

# The Palestine Issue

## *Historical Background & Contemporary Developments*



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# **Chapter Six**

*The Palestine Issue 2000–2011*

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# The Palestine Issue 2000–2011

## *Introduction*

In the first decade of the 21st century new aspects of the Palestine issue have emerged, for many factors and changes affected it, however, they did not lead to any decisive changes. Among these important events were:

- *Al-Aqsa Intifadah* (2000–2005), which dealt a blow to Israeli security and economic pillars, while vividly highlighted the Palestinian people's attachment to their rights, land, and holy sites.
- The rise of Hamas as a major player in the Palestinian arena, after it played an essential role in *al-Aqsa Intifadah* and won legislative elections. It formed the 10th Palestinian government, controlled GS, successfully thwarted the Israeli aggression on the Strip, and maintained great popularity both inside and outside Palestine.
- The Palestinian schism and the struggle between the Fatah and Hamas movements, the geographical division in the PA administration between Ramallah and GS, and the paralysis of PLO institutions.
- The increase of religious and right-wing extremism in Israeli society, in addition to the weakness and disintegration of leftist trends.
- The peace process reaching a dead-end, after Israel's insistence on continuing to build settlements in the WB, despite the PA executing all its obligations as specified in the Road Map.
- The "war on terror" waged by the US, and its occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, along with its failure to impose its vision regarding the Middle East or to resolve the Palestine issue.
- The changes and revolutions witnessed in the Arab world since 2011 and the successful revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia; the move towards the establishment of regimes that reflect the will of the people. This is in addition to a new strategic reality for Israel in which more states in the region are supportive of resistance movements, and the unbalancing of the traditional

setup of the “moderate states axis” whose policies have been harmonious with US interests in the region.

- The emergence of Turkey as a major regional player, with an increased tendency to support the Palestine issue and distance itself from Israel.

## ***First: The Aggression and the Resistance***

### ***1. Al-Aqsa Intifadah***

The *al-Aqsa Intifadah* began on 29/9/2000, following Likud leader Ariel Sharon’s provocative visit to *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 28/9/2000. The visit was supported by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who sent 600 soldiers to accompany Sharon, mobilizing more than one thousand soldiers and policemen in Jerusalem and its neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup> Muslims decided to defend the mosque, and the first confrontations led to five deaths and more than a 100 injuries. The elements for igniting the situation were in place, as the peace process had reached a dead end, Israel’s plans for Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque were confirmed, and the Israelis continued to confiscate land and expand settlements.



• Sharon “storms”  
*al-Aqsa Mosque* 2000

In a secret meeting, on 25/10/2000, Ehud Barak stated that the only solution is to push the situation towards explosion.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps he wanted to show more strength and gain more popularity among Israelis. He wanted to exploit all of this to halt the peace process or put it through successive crises, hence exert more pressure on the PA, which, as past years had proved, has made concessions, retreat, and has lowered the ceiling of its demands.

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The *Intifadah* indicated that:

1. The Muslim *Ummah* (Nation) is still alive, despite the many blows, the spirit of resistance and sacrifice had not died. Indeed, tens of thousands, if

not hundreds of thousands of demonstrators staged protests in almost every country in the Muslim world, from Rabat in the far west of the Muslim world to Jakarta in the far east, in support of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Jerusalem and Palestine. These protests supported resistance and offered donations; a glimpse of the huge potential of Islamic unity over Palestine.

2. The Palestine issue unites Muslims, and motivates them to overcome their differences and focus on their common challenge represented by the Israeli occupation. This issue has become the Muslim world's central issue, for no other issue or enemy would bring Muslims together this way.
3. The *Intifadah* dealt a strong blow to the peace process and normalization with Israel, while the resistance option emerged stronger.
4. This *Intifadah* was reflected in people's manner of thinking and daily lives, hostility increased against Israel and the US, and resistance and unity were reinforced. The masses responded to the calls for boycotting US and Israeli goods, and millions of people changed their daily eating, drinking, clothing, transport, communication and entertainment habits. Thus a popular socio-educational school has emerged, with results the like of which reform movements need years to reach. Even more, US companies had to publish ads stating that they were not related to Israel, and to make donations to the *Intifadah* victims. This was the case for McDonald's, where the license holders of McDonalds franchises in the KSA pledged to donate one Saudi riyal (about \$0.27) to Palestinian children's hospitals for each meal sold during Ramadan.<sup>3</sup>
5. The importance of the media and its role in mobilization was highlighted, as Muslims were able to break the Western pro-Israeli media circle through Arab satellite channels, internet and email, especially during the first stages of the *Intifadah*.

The *Intifadah* was thus characterized by broad popular participation all around Palestine, all Palestinian movements included. Simultaneously, it was characterized by extreme Israeli oppression, including killing children and innocents, and using internationally prohibited weapons.

In 2005, the wave of *al-Aqsa Intifadah* subsided as a result of the circumstances that followed the death of Yasir ‘Arafat, the election of Mahmud ‘Abbas as PA president, and the preoccupation of Palestinians in GS and the WB with the municipal elections and the preparation for the legislative elections. This was in addition to the announcement of the Palestinian factions on 22/1/2005 of unilateral appeasement, followed by a ceasefire announcement between the PA and Israel on February 8th.

Between 28/9/2000 and 31/12/2005, 4,242 Palestinians were killed, including 793 children and 270 women. The number of targeted killings reached 376, and 140 persons (including children, women, and old people suffering from heart and kidney disease, and cancer) died because of Israeli hurdles and checkpoints, while 46,068 were wounded.<sup>4</sup> Despite the announcement of Palestinian appeasement and the decline of the *Intifadah*, the number of prisoners increased from around 7,800 in early 2005 to around 9,200 by the end of the same year. Moreover, 3,495 Palestinians were arrested during 2005, of whom 1,600 remained jailed.<sup>5</sup>



• Yasir ‘Arafat traveled to a military hospital near Paris for treatment 2004

During *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, Yasir ‘Arafat was put under siege in his Ramallah headquarters for two and a half years. He passed away in mysterious circumstances on 11/11/2004.

Several Hamas leaders also were killed, such as Jamal Salim and Jamal Mansur on 31/7/2001, Salah Shehadeh on 22/7/2002, and Isma‘il Abu Shanab on 21/8/2003. Hamas was dealt one of its strongest blows when its spiritual leader and founder Sheikh Ahmad Yasin passed away on 22/3/2004, followed by ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Rantissi on 17/4/2004. Moreover, 604 members of Al-Qassam Brigades were killed during *al-Aqsa Intifadah* (28/9/2000–end of 2005), Abu ‘Ali Mustafa, the Secretary General of the PFLP was assassinated by the Israelis, on 27/8/2001.





• Abu 'Ali Mustafa



• Jamal Mansur



• Jamal Salim



• Salah Shehadeh



• Isma'il Abu Shanab



• Sheikh Ahmad Yasin (left) and the site of his assassination; a pool of blood and the remains of his wheelchair can be seen



• Abdul 'Aziz al-Rantissi





• Demolished houses



• Demolished educational institutions



• Uprooted trees

71,470 houses were totally or partially demolished, and 316 educational institutions were bombed. Moreover, 43 schools were turned into military barracks. The Israelis uprooted and destroyed one million and 355 thousand trees. The unemployment rate reached 28.4% in 2005, and the poverty rate in the WB and GS stayed at 42% until the end of 2004 (63.2% in the GS, 31.2% in the WB). According to estimates, the Palestinian economy lost around \$15.6 billion between the start of the *Intifadah* and 29/9/2005.<sup>6</sup>

All Palestinian factions took part in military operations. According to Israeli estimates, 22,406 resistance operations were executed between 29/9/2000 and 24/7/2005.<sup>7</sup> Hamas had a prominent role in self-immolation operations that destabilized security in Israel. 135 self-immolation operations took place until 1/12/2005, of which Hamas executed 61 and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and the PIJ conducted many others.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades focused on shooting settlers and Israeli forces in the WB and GS. As for the PIJ, it conducted several strong resistance operations that left a great impact. Also, the PFLP and DFLP executed many operations. Among the noteworthy operations was the PFLP assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi, on 17/10/2001. Ze'evi was a former army general and an extremist and his killing was in retaliation for the assassination of the PFLP's Secretary General Abu 'Ali Mustafa.



• Rehavam Ze'evi

Despite their relative small number, the self-immolation operations were most effective. Those who defend such operations said that Palestinians under the Israeli brutal occupation, killing their innocent beloved ones, destroying their land and properties, have nothing but their bodies to sacrifice. They noted that many of the Israeli “civilian” victims were in fact Israeli reserve soldiers, as almost all (male and female) Jews in occupied Palestine aged 18 and above are subjected to mandatory military training. However, the large majority of Palestinian victims were civilians. According to the Israel Security Agency—ISA (*Shabak*) report, 1,513 Israelis were killed and 3,380 were injured from the beginning of the *Intifadah* until July 2005.<sup>9</sup>

The Israeli economy declined compared to its pre-*Intifadah* levels. Tourism, Israel’s second largest income, was quasi-paralyzed during the *Intifadah*’s first two years. A report published by the National Insurance Institute of Israel stated that the number of Israelis living below the poverty line had increased to around 22% by the end of 2004, a total of one million and 534 thousand Israelis.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2002 was economically the worst year in 50 years (1953–2003). The GDP declined by 1% in 2002, in continuation of a 0.9% decrease in 2001 and compared with a 7.4% increase in 2000.<sup>11</sup> Annual GDP per capita decreased by around \$3 thousand (from \$18,600 in 2000 to \$15,600 in 2002). According to the Lahav economic division, around 50 thousand shops closed in 2002.<sup>12</sup> According to some estimates, total Israeli economic losses during the *Intifadah*’s first two years reached around \$8 billion, around \$11 million a day.

Therefore, the core transformation caused by the *Intifadah* was that the Palestinian people were no longer the only ones paying the price of the Israeli occupation; being killed, wounded, and suffering destruction. Israel this time also paid a hefty price for its occupation and injustice.

The *Intifadah* shook two of Israel’s pillars: security and economic prosperity. Tens of thousands of Jews packed their bags and left for Europe, US and Australia, and public opinion polls revealed that more than 25% of Jews in Palestine were seriously thinking of leaving the country. A poll conducted by the *Jerusalem Post* newspaper on 29/11/2002 showed that 69% of Israelis lived in a state of fear from injury or death by self-immolation operations.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, despite great Palestinian suffering, a poll published on 18/12/2002

revealed that 80% of Palestinians supported the continuation of the *Intifadah* and 63% supported self-immolation operations.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. The Aggression and the Resistance 2006–2011

Israel continued its aggression during 2006–2011, while the Palestinian factions continued their resistance, albeit in different manners and forms. The period was characterized by:

- The Palestinian resistance was hit and most of its cells were dismantled in the WB because of the comprehensive cooperation between the PA and Israel.
- The development of Palestinian resistance in the GS, under the sponsorship of the Hamas-led government. It was able to mobilize thousands of resistance members and to smuggle weapons. It was also able to develop its rocket capacities, albeit in a very limited manner compared to Israeli capacities, and despite the suffocating siege of GS.
- Great reliance on rocket launching from the GS as part of resistance operations, and a decrease in self-immolation operations that characterized *al-Aqsa Intifadah*. According to Shabak, 5,765 rockets and 3,758 mortar shells were launched from the Strip during 2006–2010,<sup>15</sup> including 742 rockets and mortar shells fired during the aggression against GS in 2008/2009.<sup>16</sup> Besides, only eight self-immolation operations were executed in this period, leading to the killing of 19 Israelis.<sup>17</sup> Although there were a large number of rockets and mortar shells fired, their impact was limited because they were mostly imprecise and short-range, and filled with very few explosives. According to Israeli statistics, 17 Israelis were killed and 1,150 were injured during 2006–2009 by these rockets and shells—including five killed during the aggression on GS in 2009. Nonetheless, they affected the morale of around one million Israelis in the area close to the GS, putting them in a constant state of fear.<sup>18</sup>



• Launching rockets

- The Israeli aggression on Lebanon in the summer of 2006 and on GS at the end of 2008 and early 2009.

During 2006–2010, 3,293 Palestinians were killed and 12,054 were wounded in WB and GS, and among those injured there were several international solidarity activists. Whereas, 105 Israelis were killed and 1,573 injured during the same period.<sup>19</sup> A simple comparison reveals the extent of the suffering and massacres endured by the Palestinians due to superior Israeli military capabilities, while the Palestinians resisted by simple means. This also reflects the Palestinian schism in which one Palestinian side stalled and hindered resistance actions in WB during most of the period; while there was no direct contact with Israeli forces and settlers in GS due to the Israelis' 2005 withdrawal.

Israeli military campaigns during that time were focused on GS in order to topple the Hamas government, attack the resistance and stop rocket attacks. Among Israel's major campaigns was Operation Summer Rains, during the period 26/6–31/10/2006.

Operation Summer Rains came after Hamas led the Operation Dispelled Illusion (*al-Wahm al-Mutabadid*) in collaboration with the Popular Resistance Committees and the Army of Islam, which led to the capture of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Operation Summer Rains caused the killing of 400 Palestinians and the injury of 1,852 others. Israel also executed Operation Autumn Clouds in November 2006, which led to the killing of 105 Palestinians and the injury of 353 others; and Operation Hot Winter on 27/2–3/3/2008, which led to the death of 107 Palestinians. These operations were faced with heroic, although often symbolic, resistance by the Palestinians.<sup>20</sup>



• Operation Summer Rains

However, the fiercest and broadest Israeli attack was the wide-scale aggression on GS from 27/12/2008–18/1/2009, known as Operation Cast Lead, and dubbed by the resistance the *al-Furqan* Battle. The Israeli war machine was faced



• Victims of Israeli aggression on GS 2008/2009

with strong resistance by Hamas and other resistance forces, and Israel failed to occupy GS, break down the resistance forces or topple the Hamas-led government. Consequently, the Israelis withdrew unconditionally, which greatly boosted the morale of resistance forces, and made them win broad Palestinian, Arab, Muslim

and international support. This Israeli aggression led to the deaths of 1,334 Palestinians, including 417 children and 108 women, and the injury of 5,450 citizens. Additionally, 5,356 homes were destroyed, while a further 16 thousands were damaged. As for Israel, it only acknowledged the deaths of nine Israelis and the injury of 185, while the resistance forces estimated the killing of around 80 Israelis during this aggression.<sup>21</sup>



• Israeli aggression on GS 2008/2009





• **Determined for victory despite imprisonment**

ministers were detained; 47 PLC members were detained, of whom 42 were of the Change and Reform List (Hamas), in addition four were from the Fatah Movement, of whom three were arrested before the PLC elections, along with Ahmad Sa‘dat, the secretary general of the PFLP.<sup>22</sup>

In early 2011, there were still around seven thousand prisoners in the Israeli jails. However, since arrest operations are a continuous process, and even if the prisoners are often released after a few months, they are quickly replaced by others. In 2007, around 7,500 Palestinians were arrested, compared to 5,800 in 2008, 5,100 in 2009, and 4,200 in 2010. It is likely that the statistics show a decline in Palestinian resistance because of the increased effectiveness of the security cooperation between Salam Fayyad’s government and Israel.

During that period, the Israelis launched a full-fledged 33-day aggression (12/7–14/8/2006) against Lebanon, which specifically targeted South Lebanon and the southern suburb of Beirut. It faced a strong resistance from Hizbullah,

The condition of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons greatly reflected Palestinian anguish. Arrests did not stop even after the *al-Aqsa Intifadah* ended, with number of detainees increasing until it reached 11,550 by the end of 2007, among whom 10,485 were from the WB, 860 from GS, and 140 from the 1948 occupied Palestinian territories, in addition to tens of Arab detainees. During that year, 52 members of the PLC and ex-



• **Ahmad Sa‘dat**



• **Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons**

beside other resistance forces, thus leading to the withdrawal of the Israeli forces and their subsequent failure to achieve their objectives. This war led to the killing of 1,400 Lebanese people and the injury of 3,700 others, as well as the temporary



• Israeli aggression on Lebanon 2006

displacement of 973,334 people. It also caused massive destruction of the infrastructure, damaging around seven thousand houses and 145 bridges. Israeli losses were estimated at around 400 killed and 1,187 injuries, as well as 11 thousand damaged

houses due to the fall of 3,204 Katyusha rockets. Hizbullah also declared that it had managed to destroy 120 Merkava tanks, 30 armored vehicles, 2 warships, and 5 helicopters.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the end of the *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, the exceptional events witnessed in WB, the siege of GS, the strong resistance that took place during that period, and its development of its armament abilities, especially regarding rockets, confirm that the resistance forces were characterized by resilience, bravery, sacrifice, and their ability to innovate and cause losses to the enemy.

### ***Second: The Internal Palestinian Situation***

The internal Palestinian situation during the first decade of the 21st century was characterized by the rise of the Hamas Movement and its success in the legislative elections; its control of the GS; the death of Yasir ‘Arafat and his replacement by Mahmud ‘Abbas; the disruption of the Fatah Movement’s course; Palestinian schism; the paralysis of the PLO and its institutions, and the regression of the Palestinian Left. The general Palestinian public was occupied during the first five years of the decade with resistance and the activation and support of *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, but in later years there was focus on putting the Palestinian house in order, national reconciliation and lifting the siege.



## 1. The PA's Course

*Al-Aqsa Intifadah* restored the glory of resistance action. While the security grip of the PA weakened, the scope of resistance action grew wider, and gathering around it all the Palestinian people and its factions, including the Fatah Movement, Hamas Movement and the resistance forces took advantage of these conditions to rearrange their internal structures.

Hence, *al-Aqsa Intifadah* was accompanied by the Hamas Movement's growing popularity, due its leading resistance role. There was also a decline in the popularity of Fatah and the PA as a result of their mismanagement and corruption.

With the occupation of the PA-controlled areas by Israel and the destruction of the PA's headquarters and police stations, as well as the siege of Yasir 'Arafat (March 2002 until his death on 11/11/2004), the PA responded to Israeli-American pressures. It approved the Road Map for peace plan proposed by George W. Bush, and the "PA reform," which included the establishment of a prime minister post, giving him prerogatives that would diminish those of President 'Arafat, and merging the nine security forces into three, in addition to a number of administrative and financial reforms.

Mahmud 'Abbas was prime minister during the period 29/4–6/9/2003 and he succeeded in securing an appeasement deal on 29/6–21/8/2003, which collapsed following the Israeli forces' assassination of Hamas leader Isma'il Abu Shanab, on 21/8/2003. 'Abbas faced many difficulties in dealing with President 'Arafat, the factions and the Israelis, and this ultimately led to his resignation. He was replaced by Ahmad Qurai', who formed the seventh, eighth and ninth Palestinian governments, from 5/10/2003 to 27/3/2006, in which Salam Fayyad was entrusted with the Ministry of Finance.

The *Intifadah* suffered exhaustion in 2004 because of the brutality of the Israeli occupation, the scarce resources, and weak Arab, Muslim and international support. In the summer of 2004, Fatah leader Muhammad Dahlan roused hundreds



• Ahmad Qurai'



• Muhammad Dahlan



• **Rawhi Fattuh**



• **Mahmud 'Abbas  
proclaiming victory in the  
presidential elections**



• **Mustafa Barghouti**

of supporters into demonstrations and protests that targeted president 'Arafat under the pretext of demanding reform. The protests were supported by many Fatah leaders, especially in GS, as well as by the US and European Union (EU). These protests stirred many questions; about their timing, their real objectives, the person behind them and the person who was targeted. There were also questions about Mahmud 'Abbas' lack of reaction or objection. A few months later, Yasir 'Arafat had a mysterious illness and had to go to Paris to seek treatment. However, he died there on 11/11/2004, amid many unresolved questions about the real cause of his death. His body was carried to Cairo then to Ramallah, where he was buried. Yasir 'Arafat was present on the political scene for 35 years, and headed Fatah, the PLO, PA and the Palestinian state, in addition to holding the position of supreme commander of the Palestinian forces. 'Arafat was a combination of the pragmatic politician and the embodiment of the Palestinian people's hopes, even if many Palestinians and Palestinian factions did not assent to his leadership.<sup>24</sup> 'Arafat became increasingly popular and respected during the Israeli siege of his compound before his death.

In accordance with the Palestinian Basic Law, the Speaker of the PLC Rawhi Fattuh became the interim president of the PA, following the death of President Yasir 'Arafat. The Palestinian presidential elections took place on 9/1/2005, and were boycotted by Hamas and the PIJ. 65% of voters participated, and the winner of the elections was Mahmud 'Abbas, the Fatah candidate, with 62% of the votes, while the Leftist candidate, Mustafa Barghouti, gained 20% of the votes. 'Abbas also headed Fatah and the PLO.

Following the ceasefire that ‘Abbas secured with the cooperation of Palestinian factions, and the Cairo Agreement that was signed by the Palestinians on 17/3/2005, the *Intifadah* was effectively over. The Palestinians became busy with putting the Palestinian house in order and with the PA’s municipal and legislative elections.

The Israeli withdrawal from GS in September 2005 was a huge victory for the resistance forces, and a drawback to the peace process. Indeed, the Israelis paid a hefty political and human price for resistance actions. Also, the unilateral withdrawal was without any negotiations or coordination with the PA, as if the Palestinian-Israeli peace process was nonexistent.<sup>25</sup>

The municipal elections, which took place in four phases, revealed the growing popularity of Hamas, which worried the Fatah leadership and the PA. However, it was not easy to accurately determine the results, especially in light of the fact that many of the Hamas candidates were, for security or social reasons, independent. Generally speaking, Hamas obtained more votes than Fatah and prevailed in the large municipalities, while Fatah obtained more seats than Hamas and prevailed in the small municipalities. It was noteworthy that Hamas won 74% of the votes in Nablus, and that the PA did not hold municipal elections in Hebron and Gaza, which are Hamas strongholds. According to estimates, Fatah won 1,164 seats while Hamas won 862 seats, and the other organizations and the independents got 701 seats. Hamas obtained half of the votes in the first and fourth stages, and 33.7% in the second stage, and 26% in the third stage. As for Fatah, it obtained 32% of the votes in the first stage, 40% in the second, 53.7% in the third, and 30% in the fourth.<sup>26</sup>

Amidst uncertainty and internal conflicts in Fatah, ‘Abbas postponed the legislative elections from July 2005 to 25/1/2006, and the elections were only confirmed after Fatah overcame its conflicts and united the official list with “the Future” list announced by Muhammad Dahlan, in agreement with Marwan Barghouti, Jibril Rajoub and many young Fatah leaders. The elections would not have taken place had there not been a feeling of reassurance resulting from the polls that Hamas would win only 25% of the votes or seats, compared with 38–40% for Fatah. ‘Abbas was in dire need of affirmation of the legitimacy of his presidency and believed that introducing Hamas as a “controlled” opposition in the framework of “Palestinian legitimacy” would enable him to pursue the peace process with greater strength. This led the US to support the electoral process, and the Israelis did not object, although they did express fears about it.



•  **Hamas winning legislative elections**

Everyone (including Hamas supporters and leadership) was surprised when Hamas won 74 out of the 132 seats of the PLC. Moreover, four independent candidates on the Hamas lists also achieved victory, while Fatah won 45 seats, the PFLP won three seats, the DFLP and the Palestinian People’s Party (PPP) coalition won two seats, the Independent Palestine List headed by Mustafa Barghouti won two seats, and the Third Way List headed by Salam Fayyad won two seats.

Hamas sought in vain to form a national unity government with Fatah and other Palestinian factions but did not succeed, and thus had to form the government alone. Amidst the shock, confusion, and frustration of Fatah and PA leaderships, who found by their side an unwelcomed partner imposed by the people. Many measures were taken to besiege Hamas and weaken its government and lead it to failure, despite the leaderships’ announcement of acceptance of the election results and respect for Palestinian democracy. Among the main measures were:

- A session was held by the former PLC, in which Fatah enjoyed the majority, two weeks after the election results were announced. Many decisions and constitutional amendments were made (in violation of legal and parliamentary practices), aimed at strengthening the president’s powers and weakening the government and the elected council. They gave the president absolute power in forming the Constitutional Court in addition to the authority over the General Personnel Council. The PLC, whose mandate had expired, approved a presidential decree stipulating the appointment of a secretary general for the PLC to replace the council’s secretary, who must be an MP from the council. This was dubbed by Hamas an “overthrow and constitutional corruption.”
- President ‘Abbas issued a decree that put all media outlets affiliated with the PA under his direct supervision.

- ‘Abbas issued a decree establishing the General Administration of Crossings and Borders headed by Sa’ib ‘Uraiqat.
- ‘Abbas issued a decree appointing Rashid Abu Shbak director-general of Internal Security Forces in the Ministry of Interior, thus heading the Preventive Security, Civil Defense and Civil Police Forces.
- ‘Abbas appointed Suleiman Hilliss head of National Security Forces.
- President ‘Abbas transferred the responsibility of following up the Palestinian embassies abroad from the PA’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the PLO.
- President ‘Abbas also excluded all the government’s ministers, including the foreign minister, from his international trips and his meetings and discussions with Arab and foreign officials.



• **Rashid Abu Shbak**

This was how the Fatah command began its battle to remove the prerogatives of the Hamas government and to make it fail even before it began its work. The complete control of Fatah on the security forces and the bureaucratic administrative body of the PA, its ministries and institutions, was a great obstacle before the Hamas government (despite its ministers’ exceptional competencies), which had to deal with many security and administrative leaderships that sought to stall, delay and thwart matters.

The Hamas government also faced huge difficulties in managing the situation under occupation, and in dealing with influential Arab and international forces. Indeed, a political and economic siege was launched by Israel and other countries, and the aid to the PA, which represented more than half of its budget, was halted. Israel refused to deliver the taxes it collected for the PA, and which represent around a third of the latter’s budget, and bank transfers to the PA’s accounts were suspended. The Quartet (US, EU, Russia and the UN) imposed conditions on Hamas and its government. They included the recognition of Israel by Hamas, the rejection of “terrorism” by Hamas and its suspension of armed resistance, in addition to its approval of all the agreements signed by the PLO. These were impossible conditions for Hamas, and they meant losing its identity and democratic mandate entirely.

The Hamas government found itself with an empty treasury, and debts of \$1 billion and 772 million.<sup>27</sup> The opposition forces (especially Fatah) organized protests, demonstrations and strikes to demand the payment of salaries. The security forces did not cooperate with Interior Minister Sa'id Siyam in an adequate manner, as his alleged powers over them were stripped, at a time when chaos and lawlessness spread—especially in GS.



• Sa'id Siyam



• The Executive Force



• The Presidential Guard

This forced the interior minister to form the Executive Force, which was composed of loyalists to Hamas and the resistance forces that were on good terms with it.<sup>28</sup> This dragged the PA into a new conflict over powers, and President 'Abbas established a security force known as the Presidential Guard, a few days after the formation of the Executive Force.<sup>29</sup> The US allocated \$86 million and 400 thousand to support the Presidential Guard forces.<sup>30</sup>

In the context of power struggles, protests and counter-protests, and media campaigns, it seems that serious efforts were made to drive Fatah and Hamas to clash. Political instigation gradually turned into incidents of shooting and armed skirmishes. The assassination on



31/3/2006 of ‘Abdul Karim al-Quqa, the secretary general of the Popular Resistance Committees (which were close to Hamas), was major step towards starting an armed conflict, as the Committees accused Muhammad Dahlan of being well-informed on the assassination. This was followed by the assassination of Muhammad al-Tattar, a Hamas military leader, on 16/5/2006, and Hussein al-‘Awja, a Hamas political leader, on 6/7/2006. The political conflict, between 1/1–30/11/2006, led to the killing of 41 Palestinians, with 40 of them being killed in GS alone. However, as for the general state of turmoil during 2006, 260 persons were killed and 1,239 were injured.<sup>31</sup>



• ‘Abdul Karim al-Quqa

The agreement among the Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas, on the National Reconciliation Document of Palestinian Prisoners inside Israeli Prisons, in June 2006, paved the way for the formation of a national unity government. Hamas agreed to decrease its rightful quota of ministers in the government and abandoned the post of prime minister, refraining from nominating any front-row leaders in the government. It then became clear that the issue was linked to the Quartet conditions and Israeli-US-European pressures, and not just to the quota and powers of each side in government. What added insult to injury was the call of President ‘Abbas on several occasions (21/5/2006, 27/9/2006, 16/12/2006 and 19/1/2007) for early presidential and legislative elections; ‘Abbas did not have the constitutional powers to dissolve the PLC, and his call was therefore undemocratic.



• Gilad Shalit

Conditions for the PA became more complicated after Operation Dispelled Illusion that led to the capture of Gilad Shalit. This was followed by Israel’s launching of a broad campaign of immediate arrests that included 64 Hamas ministers, leaders, and members of the PLC. The scope of the arrests and military campaign was then widened, thus suspending



the work of PLC and Hamas government in WB. Starting on 26/6/2006, and for a period of five months, Israel executed Operation Summer Rains and Operation Autumn Clouds in GS, leaving 505 Palestinians killed and 2,205 wounded. In 2006, Israel arrested 5,671 Palestinians, and among the detainees were 30 Hamas PLC members and four ministers of Isma‘il Haniyyah’s government.<sup>32</sup>



• **Dispelled Illusion Operation and the destroyed Merkava Mark III tank**

As tensions and skirmishes escalated between Fatah and Hamas in early 2007, KSA called for a dialogue between the two parties, which led to the Mecca Agreement on 7/2/2007, and was received by the Palestinians with elation. The agreement stipulated the formation of a national unity government headed by Isma‘il Haniyyah. It was formed of nine members from Hamas, six from Fatah, four from the other factions, and five independents, and on 17/3/2007 the PLC passed a vote of confidence in it. However, on 2/3/2007, President ‘Abbas appointed Muhammad Dahlan as his national security advisor and as



• **Formation of a national unity government headed by Isma‘il Haniyyah**

secretary of the Palestinian National Security Council (PNSC), making him very influential over the security forces, in violation of the Palestinian Basic Law. This appointment was the first problem in the government’s work, because it snatched its control over the security forces and put them in the president’s hands.

The internal Palestinian crisis escalated again, after the new independent Interior Minister Hani al-Qawasmi did not succeed in exercising his powers or making any security reforms. His resignation was a result of the fact that Rashid Abu Shbak (who was close to Dahlan) controlled the Interior Ministry's security forces and prevented the interior minister from contacting the leaders of these forces. Also, the Palestinian presidency stripped the Interior Ministry of its financial and administrative powers.<sup>33</sup>



• Hani al-Qawasmi

## 2. Hamas' Control over GS, and Fatah's over the PA in the WB

Events indicated that Fatah and Hamas were moving towards a clash. US-Israeli plans aimed to topple the national unity government, and a Palestinian side close to Fatah was ready to maintain Lieutenant General Keith Dayton's plan to arm and train the Palestinian Presidential Guard for potential confrontations with Hamas in GS.<sup>34</sup> There was a recommendation that "Dahlan oversees effort in coordination with General Dayton and Arab [countries] to train and equip



• Keith Dayton

15,000-man force under President 'Abbas's control," and that there is a "need for bolstering Fatah's forces in order to 'deter' Hamas."<sup>35</sup> As for Dayton, he assured the Subcommittee on Middle East and South Asia of the House of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives at the end of May 2007 that the "worrisome scenario in Gaza that I have been warning about for the past several months is coming to a head."<sup>36</sup>

The Palestinian presidency and the influential Fatah security forces did not really cooperate in controlling and organizing the security forces. The influential forces took several measures that corresponded to a great extent with what was leaked regarding US plans. This included the expansion of the Presidential Guard, the erection of security checkpoints, and several abductions and assassinations attributed to the loyalists of 'Abbas and Dahlan, especially in mid-May 2007. Hamas sources said that 22 of its members were assassinated in one week by the security forces.<sup>37</sup>

Hamas waged what it called a “decisive battle” against “Fatah’s coup movement,” and was able on 11–14/6/2007 to take control of GS. According to the statistics of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, the decisive military battle claimed the lives of 161 victims during 7–16/6/2007, including 43 civilians, 91 members of the Fatah Movement and its affiliated security forces, and 27 members of the Hamas Movement, Ezzedeem Al-Qassam Brigades, and the Executive Force.<sup>38</sup>



• **Hamas faced a state of lawlessness after it won the PLC elections**

Hamas considered its actions a necessity which only targeted a certain group of people affiliated to Fatah. It said that it had not intended at first to control the Strip, but the situation “deteriorated” until it reached that point, and that it had not planned to control the “Security Square” and the presidential office compound, but was obliged to do so because the latter was abandoned by the security forces and was pillaged by the people. Hamas sought to control some security forces in order to block the road before those who are implementing an Israeli agenda and are part of these forces.<sup>39</sup>

The “decisive operation,” or the “takeover,” also included negative practices that harmed the image of Hamas. Indeed, media and news outlets showed that the execution of Fatah militant Samih al-Madhoun was carried out in a crude

and damaging manner. They also showed footage of Palestinian security officers who were made to go out bare-chested. Other footage and pictures broadcasted by Hamas affiliated media outlets were effectively used to foment against Hamas. Many Hamas leaders acknowledged and rejected such acts, explaining that they were the result of mutual instigation between Fatah and Hamas.

Moreover, Hamas refused to call what it did as an “overthrow,” since the person who took the decision was the prime minister, who was also the interior minister in the national unity government and who was supported by an elected PLC representing the majority of the members. Also, Hamas maintained its recognition of President ‘Abbas and his legitimacy, and called him to dialogue, without any prior conditions. Regardless of whether it was a “decisive battle” or an “overthrow,” what Hamas did had great repercussions on the Palestinian arena:

- For the first time, there was a geographical division in addition to the political schism, and the Gazans found themselves under the control of Hamas and its caretaker government, while WB became under the control of Fatah, the Palestinian presidency, and the emergency government.
- The events revealed the strong effect of external factors on the Palestinian national scene.
- The events greatly harmed the image of the Palestinian national project and its resistance program, and caused much distress among Arabs and Muslims, and the international movements supporting Palestinian rights.
- The Palestinian presidency dealt with the control of Hamas over GS as an opportunity to bring down the national unity government and form a loyalist emergency government (in violation of the Basic Law) in WB. It took advantage of the absence of the PLC, controlled by Hamas, to issue presidential decrees that have the force of law. Presidential decrees and measures and the emergency government went a long way in pressuring Hamas and assaulting its members in WB, in addition to closing its societies and institutions and attempting to dismantle its organizational and military structure. This was while the presidency and the government in WB have been developing their security coordination with the Israeli occupation. According to Hamas sources in the WB, Hamas was the target of 1,007 assaults during 11/6–31/8/2007 by the security forces and Fatah members, including 639 arrests and abductions, 36 shootings, and 175 aggressions on institutions and societies, including Quran learning centers, charities, media companies and offices, schools and

nurseries. Also, there were 156 attacks against the private properties of Hamas members and supporters.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, Hamas and its caretaker government tightened their control over GS and dealt harshly with Fatah supporters, whose practices were considered a threat to security and stability in the Strip. However, there are no statistics available about the extent of legal violations in GS. Both authorities in GS and WB were condemned by human rights organizations.

- In the absence of a partnership with Hamas and the absence of the PLC, the Palestinian presidency found itself free to resume the peace process with the Israelis, with US, European and Arab support.
- The GS was under a continuous and stifling siege, with continuous Israeli aggressions. Regrettably, some PA members helped to foment against Hamas in order to topple its government.
- The “decisive operation” led to the diminution of insecurity in GS, and the decrease in the clashes between factions and families, thus indicating that Hamas succeeded in controlling such issues. This also shows that what Hamas claimed was probably true; that the state of lawlessness was the responsibility of a specific security force affiliated with Fatah.

According to statistics by Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, the number of victims of insecurity in the first six months of 2007 reached 422 killed and 1,946 injured. While six months after Hamas took control of GS, the number killed reached 60 and the injured 425.<sup>41</sup> Despite the harsh circumstances endured by GS, there were no victims of the Hamas-Fatah clashes in the first quarter of 2008, and it appeared that the situation was under control.

- The decision for the “decisive operation” was taken by Hamas on the ground in the GS, and was not a centralized decision.
- It was obvious that most of the security forces members did not consider the battle with Hamas to be their battle, but rather the battle of a certain security force within Fatah. Had these forces (more than 55 thousand members in GS) considered this to be their battle, it would have been extremely unlikely that Hamas would have won. A report by the Fatah military bureau in GS on the reasons behind the rapid collapse of the security forces, states that many members were convinced that they were defending the project of a single influential trend in the PA and Fatah Movement.

### 3. Salam Fayyad's Government

After Hamas' control of GS on 14/6/2007, Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas sought to put Hamas out of Palestinian legitimacy and supersede the PLC, where Hamas held a majority. He resorted to the PLO umbrella to support his relevant presidential measures, despite the fact that the PLO is a reference for the PA in major issues and not an executive or legislative tool within the framework of the PA. The PLO's Executive Committee held an emergency meeting on 14/6/2007 and issued several recommendations that were put at the disposal of President 'Abbas:

- Dismissing the government of Isma'il Haniyyah.
- Declaring a state of emergency.
- Forming an emergency government.
- Holding early elections.<sup>42</sup>

Salam Fayyad formed an emergency government on 17/6/2007. It then became a caretaker government after a month, even though the Palestinian Basic Law allows the president to only declare a state of emergency and not to form an emergency government. The Basic Law transforms the already existing government (Isma'il Haniyyah's government) into a caretaker one. Even if we were to recognize the legitimacy of Salam Fayyad's government, the Palestinian Basic Law states that it must gain the vote of confidence of the PLC, which did not happen. Practically speaking,



Fayyad accepted the disabling of the PLC in order to stay in his position. The Palestinians now had a government openly fighting the will of the majority and the party democratically mandated to represent the population of the WB and GS.

President 'Abbas and Fayyad's government re-drafted economic, social and security laws, and took advantage of the PLC's absence; the PLC would have



opposed their measures. From June 2007 until June 2008, President ‘Abbas and the Ramallah government issued 406 decrees that practically covered all aspects of life and the political and legal system.<sup>43</sup> This led the president and the caretaker government of Fayyad to be accused of overthrowing the legitimacy of the PLC and fighting its representatives, while they accused Hamas of causing an overthrow in GS and bypassing legitimacy.

Fayyad’s government dissolved all the Zakat (almsgiving) committees in the WB, under the pretext that they were a financial source for Hamas.<sup>44</sup> Hamas stated on 12/11/2008 that it had 616 members detained by the PA as political prisoners, and a total of 2,921 political detainees in WB during the 10/6/2007–11/11/2008 period.<sup>45</sup>

Fayyad was not only the target of protest by Hamas and some Palestinian opposition factions, but also that of many Fatah officials and leaders, who strongly objected his presence, but were expected to stay quiet at the insistence of ‘Abbas (and the Israelis and the Americans). During the Fatah Movement’s 25th Revolutionary Council (on 26/5/2008), members launched scathing attack on Fayyad who was compared by some to Paul Bremer, the first US governor of Iraq, while others said his government was US-imposed. When Fayyad formed his government on 19/5/2009, he faced opposition from the Fatah parliamentary bloc, which was pressured by ‘Abbas to keep quiet.



• Michael Moeller

Fayyad pensioned off hundreds of officials in the security forces (including many Fatah members), and offered the opportunity to US experts, notably Keith Dayton and Michael Moeller, to prepare the security forces for a peace agreement including the pursuit of resistance forces. During Fayyad’s mandate, security collaboration with Israel reached its peak and included the exchange of information, the uncovering of resistance networks and capturing the persons involved, repressing protests, preventing friction with the Israelis, and returning Israelis who had entered PA areas.

The Fayyad-led government strove to recruit police members, based on loyalty and not necessarily on nationalism. This resulted in a special battalion of 620 soldiers which underwent a four-month training program in Jordan under the



supervision of Dayton. According to *Haaretz* newspaper (April 2008), senior PA officials dubbed the battalion as “Dayton’s baby.” According to Israeli sources, coordination with the PA reached unprecedented levels, thus leading the Shabak to announce in 2010 the absence of any Palestinians



• New police battalions recruited

on its list of wanted persons for the first time in 20 years. In its report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Brussels (published on 13/4/2011), the Israeli government stated that in 2010 there were 2,968 instances of coordination and 686 joint bilateral meetings with the Palestinian security forces in the WB.<sup>46</sup>

As for economic performance, of which Fayyad was proud, this was blown out of proportion. Indeed, it remains an economy bound by occupation, siege and foreign aid. GDP increased under Fayyad’s government (2007–2012) from \$4.6 billion to \$6.8 billion, compared with the increase of the Israeli GDP for the same period of \$166 billion to \$241 billion. In other words, the Palestinian GDP per capita increased from \$1,303 to \$1,679 in 2007–2012, thus increasing by \$376 in five years, at a rate of \$75 per year. Meanwhile, the Israeli GDP per capita for the same period increased from \$23,000 to \$30,400, i.e., an increase of \$1,480 per year. Also, Israel controls the PA’s foreign trade in WB, as around 70% of the PA’s imports in Ramallah come from Israel, and around 85% of its exports go to Israel. As for the unemployment rate, it reached 18.3% in WB by the end of 2012.<sup>47</sup>

The problem of the PA’s economy is that it is designed to be at the mercy of the Israeli occupation and the peace process, thus making economic pressure a type of political blackmail. Around 50–55% of the PA’s budget originates from donor countries, and a third of it comes from Palestinian taxes collected by Israel. Thus, Israel and other foreign countries can impose on the Palestinians who spends taxes and how they are spent. Hence, it is not just an issue of competence and transparency, but also political and security performance.

Fayyad's government, which used to claim it spent more than \$100 million per month on GS, was offering a distorted image of reality. What was true was that a huge amount of money used to be allocated to employees who did not go to work. Indeed, since the Palestinian division began, the PA in Ramallah has paid salaries to those staying at home in GS and has suspended payment to those who go to work, with certain exceptions such as the health and education sectors. Fayyad's government used to spend money on around 60 thousand employees (out of 78 thousand) provided they stayed at home, and they thus obtained 86% of the salaries transferred by the PA in Ramallah to the GS. In other words, the funds sent to GS were used by Fayyad (and his successors at the head of the PA) for political objectives.

When Fayyad formed his new government on 19/5/2009, he strove to "establish the institutions of the independent state" within two years.<sup>48</sup> The plan included the establishment of projects such as an airport, a railway and a basic infrastructure; the provision of electricity and water; the improvement of housing, education, and agriculture; the promotion of investments; the improvement of the performance of security forces; in addition to building hospitals and clinics, etc.<sup>49</sup> Fayyad wanted to be practical, by making the most of available conditions and imposing facts on the ground that support the establishment of the Palestinian state or at least the steadfastness of the Palestinian people. However, he was faced with an Israeli side that stalled and obstructed, and was able to destroy any achievements. Israel was also able to make Fayyad's actions seem feeble compared with its own swift actions, such as the vast Judaization plans in Jerusalem and the rest of the WB, while it "enjoyed" the PA's implementation of its commitments in repressing the resistance movements, without this authority having any real leverage to use against the Israeli side.

Throughout the four years of Salam Fayyad's government, the announcements of its achievements related to Israeli objectives far exceeded those related to the national objectives. Fayyad's policies provided relative peace on the security level, but it was a calmness linked to dealing a blow to the resistance project; one of the most important strengths of the Palestinians in the face of occupation. Thus, it was a quietude that tempted the occupier to continue with its occupation.

Fayyad’s policies also provided a relative economic improvement, but which was in essence linked with the donations and support of the donor countries, without achieving any real development. This is while Israel continued to smother the sources of production and the operations of import/ export and fund transfers, and used them as tools for political and economic blackmail in order to achieve new gains.

#### 4. The Caretaker Government in GS

Haniyyah’s government continued to consider itself a legitimate caretaker government after Mahmud ‘Abbas dismissed it, in accordance with the Palestinian Basic Law. Despite the withdrawal of the Fatah ministers and other factions’ ministers, and despite the fact that only Hamas ministers stayed, the government continued its tasks through the remaining ministers who were in the GS. By the end of June 2008, Isma’il Haniyyah issued a decision appointing Muhammad Asqul as minister of education, Usama al-‘Issawi as minister of transport and communications, Taleb Abu Sha’r as minister of awqaf (endowments) and religious affairs, Ahmad al-Kurd as minister of social affairs, Ahmad Shuwaydeh as minister of justice, and confirmed Sa’id Siyam as minister of interior.<sup>50</sup> Siyam was later assassinated in the Israeli aggression on GS. Haniyyah’s government strove more than once to expand its ministerial formation by asking several factions to take part in it until 2011, but in vain.



• Taleb Abu Sha’r



• Usama al-‘Issawi



• Muhammad Asqul



• Ahmad Shuwaydeh



• Ahmad al-Kurd

The caretaker government in GS (or what was known as the dismissed government) found itself swimming against the current in a divided Arab environment, and an international setting that was either hostile or indifferent. The success of this government that was headed by Isma‘il Haniyyah was in its ability to survive amid near-impossible circumstances. However, it paid for this success dearly with a stifling siege of more than a million and a half Palestinians, the destruction of infrastructure, and preoccupation with providing fuel, food and medicine. But the government did not have much choice, since failure would mean the return to insecurity; the eradication of Hamas and the resistance program from GS; breaking the will of the Palestinians for change; the return of the Oslo plan, the Road Map and Annapolis, with all their negative aspects. The government thus considered that its endurance was worthy of all the suffering, and that if it must choose between “bread or dignity,” it would choose dignity.

The siege of GS generated disastrous economic outcomes, especially when Israel suspended the GS customs code on 21/6/2007, which implied the end of commercial transactions, commercial representations and trademarks with the importers and exporters located in GS. Consequently, 95% of the industrial facilities in the Strip were closed, i.e., nearly 3,700 out of 3,900 plants. Construction and infrastructure projects valued at \$370 million were suspended due to the lack of construction materials. Also, the health sector regressed due to the severe lack of medicines and medical equipment, and more than 75 thousand workers were sacked from the private sector. Agricultural exports were suspended, and around 90% of the commercial transportation sector was halted. Also, the education sector was affected due to the lack of books, stationery and publications.<sup>51</sup> The GS poverty rate exceeded 80% and



• **Sufferings due to the siege of GS**

unemployment rates reached 60%.<sup>52</sup> Around 60% of the GS population does not have water supplies except once every few days for limited hours per day. Potable water is limited to 10% of the total needs.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, more than 80% of the refugees in the GS depend on the aid of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Haniyyah’s government was able to fully control the GS, while the dire needs, the siege and the insecurity failed to topple Hamas. The government was quite popular in the Strip, amidst strong opposition, particularly by the Fatah Movement which rearranged its ranks. The tunnels on the Egyptian border, which increased in number from 24 to more than 500, represented a partial solution to providing some necessities, as this covered around 50% of the GS “imports.” The government continued to provide a cover for the resistance movements, and the transport and “smuggling” of weapons into the Strip continued, with the rest being manufactured. However, the conditions the government found itself in, rendered the actions of Hamas and the resistance movements rather defensive. Also, the government’s performance was linked to the control of security, the provision of necessities, and the fight against corruption, without having circumstances enabling any real development or economic advancement.



• A tunnel under Egyptian borders

The harsh conditions resulting from the blockade resulted in a recession of the GS economy during 2006–2008. However, it seems that Haniyyah’s government has been able to adapt to the situation and achieve a relatively good economic growth, during 2009–2011, compared to those achieved by Fayyad’s government in Ramallah, which enjoys Arab and international support, and relative cooperation by the Israeli side. Indeed, in 2009, GDP growth achieved by Fayyad’s government in the WB was 7.1%, compared to 8.4% achieved by Haniyyah’s government in GS. In 2010, economic growth

achieved by Fayyad’s government was 8.4%, compared to 11.9% by Haniyyah’s government, and in 2011, growth achieved by Haniyyah’s government jumped to 17.6% compared to 10.4% by Fayyad’s government (see table). This may imply that Haniyyah’s government was more able to benefit from available resources and to crack down on corruption. GS also drew closer to achieving self-sufficiency in vegetables and poultry production, and in providing many basic needs for the citizens. Unemployment in GS also dropped to 30.3% in 2011, having had reached 60% in 2007.<sup>54</sup>

**GDP Growth in the WB and GS 2005–2011 at Constant Prices  
(2004 is the Base Year) (\$ million)<sup>55</sup>**

Year		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
WB	<b>GDP</b>	2,876.7	2,977.7	3,317.2	3,716.7	3,979.6	4,315.4	4,764.7
	<b>Average annual growth (%)</b>	–	+3.5	+11.4	+12	+7.1	+8.4	+10.4
GS	<b>GDP</b>	1,682.8	1,344.6	1,236.9	1,161.6	1,259.7	1,409.1	1,656.7
	<b>Average annual growth (%)</b>	–	–20.1	–8	–6.1	+8.4	+11.9	+17.6

Note: The data excludes those parts of Jerusalem which were annexed by Israel in 1967.

Although the policy of the president and the government in Ramallah with public employment led to the weakening of the governmental sector in GS, it appears that Haniyyah’s government was able to adapt and provide salaries for more than 18 thousand employees.<sup>56</sup> It covered its minimum job requirements, as the number of security staff reached 13,600 after it had once been 56,000.<sup>57</sup> It also filled many of the vacancies with those who support its policies and programs, or who accept working in the prevailing conditions in GS. The government also resorted to Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades for overseeing security when needed. This prompted accusations against the latter and Hamas of favoring their supporters and giving governmental work in the GS a partisan character.

Haniyyah’s government succeeded in dismantling the security zones of several influential families in the Strip, such as the Bakr family (on 13/6/2007) in the Beach Refugee Camp, the Helles family (on 2/8/2008) in



al-Shuja'iyyah neighbourhood, and the Daghmash family (on 15/9/2008) in al-Sabra neighbourhood in the middle of Gaza city.<sup>58</sup> Haniyyah's government was able, by the end of summer 2008, to deal with a general strike held by teachers and doctors in GS and supported by Fatah and its supporters. On 15/8/2009, Haniyyah's government conducted a security operation against the Jund Ansar Allah organization in Rafah, south of GS, where 28 people were killed, including the group's leader Sheikh 'Abdul Latif Mussa, and 130 were injured. This was soon after Mussa declared the founding of an "Islamic Emirate."<sup>59</sup> Thus, Haniyyah's government tightened its grip on GS, making most of its opponents believe in the difficulty, or even the impossibility, of toppling or changing it from the interior.

Haniyyah's government endured the Israeli war on GS (27/12/2008–18/1/2009), and was able, with other resistance movements, to force the Israeli forces to completely withdraw from the Strip. It was also able to quickly absorb the shock of the war and control matters as usual. The chaos or insecurity wagered on by many sides did not happen. The steadfastness of the resistance and its courage represented a great popular, political and media leverage for the caretaker government and Hamas, and generated much disenchantment among the opponents of Hamas. All this represented a motive for pursuing national dialogue and achieving Palestinian reconciliation.

There was great destruction in GS as a result of the war: 5,350 buildings were fully destroyed, and more than 16 thousand buildings were partially destroyed. Many of these buildings housed ministries and official and security institutions. However, Haniyyah's government continued to offer its services directly after the war in alternative locations. The caretaker government estimated the costs of reconstruction at \$2.215 billion, and held on to the supervision of the rebuilding process, rejecting any direct overseeing from Fayyad's government in Ramallah.<sup>60</sup> However, it did not object to the donors executing the reconstruction efforts themselves or through trustworthy companies. But all this work failed to benefit the government, even though it was the one that administered everything on the ground. The donors insisted on dealing with President 'Abbas and Fayyad's

government, and abided by Israeli conditions and considerations, which meant the continuation of siege and the inability to provide aid and execute projects.

## 5. The PLO

Although the PLO established the PA and gave it cover and legitimacy, the PA became bigger while the PLO became isolated and declined, until it appeared with time to be nothing but a mere tool of the PA. The PLO was put in the “recovery room” after it was marginalized, and it was only needed as a “rubber stamp” for taking resolutions. In 1999, the usual legal term for the PNC, the Executive Committee, and the Palestinian Central Council (PCC) ended, however the Executive Committee and the PCC continued to convene, while the PLO leadership (the same leadership as the PA and Fatah) used them to provide legitimacy to its legal and political stance, especially to its government in Ramallah. Its attempt to control several files, after Hamas’s victory in the 2006 elections, and its attempt to remove Hamas from legitimate mainstream politics, after its control of GS in 2007, necessitated ignoring the PLC, because Hamas members had the absolute majority. The PA’s presidency was bound to have an authority that would bestow legitimacy on its decisions, and so it resorted to the PLO. Its institutions (and more specifically its Executive Committee and the PCC) suddenly began to convene, debate and issue decisions about daily PA matters, even though this violated the Basic Law. Indeed, the PLO represents a reference for the PA in major issues, and not an executive or legislative tool within the PA. Hence, this was a kind of selective activation of institutions that lack legitimacy, whose term has expired, and which according to prior agreements among Palestinian forces are awaiting their reformation and elections.

The PNC convened 20 times between the PLO’s foundation in 1964 until 1991, although the charter stipulates the holding of one meeting a year. Then in the following 20 years (until 2011), only one meeting was held! In other words, the PNC effectively lost its legislative and supervisory role (especially after the Oslo Accords in 1993), and was isolated and marginalized from the Palestinian national decision-making process. Moreover, the meeting that was held in April 1996 was only held under US-Israeli pressures to cancel the clauses of the national pact that were hostile to Israel and Zionism. It is a meeting to which

Yasir ‘Arafat added more than 450 new names, and therefore there were more than 850 members who were invited to attend the session for abrogating the pact, unbeknownst to the council’s head Salim al-Za‘nun, and without his approval, and without submitting the new member names to the PNC committees.<sup>61</sup>

One is entitled to wonder about the process used to select the representatives of the Palestinian people in the PNC. Why is it still restricted to a certain part of the population, while a large part is marginalized, especially the supporters of the Islamic movement, such as Hamas and the PIJ? Why does the number of members in the PNC exceed that of the Indian parliament, or the US Congress, at a time when the Palestinians are in dire need of effectiveness, flexibility and the ability to meet and take decisions quickly?

Any real activation of the PLO and rebuilding of its institutions is linked to comprehensive Palestinian reform, and putting the Palestinian political house in order. These two depend on conducting talks between Fatah, Hamas, and other factions to reach consensus on a joint national program. Although the PLO’s reform file was an essential point in the Cairo Agreement in March 2005, it stumbled because Palestinian, Arab and international parties feared the possible control of Hamas over the PLO, after its victory in the 2006 PLC elections in WB and GS. Although the National Reconciliation Document of Palestinian Prisoners inside Israeli Prisons (2006) and the Mecca Agreement (2007) both included clauses about the activation and reform of the PLO, no serious measures were taken in this regard. Certainly, the Fatah-Hamas conflict over legitimacy in 2007 was a reason behind the suspension of the reform process, but must not be considered the only cause. Indeed, the weakening and marginalization of the PLO was essentially linked to the peace process and the Oslo Agreement, and to the development of an individualistic style of leadership, which is at odds with institutionalization.

In 2005, there was a Palestinian consensus that the members of the PNC should number 300, half of whom would be from the WB and GS and the other half from the Palestinians in the Diaspora. However, the victory of Hamas by a vast majority represented a shock to the main movement leading the PLO and controlling the national council (i.e., Fatah). This led the PNC Head Salim al-Za‘nun to head a meeting, on 4/2/2006, with more than 100 members of the PNC and Fatah in Jordan, at which he made strange and surprising statements

that were in full contradiction with what he had previously declared. He said that he would defend every member of the PNC and not allow, under any circumstances, any alterations to the PNC, whether to the number of its members or to its structure. He added that he would defend this PNC to his last drop of blood.<sup>62</sup> On 16/2/2006, in the opening session of the PLC, al-Za'nun declared that the 132 PLC members would be added to the 783 PNC members! The least that can be said about this step is that it thwarts any real move towards the reform of the PLO and its institutions, and elected members will be lost in the sea of appointed members!!

'Abbas sought to strengthen his influence in the PLO but without making any real reforms in its structure and institutions. He issued a decision on 9/11/2006 to appoint a person close to him, Yasir 'Abd Rabbo, as secretary of the Executive Committee, and decided on 18/12/2006 to shut down the PLO's Political Bureau headquarters in Amman, which was considered to be a blow to his adversary Faruq al-Qaddumi, head of the Political Bureau and one of the Fatah's notable leaders, whose work was thus restricted to supervising his Political Bureau in Tunisia. The Central Council and the Executive Committee gave President 'Abbas the cover needed (regardless of its legal and constitutional validity) in forming the emergency government in Ramallah and turning it into a caretaker government, and stripping Haniyyah's government of its legitimacy, in addition to a variety of decrees and measures linked to fighting Hamas, the resistance forces and their institutions in the WB. In addition, he called for early presidential and legislative elections, supporting the peace process, his election as president of the state of Palestine on 23/11/2008, and the extension of his presidential mandate that ended on 9/1/2009.



• 'Abbas and al-Za'nun in the opening of the PNC emergency session 2009

'Abbas did not wait for the results of the Cairo dialogue with Hamas and held an emergency session of the (expired) PNC on 25/8/2009, at the presidential headquarters in Ramallah, for the election of six members to the Executive Committee who would replace six of its deceased members, after the committee faced

the problem of the quorum not being met. The PNC convened in the presence of 325 members out of more than 700 registered members in 1996. It was agreed to elect four members in an uncontested election: Sa'ib 'Uraiqat from Fatah, Ahmad Majdalani from the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF), Hanna 'Amira from the PPP, and Saleh Ra'fat from Fida. As for the two remaining seats, they were won by Ahmad Qurai' from Fatah and Hanan 'Ashrawi (independent).

Some raised questions over the freedom the PNC enjoys under occupation and its ability to represent the Palestinian people, whether those in the WB and GS or in the Diaspora, in addition to the problems linked to the expiry of its term. Questions were also raised over the presence of Yasir 'Abd Rabbo in the Executive Committee as representative of the Fida Party, which he had left years ago, while Saleh Ra'fat was its new representative. This faction, combined with its two allies (DFLP and PPP), were not able to obtain more than two seats (out of 132) in the PLC elections in 2006. Despite this they have four seats in the Executive Committee, excluding 'Abd Rabbo.<sup>63</sup>

As for the National Reconciliation Agreement (Cairo Document) that was signed in Cairo between Fatah and Hamas and other Palestinian factions on 3/5/2011 and on the next day was formalised in a ceremony, it stated that the “political parties of both Fateh and Hamas agree that the tasks and decisions of the provisional interim leadership cannot be hindered or obstructed, but in a manner that is not conflicting with the authorities of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization.” There was also a consensus on holding PNC elections, simultaneously with the PLCs in the WB and GS.<sup>64</sup>



• Sa'ib 'Uraiqat



• Ahmad Majdalani



• Hanna 'Amira



• Saleh Ra'fat

## 6. The National Reconciliation Path

Since the beginning of *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, the increase of Hamas's influence has put the PA in a new political crisis in addition to its other crises. The PA found itself between the hammer of strong Israeli-US-European pressure demanding the halting of the *Intifadah* and additional concessions, and the anvil of the Islamic and national resistance demanding the adoption of a national program based on the escalation of the *Intifadah* to force Israel to withdraw.

It was obvious that the PA was unable to take crucial and effective decisions without referring to the resistance movements, particularly Hamas. 'Arafat had tried more than once to declare the ceasing of the *Intifadah*, but it continued and grew, thus embarrassing the PA and reducing 'Arafat's credibility. Based on this reality, the PA, which was fully supported by Egypt, called for an inter-Palestinian dialogue, aiming to stop the *Intifadah* or announce a truce, while seeking to pursue negotiations with Israel. Egypt took advantage of its inter-Arab weight and its special relations with the PA, Israel and the US, in addition to its relations with the Palestinian opposition, to call for these talks. Hence, the most important talks took place on 10–13/11/2002 between Fatah and Hamas, and with the participation of all the Palestinian factions on 24–28/1/2003 and 4–7/12/2003. Perhaps these talks helped bring viewpoints together, but the PA failed to obtain what it wanted other than the three month truce announced by the factions, which actually only lasted 52 days (29/6–21/8/2003).

In early 2005, the Palestinians entered a new period of reconciliation and to put the Palestinian political house in order. The Palestinian factions held between 15–17/3/2005 intense talks that culminated in the Cairo Agreement, which affirmed the Palestinian fundamentals, including the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of return of the Palestinian refugees. A truce (*Hudnah*) appeasement period until the end of the year was announced, provided Israel stops its aggressions and releases the prisoners. It was also agreed to hold the PLC elections, and pursue the reform of the PA apparatuses, as well as to reorganize the PLO on an agreed upon basis to include all trends and factions.



Generally speaking, the Palestinian municipal and legislative elections took place in an atmosphere of transparency and democracy that reflected to a large extent the balance of forces on the Palestinian arena. However, although the PLO's command, identical to the PA and Fatah command, wished for all the Palestinian forces to take part in the legislative and executive institutions, it also wanted to continue to have unrestrained control over leadership, decision-making processes and institutions, particularly political and security ones. Moreover, it often sought to execute what it wanted from the agreements and in the manner it wanted. After the Cairo Agreement, it did nothing to restructure the PLO, and when it realized that the municipal elections do not really serve it, it thwarted the elections in Hebron and the city of Gaza. When it was surprised by Hamas's victory in the PLC elections, it took several of the aforementioned measures to confiscate some vital powers of the PLC and the Palestinian government, in order to thwart Hamas work and topple its government, and then seek new PLC elections in which Fatah would attempt to secure victory. In short, the Fatah command, after around 40 years of monopolizing leadership, was no longer used to, and did not wish, to have a real transfer of power, particularly with sides that have opposing ideologies, strategies and priorities like the Islamic movement.

The Palestinian internal situation was, and still is, facing with two different visions and paths in dealing with the priorities and fundamentals of the national work. They have two different approaches to managing the struggle with Israel; resistance and peace settlement, and they have different ways in dealing with Arab and international states. Hence, it would not be fair to simplify the differences between Fatah and Hamas by saying that they are a mere struggle for power. One cannot explain the steadfastness of Hamas in the face of the Israeli siege and aggression on GS, the shutting down of its institutions, the imprisonment of its PLC members, and the pursuit of its supporters in the WB, as being merely a wish to have a better position in power.

Besides, one cannot explain Fatah's persistence to see Hamas recognize the PLO agreements, and to form a government whose political program adheres to the PLO's program and the Quartet's conditions, except in the light of pushing Hamas towards a political program that includes the recognition of Israel and the relinquishment of most of occupied Palestine in 1948, and the ceasing

of resistance actions, which contradicts the principles of Hamas. Hence, the Palestinian dialogue has three main crises:

- The crisis of determining the course of Palestinian national action, including its fundamentals, priorities, political program, and ways to manage the conflict. Indeed, there is a tug-of-war between a resistance Islamic ideology seeking change and new equations for managing the conflict, and a pragmatic national path that is adapted to Arab realism and available possibilities.
- The crisis of trust especially between Fatah and Hamas, that became deeper due to political divisions; lawlessness; the control of Hamas over the GS; the collaboration of the PA in WB with the occupation to pursue Hamas and try to eradicate it; and the mutual media and security campaigns against each other.
- The crisis of external pressures and conditions, where the Quartet requirements and US and Israeli standards were used like a sword hanging over the dialogue process, even if different “lighter” formulations were used, namely: “abiding by the agreements signed by the PLO,” and “the formation of a government that lifts the siege.” All these expressions reflected the same meaning. Also, there were constant US threats to stop the peace process, cease aid and return to a siege of the WB if Hamas participated in a government that does not meet the Quartet’s requirements. Practically, the US had no objection to achieving Palestinian reconciliation as long as it leads to Fatah’s victory in the elections and regaining control over GS, in addition to containing or marginalizing Hamas and stripping it of its popular legitimacy. Any other path would mean the continuation and worsening of the siege and the crisis.

Amidst the struggle for power and the Israeli GS siege, the National Reconciliation Document of Palestinian Prisoners inside Israeli Prisons emerged. It was signed by figures who were imprisoned in the occupation’s jails and who belonged to various factions, including Fatah, Hamas, and the PIJ.<sup>65</sup>

The document affirmed the meaning of national unity; the peaceful transfer of power; cooperation and integration between the presidency, the government, the PLC and the judicial authority; the formation of a national unity government;

the reform of the PA and the PLO; and the formation of a unified resistance front with a unified political reference. The document also affirmed the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state on all territories occupied in 1967, with Jerusalem (*al-Quds*) as its capital, to secure the right of return for the refugees and to liberate all prisoners and detainees based on the historical right of the Palestinian people based on the UN Charter and international law. The document ratified, in its third clause, the adoption of negotiations and diplomatic action in tandem with resistance, and stipulated in its seventh clause that the administration of negotiations falls within the jurisdiction of the PLO and the president of the PA, on the condition that any agreement must be presented to the new PNC for ratification or a general referendum to be held in the homeland and the Diaspora.

The representative of the PIJ expressed reservations on the seventh clause pertaining to the negotiations, while Hamas prisoners in Nafha, Ashkelon, Beersheba, Naqab, Ofer and Majeddo issued a statement declaring that the document did not reflect their true position, rejecting a number of the issues and expressing reservations on other clauses.<sup>66</sup>

The document was acclaimed by President ‘Abbas and the PLO’s Executive Committee, reflecting the support the text gave to negotiations with Israel. The document also focused on the establishment of a Palestinian state on all the territories occupied in 1967, without confirming or denying whether this would constitute a final peace settlement and without confirming or denying the right to liberate the land occupied in 1948. Moreover, the document put the results



• **National Dialogue Conference 2006**

of the negotiation process in the hands of the new PNC or a referendum, despite Hamas’s initial stance that fundamentals cannot be the subject of a referendum or vote. ‘Abbas said at the National Dialogue Conference, which was held by the

PLC in Gaza and Ramallah on 25–26/5/2006, that he would subject the document to a popular referendum if no agreement was reached within 10 days.<sup>67</sup>

Officially, Hamas considered the document to be a good basis for discussion, but refused to adopt it as such, or to conduct a referendum on it. After lengthy negotiations, the document was issued in its amended form on 28/6/2006, keeping most of its original content and an ambiguity regarding several interpretations that could be used by Fatah, Hamas and the other factions. The clauses pertaining to the negotiations process were maintained, while in the fourth clause it was added that comprehensive Palestinian political action must take place in a manner that preserves the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people.

Despite what appeared to be a concession by Hamas regarding the administration of the PLO and the Palestinian leadership of the negotiations process, talks on forming a national unity government stumbled due to the continued state of lawlessness, the intensification of the Israeli and international siege, and the Israeli campaign against Hamas and the resistance forces following



• **Mecca Agreement 2007**

the capture of Gilad Shalit. It is amid these circumstances that Saudi King ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz called on 29/1/2007 for a dialogue between Fatah and Hamas in Mecca. The invitation was welcomed by both sides, and numerous meetings were held on 6–8/2/2007, leading to the Mecca Agreement, which affirmed the sanctity of Palestinian blood and agreed on the establishment of a national unity government, and also on going ahead with the development and reform of the PLO. Furthermore, it affirmed the principle of political partnership and the basis of political multiplicity.<sup>68</sup>

The Mecca Agreement included a text in which the government of Isma‘il Haniyyah commits to the entrustment letter issued by the PA president in regard to protecting the higher national interests of Palestinians, preserving their rights, maintaining and developing what they acquire, and working on achieving national objectives as ratified by PNC decisions, the Basic Law, the

National Reconciliation Document, and the decisions of Arab summits. On these bases “the government respect the agreements signed by the PLO,” and this was included in the government’s program.<sup>69</sup> Many considered that the PA’s use of the term “respect” represents a new concession by Hamas, while Hamas considered that even though this term reassured Fatah and others, it did not contain any concessions or legal implications, and that it was necessary to use it, in order to end division and face the siege. Hamas also had to respond to the number two man in al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who accused it of making concessions, saying that Palestine is an Islamic endowment land, and no one can cede a single tract of it, and that Hamas is a “movement of struggle and resistance, and will remain so, as long as there is one tract of Palestine occupied.”<sup>70</sup>

The Mecca Agreement only survived three months. Indeed, despite Haniyyah’s formation of a national unity government that gained the vote of confidence of the PLC, that period was rife with state of lawlessness and attempts by Israel, the US and a group within the Fatah Movement to thwart progress. This led to an overt struggle between Fatah and Hamas, which resulted in the control of Hamas over GS. Thus, in addition to political conflict and power struggle, there was geographical separation, the formation of two governments in Ramallah and Gaza, violence and a lack of trust. This hampered the occurrence of any possible understandings or dealings in a civilized institutional manner.

President ‘Abbas and his supporters viewed that Hamas has conducted a bloody overthrow and that no understanding with it was possible until it recanted it and announced its commitment to Palestinian, Arab and international “legitimacy.” ‘Abbas announced before the PLO’s Central Council on 18/7/2007 the end of the Cairo Agreement (17/3/2005), and accused Hamas of an assassination attempt against him. He also called for early presidential and PLC elections based on proportional representation. Certainly, the notion of proportional representation was acclaimed by the factions and small parties (particularly the leftist ones) because it would turn them from parties with a marginal impact on the Palestinian decision-making process into potential *king makers* with decisive impact, especially in light of the differences between Fatah and Hamas. Moreover, ‘Abbas went extreme

when he sought to impose a rule on every candidate to the PLC that he must first adhere to the PLO's political stance (before its restructuring and reform and inclusion of Hamas, PIJ and the other resistance forces). This effectively meant keeping Hamas away from the political process and eliminating any opportunity for reconciliation.<sup>71</sup>

As for Hamas, it considered that what it did was a legitimate, inevitable act, under the order of the PA's prime minister, who himself was performing the tasks of minister of interior, with the support of the majority of the PLC. He faced the promotion of lawlessness of the PA security forces, which refused to comply with the government's instructions. Hamas considered Haniyyah's caretaker government the legitimate government under the Palestinian Basic Law, while the formation of the government in Ramallah was a violation of this Law. Hamas wanted dialogue, but without any prior conditions. It refused to disregard the legitimacy of the PLC and the government. It also refused to use PLO institutions outside their jurisdiction in order to go beyond the PA's legislative institutions, and called for dealing quickly with the security file and rebuilding the security forces on national and professional bases and eliminating any corrupt or suspicious members.<sup>72</sup>

The Palestinian factions, namely those affiliated with the PLO, were clearer in their strong criticism of the "overthrow" conducted by Hamas and more understanding of 'Abbas's measures in the WB. They made minor criticisms of the decrees issued by 'Abbas and the strict security measures he took. It must be noted that these factions, especially the leftists, were closer to Hamas's political stance in criticizing the peace process as championed by 'Abbas.

The DFLP submitted an initiative for national reconciliation based on four points:

- Hamas renunciation of its overthrow in GS.
- The formation of a transitional government headed by an independent leader, to prepare for new elections.
- The amendment of the general elections system by adopting the proportional representation system.
- The activation and development of the PLO.<sup>73</sup>





• **Fatah and Hamas discuss Yemeni Initiative**

But this initiative fell upon deaf ears, and there was a succession of Palestinian, Arab and Islamic efforts to reconcile Fatah and Hamas. A major effort was the Yemeni Initiative, which ended with the San‘aa Declaration of 23/3/2008.

However, both this declaration and ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, who signed it on behalf of Fatah, were heavily condemned by President ‘Abbas’s advisors, thus thwarting the opportunity to build upon the declaration. It stipulated that the approval of Fatah and Hamas of the Yemeni Initiative is the framework to resume dialogue between the two movements and go back to the pre-Gaza events status quo (14/6/2007). ‘Abbas tended to take his advisors’ stance, considering the Yemeni Initiative a framework for execution rather than for dialogue.

In his capacity as the head of the OIC summit, Senegalese President ‘Abdoulaye Wade attempted to achieve reconciliation in June 2008, when he met with two delegations from Hamas and Fatah in Dakar, but without achieving any tangible results.



• **‘Abdoulaye Wade**

On 5/6/2008, President ‘Abbas called again for dialogue in a positive and reconciliatory tone, and for Egypt to sponsor the dialogue. Egypt and Hamas welcomed the idea, and Egypt prepared for the dialogue with the participation of 14 Palestinian factions, drafting a reconciliation paper. However, the atmosphere became tense because of the continuing campaign of arrests of Hamas members in the WB, and lack of seriousness in the talks. The Egyptians informed Hamas that ‘Abbas would sit on the platform at the opening alongside several Arab officials, and that he would leave the room after the officials’ speeches. Hamas asked that ‘Abbas attends all the dialogue sessions in his capacity as Fatah leader, and a major side in the conflict, and not a sponsor of the conference. There were also doubts that ‘Abbas really wanted the conference to be held as he was more concerned

with retaining the international legitimacy to renew his mandate as head of the PA. Hence, Hamas and three other factions (PIJ, PFLP–GC, al-Sa‘iqah) refused to attend the Cairo meeting, which was thus cancelled, angering the Egyptian government.

The outstanding performance and steadfastness of the GS during the Israeli aggression on 27/12/2008–18/1/2009, and the increase of Hamas’s popularity, and the sense among its opponents that it was difficult, if not impossible to overthrow Hamas, all gave a strong push to the national dialogue. Egyptian-sponsored dialogue sessions were held between Fatah and Hamas on 24–25/2/2009, followed by the participation of the other factions on 26/2/2009. Five committees were formed to deal with the issues of the PLO, elections, security, transitional government and national reconciliation. Six dialogue sessions were held, the last being on 28–30/6/2009, and it appeared that a great leap forward was achieved on several issues. However, the issue of Palestinian political detainees, especially in the WB, continued to cast its shadow on the talks. The negotiations were lengthy, the stifling siege on GS worsened, the popularity Hamas enjoyed after the war on GS ebbed away, and the PA leadership began to hope to achieve a breakthrough in the peace process after Barack Obama was inaugurated as president of the US. Consequently, Fatah was no longer in a hurry, and increasingly hardened its stances. At a time when Hamas focused on a comprehensive reconciliation agreement that would be fairly implemented on the ground, Fatah focused on forming a national unity government that would be able to lift the siege (i.e., was not opposed by Israel and the international community) and on holding presidential and legislative elections.

Egypt submitted a final detailed proposal for the reconciliation agreement composed of 4,100 words (22 pages) and asked Fatah and Hamas to sign it before 15/10/2010. Amidst the wide and very strong criticism of the weak performance of the PA towards the Goldstone Report, regarding the Israeli aggression against GS, Fatah rushed to approve, while Hamas asked for some time to peruse the text. The Egyptian document can be summed up as follows:

- Affirming the activation and development of the PLO.
- Forming a temporary leadership framework until the election of a new PNC that makes its decisions by consensus.
- Holding presidential, PLC and PNC elections simultaneously. The PNC elections would take place according to full proportional representation in

the homeland and abroad. PLC elections would take place with 75% will be elected according to lists and 25% will be elected according to region, with a 2% determination rate.

- Security forces would be professional and non-factional, and a supreme security committee would be established, by order of the Palestinian president, comprised of professional officers, by agreement. The Egyptians and representatives of the Arab countries will oversee the committee so as to monitor its implementation of the National Reconciliation Document in the WB and in GS.
- Resolving all the violations that resulted from the state of lawlessness and divisions in a legal and legitimate manner.
- Releasing all political detainees in the WB and the GS.

The crisis of trust and recent historical experience played a role in the document's insistence that Hamas revise the text and enshrine expressions, the elimination or amendment of which could be used as an exit to retreat from commitments. Hamas insisted on several amendments that can be summed up as follows:

- When talking about the temporary leadership framework of the PLO, they added the sentence: The aforementioned tasks cannot be suspended because they gained unanimous national approval.
- Amending the paragraph about the elections committee so that it stipulates the formation of a national consensus elections committee, upon a presidential decree.
- Demanding the addition of a text clarifying that the formation of the higher security committee "is agreed upon."
- Amending the following text: "The Palestinian security forces are restored and structured with Egyptian and Arab help," by replacing the term "restored" with "rebuilt."<sup>74</sup>

However, the Egyptian government and the Fatah Movement refused to debate or amend the document. Thus, the reconciliation project continued to stumble, and Palestinian attempts to reach adequate solutions by sides such as the PFLP and independent officials such as Munib al-Masry and Yasir al-Wadiyyah, did not help. There were also mediation attempts by Qatar, KSA, Sudan, Libya and Turkey, but in vain.

The file was breached once again after Mish'al's meeting in Mecca with the chief of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (GIS) 'Umar Suleiman, who said that he didn't mind if Fatah and Hamas agreed on understandings that take into account the reservations of Hamas on the Egyptian paper.<sup>75</sup> Talks were held in Damascus on 24/9/2010, during which many of Hamas's amendments were adopted, except for the security aspect. The two movements met in Damascus once again on 9/11/2010, but to no avail.

The changes in the Arab world since early 2011 contributed to the increase of pressures towards Palestinian reconciliation. The signature of Fatah and Hamas on the National Reconciliation Agreement in Cairo on 3/5/2011, after making Hamas's amendments and after resolving the security issue, represented a milestone in the path to national unity.

### ***Third: The Path to Peace Talks***

The Israeli strategy for negotiation was based on "management" rather than "resolution." It aimed to weaken Israel's opponents by all means until they accepted the only available option on Israeli terms, and this explains why the negotiations process was stalled. The Israelis had managed, since the signature of the Oslo Accords in September 1993, to reinforce Yitzhak Rabin's saying "no dates are sacred,"<sup>76</sup> which became the basis of Israel's policy and one of its means of pressure and blackmail.

When the Labor Party, led by Ehud Barak, came back to power after three years of Likud rule (1996–1999), it announced its wish to reach a final settlement but presented a platform based on the Five Nos:<sup>77</sup>

1. No to returning East Jerusalem to the Palestinians, and Jerusalem is the eternal, united capital of the State of Israel and only of Israel.
2. No to Israel's return to the borders of the pre-1967 war.
3. No to the return of Palestinian refugees.
4. No to the removal of Jewish settlements in the WB and GS.
5. No to the presence of an Arab army in the WB (meaning that the Palestinian state should be without an army or full sovereignty).

In the summer of 2000, the Israeli and Palestinian sides were invited to Camp David by US President Bill Clinton, where marathon negotiations were held on 12–25/7/2000 to reach a final agreement. It appears that the matter of borders and settlement blocs were among the issues that could be agreed upon (more than 90% of the GS and all the WB to the Palestinians, with land swaps, and Israel allowed to keep



• Camp David meetings 2000

the settlement blocs). However, the issues of Jerusalem and the return of the Palestinian refugees remained without any solution, leading to the collapse of negotiations and the launching of the *al-Aqsa Intifadah* two months later.

Israel moved towards more extremism, and Ehud Barak was forced to resign as a prime minister on 9/12/2000. Ariel Sharon won the general elections on 6/2/2001 against his opponent Barak with a historical majority of more than 25%, thus confirming the return of the extremist Likud Party.

Sharon was unable to provide security to the Israelis and to crush the *Intifadah* within 100 days as he had promised. Instead Sharon tried to change the dynamic and impose the reality he wanted. He did not believe in reaching a peace settlement, as he had voted against the Camp David Accords with Egypt and against the Oslo Accords. He had also expressed reservations on the Treaty of Peace Between The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan And The State of Israel, and had claimed several times that the Oslo Accords were dead. When Sharon came to power, his project was essentially a security one, and he only offered Palestinians autonomy over 40–45% of the WB. He also refused to enter into any talks before the *Intifadah* ended. Sharon stayed in power until early 2006, and the peace talks stumbled during his mandate, with Israel busy repressing the *Intifadah* and trying to find alternate solutions.



• Ariel Sharon

## 1. The Geneva Accord

While the Palestinians were busy with the *Intifadah*, secret negotiations took place for two years between a group close to the Palestinian presidency and Fatah, and an Israeli group close to the Israeli left and center. The negotiations led, in late 2003, to the Geneva Accord which was set to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It is a Draft Permanent Status Agreement that stipulates the following:

- It affirms “that this agreement marks the recognition of the right of the Jewish people to statehood and the recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to statehood.”
- “Palestine shall be a non-militarized state,” and would include the WB and GS with border amendments that would annex the settlement blocs and Jewish districts in Jerusalem to Israel. The latter in exchange would relinquish the same size and quality of an area from “its land.” The land is about 2–3% of the WB area.
- “The Parties shall have their mutually recognized capitals in the areas of Jerusalem under their respective sovereignty.” There shall be no digging, excavation, or construction on *al-Aqsa* Mosque or what the Israelis call “Temple Mount, unless approved by the two Parties. The initiative stated that the Jewish district” in Jerusalem, the Western Wall and the Jewish cemetery in the Mount of Olives, shall be under Israeli administration.
- The initiative gave the refugees the right to return to the Palestinian state, but didn’t give them the right to go back to their land that was occupied in 1948, and made the acceptance of their return a matter of Israeli sovereignty. It also stated that refugees “shall be entitled to compensation for their refugeehood and for loss of property.”
- The initiative approved the setting up of strict security arrangements in the Palestinian state areas that would prevent any “terrorist” acts against Israel. It may maintain two Early Warning Station in the northern and central WB, and the “Israeli Air Force shall be entitled to use the Palestinian sovereign airspace for training purposes.”
- All border crossings shall be monitored by joint teams composed of members of the Palestinian Security Forces (PSF) and Multinational Force (MF). All border crossings shall be monitored by joint teams composed of members of the PSF and the MF.<sup>78</sup>



Although this was an unofficial initiative, it was significant because it showed the extent to which the Palestinian leadership can push for Palestinian rights in the proposed state. The participating Palestinian officials who were a major part of the decision-making process, among whom were many ministers and leaders, such as Yasir ‘Abd Rabbo, the secretary of the PLO Executive Committee and former minister of information and culture; Hisham ‘Abdul Raziq, former minister of detainees’ affairs; Nabil Qassis, former minister of planning; Ghaith al-‘Umari, the political advisor to Mahmud ‘Abbas; and also Qaddoura Fares, Muhammad al-Hourani; and Zuhair Manasra, all among the well known leaders of Fatah.



• Yasir ‘Abd Rabbo



• Hisham ‘Abdul Raziq



• Muhammad  
al-Hourani



• Nabil Qassis



• Qaddoura Fares

As for Israeli participants, they all belonged to the Israeli opposition and do not have a comparable role in the Israeli decision-making process: Yossi Beilin, Yossi Sarid, Amnon Shahak, Amram Mitzna, and Avraham Burg.



• Yossi Beilin



• Yossi Sarid



• Amnon Shahak



• Amram Mitzna



• Avraham Burg

## 2. The Arab Initiative

The Arab summits and the Arab League continued to govern most of the Arab vision of Palestine’s future. Moreover, the clauses of the Arab Project for Peace adopted at the Fez Arab Summit in 1982 defined the path for Arab stances. The project stated that an “independent Palestinian State should be set up [in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967] with Al Qods (Jerusalem) as its capital,” and it affirmed “the right of the Palestinian Arab people to return to their homes,” and that all “States in the region should be able to live in peace.”<sup>79</sup>

In 2002, the Saudi Peace Initiative, which was adopted at the Arab summit in Beirut on 27–28/3/2002, replaced the Fez Arab Project for Peace and became the reference for the Arab vision of a peace settlement. In essence, it did not differ from the initiatives preceding it regarding the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the WB and the GS and the return of the refugees. However it does state that “the acceptance by Israel to this initiative means that Arabs could establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace.”<sup>80</sup>

### 3. The Road Map

It appeared that there was a new Palestinian political victory when the UN Security Council issued resolution 1397 on 12/3/2002, which reflected for the first time a clear vision regarding the future of the struggle to establish an independent Palestinian state that would “live side by side” with Israel.<sup>81</sup>

On 24/6/2002, George W. Bush presented his vision for the final peace settlement, calling for negotiations that would lead to the “emergence of a viable, credible Palestinian state,” and two states who would “live side by side in peace and security.”<sup>82</sup> This vision was adopted by the Quartet, and was amended in its final form in April 2003 into what became known as the Road Map.<sup>83</sup>



• George W. Bush

The importance of the Road Map lies in the fact that it is the first declared US commitment to establish the Palestinian state within a set time frame, i.e., by the end of 2005. It was divided into three phases and based on a trust-building program between the two parties, and offered comprehensive security guarantees to Israel, while demanding that the PA stops the *Intifadah* and launches a comprehensive political, administrative and economic reform process. The Road Map was full of loopholes: even though it called for reaching a final and comprehensive permanent status agreement, it did not offer a plan for resolving key issues, instead leaving them for future negotiations. It did not impose anything on the Israeli negotiator, while it put the Palestinian negotiator at Israel’s mercy. Practically speaking, what the US implemented were Palestinian commitments. But the Israelis did not implement their commitments, not even those related to the first phase of the Road Map, namely dismantling settlement outposts and freezing all settlement activity.

The Road Map did not offer a vision regarding the final status issues (Jerusalem, the refugees, the settlements, the borders, sovereignty...), or any real mechanism to force the Israeli side to execute its commitments. Moreover, it focused on guaranteeing the security of the occupying power instead of providing security to the victims of this power.

On 25/5/2003, the Israeli government approved the Road Map, but entered 14 reservations about it, thus practically stripping it of its intended authority. The US administration expressed its understanding of the Israeli reservations,

which included the end of the *Intifadah*; the dismantling of “the existing security organizations” and implementing “security reforms during the course of which new organizations will be formed” where these “organizations will engage in genuine prevention of terror and violence.” Also, the PA was obliged to “complete the dismantling of terrorist organizations ( Hamas, PIJ, al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and other apparatuses) and their infrastructure,” while collecting all illegal weapons and ceasing weapons smuggling and incitement, before any progress to the second phase of the Road Map. This was just the first reservation, but it was enough to halt the Road Map for years, and gave a hint of a potential civil war among Palestinians. As for the other reservations, they called for the emergence of a new and different PA leadership, eliminated the time frame of the Road Map and the Saudi Initiative as reference, as well as UN Security Council Resolution 1397 which affirms “a vision of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side.” These reservations were in addition to the Israeli condition that Palestinians announce “Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state and to the waiver of any right of return for Palestinian refugees” to the 1948 occupied Palestinian land.<sup>84</sup>

The PA for its part put together all the security forces in three apparatuses and created the Prime Minister’s Office, where Mahmud ‘Abbas was first appointed followed by Ahmad Qurai’. After Yasir ‘Arafat’s death, the Palestinians in WB and GS elected Mahmud ‘Abbas as president of the PA on 9/1/2005. This authority made various governmental amendments, particularly on the financial and economic levels, as evidence of transparency. The PA was able to convince the Palestinian factions to unilaterally declare appeasement on 22/1/2005 and then declare a ceasefire between the PA and Israel on February 8th.

On 21/6/2005, Sharon met ‘Abbas in Jerusalem, and despite Sharon’s acknowledgment of the progress made at the security and appeasement level, he did not deem it to be sufficient. According to Israeli sources, ‘Abbas demanded



**Sharon-‘Abbas meeting**

that Israel “strengthen his hand” and told Sharon, “Our situation is bad... Every bullet and mortar fired at you is fired against me too.” He added that in his difficult situation, Israel was asking a lot from the PA, as most of the operations against Israel were launched from Israeli controlled areas.<sup>85</sup>

#### 4. Unilateral Separation

Israel's unilateral separation means that it set the final form of its borders and of the peace settlement, by maintaining the largest area of the land, and getting rid of the greatest number of Palestinians, without having to pay costly dues linked to Jerusalem, refugees or the dismantlement of the settlements in the WB. The issue therefore ultimately seemed like a border problem between the Palestinians and the Israelis that could die with time. The idea of unilateral separation dominated the Israeli political vision from the end of 2003 to 2006.

On 18/12/2003, Sharon announced that he had adopted the idea, and in April 2004 he presented the Disengagement Plan, which included that "Israel will evacuate the Gaza Strip, including all existing Israeli towns and villages, and will redeploy outside the Strip." It stated that "Israel will guard and monitor the external land perimeter of the Gaza Strip, will continue to maintain exclusive authority in Gaza air space, and will continue to exercise security activity in the sea off the coast of the Gaza Strip." This practically implied turning GS into a large prison, and would keep it under Israeli occupation according to international law. The Disengagement Plan included maintaining six settlement blocs in WB, in addition to East Jerusalem and the settlements around it.<sup>86</sup>

The US supported the unilateral Disengagement Plan at a joint press conference between Bush and Sharon in Washington on 14/4/2004, and the implementation plan was divided into several phases, beginning with withdrawal from GS and four isolated settlements in WB.

*Al-Aqsa Intifadah* played a major role in pushing the Israelis to withdraw from GS after it had become a security and economic burden.<sup>87</sup> The protection of around eight thousand settlers in GS was costly and draining, requiring the deployment of thousands of soldiers to protect the settlements amidst 1.4 million Palestinians. Nonetheless, the Israeli government sought to exploit its withdrawal to achieve the greatest number of political and material gains. Indeed, it was getting rid of a great demographic burden that could not be part of any plan aiming to preserve the Jewish identity of the state. Moreover, redeployment of the Israeli army ended any contact with the Gazans, decreased the possibility of being attacked, and made the resistance in GS lose international justification for its military operations. The Israeli government, on one hand,

took advantage of the Road Map plan and tried to isolate the WB in order to Judaize Jerusalem, erect the Separation Wall, confiscate land and secure the settlement blocs under any future political settlement. On another hand, it attempted to improve its image and present itself to the international community as a peace-loving partner enduring “painful” concessions for peace.

The Israeli withdrawal from GS began in mid-August 2005 and ended on 11/9/2005. Israel announced its unilateral withdrawal and retention of control over the GS’s borders, coastline, airspace and border crossings. On 15/11/2005, it reached an agreement with the PA on border management with European supervision and surveillance cameras that constantly monitor the search process for the Israelis. The PA agreed to consult with the Israelis and the third party (Quartet Special Envoy for Disengagement and his staff and/ or the United States Security Coordinator (USSC) and his staff) prior to the PA making a decision to prohibit travel or not. During this consultation, which should not take more than six hours, the person in question would not be permitted to cross.<sup>88</sup> The PA celebrated the opening of the border on 25/11/2005.

The Israeli government’s enthusiasm for the Disengagement Plan did not last long, as frustration began to set in during the second half of 2006, and the plan was no longer on the government’s list of priorities, until it was discarded, namely due to:<sup>89</sup>

- The victory of Hamas in elections, the formation of its government, the failure to topple it, and the concerns that a withdrawal may be viewed as a victory for Hamas and a consolidation of its authority on the ground.
- The failure of the Israeli war on Lebanon and Hizbullah in the summer of 2006, and the increasing conviction that the pullout from South Lebanon in 2000 has strengthened Hizbullah’s and the resistance’s abilities and heightened the fears that a similar scenario might be repeated in WB.
- The decrease in popularity of the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and the Kadima Party weakened Olmert’s ability to manipulate events in Israel’s favor.
- Convictions on the necessity of supporting Mahmud ‘Abbas and coordinating with him to confront Hamas.



- The Israeli public was preoccupied with corruption scandals and the investigations in to the war on Lebanon.
- The emergence of security, economic, and legal difficulties that deterred its implementation on the ground, and Olmert considered, in mid-August 2006, that his convergence plan was no longer at the top of his government’s agenda. Olmert said it was impossible to ignore the Palestinian problem, but added that at that point in time (after the 2006 war on Lebanon), Israel and its government faced the enormous challenge of rebuilding the North.<sup>90</sup>

### **5. The Return Through Negotiations to the Palestinian State Option**

The victory of Hamas in the elections confounded the Palestinian and Israeli governments and affected the peace process, as everyone involved attempted to control or topple Hamas. When President ‘Abbas formed the emergency government headed by Salam Fayyad in Ramallah, following Hamas’s control of GS in June 2007, Israel opened the way to cooperate with it, especially on the security level. There were again talks about stirring the peace process, which were rounded off by the Annapolis Conference in the US on 27/11/2007.

The Israelis offered nothing new; they still wanted an entity that was more than autonomous, but less than an independent state. Many propositions were made by Israeli leaders affiliated mainly with the Kadima Party, which remained in power until February 2009 and included Ehud Olmert, Tzipi Livni, Shimon Peres and Haim Ramon. They called for a withdrawal from around 90% of the WB while maintaining the settlement blocs and conducting an exchange of lands to compensate Palestinians for what they would lose because of the settlements.

2009 was the year when the extreme right returned to power under the leadership of Likud, which still believed that it was possible to “squeeze” the Palestinians further in order to achieve even more concessions. Although the US under Obama initially stirred the peace process, it failed in imposing the simplest condition of the Road Map, namely to freeze settlement construction. Hence, negotiations were suspended throughout 2009, and stumbled in 2010. Indeed, efforts were made at resuming the talks, and led to an agreement on indirect talks to be followed by direct talks, in exchange for Israel announcing a 10-month construction freeze on all of its WB settlements. However, these efforts collapsed when Israel categorically refused to extend the freezing period, which ended on 26/9/2010.

The Arab revolutions, which began to emerge and expand in early 2011, rendered the peace process even harder to attain, when the Arab regimes supporting it (mainly Egypt) collapsed. Israeli and US policy suffered from a worrisome situation, where Israel tightened its security measures and reinforced its military infrastructure. Moreover, there was additional talk about the establishment of a Palestinian state within temporary borders, and the postponement of other final status issues. There was also talk about unilateral withdrawal.

## **6. The One-State Option**

Even if the Palestinian negotiator did not initially take heed, the option of a bi-national state began to receive increasing Palestinian attention due to the prevailing frustration regarding the two-state solution. Palestinian intellectuals and leaders affiliated with Fatah began talking about the one state option either as a tool to pressure and threaten the Israeli side, or as realistically the only option to exit the crisis and end the Arab-Israeli conflict.

On 11/8/2008, Reuters reported that when Ahmad Qurai‘ met behind closed doors with Fatah members, while he was leading negotiations after Annapolis, he did not exclude the idea of a bi-national state with the Israelis on historic Palestine. Moreover, Sa’ib ‘Uraiqat, the chief Palestinian negotiator, suggested in November 2009 the adoption of the one-state solution, if the Israelis failed to stop building settlements.<sup>91</sup>

### ***Fourth: The Separation Wall***

The Separation Wall being built by Israel around the WB is reminiscent of the apartheid policies that were used in South Africa. This is indicative of the nature of Israel, which remains a foreign body surrounded by religious, political, cultural and language “barriers” that separate it from its neighbors; isolated in a hostile environment. It is an implicit acknowledgment on its part that it did not succeed in being an entity that is accepted in the region.

The Israeli government had erected a fence surrounding GS after the first *Intifadah* in 1987, and Yitzhak Rabin won the elections in 1992 based on the slogan “We are here and they are there.”<sup>92</sup>



• Part of the Separation Wall route

The Israeli government approved the erection of the Separation Wall in the WB in April 2002, and work on it began on 16/6/2002. The Wall's anticipated length extended from 734 km in June 2002 to 770 km in April 2007, and the Ma'ale Adumim settlement, east of Jerusalem, was annexed to it. In other words, the length of the Wall became more than double the length of the Green Line (the border of WB with the territories occupied in 1948) that only extends for 320 km. Until the end of 2008, there were around 502 km of the Wall built, and the area of the Western Separation Zone, which includes the region lying between the Separation Wall and the Green Line according to the final modifications of the route, is 733 km<sup>2</sup>,<sup>93</sup> equivalent to 12.5% of the WB.

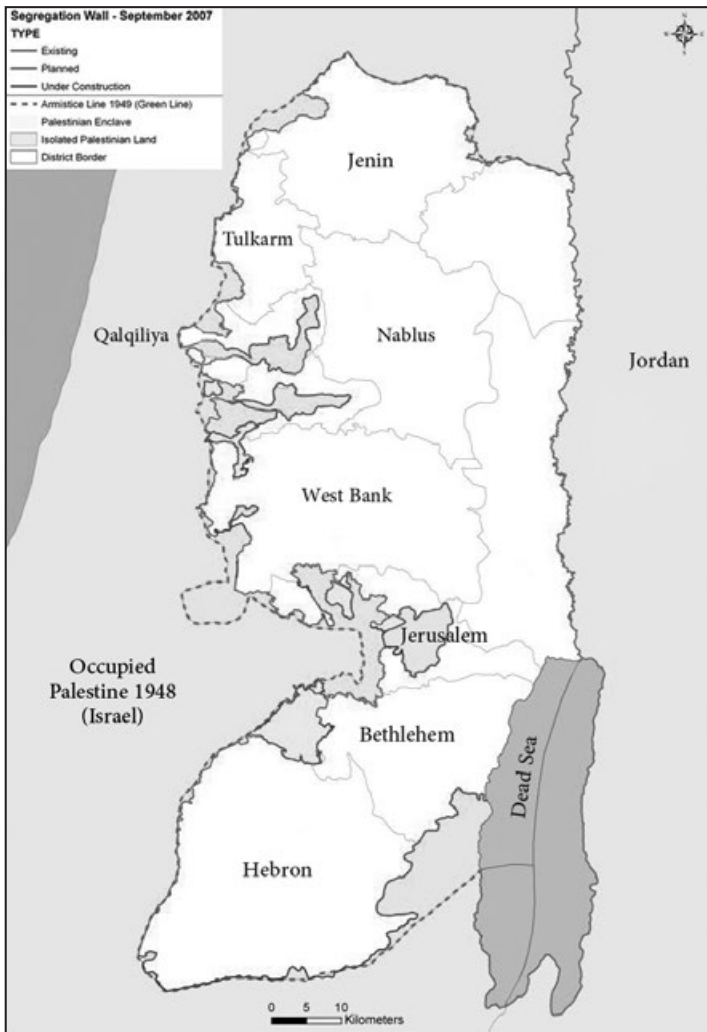
If the Separation Wall is built as it is planned, it will directly affect around 680 thousand Palestinians, and 250 thousand Palestinians will be stuck between the Separation Wall and the Green Line, while 330 thousand Palestinians will be separated by the Wall from their lands, crops and workplace. 101 towns and



• One example of the suffering of the Palestinians due to Separation Wall

villages will also be affected, with 19 of them to the west of the Wall being prevented from any contact with the other parts of the WB. 53 towns and villages would also be surrounded by the Wall on three sides. Moreover, the Wall would bring together the greatest number of Israeli settlements in the WB, including most of the WB settlers.

The Israeli authorities are attempting to market the Separation Wall as a mere fence, but anyone following its plans and the locations of its erection, will find a complex military setting including an eight meter-high cement wall with an electric fence, surveillance cameras and strong lights, in addition to military observation towers.<sup>94</sup>



The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued its advisory opinion on 9/7/2004, which considered that the “construction of the wall being built by Israel, the occupying Power, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, and its associated régime, are contrary to international law.” It further stated that Israel is “under an obligation to cease forthwith the works of construction of the wall” and to “compensate, in accordance with the applicable rules of international law, all natural or legal persons having suffered any form of material damage as a result of the wall’s construction.” The ICJ declared that “the de facto annexation of land interferes with the territorial sovereignty and consequently with the right of the Palestinians to self-determination.”<sup>95</sup>

### ***Fifth: Israel***

Israel entered the second decade of the 21st century with an advanced military and technological force compared to its Arab surrounding. It also enjoyed international support and influence, especially from the US, thus enabling it to be “above the law.”

The internal Israeli political scene was characterized by:

- The increasing influence of right-wing parties, including Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu. Even in the supposedly moderate Kadima Party, many of its leaders and members have Likudnik and right-wing backgrounds.
- The increased influence of religious parties, especially organized movements, leading to the increase of their members among the officers of the Israeli army, from 7% thirty years ago to around 40% in 2011.
- The decline in the influence of the Israeli Left and its fragmentation, including the Labor Party, which was for 55 years the backbone of Israeli politics, or one of its two pillars. It regressed, however, in the 2009 elections to the fourth position, then was fragmented in 2011, when its Chairman Ehud Barak and some of its Knesset members left the party and formed the Atzmaut (Independence) Party.
- The increase of corruption in Israeli society both on the popular level and in the political leadership. Examples of this are the accusations of corruption addressed against Prime Ministers Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert, the Israeli President Moshe Katsav, the Vice Prime Minister Haim Ramon, Israeli Chief

of Staff Dan Halutz and others. The values of exploitation, pleasure and egoism were widely spread, not to mention sexual harassment and family division; this was reflected in the increase in the number of suicides and army desertions.

- Jewish migration to Israel declined to less than 17 thousand people a year, while reverse migration increased to 10–15 thousand annually,<sup>96</sup> with indications that there are around 700 thousand Israelis living abroad.<sup>97</sup>
- Increased racism against Palestinians in the 1948 occupied territories, whether by Israelis, Israeli officials or racist laws and regulations.

Demographically, at the end of 2011 there were 5.9 million Jews and 5.6 million Palestinians in Historic Mandatory Palestine (in 1948 and 1967).<sup>98</sup>

Economically, Israeli GDP in 2011 reached \$243 billion, and per capita income reached \$31,300, which is almost similar to the rates in Europe and developed countries. Israeli exports in 2011 amounted to \$67.26 billion. As for total imports, they amounted to \$73.54 billion. Manufactured goods represent 78.5% of Israeli exports.

The US continued to enjoy its standing as Israel's leading trade partner, which receives almost third of Israeli exports. Although it is a wealthy and developed country, Israel received in 2011 a US annual financial aid of \$3.29 billion. Hence, during the period 1949–2011, it received a total of \$112.31 billion from the US.<sup>99</sup>

Part of the Israeli economic prosperity is due to the decline of the Palestinian *Intifadah* and resistance operations, and the calm of the Arab fronts, along with improved political and economic relations, particularly with Egypt and Jordan, in addition to the political and economic breakthroughs achieved by Israel with China, India, Russia, and Eastern Europe countries.

As for the military sector, Israel still has enormous expenditures, with an approved military budget for 2011 of \$15 billion. The Israeli military budget is one of the highest in the world compared to GDP or population, with an annual per capita military spending amounting to \$2 thousand, compared for example to \$46 in Egypt, \$88 in Syria, and \$211 in Jordan. Moreover, there are 178 thousand soldiers in the Israeli army and 427 thousand reservists. The Israeli army has outstanding combat skills and advanced training, in addition to the best and latest weapons, whether manufactured by the Israeli industry



or imported from the US and Europe. Israel has around 200 nuclear warheads, and it manufactures all kinds of military electronic devices, electronic blocking devices and missile guidance systems. It was able to manufacture Kfir fighter jets, Arrow (Hetz) ballistic missile interceptors and Merkava tanks, which are considered among the best tanks in the world. Israel is considered among the five greatest weapons-exporting country in the world (\$7.2 billion in 2010).<sup>100</sup>

Despite the great capacities of the Israeli army, it failed both in the July 2006 Lebanon war and in its aggression on GS at the end of 2008/ beginning of 2009. At a time when there is a decline in the Israeli soldier's capabilities, and the Israeli army is witnessing increasing psychological problems, corruption, and desertion, whereas resistance soldiers are readier than ever to endure and sacrifice.

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## This Book

This book seeks to present a comprehensive overview of the Palestine issue, its historical background, as well as its modern and contemporary developments.

The book, in a documented, methodical, and concise style, and in plain language, delves into the history of Palestine from its early history throughout the Islamic era, and the background of the emergence of the Zionist movement, as well as the British occupation of Palestine and the founding of Israel. The book analyzes the various phases of the Palestine issue and its developments, shedding light on the struggle of the Palestinian people, their uprisings and revolutions, and the role of the Palestine Liberation Organization and its factions, as well as the role of the Palestinian Islamic movements.

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The book is an important source for readers seeking to acquaint themselves with the Palestine issue, and to become informed of the pertinent facts in a balanced manner. It can also serve as an introduction to further studies of the Palestine issue.

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