of leaders and national figures, as well as, women and children. While Israel threatened to retrieve Shalit by force, and to invade Gaza to release him in case that the Egyptian mediation fails.

On The other hand, Hamas linked the issue of prisoner exchange with lifting the siege imposed on Gaza and reopening of the crossings, while Egypt has asked Hamas to soften its stance on the prisoner exchange issue. Egyptian mediation has not succeeded, because both sides; the Israeli and the Palestinian were maintained to their position. However, Egypt is still the most appropriate mediator to Israel and Hamas.

c. Egypt's Stance Towards the Lifting of the Blockade and Opening of the Rafah Crossing

Egypt has committed itself to the agreement on the crossings that the PA signed with Israel in 2005. Consequently, Egypt closed the Rafah crossing, except in exceptional circumstances, after Hamas takeover of Gaza and the departure of European observers from the crossing. This situation was interpreted by many Palestinians as participation in the blockade, and as an attempt to thwart and overthrow the Hamas government. While the Egyptian government justified it by its commitment to the agreement on the crossings, and its political and international commitments.

In January 2008, due to their enormous suffering, the Palestinians opened a new hole in the wall on the Egyptian border from which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians flowed into the Egyptian side. The Egyptian security forces tried to prevent the Palestinians from crossing, accusing Israel of intending to establish a State for the Palestinian refugees in Sinai, but then, Egypt allowed them to enter for a few days.

Abu al-Ghait said that those who were trying to get the crossing reopened, don't want to serve the interests of the Palestinian people, but rather seek to get legitimacy, adding that Egypt would not give legitimacy to a group that doesn't deserve it, referring to Hamas. But the Egyptian Minister added "We are dealing with Hamas as a Palestinian partner who won the elections. We recognize the presence of Hamas on the ground, and respect the support of the Palestinian people for it, but it must have a legitimate presence."¹⁰

Egypt submitted a proposal to Hamas to resolve the issue of the Rafah crossing, by implementing the agreement signed in 2005 between the PA, Egypt, the European Union, Israel and the United States. Hamas rejected this proposal, and insisted on the necessity of being under the Egyptian-Palestinian management, without the presence of the Israelis, or any other party.

The Egyptians responded to this position by emphasizing that "we can not change this Agreement; because we are not the only party in it." The Egyptian side informed Hamas officials that the bombing of the border wall and the entry of Palestinians to the Egyptian cities "will not be repeated for any reason."¹¹

As a result of the lack of agreement with Hamas, due to the Israeli refusal of Hamas position, the Egyptian authorities closed three gaps at the Salahuddin street that separates the GS and Egypt, using scrap metal, barbed wire and deploying hundreds of soldiers along the border; to prevent Palestinians from entering into the Sinai Peninsula.

The Egyptian security men, who were lined up along the border, prevented the Palestinians from entering through the three gaps in the separating wall, Salahuddin gate, Brazil, and the Barahmeh, but they allowed the return of Egyptians who have entered Gaza. The Egyptian security men allowed the Palestinians who obtained residence permits, or students studying in Egypt or in the Arab and foreign countries to cross the borders. They also allowed the Palestinians from Gaza, who were still in the cities of al-‘Areesh and Sheikh Zuwayyid and Rafah in Egypt, to return through the Salahuddin Gate.

According to the report of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), the Rafah crossing was closed entirely for 345 days during 2008, i.e. 94.2% of the total days of the year. While, the crossing was opened partially for 21 days, or 5.8% of the total days of the year.¹²

Egypt believed that the Rafah crossing should not be opened in the presence of an authority other than the authority of Mahmud ‘Abbas. Egypt refused any presence, even a symbolic one of Hamas at the Rafah crossing. On the basis that Hamas, from an Egyptian point of view, is a Palestinian organization, and not an authority, and Egypt recognizes only the legitimacy of President ‘Abbas, because it is recognized on the Arab and international levels.

Abu al-Ghait, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, warned saying that “Anyone who violates Egypt’s borders will get his leg broken.” Abu al-Ghait said that Egypt will continue its efforts with Israel and the European Union, to reopen the Rafah crossing legally. He also criticized Hamas for launching missile attacks on Israel, describing the confrontation as a “laughable caricature”. He noted that Hamas’ missiles are lost in the sands of Israel, meanwhile giving the Israelis an alibi to attack the Palestinians.¹³

Among the other issues associated with the blockade and the Rafah crossing, which has increased tension between Egypt and Hamas, there is the dispute over the crossing of the Palestinian pilgrims from Gaza through Egypt to Saudi Arabia.

Egypt put forward a plan for a truce between Hamas and Israel in the GS. This plan is based on three points:

1. Hamas stops launching missiles from Gaza into Israel. On return the Israelis pledges not to target the Palestinian militants inside Gaza, and to stop the targeted assassinations.
2. The exchange of prisoners, to include about 400 Palestinians detained by Israel, for the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. The plan includes the delivery of Shalit to the Egyptians, who in turn will handle him to the Israelis.
3. Israel reopens the crossings between the GS and Israel with the help of European observers.

Hamas and Israel agreed on a truce for a period of six months starting from mid-June 2008. However, Israel has not implemented the terms of the agreement, which led to the actual ending of the truce at the end of the year, when Israel carried out its broad aggression on Gaza on 27/12/2008.

Egypt has condemned the Israeli aggression on the GS in statements by President Husni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait. Egypt held Israel responsible for the victims resulted from the aggression and called for the immediate unconditioned cessation of hostilities. However, the official Egyptian position did not fail to criticize Hamas; since it held Hamas responsible for the collapse of the truce with Israel by launching missiles into Israeli towns, in spite of warnings from Cairo that Israel is going to wage war against Gaza by the end of the truce.¹⁴

During the aggression, the issue of Egypt's closure of the Rafah crossing, constitutes a real problem between Egypt and Hamas, amid mutual accusations; as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said that Egypt would not open the Rafah crossing, in violation of the 2005 agreement, except for humanitarian cases, in order not to participate in perpetuating the separation of the WB and GS.¹⁵ He also accused Hamas that it wanted to open the Rafah crossing to control it alone.¹⁶ In order to find a political solution to the crisis, the President announced on 6/1/2009 an Egyptian initiative for ceasing fire, opening the crossings, stopping arms smuggling into Gaza and forming a national unity government acceptable for the international community.¹⁷

2. Jordan

In 2008, there has been an important development in the Jordanian position towards the Palestinian issue. Jordan, for the first time after a nine years lapse, resumed contacts with the leaders of the Hamas movement. At the time it continued following the policy of moderate Arab states towards the PA, criticizing the practices of Israel in the WB and GS, and the Israeli project for the so-called “Jordanian option”, on both official and popular levels.

The declared Jordanian position continued which is to demand for an independent Palestinian state on land occupied in 1967 with Jerusalem as its capital, and the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, such as, the right of return for refugees.

The other development that has taken place in the position of Jordan at the end of the year was the harmony between the official and popular attitude of the Israeli aggression on the GS, allowing protests and demonstrations, in addition to the unequivocal support for the resistance in Gaza, and of the heroic steadfastness of the Palestinian citizens. It seems that the dialogue which has already started between Jordan and Hamas, has paved the way for Jordan’s last position.

a. The Jordanian Position Towards the Political Developments

Jordan views the Palestinian case as being the first central issue of its priorities and resolving this issue is as important for the Jordanian as it is for the Palestinians. Jordan wanted to play a key role in the peace process among the Palestinians. Thus, visits of Palestinian and Israeli officials to Jordan and their meetings with Jordanian leaders continued.

The most important of these meetings was the one of the Jordanian King and the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who suddenly visited Amman. In this meeting, the King demanded that all final status issues should be included in the peace negotiations with the Palestinians. The King stressed “it’s important that the negotiations would lead to an agreement between the two sides before the end of the current year, based on the two-state solution, and in accordance with the commitments of the parties involved in the Annapolis Conference.”¹⁸

Jordan also frequently received the President of the PA who met with King ‘Abdullah II. Their talks were always focused on the developments related to the peace process and efforts for the success of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

In addition to Jordan's confirmation on its support for the PA and their positions, especially on the final status issues, such as refugees, Jerusalem, water, and borders; which have a direct impact on Jordan and its future and security. Thus, the Jordanian King has defined his country's position towards the Palestinian issue, saying that the Kingdom is committed to the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab peace initiative as a basis for the solution.

Regarding the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, he stressed that their right to citizenship does not deprive them of their right of return and compensation. We stand firm in this position, and we insist on it. This right is included in the resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular the United Nations General Assembly resolution no. 194, which is not subject to bargaining or compromise in any way. He stressed that the acceptance of Israel in the region will remain subject to ending its occupation of Palestinian territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, and to reach a just, lasting and comprehensive solution for all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹⁹

Jordan believes that a Jordanian role on the Palestinian - Israeli track encourages Israel to make progress in the negotiations with the PA to end the conflict. However, Jordan continued to reject the "Jordanian option" to resolve the Palestinian issue, where the Jordanian government shows extreme sensitivity to talking about the "Jordanian option" or "alternative homeland", and constantly declares its refusal of the Israeli projects for displacement of the Palestinians in the territories of Jordan, and the Israeli continued occupation of the WB.

On the other hand, Jordan denied on a statement by the Jordanian Foreign Minister Salaheddin al-Bashir the existence of a document known as the "Awad-'Uraiqat" (Bassem 'Awadallah, Jordan's former Chief of the Hashemite Royal Court and Sa'ib 'Uraiqat) on the "alternative homeland". He stressed that by saying: "We are not a party in the negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, but we are concerned with some of the final status issues that directly affect Jordan, and especially the issues of refugees and Jerusalem."

He added that he never heard at all from any official in the Palestinian National Authority or any other, that there is someone who is satisfied with any solution other than that of the two-state solution. He made it clear that the Jordan supports the negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, as provided for in the Arab peace initiative and the commitments of the Annapolis, stressing that

the negotiations between these two parties is the strategic option to restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. He reaffirmed the Jordan's position of the inevitable establishment of a Palestinian state, and restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, as the most important foreign policy issue of Jordan.

Regarding the issue of sending Arab forces to the GS, he stressed that this issue has not been arisen in the Arab League, and that he has reservation on it. The only solution to what is going on in the WB and GS is the Palestinian unity so as to ensure the reinforcement of the Palestinian negotiating role, and to strengthen the PA in front of the Palestinian people and the world.

He drew attention to the resolution of the Arab Foreign Ministers Conference to support the diplomatic efforts of Jordan in the face of Israeli plans in Jerusalem, particularly those relating to the Mughrabi Gate, and of the World Heritage Committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).²⁰

b. Resuming Contacts between Jordan and Hamas

An important development in the Jordanian position concerning the parties of the Palestinian cause was the formal declaration of resuming contacts, which have been lapsed for about nine years, with Hamas. It has been announced that Muhammad al-Thahabi, director of the General Intelligence Department, held a meeting with two Hamas officials, namely, Muhammad Nazzal and Muhammad Nasr on 21/7/2008.

This was the first meeting between a senior Jordanian official, and leaders of Hamas, since 1999 when the Jordanian authorities closed the offices of the movement in Amman, expelling four of its leaders to Qatar with charges of interference in the internal affairs of Jordan. These leaders included Khalid Mish'al, the head of Hamas Political Bureau; Musa Abu Marzouk, Mish'al's deputy; 'Izzat al-Rishiq, Information Officer; and Ibrahim Ghosheh, the Spokesman of Hamas.

The tension reached its peak in the relations between them, in 2006, when Jordan cancelled the visit of Mahmud Zahhar, the Hamas leader and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and accused the movement of storing and smuggling weapons into Jordan, in preparation for operations in Jordan. Hamas has strongly denied these charges, saying that they were politically motivated, and that Jordan was bowing to US pressure.

This meeting increased the probabilities of strengthening the relationship between Jordan and Hamas, in contrast to Jordan's previous position of preferring to deal only with Fatah and the PA, instead of dealing with the rest of Palestinian factions, including Hamas. The meeting increased optimism in ending the crisis that existed in the relationship between Hamas and the Jordanian authorities.

Muhammad Nazzal, who participated in the meeting, stated that the Hamas delegation had come to Amman on behalf of Khalid Mish'al not only to seek the reform of the relationship with the Jordanian government, but also in order to know the Jordanian position on the Palestinian cause from overall dimensions. The meeting was held between a political delegation of Hamas, though it was held with the highest security official, from the Jordanian side. This had significantly important implications, because it was not with officials from the Jordanian government, but with the head of Jordanian intelligence.

Thus, this meeting was very similar to the contacts between the director of the EGIS, 'Omar Suleiman, and Hamas delegations visiting Cairo.

It is too early to talk about new foundations of the relationship with Hamas, especially that Jordan is still restricting its political choice on the Palestinian issue in dealing with the PA headed by Mahmud 'Abbas and the channel of communication with Hamas is still security, not political.

However, Thahabi, the former director of the General Intelligence Department, expressed Jordan's keenness to support the Palestinian people, respect their choice, and recognize the Hamas movement and its obtained popular legitimacy, and its role in the formation of the Palestinian National structure. He also expressed Jordan's acknowledgment of the fact that Hamas represents half of the Palestinian people, and Jordan's trust in the support that Hamas received in the legislative elections. Thus, the Jordanian government is ready to open a new chapter in the relationship with Hamas, and wants to keep the channels of communication and coordination with them in the future.²¹

The Jordan's new position was in line with the change in internal Jordanian policy toward Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. On the other hand, Hamas is aware of the importance of Jordan in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and considered the resuming of contact with the Jordanian leadership as significant support for it in the Palestinian arena. Some believe that Jordan had changed its position towards

Hamas, because it feels that the PA, at later stage, may abandon the option of an independent Palestinian state and may agree to the Jordanian option known as the “alternative homeland”. While Hamas explicitly rejects it, preferring to continue to resist, and not to fall into the trap of the Israeli projects.

This meeting allowed the members of Hamas in Syria and Lebanon, who held Jordanian passports to enter the land of Jordan to visit their families, provided that they refrain from any political activity during the visit, and that they leave voluntarily before the expiry of visit time limit. It also allowed other members of Hamas to renew their passports.

It seems that the PA did not like the new Jordanian position, which surprised them.

During his visit to Jordan, President Mahmud ‘Abbas expressed his concerns to the Jordanian officials of opening up to the Hamas movement and opening a new chapter with them, fearing that it would lead to weakening his negotiating position with Israel. He stated that what is needed is to isolate Hamas, and not to open up with it. The PA has asked the Jordanian government for an explanation of the rapprochement with Hamas.

However, The meeting did not lead to a radical change in the Jordanian position, towards Hamas, as the year ended without an invitation for the Khalid Mish‘al to visit Jordan, which Hamas was expecting, particularly after the movement’s steadfastness against the Israeli aggression on the GS.

The reasons that led Jordan to change its position towards Hamas, could be outlined in the following points:

1. Protection of Jordan and its independence from the “alternative homeland” or the “Jordanian” option to liquidate the Palestinian cause.
2. Protection of the interests of Jordan in the WB and of its role in the Palestinian cause.
3. Emphasis on the need for an independent Palestinian state in the WB and GS with Jerusalem as its capital.
4. Reduction, and perhaps elimination of the political and economic blockade imposed on Hamas.
5. Formation of a consensus status that contributes to the political and social stability in Jordan.

6. Sympathy of part of the Arab legitimacy with Hamas, especially as they face the blockade and aggression.
7. Assistance in activating the regional role of Jordan and its role in the international policy towards the region.
8. Jordan's growing popular support for Hamas.
9. Emphasis on neutrality regarding the internal Palestinian disputes, especially those between Fatah and Hamas.
10. Showing Jordan's resistance to the American and Israeli pressures that reject the recognition of the Hamas movement.

There were some positive results of this dialogue, during the Israeli aggression on the GS, when the Jordanian authorities allowed citizens to express their solidarity with the steadfastness of the Hamas movement in Gaza, and allowed the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan to lead this popular response.

In spite of the abrupt resignation of the director of the General Intelligence Department, Muhammad al-Thahabi -who had already met with the delegation of the Hamas movement- and the appointment of Major General Muhammad al-Raqqad to succeed him, however, Jordan does not seem to back down attempting to play a neutral role in the inter-Palestinian disagreements.

Resignation of al-Thahabi was linked to official Palestinian and Egyptian protests against the extensive greater openness of the Jordanian diplomacy towards Hamas, as well as, the logistical facilities provided by the security services to the protesters against the aggression on Gaza in the Jordanian streets, and the disruption of public meetings law, that requires individuals and bodies to submit a written request for permission to prior conduct of the demonstrations.

The PA has shown discontent with the Jordanian relationship with Hamas, in addition to Cairo's complaint about the demonstrations that reached the door of the Egyptian embassy in Amman, chanting slogans insulting the President Husni Mubarak, a move that was not permitted previously.

c. Jordan's Position of the Blockade on Gaza

Jordan continued to call for the necessity of lifting the siege on the GS. It also supported the truce agreement between Hamas and Israel, which was sponsored by Egypt in the mid-year. However, Jordan reserved on the Egyptian proposal to

send Arab forces to the GS, as a solution to the dispute between Hamas, which controls the sector, and the PA. The Jordanian concern arose from the belief that this may lead to the rise of the “alternative home” proposal oncemore to resolve the Palestinian problem at the expense of the Jordanian entity.

As an official said, accepting the deployment of Arab forces in the GS will be the final nail in the coffin of the Palestinian cause. The entry of Arab forces to Gaza will do no good to the interests of the Palestinian people, neither to the Palestinian cause which practically will end by the Arab forces entry to the territories still occupied by Israel. There is no doubt that the refusal of the entry of Arab forces in the GS has become a point of consensus between Jordan and Hamas.²²

On the other hand, the Jordanian King called on the international community to act urgently to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people in the GS, by working to end the Israeli siege, reopening the crossings, and allowing the entry of food and humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza.

He warned that the continuation of the blockade would lead to a humanitarian tragedy of devastating effects on the Palestinian people. The king of Jordan donated blood for the victims of the aggression on Gaza, and ordered sending a military field hospital. He said in a press statement that: “this is the least we can offer to our brothers in Gaza. We resent what is happening there, and we need to work at full speed to stop the aggression.”²³

The Jordanians continued their dash to support their brothers in Gaza, and rushed to donate blood and money to the people in Gaza. Marches of anger, protest and solidarity mounted and extended to all the governorates of Jordan. Demonstrators from different parties and unions called for stopping the criminal attacks on the people of Gaza, expelling the Israeli ambassador from Amman, withdrawing the Jordanian ambassador from Tel Aviv, and abolishing the Wadi ‘Araba Treaty as an expression of anger and indignation of the Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people.

The Jordanian House of Representatives called upon the government to reconsider the relationship with Israel, if Israel did not put an end to the siege and shelling of the GS. In a statement signed by 88 out of 110 deputies, the House of Representatives called to “exert maximum efforts to secure the cessation of the barbaric Israeli aggression on the brother Palestinian people, and to put an

end immediately to this brutal aggression.” The Parliament also called on the government to “redouble its efforts; to end the unjust blockade, imposed by Israeli occupation authorities on Gaza.”

3. Syria

Syria has always played a significant role in the Palestinian issue; it is still officially in a state of antagonism with Israel. The Syrian Golan is still occupied by Israel. Certainly, Syria has its considerations related to national security and geo-strategic and political considerations... and others. Syria dealt with Hamas, whose leadership resides in Syria, considering that it is closer to Syria than Fatah and the PA.

However, Syria attempted to appear at the same distance from both Fatah and Hamas, especially when it has to do with ending the division, and the unity of the Palestinian ranks. Syria adopted policy and stances closer to the “refusal” front that supports the Palestinian resistance versus the Arab moderation camp. It showed clearly during the Arab Summit Conference held in Damascus, and boycotted by some Arab countries that are opposed to the Syrian position. By the end of the year, Syria called upon convening an Arab summit to support the steadfastness of the resistance in the GS during the Israeli aggression against Gaza.

a. Syria’s Support for Palestinian National Unity

Despite the continued presence of leaders of eight Palestinian groups opposed to the PA and Fatah in Syria (Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front, the Popular Democratic Front, the Popular Front - General Command and Fatah-Intifadah, al-Sa‘iqa, and the Popular Struggle Front), Syria maintained contacts with the leadership of the PA led by Mahmud ‘Abbas, with some tensions occasionally in their relations.

Syria tried to play a role in converging the views of those organizations residing in Damascus, headed by Hamas, and the PA. The Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mou‘alem said that his country “will pursue the dialogue between Hamas and the PA, in order to end the internal division among the Palestinians,” and that he “will be in touch with the leaders of Hamas and the PA; to receive specific suggestions on reconciliation.”

Heading the Arab Summit, Syria tried to revive the inter-Palestinian dialogue, to end the crisis between Hamas and Fatah, and to form a unified Palestinian public

opinion on issues of peace and defending the rights of the Palestinian people. During Mahmud ‘Abbas visit to Damascus, Syria submitted an official letter that included: calling on Hamas to hold the presidential and legislative elections on time, preparing immediately for the formation of a national unity government, and discussing the rebuilding of the PLO, in order for the PLO to reflect the popularity of the factions and the balance of power on the ground.²⁴

During ‘Abbas visit to the Syrian capital and his meeting with Assad, their talks focused on national reconciliation, the Syrian role in promoting the inter-Palestinian dialogue. The Palestinian president also discussed the strained relations between Syria and the Fatah movement, and how to improve it.

However, Syria did not succeed in its quest to achieve national reconciliation, because the PA in Ramallah believes that the Syrian government is nearer in its position to Hamas, and thus it is not fit to play this role. Apart from the fact that the presidency of the PA would prefer the dialogue paper to remain in the hands of Egypt, which supported its position against Hamas.

b. Syria’s Support to the Palestinian Resistance

Syria is still considering the importance of Palestinian resistance in the Arab-Israeli conflict, as an important approach in dealing with Israel. That is why Syria embraces the presence of Palestinian organizations leaders there. Proceeding from this, Syria agreed to convene a conference in Damascus in support of the Palestinian resistance, entitled, “The Arab International Congress for The Right of Return”, attended by about five thousand participants from sixty countries, including heads of councils of Arab civil society organizations, representatives of Arab communities in the Diaspora countries, Many of the Palestinian and international figures, including Mahathir bin Mohamad, the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Bishop Kabouji, and George Galloway.

The Conference was characterized by massive multi-views attendance and by topics covered comprehensively and in depth by 205 Arab and foreign intellectuals and researchers in 25 symposiums. The conference was really the largest and most important Arab and international conference regarding the Palestinian cause in general, and the right of return, in particular. It represented the popular response to the overall fateful threats to the national constants, and not only the right of return. The conference also aimed at meeting the targeting of the Palestinian cause, and

the attempts to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict according to the American-Israeli requirements.

Syria knows that such positions may cause some tension in its relations with the “moderate” Arab countries. However, the Syrian positions were accurately outlined within an interpretation that is aware of the regional, Arab and international reality, and that recognizes the Israeli and American traps, as well as the serious challenges facing the “refusal” and resistance options.

Therefore, Syria maintained diplomatic language, stances, and tracks; in an attempt to take advantage of available opportunities, without exaggerating the possibilities and expectations.

Confirming the Syrian position of supporting Hamas and the Palestinian resistance factions, Hamas confirmed that “its relationship with Syria is strong, and is unlikely to be affected by any regional changes on the ground,” and that the transition of Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders from Damascus, has not been addressed at all during the meetings with Syrian officials. Hamas also confirmed that Syria hosts the resistance and “refusal” factions, in spite of the Syrian indirect negotiations with Israel.²⁵

The Syrian support for the Palestinian resistance during the Israeli aggression on Gaza, was confirmed by a Syrian invitation to convene an urgent meeting of Arab kings and presidents to discuss the joint Arab action; to stop the Israeli aggression and support the Palestinians in the GS. These Syrian efforts did not succeed, however, they participated in the summit which was held in the capital of Qatar, entitled Summit in support of Gaza, where Khalid Mish‘al represented Hamas and the Palestinian resistance, while Mahmud ‘Abbas boycotted this summit.

c. Syria’s Position Towards Israel

The Israeli army still occupies the Golan Heights since 1967. Though Syria deals with the Palestinian issue on a national basis, it wants to restore its land that is still occupied. From the Syrian perspective, Israel is an occupier of the Palestinian and Syrian lands. Thus, Syria started in 2008 a series of indirect negotiations, with some Israeli officials, through the intermediary of Turkey, aimed at the withdrawal of Israel from the Golan Heights in return for Syrian recognition of Israel.

These negotiations were conducted, after the Syrian President Bashar Assad has suggested that his country is preparing for war with Israel, if the occupation of the

Golan continues, saying that, “None of us rule out the option of war.”²⁶ However, the Syrian President refused to make secret and direct contacts with Israel, stressing that any talks with Tel Aviv will be announced to the public opinion. Assad said that the principle on which Syria acts is to reject secret talks or contacts with Israel, whatever they were, and all what can be done in this regard will be announced to the public opinion in Syria.²⁷

Five rounds of indirect talks between Syria and Israel were held in Ankara, under the auspices of Ahmet Davutoğlu, the chief foreign policy advisor to Turkish Prime Minister and Feridun Sinirlioğlu, deputy undersecretary for Middle East Affairs in the Turkish Foreign Ministry. The talks dealt with security arrangements, normal peace relations -if Israel withdraws from the Syrian Golan, scheduling the Israeli withdrawal, and the water issue. It is believed that Israel is not serious in these negotiations, and that it wanted to break the alliance between Syria and each of Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah.

The talks stalled because of the Israeli aggression on Gaza and with the end of the year, Syria announced that these talks stopped. Assad outlined Syria’s policy of refusing to have any agreement with Israel at the expense of his country’s relations with Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. However, he showed once again his readiness for peace with Israel in return of fully restoring the Golan Heights, i.e. beyond the line of June 4, 1967.²⁸

4. Lebanon

In the following part we will shed light on developments related to the Palestinian presence in Lebanon in 2008; and on Lebanon’s position on the aggression against the GS.

a. The Palestinian Situation in Lebanon

A unified Palestinian leadership of emergency to be responsible for the day-to-day interaction between the Palestinians and the Lebanese authorities was formed by a decision from all the Palestinian factions in Lebanon, whether under the PLO or from outside. It was emphasized that all factions would abide by the decisions of the Palestinian leadership of emergency in dealing with emergency situations in Lebanon.

The factions explained this agreement as a result of “the serious developments that swept through Lebanon, as well as, to prevent the Palestinian from being

caught by these conflicts, to maintain fraternal relations with all Lebanese parties, to maintain the same distance from everyone, and to consolidate the Palestinian position in order to preserve the higher interests of the Palestinian people.”

It was emphasized that the Palestinians in Lebanon will abide by this position, and that “its violation constitutes a Detrimental to the best interests of the Palestinian, and a departure from the Palestinian consensus.” The statement issued by the leaders of Palestinian factions declared their commitment and respect to the unity of Lebanon’s land and people, and their invitation to the Lebanese parties to dialogue.

The statement called upon all Lebanese parties to avoid “the involvement of Palestinians whether politically or in the media in the current events, not to rush in believing any rumors or fabricated information in this regard, and to contact with the concerned Palestinian leaderships to make sure of any position, information, or rumor.”

Palestinian factions took executive measures for the content of the agreement including the formation of Emergency Committee in Beirut, headed by Brigadier-General Khaled ‘Aref, a PLO official in charge of foreign affairs, with sub-committees in each camp in Beirut and its suburbs at the Emergency Committee’s disposal. It was also agreed that Major General Dr. Midhat Kamal (may God have mercy on him, was assassinated later in 23/3/2009) would be nominated for the Secretariat of the Central Emergency Committee.

In a speech during a meeting held in the camp of Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp in the southern suburbs of Beirut, Kamal said that “the developments, that have occurred in Lebanon, have unified the Palestinian factions,” adding that the Central Emergency leadership “seeks to spare the camps the involvement in any negative developments in Lebanon.” Noting that the Palestinians avoid taking any party’s side whether it was in support of the government or with the Lebanese opposition.

‘Abbas Zaki, the PLO representative in Lebanon endorsed the agreement, emphasizing “the firm Palestinian stance, of not to interfere in the Lebanese domestic affairs,” and stressing that “the Palestinians will not be with one party against another in any inter-Lebanese conflict, and they will spare no effort to be a bridge of agreement between the Lebanese.”

He called for “letting those lying in wait for the Palestinian people miss their opportunity, through strengthening the Palestinian joint frameworks.”²⁹

on 7/1/2008, in the celebration of the 43rd Fatah movement anniversary, ‘Abbas Zaki has presented what was later known as the “Palestine Declaration”, in which he offered an apology to the Lebanese people for any damage the Palestinian presence have caused to Lebanon. The announcement states:

It is fair to say that the Palestinian huge presence, human, political and military weight had an overwhelming impact on Lebanon on all levels, certainly in addition to its known share of participation in the duty of supporting the Palestinian cause (supporting state), which affected strongly its state, economy, its social human structure and living. It is as well fair to state that the Palestinian involvement in this country especially during the 1975 and 1982 wars was generally forced by internal and external vanquishing circumstances.

And this is not being said to disclaim responsibility or to attribute the events that took place then to the ‘conspiracy theory’, but we say this in search of justice for both victims, and in order to be able to open the door for reevaluation and to help ourselves to purify our memory. Thus, we do want to take the initiative to apologize to any damage we have caused to our Dear Lebanon whether intentionally or not. And this apology is in no way conditioned by a counter apology.³⁰

On the other hand, 44 Christian Lebanese signed a joint letter headlined “Appeal to our Palestinian brothers in Lebanon”; on the eve of the anniversary of the Lebanese war. It was a written apology for the “unjustifiable acts committed during the civil war in Lebanon and resulted in the death of innocent fellow Palestinian.” The letter says:

In the 33rd anniversary of the outbreak of the Lebanese war and in response to the apology made by ‘Abbas Zaki, the representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon on 7/1/2008; in our turn, we would like to recognize that some of us, we Lebanese Christians, committed unjustified acts during that long war which resulted in the death of innocent fellow Palestinians. This hurts us and we would like to apologize, asking God to show us how to compensate, if possible, for the injustice perpetrated. We call on our fellow Palestinians to enter into relations and dialogue with us in the service of a decent, secure and fraternal life for us all. We are confident that what we express here is shared by many of our fellow Lebanese.³¹

A joint seminar was held in the headquarters of the Kataeb Party, which was one of the the most vocal opponents of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, on the occasion of the anniversary of the event that took place on 13/4/1974, when some members of Kataeb Party fired at a bus carrying Palestinians in the neighborhood of 'Ain al-Rummaneh.

At the seminar, Amin Gemayel; the party leader, Akram Shayeb; Member of Parliament, Nadim Abdel-Samad; the President of the National Committee of the Democratic Left Movement, and 'Abbas Zaki, the PLO representative in Lebanon. Gemayel described the meeting as "a meeting of openness to achieve the Lebanese-Palestinian reconciliation that supports the inter-Lebanese reconciliation." Meanwhile, the MP Shayeb emphasized the refusal of "imposing resettlement", and urged "all the Palestinian factions to unite." Zaki affirmed, "the establishment of a Palestinian state is the only savior that exempts Lebanon from this heavy burden," adding that the issue of the State is "a Lebanese issue in the first place."

It should be noted that both events are linked to the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, and concerns over resettlement. Especially since the resettlement issue had been raised again between the Lebanese factions, as one of the most important political issues of concern to the Lebanese politicians and the Lebanese public opinion, from across the political spectrum. The opposition accuses the Lebanese government that it is seeking to settle the Palestinians in Lebanon, while the government denied the charge. Thus, the resettlement fear returned to loom in Lebanon.

Change and Reform bloc chief MP Michel 'Aoun accused the government of taking the decision to resettle the Palestinians. He said, "in waiting for completing the sale movie, we go to link between the current government and the sale of land and resettlement, saying that the right of return is a normal right." He added: We want to know the practical position of the government particularly that the President George W. Bush asked to establish a fund to compensate the Palestinians in replace of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). According to 'Aoun "The resettlement is actually taking place had the Lebanese did not realize its real risks, and if the plotters continued their conspiracy over the country and its people with the complicity of some people inside." He said, "The settlement is not a scarecrow, as some claim, it still exists, and worked upon to be finalized by the PA President Mahmud 'Abbas and Yossi Beilin, the Israeli official."³²

The Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Lebanese Forces, Samir Geagea, responded to 'Aoun saying that 'Aoun claims possession of documents that confirm the scheme of resettlement of Palestinians in Lebanon. The presence of Palestinians in Lebanon dates back to 1948, when there was an actual planning for the resettlement, meaning the creation of a PA in Lebanon. "General 'Aoun was not -with all due respect- the one who confronted it. We did so, and everyone is aware of what the Kataeb and the Lebanese Forces have done, at that stage." Geagea called on to stop bidding on this topic. He asked: Where is this scheme? Who implements it? Geagea added that the settlement requires the consent of the two parties; the Lebanese and Palestinian, but the two are against it.

The Lebanese Prime Minister Fu'ad al-Sanyurah rejected this exchange between the politicians by emphasizing the Lebanese official and popular position against resettlement "in all its forms, and that Lebanon upholds the inalienable right of return for Palestinian refugees." Al-Sanyurah's position was a response for the statement made by US President George W. Bush who showed his commitment to a viable Palestinian state, his appreciation of the Arab peace initiative; which was to include a comprehensive and just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees, and what the question of new international mechanisms, including compensation to resolve the problem of refugees.

Al-Sanyurah said that Lebanon was committed to the Arab peace initiative as "a draft plan for a comprehensive settlement that responds [to] the requirements of international legitimacy, and that Lebanon is entirely committed to it, without deduction or division." Al-Sanyurah stressed the necessity of resolving the problem of Palestinian refugees on the basis of "the international legitimacy and all its relevant resolutions, including the right of return."

Al-Sanyurah stressed that "Lebanon's upholds this inalienable right... and refuses resettlement in all its forms," and that this position is based on "the Lebanese national consensus, and provided in the preamble of the Lebanese Constitution in a clear and binding form."³³

There are several criteria governing the security situation in the camps in Lebanon, which are: The State, and the Lebanese parties and forces deal with the issue of the camps mainly from the security perspective. The Palestinian forces and factions and their supporters in Lebanon constitute an extension of the Palestinian

factions in the Palestinian territories, interacting with them and affected by their variables.

This was reflected more than once on the relationship between these factions within the camps, in accordance with the development of events in the Palestinian territories. During 2008, the Palestinian refugee camps witnessed a series of events that has raised Palestinian fears of repeating the events of Nahr al-Bared camp in the rest of the camps.

In February and March 2008, the Beddawi camp in northern Lebanon witnessed a series of statements which carried different signatures, such as, Fatah Alyassir's sons, the cadres and honoraries of the Fatah movement, Fatah al-Islam, and other signatures that do not have military or political extensions. These statements included threats to the leaders of the Fatah movement.³⁴ In November, the security situation was tense again in the Beddawi camp following the attempt of Fatah members to arrest one of the religious figures in the camp, accusing him of having connections with Fatah al-Islam. The attempt resulted in killing one person, arresting two wanted persons, and handing them over to the Lebanese security forces.³⁵

During 2008, 'Ain al-Helwa camp, the most prominent side in the security file witnessed a series of clashes and tensions that began with the killing of a member of Jund al-Sham in January 2008. Then, the security situation in the camp escalated on 21/3/2008, when a group of the Fatah movement, in coordination with the Lebanese security agencies, arrested a wanted member of Jund al-Sham, and handed him over to Lebanese security forces. This increased the security tension between the members of Jund al-Sham and Fatah, which led to wounding three people, and dozens of families decampment from the camp.³⁶ The tensions between Fatah and Jund al-Sham members reoccurred occasionally. A clash took place between members of Fatah and others from Jund al-Sham, in which one of the most prominent figures of the Jund al-Sham, known as Shehadah Jowhar was killed, in addition to two others, one from the 'Usbat al-Ansar.³⁷

During 2008, The most prominent event for the issue of reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared camp, was not more than the launch of the reconstruction scheme by the Lebanese Prime Minister Fu'ad al-Sanyura, on 12/2/2008, in the presence of 'Abbas Zaki; the PLO representative in Lebanon, and Karen Abu Zayd; The Commissioner General of UNRWA.

The details of this plan shows that the camp will accommodate about 22 thousand people from the camp, and the percentage of construction works to the land will be about 65%, while the buildings height would be between two and four floors. It was noted that this design reflected the position of the Lebanese army, which opposes the reconstruction of the camp's waterfront.³⁸

In 2008, some 1,900 families returned to the camp out of the 4,500 families displaced from their homes in Nahr al-Bared.³⁹ And in June 2008, the process of removing debris from the old camp in preparation for reconstruction began. This process has been scheduled for completion in August 2008,⁴⁰ however, until the completion of this report the debris were not removed completely.

Some explain the reasons for the delay in the reconstruction of the camp as the absence of a political decision of the Lebanese state in this regard, especially after the International donors' conference was held on 23/6/2008, and confirmation of Prime Minister Fu'ad al-Sanyurah that four Gulf states; namely Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, will contribute by about 50% of the amount needed for the reconstruction, which was estimated by many bodies by about \$450 million.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the European Commissioner declared, on behalf of the European Union, a European contribution of \$45 million to rebuild the camp.⁴¹ Ursula Plassnik, the Austrian Foreign Minister announced that \$122 million was offered for the reconstruction of Bared camp and the surrounding villages, an amount that is limited to the European and Western countries.⁴²

Dealing with camp issues, including the issue of Nahr al-Bared camp reconstruction from the security standpoint was reflected negatively on the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Despite the implementation of reconstruction plans by the UNRWA, and the donors pledge to finance the project of reconstruction, however, the political decision on this issue is still unresolved, which raises fears among Palestinians of the existence of obstacles in Lebanese decision-making institution, where some are still willing to keep the pressure on the Palestinians aiming at weakening their presence in Lebanon.

b. Lebanon's Position Towards the Aggression against the GS:

Lebanon was against the Israeli aggression on the GS, recalling the Israeli aggression against Lebanon in the summer of 2006. Lebanon called for curbing the

aggression, and called upon the Arab world to take urgent moves at the same level as the Israeli attack on Gaza. Salim al-Huss, the former Lebanese Prime Minister, said:

We, like all Arab citizens do not believe the humanitarian tragedies that are going on in the GS resulting from the Israeli barbaric aggression. We also do not understand the reason for the hesitation to convene the Arab summit meeting after the unjustifiable adjournment of the Arab foreign ministers meeting... The Arab rulers wait several days before meeting to launch a national position, while the lives of hundreds of the nation's children are lost and their bodies are torn every hour. We are shocked by the stand of some Arab leaders, who have blamed the victim, addressed the stricken by the language of gloat, and avoided uttering one word that would be offensive to the Israeli enemy, or would held it responsible for the consequences of the atrocities committed to our own brothers in a Palestinian territory under siege.⁴³

'Issam Abu Jamra, the Deputy Prime Minister denounced the mass killings committed by Israel against the Palestinians. He said: "Violence between nations and peoples only breeds violence, and the policy of mutual understanding is the only way to achieve stability and security." After Tammam Salam, the Lebanese Culture Minister donated blood, in a campaign launched by the Islamic Makassed Society in Beirut, he said, "Today we offer a drop of blood to support and assist this people, but there is much more required; what is required is a unified stand to our Palestinian brothers and all Arabs as a whole to confirm our full right to face this Israeli aggression and ferocity."⁴⁴

General Michel 'Aoun called on the world to stop Israeli aggression against the GS and to lift the blockade imposed on it. He called on Arab states to take a firm stand on what is going on because "silence is like participating in the crime." He said in a televised statement: "The situation should not continue as it is; Gaza is bleeding for years and the world sees the situation now as being normal." He warned of "the normalization of what is going on in Gaza," pointing out that "Israel can inflict losses (to the Palestinians), but will not be able to conquer, it is an action out of fear, and this is a sign of weakness."⁴⁵

Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah Secretary-General called for holding "A day of mourning and solidarity", under the title "In support for Gaza". He also called for "a third *Intifadah* in Palestine, and uprisings in both the Arab and Islamic worlds," and urged Palestinians to "unify".⁴⁶

5. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia tried to be neutral regarding the inter-Palestinian disputes. Consequently, it advocated consistently the need to achieve national reconciliation between the PA and Hamas, and the implementation of the Mecca Agreement which was signed on 8/2/2007 under the auspices of Saudi Arabia.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia joined the so-called moderate states, and was represented with low level of representation by only its delegate to the Arab League, Ahmad al-Qattan in the Arab Summit which was held in the Syrian capital at the end of March 2008. Saudi Arabia did not participate in the Doha conference which was held in support of the GS, however, it stressed, during the visit of former US President George W. Bush to Riyadh, on the Arab peace initiative, which is essentially an initiative launched by Saudi King in 2002, when he was the crown prince.

Saudi Arabia asked President Bush to put pressure on Israel to accept the Arab initiative. It also refused to offer further concession to Israel by changing some items of the initiative, in order to be agreed upon by Israel. Saudi Arabia pointed out that the issue of the Saudi recognition of Israel is out of the question before reaching a final and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and the commitment to the Arab initiative for peace. Even more, Saudi Arabia threatened that in the case of Israel's refusal of the Arab initiative as it is without amendment, the Arab States will have to review its options.

Saudi Arabia advocated the idea of sending Arab forces to Gaza, as a solution to open the crossings and lift the siege on the GS. Arab countries were divided between supporters and opponents, but the real refusal was from the Israeli part, which feared that a clash would occur between the Israeli army, which attacks repeatedly Gaza, and the Arab forces. If those forces are there, they will intervene if missiles were fired from Gaza into Israel, and the latter responded militarily.

It seems that Saudi Arabia wanted the crossings to be handed over to those force. It also wanted them to prepare the security arrangements to ensure the integrity of elections with the Arab help through the rebuilding the security agencies on professional and national basis.⁴⁷

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia announced that it did not interfere in the issue of the Palestinian pilgrims from Gaza, stressing that it deals with Palestinians with

equality. Saudi Arabia gave thousands of them, including the GS inhabitants, the entry visas to the Kingdom to perform Hajj. The Saudi government has increased the quota of the Palestinians, taking into account their humanitarian circumstances, and all the Kingdom's ports are ready to welcome them and to facilitate their performance of rituals. It also affirmed that all the Palestinian pilgrims are being dealt with as Muslims, regardless of their political affiliation.

Third: Developments in the Field of Normalization

The issue of normalization of relations between Arab countries and Israel is still confined to the minimal with those countries that signed peace treaties with Israel like Egypt and Jordan and other Arab countries that have established limited relations with it, like Mauritania for example.

1. Egypt

Relations of normalization between Egypt and Israel have developed, in particular at the economic level. The most important was the Egyptian approval to pump the Egyptian natural gas to Israel, pursuant to an agreement signed by the two parties valued at \$2.5 billion.

The agreement states that there will be exporting natural gas from Egypt to Israel, by 107 billion cubic meters of gas annually for 15 years, renewable, which means that one fifth of the electricity generated in Israel over the next decade will be from the Egyptian gas.

The Egyptian minister of Petroleum Sameh Fahmy, has agreed to allow the Egyptian oil and gas holding companies to export gas to Israel through the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Company, and to begin implementation. This Agreement triggered opposed reactions from the Egyptian public opinion, as represented by the civil society organizations, parties and various political currents.

The case was brought before the court, where the Administrative Court in Egypt ruled to halt the implementation of the agreement and to stop pumping gas to Israel, based on the Egyptian constitution that gave the parliament, not the Egyptian government, the exclusive right to control the sale of natural resources. However, the Government objected to the court's decision and denied the need

for the approval of the Egyptian people's Assembly to the natural gas deal; saying that it is a private agreement between the Egyptian Eastern Mediterranean Gas and Israel Electric Corporation, and not with the Egyptian government.

However, Ambassador Ibrahim Yousry, the main prosecutor in the case of the Egyptian gas exports to Israel, demanded the Egyptian government to stop immediately the supply of gas to Israel in respect of the decision of the Egyptian judiciary in this regard. About the coincidence between this decision with the intensification of the siege on Gaza, the ambassador said that Egyptian gas saved the Israeli consumer of electricity 20% of the cost, "Why do not we export the gas to Gaza instead of Israel." The Egyptian natural gas is still exported to Israel, the case is still pending before the courts.

The Egyptian companies continued importing some Israeli products, within the framework of the QIZ Protocol (Qualified Industrial Zone Agreement (QIZ Agreement)). The total number of the registered companies in the QIZ unit until November 2008 was up to 689 companies; 57% in Alexandria, the City of the Tenth of Ramadan and the Shubra al-Khaimah.

On the other hand, it was discovered that the hotels in Taba City, which located on the border with occupied Palestine, have access to drinking water through water lines from Israel, and not through the desalination plant of the Egyptian Ministry of Housing in Taba.

It was also discovered that the Facilities of the Hilton Taba Resort, which was built by Israel during the occupation of the Sinai, are all linked to the Israeli utilities network. Despite the transition of the Hotel affiliation to Egypt after the International Arbitration Commission's decision of right of Egypt in Taba, the hotel management found that it was the better and "cheaper" to access the public services of Israel.

Investors in the city of Taba admitted before the Committee on Culture and Tourism and Information in the Egyptian people's Assembly that the price per cubic meter of water is up to seven Egyptian pounds if purchased from the desalination plant, while Israel sells it only for a 1.25 Egyptian pound (the US dollar equivalent of 5.3 Egyptian pounds).

A reportage of the Seventh Israeli channel uncovered that Egypt in collaboration with the European Union hosted a conference with the participation of Israel, for

the of technology development in the field of textile and food in the countries of the Mediterranean basin, in the framework of the European technological project Medibtikar. The reportage pointed out that the project costs 7.3 billion euros (i.e. equivalent to about \$9.86 billion), and will last for three years, with the participation of Israel, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and the PA.

The Israeli representative was Sima Amir, Head of the Business and Technology Cooperation Department of the Manufacturers' Association of Israel. She said that the project will be sponsored by the European Union through several stages, where the first stage is in the area of fabric, while the second is about food.⁴⁸

2. Jordan

Jordan is the second Arab country to officially normalize relations with Israel, in spite of the popular rejection for this step. It turned out that Jordan's exports to Israel, during one month (February 2008), amounted to 3,700 tons of vegetables and fruits, while Jordan imported during the same month, 922 tons of vegetables and fruits. During the olive harvest season, Jordan also exported to Israel, huge quantities of olives at a rate of 200 to 300 tons per day.

According to a report of The Israel Export and International Cooperation Institute, which was published by Quds Press Agency, Jordanians are the largest consumer of Israeli products in the Arab world, preceding Egypt with its population that is more than about 15 times the population of Jordan. The report pointed out that Jordan is the largest "customer" of Israeli goods in the first quarter of 2008, and the volume of imports reached 102 million, an increase of 62% over the same period last year. The report considers that Jordan is Israel's first trade partner. Although the report did not refer to the nature of the Israeli products consumed by the Jordanians, however, it is mostly food, agricultural and industrial products. In addition to clothing products, that are mostly sold in some shopping centres, signed by "Made in Israel".⁴⁹

The Jordanian Agricultural Engineers Association threatened to publish a list of Jordanian traders and companies who imported agricultural materials, such as mango, barley and corn from Israel. It was found that 99% of imported mangoes in the Jordanian markets are from Israel not "Egypt", as being said in the Jordanian market. An official source in the association pointed out that the

growing importation of corn, barley, Soybeans from Israel, which reached from the beginning of 2008 till July 2008, respectively 5,610 tons and 1,500 tons and 3,000 tons.⁵⁰

3. Other Arab Countries

Mauritanian newspapers revealed that Israel succeeded to win some players in the Mauritanian government before the coup d'état, and that members of the Mossad managed to recruit Mauritanian MPs, in an attempt to block the way of any possibility of severing relations inherited from the era of former President Maaouya Ould Taya, especially after the President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi has pledged before and after his inauguration in April 2008, to present these relations for referendum and consultation and to take the appropriate decision in this regard. It is known that Mauritania decided to freeze the political and economic relations with Israel during the Doha summit in support of Gaza at the beginning of 2009. On 6/3/2009, Mauritania supplemented this resolution by expelling Israeli diplomats in Nouakchott, and the closing the Israeli embassy in Mauritania.⁵¹

On the other hand, 'Abdel Wahid al-Nur, the commander of the rebel Sudan Liberation Movement in Darfur admitted that his group opened an office in Israel, and that some Sudanese who fled to Israel are the ones who opened the group's office there, pointing at the same time that Israel; according to him, saved young Sudanese from genocide. Al-Nur said that the political vision of the movement allows the opening of an Israeli embassy in Khartoum, had it be for the interests of Sudan, according to him. Recently, Israel has granted asylum to 600 Sudanese from Darfur.

Al-Nur denied that he had visited Israel, but said that, "there's nothing to stop him from visiting it, if he found that it will be for his interest."⁵²

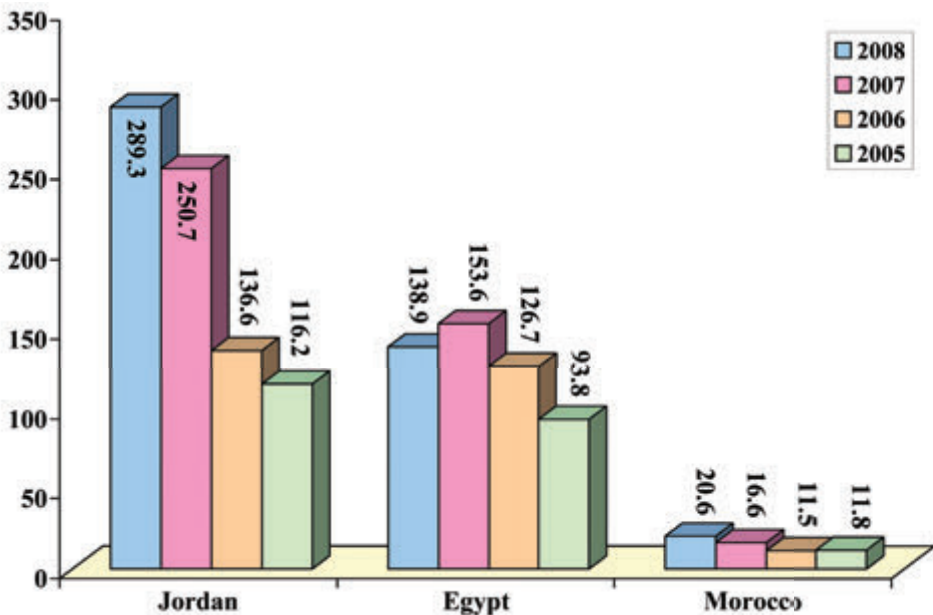
Al-Nur strongly defended the opening of an office of his movement in Israel and vowed to work on the exchange of embassies with Israel when they succeed in overthrowing Bashir, as he said, and when they achieve the establishment of the secular state. In a statement distributed to the press on 21/7/2008, and signed by the spokesman, 'Issa Ibrahim, the Office of the Sudan Liberation Movement in Israel declared its intention to organize a major rally supporting Israel, including all spectra of the Sudanese people in Israel.⁵³

In Iraq, the Supreme Judicial Council overturned the decision of the Iraqi parliament, which had been taken to lift the parliamentary immunity of the Member of Parliament Mithal al-Alusi, due to his visit to Israel, based on the Iraqi Constitution. The Iraqi Federal Court confirmed that the decision of the Iraqi parliament is contrary to the Constitution, and is not based on law. It also confirmed the right of every Iraqi to travel to Israel without imposing any legal restrictions on them.⁵⁴

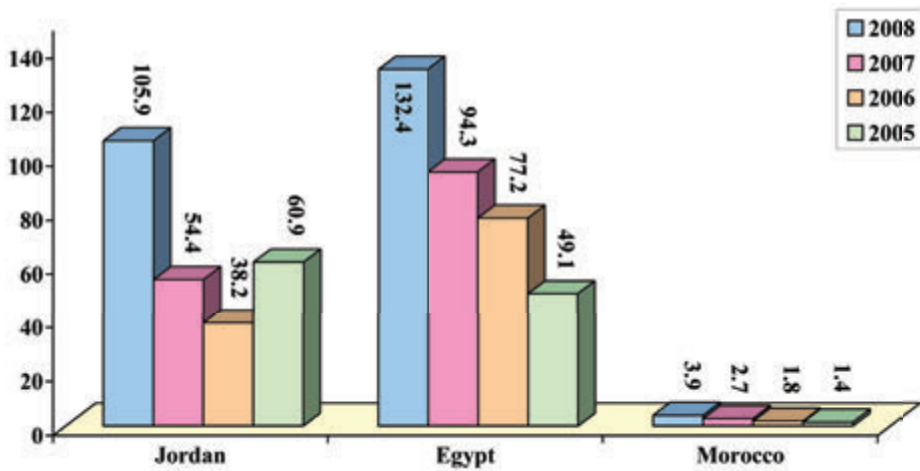
Table 1/3: Israeli Exports and Imports with Some Arab Countries 2005-2008 (\$ million)⁵⁵

Countries	Israeli imports from:				Israeli exports to:			
	2008	2007	2006	2005	2008	2007	2006	2005
Jordan	105.9	54.4	38.2	60.9	289.3	250.7	136.6	116.2
Egypt	132.4	94.3	77.2	49.1	138.9	153.6	126.7	93.8
Morocco	3.9	2.7	1.8	1.4	20.6	16.6	11.5	11.8

Israeli Exports to Some Arab Countries 2005-2008 (\$ million)



Israeli Imports from Some Arab Countries 2005-2008 (\$ million)



Fourth: The Public Arab Attitude and Orientations

The end of 2008 was the phase of Arab and Islamic popular *intifadah*, and the public massive move and broad public support for the Palestinian cause and the resistance, after the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in the GS. This aggression led the Arab and Islamic street in various parts of the world to re-embrace the Palestinian cause, and the heroic Palestinian resistance was able to move the street and the Arab public opinion to put pressure on the official Arab regimes in order to stop the Israeli aggression.

The Arab popular support for the Palestinians was miles ahead the Arab official resolutions, which embarrassed many of the Arab regimes, some of which was accused of complicity, by not moving quickly to stop the Israeli aggression.

Before looking at the Arab popular position towards the Israeli aggression, it must be emphasized that the public view of the Palestinian cause in general was supporting the Palestinian resistance, and refusing to normalize relations with Israel. In Jordan, the Anti-Normalization National Conference was held on 25/10/2008. In this conference, significant papers were presented that sharply criticized the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty, its signatories, and implementers; and called for the abolition of this treaty.

Some researches that were presented in the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions have described the peace treaty as being “disastrous”, and the treaty of “humiliation and shame”, pointing out that the treaty has established an official alliance between Jordan and Israel. In a paper presented in the Conference, the former deputy in the Parliament of Jordan Ali Abu Sukkar said, “Normalization is a Zionist invention, for its importance and strategic necessity to the Zionist entity, which aims to integrate it in the region, and change the Arabs psychologically and mentally, in order to accept and admit the existence of (Israel) as a Jewish independent state with sovereignty, and recognize the ideological basis for it.”⁵⁶

The Jordanian trade unions threatened implicitly to resume its boycott of any Jordanian who participates in normalization activities with Israel. They criticized a Bulletin issued by the Jordanian Ministry of Health about a training course for physicians that will be held later with Israeli doctors. The unions said, in a statement of the anti-normalization committees, that successive governments have facilitated the normalization and the suspicious relations, and that the Unions consider any Jordanian who agrees to attend any Israeli activity or an activity with Israelis, to be a “normalizer”.

Many Jordanian national figures called for expelling the Israeli ambassador in Amman, and the ambassadors of countries that support the siege imposed by the Israeli occupation of the GS. This has occurred during a sit-in organized by dozens of Jordanian party members, trade unionists and representatives of public events in front of the trade unions complex in Amman the capital; calling for lifting the siege on the GS.

The same applies to the Egyptian opposition, which denounced the continuation of agricultural and economic cooperation between Cairo and Tel Aviv, despite the continuing Israeli attacks almost on a daily basis on the Palestinian people. The various Egyptian political forces and parties and trade unions have called on to demonstrate in the Bar Association headquarters in downtown Cairo, to protest against the Israeli massacres in Gaza, as well as to protest against the American interference in Arab affairs. They demanded a serious Arab and Islamic reaction to stop the Israeli massacres, and holding the perpetrators as war criminals who must be prosecuted internationally.

There were also demonstrations in the Egyptian universities to denounce the Israeli massacres against the Palestinian people in Gaza, attended by thousands of

students, demanding Cairo to take a firm stance in order to stop these massacres. They also called for expelling the Israeli ambassador, termination of the Camp David Accords, withdrawing the Egyptian ambassador from Tel Aviv, reviving the boycott of the Israeli entity and countries advocating it. The parliamentary and trade union angry reactions continued all over Egypt because of shooting an Egyptian girl dead by the Israeli troops in the border area between Egypt and the GS.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt called on the Egyptian government to refrain from participating in the siege of Gaza, and demanded the reopening of the Rafah crossing.⁵⁷ During the Israeli aggression on Gaza, the Muslim Brotherhood played an active and leading role in moving the Egyptian street, through the organization of demonstrations, sit-ins, fund-raising campaigns, as they called for Arab and Muslim peoples to stand against what they called “collusion by most Arab and Muslim regimes and governments” with the Israeli enemy, aiming at striking the Palestinian resistance.⁵⁸

Hussein Ibrahim, deputy head of the Muslim Brotherhood bloc in the Egyptian parliament, said that the decision to strike Gaza, had been declared from Cairo after a meeting between Livni and Abu al-Ghait. He described what happened as a human massacre and genocide war, and demanded the immediate halting of exporting natural gas to Israel, and the reopening of the Rafah crossing for the Palestinians.⁵⁹ The Brotherhood criticized the Egyptian initiative for a cease-fire, saying it equalizes between the executioner and the victim.⁶⁰

The opposition Labor Party condemned the Egyptian official role in the war on Gaza. The Labor Party and the Revolutionary Socialists accused the Egyptian authorities of working to support the Israeli occupation, calling for “Allowing the opportunity of Jihad for those wishing to travel to Gaza.”⁶¹ Abdul Jaleel Mustafa, the general coordinator of the Kefaya movement, said: “The image of Egypt is in the bottom, because of the support provided by the regime to Israel.”⁶² Hundreds of members of the Muslim Brotherhood, Kefaya movement, the Labor Party, the Revolutionary Socialists, and others were arrested by the Egyptian security forces, following their participation in demonstrations of solidarity with Gaza.⁶³

In Nouakchott, the Mauritanian capital, the National Rally for Reform and Development Party (RNRD) demanded the Mauritanian President to use his powers to sever relations with the “entity” immediately. In a speech before a number of

Mauritanians party leaders and a rally in the headquarters of his party, Mohamed Jamil Mansour said: “we are no longer able to be patient, no longer able to wait, the President must use his powers and sever these relations immediately, and history will write this down.” Qatar and Mauritania has frozen their recognition of Israel, during the Arab summit held in Doha in support of the GS.

In Tunisia, the opposition Tunisian Democratic Progressive Party condemned the official Arab silence regarding the ongoing Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in the GS. It said that this silence “is implicitly encouraging the aggressor to continue air raids on the defenseless Palestinian people.”

Demonstrations swept all over Arab capitals and cities, the largest were in Morocco and Algeria; where millions of people participated.

Lebanese parties, forces and national figures held a national joint Lebanese-Palestinian meeting in solidarity with the Palestinian people and the heroic resistance in the GS, and the condemnation of the barbaric Israeli aggression on it.

Hassan Hodroj, a member of the political bureau of Hezbollah, said that what is happening in the GS could not wait, because the current aggression is not an aggression against the Palestinian people, it is rather an aggression by the United States with an international complicity. Mohamed Saleh, a Hezbollah official in the north, gave a speech at the sit-in, in which he said, “The aggression aims at terminating the resistance, and the imposition of humiliation and surrender.”

Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyyah in Lebanon organized sit-ins where it called upon the international community to lift the siege on Gaza, called for Egypt also to reopen the Rafah crossing. During the aggression on Gaza, the *Jama'a* has organized several joint activities with the Palestinian people, including the organization of demonstrations, sit-ins, and fund-raising, in the various regions of Lebanon.

After a massive march through the streets of Beirut, 'Ali Sheikh 'Ammar, the head of the Political Bureau of the *Jama'a* said, “The Security Council should not deal with the aggression on Gaza with such lightness and irresponsibility.” He called on the Organization of the Islamic Conference to “side with the people of Palestine.” He denounced “the Arab League’s hesitation and confusion, which indicates that it is not eligible for the responsibility.”⁶⁴ He said that the time has come for the Arab peoples to move, towards reform and change, which is compatible with the option of resistance, calling on Muslim governments to take a clear position.⁶⁵

In marches that toured the streets of Damascus, the Syrian cities and the Palestinian refugee camps, the Syrian public expressed their anger and condemnation of the massacres of Gaza and the WB.

The National Union of Kuwaiti Students, the administrative committee of the University of Kuwait branch, the administrative committee of France's branch, the administrative committee of Egypt's branch, the administrative committee of Jordan's branch, and the administrative committee of Britain's branch issued a joint statement condemning the Israeli attacks on the GS and the Palestinian people.

The general secretariat of the Arab parties conference, which is based in Amman and represents 130 Arab parties from different Arab countries, issued a memorandum to the Arab leaders and kings in the eve of the Arab summit in Damascus. The general secretariat of the Arab parties called for the Arab kings and leaders "to withdraw the Arab Peace Initiative, and support the resistance in Palestine," and "not waiving the right of return for Palestinian refugees," and "lifting the siege imposed on the Palestinians and not to press them to make political compromises," and "to forward the Sana'a agreement for Palestinian reconciliation and the severance of relations with the Zionist entity and activating the Arab boycott against Israel."

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the year 2008 began with continuation of official Arab impotence, lack of influence on the course of events in the developments of the Palestinian cause; from lifting the siege and reopening of the crossings in Gaza, to the failure to put pressure on Israel to agree to the Arab peace initiative, to stop the settlements, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state - which the former President George Bush has promised by the end of the year, and finally the intervention to achieve reconciliation between the PA and Hamas.

The year ended by the Israeli aggression on Gaza; thousands dead and wounded, the destruction of homes, mosques, universities, schools and infrastructure of Gaza, and the official Arab regime and its inability to stop the aggression.

However, in contrast, the year ended by achieving the legendary steadfastness of Hamas and the Palestinian resistance, and increased public support for them.

Hamas has shown that it is able to deal efficiently, effectively and reliably, despite the lack of capabilities, in facing the Israeli aggression, and revitalizing the spirit and awareness of the Arab street, and rallying millions of Arab citizens to support the steadfastness of the resistance in Gaza encountering the Israeli war machine, after some have betted on the disappearance of the culture of resistance from the Arab street.

This resistance has prompted the sense of pride and self-confidence for the Palestinian people, the Arab world, and the Islamic nation, while other forces tried to foster the spirit of defeat and frustration in the Arab and Islamic nations. Moreover, the victory, achieved by the Palestinian resistance, resulted in increasing the divisions between the Arab regimes; between the moderate and the “refusal states”, at a time when the Arab masses have united behind the resistance approach, which emerged victorious from the Israeli aggression.

There is no doubt that these interactions will be the ones that will drive the Palestinian issue in the coming year, which will be dealt with the officially and popularly by the Arab. However, what is certain is that the steadfastness of the resistance and its victory in the battle of wills, in the GS, and the failure of the Israeli occupation in achieving its objectives, all resulted in confusion, and made everyone redo their calculations.

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Chapter Four

The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

Introduction

The support of the Muslim states to the Palestinian issue remained during the year 2008 basically the same as in previous years. Though the tone of the moral support to the Palestinians had become louder within official and popular Muslim circles, particularly on the verge of the Israeli aggression on Gaza towards the end of the year, the Muslim states had once more failed to secure the means that would effectively stop the aggression or break the suffocating siege on the Strip, or even end the internal Palestinian schism.

This chapter addresses in some details the positions of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Turkey, and Iran towards the Palestinian issue during this year. It also surveys the positions of Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia towards the issue.

First: The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)

The OIC had essentially maintained during the year 2008 its previous position towards the Palestinian problems and concerns. The year had witnessed further deterioration in the already dangerous humanitarian conditions in Gaza, and by the end of the year Israel launched a total war on the Strip's civilians that engendered unprecedented catastrophic conditions. The OIC declared its customary "total support" to the inhabitants of Gaza, and, as in previous years, the Organization brought to the forefront the issues of the ongoing Israeli settlements in the Palestinian occupied lands, the Israeli provocation of the Palestinian people in the areas surroundings *al-Aqsa* Mosque and their excavations there that exposed the holy site to the danger of collapse. The OIC had also repeated its previous demand to hold Israel accountable before the international court of justice for its crimes against the Palestinian people, and it accused the western media of double standards when addressing the Palestinian crisis.

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, the secretary-general of the OIC, initialed the year by calling for a press conference on 8/1/2008 in which he condemned what he called “the Israeli inhuman attacks on the civilians in Gaza.” On 24/1/2008, the state-members of the OIC demanded in Geneva that the council for human rights inspects the humanitarian conditions in the occupied Palestinian lands. Meanwhile, in one of his press releases, the secretary-general of the organization drew attention to the problem of the closure of the frontier gates in Gaza, which caused great hardship to the inhabitants of the Strip, and called upon the United Nations to interfere to stop the Israeli attacks, and to lift the oppressive Israeli siege on Gaza. On 3/2/2008, the executive committee of the OIC held an emergency meeting at the level of the ministers of foreign affairs to discuss the latest developments in Palestine, especially the imposed siege on GS. In fact, throughout the year 2008 the OIC kept reminding the international community of its responsibilities towards the people of Gaza. The secretary-general called upon “the Quartet, the Security Council, the secretary-general of the United Nations and the European Union to immediately stop the Israeli attacks and to take the suitable and necessary steps to protect the Palestinian people.”¹

In an earlier declaration, on 20/1/2008, Ihsanoğlu commended the efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to bridge the gap between the Palestinian factions, particularly Hamas and the PA. In response to a question, the secretary-general maintained that efforts are ongoing to resolve the conflict between the two sides on the basis of Mecca Agreement that had been patronized by the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Ihsanoğlu had also casually commended the efforts of the Egyptian president in this respect. However, the OIC had apparently refrained from publicly discussing the issue of the failure of Mecca Agreement concluded between Hamas and the PA, and the reasons for the failure of the international community to recognize it and make it a platform for the incorporation of Hamas in the political process. In other words, the OIC did not conduct an internal investigation to explore the reasons for the failure of this agreement to achieve any meaningful progress on the Palestinian issue.

Nonetheless, the OIC continued its verbal condemnations of all the Israeli violations of the rights of the Palestinian people and the international law. In the above declaration, Ihsanoğlu condemned the Israeli measures of collective punishment against the Palestinian people. In another press release, he accused Israel of fabricating obstacles to obstruct the peace process with the Palestinians

through the construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, and the division of the Palestinian lands into small and isolated islands, which would lead to the acquisition by Israel of more Palestinian lands, and the destruction of the geographical unity of historical Palestine. Ihsanoğlu had also indicated the importance of documenting all these Israeli criminal acts, and to submit reports on them to the concerned international institutions and organizations. He specifically mentioned the Israeli plans to build 121 settlement units in Jabal Abu Ghunaym and 763 others in the region of Pisgat Ze'ev east of Jerusalem. Oğlu also called international organizations, like United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to shoulder their responsibilities in maintaining and preserving the historical sites in the region.

Ihsanoğlu cautioned against the dangers that *al-Aqsa* Mosque is experiencing due to the Israeli excavations beneath its foundations, which had actually led on 15/2/2008 to a collapse near to Qaytbay's fountain (*Sabil Qaytbay*) in the courtyards of the Noble Sanctuary (*al-Haram al-Qudsi*).² He also drew attention to the Israeli attempts to build a synagogue on the lands of an Islamic endowment (*Waqf*),³ and, at the same time, condemned the infiltration and closure of the *Aqsa* foundation by the Israeli authorities on 24/8/2008, when they confiscated all its properties and contents, including documents, maps and cash. In another development, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) of the OIC deplored the Israeli action of destroying the historical al-'Umari Mosque in Um Tuba village -situated south east of Jerusalem- which was built 700 years ago. Furthermore, UNESCO called the international community to press Israel to retract its decision in compliance with the Geneva convention and the decision of the UNESCO's heritage committee. In another declaration, the secretary-general of the OIC strongly condemned the Israeli decision to obliterate Ma'man Allah cemetery in Jerusalem, which was built on an Islamic endowment piece of land.

Throughout the year, the OIC had persistently expressed its frustration towards the catastrophic humanitarian conditions in GS, and it kept sending aid to the Strip via the representative of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In collaboration with organizations such as the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), the Islamic Fund, the Red Crescent societies and its member-states, the OIC organized at least trice a year caravans of trucks loaded with basic necessities, such as food and medicine, to the inhabitants of

Gaza. But the Organization did not seem to have asked itself whether this aid was enough for the 1.5 million persons in Gaza.

In a meeting between the relevant officials of the OIC and their counterparts of UNRWA, dated 22/4/2008, the former told the latter of their project to rebuild Nahr al-Bared camp in Lebanon. The Organization's official journal reported that the Lebanese government, the World Bank and UNRWA had organized on 23/6/2008 in Geneva a conference of the states' donors to rebuild Nahr al-Bared's Palestinian refugee camp.⁴

In an interview in March 2008 with *Annahar* newspaper, the secretary-general of the OIC accused western media of being biased against the Palestinian people. To support his argument, he gave the example of the operation against the Talmud school in Jerusalem, the western media usually do not report the inhuman and deliberate acts of killings that the Israeli military forces commit against the civilians, be them children, women or the elderly. He demanded that Israel be held responsible and tried for the crimes that it committed against the Palestinians. Oğlu took this opportunity to remind everybody that Islam rejects targeting civilians and children.

Additionally, the weekly bulletin of the OIC reported in its issue of 14/4/2008 that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia donated during the Third Extraordinary Summit of the OIC, held in Mecca, a 40 thousand meters' piece of land in Jeddah to build the headquarters of the Organization. It is worth mentioning that it was originally suggested during the founding meeting of the OIC in 1969 that the Organization's headquarter be in Jerusalem, but since the sacred town has been under occupation it was temporarily shifted to Jeddah.

On 14/5/2008, and during the 60th anniversary of the 1948 Catastrophe (*Nakba*), the secretary-general of the OIC issued a declaration that expressed the Organization's total support to the Palestinian people, and reminded the Muslims and others that the "state of Israel" had forcefully proclaimed its "independence" through the expulsion of hundreds of thousands Palestinians from their lands and those of their ancestors. Oğlu had, moreover, mentioned the refugees' right of return to their homes, and to build a sovereign state with Jerusalem as its capital. Furthermore, the OIC reminded the international community of its obligations towards this issue, which are spelled out in international law and in the resolutions of the United Nations.

On the 39th anniversary of *al-Aqsa*'s arson, which was the direct factor for the foundation of the OIC, Oğlu issued on 21/8/2008 another statement that condemned Israel's indifference to international law and the United Nation's resolutions on the Palestinian issue. He emphasized the Israeli continuous violations of the Palestinian rights through their excavations in the neighboring districts of the sacred mosque, the ongoing construction of the separation wall, the erection of barricades and checkpoints that separate communities from each other and the imposition of restrictions on the entry of the Muslim worshipers to Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

During its two-day summit, held in the Senegalese capital Dhaka during the period 13-14/3/2008, the OIC issued resolutions that reiterated its traditional support to the Palestinian people. One of these resolutions concentrated on the alarming deterioration of the humanitarian conditions in Gaza, and called for a permanent settlement to this tragedy through the implementation of the provisions of the Arab initiative that was articulated in the Beirut summit of 2002, and which called for the establishment of a secured Palestinian state on the pre-1967 territories. The resolution reminded that this initiative was once more endorsed in the Riad summit of March 2007, which also called for the implementation of the United Nation's resolutions on this issue. The final communiqué of the above OIC summit extended profuse thanks to the Moroccan King Muhammad VI for "his support to the Palestinian issue via his portfolio as the chairperson of Jerusalem committee," and to his Jordanian counterpart King Abdullah II for his success in "including the Palestinian issue in the agenda of international bodies." The communiqué also supported the call of the Egyptian President Husni Mubarak "to the Palestinian factions to settle their differences once and for all." But it dismissed the Palestinian-Lebanese group, known as "Fatah al-Islam", as a terrorist organization, and expressed "support to the efforts of the Lebanese government to rebuild the camp of Nahr al-Bared and to encourage the return of the inhabitants to it."⁵ The two-day Kampala meeting, 18-20/6/2008, of the foreign ministers of the OIC members repeated the Organization's same recommendations on the Palestinian issue.

On the Israeli aggression on Gaza towards the end of 2008, the OIC had once more expressed its support to the Palestinian people in general and the Gazans in particular. It also held on 31/12/2008 a meeting on the ambassadorial level in Gaza to prepare for an emergency meeting of the Organization's extended executive committee, scheduled on 3/1/2009. However, apart from this verbal support, the

OIC had on the whole failed throughout the year 2008 to extend any meaningful or tangible support to the Palestinian people, whose conditions had, in fact, continued to deteriorate in comparison to previous years. Ironically, the resolutions of the OIC reiterated profound thanks to its member-states for their “appreciated services to the Palestinians” at a time when the Organization had failed to even include in the agenda of the meeting of the foreign ministers of its member-states the demand of the Muslim masses that the Egyptian government opens Rafah gate in order to ease the suffocating Israeli siege on Gaza. According to many experts, the extreme hardship that the Palestinian people suffered was not only due to the siege but also because of the closure of Rafah, which led to the anger and fury of the Muslim masses all over the world. This position demonstrated that the OIC was more of an official organization that was concerned with the sensitivities of the governing regimes than a popular body that reflects the aspirations of the people that it represented. Moreover, it was a reflection of the profound weakness and flaccidness of the ruling regimes in the Muslim world.

Second: Turkey

Turkey’s relations with both Palestine and Israel were during the year 2008 rather different from those of the preceding two years, i.e. 2006 and 2007. While Turkish-Palestinian relations were rather cool by the beginning 2008, they had become much warmer by the end of the year. Conversely, the Turkish-Israeli relations were much warmer in early 2008 than previously, but had been severely strained by early 2009 largely because of the Israeli aggression on Gaza towards the end of 2008.

1. The Palestinian Track

After a long siege of Gaza, Israel launched by the beginning of the first quarter of 2008 a ferocious attack on the Strip that was characterized by violent aerial and land attacks, which caused many casualties, both dead and wounded.

In continuation of its previous support to the cause of the Palestinians, Turkey took a very firm stand against this Israeli aggression. The Turkish Premier Recep Tayyip Erdoğan described the conditions in Gaza as a “humanitarian crisis” by saying:

We are confronting a human tragedy, and I find it difficult to understand what is going on there, as there would be no justification whatsoever for a collective punishment of two million persons under the guise of stopping rocket attacks. Our friends in Israel should understand that by their siege and indiscriminate punishment of all the people they serve the cause of the marginal-extremist elements.⁶

Erdoğan's position provoked bitter Israeli criticism. The head of the Turkish Department in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs called the Turkish ambassador Namik Tan to the Ministry, where he protested against what he called Erdoğan's bad declarations that caused a lot of apathy, particularly so because they were voiced at a time when Israel was trying to block in the United States the law of the Armenian genocide. He added, "We were expecting Turkey that fights terrorism to support Israel against terrorism."⁷

Moreover, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a proclamation in which it expressed its deep concern for the siege imposed on Gaza, which serves nobody but the extremist elements, and called for its immediate lifting. Meanwhile, *Haartez* newspaper minuted that the Israeli-Turkish relations were seriously strained during "the last two days".⁸

During Davos Forum (World Economic Forum), the Turkish minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Babacan met the Israeli premier Shimon Peres on 26/1/2008, where he told him that the continuation of the siege on Gaza and the division of Palestine into two parts, i.e. GS and the WB, threatens the peace process that was agreed upon in Annapolis conference.

On 23/1/2008, the Turkish Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People (MAZLUMDER) organized a demonstration in front of the Israeli embassy in Ankara in protest of the siege. The demonstrators expressed their fury through extensive blowing of whistles, and by speeches that described Israel as the "largest terrorist organization in the world." They also criticized the Egyptian government that "imposes a siege on Gaza exactly like Israel," and called for 2008 to be the year of supporting the Palestinian people.

The strong Turkish official and public reaction against the Israeli siege of Gaza, which had seriously strained the relations between the two countries, was a primary factor for postponing a visit to Ankara that Ehud Barak, the Israeli minister of Defense, had scheduled on 11/2/2008 to promote military cooperation between the two countries.

On the renewal of the siege on Gaza, Erdoğan contacted on 2/3/2008 the president of the PA, Mahmud ‘Abbas, demanding that he resumes “the peace dialogue today and before tomorrow.” In the next day, Erdoğan contacted the Israeli premier Olmert to protest against the totally unacceptable siege, and to call upon him to resume the peace process.

On 4/3/2008, several trade unions and humanitarian organizations assembled in front of the Israeli embassy in Ankara to express their dismay against the Israeli operations in Gaza. The president of the Government Employees’ Trade Union, Ahmed Akso, described the developments in Gaza as genocide and an oppression committed by Israel, with the active support of the USA and Europe, against the Palestinian people. Akso called for the trial of Perez and Olmert as war criminals, and demanded the withdrawal of the Turkish ambassador from Israel. Moreover, the demonstrators raised banners of condemnation to Israel, and pictures of the Palestinian dead.

On 5/3/2008, a group of youngsters affiliated to a professional trade union organized a protest assembly in front of the Israeli consulate in the Levent district of Istanbul. Speeches delivered on this occasion dismissed Israel as a terrorist state that practices genocide against the inhabitants of Gaza, called for the boycott of the Israeli products and investments and placed black rosemary on the gate of the consulate. Another protest movement against Israel was organized in Sapanca district of Sakarya province. Moreover, following the Friday prayer of 7/3/2008, the worshipers organized a demonstration in Kayseri city that condemned the Israeli aggression against Gaza, and the inability of the Muslim world to confront it, and prayed a prayer for the deceased in absence (*al-Gha’ib*) for the souls of the dead of Gaza. A similar demonstration was organized after a Friday prayer in Ulu Mosque of Diyar-Bekr in south east Turkey. Concurrently, four trucks loaded with Turkish donations of food and medicine to the value of half a million dollars reached Gaza, and the Turkish Red Crescent managed to deliver aid in the warehouses of its Palestinian counterpart in Tal al-Hawa.

The Israeli siege and massacres in Gaza by the beginning of 2008 culminated towards the end of the year in a widespread aggression that started with the massacre of 27/12/2008. The initial raids lead to the death of not less than 200 Palestinians, whose numbers increased to several hundreds in the subsequent few days because of the aerial bombardment.

Turkey angrily reacted to this aggression, both on the official and popular levels. The infuriated premier Erdoğan saw in this aggression “lack of respect to Turkey” and in the whole military operation against Gaza a blow to international peace. He furiously added, “The killing of helpless innocents, women and children, the destruction of houses and the use of extensive power are all totally unacceptable.”

Moreover, Erdoğan reiterated his fury by saying, “By mediating between Syria and Israel, Turkey volunteered to remove the predicaments that faced the negotiations between the two sides,” and bitterly added, “Three or four days ago, the Israeli premier Ehud Olmert came to Turkey to explore the possibility of a fifth round of negotiations. Nonetheless, this operation against Gaza followed, which clearly demonstrates lack of respect to Turkey. I am compelled to say this. This is a long term operation, the death and destruction is a serious humanitarian crime.”

Besides reminding of the declaration issued by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on this serious development, Erdoğan added, “As a state that has important contribution in the peace process, we will convey our justified reaction to the whole world.”

Meanwhile, in a contact with Ban Ki-Moon, Erdoğan reminded the United Nations’ secretary-general of the crucial necessity of quick intervention to stop the aggression, and added:

The entire humankind should know the dimension of this tragic situation... It should be known that this kind of operation does not serve the cause of peace... These operations, which came at a time when we were concentrating our efforts for peace, to open new avenues for negotiations and to have a common peace strategy, had, no doubt, serious repercussions on the peace efforts.

He continued to say that these operations, which had provoked widespread anger in the Muslim world, can never resolve the problems of the region. He minuted, “I wish that the non-Muslim world approach this problem in a more sensitive manner. We should not forget that violence breeds violence.”

Erdoğan called upon Israel to correct this mistake by stopping its aerial operations immediately. He said that Turkey “will firmly continue extending assistance to our Palestinian brothers,” and demanded that the international community end its apathy towards this humanitarian tragedy. Moreover, he begged God’s mercy to the Palestinian dead and quick recovery to the wounded and expressed Turkey’s readiness to treat the wounded in its hospitals.

Turkish sources attributed Erdoğan's anger with Israel to a visit that its premier Olmert paid to Turkey on 18/12/2008, just nine days before the aggression on Gaza, where he assured both the Premier and the President -respectively Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül- that Gaza will not experience a humanitarian catastrophe. This flat lie and violation of Olmert's undertaking was viewed by the Turks as deceit and humiliation to them, and a belittlement to their country's role as an intermediary between Syria and Israel. Moreover, it placed Turkey in the awkward position of allegedly knowing the aggression in advance, even agreeing to it. To demonstrate his fury and disappointment with Israel, Erdoğan suspended all contacts with Olmert.

Another official Turkish move in the direction of their support to the Palestinians was a declaration by the Turkish National Security Council, issued on 30/12/2008, which called for the immediate cessation of the Israeli military operations against Gaza, and urged the Palestinians, both Fatah and Hamas, to unite.

As a result of the Turkish firm opposition to the Israeli operation, the Egyptian minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmed Abu al-Ghayt, arrived at Ankara on 29/12/2008 to explore the possibility of Turkish mediation in the current crisis. Hence, it was decided that Erdoğan visits Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, starting from 31/12/2008.

Some observers viewed Abu al-Ghait's visit to Ankara as a diplomatic move to find an exist from the Arab fiasco, particularly so as Egypt was unable to play the role of an intermediary after its stand against Hamas and refusal to open Rafah Crossing, which had in effect tightened the Israeli siege on the Gazan people. Thus, Egypt had presumably hoped that the Turkish mediation would provide a viable alternative. However, some Turkish sources had, on the other side, claimed that Egypt tried through its minister's visit to persuade Turkey not to go too far in its criticism of Israel and support to Hamas, as this would embarrass the Arabs who, directly or indirectly, support the Israeli position.

In a drive to secure an immediate cease fire, open the crossings and send humanitarian assistance to Gaza, Erdoğan started at the end of 2008 an Arab tour to Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where he also met Mahmud 'Abbas in Jordan and Khalid Mish'al in Syria. But he failed, and on his return to Turkey on 4/1/2009 issued bitter criticism of Israel's barbaric operation of 3/1/2009. In a public speech in Anatolia in Southern Turkey, Erdoğan said that the sufferings

of the Gazan people will not be forgotten, and that “he will always be on the side of the oppressed.” He added, “Israel caused through its excessive use of force a humanitarian tragedy... The tears of children and helpless women and mothers will not be forfeited, the oppressors will drown in these tears.”⁹ In a subsequent statement, Erdoğan viewed Israel’s massacres as a stigma for Israel, and that the Israelis will never escape from the trial and conviction of history.

On his part, the Turkish President Abdullah Gül condemned the Israeli aggression, which he described as “oppression personified,” and added that it hurts the heart of every human being. However, he, on the other side, made it clear to the leaders of Hamas that he opposes the launching of rockets.

The position of the Turkish minister of Justice Mehmet Ali Şahin, voiced on 3/1/2009, is worth of special attention, as he described Israel as “the number one instigator of international terrorism,” and added, “As long as this instigation prevails, the battle against terrorism is doomed to fail.” He added that the word “massacres” is an understatement of what is really going on the ground, that Turkey should bear its historical responsibility, and that Erdoğan (Premier Recep Tayyip) should rush from one place to another to find a solution to this crisis.¹⁰ Since Turkey had been by early 2009 a non-permanent member of the Security Council for two successive years, Erdoğan undertook this opportunity to convey to the Council the position and views of Hamas.

The Turkish position versus the aggression on Gaza may be summarized in the following:

- Immediate cessation of fire by both Israel and Hamas.
- Opening of all the gates to Gaza.
- To send humanitarian aid into the Strip.

On the popular level, all kinds of protests, e.g. demonstrations and sit-ins, dominated all Turkish towns, which asked for the stoppage of the aggression and the massacre. The biggest of all these protest movements was a one-million demonstration on 4/1/2009 in Çaglayan Square of Istanbul that was organized by Necmettin Erbakan’s Party, the Turkish Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*), and more than 150 non-governmental organizations. The angry protesters repeated the slogans of death to Israel and America, and demanded that the Turkish army defend Gaza. They raised pictures of Bush and Olmert, which they stormed with shoes in imitation of the bold act of the Iraqi journalist Muntazir al-Zaydi, who threw his

shoes on the American President George Bush during his visit to Baghdad towards the end of 2008. Moreover, prayers for the deceased in absence (*al-Gha'ib*) were held for the souls of the dead of Gaza, and writers and journalists urged their government to abolish all bilateral treaties with Israel, and to prohibit Israeli planes from flying over the skies of Anatolia for training. And one of the most prominent repercussions of the aggression was the dissolution of the Turkish-Israeli Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group, from which all member-MPs resigned.

Besides, a group of Turkish women, under the name “assembled women”, issued a declaration that had asked the Turkish president to specifically do his utmost best to urge Egypt to end the sufferings of the Gazan people, and to stop turning the Strip into another Auschwitz camp (in reference to a Nazi concentration camp of Jewish detainees in Poland during the second world war), or a new Srebrenica Massacre (in reference to a major massacre of Muslims in Bosnia). This open letter to the President, which was pioneered by some Turkish women professors, researchers, journalists and writers, minuted the following:

Gaza, which has completely been isolated from the outside world for 17 months, is drifting step by step towards a new genocide because of power cut that has been in place for a month. The bakeries are out of service and the people of Gaza have no bread or medicine because of the siege. Gaza is virtually isolated, it reached its limit, and it is living in front of the world once again in a big Auschwitz. We are calling the conscience of all the silent people of the world or their representatives to be a witness to this catastrophe. What crime did the people of Gaza commit to be killed, left alone hungry, subjected to torture and deprived of the bare minimum for their livelihood?.

We do not want a new Srebrenica or Auschwitz.

Besides, this is a catastrophe that is not resulting from what happened in five or ten days, but from months of misery. For the nation to avoid guilty conscious and to stop being ashamed of itself, we call upon you to gallantly defend Gaza. Honourable President, we the signatories ask you to initiate a quick diplomatic move to save the Gazan people from this barbaric attack, and to approach the Egyptian government to open the frontiers with Gaza to secure supply of clean water, medicine and other necessities.¹¹

Several opinion polls revealed the negative image of Israel in the eyes of the Turkish populace. The outcome of an opinion poll conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), published on 1/4/2008, revealed that 78% of the Turkish people do not like Israel, and only 11% do so.

Another opinion poll conducted in September 2008 by the German Marshall Fund of the United States showed that the Palestinians are the most loved people by the Turks (44%), while the Israelis came at the bottom of the list (only 8%).¹²

One of the symptoms of the fury of the Turks with Israel was an unprecedented event in the history of the Turkish-Israeli relations, whereby the president of Istanbul University, Mesut Parlak, had virtually expelled from his office the Israeli Ambassador and Consul General, respectively Gabby Levy and Mordechai Amichai. Mesut Parlak had, in fact, ended a meeting with the Israeli diplomats, scheduled at 3:30 p.m. on 22/11/2008, before it started.

According to a report on the incident in the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet*, the details given by Parlak were as follow:

They came, and I stood up to meet them at the door of my office. I and the Israeli ambassador sat down, but I realized the presence in the office of two tall men. When I asked who they were, the ambassador said that they are his bodyguard. I asked them to leave the room, but one of them hurriedly rushed in. Hence, I said to the ambassador: You are the one who asked for the appointment, but, under these circumstances, the meeting is over, and I thank you for coming. Then I saw them off to the stairs, saying, if you are that frightened why did you visit in the first place? And added, excuse me this is not a colony. This is the Republic of Turkey. Here is Istanbul University.

This incident was extensively reported in the Israeli press. Under the title “Senior Israeli diplomats expelled from Istanbul University,” *Haartz* newspaper wrote in the following day of the incident that the Israeli diplomats did not abide by the customary rules in universities where security inside universities is the responsibility of the Turks, and claimed that the university president told the diplomats that his university is not occupied territories for them to behave as they wished.

The newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* reported that the Israeli Foreign Ministry confirmed the incident. It added that the previous week was a bad omen for Israel, as this incident was preceded by “Oxford incident”, where the students there shouted in the face of the Israeli president that he is a war criminal.

Generally, it may be said that Turkey had adhered during the year 2008 to the crux of its previous support to the Palestinians, both on the official and popular levels. Nonetheless, it may be noted that the government of Turkey did not undertake during the year any new economical projects in the Bank or the Strip,

nor did it present any fresh and serious initiative to mediate between the Authority of 'Abbas and Hamas. Perhaps this retraction was due to the preoccupation of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*-AKP) throughout the first half of 2008 with the case against it in the constitutional court, in addition to Turkey's military conflict with the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*-PKK) that was resumed on a wide scale during the course of 2008.

2. The Israeli Track

The most prominent aspect of the Turkish involvement in the Middle East was on the Israeli track, specifically indirect negotiations between Syria and Israel via a Turkish intermediary. Turkey's good relations with both Israel and Syria qualified it for this role.

But it should be noted right from the beginning that Turkey was not the initiator of these negotiations, rather the idea was originally thrown by the Israeli Premier Olmert early in 2007, and amongst calls in Israel for his trial because of the failure in the July 2006 war on Lebanon, which led to the formation of the Winograd Commission. By his proposal of negotiations with Syria, Olmert may have thus hoped to counter his excessively deteriorating prestige and image inside Israel by a probable spectacular achievement in the Syrian front; or he may have felt that it is impossible to achieve victory against the resistance forces in Lebanon or the region at large, specifically Hizbullah, without distancing Syria from Iran and Hizbullah through a deal that allows the Syrian regime to resume sovereignty over the whole of the Golan Heights.

However, these negotiations could not have possibly started without an Israeli undertaking of total withdrawal from the Golan that was communicated to Syria early in 2008 via Ahmet Davutoğlu, the Turkish mediator and advisor of the prime minister. With this presumed concession, Syria agreed to start in April 2008 indirect negotiations with Israel under Turkish patronage. In fact, up to the summer of 2008, four rounds of these negotiations were conducted, but hence they were not resumed because of the resignation of the head of the Israeli negotiation delegation.

Besides being not the initiator of this complex intermission, Turkey did not offer any ideas during the rounds of negotiations, but, as emphasized by both the Turkish mediator and Riad Daoudi, the head of the Syrian negotiation delegation, it was simply satisfied by communicating the ideas of each delegation to the other. Turkey seemed to have been justifiably worried that these negotiations may

collapse. By the end of May 2008, the Turkish premier had vividly said that the real danger for these negotiations comes from the deteriorating position of Olmert within his own cabinet, which proved to be true as Olmert was forced to submit his resignation towards the end of the summer of 2008, and early parliamentary elections were scheduled on 10/2/2009. Nonetheless, Turkey had surprisingly renewed its effort to activate these negotiations by receiving on 22/12/2008 the resigning Olmert at that very delicate time when there was no official and stable government in Israel.

The Israeli aggression on Gaza on 27/12/2008 had infuriated Erdoğan against Israel in general and Olmert in particular because the latter had just deceitfully assured the Turkish government that Gaza will not be attacked and negotiations would be resumed with Syria. That's why Erdoğan's conviction came firm considering the attack on Gaza an insult to Turkey, and that it would have serious and alarming repercussions on the Turkish mediation. Few days later, the Turkish minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Babacan, said that under these conditions the resumption of the peace process between Syria and Israel is virtually impossible.

Notwithstanding Turkish enthusiasm to this intermission, which would certainly give it more influence and prestige in the region, all Turks were convinced that these negotiations were doomed to failure. For Israel was not ready for peace, but had agreed to the negotiations for tactical reasons only, and The Syrian President Bashar al-Asad had himself said that he wanted direct American patronage to these negotiations on the termination of the administration of George Bush. Moreover, Turkey was unable to impose any ideas, had no leverage on the negotiators, and could not guarantee the implementation of any agreement that the two sides may conclude. Thus, these negotiations were in effect time consuming and transitory in nature, awaiting political changes that may result from the presidential and parliamentary elections, respectively in the USA and Israel. However, there was no logistic or geographic harm in continuing the Turkish intermission at that time when neither the USA nor the European Union were in a position to do so, be that in relation to Israel, Iran or around some controversial issues with the west.

Meanwhile, military cooperation between Turkey and Israel continued in various ways and manners: exchange of visits of military experts at the levels of ministers of Defense or commanders of the naval and air forces, joint air and naval military maneuvers in which the USA participated, and intelligence cooperation between the two countries on the Kurdish and other issues.

Turkey had also striven to purchase from Israel the Heron pilotless planes. Many rounds of negotiations were conducted to test their practical feasibility, though we know that one had crashed in Turkey in December 2008 during a trial test. However, it is not known whether or not Turkey would pursue purchasing these planes.

The “Century’s Project”

The Israeli minister of Infrastructure Benyamin Ben Eliezer and the Turkish minister of Energy Hilmi Güler had formulated in Turkey on 16/8/2008 a comprehensive plan for the so-called “Century’s Project”. Being the most important joint economic project, which had political implications for the relations between the two countries for the year 2008, this enterprise plans to construct a pipeline from the Turkish port Ceyhan in the Mediterranean Sea to the Israeli port Ashkelon in order to secure the flow of petrol, gas, electricity and water to Israel. More importantly, it will connect with the current pipeline between Ashkelon and Eilat, and then transporting these products via naval trucks to India and the countries of East Asia. The plan is to secure the necessary funds, and hence complete the construction of the pipeline within three years.

The proposed pipeline is practically an extension of the present one between Samsun on the Black Sea and Ceyhan, and it will in essence transport petrol and natural gas from both Samsun-Ceyhan and Baku-Ceyhan pipelines. This requires that Israel concludes treaties with each of Russia, Azerbaijan and Turkestan to transport petrol and gas via Ceyhan-Ashkelon pipeline.

Minister Güler mentioned that:

This proposed pipeline is not just an economic enterprise but a contribution towards stability and peace in the region. The products that it carries are needed in the region. If we succeed in this enterprise, then we and Israel would substantially contribute in the development, stability and happiness in the region. This is not a bilateral project with Israel, but a multiple one.

Güler added that the preliminary preparations for this pipeline will take ten months, and it will be completed within three years. The annual capacity of the pipeline is about 40 million tons of petrol and the cost of its construction is \$6 billion. On his part Eliezer said “This is a major success,” by which Turkey and Israel will contribute in the peace process in the region.

While accompanying the Turkish prime minister in a visit to India in the Autumn of 2008, Güler said that India will be a partner in this project that will be of use to it. He added that it will reduce the pressure of oil tankers on the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelle, and transport petrol to India in 19 instead of 46 days, the latter figure been the duration of the journey from Gibraltar to the Cape of Good Hope. The minister continued to say that the pipeline will be a turning point in the Indian-Turkish relations, and, if completed, it will be a major factor in strengthening the Turkish-Israeli relations, consolidate the presence of Israel in the Middle East, and strengthen its relations with the world, including India, Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkestan and some of the South Eastern countries.

In another vein, and within the Turkish privatization drive of 2008, Israeli quarters and companies purchased some Turkish institutions. The volume of trade between Turkey and Israel increased in 2008 compared to the previous year 2007. For Turkish exports to Israel increased from \$1.61 billion to \$1.83 billion, respectively in 2007 to 2008, i.e. an increase of 13.6%, while Turkish imports from Israel shot from \$1.2 billion to 1.62 billion in the same years, i.e. a substantial increase of 35.1% (see table 1/4).¹³

Factors for Cooperation with Israel

Some factors were instrumental in strengthening the relations between Turkey and Israel during the course of the year 2008, of which the most prominent was the violent eruption of the military confrontation between the Turkish forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party. Hence, Turkey felt the need for some important Israeli weapons, such as pilotless planes and night periscopes, as well as intelligence information to detect the movements of the Kurdish fighters. The more acute the Turkish-Kurdish conflict becomes the louder would be the demands of the Turkish generals, but not necessarily the political authority, for closer contacts between Ankara and Tel Aviv.

The Turkish mediation between Syria and Israel may have been another factor for controlling the reaction of Turkey towards the policies of Israel, and also for strengthening its relations with it for the sake of success to this mediation. But the Israeli aggression on Gaza towards the end of 2008 had severely shaken the Turkish hopes in the Israeli desire to continue the peace process, and thus to achieve a major Turkish regional, even global, success in this direction.

Being convinced that its relations with Israel constitutes a key element for pressure on the White House, Turkey felt the need for the Jewish lobby in America to dismiss US congress resolution on Armenian genocide, which had gained momentum by the end of 2007 and during 2008.

Another important factor that engendered the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi-AKP*) to have better relations with Israel was the domestic difficulties that the party experienced during the year 2008, particularly the case that was filed against it in the constitutional court. This dangerous issue, coupled with the government's extensive drive to rally international support, particularly in Britain and the USA, made the party keen not to expose its relations with the West, and therefore Israel too, to any kind of strain in order not to further weaken its already weak internal position.

Thus, despite the considerable strain in the relations between Turkey and Israel towards the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, these relations are expected to be good in future due to their complexity and the need of each side to the support of the other in some inherited issues. Particularly so with regard to Israel which can not afford to loose such a big Muslim country like Turkey irrespective of the negative positions that the Turkish government might take against it. Similarly, Turkey needs Israel as a source for some necessities that it does not have, and or to help it in addressing some complicated issues such as the Kurdish and Armenian questions, armament or entry to the European Union.

As for the Palestinian arena, the official Turkish position would remain emotionally and practically supportive to the Palestinian people as long as the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi-AKP*) remains in power. Turkey will never hesitate to be part of any solution or settlement to the crisis in Gaza and Palestine in general, particularly so as such a role will not be opposed by both the Palestinians and Israel. But Turkey's aspiration to have a pioneering role in the efforts of reconciliation between the PA and Hamas on one side, or in a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians on the other side may not materialize in the current status of disarray in the Arab world, and where the Israeli settlement project and rejection of a just peace settlement continues to be in place. But Turkey would, no doubt, continues to be needed by all, be it the Palestinians, or along the Israeli-Palestinian or the Israeli-Syrian tracks, at least on the logistic side.

Third: Iran

The year 2008 was undoubtedly the year of Gaza, in which Arab, Islamic and international solidarity with Palestine against the Israeli aggression. The year started with a political, economic and trade embargo on Gaza, its people and political forces, particularly Hamas that controlled the Strip since 2007; and ended by a brutal war in which hundreds killed, mostly children and women.

In line with its anti-Israel policy and support to Hamas in particular and the resistance in general, Iran had, naturally and since the beginning of the siege, condemned Israel and its policies. In response to the Israeli warnings that it will assassinate the Palestinian premier Isma'il Haniyyah, President Mahmud Ahmadinejad accused the Israeli regime of practicing terrorism, and condemned the western powers, the so-called human right activists and claimants of freedom for their "shameless silence versus these threats against a democratically elected leader."¹⁴ In most of the occasions in which President Ahmadinejad spoke on Israel and the Palestinian issue, he never hesitated to reiterate and emphasize his position that the "Zionist entity lost the philosophy of its existence," that "support to the Palestinians is a religious obligation," and that the "Zionists will earn nothing out of their criminal acts and had no way but to eventually submit to the will of the Palestinians," whom he urged "to be patient and trust in the support of Allah."¹⁵ What the Iranian president meant by criminal acts was the siege on one side and the continuous bombardments and assassinations in Gaza on the other side. The siege had, in fact, provided an opportunity for the Iranian leaders to reiterate their position versus the Israel. Hence President Ahmadinejad called upon the west "to accept the end of the Zionist ideology sooner or later," and advised western states to forgo the Israel, which had "virtually ended," and added, "Those who support the criminal Zionists should know that the days of the occupiers are numbered."¹⁶

The Iranian news agency reported that Manouchehr Mohammadi, deputy foreign minister for Education and Research, emphasized: "There are no two states in Palestine, the international community has no option but the continuation of the crimes of the Zionist entity or to accept the plebiscite." He, furthermore, described, "The developments and Zionist violations in Palestine as the most important event in the Middle East and for the Islamic Ummah and the world."¹⁷ In the same vein, the Iranian minister of Defense, Brigadier General Mustafa Najjar,

emphasized, “The crimes that Israel commits in Gaza, with American support and total international indifference, are a vivid evidence of the double standard of the international community.”¹⁸

With the continuation of the suffocating siege and the aggravation of the human tragedy in Gaza, the Iranian position developed from concentration on the Israeli massacres of the Palestinian people to calls for the eradication of Israel and for a plebiscite to determine the status of Palestine and the Palestinian people. The Iranian verbal protest against the siege developed into a call to break it, and the direct accusation of the USA of implicit cooperation with Israel to kill the Palestinians. Iran had initially urged Egypt to cooperate in extending aid to the Palestinians, but subsequently accused it of supporting the Israeli siege on Gaza. This led to a considerable tension in the Iranian-Egyptian relations to such an extent that diplomatic representation between the two countries has been suspended till today, unlike the case with all other Arab states. The two countries exchanged harsh words -even accusations- over the events in Gaza, the reasons for the siege and the position towards Hamas and the Israeli aggression on Gaza. The events in Gaza had engendered the following Iranian positions:

1. The call for an urgent Islamic meeting to discuss the crimes of Israel. The Iranian minister of Foreign Affairs, Manouchehr Mottaki demanded that the secretary - general of OIC Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu calls for an urgent meeting of the foreign ministers of the member states of the OIC “to study the crimes against humanity committed by the Zionist entity in GS.” And Muttaki considered that one of the reasons for his call for an urgent meeting is to seek solutions that are “appropriate and quick to curtail the crimes against humanity committed by the barbaric Israel.”¹⁹ In a comment on the continuous attacks on Gaza, the spokesman of the Iranian government Golam Hossein Elham said, “Israel strives to transfer Gaza into another Holocaust,”²⁰ while the Iranian president announced that “Israel will be uprooted, and its leaders will be prosecuted,” and added in a programme in the Iranian television, “I had previously said that the real Holocaust is taking place in Palestine... For every child killed in the Palestinian land, there will be a judicial action taken to uncover those responsible for this act, they should know that they will be haunted one after the other.” Moreover, Ahmadinejad emphasized that Gaza is just the beginning, and “Israel is facing defeat and

it will be eradicated.”²¹ Within the campaign of incitement against Israel, some Iranian organizations allocated a huge prize to whoever penalizes three Israeli leaders earmarked for being behind the genocide operations against the Palestinian people: Ehud Barak, Meir Dagan, the director of the Mossad, and Amos Yedlin, Military Intelligence Chief.²²

What attracts attention in the Iranian positions and declarations is their emphasis on the weakness of the Israel, and its being in the phase of retraction, weakness and laxity, and that it is doomed to vanish. Some Iranian military and political officials repeated such phrases as “final countdown”, “vanishing of Israel”, “abolition of Israel”, “eradication of Israel”, “defeat of Israel”, “the termination of the Zionist entity”, “the filthy germ”, “the wild animal”, and “the artificial entity”.

2. The accusation of the United States of being a collaborator with Israel in assassinating the leaders of Hamas. The former head of the Iranian Shura Council Gholam Ali Haddad ‘Adel said on 21/2/2008, “America co-organized with Israel terrorist operations to assassinate the Palestinian leaders.”
3. The demand for breaking the siege. This started with a demand that Muslim states help Egypt to do so, with an emphasis on the option of resistance “to rescue the Palestinian people.” The Iranian Supreme Leader (*Murshid*) Ali Khamenei called upon the Muslim states to break the siege of Gaza, and to help Egypt, people and government, in this respect in the light of their huge historical responsibility on the subject. Moreover, Khamenei warned the Muslim governments from being instruments used against the Palestinians in Gaza, as was the case with some quarters. He added that the resistance is the only option to rescue the Palestinian people, whom he urged “to maintain their unity and to support their elected government.”²³ Ahmed Khatami, a member of Assembly of Experts, had also expected a strong response from the religious warriors (*mujahideen*) against the siege of Gaza, saying that one of the repercussions of Winograd’s earthquake was the brutal attack on the Strip. “In response to the siege and the repeated brutal attacks on the Strip,” he added, “Israel should expect a strong reprisal from the Palestinian religious warriors.”²⁴
4. Rejection of the assertion that Hamas is a satellite of Iran in the region through the emphasis on the independence of the movement. In response

to the declarations of King Abdullah II that the leaders of Hamas are under the thumb of Iran, Mohammad Ali Hosseini, the spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said, “Hamas decisions are not dictated by any state. It is regrettable that some Arab countries in the region are sometimes influenced by the American and the Israeli policies”, and added that “they turn a blind eye to the interests of the Palestinians. This kind of orientation is considered as a brand of the policy of blaming the others, and it is incompatible with the realities in the Palestinian scene.”²⁵

5. The call for a comprehensive plebiscite in the Palestinian territories to resolve the Palestinian issue and Israel. Mojtaba Samareh Hashemi, a senior adviser of the Iranian President, said, “Iran is of the opinion that the Palestinian issue and Israel should be resolved by a plebiscite in which the Palestinian people in the occupied territories, be them Muslims, Jews or Christians, and those in the diaspora worldwide, particularly in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, should participate.” And added that the “international community should accept any outcome of this exercise.”²⁶ Nateq Nouri, the advisor of the Iranian Supreme Leader (*Murshid*) Ali Khamenei, repeated the same view, arguing that general elections in Palestine are the only means to resolve the Palestinian issue, and accused the Americans of opposing such elections.²⁷ It is known that this idea, which has become popular in Iranian official circles, was a legal exist that distances them from the charge of anti-semitism, which the west revert to whenever there is a call to abolish or destroy Israel.
6. Support to Hamas and emphasis on the legitimacy and continuity of the resistance. During the reception in Tehran of Khalid Mish'al, the head of Hamas Political Bureau, Saeed Jalili, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said, “the resistance and the total and enlightened steadfastness of the resistance of the Palestinian people are worth respect, and the secret behind the success of Hamas is its serious commitment to maintain the rights of the Palestinian people.” On the same occasion, the Supreme Leader (*Murshid*) said that Israel has become unable to confront the Palestinian people, and urged the continuation of the resistance. Khamenei described the positions and measures undertaken by Hamas leadership and premier Isma'il Haniyyah as courageous, and that they inspire hope and happiness. He condemned the inhuman siege imposed on

Gaza, and the operations of killings to which children were daily exposed. In an interesting declaration, the Supreme Leader (*Murshid*) declared direct support to Hamas and Iran's determination to stand firmly with it, which was virtually a response to the other forces, Arab and non-Arab, which besieged the organization and strove to end its rule in the Strip. In the prayer of The Festival of Breaking the Fast (*Eid al-Fitr*) 2/10/2008, the Supreme Leader (*Murshid*) emphasized that the Israelis are on their way to weakness and collapse, and added, "Iran will stand by Hamas government in Gaza," and he described premier Haniyyah as the religious warrior (*mujahid*), and called "to coordinate all the efforts and rally all Muslims to secure victory for the Palestinian people."²⁸ On the same occasion, he warned against all kinds of sectarianism and dissension among the Muslims, as the enemy does not distinguish between them, and called upon the Muslim world "to work together in one front for the victory of the Palestinian people." President Ahmadinejad reiterated the same position, but with noticeable clarity, by saying that his country "will continue to support the resistance movement Hamas until the collapse of Israel," and that Iran "considers its support for the Palestinians a national and religious duty, and that we will stand with the Palestinians until the festival of the greatest victory, i.e. the collapse of the Zionist regime."

7. Criticism of the Egyptian government for its closure of Rafah Crossing, which lead to the resumption of acute tension between the two countries as reflected in reciprocal accusations and harsh declarations. Iran had furthermore criticized some Arab regimes that had participated or turned a blind eye to the siege of Gaza. Hashemi Rafsanjani, Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council of Iran, held the Egyptian government responsible for the closure of the crossing and the destruction of the tunnels that the "oppressed" people of Gaza used to transport people and commodities.

The Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) quoted him saying the following in a speech that he gave on the occasion of the prayer of The Islamic Festival of Sacrifice (*Eid al-Adha*): "I wonder how the Egyptians who have great Islamic and civilizational past would close their borders in the face of their brothers." He, furthermore, described the situation in Gaza as catastrophic,

and emphasized that the bitterness and fury of the Muslims “will exasperate to such a magnitude that will destroy the Zionists, and that stigma would be for Muslim countries that declined to support their Palestinian brothers.” Likewise, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, the secretary-general of International Conference in Support of the Palestinian *Intifadah*, said, “The Egyptian President Husni Mubarak is squarely responsible for the aggression,” as he “knew of the attack on Gaza in advance,” and demanded “the trial of some Arab leaders, President Bush and the Israeli leaders.”

The Egyptian-Iranian differences had further intensified because the angry Iranian demonstrators attacked the office of the Egyptian interest section in Tehran, and were about to destroy the building had not the police blocked them. Demonstrations and sit-ins had, in fact, taken place in front of more than 25 Arab and foreign embassies whose countries took part in a conference on dialogue between religions, organized by Saudi Arabia in New York towards the end of November, 2008. The Iranian students claimed that the Egyptian government “prevented the entry of humanitarian aid and caravans to Gaza,” and they accused it of “cooperating with Israel in imposing the siege and committing the massacres against Palestinian children and women.” Egyptian diplomacy quickly responded, and Egyptian official media directly and bluntly attacked Iran and its policies in the region. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the head of the Office of the Iranian interests section in Cairo, and conveyed to him Egypt’s protest and extreme disgust by “the demonstrations orchestrated by some Iranian quarters in front of the headquarters of the diplomatic mission in Tehran.” Some Egyptian writers and journalists, including Muhammed Ali Ibrahim, the editor in chief of the *al-Gomhuria* newspaper, dismissed what the Iranian students had done as “rude and vile”, and added, “Since the time when Iran initiated a dialogue with Hamas and paid huge salaries to its leaders, the Arab-Israeli conflict has become increasingly complicated.” He also said that “The Palestinian state was about to be declared had it not been to the Israeli stubbornness, and the internal Palestinian schism which was masterminded, financed and encouraged by Tehran.”²⁹

As expected, Egypt rejected the criticism of Iranian officials, and the spokesman of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in this respect, “Egypt does not

accept any outbidding from any party on the Palestinian issue, as its history in supporting this cause is known to all, and does not need confirmation from any source.” In the same vein, Muhammad Bassiouni, the head of the Shura Council’s Foreign Relations and National Security Committee, said, “Iran is keen that the pivotal role of Egypt in the region, which strives to achieve stability and development, be discontinued.” However, these developments did not prohibit the continuation of contacts with the Iranian side to convene a meeting of the Islamic Parliaments Union “to discuss the Israeli siege on the Palestinian GS.” For this purpose, ‘Ali Larijani, the speaker of Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran (The Iranian Parliament), had already contacted his Egyptian counterpart Ahmad Fathi Sorour, and the Iranian minister of Foreign Affairs Manouchehr Mottaki requested that Iranian aid be sent to Gaza via Rafah Crossing. Nonetheless, Larijani had also severely criticized Egypt for receiving Tzipi Livni, the Israeli minister of Foreign Affairs, saying that “his country had all alone confronted America, while the countries facing the Gulf were supporting Washington, and others kept silent.” He added, “We are proud that we support Hamas and Hizbullah. Those who assume that they can force a people to surrender through a siege should be ashamed of themselves.”³⁰

On the Israeli aggression on Gaza late in 2008, the tone of Iran’s criticism to Arab countries and its call upon Islamic countries to work for the end of the aggression had substantially intensified. Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader (*Murshid*) of the revolution, said, “The conspicuous silence and encouragement of some Arab regimes, which claim to be Muslim, to the Israeli crimes is the greatest catastrophe.” He called upon the scholars of the Azhar to “publicly reveal the truth, and to alert the Muslims to the danger that threatens Islam,” Khamenei urged “the Muslims to support the Palestinian people,” and demanded that the Organization of Islamic Conference perform its historical duty in confronting Israel, and to try and punish its criminal leaders.³¹ He added, “It is the duty of the Palestinian religious warriors and the believers in the Muslim world to defend the unarmed women and children in Gaza, and they will be martyrs if killed.”³² Besides its effort to send humanitarian and medical aid to the besieged Strip,³³ Iran strongly condemned the war on Gaza and the silence of the international community. Hassan Qashqavi, Foreign Ministry Spokesman, demanded that “the international community, particularly the Security Council and the Organization of Islamic Conference, to

take action immediately to prevent the Zionist entity from continuing to commit its barbaric crimes against the Palestinians.”³⁴ Many angry demonstrations against the aggression were organized in Tehran and other Iranian cities, in which some top Iranian leaders and senior officers in the army and the revolutionary guard participated.³⁵ Some religious leaders opened the door for volunteers to fight the Israeli regime “in the military, financial or the propaganda fields.”³⁶ Similar steps were taken by more than one Iranian leader, from Rafsanjani to the Iranian minister of Foreign Affairs Manouchehr Mottaki. Moreover, the Iranian mission to the United Nations sent an urgent message to the president of the Security Council demanding for immediate steps to be taken “to face the crimes of the Zionist entity in Gaza, and to terminate the killing of the children of the Palestinian people.”³⁷

However, The year-long siege of Gaza did not undermine the importance of the indirect Syrian-Israeli negotiations, and their expected impact on the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance movements, particularly so as Israel had publicly declared that it aimed by these negotiations to distant Syria from Iran, Hamas and Hizbullah in such a way that peace on this front would lead to the end of the conflict in the Middle East. This is the same idea that Richard Haass and Martin Indyk had advocated in the book *Restoring The Balance: A Middle East Strategy For The Next President*, which was published by Saban Center and Council on Foreign Relations. The two writers called upon the new American administration “to promote peace agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors, in particular Syria, on the assumption that the potential for a strategic realignment would benefit the effort to weaken Iran’s influence in the sensitive core of the region, reduce external support for both Hezbollah and Hamas and improve prospects for stability.” The writers concluded that:

some initiatives will take considerable time to ripen and bear fruit... whereas it may be possible to realize others relatively early on (assembling a new diplomatic offer to Iran backed by the threat of harsher sanctions... promoting Israeli-Syrian peace). At minimum President Obama will need to remain conscious of the interrelated nature of regional dynamics and try to synchronize the various branches of his Middle Eastern strategy.

But the outbreak of the war on Gaza impelled Syria to unilaterally freeze these negotiations. It worth noting that Iran did not publicly attack these indirect Syrian-Israeli negotiations either because it was convinced that Syria will not forgo its alliance with the Islamic Republic and the resistance movements, or because it did

not expect that these negotiations would achieve any tangible progress, as was the case in the previous rounds. Thus, the Iranian government seemed to have felt that it would be unwise to publicly reveal its different outlook with its strategic ally (Syria) over these negotiations, as their continuity and outcome were doubtful, even not guaranteed, as subsequently demonstrated on the outbreak of the war on Gaza.

Despite the preoccupation of the region and the international community with the war on Gaza, tension and mutual threats between Iran and Israel never stopped during the year 2008. Some analysts maintained that Israel will take advantage of the transitional period before Obama's assumption of power to launch a quick strike to destroy, or delay for many years, the Iranian nuclear program. The Israeli President Shimon Peres had, in fact, accused Iran of playing a central role in terrorism and fanaticism, and that it "had divided Lebanon through its support to Hizbullah, and led to chaos and schism among the Palestinians via its support to the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), which imposed its authority over Gaza in June 2007."³⁸ Moreover, the United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice maintained that Hamas was fighting on behalf of Iran, which strives to have the nuclear bomb to destroy Israel, and cause instability in the Middle East; and added that the United States will continue its effort to isolate Hamas.³⁹ In response, several Iranian officials uttered declarations that defended their country's position on these issues. The Iranian President Ahmadinejad held "the Zionist killers responsible for all the crises,"⁴⁰ while other Iranian leaders implicitly spoke of a deadly response if Israel dares to attack Iran, though several Israeli leaders had actually repeatedly maintained that their country is ready to launch such a strike to paralyze Iran's nuclear threat.

Thus, the year 2008 ended as it started i.e. Gaza had been the focus of attention, and subsequently the theatre of war. Moreover, what happened in Gaza shaped Arab and Islamic responses, from condemnation of the siege to that of the condemnation of the war, from silence on the siege to silence on the war. In both cases of the siege and the war, Iran had forthwith and immediately declared solidarity and support to lift the siege on GS, and to openly stick to and support the continuation of the resistance against the occupation, particularly to Hamas who fights the Israeli aggression. Iran will continue its anti-Israeli policies, which will expose it to a flood of accusations and threats; and what had happened in Gaza will inevitably be the

prime reason for the inevitable resumption of tension between the Islamic Republic and many Arab regimes. However, the Israeli desire of a pre-emptive strike against Iran before Obama's assumption of power did not materialize. Hence, was the war on Gaza, as Israel felt that the destruction of Hamas and the Palestinian resistance will on one side keep the Palestinian issue under control, and, on the other side, encourage the new American president to focus on the Iranian nuclear program, which Israel views with great concern and as a threat to its security and existence.

Fourth: Pakistan

Al-Hayat newspaper reported in its issue of 29/1/2008 a meeting in a hotel in Paris between the Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Ehud Barak, the Israeli minister of Defense. Though the president and the minister had allegedly "accidentally" met in the hotel's lobby, the two had agreed to meet the next day to discuss the issue of Pakistan's nuclear armament, the escalation of fundamentalism in Pakistan and the Iranian nuclear armament!! Some governmental sources in Pakistan and the Israeli press confirmed that the meeting had actually taken place, though the latter did not elaborate. Nonetheless, it is legitimate to wonder why should the president of Pakistan "accidentally" discuss such issues with the Israeli minister of Defense instead of talking about the tragedy of the Palestinian people? And what is the relationship between the Iranian and Pakistani nuclear capabilities and the Palestinian people tragedy? Did the Israeli minister try to exercise pressure on the Pakistani president, and if so, on what grounds could he dare to do so? Had the Pakistani president been motivated by a desire to secure help to the inhabitants of Kashmir or to get an Israeli financial subsidy to support his country's fragile economy? In any case, the meeting was not helping Pakistani traditional support to the Palestinian issue.

Earlier, the Bahraini newspaper *al-Ayam* reported on 4/1/2008 that the Pakistani government released four Palestinians from Adiala jail in Rawalpindi, who were convicted for life because of their hijacking in 1986 a Pan American plane. Quoting a local Pakistani television station, the newspaper's report added that the four convicts were flown to Palestine in a plane of the Qatari airways. In the same

vein, *al-Hayat al-Jadidah* newspaper reported that some columnists in Israeli newspapers viewed the resignation of President Pervez Musharraf as a serious loss of a genuine friend of Israel in the Muslim world. On the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the demise of the Palestinian President Yasir ‘Arafat, on 11/11/2008, the Pakistani newspaper *The Dawn* published an article on his catastrophic legacy, in which it held Fatah squarely responsible for the Palestinian schism. According to this newspaper, the Pakistani government repeated its earlier call of the immediate implementation of the United Nations resolutions on the Palestinian issue. Moreover, *al-Khaleej* newspaper reported on 30/12/2008 that the new president of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari strongly condemned the Israeli invasion of Gaza, and urged the international community to find a just solution to the Palestinian issue.

Fifth: Indonesia

Throughout the year 2008, Indonesia, the largest Muslim country, had continuously and consistently expressed support to the Palestinians. During the period 14-15/5/2008, the University of Indonesia organized a conference, entitled “Freedom and the Right of Return: Palestine and 60 Years of Ethnic Cleansing.” Based on an article of the Indonesian constitution, which stipulates: “With independence being the right of every nation, colonialism must be eliminated from the face of the earth as it is contrary to the dictates of human nature and justice”.⁴¹ The conference expressed their total support to the Palestinians and the Palestinian issue. Experts on the subject from 20 countries worldwide presented papers in this conference, including some American and British Jewish rabbis who placed tags saying “Jewish but not Zionist.” In another development, the Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono opened an Afro-Asian conference on Palestine, which was attended by the Palestinian premier Salam Fayad, and in which the president urged all countries to extend support to the Palestinians in their struggle against Israel.⁴²

Some Indonesian organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, reported that they had sent via the Indonesian Red Crescent humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza. According to *al-Khaleej* newspaper, by the end of the year

2008 and on the outbreak of the Israeli war on the people of Gaza, the Indonesian government strongly condemned Israel.⁴³ On the same vein, Reuters news agency reported that the Islamic Defender Front, an Indonesian non-governmental organization (NGO) planned to recruit and train one thousand volunteers to fight in Gaza.⁴⁴ Though this attempt had failed because of the International Law, the incident revealed the strong adherence and support of the Indonesian Muslims to the Palestinian just issue.

Sixth: Malaysia

The Malaysian government demonstrated its strong support to the Palestinian people through sending humanitarian aid to the Palestinians, particularly to the Gazans, and by supporting the efforts of reconciliation between the Palestinian factions. In its issue of 31/1/2008 *al-Khaleej* newspaper reported that the Malaysian minister of Foreign Affairs, Syed Hamid Albar, offered to intercede between Fatah and Hamas for the sake of concluding a political settlement between the two sides. But apparently this offer was blocked at the level of OIC.

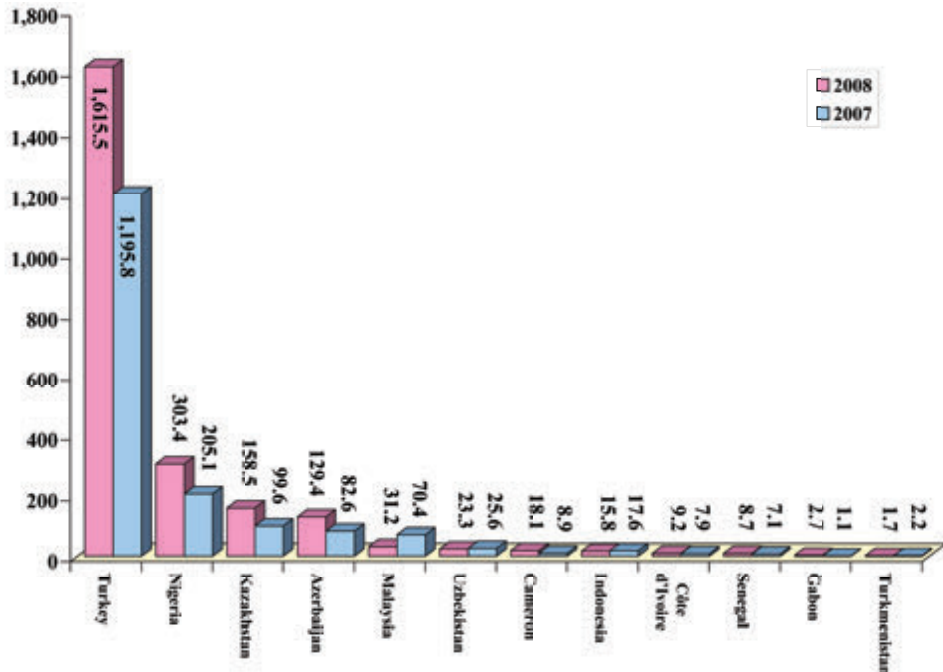
On 10/5/2008 two Malaysian non-governmental organizations, Aman Malaysia and the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), organized on the anniversary of the Catastrophe of 1948 (*Nakba*) a public forum at the Sin Chew Hall in Petaling Jaya, under the title: “Palestine: 60 Years of Struggle - *Al Nakba* Remembered”. During the sessions of the forum, some politicians and academics highlighted the problem of the Palestinian refugees since 1948, and the failure of the international community to support their just cause. The forum initiated a donation campaign for the cultivation of olive trees in Palestine.⁴⁵

As mentioned by the Malaysian National News Agency (BERNAMA), on the Israeli aggression on Gaza in late 2008, the Malaysian premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi called upon the international community to organize joint effort to secure the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people. Badawi also commended the courage of the Palestinians in confronting Israel, and declared Malaysia’s support to the Palestinians.⁴⁶

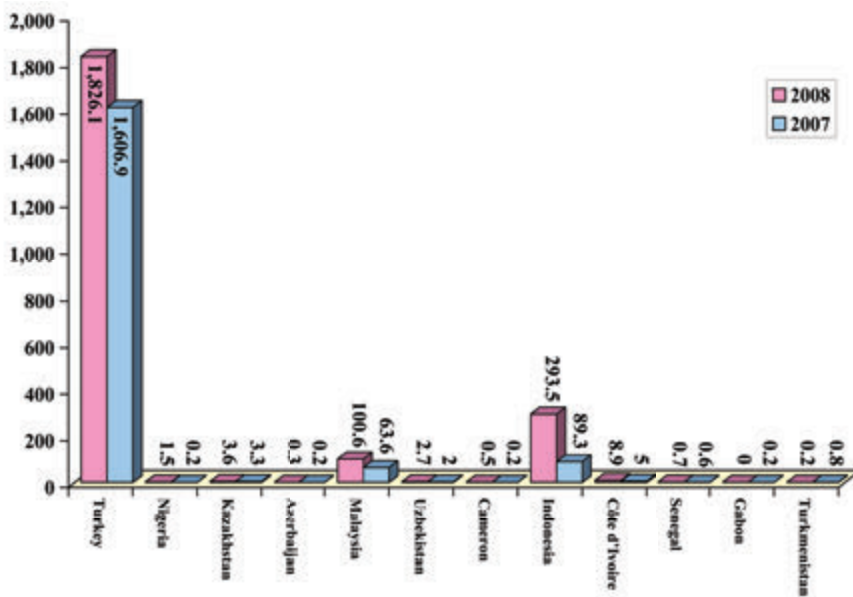
**Table 1/4: Israeli Trade with a Number of Islamic Countries (Non-Arab)
2005-2008 (\$ million)⁴⁷**

Countries	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2008	2007	2006	2005	2008	2007	2006	2005
Turkey	1,615.5	1,195.8	821.2	903.2	1,826.1	1,606.9	1,272.7	1,221.1
Nigeria	303.4	205.1	78	47.4	1.5	0.2	0.2	0.7
Kazakhstan	158.5	99.6	64.3	47.9	3.6	3.3	2.2	3.6
Azerbaijan	129.4	82.6	28	5.4	0.3	0.2	0.6	0.4
Malaysia	31.2	70.4	68.1	130.7	100.6	63.6	53.7	41
Uzbekistan	23.3	25.6	12.2	6.2	2.7	2	1.2	1.3
Cameron	18.1	8.9	13.6	5.7	0.5	0.2	0	0
Indonesia	15.8	17.6	12.9	14.1	293.5	89.3	87	43.6
Côte d'Ivoire	9.2	7.9	8.8	9	8.9	5	2.2	5.5
Senegal	8.7	7.1	5.8	4.5	0.7	0.6	0	0.1
Gabon	2.7	1.1	1.4	0.8	0	0.2	1.5	1.4
Turkmenistan	1.7	2.2	0.1	2.6	0.2	0.8	1	1.7

**Israeli Exports to a Number of Islamic Countries (Non-Arab)
2007-2008 (\$ million)**



Israeli Imports from a Number of Islamic Countries (Non-Arab) 2007-2008 (\$ million)



Conclusion

The attitude of the Muslim world towards the Palestinian issue during the course of 2008 was basically similar to that of previous years. The customary positions and declarations that sympathized with the Palestinian people and rejected the Israeli violations had continued at the same rate and by the same tone. But the political and economic reactions to the issue remained less than the required.

Though the OIC had repeatedly expressed its concern towards the humanitarian conditions in GS and condemned all the Israeli violations, not a single concrete achievement could be recorded to its credit in this respect throughout the year 2008, particularly with regard to the lifting of the siege on Gaza and the opening of Rafah Crossing. Besides, the OIC did not conduct an internal investigation on the reasons behind its continuous failure to achieve any tangible progress on the Palestinian issue.

As for Turkey, it maintained, both on the official and popular levels, the main lines of its support to the Palestinian people, which had, in fact, become

more assertive after the late 2008 Israeli aggression on Gaza. This engendered considerable tension in the Turkish-Israeli relations, and extremely angry Turkish reactions against the Israeli actions.

Nonetheless, the Turkish-Israeli relations are expected to be generally good in future because of the common security, economic and political interests between the two parties. Having said this, we should note that under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi-AKP*), Turkey is inclined towards more independence, to gradually forgo its relations with Israel and to develop relations eastward with the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Iran did continue its position of support to Hamas, emphasis on the legitimacy and continuity of the resistance, and demand for lifting the siege on Gaza. Hence, it criticized the insistence of the Egyptian government to close Rafah Crossing, which had led to the resumption of strained relations between the two countries. The Iranian criticism extended to include some Arab states that “participate” or turn a blind eye to the siege of Gaza, particularly so after the Israeli war on Gaza towards the end of 2008.

As for Pakistan, no basic changes took place with regard to its position on the Palestinian issue. The country had been fully engaged in its chaotic and unstable internal affairs, of which the most significant was the resignation of Pervez Musharraf, which was viewed by some Israeli newspapers columnists as an Israeli loss of a true friend in the Muslim world. On their part, Indonesia and Malaysia continued their support to the Palestinians, but without significant developments during the year.

Israel did not succeed during the course of the year 2008 to achieve any breakthroughs in the Muslim world. The Israeli aggression on GS had demonstrated the huge interaction of the Muslim people with the Palestinian issue. The flood of demonstrations, sit-ins and donation campaigns are but a few indicators of the massive centrality of the issue to the Muslims worldwide. They also reveal the great potentials in the Muslim world, which the Palestinians had not thus far made use of to support their cause and gain their rights. But this goal appears to be closely affected by the internal Palestinian schism. Its realization requires that the Palestinians put their house in order and unite around a common national program and a comprehensive vision that gives the Islamic dimension its due weight and importance.

Endnotes

- ¹ This report is based on the weekly newsletter published by the (OIC), see *OIC Newsletter*, 19/11/2008, in: www.oic-oic.org
- ² OIC, 16/2/2008, see:
http://www.oic-oic.org/topic_detail.asp?t_id=836&x_key=%CD%DD%D1%ED%C7%CA
- ³ *OIC Newsletter*, 15/10/2008.
- ⁴ *The OIC Journal*, July/September 2008.
- ⁵ OIC Resolution 1/11-PAL(IS) and OIC/SUMMIT-11/2008/FC/Final.
- ⁶ *Hürriyet* newspaper, Turkey, 25/1/2008.
- ⁷ *Hürriyet*, 25/1/2008.
- ⁸ *Haaretz*, 22/1/2008.
- ⁹ See: http://www.worldbulletin.net/news_print.php?id=34375
- ¹⁰ See *Assafir*, 5/1/2009.
- ¹¹ See *Assafir*, 11/12/2008.
- ¹² German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Compagnia di San Paolo, *Transatlantic Trends 2008 Partners*, 2008, see: http://www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/doc/2008_English_Key.pdf
- ¹³ See Helen Brusilovsky, *Summary of Israel's Foreign Trade by Country-2008*.
- ¹⁴ *Al-Khaleej*, 3/1/2008.
- ¹⁵ *Albayan*, 18/1/2008.
- ¹⁶ *Al-Watan*, Saudi Arabia, 31/1/2008.
- ¹⁷ Ma'an News Agency, 29/1/2008.
- ¹⁸ *Al-Khaleej*, 9/1/2008.
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- ²⁰ *Al-Sharq*, Doha, 2/3/2008.
- ²¹ *Al-Khaleej*, 3/3/2008.
- ²² *Al-Khaleej*, 10/3/2008.
- ²³ *Al-Khaleej*, 9/2/2008.
- ²⁴ *Al-Khaleej*, 9/2/2008.
- ²⁵ *Al-Watan*, Saudi Arabia, 13/2/2008.
- ²⁶ *Al-Khaleej*, 2/2/2008.
- ²⁷ *Al-Akhbar*, Beirut, 27/9/2008.
- ²⁸ *Asharq Alawsat*, 2/10/2008.
- ²⁹ Moheet.com, 13/12/2008.
- ³⁰ *Assafir*, 27/12/2008.
- ³¹ *Al-Akhbar*, Beirut, 29/12/2008.
- ³² *Albayan*, 29/12/2008.
- ³³ *Alhayat*, 27/12/2008.
- ³⁴ *Al-Khaleej*, 28/12/2008.
- ³⁵ Aljazeera.net, 29/12/2008.
- ³⁶ *Addustour*, 30/12/2008.
- ³⁷ *Al-Khaleej*, 30/12/2008.
- ³⁸ Aljazeera.net, 25/9/2008.
- ³⁹ *Al-Khaleej*, 1/5/2008.
- ⁴⁰ Aljazeera.net, 25/9/2008.
- ⁴¹ See: <http://voiceofpalestine.net>
- ⁴² *Al-Watan*, Saudi Arabia, 15/7/2008.
- ⁴³ *Al-Khaleej*, 30/12/2008.

⁴⁴ Reuters, 29/12/2008.

⁴⁵ See: <http://www.just-international.org/events.cfm>

⁴⁶ *Felesteen* newspaper, 29/11/2008.

⁴⁷ See Helen Brusilovsky, Summary of Israel's Foreign Trade by Country-2008.

Chapter Five

The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

Introduction

Although the international community -especially its major powers- has promised the Palestinians with a viable state by the end of 2008; that promise has turned into an Israeli military attack on the GS by the last days of the year. The attack, which continued for 22 days, brought the Palestinian cause to the focus again, through the demonstrations that swept the world's capitals and cities. The brutal aggression that targeted children and civilians on the one hand, and the popular steadfastness of the resistance that repelled the Israeli ground attacks on the other hand; both had a direct impact on the denounce of the aggression and the support for the Palestinian people that the world witnessed.

The US administration was preoccupied by settling the issues of Iraq and Afghanistan, dealing with the Iran nuclear issue, and then it was concerned -along with the rest of the world- over the crucial financial crisis. Despite all that, the Palestinian issue received greater attention from the administration of President George W. Bush compared to previous years, in an attempt to follow up the outcome of the Annapolis conference, in order to reach an outstanding achievement before the end of Bush's non-extendable term in office.

On the other hand, the world has been preoccupied since the beginning of 2008 by the tension resulted from various media reports on the US-Israeli plan to launch a military attack on Iran. It was coincided with an unprecedented surge in oil prices to \$147 a barrel around the middle of the year. This put many countries under the pressure of difficult economic conditions. The international diplomatic efforts were engaged in attempts to contain the implications of such developments, both at the regional or international level.

At a later stage, the crisis of the Georgian-Russian relations formed a breakthrough in the Russian politics, in which Russia restored some of its military prestige, challenging the US Administration. This issue drew the attention of the major countries particularly that Russia succeeded in changing the map of the Caucasus region through separating both Abkhazia and South

Ossetia from Georgia, when they were announced to be two independent states. This brought about a series of international meetings, and apprehension of being on the verge of a structural changes phase in the international system, given the increasing international feeling of Russia's return to be more effective in determining the trends of international interactions, given the fears of a Russian-NATO confrontation, especially after the various movements of the American and Russian navy's warships in the Black Sea region.

Later, the world was concerned over the financial crisis that pushed the economies of many major countries in the international system to the brink of recession. Fears of economic recession similar to the 1929 international depression crisis were mounting. The USA was the centre of this international crisis, which raised once again the issue of the capitalist system capability to lead the financial system and the global economy. The world's attention was focused on the monitors of the international stock markets watching its ups and downs.

There were many factors that led the Palestinian cause into a state of "relative stagnation" at the international level, particularly from the USA side. The USA was preoccupied by the presidential election and the accompanied heated election campaigns. It was also engrossed in the major financial crisis and its repercussions on the American and global economy. It exhausted much of its efforts to resolve its situations in the Iraq and Afghanistan quagmires. On the other hand, the inter-Palestinian division, in addition to the inability of President Abu Mazen and the PA government in Ramallah to provide convincing answers concerning speaking on behalf of the Palestinians, and to move forward with settlement agreements that are enforceable and accepted by the Palestinians; both discouraged the major and influential countries from taking serious measures towards the settlement process.

Moreover, the government of Hamas in the GS has been under siege and was in six-month truce. This contributed to reducing the tension, moving the case away from top news in the media, and leaving the international powers preoccupied by other issues, waiting for better conditions for a settlement in which the rule of Hamas would be weakened or overthrown.

On the Israeli side, there were also factors discouraging to continue moving on the course of settlement; including the Israeli internal partisan and political problems, the prosecution of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on charges of corruption that forced him to resign, the ruling party "Kadima" launching a process

of re-arrangement, the failure of Tzipi Livni to form a new government, and the subsequent call for new elections.

In general, the “three weak ones”; i.e. Bush, Olmert and ‘Abbas did not have the potential of moving towards successful settlement negotiations.

On the other hand, there were some circumstances and events that brought the issue again to the international attention such as the Palestinians’ breaking through the Rafah Crossing, the Israeli attacks on the GS from 27/2/2008 to 4/3/2008, the prisoner exchange between Hezbollah and Israel, the judaization and destroying houses which raised criticism from some European countries such as Switzerland.¹ The year concluded by the overall Israeli aggression on the GS, which the whole world was concerned with.

Despite the concerns of the American administration, it should be borne in mind that the Bush administration has been relatively active, in comparison to previous years, trying to make a breakthrough in the settlement process, as any success in this area will enhance the Republicans electoral chances, consequently the visits to the region by the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other American officials increased. Rice visits amounted to eight visits during the year 2008.

Israel has taken advantage of this situation to do more projects of settlement and Judaization, ignoring international objections, which were nothing more than words in the air. The Israeli efforts also continued to broaden the base of natural ties with the countries of the region. The United Nations conference on dialogue between religions on 12/11/2008 was one of these efforts’ new tracks; especially that it was adopted by some major Arab countries such as, Saudi Arabia.

Accordingly, we will address the international dimension of the Palestinian issue through the diplomatic efforts of the international major powers and the role of the international community in the economic dimension.

First: The Diplomatic Focus

The year 2008 was supposed to be devoted to achieve what was agreed upon in late 2007, particularly in the Annapolis conference in November 2007, where the year 2008 was undertaken to be the year of the solution based on two states, Palestinian and Israeli, living in peace side by side.

Tracking the diplomatic activity of the central powers with the greatest influence in the movement, we can see the collective failure represented in the committees and international organizations, and the individual failure represented in the solo effort of each State, as indicated in the following:

1. The Quartet

The Quartet (the United Nations, the USA, Russia and the EU) represents the most influential international actors in the international dimension of the Palestinian cause. However, the efforts of this committee did not lead to meaningful results, as evidenced in the four meetings held during 2008 as follows:²

a. The first meeting in London on 2/5/2008: The statement of the meeting included some of points such as:

1. Emphasis on continuing negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides to realize a Palestinian state by the end of the year 2008.
2. The Quartet called on Israel to remove roadblocks and the outposts, expressed its deep concern at continuing settlement activity, called on Israel to freeze all settlement activity including natural growth, and urged Israel to facilitate the delivery of security assistance to the Palestinian. The Quartet also expressed its continuing concern over the closure of Gaza crossing points.
3. On the Palestinian side, the Quartet also expressed its strong backing for the Bethlehem Conference “Investing in Palestine: Partners for Change” for private sector development, called for all donors to follow through on pledges made at the December 2007 Paris International Donors’ Conference, encouraged the Arab states to fulfill both their political and financial commitments made in the Annapolis conference, and supported the improvement of security conditions in Jenin. It called on the PA to fulfill its commitment to fight terrorism, to accelerate steps of rebuilding its security apparatus. The Quartet also condemned the rocket attacks from Gaza on southern Israel.
4. The Committee called on Egypt, the PA and Israel to provide security to all Gazans, and to end all acts of terror.
5. Reference to the importance of the Arab initiative to settle the conflict in the Middle East.

b. The second meeting in Berlin on 24/6/2008 included the following:

1. Emphasizing on the PA to continue fighting terrorism, and emphasizing the importance of unobstructed delivery of security assistance to the PA.
2. Increasing aid for Gaza under the management of the PA, and welcoming the EU's offer to resume its monitoring of crossings in the GS.
3. Welcoming the calm in the GS between Israel and Hamas, supporting the Egyptian efforts in this regard.
4. Voicing support for the Berlin Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and the Rule of Law.
5. Welcoming the indirect negotiations between Syria and Israel in Turkey.

c. The third meeting was in New York on 26/9/2008. The statement of the Committee states:

1. The Quartet called on all Palestinians to commit themselves to non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements between the PA and Israel.
2. Restoring Palestinian unity based on the PLO commitments, and supporting the Egyptian endeavors to reunite the Palestinians in the WB and GS under the legitimate PA.
3. Supporting the PA in confronting militias and terrorist groups, stressing the need for dismantling the infrastructure of terror.
4. The Quartet expressed deep concern about increasing settlement activity, and noted the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative as a major element in moving the process forward.
5. Supporting the idea of convening an international conference in Moscow the Spring of 2009.

d. The Fourth Meeting on 9/11/2008, in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. The statement of the Commission states:

1. Hearing each of Mahmud 'Abbas and Livni in each's presentation of their negotiating efforts; noting that they will continue to negotiate and they formed ten committees.
2. Welcoming the deployment of Palestinian security forces in Hebron.

3. Emphasizing the importance of the Arab peace initiative.

What can be observed from all these statements?

- a. The Committee is seeking to liquidate and cordon the resistance through strengthening the Palestinian security services, and facilitate the arrival of what is needed in this aspect.
- b. The Committee insists on not recognizing or dealing with Hamas unless it recognized all the agreements, signed by the PA or the PLO.
- c. Supporting the Egyptian efforts to unite the Palestinians under the legitimate authority; that is defined by the Committee as the Government of President Mahmud ‘Abbas.
- d. The Committee expresses “concern over the settlement”, and calls for “freezing it”, but does not consider it as a wrongful act that must be ended in all its forms. It is even noted that successive statements urging to “freeze”, and not to remove all the settlements, while insisting on ending all forms of incitement and violence and “terrorism”.

It is noticed that the most significant paragraphs of the Quartet statements are repeated in the Security Council resolutions, as will be seen later when we review the Security Council Resolution no. 1850.

However, comparing the statements of individual parties of the Commission indicates a range of positions on various aspects of the issue. This can be seen in the statements of the EU when compared with the American positions as will be indicated later.

2. The United States of America

During the year 2008, the Middle East witnessed some meetings that brought together international leaders with the regional leaders. President Bush was the first to visit the Middle East in 2008. His first visit to Israel in his capacity as president of the USA was in January of the same year; to give the impression of the continuity of his effort to establish a Palestinian state that he promised. Dick Cheney, the Vice President visited the region in March 2008 (his first interest was investigating the rise in oil prices). In both visits, they emphasized the “necessity” for the establishment of a Palestinian state before the end of the year, a position which has been repeated by the American President almost throughout the year. In his speech at the Davos conference in May 2008, President Bush emphasized this

view. He reconfirmed it again during a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas in September 2008,³ continuing turning a blind eye to the growing siege on the GS, which prompted some Gazans to sweep through the Rafah border crossing on the Egyptian border in late January 2008.

However, in return for his emphasis on the creation of a Palestinian state, Bush had initiated his visit to Israel stressing the Judaism of the Jewish state, while noting that the alliance between the USA and Israel contribute to ensure its security as a Jewish state.⁴ A position similar to what was expressed in the House of Representatives and the Senate, which released two separate statements on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of Israel, describing it as “a homeland for the Jewish people”.⁵

The American diplomatic efforts includes the visits of Condoleezza Rice, the American Secretary of State, in which she frequently criticized the continued Israeli settlement, considering it as an act that impedes the peace,⁶ but did not, at any time, call for the need to end the settlement activity and not just freezing it.

The policy of “carrot and stick” was dominating the efforts of the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The stick part was evident in the continued emphasis on refusal to deal with the GS ignoring the siege imposed on it, and in the hard work to weaken the Arab summit held in Damascus in March 2008, the same month, in which a US warship arrived to the Lebanese coast.

This American orientation can also be seen in the speech delivered by US Ambassador to the United Nations, Khalilzad on 25/3/2008, when he emphasized on the continuation of US Gen. William Fraser to lead the US efforts to pressure for the implementation of the road map, and the continued support of the PA by signing the American-Palestinian Agreement on 19/3/2008. Under this Agreement, the USA provides \$150 million for the PA.⁷ The American conduct became clear in objecting to the draft resolution, submitted by Libya to the Security Council to halt the fighting that erupted after the Israeli attack on the GS, at the end of December 2008.

Meanwhile, the carrot was represented in the Rice’s Declaration of releasing \$100 million of aid to Egypt, which the US Congress froze because of the Egyptian human rights record.⁸ However, that was accompanied by the continuation of Egypt’s blockade of Gaza, and work on destroying the tunnels by which the Gazans try to lift the blockade as much as possible. This Egyptian approach in the closure

of the Rafah crossing has continued even after the Israeli aggression on Gaza by the end of December 2008.

From the discussions of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the US House of Representatives on 21/5/2008, regarding the Israeli-Egyptian-American relations, it was clear that the USA is preoccupied with how to strengthen the Egyptian role in controlling the Egyptian border with the GS, as indicated by the following actions that have been proposed in the Committee:⁹

- a. Allocating \$23 million to procure advanced detection equipment and devices to help the Egyptian Government thwart the smuggling of weapons along the border to the GS. This issue was raised by the Israeli government later when the attack on the GS started on 27/12/2008.
- b. The need to think of activating the Multi-National Force stationed in the Sinai, working within the framework of Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty since 1979.
- c. Calling for encouraging the European role in the development of Sinai in a way that helps in weakening the role of Sinai Bedouin, nearly a 60 thousand population in the “smuggling” of weapons.

The “policy of the carrot” is also realized in the American-Palestinian relationship. During the Israeli attacks on the GS in March, President ‘Abbas suspended talks with Israel, they were resumed after a meeting with Rice, which made *The Economist* magazine commenting on this saying that ‘Abbas’ “main claim to legitimacy among his people is that America and Israel recognize him as a partner for peace. If they withdrew their support he would probably be finished as a leader.”¹⁰ Perhaps this explains the fact that President ‘Abbas was the only official in the international community, who, until the middle of the year, continued saying that he had hope for a Palestinian state this year.

The Democratic elected President, Barack Obama, has presented conflicting indications of the directions he’ll take. He visited Palestine for the first time in January 2006, and revisited the region in July 2008. In a conversation with students, he said that he “supported the idea of two states.” It also quoted him telling a group of people in Muscatine on 11/3/2007 after announcing his candidacy for the presidential election, that “nobody is suffering more than the Palestinian people.” He added that Hamas has to acknowledge that the road to peace is not going through terrorism and other violence; and that the Israeli settlement is also a problem.

Meanwhile he noted in an interview with the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* on 29/2/2008, “that Israel has to remain a Jewish state.”¹¹ He also expressed sympathy with Israel during a ceremony by the Jewish lobby, The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), in June, in which he said that he is in favor of keeping Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel.¹² Then raised concern of the appointing some personalities that have Israeli inclinations in important posts in the White House.

In spite of the continuous Palestinian meetings (the team of Ramallah Government) with various international parties, the problem of dealing with Hamas (Gaza government) is still a point of internal debate between the major international powers. At a time when the USA remained committed to the policy of boycotting the “Gaza government” in any sense, there were emerging views from outside the American and European official circles that see the necessity of dealing with this government, despite the differences in the degree and level of this engagement.

The advocates of engagement with Hamas justified their opinion on two grounds:¹³

- a. Any course of a peaceful settlement would not be feasible without the participation of Hamas, given Hamas’ power and popularity among Palestinians and its ability to undermine this course of settlement.
- b. The realistic thinking demands that the Palestinian forces are only to be dealt according to the balance of power that they hold in the Palestinian community, not only on the basis of the degree of satisfaction with the directions of these forces.

It seems that the meeting of Jimmy Carter, the former US President, with Hamas leaders in Damascus in April 2008 was part of that view. From the above, The American position can be summarized in some points:

- a. Failure to achieve the promise of a Palestinian state in 2008.
- b. Disruption of the calls for an immediate cease-fire that have accompanied the Israeli aggression on Gaza on 27 December.
- c. Continued financial, political and security support for the PA on the one hand, and the continued pressure on the Hamas movement in the same three fields.

3. European Union

The EU's position achieved more progress, though slightly, than the American position; as the European diplomacy tries to give a degree of balance to its positions. It is a reflection of the differences in the directions taken by the Member States of the Union, which can be felt in the position of Sanja Štiglic, the EU representative in his speech at the Security Council on 28/3/2008; in which he noted:¹⁴

- a. Condemning the attack on a Jewish religious centre in Jerusalem on 3/3/2008 on the one hand, and expressing concern over the Israel settlements expansion.
- b. Stressing the right of Israel in defending itself, on the other hand demanding the cessation of all acts of violence.
- c. Emphasis on the European position that the settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law. This is the same position that considered the settlement as a major obstacle to peace, in his statement on 22/1/2008. It should be noted that this clear paragraph about settlement is being generally re-edited in the Quartet resolutions.

MPs of the EU also invited their counterparts of the Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council for dialogue in early November 2003,¹⁵ which indicates a degree of disparity from the US position.

But the paradigm shift in the European-Israeli relationships emerged in two steps declared in the last month of the year 2008, namely:

- a. An agreement signed between Israel and the EU on 2/12/2008, that stated on enhancing cooperation in the fight against terrorism, the strengthening of military relations and the exchange of intelligence information,¹⁶ which reinforces the previous agreement reached between the two parties in October 2006.
- b. Decision of the EU Foreign Ministers on 8/12/2008, for strengthening the European-Israeli relations in accordance with the principle adopted by the EU in June 2008; the resolution noted:
 1. Holding meetings at the level of foreign ministers three times a year, and once yearly for ministers in the other sectors.

2. Opening the way for a summit between the two parties.
3. Probability of calling Israel to participate in civilian missions in European security and defense operations.
4. Emphasized that the relations between the two parties are based on respect for human rights, the rule of law, and the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-state solution.
5. Giving each of the EU countries, during its presidency of the EU, the right to invite an Israeli diplomatic official to a meeting of EU ambassadors on security issues.

Although the European Parliament postponed voting on this resolution until Israel shows “serious signs of good intentions”, according to Francis Wurtz, the Chairman of the European United Left-Nordic Green Left Group, and because of the worsening situation in the GS, according to statements made by the Socialist Veronique De Keyser; the parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee had recommended the support of the proposal by the 27 member states. This resolution is supposed to be adopted in April 2009.

Bernard Kouchner, the French Foreign Minister, said referring to the EU’s decision that enhancing the relations with Palestine will come next, but it is somewhat difficult with the Palestinians, because it would be more complicated in the absence of a state.¹⁷

Regarding The European attitude of aggression on the GS at the end of December 2008, it is clear from the statement of the EU that there is no change in European attitudes; where it stated:¹⁸

- a. Immediate cessation of rocket launching and Israeli military operations. It is noticeable in the drafting of the European statements in this regard that the text on halting the Israeli military action is always preceded by the text on halting the Palestinian military action, to make the Israeli military action seems to be a response to the Palestinian reaction.
- b. Opening of all border crossings, as provided for in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) signed between Israel, the PA, and the EU. This means depriving Hamas of any role in organizing the movement through the crossings. In other language, it means the continuation of the blockade as far as the Hamas government is the one that rules the GS.

- c. The EU is ready to re-dispatch the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) to Rafah to enable its re-opening, in cooperation with Egypt, the PA and Israel. Thus, deliberately disregard the fact that the concerned PA does not exist in Gaza.
- d. Providing immediate humanitarian aid.
- e. Stepping up the peace process based on the Annapolis conference resolutions.

However, the individual diplomatic efforts of European countries sometimes seem to be in tune with the general European orientations, and sometimes appear to have some disparities in the detailed issues.

a. Germany

Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor conducted her third visit to Israel during the 26 months of her term in office, and delivered a speech in the Israeli Knesset on 18/3/2008 in which she emphasized the depth of the German-Israeli relations.

It is worth mentioning that Germany is the least country in directing criticism to the Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. This is due to the heritage of relations between the two parties on the one hand, and the role played by Merkel in the European policies towards Israel on the other hand. Germany has played a key role in the 2000 Convention for the liberalization of trade between Israel and the EU, which raised the volume of trade exchange between Israel and Germany to \$6.6 billion, making Germany the second-biggest trading partner with Israel.¹⁹

It is noticeable that Merkel condemned the launching of rockets from Gaza on Israeli settlements, but did not mention the death of more than a hundred Palestinians in the Israeli attacks during March. She declined to condemn the continued Israeli settlement in her visit, in which she was accompanied by about half of the cabinet members. It is also noted that the French and the British positions were more active toward the cease-fire to halt the fighting -that broke out in Gaza after the Israeli attack at the end of December- than the German role which has shown little enthusiasm to rein in the Israeli military machine. Despite the fact that the French President Sarkozy held Hamas a great responsibility for the development of events at the end of the year.

However, it is necessary to take note of some German differences with Israel; such as the German-Israeli difference on using military action against Iran. Israel

tends to encourage this position, while Germany is showing some reluctance in this regard, note that Iran is first importer from Germany.

In June, Germany hosted a conference on justice and security in Palestine.²⁰ The main goals of the conference are to reinforce internal environment in favor of PA aspirations.

b. Britain

Regarding the British policy, it is necessary to be aware that the leadership of the British Labor Party was sympathetic with the Israeli project, regardless of the balanced stance that the party is trying to suggest. Tony Blair, Special Envoy of the Quartet on the Middle East, and James Gordon Brown, the current British Prime Minister are members of the Pro-Israel lobby group Labour Friends of Israel²¹ and Partons of The Jewish National Fund (JNF).²²

Gordon Brown, the British Prime Minister has made no secret of his feelings towards Israel. In his speech to the Knesset, the first speech by a British Prime Minister to the Knesset, on 21/7/2008, he referred to the role his father played in deepening his emotions towards Israel, the divine promise of the establishment of Israel, and the unbreakable partnership between Israel and Britain. He said that for the whole of his life he has counted himself a friend of Israel, adding that they are determined to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapons program. After meeting with ‘Abbas, the PA President, Brown said that there is an urgent need for a viable Palestinian state, and that he had brought to the Knesset his view of a two-state solution, according to the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both.²³

c. France

During the year 2008, France continued calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state as soon as possible, and asked Israel to halt the settlement process to prejudice the ability of the forthcoming Palestinian state to survive according to Pascale Andréani,²⁴ the French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman. While Nicolas Sarkozy, the French President repeatedly stressed France’s commitment to the security of Israel.

In the framework of the French diplomatic effort, Kouchner, the French Foreign Minister visited Ramallah in February 2008, in which he assured that the Israeli blockade actions have a direct impact on the Palestinian economy as a whole, and the living conditions of the Palestinians. He called for improving the conditions

of transportation in the WB and the lifting the siege on Gaza. He called on Israel to completely freeze settlement in the WB and East Jerusalem, to dismantle all settlements, which are described as being non-legitimate, and to reopen the Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem. He added that the settlements are an obstacle to peace and they deny the principle of exchanging land for peace. On the other hand, he added that, the PA should make a major effort to combat terrorist movements and to reform the security services to become more effective. He also expressed hope for the establishment of a Palestinian state before the end of 2008.²⁵

The spokesman for the French presidency quoted the President Sarkozy saying to his Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres, during an official visit to France by the latter that as a friend he says to them that Israel's security passes through the cessation of colonialism. He added that Israel's security is out of the question, and that France will always be by the Israeli side. He asserted that the best guarantee of Israel's security is the establishment of a modern, democratic, and viable Palestinian state before the end of the year 2008.²⁶ These are the same stances confirmed by Sarkozy during his visit to Israel in June 2008, along with his call to lift Gaza blockade, and to reaffirm France's position of refusing any dialogue with Hamas as long as it did not respond to the Quartet's conditions.²⁷

In this context, it is worth mentioning that Isma'il Haniyyah, the prime minister of the Palestinian dismissed government sent a letter to Sarkozy in January 2008, on which France replies by confirming that Hamas needs to comply with the requirements of the Quartet.²⁸ This was a firm stance from France, in spite of the French communications with the Hamas movement in May. Pascale Andréani, the French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman diminished the importance of the contact between a former French ambassador with Khalid Mish'al at the time, pointing out that such contacts do not amount to the level of political relations, and assured Israel that the French stance does not change and still committed to the conditions of the Quartet.²⁹ Moreover, Sarkozy told Tzipi Livni, the Israeli Foreign Minister, during a meeting in Paris on 25/5/2008, that the meeting between the French envoy, and representatives of Hamas, was a mistake, adding that "France will not hold any meeting with Hamas."³⁰

Furthermore, *Le Figaro* newspaper said that Nicolas Sarkozy, the French President, put forward in December a new peace plan for the Middle East, in which Jerusalem becomes a unified and open capital for the Israelis and Palestinians, with troops from the EU to maintain order in the WB. The newspaper said that France

is willing to solve the problem of Palestinian refugees through the “financial settlement” and the compensation for the refugees through an international agency, at a cost ranging from \$80 billion to \$200 billion paid by the Arab Gulf States and the EU. The plan also includes resettlement of a limited number of the Palestinian population in the Negev Desert.³¹

d. Crisis with the Vatican

It is useful to stop at the Israeli relations with the Vatican during the year 2008, when a crisis erupted between the two sides after an Israeli rabbi raised, during a visit to the Vatican, the role of Pope Pius XII during the World War II, saying that he has not performed his duty properly in protecting the Jews, on the background of the intention of Pope Benedict XVI to upgrade Pope Pius XII to the ranking of a saint. The problem exacerbated after Shimon Peres, the Israeli President said in 19 October that “We have reason to believe that Pius XII didn’t do enough to save Jewish life.” The response was from Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican’s spokesman, referring to an invitation from Peres to Pope Benedict XVI to visit the Holy Land, saying that criticizing Pius XII would not be “the determining factor” deciding a papal visit to Israel.³²

This came in spite of Pope Benedict’s statements sympathizing with Israel, as he commented upon receiving the credentials of Mordechai Lewy, the new Israeli ambassador to the Vatican, in May 2008 saying that, “The Holy See joins you in giving thanks to the Lord that the aspirations of the Jewish people for a home in the land of their fathers have been fulfilled,” and he recognized Israel’s “legitimate need for security and self-defense.”³³

Regarding the position of the Vatican from the Israeli military aggressions against the Palestinians, the Pope condemned the spiral of destruction and death that which seems to have no end in the Holy Land, in the aftermath of Operation Hot Winter at the end of February and early March 2008.³⁴ The Pope also condemned what he described as “violence” in the GS, following the Israeli launching of operation “cast lead” against the GS, saying he was “distressed” for deaths and injuries.³⁵ However, Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican’s spokesman said that an Israeli reaction to the launching of rockets from Gaza was “expected”, adding: “Certainly it has been a strong blow against Hamas. At the same time there will be numerous innocent victims,” in addition he said that Hamas is a prisoner of the logic of hatred and Israel of the logic of force.³⁶

4. The Russian Federation

When looking at the Russian position, we should pay attention to the impact of the Georgian crisis (the Georgian-Russian war in 2008) on the Russian-Israeli relations. These relations were influenced by some factors, including:³⁷

- a. The growing conviction in the Russian community that the Israeli presence in Georgia is a part of the US effort to encircle Russia from the Asian front, after encircle it from the Eastern Europe side, this was confirmed by revealing the Georgian-Israel military relations.
- b. The growth of the arms trade and selling the Israeli security expertise since 2001. This was clear in the role played by the Israeli military experts in the training and management of the battles between Russian army and Georgian troops.
- c. Israel owns a strong interest in Caspian oil and gas pipelines reach the Turkish terminal port of Ceyhan, rather than the Russian network... and thence to Israel's oil terminal at Ashkelon and on to its Red Sea port of Eilat. From there supertankers can carry the gas and oil to the Far East through the Indian Ocean. Israel offered Russia a stake in the project but was rejected.

The Israeli Government was concerned about the implications of the Georgian crisis on relations with Moscow, which led Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister to visit Moscow in October 2008. A joint statement by the two sides confirmed continuing their dialogue on defense issues, and forming a team to discuss arms sales. Olmert said that Dmitry Medvedev, the Russian President had told him that Russian policy will continue on the basis of not to harm Israel's security under any circumstances.³⁸

However, the Israeli concerns still exist about the possibility of Russia's providing Syria with sophisticated weapons, or establishing military bases or facilities for the Russian Navy in the Syrian ports.

Israeli officials have raised reports of Russian's spying on Israel. Colonel Ram Dor, chief of information security in the armed forces, said to the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, "Israel believes Russia passes intelligence it gathers about the Jewish state to Syria and indirectly to Hezbollah guerrillas."³⁹

However, this does not preclude that other aspects of relationships have developed; Israel and Russia has switched to visa-free regime in September

2008.⁴⁰ In addition to this, Russia attempts to continue dialogue with Israel to ensure the success of the international conference suggested to be held in Moscow in the Spring of 2009. During a meeting with the Egyptian Foreign Minister on 26/3/2008, Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister said that the Moscow meeting “will provide collective support for the Palestinian-Israeli talks.” This was emphasized during his meeting with President ‘Abbas in Ramallah in March 2008.

However, the Russian role seems to be limited in its ability to influence the course of events after the outbreak of fighting between Hamas and Israel in Gaza at the end of December. Despite the Russian call for a cessation of fighting, Israel totally disregarded this call.

5. China

Chinese Positions remained in their traditional framework.⁴¹ A delegation from the Chinese Communist Party visited the region, including the WB on an invitation from the PLO. In this visit, the Chinese stressed their support for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. In addition to this, during a visit of a Syrian delegation to Beijing in the July 2008, Yang Jiechi, Chinese Foreign Minister, said that his country emphasizes the solution of problems between Israel and its neighbors on the basis of the UN resolutions and the principle of “land for peace”.

Regarding the Chinese position on the crisis and the siege of Gaza, Jiang Yu, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said that her country is concerned about the situation in the GS, and hopes that everyone will work to improve the humanitarian condition, hoping that the negotiations between the two sides will reach positive outcomes soon on the basis of two states living side by side peacefully. In March 2008, the Chinese government demanded Israel to stop its military operations in Gaza, especially since it has an impact on the peace negotiations between the parties.

6. Japan

The diplomatic effort of Japan during the year 2008 focused on the project, called “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity”, which we will talk about in the Economic Focus. Tokyo also hosted the Fourth Conference for confidence-building between Palestinians and Israelis on 22-23/10/2008, where Sa’ib ‘Uraiqtat headed the Palestinian delegation, and Meir Sheehrit, the Israeli Interior Minister headed the Israeli delegation.⁴²

Othaer than that, the Japanese diplomacy only made some statements that indicate its position on key issues that have occurred during this year. These issues include the Israeli settlement in the WB; in March the Japanese government expressed concern about the Individual Israeli practices in the construction of the controversial Israeli settlements “that might further undermine the momentum for peace, and could never make any constructive contribution to the confidence-building between the concerned parties,” Commenting on the resumption of construction of approximately 750 housing units at a settlement located in the vicinity of Jerusalem⁴³ and the announcement of the construction of 1,300 houses at settlement in the WB in June.⁴⁴

Tokyo had expressed concern about the situation in the GS, following the end of the operation “Hot Winter”.⁴⁵ It expressed concern again following the launching of the Israeli aggression on the GS in December, and called on Israel to maintain self-restraint, and the Palestinians to stop launching rockets. Hirofumi Nakasone, the Japanese Foreign Minister said in a statement that Japan is urging both sides to immediately halt the use of force and achieve a durable cessation of violence.⁴⁶

7. International Organizations

At the level of international organizations, an international meeting was held within the UN on the Palestinian issue on 4/6/2008, with emphasis on continuing negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, along with the emphasis on three points:⁴⁷

- a. Emphasizing the damage caused by the construction of the wall, and the continuation of settlement activity in and around East Jerusalem.
- b. Supporting the efforts of the PA in the area of enforcing security in the WB.
- c. Criticizing the Israeli government for not doing enough to ensure the protection of civilians under occupation.

Regarding the diplomatic effort in the scope of international organizations, specifically the UN. In its session no. 63 on 11/11/2008, the UN General Assembly stressed the Palestinian people’s right to “self-determination”.

The Security Council, made five resolutions on the Middle East during the year 2008;⁴⁸ three of which are primarily concerned with the Lebanese situation, and in one of them there is a reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the need to resolve on the basis of international resolutions 242, 338, etc. While the fourth

resolution is on the international crisis with Iran over its nuclear program. The Security Council held a public meeting on 26/9/2008 to discuss the continuation of Israeli settlement. However, the most significant among these resolutions is the resolution no. 1850, which deserves some attention, the resolution states that the Security Council:

Recalling all its previous relevant resolutions, in particular resolutions 242, 338, 1397, and 1515 and the Madrid principles. Reiterating its vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders. Welcoming the 9 November 2008 statement from the Quartet and the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Understanding announced at the November 2007 Annapolis Conference, including in relation to implementation of the Performance Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Noting also that lasting peace can only be based on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement, and terror, and the two-State solution, building upon previous agreements and obligations. Noting the importance of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, declares its commitment to the irreversibility of the bilateral negotiations, calls on all States and international organizations to contribute to an atmosphere conducive to negotiations and to support the Palestinian government that is committed to the Quartet principles and the Arab Peace Initiative and respects the commitments of the PLO. The Security Council also welcomes the Quartet's consideration, in consultation with the parties, of an international meeting in Moscow in 2009.

A careful reading of the resolution suggests some conclusions:

- a. The resolution is an implicit declaration of the failure of establishing the promised Palestinian state on the date set by President Bush.
- b. The focus is totally on the cordoning off the resistance, which is reflected in the emphasis on the renunciation of violence and terrorism, implementation of the road map, respect for the obligations of the PLO, and commitment to the Annapolis, which conforms to the statements of Condoleezza Rice that there is no way other than through Annapolis.⁴⁹
- c. Leaving room for the Israeli side to maneuver. The resolution does not state for the acceptance of the Arab initiative, but rather its "importance", which means that the Israeli side sees it as debatable and not acceptable as stated by Peres. The resolution also preconditions consultation between the two parties for the Moscow meeting, which is linked to Israel's hesitation to

participate in this meeting, which means that it is left to them to decide as it deems appropriate.

- d. The resolution clearly and repeatedly noted all elements of the strangulating the resistance, while not referring to the idea of withdrawal from the occupied territories, neither to deem the settlement as an illegal activity.
- e. The resolution suggests unequivocally that any future Palestinian government is obliged to follow a certain categorically defined foreign policy, which means that the Palestinian people's choice of political orientations is tightened to the extent. Any government that does not commit itself to these principles would be unacceptable even if it came through a democratic way.
- f. Such resolution, and the consent of the Arab parties to it shows how weak they are, their declining political performance, their low ceiling, even in comparison with the previous readings of the UN.

These orientations define the features of the international map, which explain the background of launching the Israeli attack at the end of December on the GS, along with some considerations that can be summarized as follows:⁵⁰

- a. Termination of armed resistance in the occupied territories.
- b. Strengthening the PA in a way that allows it to continue negotiation, to make more concessions, especially after losing the tools of pressure represented in the armed resistance.
- c. Restore the prestige of the Israeli army, after the deterrent power in Lebanon was shaken after the war of July 2006.
- d. Intensification of US and the Western efforts of political, economic and security pressure on the Arab (as well as Muslim and foreign) countries, which have supported the resistance in the GS during and in the aftermath of the aggression, on the one hand, and on the other rewarding the governments that have colluded with them.

Second: Economic Focus

Following the Paris Conference in late 2007, and after the meeting of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee in London, 2/5/2008, the international aid was supposed to begin flowing to the PA, but Salam Fayyad, the Authority Prime

Minister said in late October 2008, that he was concerned about the suspension of donor aid to the Palestinian people, although the US has provided more than \$700 million to the PA during 2008, which is \$200 million more than its commitments.⁵¹

Mohammad Shtayyeh, the president of the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR) stated that the international aid for the year 2008 totaled \$1.2 billion, out of \$7.7 billion that was donated by donor countries from 2008-2010.⁵²

The State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs stated that the US government released hundreds of millions of dollars, and transferred them to the WB "to boost the economy" on the occasion of Palestine Investment Conference in Bethlehem in May 2008, focusing on the sectors of housing and information technology. The USA Agency for International Development (USAID) promised to build youth centres. Robert M. Kimmitt, the USA Deputy Secretary of the Treasury and the president of the American delegation to the Conference, emphasized the President Bush's support for promoting investments in the WB, saying that the USA will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), at the same time avoiding direct contact with the Hamas government, which is considered by the US government as a movement that adopts terrorism.⁵³

A study of international aid for the Palestinians, particularly the US aid, indicates to the permanent presence of the security aid. This study shows that the main drives behind providing the US aid are the security factors in the first place, then the economic factors. This is confirmed by the fact that the international community pledged at the Berlin Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and the Rule of Law in June 2008 to provide \$242 million to enhance the security forces and the judicial system.⁵⁴

At the European level, the European countries have committed themselves, at the end of 2007, to provide aid as follows:⁵⁵

Table 1/5: European Financial Pledges to the PA (\$ million)

Donor	Amount	Period
European Union	631	2008
France	300	2008-2010
Germany	287	2008-2010
Sweden	300	2008-2010
USA	550	2008
UK	489	2008-2010
Spain	360	2008-2010
Canada	300	2008-2012
Australia	45	2008

The Europeans have adopted a mechanism (known as *Mécanisme Palestino-Européen de Gestion de l'Aide Socio-Economique*) or PEGASE; to provide aid to the PA starting from February 2008. This plan is based on facilitating assistance to support the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) during the period from 2008-2010. It was presented to the Paris donor conference; it includes a consistent and unwavering flow of aid. Accordingly, it was supposed that the Europeans would pay 440 million euros in 2008 (about \$631 million) out of 664 million euros (about \$952 million) that the EU has pledged.

It was expected that Tony Blair, Special Envoy of the Quartet, would visit Gaza in July, but he changed his mind at the last moment on the pretext that there is a risk to his life, according to the Israelis.⁵⁶

However, the volume and continuity of the European aid was influenced by the inter-Palestinian conflict. During 2008, the British aid reached about 50 million pounds sterling (approximately \$92.5 million). The British Prime Minister said during a meeting with 'Abbas in July 2008 that the UK will provide "an economic road map for peace", citing Northern Ireland as a place where prosperity had discouraged violence.⁵⁷

On the other hand, it is expected that the global financial crisis will be reflected on the volume of international aid to poor countries, which may affect the volume of international aid to the Palestinian community negatively. This means that the international community, which has not fulfilled its pledges during the previous conferences to help the Palestinians, may not be able to meet the new commitments because of the current financial crisis.

From another economic perspective, it is necessary to review the Japanese project entitled the “Corridor of Peace and Prosperity” in 2008, especially since this project is a major effort by the Japanese diplomacy on the Palestinian issue. Japan hosted The Third Ministerial-Level Meeting of the Four-Party Consultative Unit for the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” (Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Japan) in July 2008, where Masahiko Komura, the Japanese minister of Foreign Affairs said that his country sees that stability in the Middle East is vital to the world peace, and that corridor for peace and prosperity is vital for peace in the Middle East. He added that the parties shared common views on the followings:⁵⁸

1. Emphasis on the start of the Agro-Industrial Park in Area A in Jericho, with the possible extension to adjacent Area in the future.
2. The feasibility study will be completed in November 2008, and projects to develop the basic infrastructure will move into the implementation stage as early as possible in 2009.

During the regular meetings of the parties of the project in 2008, and at the third and fourth meetings, from 31/3/2008 to 1/4/2008, they agreed as follows:

1. Emphasis on the encouraging regional cooperation, and the participation of public and private sectors.
2. Discussing possible access routes from the project site to Jordan.
3. Supporting the Four-Party Agricultural Technical Cooperation.
4. Japan’s contributions:
 - a. The rehabilitation of agricultural wells and irrigation systems.
 - b. Provide technical assistance in the agricultural field.
 - c. The rehabilitation of Jericho-Taybeh road.

The joint Israeli-Japanese issued a statement on 27/2/2008 following the visit of Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister, to Japan. The statement primarily emphasized the importance of the Japanese initiative of the Corridor project.

It is clear that the dominant idea for the Japanese side is to expand the common interests between the conflicting parties, which will result in the long run on weakening the conflict of interests between them, i.e. converting the relations between the parties, gradually, from a zero-sum to a non-zero-sum relationship, according to the descriptions of the international relations literature.

Furthermore, Russia has sent humanitarian aid to Gaza in September 2008, which was handed over to the United Nations Mission in the GS. Russia also delivered 25 armored cars to the PA though not equipped with guns.⁵⁹

On the Chinese side, the Chinese government announced, in October 2008, that it would fund the construction of The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs building, and to be implemented through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).⁶⁰ China also has received, during the year 2008, about 150 Palestinian trainees in some different sectors.

Regarding the International organizations, particularly the United Nations, The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in its August report expressed concern for the inadequate protection afforded Palestinian children, pointing out the Palestinian children who were shot to death, by the Israeli Border Police.⁶¹ This issue was emphasized again in the meeting of the UN Committee for the Protection of Civilian Persons, in the period from 12-18/11/2008.

In the field of humanitarian assistance, it is estimated that UN assistance during the year 2008 was about \$312.7 million.⁶² Statements issued from the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and from the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, explicitly refers to Israeli refusal of allowing aid in, and that the relief agency facing a deep and imminent financial crisis.

These are the positions which have been expressed by Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General, during November, however, Ban Ki-moon has also condemned the launching missile attacks on Israeli civilian targets.⁶³ On the other hand, he stated that “the occupation of the 1967 territories must come to an end.”

The UN and relief agencies estimate that the Palestinians needed \$462 million of emergency aid in 2008, and they only received 70% of it. On the other hand, in a speech in Vienna in October 2008, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA called on the international community to allocate \$282 million for the reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared camp in Lebanon, pointing out that the amounts collected for this purpose is \$57.8 million, of which five million was received from The OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID), and 91% of the amount was collected through voluntary contributions from Western countries.⁶⁴

A report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) called on the need to break the isolation of the Palestinian economy,

to lift restrictions on freedom of movement in the WB and GS, and to allow access to domestic and foreign markets.⁶⁵

When Richard A. Falk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, attempted to go to the occupied territories, the Israeli authorities barred him from entering, which is considered “regrettable”, by the UN as Ban Ki-Moon said.⁶⁶

Third: International Public Opinion

It is mentioned in previous reports that the image of Israel and the USA is clearly negative to the international public opinion. This issue is reflected during the year 2008 by some indicators, including:

1. International Popular Sympathy with the GS Encountering the Siege

During the period from 22/8/2008 till 29/10/2008, four ships carrying delegations of lawyers, politicians and human rights activists arrived to the GS, in order to exert political pressure to lift the siege. The delegations included 13 European MP and Clare Short; the former British Secretary of State for International Development.

The Scottish MP, Pauline McNeill, a member of the European campaign to break the siege said that the goal of the campaign is to form political pressure on Israel. The European campaign set up a week for Gaza, in one hundred European universities in February 2009.⁶⁷ The indicators showed popular sympathy manifested in large demonstrations in several European countries; to condemn the Israeli aggression on Gaza by the end of December.

2. Studies of International Public Opinion

A study was conducted by the World Public Opinion which is a project managed by Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland on the Arab-Israeli conflict during the year 2008 on citizens of 18 countries constitute the total 59% of the world population (USA, China, India, Russia, UK, France, Spain, Mexico, Nigeria, Thailand, South Korea, Peru, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Turkey, Ukraine, Iran, and Egypt). The study indicated the following results:⁶⁸

- 58% say that their country should not take either side of the conflict.
- 54% say that Israel it is not doing its part well.
- 35% of Indians regard Israel positively.
- 25% of Indians regard Israel negatively.
- 75% of Americans critical of Palestinian efforts.
- 74% of South Koreans said that the Palestinians are not doing their part well.
- 59% of all countries rate US efforts poorly.
- 67% favor the UN Security Council offering -if Israel and the Palestinians come to a peace agreement- to send a peacekeeping force to enforce the agreement.

The study indicates the disparity in the attitude towards the Palestinians and Israelis as follows:⁶⁹

Table 2/5: WorldPublicOpinion.org Poll of Favoring the Palestinian or the Israeli Side in Some of the World Countries

Country	Palestinians' Side %	Israel's Side %
India	23	24
China	10	2
South Korea	5	10
Russia	7	7
Spain	12	7
Ukraine	4	4
UK	8	2
France	6	4
USA	3	21
Peru	4	4
Mexico	4	3

Another study was conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), during the period from 31/10/2007 till 25/1/2008, and included 17,457 people from 34 countries. The study points out that view towards Israel and the USA is generally characterized by decline, which can be seen from the following results:⁷⁰

Table 3/5: The BBC Poll for Mainly Positive Views of United States' Influence

Year	Mainly Positive Views of the USA %
2005	38
2006	32
2007	28
2008	32

The survey also shows growing negative views of Israel's in the USA, where the rate was 33% in 2007, and rose to 39% in 2008.

3. General Trends

It is clear that the major world powers are generally interested in some dimensions of its foreign policy towards the Palestinian issue:

- a. Priority of peace to the withdrawal from the occupied territories, that is, they are interested in the Israeli security more than the ending of occupation. Despite the huge number of various statements (from the Quartet or the major countries individually), the issue of "terror" and Israel's security is a common denominator in all statements, however varied the methods of expression among countries. On the other hand, the issue of the Israeli withdrawal is not clearly mentioned nor it is being assured, despite the reference to the international resolutions no. 242, 338, etc.

The non-recurrence of the term "withdrawal" of Israel from the occupied territories, and vaguely rendering it with formulas that are subject to interpretation, is a matter of concern indicating the tacit acceptance by these major countries of changes in the political map of the border responding to Israeli conditions and the reality imposed by the Israelis.

Expressions such as "viable state", or "geographically contiguous state", or "supporting whatever agreed by the negotiators", or "concern over the continuation of settlement activity", etc, refer to an attempt to obscure the concept of withdrawal from the occupied territories turning it into a kind of contiguous arrangement between Israel and Palestine.

We believe that the next negotiation will focus on the priority Israeli security other than the withdrawal from the occupied territories. When security

according to the Israeli view is achieved, the Arab side would be abandoning its available means of pressure; making Israel free from the pressure to withdraw in such a way acceptable to the Palestinian side.

- b. All statements from the major countries cite the term “call for settlement freezing”, and not to “remove all the settlements”, which suggests orientation to tame the international and regional environment to deal with existing settlements as a matter of fact, and the need to look beyond this fact.
- c. Diplomacy of promises: It is clear that during the year 2008 (and the end of 2007), the Palestinians were promised a Palestinian state before the end of the year 2008, and were promised more than seven billion dollars aid. It is clear that none of these two promises were achieved, even minimally. The state has not been established there is even nothing to suggest its establishment in the near future. The promised funds were not received; the international financial crisis could push the Palestinian economic situation further to the point of suffocation.
- d. International consensus on the continued siege of the resistance by all diplomatic, economic, and military means. The efforts of the major powers, particularly the USA, the major European countries, and the UN to put pressure on the countries of the region for the realignment around this stance, which is reflected in the attitudes of international and Arab towards the Israeli attack at the end of the year 2008.

Fourth: The Prospects for the Year 2009

The battle of Gaza, at the end of the year 2008, imposed itself on the international diplomatic activity, and the attempts to resolve the crisis. It is clear that the international effort has begun on the basis of the following guidelines:

1. Working to end the fighting after giving adequate opportunity for the Israeli aggression to achieve the Israeli targets adequately, in particular the commitment to stop the rockets from Gaza towards Israeli settlements, and banning the entry of weapons into the GS.
2. Attempt to emphasize the diplomatic isolation of Hamas, and to highlight the diplomat role of the PA, and the attempt to gradually returning it to Gaza,

particularly through the exploitation of the 2005 Convention for the Rafah Crossing, which we above mentioned.

3. Attempt to introduce the idea of an international buffer force in the GS, whose task is to prevent the resistance from the exercising its activities, or creating international arrangements to control the borders of Gaza.
4. Organizing the efforts of reconstruction of the GS, especially in financial terms. The Western countries, in particular, seek to expand the role of the PA in this area at the expense of the Gaza Government.

Attention was attracted mainly by the new US administration led by Obama, an administration that need first six months of the year to explore the views of the parties in the Middle East and other international forces; while Israel would continue the settlement activity, and the Arab statements would increase calling for “giving Obama an adequate opportunity.”

In the light of these trends, 2008 passed in, the year 2009 came witnessing some international efforts to address the Israeli aggression on Gaza, which ended with the Israeli unilateral declaration of cessation of hostilities after nine days of the release of Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire (followed by another resolution of the UN General Assembly stressing the immediate cease-fire). Thus, we have to record the following preliminary observations on the first three weeks of the year 2009:⁷¹

1. The USA abstained from voting on the Security Council resolution that was released on 9/1/2009 with the consent of 14 countries. This implicitly suggests the possibility of the continuation of the Israeli military operation until the achievement of its targets under the tacit US approval. Abstaining rather than using veto was an attempt to absorb the Arab project presented to the Security Council regarding the cease-fire, which happened indeed when the Arab retracted their project.
2. The EU attempted to intervene in the diplomatic efforts to rein in the conflict. This was represented in three indicators:
 - a. The visits of Nicolas Sarkozy, the French President, to the region, which began on January 5th, in order to create arrangements for the cease-fire.
 - b. Sending the Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg by the EU.
 - c. A consultation conference with Israeli Prime Minister attended by

leaders of the EU major States (the British Prime Minister, the German Chancellor, the French President, the Italian Prime Minister, together with Tony Blair; Special Envoy of the Quartet).

There are some observations on the European effort in this domain:

- a. The European statements in all of these efforts focused on emphasizing the right of Israel to defend itself, provided that it does not allow actions that largely affect civilians according to the Czech Minister, as the EU representative. The formulation of the statement indicates an attempt to understand the Israeli military operation, with reference to the fact that Israel should not excessively use force; a trend completely dominated the European statements from the beginning of the crisis.
- b. The above mentioned consultative conference that was attended by the most prominent European leaders, involved some kind of sympathy and moral support for Israel; in light of the growing popular demonstrations in the world and in Europe specifically, and in the light of severing relations by Latin American countries (Venezuela and Bolivia), the sharp Brazilian criticism, and the increasing number of legal organizations and bodies and intellectual figures (some of which are Nobel laureates) calling for the prosecution of Israeli leaders as war criminals.
- c. Europe announced that it would urgently send humanitarian assistance of about 4.2 million euro (approximately \$5.56 million), but linked this by the need to cooperate with the PA.

In observing the international interactions to the aggression on Gaza, the picture seems as follows:

1. It is noted that the cease-fire declaration by Israel was two days ahead of Obama's receiving of his official duties, which means an investment of position of Bush administration until the last moment, on the one hand, and an attempt to create a certain reality for Obama's administration in which it will be captive, on the other hand. This was reinforced by the security Memorandum of Understanding between the USA and Israel (and signed by the two Foreign Ministers Condoleezza Rice and Tzipi Livni, respectively), which is based on organizing international effort to control "arms smuggling" to Gaza through international cooperation which includes the North Atlantic

Treaty in the majority of sea lanes that lead to the GS. In his first statements, Obama noted this agreement, and the need to activate it, after he announced the appointment of George Mitchell as the US envoy for the Middle East.

2. It is noted that first Obama's statements were based on the same grounds of Bush's policy, regarding the need for Hamas' recognition of Israel, and stop the launching of rockets (which implies the cessation of armed resistance).
3. The weakness of international reactions towards the siege of the GS, and the military aggression against it, indicates that Israel will invest in the major countries' preoccupation, in particular, with their economic issues, and the lack of concern over possibility that the Middle East crisis would increase the oil prices in light of the collapse of such prices at least in the foreseeable future.

This Israeli investment will take the form of: continuous pressure on the resistance movements, expansion of settlements, and the expansion of the PA influence in the security domain. That will be affected by the final adoption of reinforcing the above mentioned European-Israeli relations in 2009, the possibility of initiating US-Iranian negotiations, a possible return in a later stage to the indirect negotiation between Syria and Israel, and more Arab states opening up to Israel through back roads, despite the flow of verbal statements that accompanied the recent Israeli military aggression on Gaza.

4. It is noted that the diplomatic efforts of both China and Russia during the crisis were weak (each sent an envoy, and the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov has called for an immediate cease-fire). They even voted in favor of the previously-mentioned Security Council resolution.

It seems that the lackluster performance of the PA, the Palestinian division, and the Arab sharp differences, added more difficulty to the two countries' ability of movement, as China continues the policy of not indulging in sharp conflicts, while Russia seems to be concerned over the gas crisis with Ukraine and Europe.

To Sum it up, it seems that the international pressure on the Palestinian resistance will continue according to three central determinants:

1. Constant pressure on the Palestinian resistance to recognize Israel by investing the aid to the GS, pressure to engage the PA actively in the Gazan

affairs, turning a blind eye to the continuation of some military Israeli pressures on Gaza, and the tampering with opening the crossings linking it to certain political conditions.

2. Attempting to pressure to activate the Arab initiative firstly, then working to modify some of its paragraphs to be commensurate with the Israeli orientation. It seems that the French role in this regard will increase.
3. Blocking all efforts in all international forums to prevent any attempt to bring Israeli officials to trial before the international criminal tribunals.

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Chapter Six

The Land and the Holy Sites



The Land and the Holy Sites

Introduction

The pace of the vicious attacks launched by the Israeli occupation authorities and the extremist Jewish societies in occupied Jerusalem, particularly in the interior of the old city and in the areas adjacent to and surrounding *Al-Aqsa* Mosque, had accelerated during the year 2008 in a persistent strive to judaize this region. These attacks took an intensive form after Annapolis conference and following the Israeli municipal and partisan elections, when all the Israeli parties -with no exception- were outbidding each other on the issue of Jerusalem and the WB settlements; this has reflected through the numerous contracts and plans advertised by settlement societies and their executive arm, the “Jerusalem District Planning and Construction Committee” at the Israeli Jerusalem municipality, to construct thousands of new settlement units inside and around Jerusalem; in an obvious strategy of imposing a drastic change on the Jerusalemite population and land composition.

First: Jerusalem and the Holy Sites

Jerusalem has been the centre of focus for the Israeli greed; very often, Israeli plans are revealed on how to take over the city without giving any consideration to the city’s holy sites. The occupation authorities never hesitate to use any possible mean to control and judaize the city. On one side, it imposes restrictions on the various aspects of the daily lives of the Jerusalemites, in an attempt to displace them away from their city and thus achieve a Jewish demographic majority; and on the other side, the occupation strives to control the land through settlement projects, building of synagogues, and construction of tunnels beneath *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

1. Judaizing the Old Town

The Israeli authorities have maintained their policies of judaizing the Old Town in Jerusalem, confiscating houses and building synagogues, in pursue of the Israeli

vision “Jerusalem 2020” aimed at judaizing the Old Town, which was originally set and planned in 1994 to reduce the number of Palestinians in the Old Town and expelling them.

Accordingly, the Israeli District Planning and Construction Committee in Jerusalem approved a plan to expand the Jewish women’s prayer area at *al-Buraq* Yard (Wailing Yard) near the Mughrabi Gate, where all vacant areas around will be surveyed and allocated for the use of Jewish prayers. Shmuel Rabinovitch, Rabbi in charge of the Western Wall, believes that the above measures will eventually settle the issue of building the bridge between the Mughrabi Gate and *al-Aqsa* Mosque.¹ The Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) had started excavations to dig a tunnel beneath the Islamic neighborhood in the Old Town; this tunnel, dug under the houses of the Islamic neighborhood, is planned to connect to the tunnel beneath *al-Buraq* Wall.² Yet further, to tighten the Israeli grip on the city especially the Old Town and its Islamic and Christian holy sites including *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the occupation has announced a plan to enforce its presence in East Jerusalem, referring the aforementioned holy sites (known as the “Holy Basin”) and areas to direct Israeli supervision and administration.

The new plan also includes a number of settlement projects aiming at confiscating the Islamic and Christian lands and endowments [*Awqaf*], putting it under the authority of an especially set official committee by the government, municipality and the Jewish Land Authority.³ In a serious development, UNESCO agreed, in a meeting it held in Canada, on placing the Mughrabi Gate under an Israeli supervision;⁴ the Jerusalem District Planning and Construction Committee refused all objections to the plan of the Mughrabi Bridge, and a relatively short bridge was approved. The plan suggests the construction of a bridge that is supported by several pillars, which will enable the entry of 300 policemen at once into the courtyards of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, causing a great imbalance within the sensitive area inside and around *al-Aqsa* area; it will also lead to a profound change of movement and mobility within the area, and in the existing status that goes back to 1967; allowing for the infiltration of Jews in large numbers to the yards of the mosque.⁵

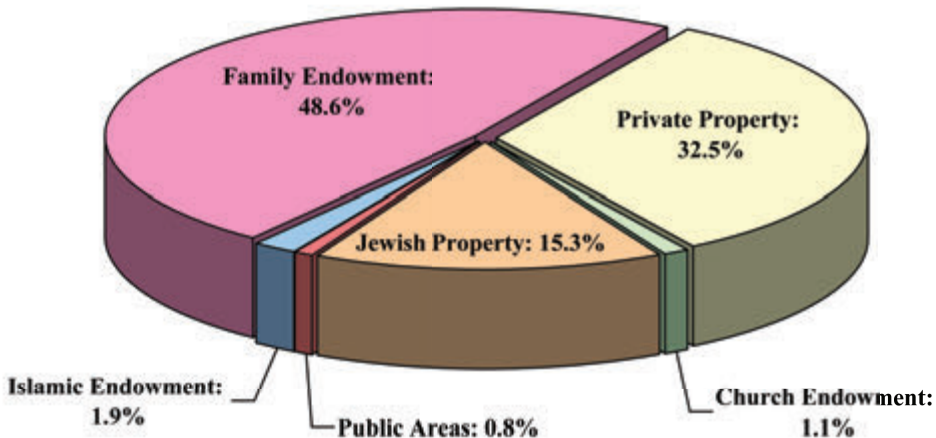
Meanwhile, the Israelis have proceeded with the implementation of another unprecedented project in the Jewish neighborhood of the Old Town. The Israeli weekly *Urshalem* published on 11/11/2005 a news piece, which was republished by

Haartež newspaper of 10/3/2008, stating that the Jewish Quarter Development Company (JQDC) is working on the registration of 1,300 real estates in the Old Town in the *Tabo* (land register). The properties included 585 apartments, 146 shops and more than 60 public institutions. The occupation authorities issued in 1967 an official decision no. 5b/a/108/322 published in Official Gazette no. 1443, for the confiscation of 116 dunums of land from the Old Town. According to the decree, 790 properties were confiscated, whose ownership is distributed as indicated in the following table:

Table 1/6: The Real Estates in the Old Town⁶

Property Type	No. of Properties Confiscated	Percentage %
Islamic Endowment	15	1.9
Family Endowment	382	48.6
Private Property	257	32.5
Church Endowment	9	1.1
Jewish Property	121	15.3
Public Areas	6 (municipality)	0.8
Total	790	100

The Real Estates in the Old Town



A report issued by the Palestinian Ministry of *Awqaf* (endowment) and Religious Affairs revealed 120 cases of registering and transferring real estates in Jerusalem to Jewish settlers by using forged documents and in an illegal way. Moreover,

the occupation authorities were reportedly harboring to register an area of 137 dunums of land and real estates in the area of the Mughrabi Gate as well as the Jewish settlements in the Old Town, which were originally owned by the Islamic Endowment.⁷

Statistics indicate that 84% of the confiscated land in 1968 belonged to the Arabs. The Israeli government actively continued its policy of judaization, inaugurating a synagogue in the Old Town; this synagogue is one of ten synagogues planned in the Old Town in an attempt to change the dominant Arab and Islamic architectural character of the Old Town, and imposing a new style of architecture that eliminates the former historical roots. A synagogue was built in al-Sharaf neighbourhood (*Harat al-Sharaf*) with a multi-domed dome directly facing that of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, so as to impose the synagogue's presence in the general view of the city. Yet more seriously, the occupation authorities inaugurated one of the most culturally treacherous museums, administered by a group of fanatic settlers, and established in the heart of the Old Town; to ascertain, according to its founders, the "Jewish history of Jerusalem", through a major Jewish symbol: King David (*Daoud*), who is often mentioned in the Old Testament, and who is presented in the museum as the "first conqueror" of Jerusalem, that he made the capital of his kingdom. The museum includes a special section for printed material on King David, including a copy of the Davidic Psalms that date back to 1511 AD, and other copies of different later dates starting from 1696 AD. The museum presents the history of Jerusalem in three thousand years.⁸ Also within context is the Israeli practices in the historic Silwan neighbourhood, or what the Israelis call the "Holy Basin", where houses are confiscated, settlement societies are sprouting, and a museum of "Jewish history" is being built.

Attempts of Judaizing the city went to the extent of Esterina Tartman of Yisrael Beiteinu Party demanding that the Muslim call to prayers (*Athan*) should not be loudly announced over microphones, under the guise of peace and calm for the settlers.⁹ The settler association Elad took over three settlement units, by seizing eleven houses in the region of Wadi al-Hilwah. The organization runs two religious schools, a nursery, and a centre that receives the students of extremist religious schools and organizes tours and visits to excavation sites of the IAA such as al-'Ain, the Roman stairs, the tunnel and the museum. These tours are

supervised by a team of Elad during which the association spreads its ideology and its own view of history; it issued new maps of the area with Hebrew names for all sites and areas seized. The number of settler families dwelling in Silwan has amounted to 16 families and around 300 students of extremist religious schools; a synagogue was established in the region.¹⁰ Jerusalem municipality has proceeded with arrangements for building the synagogue in Silwan that would include a library, nurseries, ten dormitory rooms, and an underground area that accommodates hundred cars.¹¹ Elad association is very active in this area where it strives to seize the Arab houses there on the pretext that they constitute part of “the historic Holy Basin”.

Yet further, to close the settlement circle surrounding the Old Town, a new 18 dunum 200 units settlement project was announced in the Sheikh Jarrah area. The project aims for destroying the existing neighborhood where forty Palestinian families live, and to erect housing units by which Jewish settlements would extend to surround the Old Town, which is inhabited by a considerable Palestinian population majority.¹² Not far away from the latter site is another 122 housing units settlement project, project no. 11356, with a nursery, a synagogue, and hotels, specifically in the Shepherd hotel area. A third project of 300 settler units is planned to be built on lands confiscated in 1968 (Karm el-Mufti)¹³ in some of the lands that were confiscated in 1968. These projects, as well as that of “Ras al-‘Amoud”, come within the Israeli policy of creating and imposing *de facto* conditions, which is adopted by the successive Israeli governments for Jerusalem, especially after the green light given by the American President George W. Bush to the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that the realities on the ground would be taken into consideration in the final status agreement.¹⁴ An interesting phenomenon has appeared in the Jerusalem judaizing projects which is the increase of wealthy Jews donations to support different settlement projects in Jerusalem, particularly those of the Old Town;¹⁵ also in Silwan and *al-Buraq* tunnel, in addition to building synagogues.¹⁶

Diplomatic missions have objected to these projects, requesting from the Israeli government to stop making this area a quagmire for conflict between the settlers and the Palestinians.¹⁷ The only observed reaction or response of the Israeli government to this was instead, the confiscation of additional houses, in Sheikh Jarrah area, and expelling their Jerusalemite inhabitants.¹⁸

2. The Excavations

Within a clear policy and plan that have been pursued by the Israeli establishment and the settlers' societies, the excavation within and outside the Old Town continued. The pace of these excavations under *al-Aqsa* Mosque has accelerated in 2008, which increased the fissures and collapses in the buildings of the Old Town.

At the beginning of 2008, *al-Aqsa* Foundation revealed that the Israeli authorities started digging a 200 meter tunnel adjacent to the Western Wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The tunnel starts from the left side of *al-Buraq* Yard and goes northwards towards the interior of the Old Town, passing under tens of the Palestinian houses, until it reaches al-Wad street in al-Hammam al-‘Ain neighborhood where other excavations are also taking place; there, the Israeli authorities are erecting a Jewish synagogue only fifty meters away from *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

The Israeli authorities are also actively engaged in deepening the excavations and directing them towards Bab al-Silsila; as the excavations there go in an opposite direction, southward from Hammam al-‘Ain towards *al-Buraq* Yard, connecting the two sides of the tunnel, and, the above mentioned synagogue, under construction, with *al-Buraq* quarter and the area of The Mughrabi Gate.¹⁹ The excavation of another 600 meter tunnel was revealed southern of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, extending from the valley of Wadi al-Hilwah in Silwan village to the southwestern corner of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Such excavations have caused many collapses, including the one that took place in mid February 2008 near Sabil Qait Bey area, in the interior of the courtyard of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, between the gates of al-Muthara and al-Silsila. Major fissures and cracks were observed in the Jerusalemites' houses in that region.²⁰ In July 2008, the Islamic-Christian Front announced that fissures and cracks are increasingly observed, and widening, in the buildings and the houses located southern of *al-Aqsa*, and in the region of Wadi al-Hilwah till ‘Ain Silwan; in addition to many historical houses and buildings located adjacent to the western wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, particularly in the most adjoining quarters like Bab al-‘Amoud, Bab al-Silsila and Bab al-Hadid. Some 13 historical houses in these areas were classified as uninhabitable because of the serious and wide fissures and cracks observed in its ceilings and walls; nonetheless its inhabitants have refused to leave it even if that will led to its collapse over their heads. With the excavations in these regions ongoing, the Arab constructional belt

that extends from Wadi al-Hilwa south of *al-Aqsa* through *al-Buraq* Wall up to the area that lies north-west of *al-Aqsa*, is facing an imminent danger that seriously threatens to demolish its significantly historic buildings, architecture, holy sites and its historical legacy and symbolism.²¹

Worth recalling here is that Ehud Barak once told the former Palestinian President Yasir ‘Arafat, during a round of final settlement negotiations that, in Jerusalem the Palestinians have what is over the ground, but what is beneath is the Israelis’.²² But what is actually taking place, *viz* settlements, depopulation and excavations that threaten *al-Aqsa* and the Jerusalemites’ houses with collapse, indicate that Israel is attempting to impose its control on both, above and under the ground. Until the date of this report, sixty excavations were undertaken in Jerusalem, concentrated in the areas under *al-Aqsa* and it’s surrounding, and essentially constituting a series of deep tunnels, sometimes forty meters deep, that threaten the foundations of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

3. Infringements on the Holy Sites

It is essential to mention that the Israeli judaization plans are not restricted to Jerusalem but extend in varying degrees to many other Palestinian towns and villages. However, all these designs aim at significantly changing the historic Arab and Islamic identity of the Palestinian regions. Thus, the Israeli infringements on the Islamic and Christian holy sites in the various Palestinian towns and villages continued throughout the year 2008. In Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities contracted with Reichmann’s International Property Corp, a construction company to demolish a major part of the compound of the Supreme Islamic Council, situated near *Al-Aqsa* Mosque; to construct a residential building. The Supreme Islamic Council compound construction was completed on 22/12/1929, on the request of the Haj Ameen al-Husseini, then seized by the Israeli occupation in 1948 under the guise of the discriminatory Israeli “absentee law”.²³

The Israeli authorities had also issued a decree to demolish al-‘Umari Mosque in the village of Umm Tuba south of Jerusalem, notwithstanding its great historic significance being named al-‘Umari after its founder the second Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, and later rebuilt during the Ayyubid Era. In addition, this mosque has been the only mosque for the three thousand or so inhabitants of Umm Tuba village.²⁴

Yet more, an Israeli attempt to seize the properties of the Orthodox church in *Bab al-Khalil* east of Jerusalem was halted, after the Patriarchate won the suit filed against an Israeli settlement company, which made the original deal in the term of the deposed Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, Irineos I, demanding the stoppage of the maintenance and developmental works of al-Batra' hotel, prohibiting the Patriarchate from collecting the rents of the hotel and the appointment of a liquidator to administer the building.²⁵

In Hebron (*al-Khalil*) town, some settlers attempted to burn al-Ra's Mosque, east of the town, and they threw garbage inside it. In November 2008, the Israeli forces seized four houses in the town for four days, on the guise of "military purposes", compelling its dwellers to squeeze into one room. The Israeli forces closed *al-Haram al-Ibrahimi* Mosque or the Sanctuary of Abraham for two days, on the excuse of allowing the Jewish worshipers to commemorate the death of the biblical matriarch, Sarah. During the same month, the settlers had once more attacked a Muslim cemetery and a mosque in Hebron, where they wrote on the mosque's walls insulting expressions to the Prophet Muhammad.²⁶

Similar attacks have been observed recurrently on mosques and Islamic cemeteries throughout the year 2008, in different parts of occupied Palestine. In Tiberias (*Tabariya*) city, al-Zaidani Mosque was converted into storage for building materials.²⁷ In Acre (*Akka*), a group of settlers profaned al-Manshiyyah Mosque and wrote insulting expressions to Islam and the Arabs.²⁸

4. Settlement Activities in the Region of Jerusalem

Settlement activities and Judaization campaigns have increasingly focused on Jerusalem in 2008, more than any other region, to the extent that Ehud Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister, and a number of his ministers had declared that settlement activities in East Jerusalem are not included in any Israeli commitment to settlement freeze, being part of their united capital that was "liberated" in 1967 -all according to the Israeli statements.²⁹ Olmert had reportedly said that Jerusalem will be the last issue to be negotiated.³⁰ He also undertook to continue the construction activities in Jerusalem,³¹ and had specifically assured Shas Party that settlement activities will continue in East Jerusalem, after the party has threatened to withdraw from the coalition government.³²

Ze'ev Boim, the Israeli Minister of Housing and Construction, considered the construction within Jerusalem territory an Israeli right,³³ while Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, the Israeli Minister of National Infrastructure, said in reference to the settlements in Jerusalem and the WB: What we build are the settlements that we intend to keep,³⁴ adding that the settlers' buildings in East Jerusalem are constructed with the approval of the prime minister, and that Jerusalem and the settlements are not of the same status as the WB.³⁵

It must be noted that many Israeli officials stated to the media that Israel will relinquish the Arab quarters of East Jerusalem in peace treaties,³⁶ with the last of these statement being by the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert himself, who said:

If we are determined to preserve the Jewish and democratic character of the State of Israel, we must inevitably relinquish, with great pain, parts of our homeland, of which we dreamt and for which we yearned and prayed for generations, and we must relinquish Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem, and return to that territory which comprised the State of Israel until 1967.³⁷

In a daring move, the Israeli media spokesman of the Jerusalem municipality declared that the municipality will construct 31,990 settlement housing units in Jerusalem, in the context of its attempts to impose a pro-Israeli demographic change in the city. The (currently former) Israeli mayor of Jerusalem, Uri Lupolianski, declared plans to build 10,000 settlement housing units in East Jerusalem.³⁸

Several other settlement expansion activities were also given the green light. The table below presents approved construction plans of new settlements and expansion plans of existing settlements:

Table 2/6: Plans to Build and Extend Illegal Settlements in Jerusalem³⁹

Neighbourhood	Settlement housing units	Area (dunums)
East Talpiot - Western Armon Hanatziv (<i>Jabal al-Mukabbir</i>)	440	262.5
Har Homa-Stage 2 (<i>Jabal Abu Ghneim</i>)	2,653; tenders have been approved for 1,486	977
Eastern Pisgat Ze'ev	233	90
Eastern Pisgat Ze'ev	252	163
East-central Pisgat Ze'ev	274	-
East Talpiot- Armon Hanatziv	180	67
Ramot	180	12
Gilo	Hotels and residences; 1,905 units.	
Givat Hamatos	3,150	
Neve Ya'acov	393	108
Har Homa	121	
Pisgat Ze'ev	763	

Jerusalem municipality had earlier approved the construction of 20 thousand housing units in West Jerusalem within Moshe Safdie's project which was opposed by the largest coalition of activists ever assembled in the city, a group of twenty organizations led by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel. The Israeli Minister of Housing, Ze'ev Boim, said building is continued within all Jerusalem's municipal boundaries. He added that what had been portrayed as delays in construction in East Jerusalem "are in fact final stages of coordination" with the municipal authorities.⁴⁰ The Israeli weekly *Urshalem* cited Ehud Olmert on continuing the settlement construction on the outskirts of Jerusalem.⁴¹ The construction of 750 settlement housing units in Givat Ze'ev (Agan Ha'ayalot) was approved,⁴² in addition to 800 other housing units in Ma'ale Adumim in the region known as 07. The expansion of the same settlement northwards under the title (E1) was approved, whereby four thousand settlement housing units and five hotels are to be constructed. The police station has been moved from the area of Ra's al-'Amoud, following an agreement with the settlers, and sixty new settlement units were constructed on a 14 dunum land within the project of

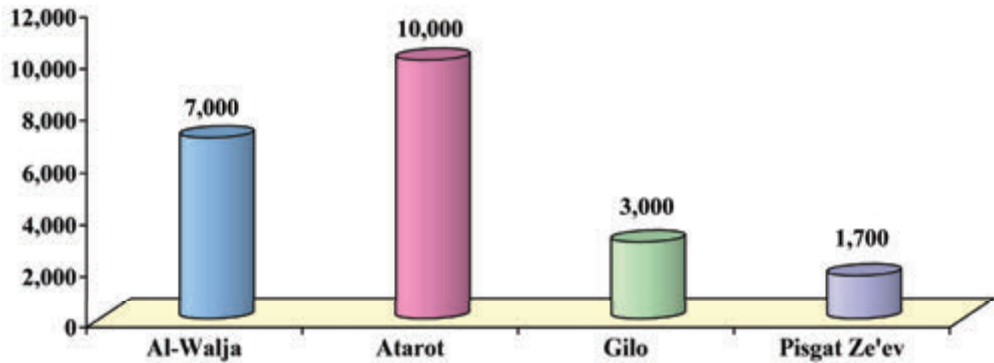
extending Ma'ale Hazeitim settlement. A ten dunum area project has been also presented under the Town Planning Scheme (TPS) number 13098 for constructing 110 settlement housing units and six public institutions, with the name Ma'ale David. The property originally belonged to the Bukharian Jewish community and the Bukharian endowment submitted a plan for the new neighborhood to be built, the settlement societies have collectively decided to use these buildings as a base to build a settlement quarter in the heart of the Arab area Eastern of Jerusalem, thus providing a continuation of the adjacent neighborhood of Ma'ale Hazeitim. The Israeli right concentrated on this region in order to obstruct any somehow "safe" connection between the Palestinian areas in the WB and Jerusalem.⁴³ In response to Annapolis, Jerusalem municipality announced TPS number 7984 for the extension of East Talpiot settlement, originally constructed on the lands of Sour Baher village. The project includes the construction of 440 settlement units and a football stadium, on a 262.5 dunums area.⁴⁴ This was followed by another 67 dunum of 180 settlement housing units.⁴⁵ The lands on which these settlements will be built were confiscated in 1970 by the orders of confiscation for the public interest, and are currently used to establish new settlement units.⁴⁶ In continuation of this *de facto* policy and to effect a demographic change, the TPS number 5834 A was announced to establish Givat Hamatos settlement of 2,200 residential units, on 411 dunums of the Palestinian Beit Safafa village south-west of Jerusalem. This project is part of a grand one thousand dunum project for the establishment of 4,200 housing units and nine hotels with an estimated 25 thousand settler population capacity.⁴⁷ In accordance with that, a tender was announced for the establishment of 307 settlement units in Har Homa, and the Israeli Land Administration (ILA) published the list of successful bidders, in an important preparatory step to start the building construction in the region.⁴⁸

To further consolidate the settlement and the judaization drive, construction was approved to a grand educational centre on the confiscated lands of Shu'fat village north of Jerusalem, near the railway station under construction. This project is part of a plan to support the Israeli educational institutions in Jerusalem, for which also forty dunums were allocated from Pisgat Ze'ev settlement that is constructed on the lands of Beit Hanina village.⁴⁹

Table 3/6: Plans for Settlements' Expansion⁵⁰

Region	No. of settlement residential units	Description
Al-Walja	7,000	It is expected that the settlement of Givat Yael will be built on the lands of al-Walja village. The village's geographical location is divided, half inside the wider municipal borders of Jerusalem, and half inside the WB. The settlement will include 3,500 housing units, and will connect the southern settlement of Gush Etzion with Jerusalem. Most important in this, is that with the construction of the separation wall, <i>al-Walja</i> village will become totally isolated.
Atarot	10,000	Settlement construction in this area, currently unused lands of Qalandia airport, has not yet been fully approved; but when so, it will become the largest settlement in East Jerusalem, and some very extremist Jewish families will reside there, similar to those residing in Kochav Yaakov settlement on the eastern Palestinian side of the Separation wall, near the village of Kafar 'Aqab. Geographically, this area is near the Separation wall and Qalandia crossing, towards the north of the WB. A tunnel will connect this settlement with road number 443 to facilitate transportation to coastal areas.
Gilo	3,000	Currently, 32 thousand settlers reside in this settlement. Gilo was established in 1970 on the lands of Sharafat and Beit Jala villages. 2,743 dunums of these villages' lands were confiscated to build settlements, under the Israeli occupation order H F /1/211/322.
Pisgat Ze'ev	1,700	Established in the north of Jerusalem in 1985; lands were confiscated to build this settlement from the villages of Beit Hanina and Hazma, under the Israeli occupation order H F /135/322. Currently, 41,200 settlers reside there.
Total	21,700	

Number of Residential Units in Settlement Expansion Plans



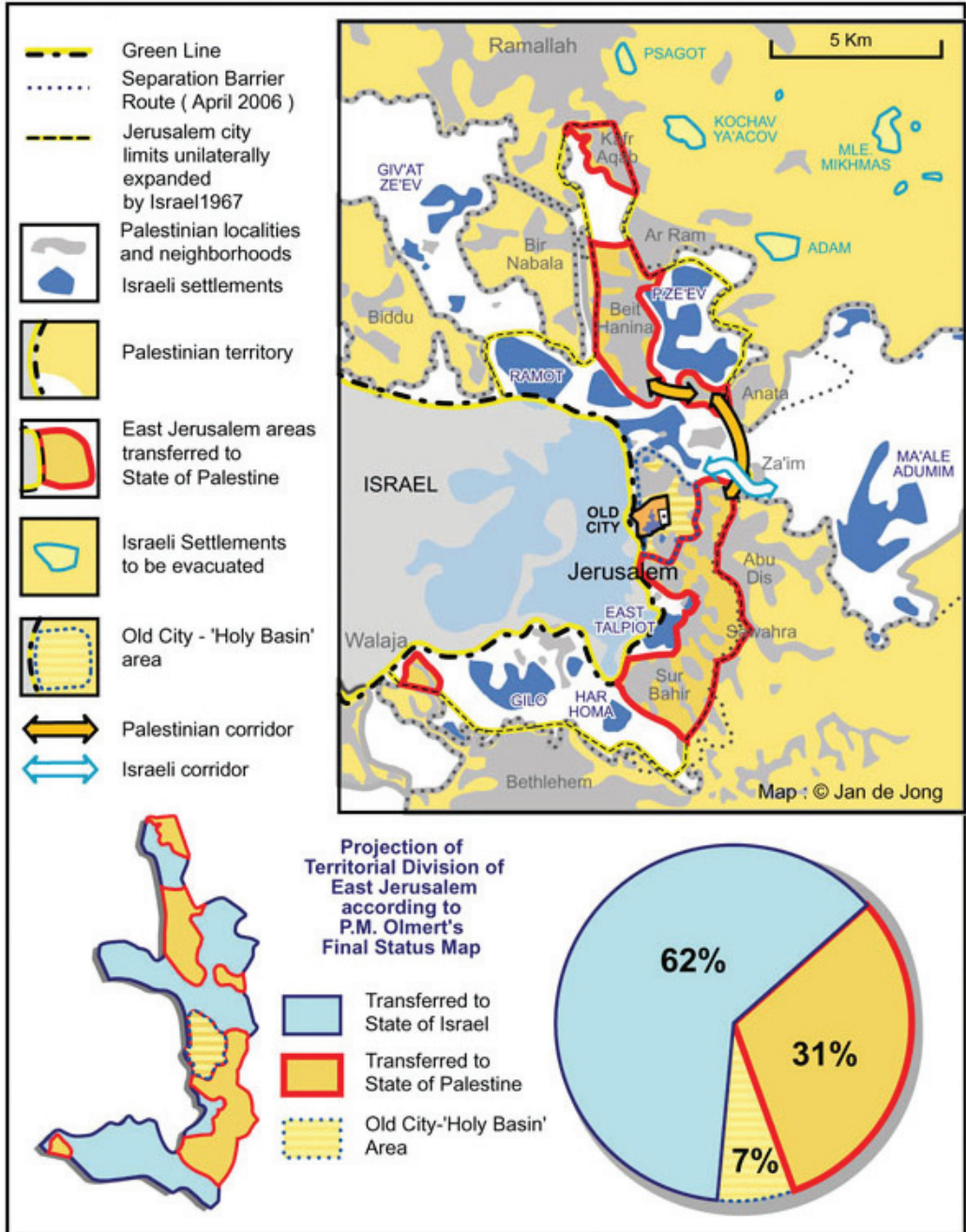
In support of the project of a greater Jerusalem, MK Yisrael Katz, who represents the Likud Party in the Knesset, submitted a draft law that provided for the annexation of the settlements that lie outside the boundaries of the Jerusalem municipality, i.e. Ma'ale Adumim, Givat Ze'ev and Gush Etzion, to the authority of the Jerusalem municipality. The proposal itself is not new in that it had been previously suggested by the former Israeli Prime Minister Sharon and by Shaul Mofaz, Minister of Transportation and Road Safety. In effect, this project totally isolates East Jerusalem and many Palestinian communities from the WB, besieging them from all sides; it also annexes wide Palestinian lands to the authority of Jerusalem, and obstruct any possible geographical communication between Jerusalem and the WB. In an interview with *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper, the Israeli PM Ehud Olmert claimed that the Ma'ale Adumim settlement is an integral inseparable part of Israel, describing the continuation of building in the settlement blocs surrounding the city as "legitimate", as in the case within the municipal borders.⁵¹

During his campaign in the latest elections for Jerusalem municipality, Nir Barakat, declared, on the initiative of the Israeli right, his intention to erect in an area of two thousand dunums a Jewish settlement of four hundred residential units and a high-tech industrial park, connecting Jerusalem with Ma'ale Adumim (the eastern gate). In his winning speech, the Mayor of Jerusalem, Barkat promised to maintain the unity of Jerusalem to be the forever capital of Israel. Moreover, some of his close aides declared that he will cooperate with the Ministry of Construction and Housing in its ongoing projects to establish a new Jewish neighborhood, north of Jerusalem with more than ten thousand residential units and two tunnels to

connect the Jordan Rift Valley region with the eastern settlements in Jerusalem and Beit El in Atarot, without the need to pass through or open the separation wall; in addition to developing the industrial region.⁵² A new Jerusalem District Plan (30/1), aims at developing the district economically, socially and educationally, through intensifying construction activities, erecting new settlement neighborhoods or extending the existing ones, and to consider Jerusalem the “capital of the state and the heart of the Jewish people, and the spiritual congregation to all the Jews in the world and in the state.” Moreover, due consideration will be given to the Holy Basin that surrounds the Old Town, by establishing representative agencies for the international Jewish societies as intermediaries between the city and the Jews of the world.⁵³ The objective was to effect a demographic change through extensive building that makes Jerusalem an attractive centre for Israelis. Barkat also promised, as the new mayor, to intervene in the administration of the holy sites, especially *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

The Israeli government has developed a new project, 30/A, that will serve till the year 2020, and in accordance with the Israeli policy drive to make Jerusalem the eternal capital of the state with an overwhelming Jewish majority and a handy Arab minority. The “Jerusalem 2020 Master-plan” has similar aims as the aforementioned goals of the 30/1 project, namely: providing for the economic, social and educational development in Jerusalem through improving the infrastructure; establishing new Jewish settlements and neighborhoods in the city, and/or expanding the existing ones; giving privileges to the city of Jerusalem and announcing it as a first class developmental zone; improving educational and cultural services, by assembling all the institutions of the “Jewish people” in it, and establishing legations representing the World Jewish Communities to become the link between the city and the Jews around the globe; and moving all the governmental scientific research centres to Jerusalem. Also among the stated goals is encouraging the Jewish migration to Jerusalem, especially the various nationalities; fighting the phenomena of Israelis/Jewish migrating outside Jerusalem; establishing new industrial zones that would contribute to the development of the city, in addition to a transportation infrastructure (railroads, highways, tunnels, and bridges) that connect residential areas to commercial and industrial ones. Thus, the project is but an embodiment of the Jewish geopolitical vision of the city.

Projection of Prime Minister Olmert's Final Status Map East Jerusalem - October 2008



Source: <http://www.fmep.org/maps/redeployment-final-status-options/v18n6-map-jerusalem-inset.jpg>

Map Illustrating the Palestinian Neighborhoods in and around the Old Town, March 2008



Source: <http://www.fmep.org/maps/jerusalem/containing-palestinian-neighborhoods-in-and-around-jerusalem-old-city-mar-2008>

5. Ethnic Cleansing and the Withdrawal of the ID Cards

In a continuation of the Israeli policy to implement plans that divide the WB into isolated provinces, and the policy of isolating Jerusalem and reducing its Palestinian inhabitants, the Israeli authorities started quietly but persistently a major operation of ethnic cleansing around Jerusalem in al-Aghwar region. The dwellings of the Jahalin Arabs [a Bedouin Arab group] in al-Jeib area north west of Jerusalem were demolished under the guise that they obstruct the path of the separation wall. The rest of the Bedouin families who lived near to this site were told to vacate their houses and leave the area because their residences lie in the closed military zone, the so-called “the security boundaries of the wall”.⁵⁴ In Jerusalem district alone there are about 7,500 Bedouins of the Jahalin and al-Ka‘abneh Bedouin Arabs, who are distributed along the northern, eastern, and western hills of Jerusalem. Within its plan of the “ethnic cleansing of the Bedouins”, the occupation authorities intend to remove them from this area in order to establish the Israeli vision of their “greater Jerusalem”.

Similarly, the Jerusalem District Planning and Construction Committee, a subsidiary of the Israeli Civil Administration, has demolished with military bulldozers the agricultural structures, houses, cattle barns, and wells in the Bedouin areas of the northern Aghwar; Hadidiya, Hamsa, Furush Beit Dajan and al-Qadisiyah.⁵⁵ Moreover, the Israeli court in Beit El settlement issued an order for demolishing all the houses and agricultural constructions in the area of Wadi al Maleh in Tubas Governorate.⁵⁶

The withdrawal of identity cards (ID) and the denial of family reunion applications has continued at high rates, that it led to social problems especially with issues of marriage and travel since as many as over 50 thousand citizens have lived for a long period in Jerusalem without having Jerusalemite IDs, i.e. living at risks of being punished. In addition, and within its efforts to delimit the Jerusalemite Arab population, the Israeli government conducted a new population census in order to put a new anti-Arab policy, which had eventually led to a new campaign of destruction of the houses of those who were asked to emigrate (i.e. expelled). In 2008 alone, the demolition of 72 houses was documented.⁵⁷ This impelled the Swiss government to firmly demand Israel to stop demolishing houses, which is considered a violation to the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War - Section III: Occupied territories.⁵⁸

However, these statistics should be cautiously viewed. For while Palestinian sources recorded that 72 houses were destroyed in 2008, Israeli reports raise the figure to 85. Other sources mention that the total number of demolished houses in 2008 with the pretext of lack of building licenses or for security reasons was 400, of which 65 were in Eastern Jerusalem.⁵⁹

6. Activities in Solidarity with Jerusalem

The exacerbated threats and dangers that Jerusalem was subjected to from the Israeli occupation triggered the rise during the course of the year 2008 of a number of movements in support and solidarity with the inhabitants of the city. This was reflected in a flood of protests and declarations from Arab, Muslim, and foreign states as well as from many public, private, and international institutions and personalities, who warned against the occupation measures against *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the city of Jerusalem and its people, particularly with regard to the policies of judaization, house demolition, and settlement expansion.

Many protest movements were organized in Arab, Muslim, and foreign countries. Following an invitation by the Muslim community in South Africa, the Islamic movement in the 1948 occupied lands (i.e. Israel) held the festival event of “*al-Aqsa* in Danger” in Cape Town in February 2008.

The Islamic movement also held its same festival even, “*al-Aqsa* in Danger” later on 13/8/2008, in the city of Umm al-Fahm in the 1948 occupied lands, with the participation of thousands of 1948 Palestinians (the Palestinians whose villages lie inside the current borders of Israel).

Also in Umm al-Fahm, where the headquarters of *al-Aqsa* Foundation for Reconstruction of Islamic Sanctuaries is based; the Foundation has played a major role in revealing a number of documents that scandalize the judaization practices of the occupation in Jerusalem. The most significant among which was a plan to build several Jewish synagogues in the Mughrabi neighborhood which was reported by the Foundation on 12/8/2008. Two weeks later, and on the directive of the Israeli Minister of Defense Ehud Barak, the Foundation was closed down, and its properties and funds were confiscated along with many invaluable historical documents and documentaries, under the pretext of having contacts with Hamas.

In October 2008, Shiekh Ibrahim Sarsur, head of the southern wing of the Islamic Movement, issued a letter to the Secretary-General of the OIC and its current chairman, and to Secretary-General of the Arab League, alerting them on the heavy burden and responsible measures needed for *al-Aqsa* Mosque, noting that all the currently forced efforts by the Islamic movement's *al-Aqsa* Foundation for Endowment and Heritage, and also the efforts of tens of societies, foundations, and committees within and outside Palestine, cannot alone shoulder this heavy burden of protecting *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Islamic holy sites; calling for an instant Arab, Islamic and international action, before it is too late: "before there remains nothing that we can defend in Jerusalem."

In another vein, the International Media Assembly for the defense of Jerusalem was founded in Gaza on 30/8/2008. It appealed to all the Arab and Islamic television networks to transmit directly from *al-Aqsa* Mosque the Friday and taraweeh prayers during the month of Ramadan; in response, al-Quds Satellite Channel did so, being the first precedent of its kind among all satellite channels.

Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, hosted the 3rd al-Quds Youth Forum between 10-14/7/2008, under the motto "Together, for al-Quds", with the participation of 170 youth representing 35 countries from different parts of the world.

In Jordan, Secretary General of The Royal Committee for Jerusalem Affairs (RCJA), 'Abdullah Kan'an, called on 22/7/2008 for sanctioning Israel under the mandate of the UN Charter - Chapter seven, to compel it to end its occupation of Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories. The Palestine Committee of the Jordanian Professional Syndicates Union held a festival in the memory of the 39th anniversary of *al-Aqsa Mosque* burning, in the Jordanian capital, Amman. The participants signed the pledge for Jerusalem, which has been initiated by the International Popular Campaign in Support of Jerusalem; together, they orally recited the oath of defense for *al-Aqsa* and Jerusalem.

On the fringe of its sixth annual conference held in Doha in Qatar, al Quds International Institution organized a fund-raising event on the evening of 12/10/2008, where some Jerusalemite items were sold in auction, and approximately \$16 million were collected for funding projects in Jerusalem. The final statement of the institution's conference called the Arab and Islamic countries to lift the siege

on Palestine, reconcile Palestinian factions, and condemn the Israeli excavations beneath *al-Aqsa* Mosque with a consensus resolution on the necessity of sidelining the political, religious, and sectarian difference between the Sunna and the Shi'ah and to prioritize the interest of Jerusalem, noting that: "We are now experiencing a decisive phase in the history of the conflict over Jerusalem; what is happening now and will happen in the coming few years will determine the destiny of *al-Aqsa* Mosque." The statement also noted that "the declaration of Jerusalem the Capital of Arab Culture for the year 2009 represents a real challenge to the Arab nation with all its sects and official and popular components."

The 11th conference of the Arab Archaeologists Union, held in Damascus on 21/10/2008, called upon Arab countries to extend technological and financial support to the Union's effort to prepare academic and documented studies that reveal the occupation's transgressions against *al-Aqsa* and the rest of the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem.

In the same vein, the participants in the "Urban Planning in Palestine" conference, held in Amman in October 2008 and organized by the Jordanian Engineering Syndicate, called for serious efforts in the area of exposing the Israeli deliberate plans and infringements and make them fail, through serious scientific efforts at all levels; so as to preserve the Arab and Palestinian identity and protect the Islamic and Christian holy sites from judaization.

The Islamic-Christian Front for Defending Jerusalem and the sanctuaries continued the publication of its periodical reports on the status of Jerusalem and the Islamic and Christian holy sites, especially *Al-Aqsa* Mosque. These reports were successfully released for the press and widely received and covered in the media.

Second: Separation Wall

In total and deliberate disregard to international resolutions, the Israeli government continued building the separation wall, even though an international report demanded the termination of the illegal status resulting from the construction of this wall. In this respect, John Dugard, the UN Special Rapporteur on the

situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 said that the wall can never be an excuse for self-defense.⁶⁰ This report supported what the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (B'Tselem) had earlier published, namely that the Israeli government does not abide by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) resolutions, or even by the Israeli Supreme Court injunctions that certain parts of the wall should be demolished.⁶¹ The PLO had also appealed to the UN to issue a resolution against the continued construction of the wall, as its construction also prevents the Palestinian farmers from reaching their lands behind. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that only 18% of the Palestinian farmers who own lands behind the wall are actually given the permission to reach their lands; the remaining 82% are denied their rightful access.⁶² This tremendous Israeli pressure on the inhabitants of the districts near to the wall aims at compelling them to emigrate but in an ostensibly voluntary manner.⁶³

Nonetheless, the Palestinians continued to protest against the wall;⁶⁴ thus establishing a popular movement which compelled the occupiers to return 2,600 dunums of the lands of the villages of Jaiyous and Falamyeh in turn, this was in itself an incentive for the continuation of the struggle against the wall.⁶⁵

In Jerusalem, the residents of Sheikh Sa'ad neighborhood filed a lawsuit against the wall because, if constructed, its path will divide the town of *Jabal al-Mukabbir* into two halves, thus dispersing families and obstructing the inhabitants' access to various necessary services.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the court turned down a case against the construction of the wall around the area of Shu'fat camp and Ra's Khamis, particularly al-Salam suburb, on the basis that the wall was necessary to completely stop the infiltration of the "undesired people". Hence, the work on the wall was resumed.⁶⁷

The Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared that all who live outside the wall are living outside the state of Israel,⁶⁸ which emphasizes that the wall was not a security measure but a political and demographic barrier. Thus, the Israeli government started to deal with the inhabitants of those regions in this manner, which resulted in great sufferings and hardship. This was particularly reflected in the slow and inefficient services extended to the area, and in the pupils' long

queues to schools, in addition to the worsening health and social conditions in those areas.⁶⁹ In his election program, Nir Brakat, the candidate for Mayor of Jerusalem office, presented his proposal to build a tunnel in the Mount of Prophet David through which trains of tens of thousands passenger capacity will be traveling daily to The Mughrabi Gate of East Jerusalem, and from there to *al-Buraq* Wall. Barakat also undertook to transfer Silwan into a tourist town, similar to Tuscania, where tourists will be able to reside facing the walls of the old city.⁷⁰ Moreover, Jerusalem municipality prohibited putting municipal election boxes/centres for the villages situated behind the wall, which was an obvious move towards getting rid of the Palestinians living there. In fact, this was one of the Israeli steps to have an overwhelming Jewish majority in Jerusalem, and an easy-to-control Arab minority.

A closer look at the available statistics on the construction of the separation wall would reveal that the building was rather slow during the year 2008. Micha Lindenstrauss, the Israeli State Comptroller, attributed this delay to budget constraints and to the many cases filed by Palestinians against the path of the wall through their lands. He added that 30% of the wall around Jerusalem was not yet completed i.e. 50 km out of 164.5 km; but that ten out of the 13 gates in the wall around Jerusalem were finished.⁷¹ According to the Israeli Ministry of Defense, 12 km of the wall were constructed during the year 2008, and that what had been completed up to the beginning of the same year totaled 490 km. The ministry's spokesman, Shlomo Dror, noted that the construction in about 100 km has been frozen because of the lawsuits filed against the wall, and that the meager budget allocated for the construction in 2008 was the primary reason behind postponing the construction of many new sections of the wall; according to Dror, this allocated budget was 1.05 billion shekels, i.e. around \$292.7 million, way less than the required.⁷²

An estimated population of 300 thousand Palestinians of the WB (12.4% of WB population) was isolated from the agricultural lands; while an estimated 256 thousands were isolated from the rest of the WB, i.e. 10.6% of the WB population. Moreover, around 46% of the WB lands area has been seized by the settlements and the wall, i.e. around 2,703 km².⁷³

Map Illustrating Separation Wall, the Israeli Settlements, and PA Territories in WB



Source: http://www.poica.org/editor/case_studies/IV_Map1.jpg

This discriminatory expansionism had adverse socio-economic impact upon the Palestinians who lived on the path of the wall. The percentage of those who were forced to emigrate increased substantially by 58% in 2008 compared to 2005. This is glaringly reflected in the following figures (as of June 2008): The number of families who were compelled to emigrate from the beginning of the wall construction and until June 2008 was estimated by 3,880; compared to 2,448 during the period from the beginning of the construction of the wall up to May 2005. The numbers of individuals who were compelled to leave during the same two periods were 27,841 and 14,364 respectively.

Meanwhile, statistics indicated that the area of land confiscated for the construction of the separation wall totaled up to the end of June 2008 about 49,291 dunums; while approximately 274,607 dunums of land have become isolated and their owners have no access to them.

Third: Settlements and the Settlement Expansion

The building and expansion of the settlements remained a major Israeli drive throughout the year 2008, which reflected the Israeli determination to impose the *de facto* policy. This drive had the support of the government and the religious establishment, who ruled that the construction may continue on Saturdays and during the Jewish festivals as long as this would contribute towards the imposition of the Israeli authority on more Palestinian lands.⁷⁴ The published data revealed that more than 2,600 new housing units were scheduled to be constructed in the existing settlements in the WB, of which 55% will be east of the wall. The pace of settlement construction between January and May 2008 has increased by 80% compared to the same period in 2007; the advertised tenders for the settlements' construction have increased by 550%.⁷⁵

Within this unprecedented and government-supported drive, it was declared that more than 1,800 new settlement housing units will be constructed outside the green line.⁷⁶ Moreover, the Israeli Ministry of Defense approved the extension of the industrial zone in Ariel settlement (geographically located to the south of Nablus and northeast of Salfit), by building 25 new factories on lands that had already been confiscated on the pretext of being property of the state. Currently, wide-scale infrastructure activities are taking place there.⁷⁷

Within the Israeli policy to encourage settlement in the WB, Histadrut (General Federation of Laborers in the Land of Israel) reduced the debts of 3,500 settlers who live in 140 settlements in the WB; out of their total debt of 700 million shekels (\$195 million), 350 million shekels (\$97.5 million) were removed.⁷⁸

New structural plans for expanding the current settlements were approved, as was the case in Har Bracha settlement, which is established on the seized lands of Borin village in Nablus, on 229 dunum area; to build new settlement housing units.⁷⁹

Moreover, a project for the transfer of the military settlement Maskiot into a civilian one was declared in order to establish 30 housing units in the Jordan Rift Valley area. The Israeli Ministry of Defense approved this project within the government's policy to resettle the evacuated settlers from Gaza in this highly strategic region.⁸⁰ This intensified settlement activity in the Jordan Rift Valley area comes within the Israeli policy of isolating, where the borders of future Palestine state are drawn according to Israeli vision, and preventing the geographic contiguity with Jordan, and shutting down the area in the face of Palestinian expansion. The Israeli Civil Administration statistics show that 94% of the Palestinian building permit requests were rejected, while licenses and contracts for Israeli settlements were generously granted.⁸¹

As for the illegal settlement outposts, they were kept on the pretext of making them touristic or educational institutions.⁸²

Meanwhile, the Israeli Vice Prime Minister Haim Ramon expressed his looking forward to avoid confrontation with the settlers by reaching a deal on the settlement outposts. He said that on investigating the legality of 200 settlement outposts, it was found that one third of them could be "legalized", while a second third could not, and the last third is negotiable.⁸³

Within the overbidding between the Israeli political parties in preparation for the Knesset legislative elections, and to gain the votes of the settlers in the WB, the Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak approved a number of settlement projects in the WB, that included the construction of sixty housing units in Sansana settlement quarter,⁸⁴ and other housing units east and behind the separation wall, i.e. beyond the areas the state defines as "settlement blocs" and it expects to retain under

Israel’s control following a permanent agreement with the Palestinians.⁸⁵ These projects also included the registration and publication of construction projects in the “Seven Stars” project which blurs the green line, a project that was suggested way back in 1990 by the then Israeli Minister of Housing, Ariel Sharon.

Settlement activities continued to increase in the WB, both in big settlement blocs or in the isolated areas. A report by the national relations department of the PLO indicated that the occupation authorities was directly involved in 2008 with the establishment of 20 thousand settlement housing units in and around Jerusalem, of which four thousands were already completed. In addition, 1,500 dunums of land were confiscated for the sake of the separation wall.⁸⁶ Another report issued by the Israeli “Peace Now” movement stated that the settlements outside the region of Jerusalem increased in 2008 by 60% compared to 2007, with the number of buildings constructed in 2008 being 1,257 of which 748 were permanent and 509 were caravans; while the number of the settlers increased to 300 thousands. This figure does not include 200 thousand settlers east of Jerusalem. Here, it should be mentioned that Palestinian and Israeli figures vary considerably because most of the Israeli institutions do not include in their figures the settlements or the settlers east of Jerusalem.

Table 4/6: New Settlements and Settler Population in WB and East Jerusalem (2006-2008)

Year	New Settlement Units	Settler Population in the WB
2006	1,700	468,000
2007	3,614	482,000
2008	3,515	500,000

The construction of the infrastructure of E-1 settlement, for which \$50 million were allocated, continued during the year 2008. Being one of the eight settlements of Ma’ale Adumim settlement block (the seven others are Kedar, Mitzpe Yehuda, Alon, Kfar Adumim, Almon, Neve Brat and Mishor Adumim), E-1 settlement is viewed as one of the most dangerous settlements because it will obstruct the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, since its erection

will prevent the extension of such a state westwards, northwards and southwards, and the only way for the extension of east Jerusalem will be towards the east. The 12,442 dunums land area of this settlement were confiscated in 1994 from the lands of Abu Dis, al-Tur, al-Issawiyyeh, al-Izriyyeh, and Anata villages under the guise that this land is state property. According to the plan, four thousand settlement units, ten hotels and an industrial area would be established in the E-1 area, in addition to the moving the Israeli Police headquarters of Judea and Samaria District to there. The plan generated harsh criticism from the American government and the European Union. Both demanded that the plan be frozen, on the grounds that it violated Israel's commitments according to the "Road Map". Instead, they maintained that the future of this territory be decided upon by a final status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. Following this pressure, the Israeli government froze the project in 2004. However, building of the police headquarters was continued on the grounds that, like army bases, the police station would not be seen as creating facts on the ground, but rather as a building that could be removed.⁸⁷ Therefore, the biggest Israeli police headquarters in the WB was inaugurated in April 2008.

Fourth: Land Seizures and Uprooting of Trees

The year 2008 started with a vicious Israeli settlement wave targeting Jerusalem, at a time when the extremist Israeli settlement groups and political parties within the Israeli government were engaged in a bitter electoral competition; taking advantage of the assertion made by Olmert in Annapolis and Paris conferences on his intention to relinquish the occupied lands, including Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the Israeli government continued its policy of connecting settlements in the WB and isolating various Palestinian communities. It advertised tenders for the Ring Road project no. 4585 that extends for 1,250 dunums across the lands of Sur Baher, Abu Dis and al-Sawahira al-Sharqiyya villages. This includes the construction of three tunnels, and a bridge forty meters long and 115 meters high above al-Nar Valley. Moreover, six houses were demolished immediately and others will be demolished later, including houses situated beneath the bridge; while a third group of houses would be sandwiched between the road

and the separation wall. The aim of this road is to connect the settlements in the north of East Jerusalem (*Gilo/ Jabal Abu Ghneim*) with those to its south. Part of this road was already constructed, under the number 70; for which an estimated 550 dunum area of land were confiscated from the towns of Anata and al-Issawiyyeh.⁸⁸ To complete the connection between the settlements outside Jerusalem with those inside the city, the project number 4/905 was announced to widen Road no.1 Mishur Adumim and off Anata. An estimated 1,500 dunums of land were confiscated to connect Ma'ale Adumim settlement with the highway,⁸⁹ especially Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, 356 dunums of the village of Tubas were confiscated.⁹⁰ Another 36 dunums of Bardala village in the Jordan Rift Valley were also confiscated, in continuation of the Israeli policy of erecting road blocks and checkpoints.⁹¹ And in al-Zahiriyya and Dura villages, 766 dunums of land were confiscated to build a security wall around the nearby settlement of Eshkolot.⁹²

The segregation wall had been instrumental in swallowing further lands from the WB. On 23/6/2008, the Israeli occupation force eradicated wide areas from Beit Hanina village destroying 500 olive trees, and seized al-Zawaya site near Wadi Lefta declaring it a closed military zone. This was after an Israeli decree was issued to confiscate 5,500 dunums of the lands of Beit Hanina al-Tahta in order to complete the construction of new segments of the wall.⁹³ The Israeli forces also confiscated for the wall another four thousand dunums of land from Ramadin Bedouin village, thus depriving its population from their agricultural and grazing lands that was their only source of income.⁹⁴

The number of documented ultimatums of destruction or control of houses and economic institutions in 2008 was 219, in addition to 36 cases of land seizure in Jerusalem city.⁹⁵ In January 2008, the Israeli Civil Administration confiscated 47 dunums of the lands of al-Jab'ah village south west of Bethlehem, and five other dunums of the lands of Nahalin south west of Bethlehem, under the pretext of being state property.⁹⁶

The Israeli forces confiscated 23 dunums of the lands of Husan village west of Bethlehem, and another 140 dunums from Bardala village near the Beesan checkpoint in the northern Jordan Rift Valley.⁹⁷ Moreover, a military directive

was handed to the inhabitants of the village Bil'in, issuing orders to confiscate 61 dunums of their agricultural land to establish a military checkpoint under the name Kiryat Sefer.⁹⁸

According to a report by the Israeli organization "Peace Now", a total of 275 dunums of land in the WB were confiscated during the year 2008. The most common method Israel uses in order to confiscate land is to declare it state land. The method is based on a law from the Ottoman era (from 1858) that allow the Sultan to confiscate land that had neither been planted nor cultivated for three years in a row. Over the years Israel sought out land that was not being cultivated in the WB and declared it as state land. In this way Israel confiscated more than 900 thousand dunams in the WB; the report added. Israel sometimes also used a confiscation order for public needs in order to take over land or issued a seizure order for military needs.⁹⁹

The following table presents some military decrees issued by the Israeli occupation authorities to confiscate Palestinian lands in the WB between January and September 2008.¹⁰⁰

Table 5/6: Selected Israeli Military Orders for the Confiscation of Palestinian Lands in WB between January and September 2008

Date	Confiscated area (dunums)	Location	Purpose
21/1/2008	72.2	al Jab'aa and Wadi Fukin	"State Property"
24/2/2008	860	al-Zahiriyya and Dura, south of Hebron	To build a military wall around Eshkolot settlement
29/4/2008	20	Ni'lin	To construct Kiryat Sefer crossing
1/5/2008	-	Zawata, Qusin, Nablus (city), Beit Iba, Beit Wazan, Azmut, al- Junaid, Deir al-Hatab, Salem, Sarra, 'Askar (Camp), Balata (Camp), Tell, 'Iraq Burin, Rujeib and Kafr Qallil.	Security fence on Nablus city and 15 surrounding Palestinian villages
18/5/2008	25	al-Issawiyyeh, south-east of Jerusalem city	to construct a section of the Israeli Separation Wall
16/6/2008	356	Khirbet Samra, east of Tubas city	-
1/7/2008	-	al-Bustan Neighborhood in Silwan	demolition of 100 Palestinian houses
9/7/2008	6	Rummanah, west of Jenin	Expansion of training base located close to Salem Camp
15/8/2008	1.5	Tel Rumeidah, Hebron	To construct a military Road
15/8/2008	92	al-Khader, west of Bethlehem	Expansion of Efrata settlement, south-west of Bethlehem
21/9/2008	33	Yatta, south of Hebron	to add new wall sections in the area
22/9/2008	6.5	Ramin, east of Tulkarm	To expand Enav military Checkpoint
2/9/2008	427	Jayyous and Falamyeh	to amend the path of the Israeli Separation Wall

In another vein, the Israeli authorities continued their policy of economic siege in the WB and Jerusalem, and the policy of uprooting trees, particularly the fruitful ones. Israel imposed during the year 2008 strict restrictions on the entry of Palestinians to Jerusalem, in pursuit of its policy of separating the WB from the holy city. And in the WB, the attacks of the Israeli settlers on the Palestinian farmers during the olive harvest had intensified to such an extent that they destroyed, burned and stole the yield;¹⁰¹ the olive harvest being an important source of revenue for the Palestinian economy.

The aggravating tension between the Palestinian inhabitants and the Jewish settlers led a curfew imposed by the Israeli authorities on some Palestinian villages like Borin, Kafr Qaddum and Kafr Qallil; within their policy of economic sanctions.¹⁰² The uprooted trees during the year 2008 totaled more than 2,200 trees.

Fifth: Water supply in the WB and GS

The issue of water is an extremely sensitive geopolitical issue in the Middle East, as water security is an important component of national security. This reality, coupled with an increase in water consumption as well as urban and economic development, triggered Israel to place the water issue within the red line that cannot be superseded in the treaties that it concluded with the Palestinians. Thus, digging of wells at certain depths was prohibited in these treaties, which also strictly regulated the pumping of water; this created a serious water crisis for the Palestinians, particularly so because of the meager rainfall during the past years and the increasing consumption needs.

The mountainous limewater and the coastal sandy water constitute the most two important sources for the interior waters in both the WB and GS, where the mountainous reservoir is divided into three interior basins: the western, northern-eastern and eastern. While Israel shares with the Palestinians the first two basins, the third is entirely situated in the WB. Hence, the rainfall accumulation was, and is still, an important source of water supply in the WB.

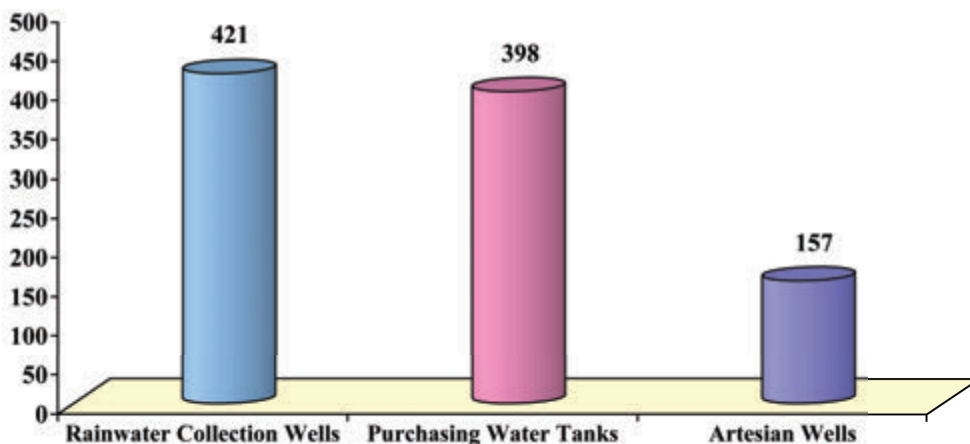
The 2008 surveys showed that 123 localities (22.9%) in the Palestinian Territory, with 177,275 persons, have no public water network, all of them in the West Bank.¹⁰³ The survey data also showed that 116 population centres in the WB and GS, inhabited by 454 thousand persons (i.e. %12.1 of the total population in

the Bank and the Strip) get their water supply from the Israel’s National Water Company (Mekorot); of these, 110 of the connected localities are in the WB and 6 localities in GS. Another 112 of the connected localities to the public network in the West Bank obtain water through the West Bank Water Department.¹⁰⁴ The results indicate that 157 localities in the Palestinian Territory depend on ground water wells as an alternative to the public water network. And 421 localities in the Palestinian Territory depend on rainwater collecting wells as an alternative to the public water network,¹⁰⁵ and 398 centres depend on purchased water reservoirs as an alternative to the public network.¹⁰⁶ The household environment survey conducted in 2008 showed that 88.2% of the families in the WB and GS live in houses connected to the public water networks, more specifically 84.2% of the WB families and 97% of GS families.¹⁰⁷

Table 6/6: The Alternative Water Sources for the Public Water Network and Governorate in WB and GS¹⁰⁸

Water source	Population territory
Rainwater collection wells	421
Purchasing water tanks	398
Artesian wells	157

The Alternative Water Sources for the Public Water Network and Governorate in WB and GS



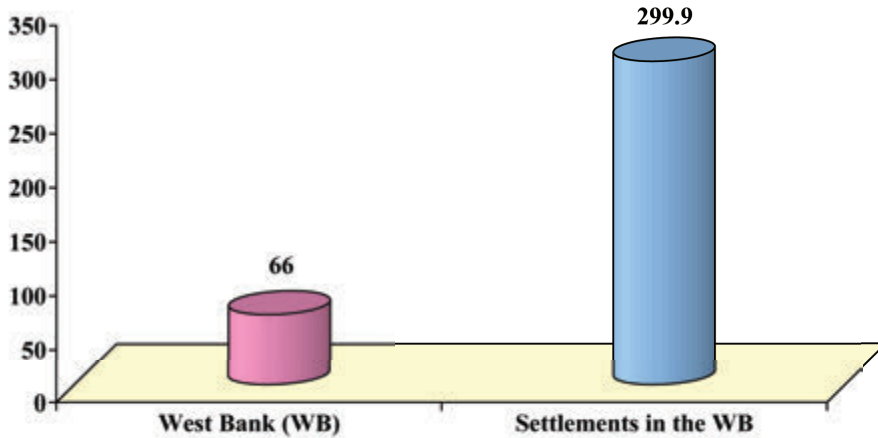
According to a report issued by the PCBS, the amount of water bought from Mekorot was estimated by 48 million cubic meters, while the available amount of water in the WB and GS was, according to the latest available statistics, 335.4 million cubic meters. The water supply allocated for the household service was 175.6 million cubic meters, distributed as 85.5 million cubic meters for the WB and 90.1 million cubic meters for GS. The average daily amount per individual of the household water was 135.8 liters, with the lowest being 46.6 liters per individual per day in Tubas governorate.

A report issued by the World Bank on the water in the WB and GS revealed that the Israeli individual gets four times the amount of water compared to the Palestinian individual in the WB and GS.¹⁰⁹ The head of the Palestinian Water Authority, Dr. Shaddad al-‘Attili, said that the annual amount of renewed rain water in the water basins of the WB ranges between 700 and 800 million cubic meters, of which the Palestinians consume 100 to 120 million cubic meters, and the rest is consumed by the Israelis, according to al-‘Attili.¹¹⁰ This indicates that about 500 thousand Israeli settlers in the WB consume daily around 143 million liters out of the total amount of water in the WB (see table 7/6).

Table 7/6: Comparing the Average Water Consumption per Individual between the Israeli Settlers and the Palestinians in WB¹¹¹

	Amount of water consumed daily (million liters)	Average per individual (liters)
West Bank (WB)	155.14	66
Settlements in the WB	142.7	299.9

Comparing the Average Water Consumption Consumed Daily per Individual between the Israeli Settlers and the Palestinians in WB (liters)



The pollution of the sources of water caused by the sewage water from the Israeli settlements in the WB continues to be a major problem for the water sector in the WB, as it deprives thousands of Palestinians from having the bare minimum of healthy water.

Besides, the strict inhumane Israeli siege of the GS deprives the Palestinians there from their basic needs of water; for it blocks the supply of the energy needed to operate the water purification stations and the sewage system, or even to maintain them, which threatens the eruption of an environmental crisis.

The head of the Palestinian Water Authority, Dr. Shaddad al-‘Attili, described the water situation in Gaza as catastrophic. Al-‘Attili noted that GS depends on underground water and that only provides 50 million cubic meters of drinkable water, while the GS needs more and actually takes 165 million cubic meters, of which part is from the salty sea water, and about 30 million cubic meters is derived from the sewage water that mixes with underground water. Al-‘Attili revealed that 70% of diseases in the GS are caused by the polluted water.¹¹² In the same vein, results of the Household Environment Survey 2008 indicated that 45.6% of the families in the WB and GS consider the water to be good. This percentage varied significantly between the WB (64.3%) and GS (13.8%). In both areas however, this percentage is in deterioration, where earlier 67.5% of the families used to consider the water good.

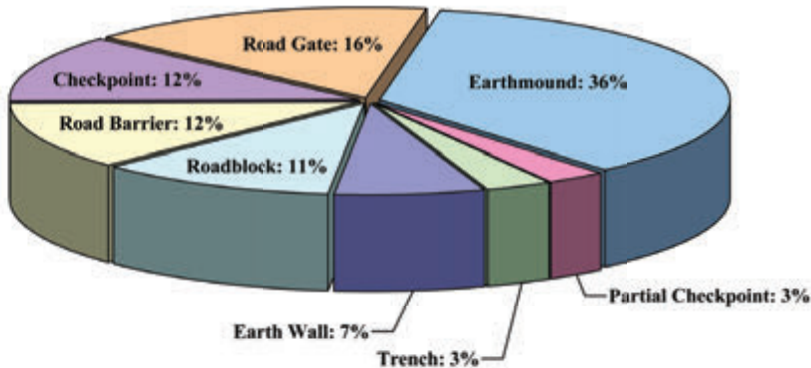
It is expected that during the coming five years, more than 400 thousand Palestinians would suffer from a shortage in water supply, by about 80 million cubic meters in drinking water, 20 million cubic meters in agriculture, and 30 million cubic meters in tourism and industry. By the year 2010, the total Palestinian shortage of water supply is expected to reach 280 million cubic meters,¹¹³ which indicates that a really serious water crisis is in the making for the Palestinians in both the WB and GS.

Sixth: The Closure Obstacles and Checkpoints

The Israeli occupation authorities continued to restrict the movement of the Palestinians in the WB through many barriers and checkpoints.

During the period 4/9/2007 to 11/9/2008, the number of closure obstacles increased from 566 to 630 blocking internal Palestinian movement, including 93 staffed checkpoints, and 537 unstaffed obstacles (earthmounds, roadblocks, road barriers, etc), this does not include 69 obstacles located in the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron (H2).¹¹⁴

Closure Count by Type of Obstacle (September 2008)¹¹⁵



While the average weekly random or flying checkpoints had decreased from 133 during the period January-August 2007 to 66 during its counterpart 4/9/2007-29/4/2008,¹¹⁶ it rose to 89 weekly random checkpoints during the period 30/4/2008-11/9/2008. Similarly, out of the 72 main routes leading to 18 of the most populated cities and towns in the West Bank, 53 or almost three quarters of them (73.6%) are either blocked (by an obstacle or by the Barrier) or controlled

by an Israeli checkpoint. In addition, of the 51 secondary routes into these cities and towns that were newly constructed or developed over time as alternatives to main routes, almost half of them (24) were subsequently blocked or controlled by a checkpoint.¹¹⁷

The UN OCHA report on the Israeli closure obstacles in the WB after eight years of imposing this policy concludes that what was once justified by the Israeli authorities as a short-term military response to violent confrontations and attacks on Israeli civilians, appears to be developing into a permanent system; a system, which is fragmenting the West Bank territory and affecting the freedom of movement of the entire Palestinian population.¹¹⁸

Commenting on the so-declared “goodwill gesture” of the Israeli Government, headed by Olmert, to ease the movement of the Palestinians in the WB by removing one hundred unstaffed obstacles during the period March-September 2008; the OCHA office reported that of these obstacles, 25 were previously mapped and counted by OCHA and their removal confirmed. Five obstacles that had been mapped and counted by OCHA, were not removed in practice, despite the Israeli announcement. The remaining 70 obstacles, were either considered insignificant and therefore not mapped or counted by OCHA, or had already been removed in the past. The office also reported that with the removal of one of the major military staffed checkpoints, allowed over 50 thousand Palestinians living in two Barrier enclaves (Bir Nabala and villages south of Road 443) to travel to and from Ramallah without delay... Additionally, three main routes, which had been permanently closed, were opened for Palestinian traffic without dismantling the physical infrastructure. However, the report drew attention to the fact that these actions impact remains limited geographically because it does not reduce the larger territorial fragmentation of the West Bank. In addition, past experience demonstrates that in places where an easing instead of a removal has been implemented (meaning that the infrastructure was kept intact), restrictions are likely to be re-imposed for temporary periods of time.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

The Israeli institutions that were concerned with the judaization and the settlement activity continued to actively pursue their consistent and persistent policy aimed at profoundly changing, actually counterfeiting, the history in

Jerusalem; and at imposing a Jewish character on the predominantly Islamic-Christian character of the holy city.

Through a close look at the Israeli operations of judaization and settlement, one can clearly observe the dangerously accelerated pace of settlement, confiscation of land and excavations beneath *al-Asqa* Mosque, particularly in the aftermath of Annapolis conference of 27/11/2007 that aimed at striking a final settlement before the end of 2008. Apparently Israel had exploited negotiations with the Palestinians to endorse its own settlement and judaization plans.

The Israeli illegal measures and expropriation of land and property was not limited to seizing what is above the ground through confiscation of lands in the interest of the separation wall and the establishment of settlements but extended to the counterfeiting of history and changing what is beneath the ground; i.e. the Islamic archeological relics as the excavations beneath *al-Aqsa* Mosque continue at high pace. Yet more, Israel has been stealing the water of the WB for the sake of developing the Jewish settlements there.

In light of the above, it seems that the Israeli establishment, with its different departments and orientations, is heading towards the implementation of its plan of dominating Jerusalem, depopulating it from its original inhabitants and to transfer it into a Jewish city. Hence, it is expected that the settlement operations will further accelerate, particularly with the forthcoming right-wing government in Israel, who declared on more than one occasion its settlement and judaization intentions. The coming few years are extremely crucial for the fate of Jerusalem, and for a probable establishment of a Palestinian state. It is therefore essential to commend the steadfastness of the Jerusalemites in the holy city, and the appreciated efforts of the societies and institutions that work for the interest of saving or at least preserving the city against the tremendous Israeli pressures and illegal measures. Having said this, it is important to highlight the extensive conspiracy against Jerusalem and the future of the Palestinian issue at large. This requires the intensification of the Arab-Islamic efforts and the rally of the Arab-Islamic street to confront the Israeli plans. It is unacceptable for the seemingly endless Palestinian-Palestinian and Arab-Arab differences to continue while the judaization of the holy city in particular and Palestine in general is being imposed.

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Chapter Seven

The Palestinian Demographic Indicators

The Palestinian Demographic Indicators

Introduction

The year 2008 has passed while the Israeli Occupation and the international community were still forcing on the Palestinians a de facto policy, in an attempt to pressure the latter to accept partial solutions in favor of the Israelis; at a time when the Arab regime, the international community, and human rights organizations have failed to provide the Palestinians with their simplest and most basic human rights including freedom, independence, and their right to establish a state on their own land. This issue basically aims for negatively impacting the demographics in Palestine, which are in favor of the Palestinians, in order to make the state of Israel a Jewish state. This reveals the discriminatory and racist foundation on which basis the Israeli state has been established. The danger of the Jewish State concept lies in the fact that it may imply depriving the Palestinians, who hold the Israeli citizenship, from their citizenship rights, or yet worse expelling them from their lands; the threat seems more serious as the USA and some EU countries might recognize this concept.

The conditions of the Palestinians in Diaspora were not better than their fellow Palestinians inside. Hardships and sufferings faced by the former were sometimes more, especially when related to mobility, finding a job, living with dignity, or even securing their own selves in areas of conflict and insecurity like Iraq; this is the reason why many of the Palestinian individuals and families were forced to immigrate to Arab or Foreign countries, that opened their doors and gave a chance to some Palestinian categories to become citizens.

First: The Palestinian Population Worldwide

PCBS released that the number of Palestinians in the world at the end of the year 2008 was estimated to be around 10.6 million Palestinians; more than half of them (51.9%) live in Diaspora, while the rest are distributed between the territories occupied in 1948 i.e. Israel (around 1.22 million) and the occupied Palestinian territories i.e. WB and GS (around 3.88 millions) which includes the Palestinians

living in the East Jerusalem that was forcefully annexed by the Israeli occupation in 1967, and excludes the Arab Syrian population living in the occupied Golan Heights.

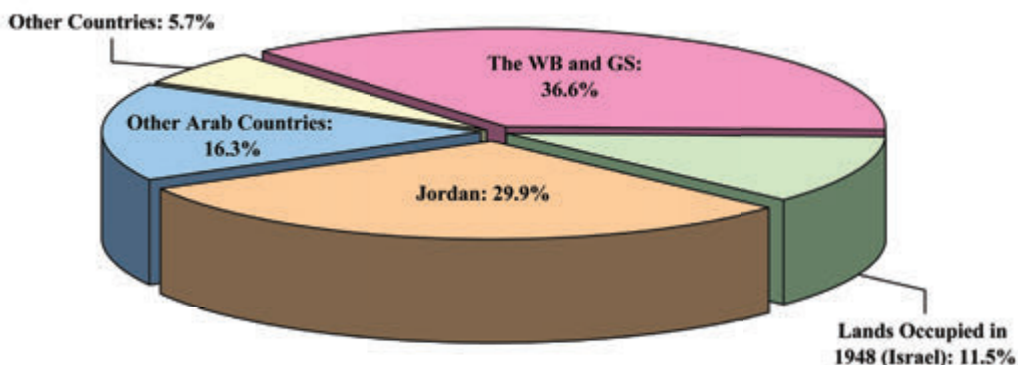
Table 1/7 presents the estimates of the Palestinian population at the end of the year 2008, according to the Place of residence.

Table 1/7: Palestinian Population Estimate According to their Place of Residence at the End of the Year 2008¹

Place of Residence	Population Estimate (thousands)	% of Palestinian Population
The WB and GS*	3,878	36.6
Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 (Israel)	1,215	11.5
Jordan	3,171	29.9
Other arab countries	1,733	16.3
Other countries	605	5.7
Total	10,602	100

* Includes the lands occupied in 1967 and Jerusalem Governorate.

Palestinian Population Distribution in Percentages According to Their Place of Residence at the End of the Year 2008



Palestinians in Diaspora are concentrated in the neighboring Arab countries, especially in Jordan where the Palestinian population was estimated by 3.17 millions at the end of 2008, i.e. approximately 29.9% of the total Palestinian

population. The majority of the Palestinians in Jordan hold Jordanian citizenship, unlike Palestinians in other Arab countries who were estimated by 1.73 million (16.3% of the total Palestinian population) at the end of 2008. The latter are concentrated in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Gulf countries. As for the remaining Palestinians living in foreign countries, their number was estimated to be about 605 thousands (5.7% of the total Palestinian population), most of whom live in the USA, Latin America, Canada, Britain, and other EU countries.

Second: General Demographic Indicators

1. The WB and GS

The population of the WB and GS was estimated, at the end of 2008, to be 3.88 millions, distributed by 2.42 million people in the WB, i.e. 62.3%, and 1.46 million in GS, i.e. 37.7%; the percentage of people living in Jerusalem Governorate borders, among the above mentioned population of the WB and GS, is estimated by around 9.6%, i.e. 372 thousand people.

Available statistics from the year 2006 indicate that 44.8% of the WB and GS population are refugees (registered and non-registered);² given that this percentage is relatively fixed, projections to the end of 2008 indicate an estimate of 1.737 million refugees among the 3.88 million population, 747 thousands of whom reside in the WB (30.9% of the WB population), and 990 thousands in GS (67.7% of GS population).³

Table 2/7: Comparing the Palestinian Total and Refugee Population in WB and GS as Estimated by the End of 2008

Place of Residence	Total Population		Refugee Population	
	Estimate (thousands)	Percentage %	Estimate (thousands)	Percentage %
WB	2,416	62.3	747	30.9
GS	1,462	37.7	990	67.7
Total	3,878	100	1,737	44.8

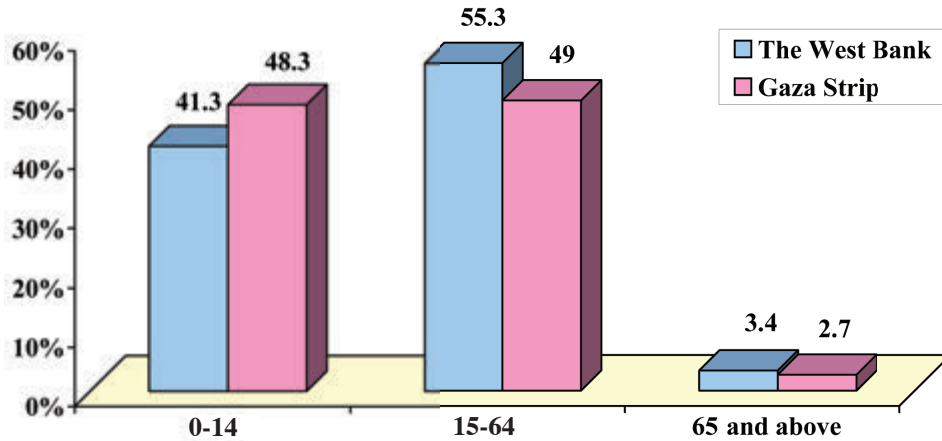
The age distribution within the Palestinian population reveals a wide-based population pyramid with a pointed narrow tip. The Palestinians will be influenced in the upcoming years by the relatively high natural population growth, despite the decrease in the fertility rate and the population growth rate in the past few years. According to 2007 statistics, 44.1% of the Palestinian population in the WB and GS is under 15 years of age, i.e. 1.71 million; among the remaining, 2.05 millions (52.9%) are in the working (15-64 years) age category; and 116 thousands are elderly, i.e. only 3%. These numbers do not show a significant difference from those of 2006, when the percentage of the population under 15 years of age was estimated by 45.7%; thus, age dependency rates remain relatively high.⁴

When observing the population age structure according to the place of residency, the available data indicates that the Palestinian society in the WB is still young. Compared to 1997, the last decade has witnessed a decrease in the percentage of children between 0-14 years of age from 45.1% in 1997 to 41.3% in 2007, i.e. a decrease by 3.8%. In return, the percentage of the population in working (15-64 years) age category has witnessed a significant increase by 4.2% during the same period, from 51.1% in 1997 to 55.3% in 2007. Thus, while the Palestinian society is still young compared to other societies, the percentage of children and youth is decreasing with time due to the decrease in fertility rates; the total fertility rate in the WB in 2007 was estimated by 4.6 births per woman, while in 1997 it was estimated by 5.6 births.

The elderly (above 65 years of age) population category was estimated by 3.4% of the WB 2007 population, whereas in 1997 they constituted 3.8%. Unlike what would have been expected since the fertility rate has decreased, the elderly percentage among the population did not increase but rather decreased slightly, indicating that the phase of demographic transformation, which was reflected in the increase of the percentage of the 15-64 age group, has not yet reflected on the elderly.⁵

As for GS, estimates of 2007 indicate that the Palestinian community there is young, and even more youthful than that of the WB. Around 48.3% of the GS population is under 14 years of age; 49% are between 15 and 64 years of age; and only 2.7% of the population is elderly (above 65 years of age).

The Percentage of the Palestinian Population in WB and GS According to Age Category 2007



Comparing the estimates of 1997 and 2007, it could be observed that the last decade have witnessed a decrease in the percentage of children aged between 0-14 in GS, where their percentage dropped from 50.2% to 48.3%, i.e. a decrease by 3.8%. Accordingly, the percentage of population aged between 15-64 has increased significantly from 46.9% of the total GS population in 1997 to 49% in 2007, i.e. an increase by 4.5%. This indicates that although the Palestinian society is young compared to other societies, the percentage of children and youth is decreasing with time due to the decrease in fertility rates.⁶

Statistics indicate that the total fertility rate for the year 2006 in the WB and GS has decreased to 4.6 births per woman, from a 4.9 births in 1999; this was not the same in the WB and GS, where in the latter the total fertility rate was estimated by 5.4 and in the former 4.2. But despite the decrease in fertility rates, the average natural population growth in the WB and GS has remained high, estimated by 3% in the year 2007.

The data also points out that there is a decrease in the average family size in the WB and GS. The average family size has dropped to 5.8 members in 2007, compared to 6.4 in 1997. More specifically, the average family size in the WB has dropped from 6.1 members in 1997 to 5.5 in 2007; in the GS, the average family size has dropped from 6.9 members in 1997 to 6.5 in 2007.

The crude birth rate (CBR) in the WB and GS has dropped from 42.7 births per one thousand inhabitants in 1997 to 33.6 births in 2007. This is due to the decrease

in the fertility rates in both the WB and GS. However, if we were to consider the birth rate of each area independently, we would notice the contrast of CBR in each of the WB and GS. In the WB, CBR has decreased from 41.2 births in 1997 to 31 births in 2007; whereas in GS, the decrease was notably less, from 45.4 births in 1997 to 38 births in 2007.

The crude death rate (CDR) in the WB and GS has dropped from 4.9 deaths per one thousand inhabitants in 1997, to 4.1 deaths in 2007. However, when considering each area separately, we find that there is a slight difference between the WB and GS; since in the WB, the CDR has dropped from 5.1 deaths in 1997 to 4.1 deaths in 2007, whereas in GS it has dropped from 4.7 deaths in 1997 to 4 deaths in 2007.⁷

The gender ratio in the WB and GS has both witnessed a tiny decrease between 1997 and 2007. In the WB, the gender ratio has dropped from an estimated 103.2 males per one hundred females in 1997 to 103.1 in 2007. Similarly, in GS the gender ratio has dropped from 103.1 males one hundred females in 1997 to 103 in 2007.⁸

The final results of the WB population census indicate that the number of families in the WB in the year 2007 was 427,097, and based on this, the average family size in the WB has been estimated by 5.5 members; with a significant decrease from the estimated average family size of 6.1 members in 1997, when the number of families in the WB was estimated by 307,624 families. This indicates on one hand the decrease in fertility rates, and, on the other hand, the tendency to prefer nuclear families on extended families.

The results also revealed an increase in the percentage of nuclear families with private household among the families in the WB, from 74% in 1997 to 83.2% in 2007. The percentage of the Palestinian extended families with private households, in the WB, has dropped from 21.7% in 1997 to 12.4% in 2007. This confirms with the earlier mentioned tendency to prefer nuclear families on extended families. On the other hand, there is a slight increase in the percentage of private households with a single individual from 3.8% in 1997 to 4.2% in 2007. The remaining households were compound families that made up a diminishing 0.2% percentage in 2007, compared to a yet small 0.6% in 1997.

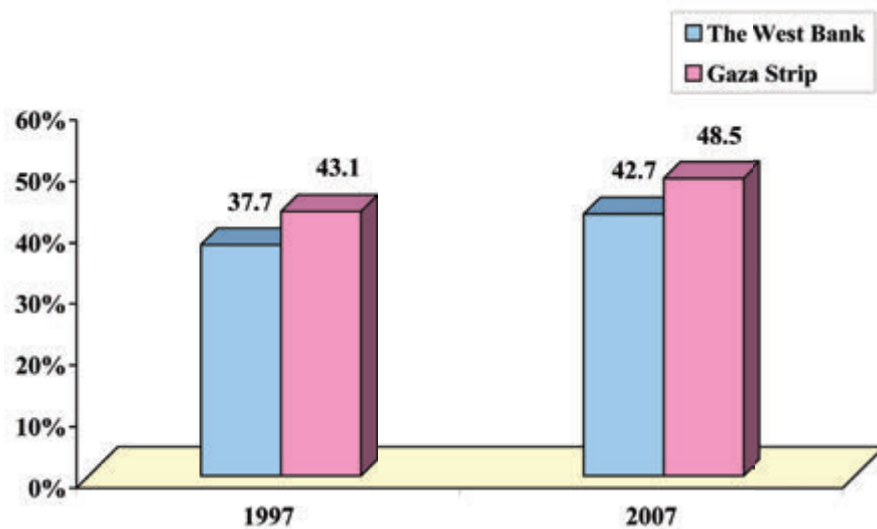
As for GS, preliminary results of the population census estimated the number of families in GS to be about 219,220 families in 2007; and based on this, estimated the

average family size in GS by 6.5 members. Of the above families, approximately 73% (160,111 families) are nuclear families; which is not significantly different from the estimated 71.8% in 1997. Similarly, the percentage of Palestinian extended families with private households has slightly decreased between 1997 and 2007 from 25.3% to 24.5%. This confirms the tendency towards an increase in nuclear families at the expense of extended families. As for the private households of single individuals, their percentage slightly dropped from 2.6% in 1997 to 2.4% in 2007. The remaining percentage, i.e. that of compound families, made up a miniature 0.1% in 2007 and 0.3% in 1997.⁹

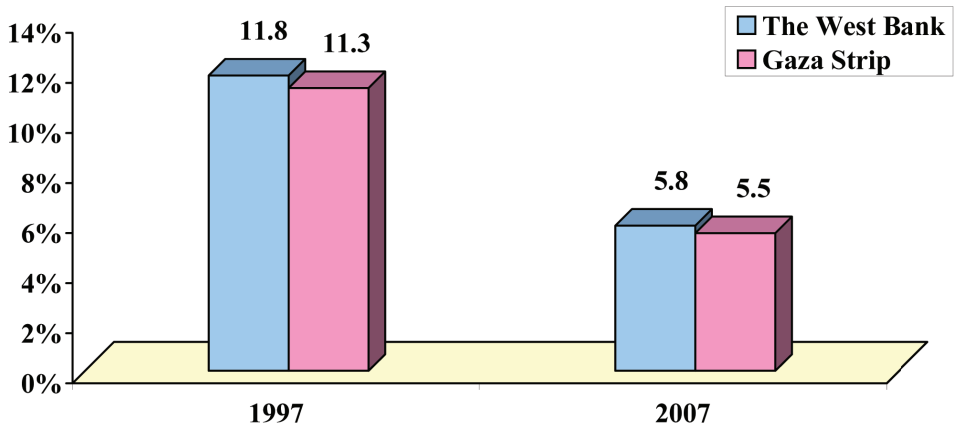
Statistics regarding the education of the WB and GS populations, indicated an increase in the school/ university enrollment rates among the total population above 5 years of age. In the WB, the percentage of those enrolled among the total population above 5 years of age, has increased from 37.7% in 1997 to 42.7% in 2007;¹⁰ and in GS from 43.1% in 1997 to 48.5% in 2007.

In accordance, illiteracy rates among the population above 10 years of age have dropped; in the WB, from 11.8% in 1997 to 5.8% in 2007, and in GS from 11.3% in 1997 to 5.5% in 2007.¹¹

The Percentage of Palestinians Enrolled in School/ University in WB and GS in 1997 and 2007



Illiteracy Rates Among the Palestinians in WB and GS in 1997 and 2007



Continuing with social indicators, and comparing the marital status of individuals in 1997 and 2007, statistics indicate that the percentage of married individuals in the WB has dropped from 56.5% in 1997 to 51.5% in 2007; in terms of gender, the percentage of married males in the WB was 52.5% in 1997 and dropped to 50.3% in 2007; for females, it dropped from 55.2% in 1997 to 52.7% in 2007. This indicates a decrease in marriage rates in the WB, which might be a result of the Israeli assaults during and after *al-Aqsa Intifadah* (28/9/2000), and the accompanying economical hardships. On the other hand, divorce rates in the WB remained unchanged at 0.6% in 1997 and 2007.

Similarly in GS, the percentage of married individuals dropped from 53.8% in 1997 to 49.6% in 2007; in terms of gender, from 54.1% in 1997 to 48.7% in 2007 for males, and from 57.2% in 1997 to 50.5% in 2007 for females. Divorce rates dropped as well from 0.8% in 1997 to 0.6% in 2007.

The average number of individuals per room in the WB has decreased from 1.9 in 1997 to 1.55 in 2007, indicating an increase in the individual's space in rooms. As for GS, the average number of individuals per room has slightly decreased from 2.1 in 1997 to 2 in 2007. This increase could be attributed to the decrease in the average size of families, mentioned earlier, and to the increase in the average number of rooms in housing units.

When comparing the patterns and types of housing units between 1997 and 2007, statistics indicate an increase in apartments. Figures of 2007 indicated that apartments constituted 53.3% of housing units in the WB and 51.2% in GS, compared to 44.5% and 46.5% respectively in 1997. On the other hand, percentage of traditional houses [*Dar*] decreased between 1997 and 2007 from 52.2% in the WB and 51.6% in GS to 43.2% and 47.4% respectively. This goes in accordance with increased urbanization trends and tendency towards nuclear family structures. In addition, a slight increase was observed in the percentage of villas in the WB from 0.9% in 1997 to 1.7% in 2007; unlike in GS where it slightly dropped from 0.6% in 1997 to 0.5% in 2007.¹²

As for the public networks in the WB, when comparing the availability of these networks to inhabited residences, it was shown that the percentage of residences connected to the public electricity network has increased from 94.1% in 1997 to 98.4% in 2007. Also, the percentage of inhabited residences connected to the public sanitation network has increased from 24.4% in 1997 to 35.8% in 2007. However, the percentage of residences connected to the public water network hasn't witnessed an as remarkable change, increasing from 79.1% in 1997 to 81.4% in 2007.¹³

As for marriage and divorce in the WB and GS, statistics released by PCBS point out that the number of marriages has increased from 23,492 in 1997 to 32,685 in 2007. The crude marriage rates have raised from 8.4 marriages per one thousand inhabitants in 1997 to 8.7 marriages per one thousand inhabitants in 2007, noting however the dramatic decrease of marriages during the *Intifadah's* years, where it reached in 2002 its minimum of 22,611 marriages.

On the other hand, the number of divorces has also increased from 3,449 in 1997 to 4,043 divorces in 2007; noting however that during this decade, this figure has reached its maxima of 4,211 in 2005. The crude divorce rate was estimated in 2007 by one divorce per one thousand inhabitants while in 1997 it was estimated by 1.2 divorces per one thousand inhabitants.¹⁴

Table 3/7 summarizes the main population indicators, in each of the WB and GS in 2007; while table 4/7 compares these indicators in the governorates of the WB and GS, for the years 1997 and 2007.

Table 3/7: Population and Family Count in WB and GS 2007¹⁵

Region	Population count			Number of families	Average family size
	Males	Females	Both		
WB	1,193,244	1,157,339	2,350,583	427,097	5.5
GS	718,711	697,832	1,416,543	219,220	6.5
Total	1,911,955	1,855,171	3,767,126	646,317	5.8

Population Count in the WB and GS 2007

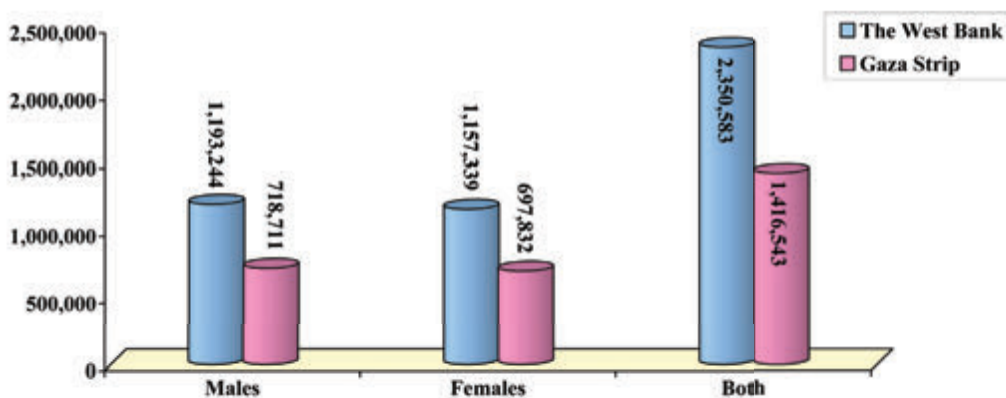


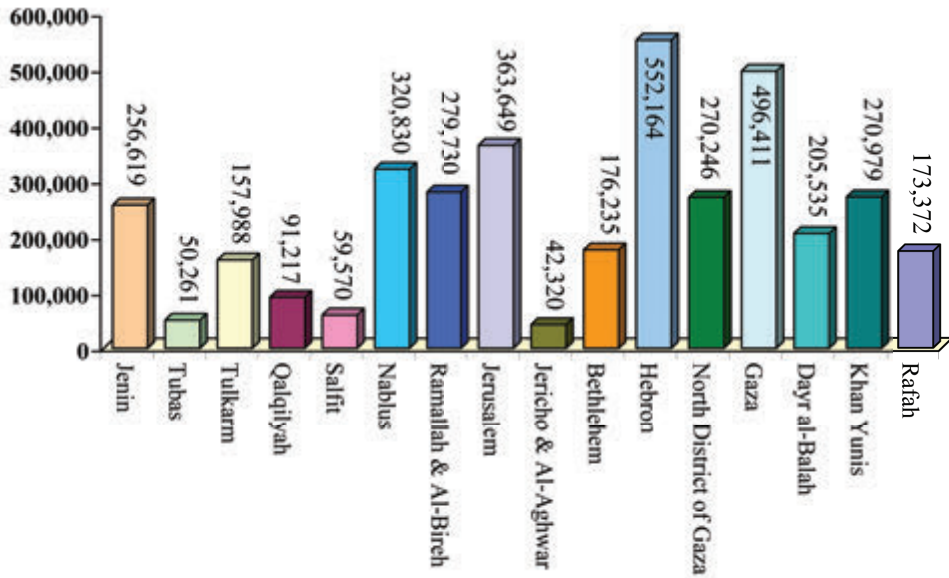
Table 4/7: Population Count, Average Family Size and Gender Ratio for the Years 1997 and 2007 in Governorates in WB and GS¹⁶

Region	Population count		Average family size		Gender ratio	
	1997	2007	1997	2007	1997	2007
WB	1,873,476	2,350,583	6.1	5.5	103.2	103.1
Jenin	203,026	256,619	5.9	5.4	103.8	103.2
Tubas	36,609	50,261	6.1	5.6	103.1	103.3
Tulkarm	134,110	157,988	5.8	5.3	102.2	102.1
Qalqilyah	72,007	91,217	6.1	5.5	105.7	105.2
Salfit	48,538	59,570	6	5.4	103.6	103.3
Nablus	261,340	320,830	5.9	5.4	103.3	102.3
Ramallah & al-Bireh	213,582	279,730	5.9	5.3	100.4	101.4
Jerusalem	328,601*	363,649	5.4	5.2	102.1	103.5
Jericho & al-Aghwar	32,713	42,320	6	5.6	101.7	100.3
Bethlehem	137,286	176,235	5.8	5.4	104.8	103.8
Hebron	405,664	552,164	6.7	6.1	104.9	104.1
GS	1,022,207	1,416,543	6.9	6.5	103.1	103
North district of Gaza	183,373	270,246	7.2	6.7	103.7	103.7
Gaza	367,388	496,411	6.9	6.5	103.6	103.5
Dayr al-Balah	147,877	205,535	6.9	6.4	102.4	101.6
Khan Yunis	200,704	270,979	6.9	6.3	102.5	103.1
Rafah	122,865	173,372	6.9	6.5	102	101.8
Total population (WB & GS)	2,895,683	3,767,126	6.4	5.8	103.2	103.1

N.B. The population count includes individuals who were living in the WB and GS during the study period 1-16/12/2007 and was estimated for those who were not counted, through a projection study.

* Estimates for the population living in East Jerusalem, in the areas forcefully annexed by the Israeli occupation in 1967. Figures related to this region are estimates and not actual population count.

Population by Governorates 2007



According to 2007 census, the average family size in the WB and GS reached 5.8, distributed between 5.5 in the WB and 6.5 in GS. While in 1997 the average family size in the WB and GS was 6.4 individuals. Although fertility rates have dropped, rates of structuring in families stayed relatively high and within the expected range, due to the decrease in the average number of members per family.

The population distribution according to governorates, at the end of 2007, was as follows: Hebron is the governorate with the largest population among the 16 total governorates (11 in the WB and 5 in GS). Hebron’s population was estimated by 552 thousands at the end of 2007. The next largest governorate is Gaza governorate, where the population was estimated by 496 thousands. The third was Jerusalem governorate with an estimated population of 364 thousands. On the other hand, the governorates with the smallest populations were Jericho, Tubas, and Salfit, with estimated populations of 42 thousands, 50 thousands and 60 thousands respectively.

As for the governorates in terms of the average family size, it was observed that all GS governorates, in addition to Hebron (South of the WB), have the highest average family size estimated by 6.5 members.

2. Palestinian Territories Occupied in 1948 (Israel)

The estimated number of Palestinians living in Israel by the end of 2008 was estimated by 1.22 million Palestinians. Their society is significantly young, as revealed by the demographic statistics available; 40% of their population is aged 15 years or below, and 3.1% are aged 65 years or above. The gender ratio in 2008 was estimated by 103.6 males per one hundred females. These figures however don't include the Arab population in the Syrian Golan Heights; neither it does include the residents of the J1 area in Jerusalem governorate, nor the Arab Lebanese who moved temporarily to the Israeli areas, whereas the Israeli authorities do count them among its population and among the more general Arab population in Israel.¹⁷

The total fertility rate among the Palestinians in Israel was estimated by 3.62 births per woman in 2007, which is considered relatively high compared to the Israeli fertility rate. The crude birth rate in 2007 was about 27.3 newborns per one thousand inhabitants, whereas the crude death rate was 2.8 deaths per one thousand inhabitants. Figures also indicated that the average Palestinian family size was five members in 2007. As for the neonatal mortality rate for the same year, it was estimated by 7.2 deaths per one thousand live newborns, taking into consideration the fact that this rate reached eight neonatal deaths per one thousand live newborns in 2005. 26.2% of Palestinian families live in densely populated residences (two members or more). Illiteracy rate among the Palestinian population aged 15 years and above was about 6.1%.¹⁸

3. Jordan

At the end of 2008, the Palestinian population in Jordan was estimated to be about 3.17 millions, according to PCBS estimates. Available data indicates that the Palestinians living in Jordan in 2007 constitute a relatively young community, where 35.9% are aged 15 years or below. The total fertility rate among the Palestinians in Jordan in 2007 was estimated by 3.3 births per woman.

But comparing the above figures to those of the year 2000, we observe that the percentage of population aged 15 years or below has actually dropped from 41.7% in 2000 to 35.9% in 2007; similarly, the total fertility rate has dropped from 4.6 births per woman in 2000 to 3.3 in 2007. This reveals a general tendency within the Palestinian population in Jordan, towards lower fertility rates and less paced

population growth; a trend that has been observed among the majority of the world nations. The average family size among the Palestinians in Jordan in 2007 was estimated by 5.1 members.¹⁹

According to the statistics of UNRWA, there was, as of 31/12/2008, one million and 951,490 UNRWA registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan; while for the same date of 2007, the number of UNRWA registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan was one million and 903,490 refugees. Thus, the population growth rate among the registered refugees is estimated by 2.5% annually.

By mid 2008, the UNRWA registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan made up 387,992 families, of whom 17.3% live in refugee camps.²⁰

Besides the above estimates, it should be mentioned that the Palestinian population in Jordan include a great number of refugees who are unregistered for different reasons, where around 13% of the refugee camp residents in Jordan are not registered with UNRWA; Moreover, about 95% of the Palestinians living in Jordan hold the Jordanian citizenship.

4. Syria

The number of UNRWA registered Palestinian refugees in Syria, as of 31/12/2008, was about 461,897; while for the same date in 2007, the figure was 451,467 refugees. Thus the population growth rate is estimated by 2.3%. By mid 2008, the UNRWA registered Palestinian refugees in Syria make up around 111,419 families, of whom 27.1% live in refugee camps; noting that the aforementioned estimates don't include the Palestinians who were displaced to Syria in 1967 and 1970, since the majority of them is not registered at UNRWA.²¹

The Palestinian population in Syria is mostly concentrated in Damascus, where 67% of the total registered Palestinian population in Syria resides. Statistics of the year 2007 indicate that 33.1% of the registered refugee population in Syria is aged 15 years or below, and 4.3% of the population is aged 65 years or above.

The gender ratio was estimated by 100.4 males per one hundred females.

As for the marital status; among the males aged 15 years or above, 48.3% have not been married; among females in the same age category, 40.8% have never been married (both figures are for the year 2007). The lowest marriage rates were in the age category 15-19 years, where 100% of males and 92.7% of females have never

been married. We also notice a relatively high percentage of Palestinian female widows in Syria, being 4.2%, as opposed to 0.5% male widowers.

The total fertility rate among Palestinian women in Syria was 3.64 births per woman in 2007, compared to 3.5 births per woman in 2001. The crude birth rate was estimated by 29.3 births per one thousand Palestinian residents in 2007. Sources also indicate that the average Palestinian family size in Syria was 4.9 members according to 2007 estimates.²²

5. Lebanon

The Palestinian refugee population registered with the UNRWA in Lebanon, as of 31/12/2008, was estimated by 422,188 refugees, who formed up 110,026 families by mid 2008. About 52.8% of this population lives in refugee camps. As for the average family size of Palestinians living in Lebanon, it was about 3.8 members in 2008.²³

The gender ratio of Palestinians living in Lebanon was about 98.4 males per one hundred females in 2007.

The total fertility rate was three births per woman in 2007, as opposed to 3.5 births per woman in 1999. The crude birth rate was estimated by 21.8 births per one thousand inhabitants in 2007. When observing the detailed fertility rates by age categories of women, we find that these rates peak in the 30-34 age group where the average birth rate was 158 birth per one thousand women.

The percentage of population under 15 years of age was estimated by 32.9%; whereas the percentage aged 65 years or over was about 5.4%, which is considered high compared to other Palestinian communities outside Lebanon. But generally speaking, the age structure of the Palestinians in Lebanon doesn't differ from other Palestinian communities in refuge (Jordan, Syria and Iraq), in being young.

As for marital status, 44.1% of the Palestinians in Lebanon who are aged 15 years or above, have never been married; as per sex group, 47.9% of males and 40.5% of females. As for the percentage of married individuals, it was about 48.7% (49.6% males and 47.9% females); the percentage of divorced was 1.4% (0.8% males and 2% females); and the percentage of widows was about 5.7% (1.7% male widowers and 9.6% female widows); all figures are for the year 2006.

As for the classification of women in the 15-49 age group based on their level of education, 76.5% have completed elementary or preparatory school, 19.1% have high school diplomas or higher, while less than 4.5% were uneducated.

The 2007 statistics also indicate that 0.5% of families of six and seven members.²⁴

As for the condition of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the book “Conditions of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon” released by al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, noted the demographic, legal, educational, and social conditions of these Palestinians, pointing out that the Palestinians in Lebanon are being deprived of many civil rights, including the right to work in many occupations and the right of ownership. Add to this, the political and legal Lebanese environment that is anti-Palestinian and pressuring against their presence, on the claim of the need to prohibit permanent settlement; while, the truth is, the Palestinians don’t want to be Lebanese citizens, but merely they ask for their just rights and humane indiscriminating treatment. Moreover, the argument that keeping the Palestinians in suffering and depriving them of their rights to a dignified life will keep them focused on their issue, is just an excuse with no true foundations, since their suffering is causing them to immigrate to Western countries thus pushing them further away from their centre of concern.

6. Iraq

The Palestinians residing in Iraq were subject to many threats, murder, kidnappings, and forcible displacement by some militias, after the American occupation of Iraq. The result of this was that many families fled from their homes to different areas, inside or outside of Iraq, or to temporary refugee camps set up on the borders shared by Iraq and its neighboring countries. The condition of the Palestinians in Iraq is unmatched by the condition of any other Palestinian community worldwide, in terms of suffering. Moreover, the situation is made worse with the absence of any reliable data or records (official or unofficial) on their detailed numbers and conditions, at the same time there is a difference between the number of Palestinians and the number of Palestinian Refugees; all of which makes it difficult to find reliable data and statistics on their numbers, geographical distribution, demographic indicators and social conditions.

The latest available detailed statistics about the number of Palestinians in Iraq was that released by the PCBS for the year 1989. Then, it was estimated that the number of Palestinians in Iraq was about 35 thousands. Their age distribution was as follows: 39.7% under 15 years of age (37.8% of the males and 41.6% of the females); 3.4% above 65 years of age (3.2% of the males and 3.7% of the females). The total fertility rate of the Palestinians in Iraq was 5.3 births per woman, whereas the highest fertility rate was observed among women in the 30-34 age group, and that was 346.8 births per one thousand women.²⁵

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has estimated in 2003, shortly after the American occupation of Iraq that the total number of Palestinian refugees there is between 35-40 thousand refugees. Later, in March 2008, the PLO Department of Refugee Affairs estimated the number of Palestinian refugees who stayed in Iraq till then, by 15 thousands.

Within this context, on 7/12/2008, Alhourriah arabic online magazine published what it claimed to be “the latest statistical data about the Palestinians in Iraq”. Entitled “This is How the Palestinians in Iraq were Displaced Again”, the statistical report mentioned more than 15 Arab and European countries to where the Palestinians of Iraq have been displaced as a result of the various assaults they faced by the local militias. These destinations were, according to the same report: al-Waleed refugee camp (2,000 refugees), al-Tanaf refugee camp (800 refugees), al-Houl refugee camp (450 refugees), Cyprus (1,600 refugees), Sweden (800 refugees), Brazil (140 refugees), Chile (130 refugees), Iceland (50 refugees), Australia (150 refugees), Switzerland (25 refugees), India (80 refugees), Malaysia (30 refugees), and France (one family). In addition, unknown numbers of Palestinian refugees have fled Iraq to Norway, Denmark, Canada, and Holland. The number of those who remained in Baghdad was, according to the latest statistics, estimated by 10,750 refugees.

But if the above was true, the number of Palestinian refugees who are still residing in Iraq would be estimated by around 14 thousand refugees.

The same source has also noted its documentation of at least 300 deaths among the Palestinian refugees in Iraq, who were killed by some local Iraqi militia;²⁶ whereas other sources estimated the death of about 500-850 Palestinians.²⁷ The Palestinian government has decided to consider the Palestinians killed in Iraq among the “national martyrs of Palestine”.

The year 2008 has witnessed some developments regarding the Palestinians refugees who were formerly in Iraq and fled to the Iraqi-Syrian borders but were stuck there. In 2008, 116 of them immigrated to Chile. Similarly, 157 were accepted to Sweden, in four groups, during the same year, whereby the last group reached Sweden on 3/11/2008.²⁸ Iceland has also agreed to accept thirty refugees from al-Waleed refugee camp; in addition to the agreement signed by the PLO and the Sudanese government, by which the latter will host two thousand Palestinian refugees from the camps on the Iraqi-Syrian border.

Here it is necessary to point out that these procedures concerning the movement of a limited number of Palestinians, fleeing from the misery of killing and torture in Iraq, to countries such as Chile, Iceland, Sweden, and other western countries that sympathized with the humanitarian conditions of the Palestinian refugees, have aroused fears and suspicion among many concerned with the Palestinian issue and especially the refugees issue, that such attempts are being made to disperse the Palestinian refugees over western and foreign countries, with the Iraq case mentioned above being adopted as an example that would possibly be carried out on a larger scale to solve or “dissolve” the refugee problem eventually; while on the other hand, neighboring Arab countries of Palestine have closed their doors in the refugees’ faces.

Internally within Iraq, the Iraqi government issued on 4/11/2008 a resolution entailing the application of the 1971 Political Refugee Act (Law no. 51) to the Palestinian refugees, which means the Palestinian refugees are under the surveillance of the security and military intelligence departments, and entitles the minister of Interior to assign the refugees’ place of residence, approve their leave, and he may order their exodus if they have breached the national security or obstructed the national political interests. Moreover, if a refugee’s leave lasted more than a month, he must get the approval of the Iraqi president, all according to the above mentioned law.²⁹ On the other hand, the Iraqi government issued on 26/11/2008 a resolution that granted Iraqi citizenship to the children of Iraqi women who are married to Palestinians.

Concluding, it seems as though the conditions of the Palestinians in Iraq are heading towards some stability. It is predicted that their numbers will remain in range, albeit with few exceptions for cases of immigration attempts to western countries; especially after the noticeable calm down of violence in Iraq.

7. General Comparisons between the Palestinian Populations

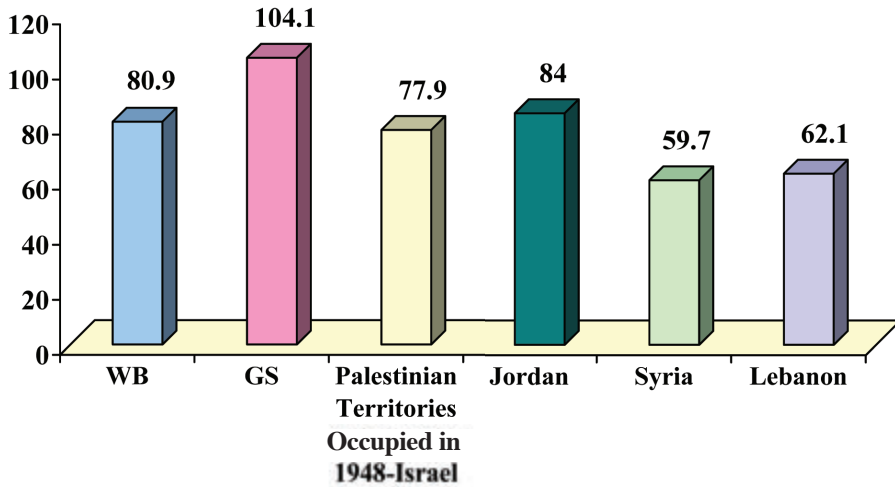
Table 5/7 presents and compares the main demographic indicators for the Palestinians in the year 2007 (unless otherwise, the year is stated in brackets).

**Table 5/7: Selected Demographic Indicators for the Palestinians
According to their Place of Residence 2007³⁰**

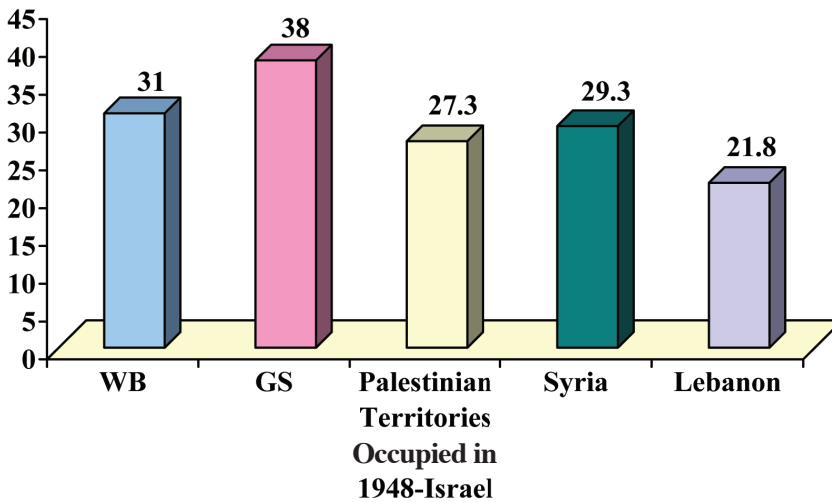
Indicator	WB	GS	WB and GS	Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 (Israel)	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon
Percentage of individuals aged 15 years or less	41.3	48.3	44.1	40 (2008)	35.9	33.1	32.9
Percentage of individuals aged 65 years or more	3.4	2.7	3	3.1 (2008)	5.2	4.3	5.4
Dependency rate (per 100 individuals 15-64 years of age category)	80.9	104.1	89.1	77.9	84	59.7	62.1
Gender ratio (males per 100 females)	103.1	103	103	103.6 (2008)	-	100.4	98.4
Crude birth rate (newborn per 1000 inhabitants)	31	38	33.6	27.3	-	29.3	21.8
Crude death rate (death per 1000 inhabitants)	4.1	4	4.1	2.8	-	2.8 (2006)	-
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	4.2 (2006)	5.4 (2006)	4.6 (2006)	3.62	3.3	3.64	3
Natural population growth	2.7	3.4	3	2.51	-	2.65	-
Average family size	5.5	6.5	5.8	5	5.1	4.9	3.8 (2008)

N.B. (-) means data is not available

Dependency Rate in Major Palestinian Communities 2007



Crude Birth Rate in Major Palestinian Communities 2007



Using the above statistical data (table 5/7), the following should be remarked:

- The crude birth rates are the highest among the Palestinians in GS and the WB, and the lowest among the Palestinians in Lebanon and Israel. This, in particular, constitutes additional demographic pressure on the Strip, which

already suffers from the highest population density in the world, of 3,881 individuals per one km².

- The crude death rates not only remained high in the WB and GS, but increased compared to 2006 rates. This is mainly a result of the Israeli occupation and its continuous assaults and measures, and its racist discriminatory policies that have lasted decades, especially the murders it commits.
- The natural population growth rates (the difference between the birth and death rates) has dropped in the WB and GS. Yet, they are still considered high especially in GS.
- The Palestinian society is a young society. Nonetheless, its age distribution exhibits some remarkable differences depending on the area of residence/refuge. The percentage of population under 15 years of age is the highest in GS, followed by the WB, where the dependency rates remain high; and this adds huge economical burdens on the family providers in the WB and GS. The dependency rates observed were the lowest in Syria and Lebanon. The highest percentage of elderly (65 years of age or older) was observed in Lebanon, and the lowest was observed in GS.
- The crude birth rate in Syria and Lebanon has changed significantly, increasing from 2006 estimates as indicated by the more recent survey carried out. In Syria, the crude birth rate increased from an estimated 18 births per one thousand inhabitants in 2006 to 29.3 in 2007; while in Lebanon it increased from an estimated 16.3 births per one thousand inhabitants in 2006 to 21.8 in 2007.
- There is an obvious and continuous decrease in the average family size in the WB and GS compared to previous years. Despite this, GS has maintained the highest average, estimated in 2007 by 6.5 members per family, whereby the average in the WB was 5.5 members. The smallest averages were observed among the Palestinian families in Lebanon and Syria.
- The total fertility rate is witnessing a slow decrease in comparison to previous years, especially in the WB and GS; knowing that this rate apparently has increased in Lebanon and Syria, compared to previous years, but this is most probably attributed to reasons concerning the statistical methodology of the source of the data.

Third: The Palestinian Refugees

The task of precisely determining the number of Palestinian refugees continues to be amongst the hardest challenges faced by researchers, research centres, and survey institutions. This is attributed to many reasons mentioned earlier in the Palestinian Strategic Report, the most important among these reasons being: the dispersion of the Palestinians across the globe, and consequently living under the rule of different governments that deal with them in contrasting ways, whether it be statistically, politically, socially, or economically; the common mistake of limiting the definition of refugees to those who were forced to leave Palestine in 1948, and thus excluding other Palestinians who were also forced to leave Palestine and prohibited the right of return to their land, including Palestinians from the WB and GS; estimating refugees based on the number of refugees living outside Palestine, thus excluding the immense refugee population in GS and the WB, and as well the refugees (technically internally displaced) who still live within the Israeli geographic borders. In addition, registering in the UNRWA records is optional, so there are many Palestinian refugees who haven't registered their names, either because they don't need the agency's assistance, or because they live in areas where the agency's services are not provided, or for political reasons, or other reasons.

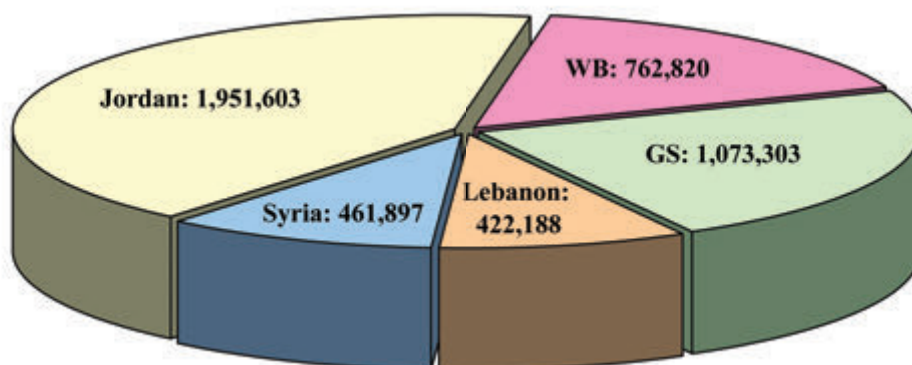
Regardless of the UNRWA statistics, estimates of Palestinian refugee population worldwide indicate it to be approximately 7.4 million Palestinians, i.e. around 70% of the total Palestinian population that was estimated by 10.6 millions by the end of 2008. The Palestinian refugee population is distributed by 5.5 millions living outside historical Palestine, 1.73 million refugees living in the WB and GS, and about 150 thousand displaced Palestinians living in the territories occupied in 1948. Although these figures are rough estimates that might include some statistical overlapping especially with regards to the refugees in the WB and GS who have left for various reasons but maintained their permits that allow them to return to the WB and GS; these estimates are more reliable than the figures provided by the UNRWA, in being nearer to the actual figures and more precise. Therefore, we refer to the UNRWA figures with much reservation when it comes to refugees, although it sometimes presents an important source of information in specific places such as GS, WB, and Syria.

Table 6/7 presents estimates of UNRWA registered refugees at its areas of operation, as provided by the agency:

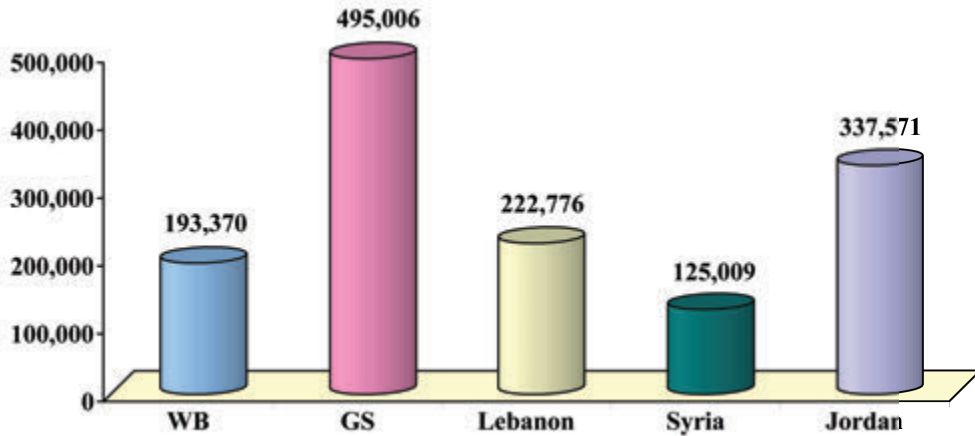
Table 6/7: Numbers of Individuals, Births, and Families of the Palestinian Refugees Registered with UNRWA in its Regions of Operation as of 31/12/2008³¹

Region	Individuals	Births (30/6/2008)	Average family size (2006)	Average family size (30/6/2008)	Families (30/6/2008)	Camps	Individuals in camps	% of individuals living in camps (2006)	% of individuals living in camps (2008)
WB	762,820	8,510	4	3.8	196,894	19	193,370	25.8	25.3
GS	1,073,303	24,972	4.6	4.5	233,825	8	495,006	47	46.1
Lebanon	422,188	3,524	3.9	3.8	110,026	12	222,776	52.9	52.8
Syria	461,897	8,371	4.2	4.1	111,419	9	125,009	26.6	27.1
Jordan	1,951,603	26,389	5.1	5	387,992	10	337,571	17.7	17.3
Total	4,671,811	71,766	4.6	4.4	1,040,156	58	1,373,732	29.8	29.4

Estimates of Palestinian Refugees Registered with UNRWA in its Areas of Operation as of 31/12/2008



Estimates of Palestinian Refugees Living in Camps and Registered with UNRWA in its Areas of Operation as of 31/12/2008



Referring to the previous table, we notice that the number of refugees registered in the five areas where the UNRWA operates, as of 31/12/2008, is about 4.67 million refugees. Of these 4.67 millions, about 41.8% live in Jordan, 39.3% live in the Occupied Palestinian Territories of 1967 (divided into 23% in GS and 16.3% in the WB), and the remaining 19% are registered in Syria and Lebanon.

We also notice that in 2008 the percentage of those living in Palestinian refugee camps is about 29.4% among the total UNRWA registered refugee population, which is slightly less than that of 2006. Moreover, the percentage of those living in refugee camps in Lebanon and GS is higher than that of any other region.

We also take note that the average family size here doesn't actually represent the extended families that live together in one house, but rather identifies the family as the unit to which an independent UNRWA family card is given. Therefore, it isn't strange that the average family size is smaller than the average household. And we notice that the average family size has been slightly decreasing with time, consistently across all regions of UNRWA's operation, where the total average has decreased from 4.6 members in 2006 to 4.4 members in 2008.

When considering the number of registered refugees in the past 37 year, i.e. between the years 1970 and 2007, we find that the UNRWA registered refugee population has increased from one million and 425,219 refugees in mid 1970, to four million and 618,141 refugees by mid 2008. Thus, calculating the stable average annual population growth rate for the registered refugee population in the

mentioned period, it is found to be around 3.2% annually; and by using this rate and assuming it to be stable for the future coming years, as it remained so over a long period of time, it is predicted that the number of registered refugees will double in about 22 years. Due to the stability in the annual population growth rate, it is possible to be confident in the 3.2% annual population growth rate estimate for the Palestinian refugee population worldwide.

Fourth: Population Growth Trends

The provided demographic indicators haven't changed from what was published in the 2007 Strategic Report, where the fertility, death, and immigration are considered the essential elements of change and population growth for any country or region. As for immigration, it doesn't affect the estimates concerning the total Palestinian population in the world, but it does affect their distribution in the world and the place in which they reside. Therefore, the factors affecting the population growth trends are actually the fertility and death rates and trends of the Palestinian communities in the world.

Statistics published by the PCBS point out that the fertility rates in GS and the WB have dropped during 1997-2007, from an average of 6.04 births per woman in 1997 to an estimated 4.6 births per woman in 2006.³²

When comparing the fertility rates of the WB and GS, remarkable differences are observed; where the aforementioned statistical source indicates that the total fertility rate in the WB has dropped from 5.6 births in 1997 to 4.2 births in 2006, whereas in GS it dropped from 6.9 births to 5.4 births during the same period.

The annual population growth rate of the Palestinians in the WB and GS has dropped from 3.8% in 1997 to 3% in 2007. This was accompanied by a decrease in crude birth rates from 42.7 births per one thousand inhabitants in 1997, to 33.6 births per one thousand inhabitants in 2007.

As for the Palestinian population in the world, who were estimated by 10.6 millions at the end of 2008, in comparison to 10.35 millions at the end of 2007; their annual population growth rate has been estimated by 2.5%. Therefore, the annual average growth rate of 2.5% can be used to estimate the number of Palestinians in the world, keeping in mind that this rate differs between one area

and another. And based on this assumption, it is predicted that the Palestinian population in the world will double by 2036, and become 21.2 million people.

As for the WB and GS, assuming that the net immigration is zero, the annual growth rate has dropped between 1997 and 2007 from 3.6% in the WB to 2.53%, and in GS from 4.1% to 3.32%. Thus keeping with our assumption of zero net immigration, we could conclude that despite the decrease in the predicted annual growth rate, there is a continuous increase in inhabitants and the population density in GS, at a relatively larger rate than the WB; which will eventually lead to having a larger percentage of the Palestinian population living in the Strip.

Fifth: Argumentation Regarding the Estimates of the Palestinians within Historical Palestine

The demographic struggle in Palestine has never been as serious and intense as it is today. The demographic factor has been, whether implicitly or explicitly, behind all the Israeli practices and measures, of waging wars or constructing the apartheid wall, or destroying houses or confiscating lands; and in internal Israeli policies and laws. And there are no lodges exist, whether secret or public, which do not interweave demographic conspiracies against the Palestinian people by all available means, known ones or hidden. Earlier Strategic Reports of 2005, 2006, and 2007 have shed lights on some Israeli plans and conspiracies against the “Palestinian Demographic Threat”. This label is employed by the Israelis in two senses; first, to emphasize that the Palestinians are a minority, therefore they must either accept what the Jewish majority imposes or should be subject to transfer or genocide. The second sense is saying that the Palestinians form a demographic bomb that would explode if left “untreated”, and thus all means should be taken to displace the Palestinians by making their lives in Israel worse off economically and socially; and both senses have the same objective.

Some data published on the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) website, mentions that the population statistics confirm that the Palestinians living in historical Palestine have actually exceeded the Israelis demographically; where at the beginning of May 2008, the population of Israel was estimated by seven million and 112,359, among whom five million and 433,842 are Jews, one

million and 137,977 are Muslims, 149,360 are Christians, and 113,798 are Druze. The site also points out that the actual number of Jews in historical Palestine, including the number of settlers in the WB, Eastern Jerusalem, and Golan Heights, doesn't exceed four million and 733,842 Jews. While estimates of the Palestinian population residing in the WB and GS estimate it by around four million and 149,173 people, divided by one million and 537,269 in GS and two million and 611,904 in the WB including Jerusalem. Thus when adding the number of Arabs, i.e. Muslims, Christians, and Druze, inside Israel (a total of one million and 401,135) to the Palestinians in the WB and GS, the total number of Palestinians in historical Palestine would be estimated by five million and 550,308 people, which means the Palestinian population does exceed the Jewish population.³³

Being very important to Israel, the demographic issue was brought up for discussion at the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in the Israeli Knesset, both secretly and in public in 2001. It was also discussed at the Herzliya Conference more than once, where many suggestions were made to deal with it.³⁴ With time, it is becoming more obvious that the issue of increase in the Arab population in the Hebrew state has become an obsession to Israeli politicians, where the idea of transforming Israel into a binational state has dominated the negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis during the peace talks in 2008. The Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert, has warned against the growing calls within the international community for a binational state if no agreement was reached; making it clear that “an agreement would lead to international recognition of Israel’s borders in the context of a two-state solution”;³⁵ In the same context, President Shimon Peres, regarded the right of return of the Palestinian refugees as demographic suicide, and that will mean also that Israel will not be a Jewish state.³⁶

By observing the Israeli political discourse,³⁷ academic statements,³⁸ and practical measures to deal with the Arab population increase in historical Palestine in general, or specifically in the Hebrew state, the issue of decreasing the Arab existence in Israel surfaces as a top priority Israeli concern on the political level. This has led all Israelis, regardless of their political or religious ideology, to seriously call for exchanging lands of Arab majority currently under their rule, with some lands in the WB where there are settlements and Jewish populations,³⁹ and this is what the Israel is doing by building the separation wall.

Moreover now, it is expected that the issue of “Jewish identity of the Israeli state” will continue to take additional space on the list of Israeli priorities, after the formation of a government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, and the participation of right-wing extremist parties such as Yisrael Beiteinu, led by Avigdor Lieberman who calls for the exodus of the Arab Palestinians from their homeland currently Israel. It is expected that the Israeli measures to further assert the “Jewish identity of Israel” will increase on a political level by trying to get a Palestinian recognition of the “Jewish identity of Israel”, and on a social and geographical level by increasing the Jewish immigration to Israel, or by tightening the grip on the Arabs under their authority, to worsen off their conditions through various discriminatory and racist citizenship laws, many of which had already been passed by the Israeli Knesset. Such laws are considered a clear breach of the minority rights, which are provided for in the International and Humanitarian law.

Sixth: The Israeli Pressures and Measures to Affect the Palestinian Demographics

The year 2008 has witnessed increased discussion of what is called the “Jewish identity of the Israeli State”, where it became a common topic in the Israeli and global media especially in context of the peaceful settlement, and in the statements of some major international players like the USA and France; in relation to issues like the final status agreement, the role of the Arab minority in Israel, the implicit calls by some Israeli leaders to expel them from their lands to the WB and GS, and in addition to the continued policies of confiscating their lands or preventing them from building on their lands, demolishing houses on the claim that there are no building permits, and marginalizing them and tearing them away from their Palestinian people and the wider Arab and Muslim nation. Israelis have been exerting all sorts of pressure and taking all possible measures to affect the Palestinian demographics within the green line.

Affecting the demographics is not restricted to the Palestinians in Israel. The Palestinians in the WB and GS have suffered also from similar Israeli policies. Closures and movement restriction policy, according to OCHA, have been increasingly adopted by the Israeli occupation authorities in the WB and GS, to prevent the Palestinians from entering Israel to work daily, and to restrict the

Palestinian imports and exports; thus in both cases and since the beginning of the second *Intifadah* in 2000, the unemployment rates of the Palestinians have increased; but more importantly the humanitarian conditions have deteriorated especially that the food insecurity rates that reached 34% (1.3 million Palestinians), with additional 12% at risk of suffering from food insecurity.⁴⁰

It is also clear, based on the new study carried out by Nadav Shragai, that around 50 thousand Palestinians have moved to the west side of the separation wall in Jerusalem. These Palestinians moved to Palestinian neighborhoods such as Shu‘fat, Beit Hanina, al-Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, and the Old City of Jerusalem; which increased the population density and accordingly housing rents. Some Palestinians also have resided near Jewish neighborhoods, where they bought or rented houses from Jews, because they feared losing some rights or privileges, and the ease of access to reach their jobs in Israel (only Palestinians in Jerusalem city can work in Israel since they are given the status of “permanent residents” in the city). The study also explores the possibility of the transformation of some Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem into border neighborhoods if the city is divided, thus leading to the departure of thousands of Jews from the city.⁴¹

The Christian Science Monitor newspaper revealed in a report dated 10/6/2008 that Israel is expelling Arabs from their homes in Jaffa to settle Jewish immigrants in their places. It added that the Arab neighborhood in the city have turned into Jewish neighborhoods over the past few decades, as well as al-‘Ajami neighborhood, since both neighborhoods have a sea view; which makes them tempting to the new Jewish immigrants. The report points out that Israel had ignored and marginalized Arab neighborhoods in Jaffa for forty years, but have just begun to show great interest in these neighborhoods, which are witnessing today many renovations and building projects; whereby in the same context, the Israeli Authorities have expelled more than 500 Arab families in the past few months.⁴²

Another report, issued by two Israeli rights advocate organizations B’Tselem and HaMoked-Center for the Defence of the Individual, stated that Israel is taking unilateral measures to institutionalize and perpetuate a new factual and legal reality of separation between residents of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The report warned that the Israeli Authorities are infringing the residents’ rights and impeding the possibility that the Palestinian people will realize their right to self determination. It also emphasized that “Israel is turning Palestinian residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) into ‘illegal aliens’ in their own homes.”

The report also added that:

Since the beginning of the current intifada, Israel has taken various measures designed to separate the WB and the GS, to split the Palestinian population into two separate entities and to cut those off from each other. This policy escalated in the past year with a new requirement imposed on Palestinians whose registered address is in the GS, to hold a permit in order to be present in the WB, and with the removal of such persons from the WB and defining them ‘illegal aliens’.

Concluding that “the new permit regime is an unprecedented, legally baseless move, by which Israel is turning Palestinian residents of the OPT into ‘illegal aliens’ in their own homes”; pointing out that since November 2007, the Israeli Authorities has demanded that a resident of the Gaza Strip who is present in the West Bank is required to hold a permit known by Israelis as “permit to remain in Judea and Samaria”.⁴³

The Research and Documentation unit in the Jerusalem Center for Social and Economic Rights (JCSER) stated that the survey teams, employed by the Israeli Ministry of Interior for carrying out a population census, have finished their theoretical and practical training and are expected to begin the actual census procedure as soon as the Jewish holidays end, with the planned finishing date being maximum by early 2009. The city of Jerusalem has recently witnessed a state of confusion and chaos amongst Palestinian Jerusalemites after the Interior Ministry’s teams raided citizens’ houses in different parts of the city to conduct a random census for the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem center however ruled out the possibility that the survey will diverge from the Israeli policy line of more land and less Arabs, noting that Israeli authorities might employ statistics to serve Israeli policies of judaizing Jerusalem and occupying what remained in the city, counterfeiting its history and culture, and denying the rooted Palestinian rights in the city although they have owned all the city and although not a single Jewish individual was residing in East Jerusalem before 1967, when the Israeli occupation forcefully confiscated 86% of their lands where 180 thousand Jewish settlers reside today; all statistics according to the 2007 Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem by PCBS.⁴⁴

Seventh: The Palestinian Immigration and Brain-Drain

The preliminary results of the survey of the immigration of the Palestinian workforce in Ramallah, al-Bireh, and Petunia for 2008 indicate that the Palestinians living in these areas tend to immigrate abroad, and this somehow generally reflects the wider immigration trends for the WB and GS populations. It indicates that 7.3% of those aged 15 years or above do consider immigration outside the WB and GS; these were divided as 63.8% males and 36.2% females; 53.8% married, and 43.7% have never been married; and 55.7% of them are employed while only 15.9% are unemployed.

As for the countries most preferable as destination, approximately half of those considering immigration among the surveyed population mentioned the USA, while the Arab Gulf countries came second being preferred by 14.1%, then Europe by 13.1%.

The reasons mentioned for considering immigration were primarily related to improving the personal/family financial status (mentioned by 72.9% of those considering immigration), followed by the prevailing political and the security conditions (21.1%).⁴⁵

On the other hand, statistics for emigration among the Palestinians from the WB and GS indicate that: in 10% of families, at least one family member has emigrated in the indicated period from the WB and GS. These emigrants were distributed according to their gender as 80.4% males and 19.6% females; and mainly youth, where 48.6% of the emigrants were aged between 15-29 years.

Around two thirds of the aforementioned emigrants (65.9%) did emigrate in the past eight years (between 2000 and 2008).

The majority of the immigrants (71%) immigrated to the USA; second destination preference was Jordan, to where 6.5% of the immigrant population immigrated. The reasons mentioned for immigration were not different than the above mentioned, where 52.9% of those who immigrated did so to improve their financial situation, and the second reason was to study and to conduct scientific research (23.2%).

Although the size of this phenomenon hasn't yet constituted a serious threat to the Palestinian internal demographics, emigration from the WB and GS should not

be overlooked; awareness should be raised about its risks to limit its future negative impact on the region. The Palestinian policy maker should consider all possible measures that help eliminate this phenomenon or at the very least limit its effects and analyze then tackle its reasons; Although the majority of the Palestinians who leave return back later and settle down in their homeland.

The most obvious reasons behind this phenomenon is the Israeli occupation and suppression, especially in the past seven years since *al-Aqsa Intifadah*; in addition to what happened during the last two years 2006-2007; the siege imposed on the Palestinians since Hamas electoral victory, and the internal political schism between Fatah and Hamas; that eventually led to the current situation of almost complete isolation between the WB and GS, and heightened the imposed siege on GS; added to the factors of seeking security and suitable employment opportunities, impossible under the strict and inhumane occupation measures; all in an atmosphere of international pressures attempting at keeping the flame of internal Palestinian strife alive, to the favor of the Israeli interests of continued occupation, land confiscation and expulsion of Palestinians; and to cover up for the failure of global powers in finding and implementing a just solution to the Palestinian issue, and accordingly the failure of the foreign policies of global powers in the Middle East.

Eighth: The Palestinians Outside Palestine and the Right of Return

A careful reading of the negotiations track in the past ten years, and the numerous meetings and agreements that have been held in this context, reveals a stalemate situation that could be summarized in Annapolis conference and Bush's vision of a two-state solution, without setting any serious timeline commitment on behalf of Israel to end its occupation. With the UN Security Council adopting Annapolis as a reference point in its recent resolution, it is becoming more obvious that the Israeli interests are the only interests considered, i.e. giving Israel a green light to continue with its Judaizing activities in historical Palestine, including the WB and GS; and abandoning any discussion of final status issues related to Jerusalem, the right of return, and removing the WB settlements. On the contrary, settlement projects have expanded and accelerated, especially in Jerusalem, and

the occupation authorities continued with demolishing houses, confiscating lands and building the separation wall; thus misappropriating more Palestinian lands, isolating their inhabitants, and restricting their mobility and freedom of movement even to their very basic daily activities such as work and school.

The year 2008 has witnessed many activities and events held by the Palestinians abroad to emphasize their adherence to the right of return. The most prominent of these events was the Sixth Palestinians in Europe Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark on 3/5/2008 under the slogan “Sixty Years: And the Return is Nearer”, and with the participation of approximately seven thousand Palestinians.⁴⁶ The speeches made during the conference confirmed adherence to the right to return, where Majed al-Zeer, Conference director and the director-general of the Palestinian Return Centre in London, expressed his belief that the Palestinians are “getting closer to achieving their determined goal of returning to Palestine and ridding themselves of the occupation.” Al-Zeer emphasized the need to involve the Palestinian refugees inside and outside of Europe in the Palestinian decision making.⁴⁷ Ameer Makhoul, director of the Union of Arab Community Based Associations (*Ittijah*) stressed that the return is our -the Palestinians everywhere- project, that we will never give up.⁴⁸ The Palestinian Center for Justice in Sweden emphasized that the Palestinians Diaspora in Europe have realized that they are nearer to achieve their right to return to Palestine, as long as they have proved that time is incapable of making them give it up, thus sustaining the test of time, and maintaining their just cause, against all odds and planned conspiracies; according to the director of the Center, Sameer al-Jeraisy.⁴⁹

Later on, during the period 23-24/11/2008, The Arab International Congress for the Right of Return was held in Damascus under the theme “Return is a Right”, and with the participation of more than 4,500 delegates from 54 different countries in five continents. The congress included speeches by prominent Palestinian figures such as Faruq Qaddumi, Khalid Mish‘al, and a number of politicians, intellectuals, and scholars; and workshops and discussion panels on the various aspects of the right of return. The forum concluded by issuing “International Declaration in Defence of the Palestinian Right of Return”. The declaration called for the activation of political, legal, economic and media instruments and methods to defend the right of return and disseminate its culture; and called upon all the institutions, organizations, and agencies to coordinate their efforts and contribute

to the mobilization of all available resources and power in order to realize a global consensus to implement the right of return.⁵⁰

In addition, President Mahmud ‘Abbas signed a binding document that provides for the adherence to the Palestinian refugees’ right of return, on a big poster entitled “we must return to our country”, while the document includes, we are determined on behalf of our people and nation, to remain committed to the right to return to our homeland; we know the destination, we walk with firm steps, and we declare that any agreement that doesn’t include our political, material and non-material rights is a void agreement, that can’t be binding to our people and should be resisted and firmly opposed.⁵¹

In a document they released marking six decades since the Palestinian Catastrophe, the Palestinians in Europe have reiterated the aforementioned statement, on believing they are getting nearer to achieve the right of return to their lands occupied in 1948, and their adherence to this right. They requested from the international community to help them achieve this right, i.e. to return to their lands from which they were forcefully expelled, and to receive appropriate compensation on all the material and mental damages and losses they and their following generations have suffered in the past 60 years.⁵²

Aljazeera Satellite Channel (JSC) carried out many polls, two of which were related to the right of return. The first poll showed that 88.3% of the participants do not support the relinquishment of the right of return in exchange for establishing a Palestinian state in the WB and GS; while the second poll indicated that 85.6% of the participants reject the idea of permanently settling in another country (and be given citizenship) and/or financial compensation in exchange for relinquishing the right of return.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the Palestinian population growth is in a state of constant decline compared to what it was in 1997. This is noticed as a drop in the fertility rate of the Palestinian woman and an increase in the percentage of population aged between 15-65, as well as a decrease in the percentage of population aged less than 14 years.

The Palestinian population growth is considered one of the major arenas of the Arab-Israeli conflict, as the Israeli officials can no more hide their serious concern and fear of the Palestinian demographic growth, not only of the Palestinians in Israel but also in the WB and GS. In this context, the year 2008 has witnessed Israeli attempts to promote an “alternative homeland” for the Palestinians. In addition, political and religious figures in Israel have expressed their fear of the drop in the number of Jewish immigrants that also affects the demographic balance in historical Palestine and tips the scale to the favor of the Palestinians.

But as it seems, the Israeli negotiator has realized the size of the threat posed by the Palestinian population growth, and is attempting to tackle the situation by taking various preventive measures to hinder it without affecting the Israeli demographics. The Israelis are more serious now than ever in discussing land exchange to get rid of the Palestinians living inside the Hebrew state. Nonetheless, all indicators affirm that the few coming years will witness a demographic dominance in historical Palestinian, to the favor of the Palestinians.

Endnotes

- ¹ See the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), Shibbanah Head of PCBS Presents Statistics for the Year 2008 Closing (in Arabic), 31/12/2008, in: http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/end2008.pdf
- ² Figures of the PCBS indicate that the percentage of refugees among the WB and GS population is 44.6%; the editors of this volume adopted however the different figure (44.8%) because it aligns with the other statistics provided by the same source on the refugee percentage in each of the WB (30.9%) and GS (67.7%).
- ³ PCBS, Shibbanah Head of PCBS Presents Statistics for the Year 2008 Closing.
- ⁴ See PCBS, *Kitab Filastin al-Ihsa'i al-Sanawi Raqm "9"* (Palestine Statistical Yearbook Number "9") (Ramallah, Palestine: PCBS, December 2008), p. 231, in: http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_PCBS/Downloads/book1526.pdf
- ⁵ PCBS, Head of PCBS Presents the Final Results of the 2007 Census in the WB (in Arabic), 1/9/2008, in: http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/census_westbank_2007.pdf
- ⁶ PCBS, Head of PCBS Presents the Final Results of the 2007 Census in GS (in Arabic), 15/2/2009, in: http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/gaza_census.pdf
- ⁷ PCBS, Shibbanah Head of PCBS Presents Statistics for the Year 2008 Closing.
- ⁸ PCBS, Head of PCBS Presents the Final Results of the 2007 Census in the WB; and PCBS, Head of PCBS Presents the Final Results of the 2007 Census in GS.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ PCBS, Head of PCBS Presents the Final Results of the 2007 Census in the WB.
- ¹¹ PCBS, Head of PCBS Presents the Final Results of the 2007 Census in the WB; and PCBS, Head of PCBS Presents the Final Results of the 2007 Census in GS.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ PCBS, Head of PCBS Presents the Final Results of the 2007 Census in the WB.
- ¹⁴ PCBS, *Kitab Filastin al-Ihsa'i al-Sanawi Raqm "9"*.
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- ¹⁷ PCBS, Special Statistical Report on the Annual Commemoration of the *Nakba* (in Arabic), 13/5/2009, in: http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/nakba_61.pdf
- ¹⁸ See PCBS, Shibbanah Head of PCBS Presents Statistics for the Year 2008 Closing; and PCBS, *Kitab Filastin al-Ihsa'i al-Sanawi Raqm "9"*.
- ¹⁹ PCBS, Shibbanah Head of PCBS Presents Statistics for the Year 2008 Closing.
- ²⁰ See: <http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/PublicStat/pdf/uif-18.pdf>; <http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/PublicStat/pdf/uif-16.pdf>; and <http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/Refugees/pdf/TABLE1.PDF>
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- ²² See PCBS, Shibbanah Head of PCBS Presents Statistics for the Year 2008 Closing; and PCBS, *Kitab Filastin al-Ihsa'i al-Sanawi Raqm "9"*.

- ²³ See: <http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/PublicStat/pdf/uif-18.pdf>;
<http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/PublicStat/pdf/uif-16.pdf>;
 and <http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/Refugees/pdf/TABLE1.PDF>
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- ³⁴ Fayeze Rashid, Analytical Report: Herzliya Conferences (in Arabic), *al-Sharq*, Doha, 28/1/2008.
- ³⁵ *Haaretz*, 16/9/2008, see: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/1021689.html>; and *The Jerusalem Post*, 16/9/2008.
- ³⁶ *Asharq al-Awsat*, 10/4/2008.
- ³⁷ Refer back to Livni's statements about expelling the Arab Palestinians from Israel in: *Assafir*, 12/12/2008.
- ³⁸ Arnon Sofer, Tel-Aviv State Threatens Israel (in Arabic), Aljazeera.net, 21/6/2008, see: <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/32FF394A-77E4-413E-ACEF-41C6EE950120.htm>
- ³⁹ Interview with Avigdor Lieberman, *al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 19/1/2008.
- ⁴⁰ *Elaph*, 23/4/2008.
- ⁴¹ Sama News Agency, 22/5/2008.
- ⁴² *Okaz*, 11/6/2008.
- ⁴³ B'Tselem and HaMoked, Separated Entities: Israel Divides Palestinian Population of WB and GS, September 2008, in: http://www.btselem.org/Download/200809_Separated_Entities_Eng.pdf
- ⁴⁴ Baheth Center for Studies, 17/10/2008.
- ⁴⁵ Press Release on the Basic Figures of the Survey of the Migration of Palestinian Workforce to Ramallah, al-Bireh and Beitonia Areas, 2008.
- ⁴⁶ BBC, 6/5/2008.
- ⁴⁷ BBC, 4/5/2008.
- ⁴⁸ Quds Press, 3/5/2008.
- ⁴⁹ Quds Press, 5/5/2008.
- ⁵⁰ Aljazeera.net, 25/11/2008.
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Chapter Eight

*The Economic Indicators in the
WB and GS*

The Economic Indicators in the WB and GS

Introduction

The Palestinian economy in the WB and GS continues to suffer from the Israeli occupation and its policies that aim to tie the Palestinian economy to the Israeli economy, making the former totally dependent on the latter and for its service. The Israeli control of the crossings as well as the export and import operations and its targeting or obstruction to the infrastructure, forms the main obstacle in the path of developing the Palestinian economy. The essence of the Palestinian issue is the national liberation project which aims for independence; and despite the need to work in every way possible to provide a dignified life for the Palestinians, the national project shouldn't be curtailed merely if "luxury under the occupation" is achieved. The economical and life suffering of the Palestinians should be put in the context of the conflict with the occupation, and acts of humiliation and degradation for a morsel or bread or a pill should be refused. The Palestinian people have great potentials and abilities that are not reflected in the figures and reports. In addition, the overall performance and average statistics do not necessarily reflect a similar situation in the WB and GS because of the difference in the ways with which the occupation and the Arab and international communities deal with these two areas; despite the fact that both are suffering because of the occupation, GS is experiencing an unprecedented stifling seige, that led to the paralysis of many aspects of the economy.

First: National Accounts

Preliminary figures released by the PCBS for 2008, has indicated an increase in the value of the GDP at constant prices in 2008 by 2.3% from last year, i.e. from \$4,535.7 million in 2007 to \$4,639.7 million in 2008.

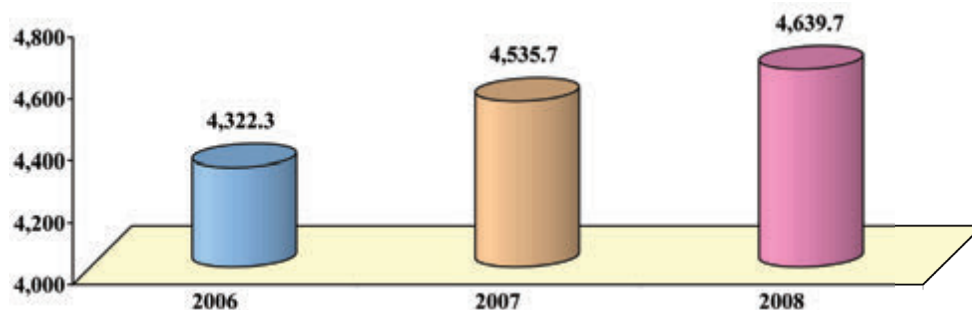
There had been a decline in some economic activities, such as agriculture, fishing, construction, transport, storage, and communications, whereas the size of other sectors has increased, as in the sectors of mining, manufacturing, water, and electricity, wholesale and retail trade, services, financial intermediation, public administration and defense, and household services.

**Table 1/8: GDP in WB and GS 2006-2008 at Constant
Prices: Base Year is 2004 (\$ million)¹**

Year	2006	2007	2008*
GDP	4,322.3	4,535.7	4,639.7

* Preliminary estimates (first release).

GDP in WB and GS 2006-2008 (\$ million)



Second: Economic Sectors

The performance of the economic sectors that formed the GDP of the year 2008, has reflected clear signs of confusion and imbalance, due to the difference in situations, occupation conditions, and siege between the WB and GS; the economic situation in the WB has relatively improved, while in GS the siege tightened and the suffering worsened.

1. Agriculture and Fishing

Agriculture is considered an important productive activity in the WB and GS. The agriculture sector plays a major role in the Palestinian economy, where agricultural exports constitute a significant share of foreign trade. In addition, the agriculture sector provides a lot of raw and primary materials to the various other economic sectors.

The area of cultivated land in the WB and GS was estimated by 1.835 million dunums (90.1% in the WB and 9.9% in the GS) in the agricultural year of 2006/2007; compared to 1.826 million dunums in the agricultural year of 2005/2006. The area planted with fruit trees had the largest share in the percentage of cultivated

land, estimated by 63.5% in the agricultural year of 2006/2007. Irrigated farming has been prevalent in GS, making up 73.3% of the total cultivated land there; the percentage of irrigated farming in the WB was estimated by 8.3%.²

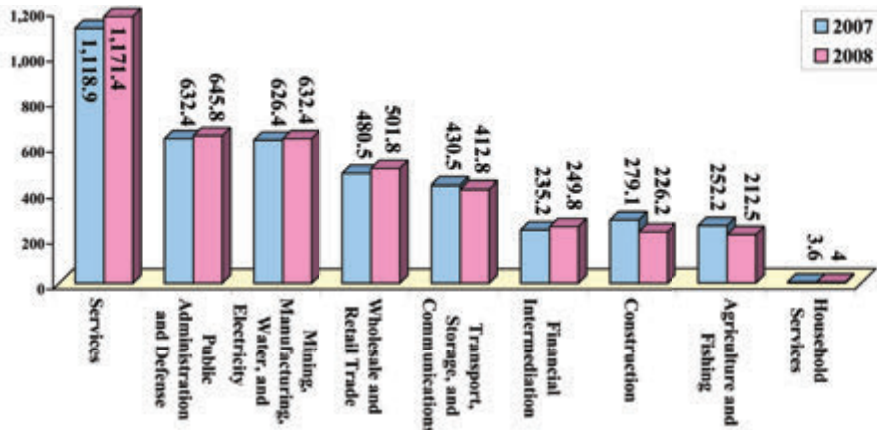
Preliminary estimates of the PCBS point out that the total value added by the agricultural and fishing economic activities in 2008 has dropped by \$39.7 million from the estimated \$252.2 million in 2007 to \$212.5 million in 2008, i.e. by 15.7%. The percentage of the contribution of the agriculture and fishing sector to the GDP was estimated by 4.6% (see table 2/8).

**Table 2/8: GDP in WB and GS by Economic Activity 2007-2008
at Constant Prices: Base Year is 2004 (\$ million)³**

Economic Activity	2007	2008*
Agriculture and Fishing	252.2	212.5
Mining, Manufacturing, Water, and Electricity	626.4	632.4
-Mining and Quarrying	17.6	15.9
-Manufacturing	450	455.7
-Electricity and Water Supply	158.8	160.8
Construction	279.1	226.2
Wholesale and Retail Trade	480.5	501.8
Transport, Storage, and Communications	430.5	412.8
Financial Intermediation	235.2	249.8
Services	1,118.9	1,171.4
- Real estate, Renting, and Commercial Activities	417.5	419.6
- Community, Social, and Personal Services	69.9	74.4
- Restaurants and Hotels	62.4	101.7
- Education	442.9	448.2
- Health and Social Work	126.2	127.5
Public Administration and Defense	632.4	645.8
Household Services	3.6	4
Minus: Financial Intermediation Services Indirectly Measured (FISIM)	-257.1	-263.5
Plus: Custom Duties	283.9	285.4
Plus: Net Value Added Tax (VAT) on Imports	450.1	561.1
Gross Domestic Product	4,535.7	4,639.7

* Preliminary Estimates (first release).

GDP in WB and GS by Economic Activity 2007-2008 (\$ million)



2. Mining, Manufacturing, Water, and Electricity

The mining and manufacturing sector in the WB and GS has faced many difficulties and problems concerning the industry’s structure and size, the inability to find new markets for its products, in addition to the shortage in the necessary funding, equipment, and industrial needs, lack of raw materials, and irregular receiving of the imported materials. The industrial sector has also suffered from lower productive efficiency rates, higher production costs, a notable deficiency in the specialized technical expertise, and the absence of order and planning within the industrial sector. These problems and obstacles are linked to the Israeli occupation policies and measures of preventing or hindering any development or growth in the WB and GS industrial sectors.

The final results of the 2007 construction census and its updates until 31/12/2008, point out that the number of economic facilities identified in the WB and GS between 20/10/2007 and 10/11/2007 is approximately 132,938 facilities, with the exception of the facilities in eastern areas of Jerusalem that Israel forcefully annexed to its territory in 1967. Among the earlier, 94,270 facilities are located in the WB and 38,668 in the GS. The number of facilities of the private sector, public sector, and government companies’ that are active in both the WB and GS was estimated by 109,476 facilities, at which 299,754 workers work.⁴

Preliminary statistical estimates indicate a slight growth in the value added to the mining, manufacturing, water, and electricity sector in the WB and GS during the year 2008, from \$626.4 million in 2007 to \$632.4 million, which amounts to an approximately 1% growth rate. The manufacturing sector makes up the

largest share of this sector's activities, estimated by 72.1% in 2008. The mining, manufacturing, water, and electricity sector has contributed in 2008 approximately 13.6% of the GDP (see table 2/8).

3. Construction

The gross value added to the construction sector in the WB and GS has witnessed a decline in 2008, where it dropped from \$279.1 million in 2007 to \$226.2 million in 2008, i.e. by 19%. The contribution of the construction sector to the GDP in 2008 amounted to 4.9% (see table 2/8).

It should be noted that this sector has stopped its activities in the second half of 2007 in GS, after Israeli occupational forces imposed a complete closure on GS thus preventing the entrance of various materials required for construction activities, and the termination of all construction projects in GS, which suggests that the set back in this sector in GS was covered up mainly by the WB.

4. Wholesale and Retail Trade

Preliminary estimates indicate an increase by 4.4% in the value added to the retail and wholesale trade activity in the WB and GS in 2008, from \$480.5 million in 2007 to \$501.8 million. The contribution of this sector to the GDP in 2008 amounted to 10.8% (see table 2/8).

5. Transport, Storage, and Communication

According to the preliminary estimated data of 2008, the transport, storage, and communications sector in the WB and GS has dropped by 4.1%, from \$430.5 million in 2007 to \$412.8 million in 2008. The contribution of this sector to the GDP in 2008 was 8.9% (see table 2/8).

6. Financial Intermediation

Preliminary estimates indicate the growth of the value added on the financial intermediation in the WB and GS during the year 2008 by 6.2%, as it rose from \$235.2 million in 2007 to \$249.8 million in 2008. The contribution of this sector to the 2008 GDP was estimated by 5.4% (see table 2/8).

7. Services

The total value added on the services sector has witnessed a 4.7% growth during 2008. The value of these activities rose from \$1,118.9 million in 2007

to an estimated \$1,171.4 million in 2008. The contribution of this sector to the GDP of 2008 amounted to 25.2%. With regards to the activities that constitute this sector, education made up 38.3% of the total sector activity, which amounts to \$448.2 million; followed by real estate, renting, and commercial services which contributed \$419.6 million and 35.8% of the total sector activity; the health and social work sector that constituted 10.9% of the total sector's activity i.e. \$127.5 million; the restaurants and hotels sector by \$101.7 million, and finally the community, social, and personal services activity sector that contributed \$74.4 million (see table 2/8).

The PCBS announced the results of the survey of the hotel activity in the WB and GS during the year 2008, that was carried on by comprehensively surveying all the hotel facilities in the WB and GS. The results revealed that the number of hotels operating in the WB and GS was 87 hotels in December 2008, with a total capacity of 4,346 rooms and 9,466 beds. The average number of hotel employees in the WB and GS during the year 2008 was 1,345 employees, 14% of whom were females.

Hotel activities have took up again, following the decline it has witnessed in 2002 when the Israeli measures, raids, and closures climaxed. Since 2003, the number of guests has gradually increased, from 62,812 guests then to 316,866 guests in 2007 and 446,133 in 2008, keeping in mind that the number of guests in 2000 was 355,711. Accompanying the above mentioned gradual increase in the number of guests, was the improvement in all other major hotel activity indicators, such as the number of nights booked and the average room and bed occupation rate of the hotel. Until 2008, the room occupation rate of the hotels in 2000 was the highest since 1995, being 32%; in 2002 this rate dropped to 10%; in 2007, it increased to 25%; in 2008, it rose to 36%.⁵

8. Public Administration and Defense

The value added on the public administration and defense sector has witnessed a 2.1% growth rate between 2007 and 2008, increasing from \$632.4 million to \$645.8 million. The contribution of this sector to the GDP in 2008 was estimated by 13.9%. Factors behind this growth are believed to be related to the increase in government expenditure in the form of salaries due to the employees in the public sector and security apparatus (see table 2/8).

Third: The GDP per Capita

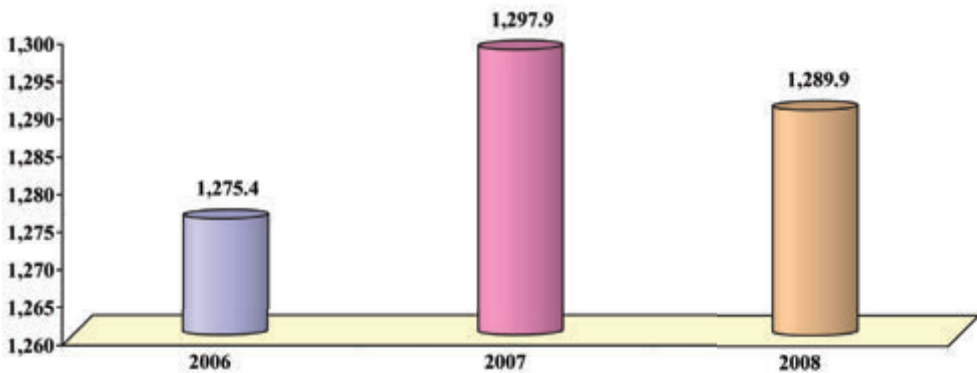
Table 3/8 presents the change in the GDP per capita in the WB and GS during the years 2006-2008 at constant prices. The figures are as indicated by the PCBS preliminary estimates. It is remarkable that the GDP per capita has slightly dropped in 2008 by 0.6%, from \$1,297.9 in 2007 to \$1,289.9 in 2008. It seems however that the decline in the GDP per capita was in GS because of the choking Israeli siege while in the WB it increased, thus almost balancing the average overall change.

Table 3/8: GDP per Capita in WB and GS 2006-2008 at Constant Prices: Base Year is 2004 (dollars)⁶

Year	2006	2007	2008*
Estimated GDP per capita	1,275.4	1,297.9	1,289.9

* Preliminary estimates (first release).

GDP per Capita in WB and GS 2006-2008 (dollars)



Fourth: Public Finance

Before proceeding to this topic, it is important to state again the exceptional conditions witnessed by the PA in the WB and GS since mid 2007, with the WB under the control of the Presidency and Ramallah’s emergency government; and GS under the control of the dismissed government of Hamas headed by Isma‘il Haniyyah. In these conditions, any improvement in the financial situation will not necessarily reflect on both regions; while the WB witnessed a relative improvement, GS had been increasingly suffering from the seige, hardships, and poverty.

A statistical report released by PCBS indicated that the process of collecting government revenues has increased according to the Ministry of Finance's data; by 23.2% in 2008 compared to 2007. The revenues collected in 2008 amounted to \$1.6 billion. This increase is attributed to the continued flow of the clearance taxes collected by the Israelis, and the improved performance of local tax-collectors, in addition to the increase in non-tax revenues. This increase in government revenues was however accompanied by an increase in public expenditure in 2008 by 11.1% compared to 2007. One of the main reasons for this increase is the payment of all the dues and arrears related to the government sector, especially the employee salaries, where the number of employees in 2008 was estimated by 165 thousands.⁷

1. Public Revenues

The report of the Palestinian Ministry of Finance on the PA's financial operations, in terms of revenues, expenditures and finance resources, that in 2008 the total revenues reached \$1.57 billion from an estimated \$1.27 billion in 2007, i.e. a growth rate of 23.3%. However, the local revenues in 2008 did not exceed \$562 million of the total revenues, \$273 million of which were tax revenues and \$234 million were non tax revenues. Most of the revenues were clearance revenues (resulting from the Palestinian exports and imports) collected by the Israeli government, as these increased from \$896 million in 2007 to an estimated \$1.12 billion in 2008, i.e. by 25.2% (see table 4/8).

2. Public Expenditures

In the same report referred to above, the Palestinian Ministry of Finance data estimated the total expenditure for 2008 by \$2.83 billion, compared to \$2.54 billion in 2007, i.e. an increase rate of 11.1%. Wages and salaries made up 51.4% of the 2008 public expenditure, amounting to \$1.45 billion, in comparison to \$1.28 billion (50.5%) in 2007.

The deficit in the PA budget was covered by the foreign budgetary support, which amounted to \$1.89 billion in 2008 (see table 4/8).

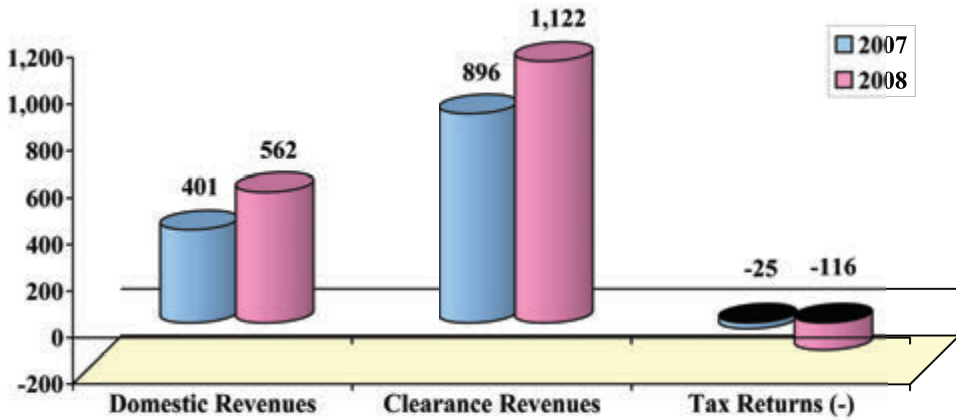
Table 4/8: Report on the Financial Operations of the Palestinian National Authority: Revenues, Expenditures, and Finance Resources 2007-2008 (\$ million)⁸

Financial Operations	2007	2008	
	Actual	Budget	Actual
Net Public Revenues	1,272*	1,632	1,568
Domestic Revenues	401*	564*	562
- Tax Revenues	202	253	273
- Non-Tax Revenues	122	166	234
- Profit Distribution**	78	146	55
Clearance Revenues	896	1,087	1,122
Tax Returns (-)	-25	-20	-116
- Value Added Tax	25	20	47
- Petroleum	0	0	69
Total Current Expenditure and Net Lending	2,543	2,845	2,825
Salaries and Wages	1,283	1,481	1,453
Other Current Expenses	725	964	925
- Operating Expenses	239	399	291
- Transfer Expenses	486	565	634
Net Lending	535	400	447
Deficit in Budget before financing	-1,271	-1,213	-1,257
Developmental Costs	131	492	250
Net Change in Arrears	-23	-217	-387
Total Deficit before Finance	-1,426*	-1,922	-1,894
Finance	1,426	1,922	1,894
- Budget subsidization	1,011	1,634	1,763
- Finance of Developmental Costs	100	492	250
- Withheld Clearance Revenues that have been released	421		15
- Bank Finance	-106	-204	-134
Exchange Price	4.1	3.6	3.6

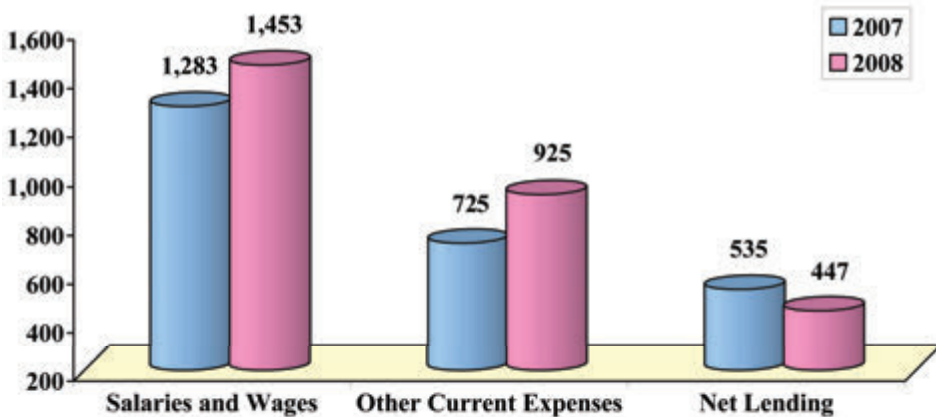
* It seems that some estimation and rounding operations have been done to the numbers presented by the Budget department in the Ministry of Finance; that caused the net revenues in 2007, the domestic revenues in 2007 and the domestic revenues in the budget of 2008, to be less by around one million dollars than the sum of its detailed classifications mentioned below it. This remark also applies to the estimate of total deficit before finance.

** This figure in 2008 does not include the profits of investment fund that amounted to \$197 million and were used to pay the PA's debt to the fund.

PA Revenues 2007-2008 (\$ million)



PA Expenditures 2007-2008 (\$ million)



Fifth: Grants and Foreign Aid

Despite the harsh blockade imposed on the elected Palestinian government since the beginning of 2006, the total aid received by the PA from various donors during 2006 amounted to about \$738.2 million. In 2007, foreign aid and grants amounted to \$1.416 billion according to the Ministry of Finance data.

It is worth mentioning in this context that a part of this aid was received without coordinating with the government. Instead they were received in unsystematic flows of content, management, or dates; which diminished the possibility of managing, directing, planning or investing this aid on the basis of a unified plan or vision. This weakened the financial system of the PA and weakened its ability to influence the developments of the economy.

We must note also that the flow of aid has resumed directly to the PA from donor countries and organizations, immediately after forming the caretaker government in Ramallah; where earlier the flow took indirect forms.

In this context, 87 countries and international organizations have pledged \$7.4 billion in aid to the PA over a period of three years, during the “International Donors’ Conference for the Palestinian State” held in Paris on 17/12/2007. The PA had then presented a three-year fiscal framework (the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan - PRDP) that covers the course of 2008-2010. The plan gives off a rescue nature and includes reconstruction of the infrastructure and providing the salaries of the PA employees. It states three major foundations for actual development in the WB and GS; these are:

1. The enforcement of law and order in the WB and GS; and carrying out vital reforms that enable the PA to establish a sustainable economy and active institutions that would form the nucleus of the independent state.
2. The removal of all obstacles put by Israel that hinder the progress of the government and economy, and consequently the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.
3. Requesting the continued support of the international community to the Palestinian people and their steadfastness; and providing coordinated and flexible support to the PA.

The plan promises the donors with achieving real change and development in four areas: good governance, social sector, private sector, and infrastructure. The execution of this plan is based on the implementation of the three aforementioned foundations.

Until the date of writing this report, no specific figures exist of the aid and grants received by the PA during 2008; the prime minister of the PA government in Ramallah, Salam Fayyad, indicated at the end of October 2008 that the total

amount received by the PA since the Paris Conference reached \$1.6 billion.⁹ It appears as though most of the aid goes towards paying off the deficit in the budget (about 95%), whereas the rest goes towards the subsidization of projects, which is the opposite of what was happening in 2000 (before *al-Aqsa Intifadah*), when most of the aid went to the subsidization of projects.¹⁰

The EU have pledged to contribute 440 million Euros (\$631 million) during 2008; the US pledged \$550 million and Australia \$45 million during the same period; while France, Germany, Britain, Spain, Canada, and Sweden have pledged amounts that totaled \$2.036 billion on the course of three years (2008-2010).¹¹

It seems as though the PA in Ramallah complained about the fact that the Arab countries had not fulfilled their pledges made at the Beirut Summit, which involved providing annual financial aid amounting to \$660 million. According to a report published by *The Washington Post*, then republished in some parts by *al-Ahram* and *al-Quds* newspapers at the end of July 2008, most of the Arab countries had not fully paid what it had pledged; the amounts received by the PA then actually amounted to \$1.27 billion less than what was pledged. The report mentioned four countries that did fulfill its pledge or was on the way to, and these were Saudi Arabia, Algeria, the UAE, and Qatar.

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have pledged to contribute annually \$92.4 million each. Saudi Arabia gave \$561 million out of \$647 million due on the course of seven years (2002-2008), whereas Kuwait gave \$199 million. As for Algeria, it gave \$274 million out of the \$374 million it pledged (i.e. 73.2%). The UAE gave \$259 million out of the \$301 million it pledged, \$43 million annually, i.e. 86%.

Qatar had paid the pledged \$180.3 million on the course of the seven years (\$25.8 million annually), and added another \$52.4 million i.e. a total of 129% of the total amount pledged. Libya however, contributed only \$67 million throughout the seven years, out of a total \$79 million pledged annually, i.e. the total amount it pledged for the seven years is \$469 million and it have only paid 14.3% of it. Similarly, Oman had given only \$19 million out of \$91 million pledged (i.e. 20.9%), it has pledged to pay \$13 million annually.¹²

The UAE later announced that it had fulfilled its pledge by giving \$42 million at the beginning of August 2008.¹³ Saudi Arabia gave the PA in Ramallah \$100 million at the end of August 2008, which made the former's total contribution

\$661 million,¹⁴ which exceeds the total amount it pledged by \$14 million. As for Kuwait, it presented \$80 million at the end of August 2008 via the World Bank, thus increased its actual contribution to 43.1% of the amount pledged for the period 2002-2008.¹⁵

It seems that the official Arab interaction has increased after the Israeli aggression on GS (27/12/2008-18/1/2009), when the Arab countries pledged about two billion dollars, one billion of which was pledged by Saudi Arabia, \$500 million by Kuwait, \$250 million by Qatar, and \$200 million by Algeria.

Sixth: The Israeli Siege and Closure

Despite the fact that the siege isn't news for the Palestinians, but had been a characteristic of the Israeli occupation and a vital part of the Occupier's policy; the damages and losses inflicted on the Palestinian economy, especially in GS during 2008, were unprecedented, as a result of the escalation of this siege and the cruelty of its measures. The situation was made worse with the vicious Israeli aggression on GS at the end of 2008.

1. Economic Losses due to the Israeli Siege on GS

After Hamas gained control of GS on 15/6/2007, Israel intensified its marine, ground, and air siege of GS, declaring it a "hostile entity". The Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, ordered on 18/11/2008 the "closure of all the crossings" into the GS.¹⁶ Israel also totally cut off fuel supplies to GS on 20/1/2008; which made GS totally blockaded (see table 5/8).

The Israeli decision to stop supplying GS with fuel had critical implications on the various economic, social, humanitarian, health, and educational life aspects. All the economic sectors totally collapsed and the Palestinian economy suffered great losses.

Table 5/8: Number of Total Closure, Partial Closure, and Operating Days of GS Crossings until the End of 2008 ¹⁷

Crossing	Total Closure (days)	Partial Closure (days)	Operating (days)	Period
Rafah	159	31	175	26/11/2005-31/12/2006
	308	-	57	1/1/2007-9/1/2008
	102	-	-	9/1/2008-19/4/2008
	163	20	-	19/6/2008-19/12/2008
Al-Mantar (Karni)	112	142	111	25/11/2005-24/11/2006
	121	56	188	2007
	114	-	-	10/1/2008-1/4/2008
	149	-	34	19/6/2008-19/12/2008
Beit Hanoun (Erez)	254	-	-	25/11/2005-24/11/2006
	365	-	-	2007
	366	-	-	2008
Sufa	186 for imports	-	179 for imports	24/11/2005-25/11/2006
	365 for workers		365 for workers	
	300	-	65	2007
	42	56	-	26/12/2007-1/4/2008
	45	83	-	26/6/2008-31/10/2008
Karm Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom)	314	-	51	24/11/2005-25/11/2006
	186	-	179	2007
	56	-	42	26/12/2007-1/4/2008
	127	-	56	19/6/2008-19/12/2008
Nahal Oz	62	-	303	24/11/2005-25/11/2006
	92	-	273	2007
	78	105	-	19/6/2008-19/12/2008

The Effects of the total closure of GS can be summed up in the following:

- The Private Sector: OCHA mentioned in a report that the private sector in GS, which provides 53% of the total job opportunities, suffered the most as a result of the closure and the lack of raw materials and commercial business opportunities. 75 out of the 110 thousands employees in the private sector were temporarily laid off due to the closing of the crossings, and the majority of private commercial businesses were closed.¹⁸

The Popular Committee Against Siege (PCAS) issued a report on 9/3/2008, in which it pointed out that the productive capacity of the private sector in GS has dropped to 11% of its full capacity since the complete closure was imposed on GS in mid June 2007. Preliminary estimates indicate that over 43% of private sector organizations have totally stopped their commercial activities and more than 55% of these organizations have decreased their commercial activities by more than 75%.¹⁹

- The Industrial Sector: The General Union of Palestinian Industries estimated the monthly losses of the industrial sectors in GS by about \$15 million since mid June 2007, which amounts to approximately \$277.5 million by the end of 2008. The data issued by the economic sectors indicate that the losses have surpassed \$200 million, according to the aforementioned report of the PCAS.²⁰ A following report, issued by the Committee on 25/11/2008, pointed out that around 97% of a total of 3,900 factories and workshops in GS have shut down; the remaining has suspended their activities due to the cutting off of electricity and the lack of gas and fuel. This added approximately 35 thousand more employees to the list of unemployed Gazans.²¹
- The Agricultural Sector: The OCHA has reported on 17/12/2008, among the consequences of the seige of GS, that about 40 thousand temporary and permanent job opportunities in the agriculture and fishing sectors were lost. The report detailed that the lack of necessary equipment parts, the restraints imposed by the Israeli army on the freedom to fish, and the deterioration of the marine life due to the disposal of sewage water in the sea; are some of the main factors affecting the fishing sector. As for the agricultural sector, the report stated that the ban imposed on exports and the lack of the basic inputs has led to the paralysis of huge sectors within the agriculture sector. The reports of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicate that 70% of the farmlands in Gaza are not irrigated at the present time, which resulted in gradual desertification. Moreover, the recurrent Israeli raids and incursions on GS have resulted in damages in the land, crops, and equipment, as well as in preventing the Palestinians from reaching their vast farmlands close to the buffer zone. The farmers and owners of poultry farms have suffered from a lack of chicken feed and cooking gas, and this caused the death of lots of

birds.²² According to the data of the Ministry of Agriculture, the daily loss rate due to the inability of farmers to export their products is estimated by \$150 thousand daily²³ i.e. \$55 million annual losses.

- The Commercial Sector: Figures released by PCAS indicate that the commercial crossings have been generally shut since 15/6/2007, when the siege has been most strictly imposed. Of an estimated 600 truckloads needed daily by the Gazans, only 10-15% is let through the crossings. Moreover, since 4/11/2008, Israel closed the crossings without allowing anything through, not even the 15% that was allowed before.²⁴ In addition, economic restrictions on cash shipments to Gaza imposed by Israel have created a lack of shekel currency in the local market. As a result, on 19/11/2008, UNRWA was forced to suspend its cash assistance program to support refugee “special hardship cases”.²⁵
- The Real Estate and Construction Sector: After the Israeli occupation authorities announced the discontinuation of the use of the customs code of GS, and the prohibition of importing raw materials such as cement and steel to the GS, the construction sector in GS has suffered from paralysis; all construction factories (13 tile factories, 30 cement factories, 145 marble factories, and 250 brick factories) were shut down, resulting in the loss of 3,500 jobs. Losses incurred as a result of suspending construction projects are estimated by more than \$350 million.

In addition, the UNDP has suspended all infrastructure construction contracts, such as the rehabilitation of streets, water, and sanitation, which is valued at about \$60 million. Yet worse, the UNRWA has suspended its employment programs estimated by \$93 million, and from which over 16 thousand people directly had benefited.²⁶ According to a report by the PCAS, published on 25/11/2008, 97% of real estate agencies in GS closed down as a result of the Israeli siege.²⁷

- Unemployment: Reporting about the effects of the siege of GS, the OCHA pointed out that the unemployment rate rose from 32.3% in the second quarter of 2007, to a record breaking 49.1% for the same time period in 2008. It added that the involuntary unemployment of over 100 thousand people, who are able to work, is considered one of the main factors of the crisis faced by

the Strip.²⁸ In this context, the PCAS reported on 25/11/2008 that there are 140 thousand unemployed people in GS due to the closure of the crossings and the continuing seige since two years.²⁹

- Poverty: The report of the PCAS, published on 25/11/2008, mentioned that 80% of the inhabitants of Gaza are living below the poverty line.³⁰

2. Economic Losses due to the Israeli Aggression on GS (27/12/2008-18/1/2009)

The PCBS revealed that GS has suffered direct economic losses estimated by \$1.9 billion as a result of the Israeli violent aggression. The direct losses in the infrastructure reached about \$1.2 billion. The report by the PCBS shows that the aggression resulted in the total destruction of 4,100 houses, as well as the partial destruction of 17 thousand houses; government buildings and security forces headquarters were also destroyed.³¹ A report by the OCHA brought attention to the fact that 18,035 displaced Palestinians were still homeless in the UNRWA shelters in GS, as the aggression ended.³² Figures released by the UNDP estimated the number of houses damaged or totally destroyed in GS by 14 thousand houses; additionally indicating that over 60% of the 400 surveyed schools in Gaza had been either partially or totally damaged.³³

According to the PCBS, losses of the economic activity in GS were estimated by \$3.9 million daily (see table 7/8), and \$86.7 million during the period of the aggression. Assuming a fixed decrease in the daily loss rate, and projecting the incurred losses in economic activity until the Palestinian economic activity in GS could be regained (estimated to take about a year); the losses of the period 18/1/2009-17/1/2010 are estimated by \$717.3 million. All in all, the Palestinian economic activities had lost about \$804 million due to the Israeli aggression on GS and its future consequences.³⁴

The head of the PCBS, Lu'ay Shabaneh, announced that the wide Israeli aggression has left GS a disaster area on all humanitarian, economic, health, and social levels.³⁵

Table 6/8: Direct Losses in the Infrastructure due to the Israeli Aggression on GS, PCBS - Ramallah³⁶

Structure	Number	Cost (\$ million)
Totally destroyed houses ⁽¹⁾	4,100	200
Partially destroyed houses and buildings ⁽¹⁾	17,000	82
Number of mosques totally or partially damaged ⁽¹⁾	92	12
Number of educational institutions (schools and universities) destroyed ⁽¹⁾	29	9.7
Security Centres and Headquarters ⁽²⁾	60	12.2
Ministerial Complex ⁽²⁾	1	25
Ministerial Buildings ⁽²⁾	16	43.5
Bridges ⁽²⁾	2	3
Headquarters of municipalities and local agencies/bodies ⁽³⁾	5	2.3
Gas Stations ⁽¹⁾	4	2
Furniture, vehicles, machines, equipments, and miscellaneous items within destroyed buildings ⁽¹⁾	-	1
Water and Sanitation lines (unit is line) ⁽⁴⁾	10	2.4
Farmland and the necessary supplies for its average consumption and infrastructure	-	170
Ambulances and Civil defense vehicles ⁽¹⁾	20	1.5
Electrical power stations ⁽¹⁾	10	10
Roads (kilometers)	50	2
Factories, money exchange shops, blacksmith workshops, and other commercial establishments	1,500	19
Fences of houses, factories, and workshops ⁽¹⁾	-	5
Other direct losses not included in the above ⁽¹⁾	-	22
Total sum of direct losses		624.6
Cost of rubble removal and worker wages ⁽¹⁾	-	600
Total sum of infrastructure and building losses		1,224.6

⁽¹⁾ Estimates of PCBS.

⁽²⁾ Estimates of PCBS based on preliminary evaluations of contractors.

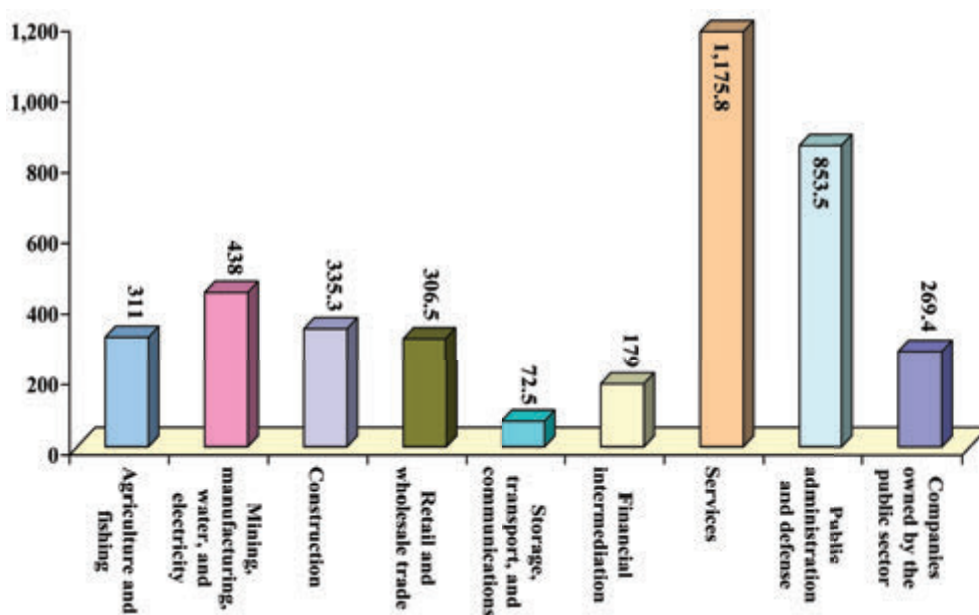
⁽³⁾ Estimates of Ministry of Local Government.

⁽⁴⁾ Estimates of Water Authority.

**Table 7/8: Daily Losses of Economic Activities in GS,
PCBS - Ramallah (\$ thousand)³⁷**

Economic Activity	Daily Losses
Agriculture and fishing	311
Mining, manufacturing, water, and electricity	438
Construction	335.3
Retail and wholesale trade	306.5
Storage, transport, and communications	72.5
Financial intermediation	179
Services	1,175.8
Public administration and defense	853.5
Companies owned by the public sector	269.4
Total	3,941

**Daily Losses of Economic Activities in GS, PCBS - Ramallah
(\$ thousand)**



On the other hand, according to the preliminary estimates of specialized committees hired by the Ministry of Planning in GS, the total losses of the Palestinian economy as a result of the Israeli aggression on GS were estimated by \$2.734 billion, distributed as in the following table:

**Table 8/8: Total Losses of the Palestinian Economy,
Ministry of Planning - Gaza (\$ million)³⁸**

Category	Estimated Losses
Direct losses	1,704
Indirect losses	214
Lost-Opportunity losses	287
Funding of emergency relief programs	529
Total losses	2,734

**Total Losses of the Palestinian Economy,
Ministry of Planning - Gaza (\$ million)**

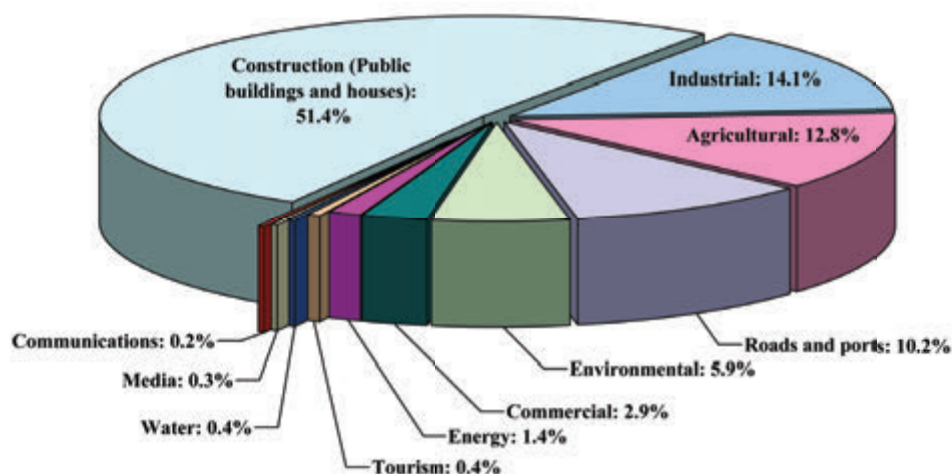


When examining the details of the direct losses, we find that the construction sector suffered the most damage, since its losses amount to 51.4% of the total direct losses, followed by the industrial sector, with 14.1%, and finally the agricultural sector with 12.8% of the total direct losses (see table 9/8).

**Table 9/8: Direct Losses Distribution Based on Economic Sector,
Ministry of Planning - Gaza³⁹**

Sector	Losses (\$ million)	Percentage %
Industrial	240	14.1
Commercial	50	2.9
Agricultural	218.2	12.8
Tourism	6.7	0.4
Energy	23.4	1.4
Water	6.5	0.4
Construction (public buildings and houses)	876.1	51.4
Roads and ports	173	10.2
Media	5.4	0.3
Communications	3.9	0.2
Environmental	100.5	5.9
Total	1,703.7	100

**Direct Losses Percentage Distribution Based on Economic Sector,
Ministry of Planning - Gaza**



3. Tunnels: An Exceptional Alternative and a Survival Tool

As the Israeli seige started to tighten on GS in 2006, the tunnel phenomenon in Rafah began to grow and expand as a way of smuggling all sorts of materials and goods. The climaxing intensity of the seige, led to a dramatic increase in the number of these tunnels, from around 20 tunnels in mid 2007 to an estimated 500 tunnels in November 2008; of various forms and purposes, with lengths ranging between 200-1,000 meters, and widths ranging from half a meter to two meters, whereas the height reaches about one and a half meters. The tunnels are dug about 8-15 meters under the ground, and the digging of these tunnels needs at least few weeks and could possibly take few months, and the cost of digging ranges between 20-100 thousand dollars, depending on the length of the tunnel (it costs about \$100 per meter).⁴⁰

Tunnels are used in one direction, to smuggle goods and materials into GS and not to export outside to Egypt or abroad which means that the economy of Gaza is purely a consumer economy. Figures estimate the monthly imports through tunnels by 35-40 million dollars. The annual profits made by the merchants, tunnel owners, and those working in the tunnels are estimated between 200-300 million dollars. At the beginning of September 2008, the Rafah municipality began to collect fees from the tunnel owners under the pretext of commercial activity across the borders; each tunnel owner had to pay ten thousand Shekels (equal to \$2,700). Those who don't pay are not allowed to continue digging their tunnels, and in case their tunnels were operating they would be closed. Although most of the goods are sold at high prices, some of the strategic goods are sold at half the price when compared to the goods imported from Israel, especially fuel and combustibles (gas oil, gasoline, and kerosene).

Noteworthy is that a large percentage of tunnel owners are young (25-40 years old), and that the number of tunnel workers is estimated by more than 12 thousand workers, excluding those working in related trade, transport, and distribution. Since the beginning of 2008 and until early December 2008, 49 Palestinians died in tunnels due to the lack of necessary security and safety measures and the unavailability of digging equipment and tools needed to remove rubble; not to mention the Israeli and Egyptian security pressures.⁴¹

The operations of transferring goods and commodities through the tunnels led to the increase of imports from Egypt to GS including “bag trade”, from \$30 million annually in the years 1994-2006 to an estimated \$650 million annually.⁴² This means that the tunnels were able, even if only partially, to alleviate the siege or break it; contributing in the reduction of the GS’s dependence on the Israeli economy, and increasing GS interaction with its Arab neighbors. The tunnels also have acted as an expression of the Gazan’s will to endure and survive, and their refusal to submit to the Israeli will; the tunnels have revealed the ability of the Palestinians to adapt to exceptionally harsh conditions. Their persistence and determination was mostly embodied with their ability to transfer weapons through the tunnels, which enabled the resistance to face the Israeli incursions and raids, especially the wide aggression taken by the Israeli against the Strip between 27/12/2008 and 18/1/2009.

Although the tunnels helped to breathe life into the Strip’s economy and generated work opportunities for thousands of Gazans, they remain a means to serve the consumption needs of GS but not their export needs; in addition, tunnels still involve high risks and instability. Nonetheless, the crucial national role it plays in facing the siege should be the first and foremost standard in evaluating it.

Seventh: Work, Unemployment, and Standard of Living

Estimates of poverty rates, based on the real consumption patterns, among Palestinian families in 2007 reached 34.5% (23.6% in the WB and 55.7% in GS). The monthly income of 57.3% of Palestinian families has been below the national poverty line (47.2% in the WB and 76.9% in GS). This is mainly due to the Israeli occupation and its policies and measures that led to the deformation of the Palestinian economy, the seizure of Palestinian natural resources, and increased dependence on the Israeli economy.

During the year 2008, the percentage of the joint workforce in the WB and GS was estimated by 41.3% (43% in the WB and 38.1% in GS). Rate of unemployment in the WB and GS was estimated by 26% (19% in the WB and 40.6% in GS). In the WB, the service sector employs the largest number of refugees being 30.6%,

followed by the commercial sector with 20.8%; whereas in GS, the service sector employs over half of the Strip workers estimated by 52%, followed by the agricultural, forestry, fishing and hunting sector with 28.4%. Average daily wages of hired Palestinians in the WB and GS was estimated by 91 Shekels i.e. approximately \$25; where the average wages in the WB was 98.6 Shekels i.e. \$27, and in GS 60.9 Shekels i.e. \$17. As for the economic dependency rate (the number of inhabitants, including workers, divided by the number of workers) in the WB and GS was estimated by 5.9 in 2008 being 4.9 in the WB and 8.5 in GS.⁴³

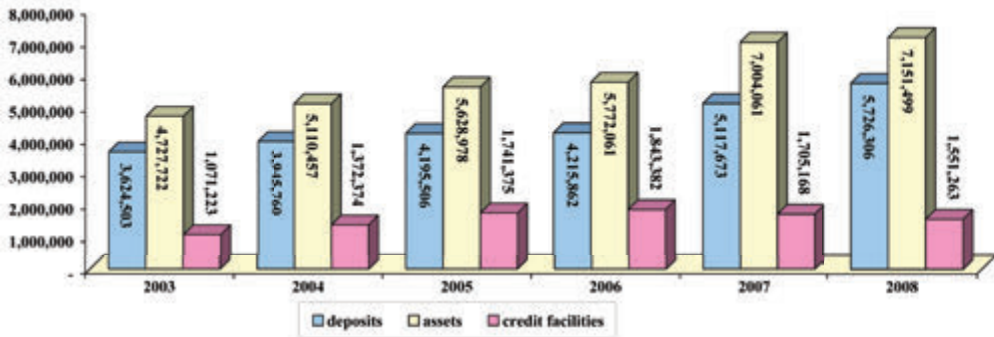
Noteworthy is that tens of thousands of Palestinian workers work illegally within the green line area, and do not have work permits. Some figures estimate the number of Palestinians working within the green line area by more than 50 thousand workers, whose status is in most cases illegal, thus they are abused by their employers, extorted, and sometimes not paid. Moreover, the majority of these workers are living under harsh and inhumane conditions, such as those living in abandoned buildings that lack basic services and installations.

Eighth: The Banking Sector

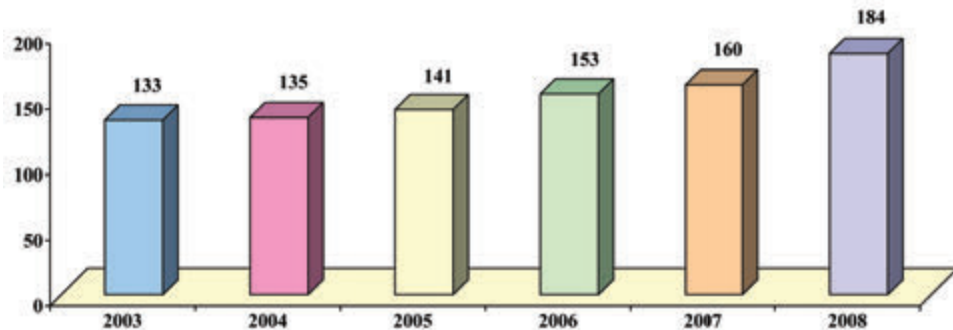
The banking sector has witnessed a huge growth between 2003 and 2008 with regards to the total amount of deposits and assets. Until 31/8/2008, the amount of deposits and assets reached respectively \$5.7 billion and \$7.15 billion. Despite this, the total amount of credit facilities has dropped to \$1.55 billion, i.e. only 27% of the amount of deposits, which is a low percentage compared to neighboring countries, where the percentage of total credit facilities to the total deposits is 68%; in developed countries 76%.

The number of bank branches in Palestine is 184 branches, which is 38.5% more than it was in 2003.⁴⁴

The Growth of the Banking Sector in Palestine 2003-31/8/2008
(\$ thousand)



The Number of Bank Branches in Palestine 2003-31/8/2008



Ninth: Consumer Price Index

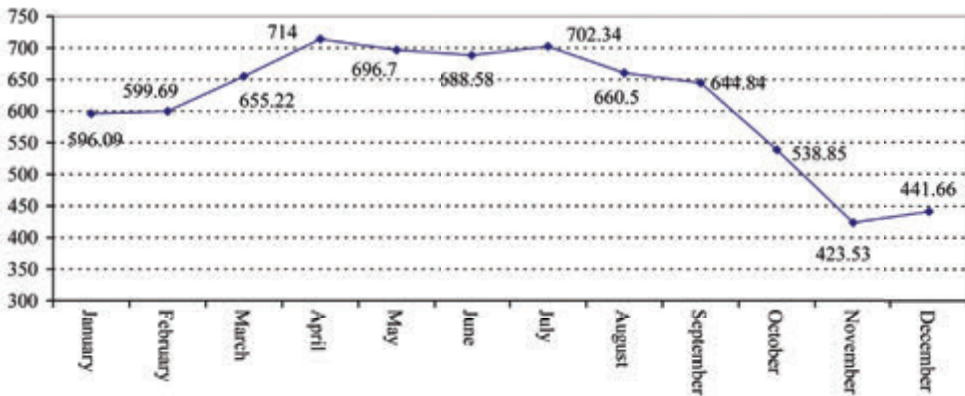
The PCBS announced that the Palestinian Consumer Price Index (CPI) in the WB and GS have increased by 9.89% in 2008 compared to 2007. The overall CPI with its 2004 base year (2004=100) reached 121.01 in 2008 while in 2007 it was 110.12.

The PCBS analysis of consumer price developments for 2008 indicated increases in the major expenditure groups, i.e. food and soft drinks by 17.26%, restaurants and cafés by 12.94%, transportation by 8.01%, housing by 7.64%, alcoholic beverages and tobacco by 7.44%, medical care by 7.25%, and furniture and household goods by 6.49%. Developments in consumer prices of other expenditure groups ranged from a slight decrease to a slight increase.⁴⁵

Tenth: The Palestine Securities Exchange

Figures of the Palestine Securities Exchange has indicated that the value of circulated shares in 2008 reached about \$1,200 million, compared to about \$800 million in 2007. The market capitalization value at the end of 2008 was about \$2.1 billion, whereas the number of transactions was over 152 thousand transactions. The volume of circulated shares was about 339 million. On the performance level, indicated by the major market indices, al-Quds index closed by the end of 2008 at 441.66 points, dropping 85.6 points from 2007 closing, i.e. 16.23%. This decrease is due to the fall of the indices of all the sectors, where the banking sector index fell by 3.41%, the industry sector by 17.73%, the insurance sector by 25.43%, the services sector by 2.78%, and the investment sector by 42.23%.⁴⁶

Al-Quds Index Monthly Closing Figures 2008



Eleventh: Foreign Trade

The Palestinian economy still suffers from structural imbalances due to the Israeli occupation; this economy is still a “dependent economy”, reliant on the Israeli political, security, and economic developments. Israel’s continued control of the crossings, airports, and borders greatly affects the Palestinian foreign trade. In addition, Israel purposely grants itself preferential and monopolizing privileges through its control, whereby it forces the Palestinian economy to deal with it as

a de facto or as an inevitable choice. Accordingly, Israel has been the origin of 86% of the imports of the PA territories in 2007, and the destination of 64% of the Palestinian exports.⁴⁷

As for 2008, Ofir Gendelman, CEO of the Israeli-Palestinian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IPCC) in Tel Aviv, pointed out that the Israeli-Palestinian trade amounted to 15 billion shekels (about four billion dollars), of which two billion (about half a billion dollars) worth of sales went to GS and 13 billion went to the WB (about \$3.5 billion).⁴⁸

The figures of the PCBS show that the total Palestinian exports of goods in 2008 amounted to \$426 million, dropping from \$513 million in 2007. Total imports were estimated by \$2.71 billion in 2008, also dropping from \$3.14 billion in 2007. The following table summarizes the preliminary results of the Palestinian foreign trade statistics with world countries; data according to the PCBS.

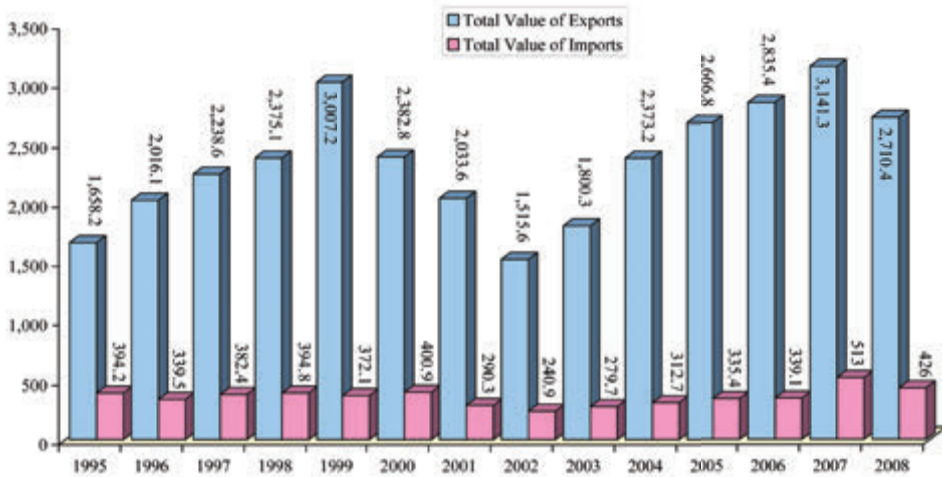
Table 10/8: Total Value of Exports, Imports, Net Balance, and Transaction Trade in Goods for WB* and GS 1995-2008 (\$ million)⁴⁹

Year	Total value of exports	Total value of imports	Net balance trade	Transaction trade
1995	394.2	1,658.2	-1,264	2,052.4
1996	339.5	2,016.1	-1,676.6	2,355.6
1997	382.4	2,238.6	-1,856.2	2,621
1998	394.8	2,375.1	-1,980.3	2,769.9
1999	372.1	3,007.2	-2,635.1	3,379.3
2000	400.9	2,382.8	-1,981.9	2,783.7
2001	290.3	2,033.6	-1,743.3	2,323.9
2002	240.9	1,515.6	-1,274.7	1,756.5
2003	279.7	1,800.3	-1,520.6	2,080
2004	312.7	2,373.2	-2,060.5	2,685.9
2005	335.4	2,666.8	-2,331.4	3,002.2
2006	339.1	2,835.4	-2,496.3	3,174.5
2007	513	3,141.3	-2,628.3	3,654.3
2008**	426	2,710.4	-2,284.4	3,136.4

* Excluding the areas of East Jerusalem which were annexed by Israel in 1967.

** Estimated data.

Total Value of Exports and Imports of WB and GS 1995-2008 (\$ million)



Conclusion

Not much could be expected or even demanded from the Palestinian economy under the measures taken by the occupation; for it is an “imprisoned” economy, totally controlled by the Israelis. Moreover, the Israeli occupation does not only control the economic life, it is also capable of stifling, paralyzing, or destroying it whenever it needs to. Such an occupation is unhesitant to use this fact as a means of pressuring and degrading the Palestinians.

The roots of the increasing Palestinian economic crisis are in the effective absence of a truly sovereign PA, when this authority is incapable of making sovereign decisions regarding the WB and GS areas, or of executing them. Moreover, the 1994 Paris Protocol on Economic Relations was designed to put additional restraints on the Palestinian economy and to consecrate its dependence on the Israeli economy.

The PA should have made plans to free itself from the occupation’s restraints and encourage the establishment of a public economic sector that contributes to producing part of the local market’s vital needs, and helps the private sector

increase its investments in the production sectors rather than building a sagging flaccid bureaucracy that costs the PA a lot more than it brings in revenues, making it subject to the conditions of the donor countries, which only further deepens the dependence of the Palestinian economy in the WB and GS on the Israeli economy.

The mismanagement and corruption that have characterized the PA led to an increased crisis within the Palestinian economy, increasing its subordination to foreign will and dictates. The only way out of this crisis would thus be the adoption of policies that seek economic independence by developing local production, encouraging productive investments, and making the economy open to other Arab economies and markets, also fighting corruption and implementing scientific management policies that are credible and transparent.

Supporting the survival of the Palestinian people in their country is a national, Arab, Islamic and humanitarian duty; breaking the blockade and reconstructing GS is at the heart of that duty. Israel should not be allowed to invest in the Palestinian suffering which it causes through economic measures, to achieve its political goals or to break the Palestinian's will and determination to resist and seek independence.

Endnotes

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- ¹² See *al-Quds* newspaper, 28/7/2008; and *al-Ahram*, 30/7/2008.
- ¹³ *Al-Khaleej*, 5/8/2008.
- ¹⁴ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 24/8/2008; and *al-Khaleej*, 24/8/2008.
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Arabic Publications

1. Mohsen Saleh and Basheer Nafi', editors, *al-Taqrir al-Istratiji al-Filastini li Sanat 2005* (The Palestinian Strategic Report 2005), Beirut, 2006.
2. Mohsen Saleh, editor, *al-Taqrir al-Istratiji al-Filastini li Sanat 2006* (The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006), Beirut, 2007.
3. Mohsen Saleh, editor, *al-Taqrir al-Istratiji al-Filastini li Sanat 2007* (The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007), Beirut, 2008.
4. Mohsen Saleh, editor, *al-Taqrir al-Istratiji al-Filastini li Sanat 2008* (The Palestinian Strategic Report 2008), Beirut, 2009.
5. Mohsen Saleh and Wa'el Sa'd, editors, *Mukhtarat min al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2005* (Selected Palestinian Documents for the Year 2005), Beirut, 2006.
6. Mohsen Saleh and Wa'el Sa'd, editors, *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2006* (Palestinian Documents for the Year 2006), Beirut, 2008.
7. Mohsen Saleh and Wa'el Sa'd, editors, *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2007* (Palestinian Documents for the Year 2007), Beirut, 2009.
8. Hasan Ibhais and Wa'el Sa'd, *al-Tatawwurat al-Amniyyah fi al-Sultah al-Filastiniyyah 2006-2007* (Security Developments in the Palestinian Authority 2006-2007), The Security File of the Palestinian Authority (1), Beirut, 2008.
9. Mohsen Saleh, editor, *Sira' al-Iradat: Al-Suluk al-Amni li Fatah wa Hamas wa al-Atraf al-Ma'niyyah 2006-2007* (Conflict of Wills between Fatah and Hamas and Other Relevant Parties 2006-2007), The Security File of the Palestinian Authority (2), Beirut, 2008.
10. Mariam Itani, *Sira' al-Salahiyyat bayna Fatah wa Hamas fi Idarat al-Sulta al-Filastiniyyah 2006-2007* (Conflict of Authorities between Fatah and Hamas in Managing the Palestinian Authority 2006-2007), Beirut, 2008.

11. Wael Sa'ad, *Al-Hisar: Dirasah hawla Hisar al-Sha'b al-Filastini wa Muhawalat Isqat Hukumat Hamas* (The Siege: A Study on the Siege of the Palestinian People & Attempts to Overthrow the Government of Hamas), Beirut, 2006.
12. Mohammad 'Arif Zakauallah, *Al-Din wa al-Siyasah fi America: Su'ud al-Masihyyin al-Injiliyyin wa Atharuhum* (Religion and Politics in America: The Rise of Christian Evangelists and their Impact), translated by Amal Itani, Beirut, 2007.
13. Ahmad Sa'id Nufal, *Dawr Isra'il fi Taftit al-Watan al-'Arabi* (The Role of Israel in the Fragmentation of the Arab World), Beirut, 2007.
14. Mohsen Saleh, editor, *Munazzamat al-Tahrir al-Filastiniyyah: Taqyeem al-Tajrubah wa I'adat al-Bina'* (Palestinian Liberation Organization: Evaluating the Experience and the Restructuring), Beirut, 2007.
15. Mohsen Saleh, editor, *Qira'at Naqdiyyah fi Tajrubat Hamas wa Hukumatihha 2006-2007* (Critical Assessments of the Experience of Hamas & its Government 2006-2007), Beirut, 2007.
16. Khaled Waleed Mahmoud, *Afaq al-Amn al-Isra'ili: Al-Waqi' wa al-Mustaqbal* (Prospects of the Israeli Security: Reality and the Future), Beirut, 2007.
17. Najwa Hassawi, *Huquq al-Laji'in al-Filastiniyyin: Bayna al-Shar'iyah al-Duwaliyyah wa al-Mufawadat al-Filastiniyyah al-Isra'iliyyah* (The Rights of Palestinian Refugees: Between International Legitimacy and the Palestinian-Israeli Negotiations), Beirut, 2008.
18. Mohsen Saleh, editor, *Awda' al-Laji'in al-Filastiniyyin fi Lubnan* (Conditions of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon), Beirut, 2008.
19. Ibrahim Ghushah, *Al-Mi'thanah al-Hamra': Sirah Thatiyyah* (The Red Minaret: Memoirs of Ibrahim Ghushah), Beirut, 2008.
20. *Durus Mustakhlash min Harb Lubnan (Tammuz 2006): Taqrir Lajnat al-Kharijiyyah wa al-Amn fi al-Knesset al-Isra'ili* (Lessons Derived from the Second War on Lebanon (July 2006): Report of the Committee of Security and Foreign Affairs in the Israeli Knesset (Issued in December 2007)), translated by 'Adnan Abu 'Amer, Beirut, 2008.
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22. Qusai A. Hamed, *Al-Wilayat al-Muttahidah wa al-Tahawwul al-Dimuqrati fi Filastin* (The United States of America & the Democratic Transformation Process in Palestine), Beirut, 2009.
23. Mohsen Saleh, Editor, *Al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah fi Lubnan munthu al-Nash'a hatta 1975* (*Al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah* in Lebanon: From its Beginnings till 1975), Beirut, 2009.
24. 'Abbas Isma'il, *'Unsurriyyat Isra'il* (The Israeli Racism), Book Series: Am I not a Human (1), Beirut, 2008.
25. Hasan Ibhais, Mariam Itani and Sami al-Salahat, *Mu'anat al-Mar'ah al-Filastiniyyah tahta al-Ihtilal al-Isra'ili* (The Suffering of the Palestinian Women under the Israeli Occupation), Book Series: Am I not a Human (2), Beirut, 2008.
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38. *Al-Transfer (Tard al-Filastiniyyin) fi al-Fikr wa al-Mumarasat al-Isra'iliyyah* (The Transfer (The Expulsion of the Palestinians) in the Israeli Thought & Practices), Information Report (10), Information Department, al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, Beirut, 2009.
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43. Oded Eran, Editor in Chief, *Qira'at Isra'iliyyah Istratijiyyah: al-Taqdir al-Istratiji al-Sadir 'an Ma'had Abhath al-Amn al-Qawmi al-Isra'ili* (Israeli Strategic Assessment: Strategic Assessment Issued by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)), translated by 'Adnan Abu 'Amer, Beirut, 2009.
44. Sameh Khaleel al-Wadeya, *Al-Mas'uliyah al-Dawliyyah 'an Jara'im al-Harb al-Isra'iliyyah* (The International Responsibility for Israeli War Crimes), Beirut, 2009.
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47. Mohsen Saleh, editor, *Dirasat fi al-Turath al-Thaqafi li Madinat al-Quds* (Studies on the Cultural Heritage of Jerusalem), Beirut, 2010.

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48. Mohsen Saleh and Basheer Nafi', editors, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2005*, Beirut, 2007.
49. Mohsen Saleh, editor, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2008*, Beirut, 2010.
50. Muhammad 'Arif Zakaullah, *Religion and Politics in America: The Rise of Christian Evangelists and their Impact*, Beirut, 2007.
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54. Mohsen Saleh and Ziad al-Hasan, *The Political Views of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon as Reflected in May 2006*, Beirut, 2009.
55. Ishtiaq Hossain and Mohsen Saleh, *American Foreign Policy & The Muslim World*, Beirut, 2009.

This Report

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2008 is the fourth in a series of annual resourceful scientific studies. This Report aims at monitoring the Palestinian issue through an informative and analytical approach. The Report covers the Palestinian internal political situation, the Israeli scene and the Israeli-Palestinian relations. It focuses on the Arab, Islamic, and International stances towards the Palestinian issue, in addition to the issues concerning the Land and holy sites. The Report also analyzes the Palestinian demographic and economic indicators. Hence, it provides a comprehensive meticulous reading of the current situation.

This Report is distinguished for its updated information till the end of 2008 and for its outstanding team of academics and experts.

Despite the heat and sensitivity of the issues discussed, the Report did its best endeavors to be professional, scientific and objective. Thus, this Report is an unequivocal addition to the area of the Palestinian studies.

The Palestinian Strategic Report

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