

The Palestine Issue

Historical Background & Contemporary Developments



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Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

Chapter Seven

The Palestine Issue 2012–2021

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The Palestine Issue 2012–2021

Introduction

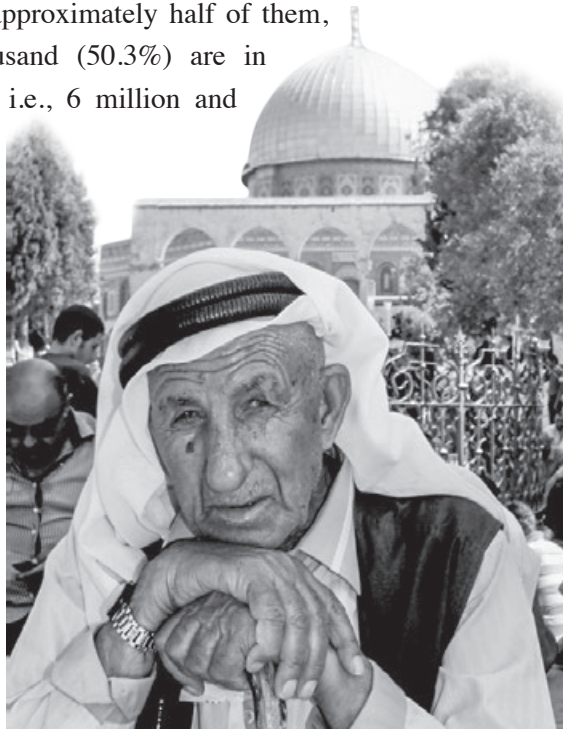
The 2012–2021 period was characterized by a number of features and variables, the most prominent of which were:

- The strength of Hamas and the resistance forces has increased. Their military capabilities have evolved and they were able to fight three fierce battles with Israel in 2012, 2014 and 2021, in addition to the fact that all Israeli areas were within range of Hamas rocket fire.
- The Israeli society has become more inclined towards religious and ultra-nationalist right, the manifestations of the “Jewish” state has strengthened, Judaization and settlement programs, especially in Jerusalem and the rest of the WB has been activated. Despite the increase of social disintegration and the growing religious and ethnic differences, there is a sense of greater stability and economic progress in Israel.
- Despite all efforts, the peace process has faltered and reached a dead end, and the “two-state solution” and Trump’s plan have failed; Israel used this process as a cover for Judaization and settlement building, to make normalization breakthrough in the region, and enhance its international “legitimacy.”
- The PA has failed and was exposed in an unprecedented way as a functional authority, serving the occupation more than its own people. The PLO has been suffering from continued weakness, deterioration and collapse of the institutions.
- The Palestinian reconciliation has faltered, and the signed agreements were not implemented. In the spring of 2021, the PA (PLO and Fatah leadership) has proved that it was not serious enough to implement the reconciliation program, complete the elections and rebuild the Palestinian institutions.
- The Arab environment has declined, becoming more weak and disintegrated. This is due to the counter-wave that targeted the “Arab Spring,” the on-going conflict in some Arab countries, normalization efforts that officially made four Arab countries (UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco) forge relations with Israel, and the decline of Palestine’s position on the official Arab agenda.

- Most of the international community is still sympathetic to the Palestinian right, but is unable to implement its decisions, due to the hegemony of the US and global forces that provide cover for Israel and treats it as a “state above the law.” Sometimes there are gains and sometimes setbacks for the pro-Palestine countries, as happened with South America. However, the international popular trend is generally going upward, albeit slowly, where the support of Palestinian right and the negative perception of Israel are increasing.

First: The Palestinian People

The Palestinians worldwide were estimated at 13 million and 682 thousand in 2020 (early 2021); where approximately half of them, i.e., 6 million and 884 thousand (50.3%) are in the diaspora. The other half; i.e., 6 million and 798 thousand (49.7%) live in historic Palestine. Of these, one million and 634 thousand live in the 1948 occupied territories and 5 million and 164 thousand in the 1967 territories; where 3 million and 87 thousand (59.8%) live in WB, and 2 million and 77 thousand (40.2%) in GS.¹



As for Jordan, at the end of 2020, Palestinians living in Jordan (most of whom are holders of Jordanian nationality) are estimated at 4 million and 393 thousand,² representing 32.1% of Palestinians worldwide (about 63.8% of those in diaspora). As for other Arab countries, the number of Palestinians is estimated at one million and 752 thousand, 12.8% of Palestinians worldwide, mostly living in neighboring Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and the Gulf countries. Palestinians in foreign countries are estimated at a total of 738 thousand, 5.4% of Palestinians worldwide, mostly living in the US, South America,

Canada, Britain and the rest of the EU countries. It should be noted that these numbers are estimates, as it is difficult to uncover accurate statistics for Palestinians in the diaspora.³ Some estimates indicate that there are more than 600 thousand Palestinians in South America, of those 300 thousand live in Chile.

It is noted that more than 75% of the Palestinian people are still residing in the countries surrounding Palestine (Jordan, Syria and Lebanon), which indicates that the Palestinians are committed to their land and aspire to return, even after 72 years after the 1948 *Nakbah* of Palestine; and that their return is feasible. This is the same commitment of Palestinians worldwide, manifested in return organizations and the activities and events held by the diaspora in the Arab countries, Europe, Asia, North and South America, and Australia.

More than two thirds of the Palestinian people still have a “refugee” status. In addition to the 6 million and 884 thousand Palestinians living abroad, a total of 2 million and 238 thousand are refugees descending from the territories occupied in 1948 and living in WB and GS, in addition to 150 thousand refugees who were expelled from their land but remained living in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948. In 2020, the total number of Palestinian refugees is 9 million and 271 thousand, 67.8% of the total Palestinian population. There is a lack of reliability in calculating some figures, for some Palestinians abroad also have Palestinian ID; however, this will be of marginal impact due to the large overall number of Palestinian refugees.

According to UNRWA, there were 6 million and 172 thousand Registered Persons (RPs) early 2019. These statistics do not accurately reflect the refugee population worldwide as they exclude many refugees residing outside UNRWA’s operation areas, like the Gulf countries, EU and the US, or because they did not need to register with the Agency and benefit from its services.⁴

**Palestinian Refugees Worldwide According to
2020 Estimates (thousands)⁵**

Country	WB	GS	Israel*	Arab countries	Foreign countries	Total
Number	815	1,423	150	6,145	738	9,271

Note: The WB and GS figures are estimates based on percentages published by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistic (PCBS) (26.3% of the WB population and 66.1% of the GS population are refugees).

* Approximate figures.



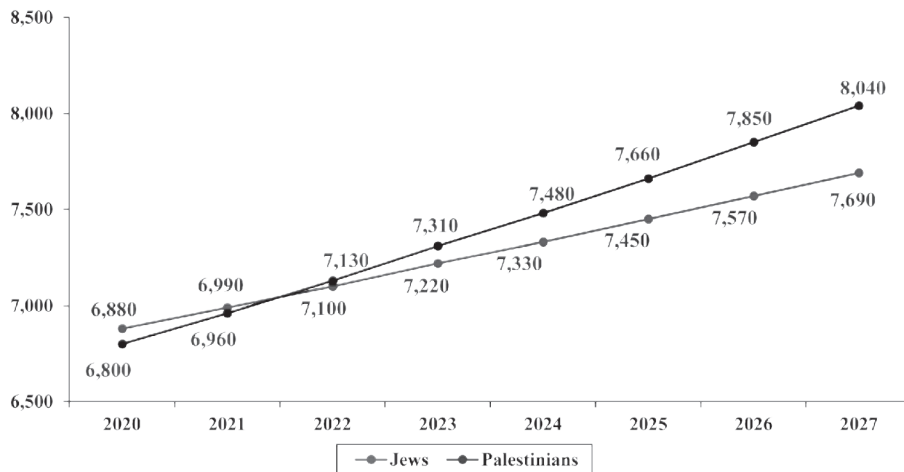
• The forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948 war

Natural population growth (the difference between birth and death rates) in the WB and GS was 2.5% in mid-2020 (GS 2.9% and WB 2.2%). Based on PCBS estimates, in 2022, Palestinians and Jews in historic Palestine are expected to be about 7 million and 100 thousand each.⁶ This worries the Israelis, at a time when calls are increasing among them to expel the Palestinians, or to transfer them, or to unilaterally withdraw from highly populated areas in WB.

**Estimated Population Count of Palestinians and Jews in Historic Palestine
2020–2027 (thousands)⁷**

Year	Palestinians in historic Palestine	Jews
2020	6,800	6,880
2021	6,960	6,990
2022	7,130	7,100
2023	7,310	7,220
2024	7,480	7,330
2025	7,660	7,450
2026	7,850	7,570
2027	8,040	7,690

**Estimated Population Count of Palestinians and Jews in Historic Palestine
2020–2027 (thousands)**



Second: The Aggression and Resistance 2012–2021

While Israeli aggression and repressive measures persisted, Palestinians continued with their resistance against the Israeli occupation, embracing all possible popular and armed forms. Despite the impediments facing the resistance in the WB due to security coordination between the PA and the Israeli army, individual resistance operations continued, parallel to unrelenting daily confrontations



and retaliation against Israel's measures, incursions and arrest campaigns. In GS, resistance forces developed their combat and field capabilities, as well as the performance of the Joint Operation Room, while undergoing several military confrontations that demonstrated high efficiency and deterrent strength. The Marches of Return presented a new and creative form of popular resistance.

Resistance operations increased throughout 2019–2020 as the Shabak recorded 2,682 attacks in 2019 compared to 1,524 in 2020 in the WB including East Jerusalem, the GS and the 1948 occupied territories. The



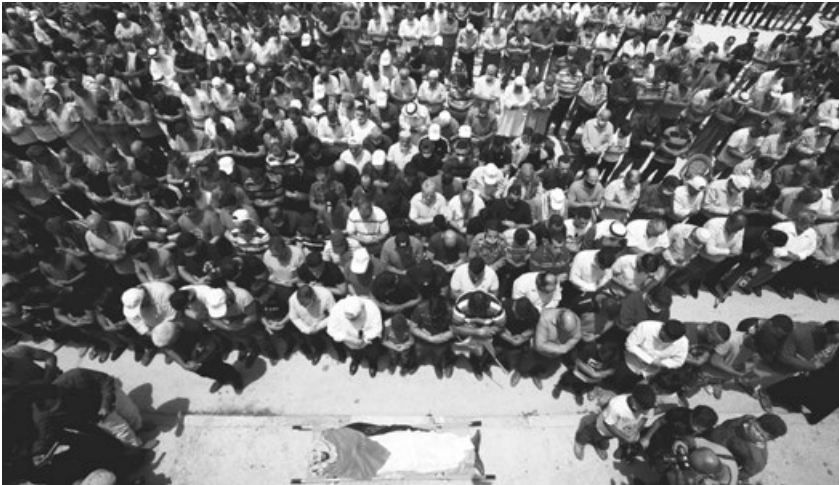
Shabak recorded 1,050 attacks in the WB (excluding East Jerusalem) in 2019 compared to 912 in 2020, while in East Jerusalem and the 1948 occupied territories, it recorded 250 attacks in 2019 compared to 336 in 2020. In GS, the Shabak recorded

1,380 attacks in 2019 compared to 276 attacks in 2020. Interestingly, most attacks in the two years in the WB consisted of throwing stones and Molotov cocktails.⁸

Security coordination reached advanced levels as Israeli security forces announced the foiling of Palestinian resistance attacks and the detection of resistance cells, in coordination with Palestinian security forces. Several Israeli security and military sources, including Gadi Eisenkot, Army Chief of the General Staff, said that security coordination had prevented Hamas from returning to its operations in the WB.⁹ For example, speaking to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Security Committee on 6/11/2018, Shabak Head Nadav Argaman said that during 2018, the Shabak thwarted 480 attacks, arrested 219 Hamas cells and prevented 590 potential lone-wolf attacks.¹⁰ In general, the PA security forces thwarts around 40% of resistance operations in WB.¹¹

The Killed and Wounded

Through the 2012–2020, a total of 3,477 Palestinians were killed and 75,274 were wounded. As for the Israelis, the Shabak recorded the killing of 195 Israelis and the wounding of 1,401.¹²



• The funeral of Ibrahim Abu Ya‘qub (34), who was shot by the Israeli forces in Salfit District in WB, 10/7/2020

A total of 149 Palestinians were killed by Israelis in 2019, including 33 children and 12 women, while a total of 43 Palestinians were killed in 2020, including 9 children and 3 women, who were shot by either the Israeli army or settlers in both GS and WB. 15,287 Palestinians were wounded in 2019, compared to more than 1,650 in 2020.

The Shabak recorded the killing of 9 Israelis in 2019, and 3 in 2020, because of Palestinian attacks. 65 Israelis were wounded in 2019, compared to 46 in 2020.

**The Killed and Wounded Among Palestinians and Israelis
in WB and GS 2016–2020**

Year	Killed		Wounded	
	Palestinians	Israelis	Palestinians	Israelis
2016	134	17	3,230	170
2017	94	18	8,300	66
2018	314	14	31,603	77
2019	149	9	15,287	65
2020	43	3	1,650	46

Prisoners and Detainees

In 2019 and 2020 the suffering of Palestinian prisoners continued, with 4,400 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons as of December 2020, including 41 women, 170 children, and 8 PLC members. There were 4,075 prisoners from WB, including 310 from East Jerusalem, 255 from GS and 70 prisoners from the 1948 occupied territories in addition to dozens of Arab prisoners of different nationalities. 380 prisoners were classified as administrative detainees or detainees pending trial, or what Israel calls “unlawful combatants.”

Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Prisons 2016–2020¹³

Year	Total no. of detainees	WB*	GS	Serving life sentences	Women	Children
2016	6,500	6,080	350	459	53	300
2017	6,119	5,729	320	525	59	330
2018	5,450	5,082	298	540	53	215
2019	5,000	4,634	296	541	41	180
2020	4,400	4,075	255	543	41	170

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

Israeli Aggression on GS: Operation Stones of Baked Clay 2012¹⁴

The Israeli army attacked GS, on 14–21/11/2012, in what the Israeli called the Pillar of Defense Operation and the Palestinian resistance called Operation Stones of Baked Clay. It led to 191 dead and 1,526 wounded, most of whom were children, women and the elderly. During this aggression the Israeli army attacked around 1,500 targets in GS, including government buildings, tunnels, rocket launchers, houses, prominent activists and weapons storehouses.

According to Shabak, six Israelis, including two soldiers, were killed, and 232 were wounded. 1,731 rockets were launched from the GS, targeting the surrounding southern settlements, as well as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. According to the business information company BDI estimates on 17/11/2012, this war cost the Israeli economy around one billion and 100 million shekels (\$278 million and 300 thousand) a week.



• Resistance rockets launched from GS during Operation Stones of Baked Clay

Israeli Aggression on GS: Operation Eaten Straw 2014¹⁵

GS was subjected to a broad Israeli aggression that lasted 51 days (7/7–26/8/2014). The assault was dubbed Operation Protective Edge by the Israelis and Operation Eaten Straw (*al-‘Asf al-Ma’kul*) by the Palestinians. The Israeli army targeted civilians in GS, reflected in the mass killings of residents in their homes, a flagrant violation of international laws and human rights conventions.

The performance of the resistance during the 51 days of war showed its ability (most notably Hamas) to develop its missile systems, increasing their range to approximately 120 kilometers, reaching all the Israeli population centers in the 1948 occupied territories. Moreover, the resistance managed to infiltrate the Israeli side by land, sea and air, and offered new surprises such UAVs. The command



• **Resistance rockets in Operation Eaten Straw**

in the GS maintained its control of Palestinian resistance forces, and was not disrupted. The Israeli side had a case of “intelligence blindness” on the ground, which weakened the potential for Israel to hit its targets. Moreover, the resistance achieved a popular and broad consensus of support, despite the extremity of the violence and damage inflicted by the Israeli forces on civilian areas.

According to statistics by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2,147 were killed, including 530 children and 302 women. Additionally 10,870 were injured, including 3,303 children and 2,101 women. The Israeli army attacked 5,263 targets in the Strip during the offensive. The aggression also led to the destruction of 17,123 homes, of which 2,465 houses were completely destroyed and 14,667 houses were partially destroyed, in addition to 39,500 damaged homes.



• **Destroyed residential buildings in GS targeted by Israeli forces in Operation Eaten Straw**

Deputy Minister of Economy Taysir ‘Amr said on 28/8/2014 that the total losses suffered by the GS during the Israeli offensive were \$7.5–\$8 billion, including direct and indirect losses.

According to Shabak, Operation Protective Edge/ Operation Eaten Straw led to the deaths of 73 Israelis, including 67 soldiers, while the number of injured was 312. As for the rockets, 4,692 fell on Israel from the GS, targeting the surrounding southern settlements, as well as Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa and al-Khudaira (Hadera). Moreover, Israeli sources estimated the direct and indirect economic damage by the war at 12 billion shekels (about \$3 billion and 70 million).

The Jerusalem *Intifadah* 2015–2017¹⁶

From its outbreak in October 2015, the Jerusalem *Intifadah* was one of the most important developments for Israel; when the Palestinian people, especially in Jerusalem, rose to defend *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the holy sites, considering them a red line that cannot not be crossed.

The individual resistance operations in WB and GS varied, but were mainly stabbings and ramming attacks, in addition to stone-throwing activities and clashes with the Israeli army.

The two-year old Jerusalem *Intifadah* maintained its momentum and diversity of operations; the number of attacks against the Israeli forces reached 3,719 in WB including East Jerusalem, GS, and inside the 1948 Palestinian occupied territories. They led to the deaths of 57 Israelis and the injuring of

416 others, according to *Shabak*. It should be noted that most of the attacks recorded during this period in WB consisted of stone and Molotov cocktail throwing.

The Israeli authorities committed grave violations in all aspects of Palestinians' life executing young people and children at checkpoints daily, as well as making arrests and intimidating citizens, confiscating land, demolishing houses, and displacing hundreds of citizens. A statistical study prepared by the PLO's Abdullah al-Hourani Centre for Studies and Documentation issued on the second anniversary of the *Intifadah*, on 6/10/2017, reported that the total number killed during the Jerusalem *Intifadah* reached 347, including 79 children and 17 women.

Lion's Gate Uprising 2017¹⁷

On 14/7/2017, a resistance operation was carried out at Lion's Gate, which resulted in the killing of two Israeli soldiers stationed at the gate, as well as the deaths of the perpetrators. Consequently, Israeli authorities installed electronic gates at the doors of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, along with surveillance cameras. They also seized the keys to the rooms and offices that were used by the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf, and tightened restrictions on the roads leading to *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

The Palestinian masses and their Muslim scholar leaders in Jerusalem realized the danger of Israeli measures that would impose direct security management on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and reduce the role of the Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places significantly. They refused to enter through



• **Two Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in Hebron's Tel Rumeida neighborhood, 24/3/2016**



• **Palestinian protestors in Jerusalem**

those gates and pray in *al-Aqsa*, demanded a full return to the pre-14 July status quo, and continued their protests that received wide popular Palestinian, Arab and Islamic solidarity.



• **Electronic gates installed at the doors of *al-Aqsa* Mosque**

After ten days, the Israeli forces dismantled the electronic gates at the doors of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and on 27/7/2017, Israeli forces removed the metal barriers and bridges, then they reopened *al-Mat-hara* Gate, and with this opening, all the gates of *al-Aqsa* Mosque returned to their pre-14/7/2017 status.

A report released by the PLO's Abdullah al-Hourani Centre for Studies and Documentation revealed that 20 Palestinians were killed in July 2017, and of those 15 were killed as a result of events at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, in addition, more than 1,400 Palestinians were injured. Israeli authorities also arrested more than 600 Palestinians in WB, including Jerusalem, and GS. However, most of the injuries and arrests took place in Jerusalem. The Shabak recorded 222 attacks in July 2017 compared to 94 in June 2017 in WB, including East Jerusalem, GS, and the 1948 occupied territories. The attacks resulted in the deaths of five Israelis, and the injuring of seven others.

The Gate of Mercy Uprising 2019¹⁸

In 2003, Israeli authorities closed the Gate of Mercy. On 17/2/2019, Israeli police put a new lock on the external gate of the Gate of Mercy, following the meeting and praying of the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf there. Next day, the masses of Jerusalem performed the noon prayer in the Gate of Mercy area, and the youth took off the gate and clashed with the Israeli forces, turning the area into a confrontation area. Consequently, on 22/2/2019, the gate was reopened, and it was for the first time since its closure in 2003.



• **Palestinians praying at the Mercy Gate of *al-Aqsa* Mosque**

Marches of Return and Breaking the Siege 2018–2019¹⁹

In January 2018, via social media platforms, Palestinian groups proposed holding popular marches simultaneously in GS and WB along with the Palestinian Diaspora. Their objective was to have an actual and peaceful return of Palestinian refugees, under the Palestinian flag, to their homeland and to the houses they were expelled from in the 1948 war. Palestinian Land Day was the date chosen to launch these marches.

The International Coordination Committee for the Great March of Return was formed, and it stressed that the idea was a non-factional one, wanted by the masses to mobilize refugees and gradually progress towards borders. However, when the Palestinian factions in GS joined the marches, on 17/3/2018, it added a resistance dimension. Then, the “Supreme National Authority of the March of Return and Breaking the Siege” was formed as the new framework of the marches, thus adding a local objective to the marches, which is breaking the

siege. The Marches of Return started on Friday 30/3/2018, and received wide response, thus becoming one of the most important developments that raised the Israeli army concerns, who despite pursuing measures and policies could not prevent them from taking place. In GS, the marches embodied the objectives most, as there is a pro-resistance environment, people are suffering from the siege, and the population are mostly refugees.

Until the end of 2019, 86 marches were held. The Palestinian people have marched, confronted the Israeli army, stormed their positions, and launched incendiary kites and balloons into Israeli settlements. Friday marches continued, culminating on 14/5/2018, when the US celebrated the transfer of their embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and 58 were killed and 2,771 injured in GS.

On 20/12/2019, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights reported that the Israeli army had killed 364 Palestinians in GS since the launch of the Great Marches of Return. The Center stated that 19,173 Palestinians, including 4,987 children and 864 women, were injured during their participation in the marches, while thousands suffered suffocation.



• A Palestinian protester participating in the GS Marches of Return, 22/10/2018

The Return Marches have witnessed wide popular participation, especially in GS, and the interaction of all social groups. They showed the Palestinian people's honest and strong commitment to the right of return, manifested national unity and were characterized by creativity, where marchers were innovative, using kites, balloons and night confusion. In addition, the Marches of Return forced the easing of the GS siege.

The Sword of Jerusalem Battle 2021²⁰

The Jerusalemites rose up to face Israeli attempts to confiscate the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and Judaize *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Jerusalem, and in early May 2021 (the last ten days of the holy month of Ramadan 1442 AH) confrontations escalated. As a result, the Hamas leadership in Gaza decided to support Jerusalem and its people, so it fired its missiles at Israel after refusing to back down, and the Battle of Sword of Jerusalem (dubbed by Israel Operation Guardian of the Walls) lasted for 11 days: 10–21/5/2021.

For the first time, Hamas and the resistance forces in GS imposed a new equation linking them with Jerusalem. Despite the siege and scarcity of resources, they fought on behalf of the Palestinian people and the Arab and Muslim nation, defending *al-Aqsa* and the holy sites. Despite the fierce and destructive Israeli war on GS, the resistance confronted the offense, developed its deterrence capacity, where the missiles' range reached 250 km, covering all of Israel. The missiles, which became more accurate and explosive, were able to



• Israeli soldiers firing stun grenades and smoke bombs at worshippers inside *al-Aqsa* Mosque, May 2021



• Buildings destroyed by Israeli shelling in Gaza during the Battle of Sword of Jerusalem

penetrate the Iron Dome and hit cities and Israeli communities. As a result, millions of Israelis sought shelter and civil aviation in Ben Gurion Airport and trains were paralyzed.

During this battle, the popular uprising in Jerusalem, the rest of WB and the 1948 occupied territories, escalated. High interaction was observed, on the Palestinian, Arab, Islamic and international levels, where huge demonstrations took place all over the world, including Europe and the US, denouncing the Israeli aggression. The Palestinian people was united behind the resistance, while the PA and the PLO became politically and popularly isolated, and the peace process proved to be a failure. Senior Israeli politicians, soldiers, security personnel and media persons have admitted that Hamas and the resistance forces won this confrontation and that Israel has lost.

The Israeli offensive targeted civilians, residential buildings, and public facilities in GS, where 260 were killed, including 66 children, 40 women and 17 elderly, while 1,948 were wounded. In WB, 29 were killed and 6,300 were wounded, while in the 1948 occupied territories, two were killed and many were wounded. In addition, 1,800 housing units in GS were destroyed and thousands were damaged. As for the Israeli side, 13 were killed and about 330 were wounded. Many buildings were also damaged, and 3,424 Israelis filed for compensation for damages to their property and homes, including 1,724 applications related to their cars and means of transportation. The Israeli economy lost about \$2 million and 140 thousand.



• **Tens of thousands of demonstrators marched through central London in support of the Palestinians, May 2021**



• **Burnt cars in Holon town near Tel Aviv, after resistance rockets were launched from GS**

Third: The Internal Palestinian Scene

The General Situation

The crisis defining the directions, tracks and priorities of the national project has continued, especially the conflict between the pro-peace camp and the pro-resistance camp. The “schism” and the failure to implement the reconciliation program have continued, without being able to put the Palestinian political house in order. Despite the many efforts that were made to achieve reconciliation, its enforcement on the ground has been delayed and faltered. The mistrust between Fatah and Hamas, and the impact of regional changes and the international environment on them, so as not to rush “paying the price” of reconciliation, make matters more difficult. Moreover, having two authorities with different tracks in Ramallah and GS has a negative impact on the national action in the 1967 Palestinian territories. The Israeli occupation of WB and its GS siege are still capable of disrupting the internal Palestinian reconciliation when the latter does not serve its interests. It would disrupt the government and the elections, and thwart the reform of the security forces in WB.

One of the most prominent aspects of the crisis is that the official Palestinian institution (the PLO) has continued to suffer from flabbiness, deterioration and “clinical death.” It is unable to include all the components and forces of the Palestinian people. It has failed to activate its institutions and the role of Palestinians inside and outside Palestine. Moreover, the role and size of the PLO have diminished, becoming more of a department among PA departments. The prospects appear bleaker and more closed off for the PA’s “statehood” project, for the PA has eroded and Israel continues to empty it of any national content, while keeping its functional role to serve its interests. Therefore, the catastrophic situation of the Palestinian representative and leadership institutions has wasted the potentials of the people and weakened their ability to proceed with the liberation project. At the same time, Israel continues with more Judaization activities and settlement building, imposing facts on the ground.

The revolutions and changes that swept the Arab world had an impact on the internal situation in Palestine. Between 2012 and 2013 (especially the first 18 months), the pro-resistance forces, especially Islamists, wagered on the success of these uprisings and the rise of “political Islam.” However, the military coup and subsequent ban on Hamas in Egypt, and the crippling blockade on GS, cast a negative shadow (even if a short-term one) on the Palestinian Islamist movement. This reality was further entrenched with the expansion in the scope of attacks against Islamist movements in the countries that saw uprisings or regime change, and even in those countries that anticipated such events. This has prompted the PA (Fatah leadership) not to rush into reconciliation, except in line with conditions that would see Hamas contained as the weaker party. However, the peace process, which hit a dead end, and the structural, political, and economic crises of the PA, compelled the Palestinians to ultimately return to the reconciliation process. This process has witnessed ups and downs in the second decade of the 21st century, where there is no unified political program and while one Palestinian faction (Fatah) insists on its continued domination of the official institutions and Palestinian decision-making.

Palestinian Reconciliation Track

On 6/2/2012, Khalid Mish‘al, head of Hamas’s political bureau, signed the Doha Agreement with President ‘Abbas under the personal sponsorship of the Emir of Qatar. The agreement required the formation of a national consensus government headed by President ‘Abbas, and the reactivation of the leadership framework of the PLO.²¹ However, ‘Abbas did not form a national consensus government over the next two years. Bilateral dialogues that took place under the auspices of Egypt until the middle of 2013 did not lead to the implementation of the agreement either, amid mutual accusations between the two parties over the failure to reconcile.



• Khalid Mish'al and Mahmud 'Abbas signing the Doha Agreement under the personal sponsorship of the Emir of Qatar

As a result, in 2012 and 2013, the emergency government in the WB continued its work under Salam Fayyad. However, the sharp objections and criticisms made by Fatah's leadership against Fayyad, and Fayyad's attempt to exploit his post, relationships, and financial and administrative influence, to create a clique of supporters, prompted 'Abbas to accept his resignation on 14/4/2013, and appoint Rami Hamdallah as his replacement.²²



• Rami Hamdallah takes the oath of office in front of President Mahmud 'Abbas

In GS, the government of Isma‘il Haniyyah continued to face a large number of challenges, most notably the economic challenge as a result of the blockade imposed on GS, along with Israeli military aggression. There were also mutual accusations with the Ramallah government of increasing the suffering of the Strip, and of smearing Hamas.

In the second half of 2013, Haniyyah’s government took a number of initiatives towards Palestinian reconciliation, which received a response from the Fatah leadership; an agreement was thus reached on 23/4/2014 to reactivate reconciliation and end the schism, known as al-Shati’ Agreement. Hamas voluntarily agreed to hand over control of GS to a government of national accord. Rami Hamdallah, who is close to Fatah, was appointed to head this government, which took over on 2/6/2014.²³ However, this government stumbled and could not discharge its duties in GS, after refusing to instate civil servants appointed by Hamas’s outgoing government in GS led by Haniyyah, and to pay them their salaries. Another issue was the demand on Hamas to hand over control of the crossings (including Rafah) to this government, before the government resolved the issue of the civil servants. Thus, despite sending more than one delegation to GS, the government failed to assume control of GS. At the same time, Hamdallah reshuffled his cabinet without consulting Hamas.

This period also saw accusations by ‘Abbas and Fatah leaders against Hamas of running a “shadow government” in GS and of “war profiteering,” and of seeking to establish an emirate in Sinai and conduct secret talks with Israel in an attempt to secede GS from Ramallah. Fatah leaders also voiced support for Egyptian measures along the border with GS including the destruction of tunnels. For its part, Hamas strongly denied the accusations, denouncing the smear campaigns against it. Hamas accused ‘Abbas and Fatah leaders of not being serious regarding reconciliation, of seeking to subdue Hamas, and deal with GS as a “remote village,” all while coordinating with Israel and inciting the regime in Egypt against Hamas. ‘Abbas and Fatah leaders were also accused of stalling the reconstruction of GS and efforts to lift the siege.

In 2016 and 2017, PLO and PA President Mahmud ‘Abbas continued to obstruct the work of the Hamas-dominated PLC, and did not seek to obtain legitimacy for his government headed by Rami Hamdallah from the PLC. ‘Abbas failed to convene the Provisional Leadership Framework which includes all Palestinian factions, except rarely and in a formal way that lacks validity and effectiveness. Moreover, ‘Abbas clashed with the PLC and Hamas when he ordered the establishment of the Constitutional Court in April 2016, a move considered by Hamas a national disaster, and a constitutional breach.²⁴ ‘Abbas used his powers granted to him by the Constitutional Court to revoke the immunity of five of his political opponents (affiliated with Muhammad Dahlan), who were PLC members, on the pretext of referring them for trial.²⁵

In 2016, Fatah and Hamas continued to hold meetings, particularly in Doha, to try to implement the reconciliation agreement signed since May 2011. In October 2016, PIJ Secretary-General Ramadan ‘Abdullah Shallah announced a 10-point initiative calling for an end to the split and for a dialogue between Palestinian factions to facilitate the adoption of a new national program, based on the cancellation of the Oslo



• Ramadan Shallah

Accords, the withdrawal of any recognition of Israel, the restructuring of the PLO, and the prioritization of the resistance program.²⁶ Although Hamas and a number of factions welcomed the initiative, Fatah treated it as an unrealistic proposal.²⁷

The Palestinian division became more acute when Hamas announced the formation of an administrative committee to govern GS in late March 2017, citing the Ramallah government’s refusal to carry out its duties in the Strip.²⁸ The PA and Fatah leadership reacted sharply to the move. Fatah announced on 26/4/2017 that it had made a strategic decision to pursue “all means” to end the division.²⁹ The PA president and government began to take a series of harsh

measures, including cutting the salaries of tens of thousands of its employees in GS, forcing thousands to early retirement, suspending medical referrals for patients, and stopping to pay for the cost of electricity collected by the Israeli occupation.³⁰ This has had catastrophic consequences for GS, which was already suffering from catastrophic conditions, after 10 years of siege, and three devastating wars with Israel.

Hamas, on the other hand, stressed that reconciliation was an irreversible “strategic decision” and accused Fatah and the PA leadership of attempting to marginalize it and subdue GS according to the criteria imposed by the Oslo Accords. At the same time, as Hamas was under financial pressure and a strangulating siege, it launched a series of initiatives aimed at activating reconciliation and lifting the siege, encouraged by new Egyptian mediation efforts. On 17/9/2017, Hamas dissolved the administrative committee and called on the Hamdallah government to assume its duties.³¹ On 2/10/2017, Hamdallah arrived with his cabinet members to GS for the handover.³² On 12/10/2017, an agreement was signed between Fatah and Hamas in Cairo stipulating that the government would assume its functions by December 2017, an administrative and legal committee will be formed to deal with the issue of absorbing civilian employees appointed by the former Haniyyah government, and that a higher security committee would be formed to resolve the issue of military personnel.³³ Although the Ramallah government assumed control of GS crossings on 1/11/2017, with Hamas pledging full cooperation in empowering the government, the PA leadership (Fatah) did not lift the sanctions and resolve the issue of the 22 thousand GS employees; rather it linked the lift of sanctions to pending further procedures. The Hamdallah government and Fatah leaders kept talking about slow and partial progress, using as a pretext their non-control of the security forces in GS. Some Fatah leaders also attempted to raise questions about the resistance activities in GS and called for controlling them.³⁴ A meeting of the Palestinian factions in Cairo on 21/11/2017,³⁵ and the meeting between Fatah and Hamas 10 days later did not help in the implementation of the reconciliation program, which continued to flounder into 2018.

The Palestinians have faced late 2017 the recognition of US President Donald Trump of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and his decision to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, with a unified national rejection, thus increasing the hope for uniting the national landscape against the growing challenges, especially as the return of coordination between President ‘Abbas and senior leaders of the Hamas



• Donald Trump

movement was announced. However, soon things were back to their previous conditions and the national internal relations relapsed, when in March 2018, a roadside bomb blast damaged several vehicles in the convoy of the PA prime minister accompanied by the PA intelligence chief.³⁶ The GS authorities accused the intelligence service in Ramallah of the blast, for they wanted the sanctions and pressures to continue,³⁷ while the PA and Fatah were quick to accuse Hamas of responsibility.³⁸

The “empowerment” of the national consensus government was at the forefront of the Fatah-Hamas debate, i.e., the full and comprehensive empowerment of all aspects of the government, including weapons, which was occasionally—explicitly or implicitly—talked about. The PA did not take any new steps to ease or lift the GS sanctions, or to address one of the most important problems between the two movements, i.e., the GS government employees. For to pay their salaries and run the Hamas administration, the latter levied internal taxes.³⁹ Fatah insisted on the empowerment of the government, including extending its control over land, security, the judiciary, border crossings, and internal levy, and these entail the return of ministers and the heads of operating organizations, authorities and institutions. Hence, it means that Fatah rejects the presence of the GS senior officials at their offices.⁴⁰

Despite all the talk about the empowerment of the national consensus government, President ‘Abbas dissolved the government and on 10/3/2019 formed, for the first time since the Palestinian schism, a government headed by the Fatah Central Committee member Mohammad Shtayyeh.⁴¹ It was an added step to the dismantling of political and legal ties between the WB and GS, thus widening the schism further. It had also a negative impact on the unification of the Palestinian left factions, where contradiction were reignited, and on Fatah itself, where internal differences were uncovered. Shtayyeh’s government did not announce a detailed program, rather only a provisional one that included holding legislative elections, as per the designation letter. His government faced a stifling financial crisis, when Israel cut the money allocated to the families of martyrs and prisoners from the clearance tax revenues it collects. Despite the PA’s decision not to accept the money if incomplete, it backed down and accepted them.



• President Mahmud ‘Abbas poses for a photo with the new cabinet of Mohammad Shtayyeh during a swearing-in ceremony at the presidential headquarters, 13/4/2019

In December 2018, the PLC was dissolved by a Constitutional Court ruling,⁴² and it seemed to many that ‘Abbas and the Fatah leadership pushed such decision. It reinforced the measures leading to the legal and political separation between WB and GS. Most of the major Palestinian factions rejected the ruling, others had their reservations, except for Fatah, which supported it along with some marginal factions. The ruling triggered legal discussions concerning the legitimacy of the Constitutional Court itself, and the contents of the ruling and

its political bias. Legal institutions have unanimously agreed on questioning the legitimacy of the Constitutional Court and the correctness of its decision to dissolve the PLC.

The speech of President ‘Abbas left no doubt that it was a political move under the pretense of legal action. In any case, seven months after the PLC dissolution, ‘Abbas dissolved the High Judicial Council,⁴³ so that no authority would be on par with the PA, the judiciary would be used for internal rivalry, and security forces would dominate the Palestinian society. This atmosphere led to the continuation of schism during 2019 and to more tension and disagreement between the two movements, more authoritarian and security targeting, and the withdrawal of PA staff from the GS crossings.

There was Palestinian consensus against Trump’s deal—“Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People” (whose details were officially announced on 28/1/2020), the US-Israeli attempts to liquidate the Palestine issue and the normalization plans that aim to isolate it from its Arab and Islamic surroundings. This deal also affected the PA and the Fatah leadership, whose bet on the peace process and transforming the PA into a real sovereign state has failed. Moreover, the PA’s role has been adjusted to serve Israel and it was ignored and bypassed when there was an attempt to impose the US-Israeli vision on “solving” the Palestine issue. As a result and after much hesitation, the PA was forced on 19/5/2020 to announce the freezing of the Oslo Accords and its annexes, and the suspension of security coordination with Israel. Nevertheless, the PA insisted on its commitment to the peace process and “international legitimacy,” and prevented any armed resistance action against the occupation in its areas.⁴⁴

In addition to the communication of Hamas with Fatah to harden the Palestinian position regarding the Trump deal and the Israeli annexation projects, the PA crisis pushed Fatah to soften its positions and hand over Jibril Rajoub the reconciliation dossier and plans to confront annexation. As a result, the Fatah-Hamas dialogue improved.

Reconciliation efforts gained momentum, after Saleh al-‘Arouri, deputy head of Hamas, held a joint press conference in July 2020 with Jibril Rajoub, secretary of the Fatah Central Committee,⁴⁵ and after the meeting of secretaries-general of the Palestinian factions.⁴⁶ The latter agreed on activating the popular resistance (considering it the most appropriate option for this stage), forming a unified leadership in WB, activating national reconciliation, ending division, developing and activating the PLO so as to include all Palestinians and all factions on democratic and popular bases, and on proportional representation basis.⁴⁷



• Jibril Rajoub hosts by video conference a meeting with Saleh al-‘Arouri, July 2020

The Fatah-Hamas meetings to discuss how to reflect consensus on the ground and include the rest of the Palestinian factions in the process, according to a timetable and clear commitments, continued. However, these meetings stumbled after the Cairo meeting in mid-November,⁴⁸ because Hamas insisted on holding simultaneous presidential, legislative and PNC elections (agreed on in the 2011 reconciliation agreement); and because the member of Fatah and PA leadership Hussein al-Sheikh announced on 17/11/2020 the resumption of relations and security coordination with Israel.⁴⁹

In January 2021, the reconciliation process saw a major breakthrough after Hamas waived the condition of election synchronization, and agreed on postponing

the agreement on political program and the addressing of the political division entitlements. It also overlooked the PLC dissolution and the resumption of security coordination with Israel. As a result, the excuses of Mahmud ‘Abbas and Fatah were no longer valid, and the arrangements were made according to the “size” of the PA. Furthermore, Hamas announced that it had obtained guarantees from Arab and Muslim countries that the elections would be fair and that they would be held.⁵⁰ Consequently, President Mahmud ‘Abbas issued in January 2021 a decree ordering Palestinian general elections to be carried out, where the legislative elections take place on 22/5/2021, followed by the presidential elections on 31/7/2021, and the formation of the PNC on 31/8/2021.⁵¹

More than 93% of eligible voters in WB and GS registered for elections,⁵² and 36 electoral lists were approved. They included all Palestinian factions and many independent lists.⁵³ However, on 29/4/2021, before election campaigns were launched, the PA (PLO leadership and Fatah) suspended the elections and postponed them indefinitely, causing widespread Palestinian frustration.⁵⁴

There have already been indications that this decision might be taken, as it was clear that the Israeli ban on elections in Jerusalem would be used as an excuse to postpone the elections, whereas actually, it was clear to everyone that fear of results was the main motive behind disrupting the elections. For the chances of Hamas winning the elections increased, and the fragmentation of Fatah was clear, where three electoral lists were



• Marwan Barghouti

submitted in its name, in addition to several pro-Fatah small lists. Also, Mahmud ‘Abbas feared a likely loss of the presidency, due to Marwan Barghouti’s insistence on running in the presidential elections, and the US, Israel and a number of Arab countries feared the strong possibilities of Hamas’ advance in the elections, thus they advised and pressured ‘Abbas to postpone them.

As a result of disrupting the elections, Fatah ‘Abbas’ popularity declined, most of the Palestinian factions, forces and elites rejected the PA’s justifications of disrupting the elections, intra-Palestinian tension and crisis returned, Fatah appeared to be the main cause of Palestinian schism, ‘Abbas and the PA position in front of the Arab and international parties has weakened, hence his legitimacy to them became weak.

In light of the election disruption and the Sword of Jerusalem Battle that Hamas strongly led a few days later, Hamas and the resistance made significant progress on the Palestinian, Arab, regional and international levels, where their status strengthened among friends, foes and neutral parties. A regional and international conviction has also emerged of the need to communicate with them in any future political arrangements to achieve regional stability. The battle also strengthened the geographical unity of the Palestinian people (WB, GS, 1948 occupied Palestinian territories and the Diaspora), where all Palestinian arenas participated in confronting the occupation and supporting the resistance.

Local Municipal Elections

In 2012, local elections were held in the WB. The Central Elections Commission in the WB endorsed the election results where the turnout was 55%.⁵⁵ Due to the boycott by resistance factions led by Hamas, the local elections were lackluster and half-hearted, given that there was no serious competition.⁵⁶ Despite Fatah winning in most municipalities, the election ended up highlighting the internal splits within Fatah, as figures and lists dismissed from Fatah won, for example in the city of Nablus.⁵⁷

The local municipal elections called by the Ramallah government on 8/10/2016 and what happened subsequently exacerbated the internal Palestinian conflict, instead of serving as a successful experiment to encourage the implementation of the reconciliation program. Indeed, most Palestinian factions (including Fatah and Hamas) decided to participate in the elections. A preliminary survey showed the presence of 787 lists in the WB and 87 in GS.⁵⁸ Amid expectations of Hamas winning the elections in the key cities of WB,

Israeli warnings were issued against Hamas expanding its political influence. In this tense climate, Fatah-affiliated entities filed appeals with the High Court of Justice in Ramallah (which many consider to be dominated by Fatah) claiming the elections in GS would be unconstitutional, arguing that the judiciary and the government in GS lacked legitimacy.⁵⁹ This was after Hamas-affiliated entities had challenged electoral lists, with the Central Elections Commission accepting four challenges, three of which involved Fatah-affiliated lists.⁶⁰ Consequently, the High Court of Justice decided to postpone the elections and conduct them in the WB alone but not in GS, which prompted Hamas, PFLP, and PIJ to boycott the elections, which took place on 13/5/2017. Independents won 65% of the seats, while party lists won only 35% of them. This reflected the weakness of Fatah's performance even in the absence of the major rival factions.⁶¹

The PA Security Coordination with the Occupation

The PA remained committed to security coordination with Israel throughout 2012–2021 (Except for limited breaks) despite the decisions made by the PCC and PNC, and the broad Palestinian popular and factional opposition. This did not only hurt the resistance forces, and relations among Palestinians, but also created deep cracks in the psychological and social fabric of the Palestinians. It seems that the PA leadership realizes that for Israel, an essential aspect of the PA existence depends on security coordination. It is also aware of the harsh measures that await if it does not do so. Security coordination has not only had negative impact on inter-factional relations, but also caused critical cracks in the psychological and communal Palestinian fabric.

Security coordination between security forces in Ramallah and Israeli authorities is one of the most contentious issues in the Palestinian interior. Calls were made repeatedly by Palestinian forces and figures, especially Hamas, PIJ, and the PFLP, to end this coordination. However, 'Abbas and the leadership of the PA insisted on continuing it, even after a PCC decision, on 5/3/2015, calling for the end of security coordination and a review of all agreements signed with Israel.⁶² 'Abbas dealt with the decision a non-binding recommendation that cannot be implemented without a presidential decree. Israeli security leaders and

officials expressed their relief over the conduct of the PA and its coordination with Israel against resistance forces. Perhaps the admission of GIS Director Majid Faraj of foiling two hundred attacks against Israelis in the first three months of the *Intifadah* (October–December 2015)—to widespread Palestinian condemnation—shows the extent of this coordination.⁶³

The PA leadership had to suspend coordination temporarily for a few days following the protests at the Lion's Gate (*Bab al-Asbat*) in Jerusalem in July 2017, but it gradually resumed coordination after the situation calmed down.⁶⁴

Israeli reports in 2018–2019 have mentioned repeatedly the importance of the PA's role in serving Israel's security. They indicated that the PA security forces thwarted 40% of the operations against Israel and contributed in facing the uprisings in WB.⁶⁵ Despite the US cutting off aid to the PA, its support to Palestinian security forces has continued, in addition to the announced high-level coordination meetings.

As we mentioned earlier, in light of Trump's deal on 23/5/2020, the PA suspended security coordination with Israel, but on 17/11/2020, it resumed this coordination.

The PLO

Throughout the period 2012–2021, Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas failed to invite the provisional leadership framework to convene even once. The PLO did not take any concrete action to accommodate Palestinian factions, especially those that have a significant popular weight such as Hamas and the PIJ into the organization. 'Abbas did not take any real action either to activate and rehabilitate the PLO. Meanwhile, 'Abbas's resignation from its membership in August 2015 and invitation to convene the PNC's old lineup in the Palestinian interior under occupation were rejected by Hamas, PIJ, and entities in the PLO itself. For one thing, it was seen as an attempt to circumvent the reconciliation agreement, and a ploy to re-form the Executive Committee to be in line with the president's agenda. As a result, the convening of the council was postponed.⁶⁶

Contrary to the Palestinian agreement in Beirut in early 2017 regarding the convening of the PNC; 'Abbas and the Fatah leadership insisted on calling for

a regular PNC session, under the occupation, in Ramallah, in April 2018. It was boycotted by Hamas, PIJ and the PFLP, who considered such a move a breach of the national consensus,⁶⁷ and it was contrary to the emergency session promised by President ‘Abbas after Trump’s decisions concerning Jerusalem. The national rift increased as the PCC convened, which was boycotted by Hamas, PIJ and the PFLP. Later, the boycott increased at the meetings of the PCC 30th session held in Ramallah on 28–29/10/2018, to include Hamas, PIJ, the PFLP, the DFLP, and the Palestinian National Initiative Movement, where Fatah found itself isolated from most powerful Palestinian factions.⁶⁸

The meetings of the PNC (30/4–3/5/2018) led to the election of President Mahmud ‘Abbas as President of the State of Palestine. They approved a new Executive Committee with ‘Abbas as its chairman, and approved the addition of 35 members to the PCC.⁶⁹ These moves consolidated the dominance of Fatah and the PA elite over the PLO, thus cutting off the road to the rest of the national forces. They also meant that the PLO was being politically used in internal disputes and in the arrangements for the post-‘Abbas period. As for the meetings’ political decisions regarding the conflict with Israel, such as reconsidering the PA and PLO commitments towards the agreements with Israel—including stopping security coordination, economic disengagement, and activating popular resistance,⁷⁰ none were implemented, even after ‘Abbas’ announcement of the formation of a committee for that purpose. Therefore, the widespread impression was that these decisions were not serious, and that they were mere media maneuvers aiming to fill the political vacuum with political rhetoric. As for the PLO leadership decisions (PA and Fatah leadership), two years after the PNC meetings, against Trump’s deal, they were temporary tactical ones, and this leadership soon retracted from them.

The Internal Factional Palestinian Conditions

The internal situation within Fatah was marked by disputes, especially between the faction loyal to President ‘Abbas and the faction loyal to Muhammad Dahlan, who was dismissed from Fatah. Dahlan, backed by the UAE and the new



• **Muhammad Dahlan**

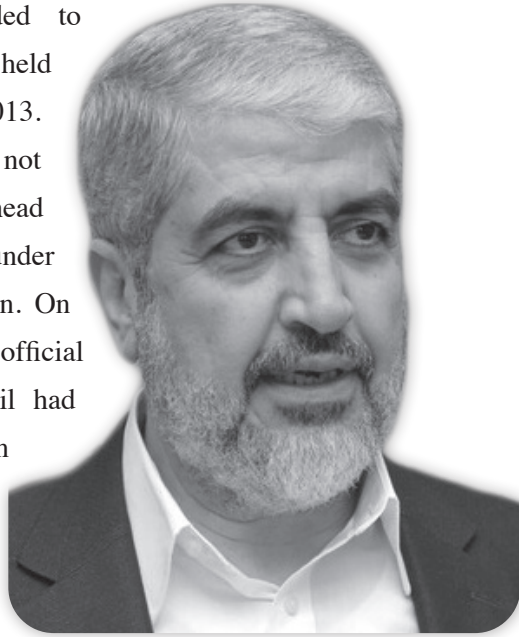
Egyptian regime that followed the ouster of President Muhammad Morsi, and helped by his influence within Fatah, continued his attacks on ‘Abbas. However, ‘Abbas responded with a fierce campaign in the media. ‘Abbas and Dahlan also exchanged accusations over responsibility for Yasir ‘Arafat’s death, as investigations by Swiss experts suggested he might have been poisoned with radioactive polonium. The differences also emerged more clearly after the announcement of the PLC elections in Spring 2021, when Marwan Barghouti and Nasser al-Kidwa formed a list independent of the “official” Fatah, Barghouti insisted on competing with ‘Abbas for the presidency, and when Dahlan formed his own list.

Fatah held its 7th conference in Ramallah on 29/11–4/12/2016 with the participation of 1,400 members. ‘Abbas was reelected as President of Fatah and 12 members retained their posts in the Central Committee out of the 18 elected members, with 6 new members joining them. 80 members of the Fatah Revolutionary Council were elected. The ‘Abbas faction was able to consolidate its control of Fatah, while banishing the Muhammad Dahlan faction.



• The seventh conference of Fatah in Ramallah, 29/11/2016

As for Hamas, it proceeded to rearrange its internal affairs, and held internal elections late 2012 early 2013. In early 2012, Mish'al said he did not intend to run for another term as head of Hamas's political bureau, but under internal pressure, he backed down. On 2/4/2013, Hamas announced in an official statement that the Shura Council had renewed its vote of confidence in Mish'al for another term.



• Khalid Mish'al

In the first half of 2017, Hamas held its internal elections. Yahya al-Sinwar was elected to head its GS bureau, Maher Salah was appointed as chief of Hamas bureau abroad, and Saleh al-'Arouri was chosen as head of the WB bureau and was later elected deputy chairman of Hamas. The *Shura* Council elected Isma'il Haniyyah as Mish'al's replacement on 6/5/2017.



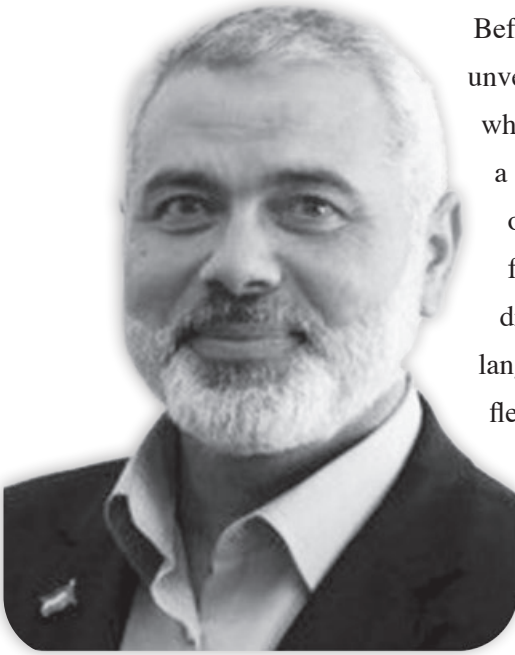
• Yahya al-Sinwar



• Saleh al-'Arouri



• Maher Salah



• Isma'il Haniyyah

Before Mish'al stepped down, Hamas unveiled a new political document, which, according to Hamas, expressed a "spirit of renewal, evolution, and openness while maintaining the fundamentals." The document was drafted in a professional political language, characterized by realism and flexibility, in which Hamas affirmed its Palestinian national identity, stressed that it would not concede any part of Palestine or recognize Israel, but said it considers the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent

Palestinian state, along the lines of the 4th of June 1967 to be a formula of national consensus.⁷¹

In the first half of 2021, Hamas held its internal elections, and Yahya al-Sinwar was re-elected as the head of its GS bureau, Khalid Mish'al was appointed as chief of Hamas bureau abroad, and Saleh al-'Arouri head of the WB bureau. In August 2021, the *Shura* Council elected Isma'il Haniyyah as head of the Hamas movement, Saleh al-'Arouri his deputy, and also the remaining members of the Hamas leadership were elected.

In December 2013, the 7th PFLP General Conference was convened, where Ahmad Sa'dat was re-elected as secretary general, Abu Ahmad Fu'ad was elected as his deputy succeeding 'Abdul Rahim Mlouh, in addition to other leadership bodies.⁷²

On 28/7/2018, the DFLP announced the results of its 7th General National Conference, where a new central committee and a new political bureau headed by Secretary-General Nayef Hawatmeh were elected.⁷³

In 2017, Ramadan ‘Abdullah Shallah slipped into a coma, therefore the PIJ held on 28/9/2018 its internal elections, declaring the election of Ziad Nakhaleh the new secretary-general and Muhammad al-Hindi his deputy. The elections included electing members of the movement’s political bureau, where the names of nine new members were announced, while the rest were kept unknown.⁷⁴ Shallah died on 6/6/2020.

On 9/11/2019, Fida held its fourth conference and re-elected Saleh Ra’fat as the party’s secretary general.⁷⁵ In June 2021, after convening its 12th conference, the PPSF re-elected Ahmad Majdalani as the party’s secretary general.⁷⁶



• Ahmad Majdalani



• Nayef Hawatmeh



• Abu Ahmad Fu’ad



• Saleh Ra’fat



• Ziad Nakhaleh



• Muhammad al-Hindi

Polls conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) in the 2012–2021 period reflect the continued polarization between Fatah and Hamas in WB and GS. More than two-thirds of respondents supported Fatah and Hamas (one third to each party), while the other factions collectively receive less than 10% of their support. The polls also showed a decline in ‘Abbas’s popularity and that the candidate of Hamas, Isma‘il Haniyyah, would win the PA presidency elections; however, if Marwan Barghouti runs for elections, his chance of winning is higher than both of them. The polls also reflected increasing frustration with the Oslo Accords and the PA’s performance, the majority refused the PA’s security coordination with Israel and the vast majority rejected the PLC dissolution.⁷⁷

Fourth: The Peace Process 2012–2021

In the second decade of the 21st century, the peace process was stagnant and stumbling, while the interest of the Obama administration in resuming negotiations declined. This was due to the continued Israeli rejection of the Palestinian demands, including freezing settlement building and accepting the 1967 borders as a reference for negotiating the borders of the promised Palestinian state. This refusal had prompted the PLO and PA leadership to resort to other alternatives, and on 29/11/2012, 138 countries voted in favor of the UN resolution accepting Palestine as a non-member state.

The peace process resumed in late July 2013, under Israeli conditions, and without meeting any PLO conditions that it repeatedly demanded for three years. The Israeli side imposed its agenda by focusing on security, while the US showed bias to the Israeli side, refraining from putting any pressure on the latter. Efforts that spanned the better part of nine months of negotiations did not produce any results, and the peace process reached an impasse once again.

The PLO leadership insisted on adhering to the peace process, despite the impasse it has reached. Amid the frustration felt by the Palestinian side, Mahmud ‘Abbas threatened to resign, reconsider the relationship with the occupation, suspend security coordination, abolish the Paris Protocol, withdraw recognition of Israel and go to international organizations to prosecute the occupation. The Israeli side, however, dismissed these as manoeuvres lacking the real will to follow them through.



• Secretary of State John Kerry with the chief Palestinian negotiator Sa'ib 'Uraiqat and Israel's justice minister Tzipi Livni in Washington, 30/7/2013

The French initiative, for which France brought together 20 foreign ministers and state representatives in June 2016 to reaffirm the two-state solution and set deadlines for negotiations, failed. The Middle East Peace Conference in January 2017 also failed because of an Israeli boycott, and because of the disruptive American role. Other Russian and Chinese peace initiatives also failed...

The Donald Trump administration identified with the Israeli right, and sided blatantly with Israel, forging an almost full partnership in occupation, settlement building and racism. Trump abandoned the US commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian state, and to the notion that the WB and GS territories are

occupied, and that settlement building is illegal. Trump talked about the need to completely change the rules of the game and disregard international law as reference and the international legitimacy of decisions that enshrined minimal Palestinian rights (the right to self-determination that includes the establishment of a Palestinian state on the territories occupied in 1967, and the refugees' right to return to the homes from which they were displaced and their right to compensation). He called for a new reference based mainly on facts established on the ground by Israel.

The peace process was dealt a severe blow when on 6/12/2017 the US formally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and decided to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, whose opening ceremony was on 14/5/2018. Moreover, the Israeli Knesset also passed a law removing Jerusalem from the negotiating process. The Trump administration ordered the closure of the PLO office in Washington, then demanded the dismantling of the UNRWA and the redefinition of the Palestinian refugee to solely include Palestinians born in Palestine and not their children and grandchildren. The US also stopped funding the PA, aside from security aid, and demanded the recognition of Israel as “the Jewish state.” The Trump administration did not address the 1967 territories as occupied territories, and in late 2019 it decided to recognize the Israeli settlements in WB, stating that their establishment is not, “per se, inconsistent with international law.”

Trump announced his peace plan, known as the “Deal of the Century,” on 28/1/2020. “Leaks” about it continued for three years. The 181-page document, contains 22 sections and four appendices, with two conceptual maps illustrating the geography of Israel and the proposed Palestinian state besides the distribution of settlements. In the document, the proposed Palestinian State is a completely demilitarized one in WB and GS, dominated by Israel, and can be called a “state.” The Palestinian capital would be in the suburbs adjacent to East Jerusalem, where Israeli settlements in WB would be annexed to Israel. The Jordan Valley will be under Israeli sovereignty and Israel will retain sovereignty over Gaza’s

territorial waters. The Triangle communities shall become part of the State of Palestine and the borders of the State of Palestine will remain monitored by Israel. As for GS, it would be expanded through neighboring areas in the Negev in exchange for land confiscated in WB, in addition, the “Palestinian state” would recognize Israel as the “Jewish state.”



• **The announcement of Trump’s “Deal of the Century” peace plan, 28/1/2020**

The deal focused on:

- a. Normalization and building relations with Arab countries while bypassing the Palestinian side, which would be used to pressure the Palestinians to accept Israeli terms and dictates.
- b. Economic peace: Dealing with the Palestine issue as a humanitarian issue, which would be solved by improving the Palestinian economic conditions, and not dealing with it as the issue of a people under occupation, who seek liberation.
- c. Ending the two-state solution, and giving the Palestinians of WB and GS autonomy (in the name of the state) and under Israeli hegemony. Also, transforming WB into torn cantons surrounded by Israel, demilitarizing GS and confronting Hamas to subdue it.

- d. Abolishing the right of return of Palestinian refugees, imposing full sovereignty over Jerusalem, and annexing the Jordan Valley and the settlements.
- e. Resetting the compass of the conflict by putting Israel into alliances in the region against “terrorism,” political Islam and Iran , while occupying the region with sectarian and ethnic conflicts.

Despite mounting pressure on the Palestinians to impose the “deal” on them, they united against it, and the Trump term ended without being able to enforce it. However, in 2020, some Arab countries adopted the peace process and normalized their relations with Israel. They are the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. It was a major setback for the Arab and Muslim nations.

With the end of Trump’s term and Biden winning the presidential elections, the US pressure concerning “Trump’s deal” waned, however, the US policy supporting and sponsoring Israel has not changed.



• Map of a future Palestinian state in Trump’s “Deal of the Century” peace plan

Fifth: Jerusalem and the Status Quo

Jerusalem is a central issue in the Zionist Jewish thought due to religious and historical considerations. UNGA Resolution 181 (the 1947 Partition Plan) stipulated the partitioning of Palestine into two states (Arab and Jewish), considered Jerusalem a *corpus separatum* under a special international regime should be administered by the UN. But the Zionists invaded West Jerusalem in 1948, and expelled 60 thousand of its Arab residents. The Palestinians own around 88.7% of the



area of West Jerusalem, which was Judaized entirely by the Zionists, who built Jewish residential neighborhoods there as well as in the confiscated Arab towns surrounding it, such as Lifta, where the Knesset and several ministries were built, in addition to 'Ein Karem, Deir Yasin, al-Maliha, and others.⁷⁸

In 1967, Israel continued its occupation of East Jerusalem, which was under Jordanian control, and which is considered to be a part of the WB. There began an intense Judaization campaign in East Jerusalem, and it was announced that the two parts of Jerusalem were unified under Israeli administration on 27/6/1967. An official Israeli announcement was made on 30/7/1980 declaring Jerusalem the eternal and unified capital of Israel.⁷⁹



Israel gradually expanded the scope of Jerusalem's municipality borders so it could include other areas of the WB, and so that it could conduct a large-scale Judaization of the city. When Israel occupied Jerusalem in 1967, East Jerusalem extended over 6.5 km² and West Jerusalem extended over 24 km². So it widened the scope of the city to 104 km², which it took from land belonging to 28 Palestinian towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem, most of which were located east of the city, i.e., in the WB. Israel continued to expand the city's municipal borders during the 1970s and 80s until its area reached 126 km², of which 72 km² are located in East Jerusalem and 54 km² in West Jerusalem.

According to estimates of 2019, there are 936 thousand inhabitants in Jerusalem (East and West), including 577.6 thousand Jews (61.7%), of whom 227 thousand reside in East Jerusalem; and 359 thousand Arabs (38.3%), who almost all live in East Jerusalem.⁸⁰ Despite all its stringent measures, the Israeli occupation has failed until now in executing its plan to decrease the proportion of Arabs to 22%. However, statistics show a decline in the number of Christians in the city of Jerusalem to about 10 thousand, or 1% of the population of Jerusalem.

Israel confiscated most of the land in East Jerusalem, and built the settlements that surrounded East Jerusalem and deprived the Palestinians of the right to build on most of Jerusalem's land. There remained only 9 thousand donums (out of 72 thousand donums) allocated for building purposes, i.e., 12.5% of the East Jerusalem area, or 7.25% of the Jerusalem area defined by the occupation.

On 11/6/1967, the Israeli forces expelled the residents of the Moroccan Quarter, minutes after giving them a warning to exit their premises. This was followed by the demolition of the Quarter's 135 houses that faced the Western Wall, most of which were Islamic endowments. Everything was razed to the ground, so that Jews could use the place for worship. The Israeli authorities controlled the Sharaf neighborhood, which is known as the Jewish Quarter, in the Old City. Indeed, they issued on 18/4/1968 an order to confiscate 116 donums including that neighborhood, Chain Gate Street, al-Bashura neighborhood and the Moroccan Quarter. The area contained five mosques,

two nooks, four schools, an ancient market, and 700 buildings, of which the Jews owned 105 buildings before the 1948 war, and the Arabs owned 595 buildings.

The Israeli authorities began to build the first Israeli settlement, Ramat Eshkol, east of Jerusalem in 1968, with subsequent settlements built rapidly after that. They built a strip of 11 Jewish neighborhoods within East Jerusalem and a larger strip around Jerusalem composed of 17 Jewish settlements, in an attempt to separate Jerusalem from its Arab and Islamic surroundings, and therefore stop any peace agreement that might restore East Jerusalem to the Palestinians.⁸¹

The Separation Wall was built to surround Jerusalem, extends to over 200 km and aims to isolate it from its Arab and Islamic surroundings. According to reports, more than 230 thousand Jerusalemites will be segregated by the Wall. Also, this Jerusalem Envelope isolates 617 holy and historical sites from their Arab and Islamic surroundings.

Moreover, the Israeli authorities endeavored to achieve a permanent and direct Jewish presence in *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its surroundings, in order to give Jewish character to the Old City and facilitate the breaking into the mosque, as well as providing a cover for the excavation works. The Israeli authorities allowed the building of synagogues at the Mosque's Wall, such as the Tankaziyya School Synagogue, and below the mosque such as Wilson's Arch, and in its vicinity, such as the Ohel Yitzhak (Tent of Isaac) and Hurva Synagogues. Their most notable achievement was the inauguration of the latter in 2010.

The Israelis began an intense campaign of excavations below and around *al-Aqsa* Mosque, focusing on the western and southern areas. This led to the appearance of cracks in several buildings, including the Ottoman Mosque, Ribat al-Kurd, al-Jawahiriya School and al-Majakia School. The excavations have been through 10 stages since 1967, and were active but discreet, reaching a dangerous level when diggers began to remove soil and rocks from under *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Dome of the Rock and used chemicals to melt the rocks. This led *al-Aqsa* Mosque to be at risk of collapse at any moment under the effect of a strong storm or a light earthquake. The Israeli authorities have confiscated and demolished many mosques and Islamic historical buildings.

For instance, on 14–20/6/1969, they demolished 31 historical buildings and evicted their residents. Moreover, by 21/8/2012, there were 47 excavations and tunnels below and around *al-Aqsa* Mosque, leading to several collapses and cracks inside and around the mosque.



• Israeli excavations below *al-Aqsa* Mosque

There were 40 attacks against *al-Aqsa* Mosque during 1967–1990, and neither the peace process nor the Oslo Accords were instrumental in stopping these attacks. 72 aggressions were recorded during 1993–1998, an indication of the escalation of the fierce campaign against one of the most sacred sites for Muslims. The most infamous of these attacks was the arson attack on 21/8/1969 by a Christian fanatic named Denis Michael Rohan. There were also attempts to blow up *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 1/5/1980, and in January, August, and December 1984. On 17/10/1989, the Temple Mount Land of Israel Faithful Movement laid the cornerstone for the Third Temple near the entrance of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.⁸² The number of assaults in the area that took place under the protection of the Israeli police increased and reached 34 assaults between 22/8/2010 and 21/8/2011.

Muslims in Jerusalem and Palestine protect *al-Aqsa* Mosque despite their oppression and suffering, even without Arab and Islamic support. All Jewish aggressions were faced by Muslims, even if this led to massacres. Such an occurrence happened on 8/10/1990, when 34 Muslims were killed and 115 were

injured when a Jewish group attempted to lay the cornerstone for the Temple inside *al-Aqsa* Mosque; and on 25–27/9/1996 after the *Intifadah* that erupted following the Israeli authorities' opening of a Hasmonean tunnel under the Western Wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, thus leading to the death of 80 Palestinians and the injury of 1,600 others.⁸³

Tens of international resolutions were issued by the UNGA and the UN Security Council rejecting Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem and any material, administrative, or legal measures that would change the status of Jerusalem, declaring them null and void. These resolutions considered the Israeli state an occupation force that must leave Jerusalem (and all of the WB and GS). The first of these resolutions was A/RES/2253 (ES-V) issued by the UNGA on 4/7/1967. This was followed by several other resolutions until Israel officially annexed Jerusalem. The UNGA then passed Resolution A/RES/ES-7/2 on 29/7/1980 with a majority of 112 votes, with seven opposed, and 24 abstentions, calling upon Israel to "withdraw completely and unconditionally from all the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since June 1967, including Jerusalem." On 20/8/1980, the UN Security Council issued Resolution S/RES/478 adopted by 14 votes to none with the abstention of the US, in which it declared that "all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which have altered or purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and in particular the recent 'basic law' on Jerusalem, are null and void and must be rescinded forthwith." Resolutions continue to be issued to this day. Though they acknowledge the rights of Palestinians, they are not accompanied by the required resolve and the necessary mechanism to force Israel to respect international resolutions.⁸⁴

Situation Development 2011–2021

In 2011–2021, settlement building in Jerusalem has focused on strengthening the Jewish presence in central Jerusalem, isolating Jerusalem from WB, increasing settlement building in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and transforming Jerusalem into an urban center for settlers living in WB settlements, on which they would depend for services, and to which they would be connected by roads and public transportation. The Israelis sought to make the most of the political

cover provided by US President Donald Trump's decision on 6/12/2017 to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and move the US embassy there.⁸⁵ Their pace of Judaization became faster and they attempted to expand the political "legitimization" of their occupation of Jerusalem. In return, there were basically popular Jerusalemite reactions, and on a lower level Palestinian, Arab and Islamic reactions to prevent the implementations of these decisions. Until now (2021), the Israeli and the US have failed to provide an international cover for their actions; however, great hazards still threaten Jerusalem and its future.

Regarding *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Israeli activities have increased a great deal to affect a permanent division of the mosque between Muslims and Jews, equally on the level of Jewish associations and at government level. The incursions have improved in organization, efficiency and size, and the Israeli authorities increased the facilities and care that they provide for them; while at the same time they tightened restrictions on the attempts by worshippers and defenders of the mosque to confront these incursions. These measures have reached the point of arresting anyone who raises his voice with *takbeer* (crying *Allah-u Akbar*) in the face of those groups, keeping worshippers out of the mosque at various times, and tightening their supervision of its visitors and those who remain there, such as those students who receive their religious education there, and others. At the same time, the Israeli authorities took a number of measures to ease restrictions placed on Jews' entry into the mosque; allowing Israeli soldiers to enter *al-Aqsa* Mosque in their military uniforms, a measure not previously permitted; allowing the holding wedding ceremonies inside, and they stopped subjecting religious Jews to inspection procedures and strict control when going inside.

As for the aggression against *al-Aqsa* Mosque, there were three parallel tracks: Temporal division and the settlers' storming of *al-Aqsa*, where the Jews insisted on gradually performing public Talmudic rituals inside it. The second is emptying the role of the Jordanian Endowments of its substance, which can be seen in two milestones: First, early 2019, when the Jerusalem's Awqaf was stripped of its authority in the restoration of the outside part of the southwestern wall, and in return the Israeli municipality made a restoration in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, for the first time in its history; and the second was in October 2019, when *al-Aqsa* guardians were prevented from escorting the Israelis, who stormed the

mosque during the holidays, or from photographing them. The third track is the spatial division that targeted the Gate of Mercy (*Bab al-Rahmah*) from both sides, at the historic cemetery next to it. However, on 22/2/2019, the Gate of Mercy prayer area inside *al-Aqsa* Mosque compound was reopened by the force of the Jerusalemites, 16-years after its closure.⁸⁶



• The Gate of Mercy prayer area

In March 2017, a law to muffle mosques' amplified calls to prayer in the 1948 occupied territories and Jerusalem won the approval of the Knesset. It bans a summons to worship via loudspeakers between 11 pm and 7 am.⁸⁷ In 2017, Israel tried to impose more restrictions in *al-Aqsa* Mosque by installing, on 14/7/2017, electronic gates at its doors along with surveillance cameras.⁸⁸ The Jerusalemites responded with the "Lion's Gate Uprising," and after two weeks of anger and sit-ins in front of the gates of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the Israelis retreated.

Israel sought to make several advances concerning Palestinian institutions and prominent figures of Jerusalem, for they closed the headquarters of the Education Directorate in Jerusalem and the Arab Health Center, and carried out major demolitions in the Shu'fat RC, Wadi Hummus and al-'Ayzariyah. They approved several Judaization projects, such as the Jerusalem cable car in the vicinity of the Old City and a new major settlement project at the Qalandiya airport site in the north. However, on 20/10/2018, they had to postpone the demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar under international and popular pressure.⁸⁹

On 21/3/2013, the temple groups organized themselves and started their effective activities,⁹⁰ with 19 officially registered associations.⁹¹ On 13/2/2012 a construction plan was approved for the most important and largest project in the “Kedem Yerushalayim” scheme, which has become known as the “Kedem Center.”⁹²

The Knesset elections of March 2015 and the subsequent government formed in May 2015 witnessed a new rise of the “temple” associations at the governmental level, as they got eight ministerial portfolios, including those of Construction and Housing and Jerusalem Affairs, in addition to a seat in the Israel’s State Security Cabinet (SSC).⁹³ This gave them the biggest political clout they had enjoyed since Israel’s inception. It is an influence that has remained strong and persistent to varying degrees until now (2021).

In 2013, the excavations and tunnels have increased under *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its vicinity, reaching more than 47.⁹⁴ During the second decade of the 21st century, excavations below *al-Aqsa* and in its periphery moved up to a new phase. The focus switched to rehabilitating the excavations and opening them to visitors; so that they would form, after their inauguration and after completing linking them one to the other, a Jewish historical city under the mosque. The most important of the inaugurated digs in 2011 was a tunnel linking the “City of David” in Silwan to the south and the Western Wall’s network of tunnels to the north; the Herodian road forms a section of this.⁹⁵

In 2016, there was a significant increase in the number of *al-Aqsa* Mosque raids by Jewish extremists, which reached 14,806, and increased by 28% from 2015, while the number of settlers who stormed the mosque in 2017 reached 25,630, an increase of 73% from 2016. Israeli forces opened the mosque in front of these incursions for 232 days. In addition, there were 900 attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque and worshipers during 2017. As for the year 2020, the number of settlers who stormed the mosque reached 18,526.⁹⁶

In addition to *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the Israeli attacks on Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem focused on the Mamilla Cemetery, where more than 100 graves were

destroyed in order to establish the “Center for Human Dignity–Museum of Tolerance (MOT).” On 19/3/2013, Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage revealed 10 judaizing schemes that would totally devour the 25 remaining donums of its area.⁹⁷ In 2014–2015, the Mamilla Cemetery was subjected to gradual chipping away at its land that spared less than one tenth of its area, while in September 2015, the Mercy Cemetery was closed to burials.

As we have noted, the people of Jerusalem and Palestine are still steadfast, defending *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the holy sites; their confrontations included *al-Aqsa Intifadah* 2015–2017, Lion’s Gate Uprising 2017; and the Gate of Mercy Uprising 2019; in addition to the confrontations defending *al-Aqsa* and Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in 2021, along with the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, which has been discussed elsewhere in this book (see pages 214–215).



Sixth: Israel 2012–2021

In the 2012–2021 period, the Israeli society had, on one hand, plenty reasons to worry, as a result of the rapid changes and revolutions in the Arab world, the resistance's success in repelling Israeli aggression in GS, and the setbacks in the peace process. On the other hand, it had an equal number of reasons to be reassured, as a result of the counter-wave that thwarted most of the Arab revolutions and plunged a number of countries in the region into collapse and civil wars, the increase of Judaization in Jerusalem and WB, the PA doing a service to the Israel with its functional role, the faltering Palestinian reconciliation, and the success in establishing official relations and normalization with a number of Arab countries, the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, particularly in 2020. Not to mention that Israel enjoys advanced economic and military levels compared to all the countries of the region.



• Benjamin Netanyahu

Israel in 2012–2021 veered further towards the extremist religious right. Right-wing forces continued to dominate the political landscape, while the left-wing parties continued to decline. The Likud Party led the Israeli political scene, and Benjamin Netanyahu became prime minister from 2009–2021, thus considered Israel's longest-serving prime minister.

The Israeli political situation continued with the usual formation and dismantling of alliances, and the emergence of new parties and the extinction of others. With the dissolution of the Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu alliance, a Zionist alliance emerged between the Labor Party and The Movement (*Hatnuah*), and just as the Kadima Party has ended, the Movement Party has subsequently ended. Furthermore, new parties appeared, such as Kulanu, Yesh Atid (There is a Future), the Jewish Home, Blue and White Party and others. Other parties maintained their seats based on their traditional

bases, such as Shas, based on Eastern (*Mizrachi*) Jews, or Yisrael Beiteinu based on Russian Jews.

On 11/3/2014, the Knesset approved raising the electoral threshold from 2% to 3.25%, so as to make small parties disappear and get rid of Palestinian Arab presence, however, the Arab parties forged alliances and kept their presence in the Knesset (11–15 seats). Practically speaking, the strength of these parties increased as a result of their sense of danger, and their chances in winning seats increased when they united in one list.

For the first time in the history of Israel, the Knesset elections were held for four consecutive times during the three years 2019–2021. In the first two, the two major parties, Likud and Blue and White, failed to form a government that enjoys a Knesset majority, whereas in the third time, they succeeded in forming a coalition government. However, few months later it collapsed. In March 2021, the fourth elections were held, where the Likud failed to form a government, whereas the fragile coalition of Yesh Atid Party (headed by Yair Lapid) and Yemina (headed by Naftali Bennett) along with other parties succeeded in forming the government, in June 2021, as they united to get rid of Netanyahu and the economic file. Notably, the Israeli political system continues to be instable, unless higher interests and major issues are at stake, all parties and movements get united.



• Naftali Bennett



• Yair Lapid

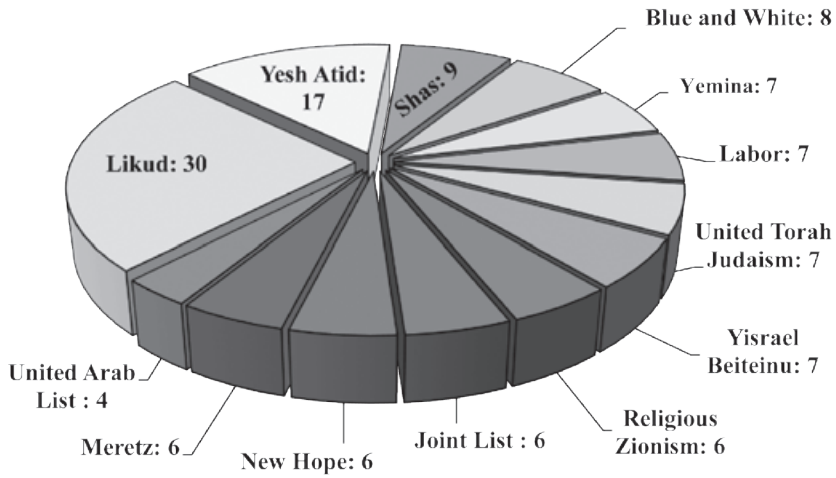
Results of the 23rd and 24th Knesset Elections⁹⁸

Name of List*	24th Knesset (23/3/2021)		23rd Knesset (2/3/2020)	
	No. of valid votes	No. of seats	No. of valid votes	No. of seats
Likud	1,066,892	30	1,352,449	36
Yesh Atid	614,112	17	–	–
Shas	316,008	9	352,853	9
Blue and White**	292,257	8	1,220,381	33
Yemina	273,836	7	240,689	6
Labor	268,767	7	–	–
United Torah Judaism	248,391	7	274,437	7
Yisrael Beiteinu	248,370	7	263,365	7
Religious Zionism	225,641	6	–	–
Joint List (United List, Hadash, Balad, Ta'al)	–	–	581,507	15
Joint List (Hadash, Balad, Ta'al)	212,583	6	–	–
New Hope	209,161	6	–	–
Meretz	202,218	6	–	–
United Arab List (Ra'am)	167,064	4	–	–
Labor–Gesher–Meretz	–	–	267,480	7
Number of eligible voters	6,578,084		6,453,255	
Total valid votes	4,410,052		4,553,161	

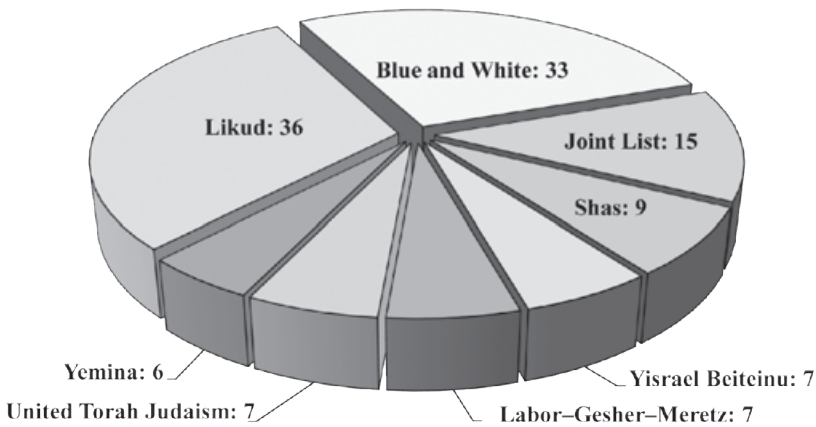
* Some names of lists, parties and alliances have been shortened in an attempt to simplify the table.

** Yesh Atid officially dissolved itself before the April 2019 elections and joined the Blue and White Party, then it got separated from it and ran independently in the March 2021 elections.

Results of the 24th Knesset Elections 23/3/2021



Results of the 23rd Knesset Elections 2/3/2020



On the other hand, several racist laws were advanced and passed in the Knesset, all reinforcing the “Jewishness of Israel.” Persecution and harassment of Palestinians living in the 1948 occupied territories increased considerably, most notably the decision in 2015 to outlaw the Islamic Movement led by Sheikh Raed Salah, and ban its activities carried out by 19 associations and foundations.

In an atmosphere in which the Israeli government has been sponsoring a racist “Jewish spirit” on the back of nationalist, historical, or religious claims, Israel’s Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked sought to draft new laws that would emphasize the identity of Israel and its Jewish heritage. As the issue of the “Jewishness of the state” made its way to the Israeli Knesset on several occasions, the Ministerial Committee on Legislation approved the Nationality Law in 2017, paving the way for its enactment. The law approves that Israel is the nation-state of only the “Jewish people,” enshrines Hebrew as the official language of Israel while the Arabic language is granted “special status,” thus it gives special advantages to the Jews, making it a racist law. On 19/7/2018, the Knesset passed the Basic Law: Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People.

In February 2017, the Knesset gave legal cover for the expropriation of private Palestinian land and thus the legalization of settlement outposts. On 8/3/2017, the Israeli Knesset approved the “Muezzin Bill” limiting the Muslim call for prayer (*adhan*) via loudspeakers. On 4/5/2017, the Knesset enacted a law to speed up the demolition of Arab houses under the pretext of unauthorized construction. Its purpose is to circumvent the judicial procedures used by homeowners in Israeli courts. In July 2016, the Knesset enacted the Expulsion Law, under the claim of inciting violence and supporting the armed struggle against Israel.

Moreover, some parties tried to impose the Israeli national anthem (*Hatikvah*) in Arab schools; and some rabbis issued a ruling allowing the killing of Palestinians carrying sharp objects (knives).

A number of prominent members of the Israeli elite were accused of corruption, such as Moshe Katsav, who was president of Israel from 2000 to 2007. He was found guilty of rape and other sexual offences, and was sentenced to seven years in prison, of which he served five (2011–2016). Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (2006–2008) was sentenced to 19 months in prison for fraud, breach of trust and obstruction of justice. In 2012 and 2015, he was convicted of accepting bribes. Also, Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces

corruption charges. He was formally indicted in November 2019, throwing his political future into doubt.

Demographic Indicators

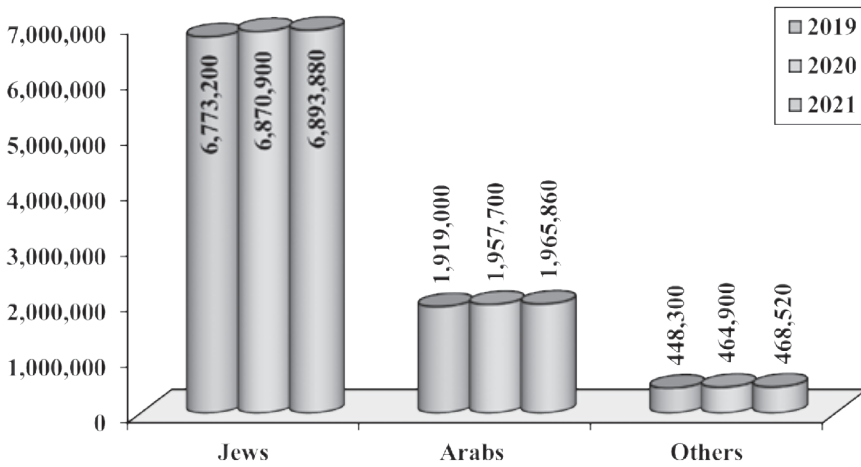
The CBS estimated the population of Israel at the end of 2020 at 9 million and 294 thousand, including 6 million and 871 thousand Jews, i.e., 74% of the population. As for the Arab population in Israel, including the residents of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, they were estimated at one million and 958 thousand in 2020, i.e., 21.1% of the population. If we exclude the population of East Jerusalem (approximately 368 thousand⁹⁹) and the Golan Heights (approximately 25 thousand), then the number of the 1948 Palestinians (i.e., those living in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948) was one million and 565 thousand in 2020, about 16.8% of the population. In terms of the population growth rate in 2019, it was 2.2% among Arabs compared to 1.6% among Jews.

Population of Israel 2018–2021¹⁰⁰

Year	Total	Jews	Arabs (including the population of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights)	Others
2018	8,967,600	6,664,300	1,878,400	424,900
2019	9,140,500	6,773,200	1,919,000	448,300
2020	9,293,500	6,870,900	1,957,700	464,900
2021*	9,328,260	6,893,880	1,965,860	468,520

* The numbers of 2021 are based on the average of the first five months of the year, according to CBS.

Population of Israel 2019–2021



According to CBS, 33,247 and 19,676 immigrants came to Israel in 2019 and 2020 respectively. These figures show a limited increase in the rate of immigration in 2012–2020. However, they remain minimal compared to the 1990s. This comes after the diminution of the numbers of Jews willing to migrate, and after most Jews abroad went to developed countries in North America and Europe, so Jews do not have an incentive to migrate on a large scale.

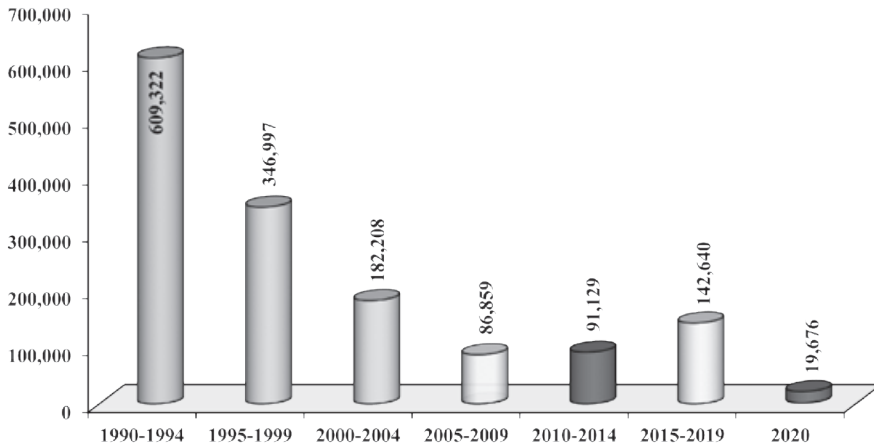
Numbers of Jewish Immigrants to Israel 1990–2020¹⁰¹

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

Year	2010–2014	2015–2019	2020	Total
No. of immigrants	91,129	142,640	19,676	1,478,831

The following chart shows the evolution of the number of Jewish immigrants to Israel every five years during 1990–2019, except 2020.

Numbers of Jewish Immigrants to Israel 1990–2020



On the other hand, the number of Jews in the world was estimated at 14 million and 707 thousand in 2019, 81.2% of whom live in the US and Israel.¹⁰² At the same time, the decline in the growth of the number of Jews in the world, excluding Israel, has continued for fifty years, due to the low rate of natural growth, the abandonment of the Jewish religion, and the spread of mixed marriages; and the spread of Western culture associated with benefit, pleasure and selfishness.

Economic Indicators

Israel lives in an advanced economic situation compared to the life standards of Europe and the Middle East countries. It lives at the expense of the Palestinian people, their land and natural resources, and benefits from US support and influence in the Western world. Not to mention that there are no threats from the Arab official regimes, and that Israel has benefitted from it normalization of ties with many Arab countries.

Israeli GDP in 2020 was 1,386.8 billion shekels (\$404 billion), compared to 1,406.7 billion shekels (\$395 billion) in 2019, a negative growth of 1.4%. This decrease is mainly related to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions on the Israeli and global economy. Israeli GDP per capita was 150,474 shekels (\$43,784) in 2020, compared to 155,437 shekels (\$43,609) in 2019.¹⁰³

The budget performance of Israeli government payments was 554.7 billion shekels (\$155.6 billion) in 2019, compared to 506.87 billion shekels (\$140.9 billion) in 2018. The adjusted budget performance of government payments for 2019 was 572.345 billion shekels (\$160.6 billion). The budget performance of government receipts in 2019 was 512.1 billion shekels (\$143.7 billion), compared to 468.5 billion shekels (\$130.2 billion) in 2018. The adjusted budget performance of government receipts in 2019 was 503.66 billion shekels (\$142 billion).¹⁰⁴ In 2020, the Israeli exports (in dollars) fell by 14.3% and imports by 10%.¹⁰⁵

**Total Israeli Exports and Imports 2017–2020 at Current Prices
(\$ million)¹⁰⁶**

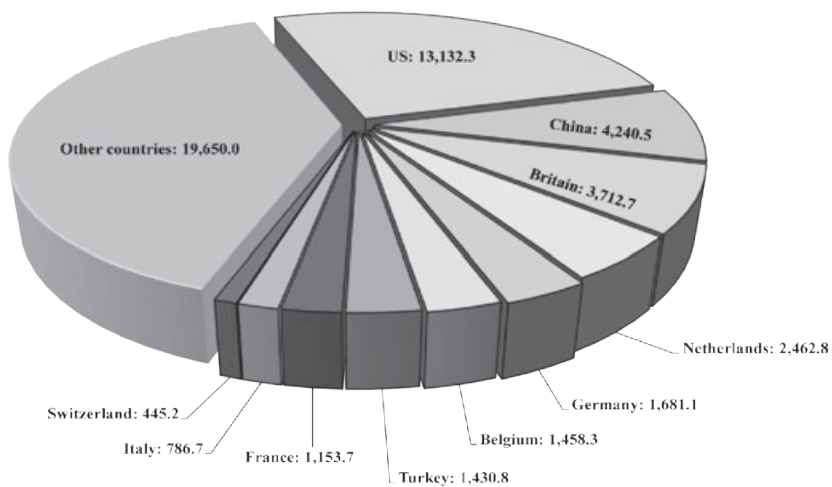
Year	2017	2018	2019	2020
Exports	61,151.5	61,951.4	58,508.1	50,154.1
Imports	69,144.7	76,610.7	76,784.9	69,270.3

The US still maintains its status as a primary trading partner of Israel. In 2020, Israeli exports to the US amounted to \$13.132 billion (26.2% of total Israeli exports), while Israeli imports from the US reached \$8.05 billion (11.6% of total Israeli imports). In the same year, China was ranked the second largest trading partner of Israel, Germany advanced to the third position, while Britain dropped to the fourth position.

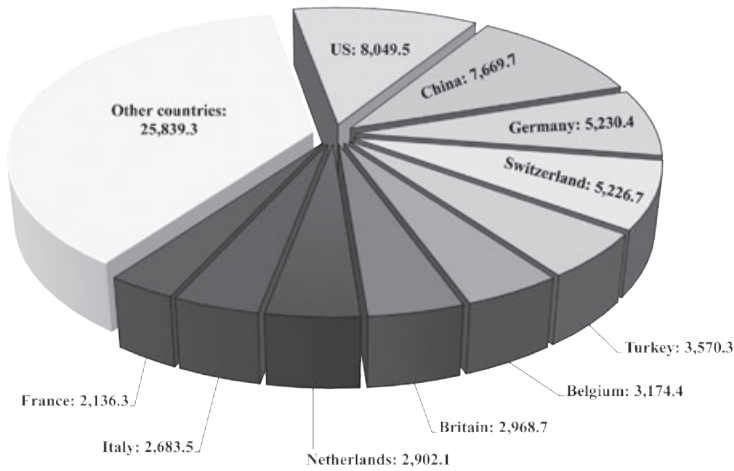
**Volume of Israeli Trade, Exports and Imports to/ from Selected Countries
2019–2020 at Current Prices (\$ million)¹⁰⁷**

Country	Trade volume		Israeli exports to:		Israeli imports from:	
	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019
US	21,181.8	27,652.3	13,132.3	15,964.2	8,049.5	11,688.1
China	11,910.2	11,220.4	4,240.5	4,422.1	7,669.7	6,798.3
Germany	6,911.5	7,303.2	1,681.1	1,671.8	5,230.4	5,631.4
Britain	6,681.4	8,027.3	3,712.7	4,992.4	2,968.7	3,034.9
Switzerland	5,671.9	6,711.1	445.2	1,085.4	5,226.7	5,625.7
Netherlands	5,364.9	5,073.9	2,462.8	2,176.2	2,902.1	2,897.7
Turkey	4,928.8	4,965.6	1,430.8	1,757.6	3,498	3,208
Belgium	4,524.4	5,234.2	1,458.3	1,636.9	3,066.1	3,597.3
Italy	3,470.2	3,755.6	786.7	949.5	2,683.5	2,806.1
France	3,290.0	3,618.5	1,153.7	1,542.6	2,136.3	2,075.9
Other countries	45,489.3	51,730.9	19,650	22,309.4	25,839.3	29,421.5
Total	119,424.4	135,293.0	50,154.1	58,508.1	69,270.3	76,784.9

Israeli Exports to Selected Countries 2020 at Current Prices (\$ million)



Israeli Imports from Selected Countries 2020 at Current Prices (\$ million)



Although Israel is a rich and developed country, it still receives US aid, whose annual average from 1979 until 2017 was \$3.1 billion. In 2018, it reached \$3.8 billion, including \$3.3 billion in military grants. Thus, Israel has received from the US during 1949–2020 a total of \$142.09 billion.

US Bilateral Aid to Israel 1949–2020 (\$ million)¹⁰⁸

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

Period	1999–2008	2009–2018	2019	2020	Total
Total	29,374.7	30,877.9	3,800	3,800	142,092.3

Military Indicators

On the military side, Israeli concerns regarding future scenarios increased in 2012 and 2013 as a result of the developments of the “Arab Spring,” in parallel with the increased threat of resistance groups, which acquired improved military capabilities. This was in addition to the threat of electronic warfare, classified by the Israeli military as the fifth battle arena, after land, sea, air, and space. However, the counter-revolutions and the preoccupation of some countries with their own internal problems and conflicts, have spread a sense of relief among the Israeli military.

Israeli military estimates reassure that there is an Israeli qualitative superiority over the regional official forces and armies, and that Arab regimes constitute no real challenge. However, the Israel military assessments state that Israel is facing increasing risks, whether from GS or from the northern front (Syria and Lebanon); especially due to the development of missile and “cyber” resistance capabilities and the potential use of drones... The reports and discussions at the Herzliya Conferences have reflected such fears, which made “defense” an important aspect of the Israeli national security strategy.

The Israeli strategy focuses on maintaining a state of deterrence on all fronts, and is based on the principle of “burning into the consciousness” of the “enemy” the prospect of Israel inflicting massive destruction of infrastructure, whether in Lebanon or GS. According to Israeli strategic assessments, the external risks are from Iran, Hizbullah and Hamas; at the same time, Israel considers the official Arab landscape cooperative on the security level, posing no real risks.

As the multi-year plan, developed by former Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot and known as Gideon Plan (2016–2020) was reaching its final year, the Israeli army Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi presented his multiyear plan for the Israeli army, called “Tnufa”(momentum in Hebrew), in which the criterion of victory is considered when causing great casualties to the “enemy.”

Israel also agreed a motion to reduce the duration of compulsory military service by four months, from 36 to 32 months. It continued to develop its anti-missile systems, notably Arrow, Iron Dome, Magic Wand and SkyShield.



• Gadi Eisenkot



• Aviv Kochavi

In 2021, the Israeli army had approximately 635 thousand soldiers, around 170 thousand are active soldiers while the reserve forces number around 465 thousand,¹⁰⁹ who are highly ready and can be fully mobilized and effectively enter service within four days. There has been a significant increase in the influence of the right-wing religious movement, even at high ranks.

In 2018, the actual Israeli military expenditures were \$20.17 billion and in 2019, they were the same;¹¹⁰ also, the general average of the military budget in the following years was not far from that. It should be noted that a large part of the annual Israeli military sales revenue has entered the defense budget for years without being declared. Therefore, the actual military expenditure may be two to four billion dollars more than the declared one; with the possibility of other unannounced confidential expenditures.

As for the Israeli military exports, they reached \$8.3 billion in 2020, the bulk of which went to countries in Asia and the Pacific region. It's the second highest sales figure ever, behind 2017, when the total hit \$9.2 billion.¹¹¹ Globally, Israel is among the top arms exporters, where in the 2010s it ranked between the sixth and eighth globally. While some unofficial estimates rank it sometimes at the fourth place (For example, according to the 2015 estimates), particularly when taking into consideration Israel's clandestine arms trade.¹¹²

Despite the great capabilities of the Israeli army, it failed in its aggression on GS, in Operation Stones of Baked Clay (Operation Pillar of Defense) in 2012, Operation Eaten Straw (Operation Protective Edge) in 2014, and the Sword of Jerusalem Battle (Operation Guardian of the Walls) in 2021. Hamas and the resistance forces were able to thwart Israeli plans, where they were a strong deterrent force despite their limited capabilities, while most Israeli areas were in the resistance range of fire.

Strategic Situation

Israel has begun the 2020s with an overwhelming feelings of pride and power, for the state believes that it has reached its best strategic status since its establishment. Its strategic achievements can be summed up as follows:

1. Israel has become the largest congregation of world Jewry, which was a central Zionist objective, and its population constitutes 47% of world Jewry.
2. Israel is militarily superior to the Arab countries and the countries of the Middle East, and enjoys advanced nuclear armament. Its army is ranked among the top in the world.
3. Israel has achieved advanced economic conditions similar to those in European countries and founded an attractive environment for Jewish settlement.
4. Israel has become significantly superior in Hi-Tech sectors, and is considered among its leaders worldwide.
5. International support and unprecedented global influence: Israel has managed to impose itself (With US and Western support) on the international scene. It has reinforced its “legitimacy” and its political relations, in particular, after the Oslo Accords and the peace process.
6. Israel has succeeded in managing the peace process and investing in the peace process agreements, especially in the Oslo Accords signed with the Palestinians, to its favor. Dozens of states forged political relations with Israel, which was able to neutralize major Arab forces and a large part of the Palestinian factions out of the conflict zone.
7. The reduction of the Palestinian national project and the transformation of the PA into a functional tool.
8. Penetrating the Arab and Islamic environment, especially with respect to declared and undeclared official relations with Arab and Muslim countries.

In return, Israel is exposed to a number of challenges and risks, which may develop in the medium to long term into a “serious threat,” including:

1. The steadfastness of the Palestinian people in their land and the increase in the Palestinian population in Historic Palestine, exceeding the number of Jews.
2. The growing strength of the Palestinian resistance, particularly in GS, and its outstanding performance, where most Israeli areas have become in the resistance range of fire.
3. The continuation of the anti-Israel popular, Arab and Islamic environment, and the refusal of the peoples to normalize relations with it.
4. The peace process crisis, which has reached a dead end, and the Israelis’ inability to use it as a cover for their policies and plans of Judaization and settlement building declined. In addition, armed resistance has re-emerged as the right way to liberate Palestine.
5. The continuation of foreign threats, including the chances of new wave of revolutions in the region, the rise of resistance forces in the countries surrounding Palestine and the “Iranian threat.”
6. The Israeli society crises: There are some religious and social gaps in this society that may widen. Furthermore, there are real differences regarding the eastern and western origins of the Jews, and regarding belonging to Israel, and religious and secular affiliation. There are as well widespread manifestations of corruption and disintegration, a desire for a life of luxury and pleasure, in addition to the fact that the quality of the Israeli “fighter” has deteriorated, and “Israel’s establishing generation” has gone.
7. Palestinians abroad have preserved their national identity, and more than three quarters of them are living in the strategic environment surrounding Israel. They constantly look forward to return and liberate the land. Thus, the Palestine issue still lives in the hearts of the Palestinian people.

8. Despite the wide international Israeli influence, there are internationally increasing popular trends that sympathize with the Palestinian right. There is an increasing negative popular impression about Israel, since it acts as a “state” above the law, and the boycott activities are globally on the rise.

In general, the Zionist project contains the seeds of its own crises, for the Israelis cannot remain strong forever, nor will the Palestinians remain weak forever. Furthermore, if the Arab regimes close to Palestine change into nationalist or Islamic regimes that support the Palestine issue and armed resistance, this would be a major change in Palestine’s strategic environment, to the benefit of the resistance forces. This may also lead to a possible change in the balance of power on the mid- to long-term. Moreover, there are no guarantees that the unconditional US-Western support will remain indefinitely; especially if the Arab and Muslim countries were able to employ the huge network of Western interests in the region to their advantage.

• **Israeli Dimona nuclear reactor**



• **Israelis of Ethiopian origin staging rallies in Tel Aviv against racism, 18/5/2015**

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Afterword

The land of Palestine is holy and blessed. It is an Arab and Muslim land whose people have made great sacrifices to liberate and safeguard it. But the Zionist project, backed by the major powers, proved to be more than their capacities and capabilities could overcome.

The contemporary Palestinian resistance (PLO and Palestinian resistance groups) now leading the Palestinian front, have also made great sacrifices, and fought to entrench the national Palestinian identity. Though the Palestinian resistance won the recognition of most countries, it suffered many pressures that weakened its efforts and ability to achieve its goals, including:

1. **The Approach:** Palestinian resistance factions initially adopted a secular ideology, ranging from nationalism and pan-Arabism, to various leftwing ideologies. It did not adopt the Islamic approach which is more capable of mobilizing the Muslim *Ummah* and rallying its energies, and unifying it against Zionist project. The PLO approach tended always to cave into pressure and the requirements of immediate concerns, and to remain in the spotlight even if at the expense of core principles, the fundamentals and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. As a result, the political demands of the Palestinian leadership shrank over time: From the full liberation of Palestine and the expulsion of the usurpers, to the democratic state that accommodates both Arabs and Zionist aggressors, and consenting to the “right” of the Israelis to 77% of the land of Palestine, and finally, to agreeing to self-rule in the WB and GS under the Oslo Accords.
2. **The Leadership:** The Palestinian political leadership has lacked harmony, and suffered from divergent objectives and the need to take into account the desires of Arab and international parties at the expense of the priorities of the Palestine issue. The Palestinian leadership did not respect the principles of institutionalized action. The leader of Fatah and the PLO held on to all powers, controlling both political decision-making and financial matters, in addition to security and military institutions. This meant that Palestinian action fundamentally depended on the initiatives and decisions of “the leader.” This led to paralysis and widespread cronyism, and undermined

the structure of the Palestinian revolution, with many competent leaders and members driven away or excluded.

3. The Institutions: The ineffective conduct of the Palestinian leadership weakened Palestinian institutional work. It also disabled the PNC, which then failed to fulfill its role in oversight and accountability. The PLO's role declined, and the organization was effectively placed into "intensive care." The PLO and PA leadership closed the door on a real and effective participation of major forces in the Palestinian arena, like Hamas and PIJ, which would reflect their clout. The diaspora, also, were also excluded from having representative and effective roles in the official Palestinian institutions. At the same time, the role of the PA swelled. After that, the PA found itself hostage to US-Israeli pressure and decisions. The role of other important institutions in the PLO declined as well, such as the National Fund, the Research Center, the institutions for martyrs' welfare, SAMED (Palestine Martyrs Works Society), the planning department, and others. Over time, control of Palestinian action fell to a handful of individuals, who gave themselves the right to decide the fate of the most important issue of the Arab and Islamic worlds in modern history.
4. The joining of the peace process and the Oslo Accords by the PLO has led to Palestinian schism, between those who are with the peace process and those with the resistance action, and has made the PA security forces crack down on resistance action. As a result, the Palestinian home front weakened and the Israelis took advantage of the peace process to entrench its occupation and the Judaization of the land and people.
5. The "independent Palestinian national decision" making process faced a major crisis, with the absence of large factions from the official legislative and executive institutional structure, and by the PLO's insistence to hold its meetings under occupation, in addition to those of the PNC and the PCC.
6. The Palestinian revolution suffered much from supposed Arab friends. It shed blood and great efforts in its battles with the regimes that sought to subdue the Palestinian revolution, or seize it and speak on its behalf or even sidestep it. This also weakened the revolution, squandered its energies, and prevented it from engaging in armed resistance abroad, confining its activities to the realm of what is "politically possible."

The resistance movement (especially the Islamic trend), took on incontrovertible roles in resistance against the Zionist project. However, this movement was met with attempts to uproot it, distort its goals, or marginalize it, whether in Palestine, the Arab world, or beyond. Yet the movement is required to:

1. Carefully develop its vision and strategy, both in the immediate and long terms, for how it intends to confront Israel and liberate Palestine. It must also carefully gather the facts, analyze them, study the complexities, monitor local, regional, and international developments, and provide realistic solutions that draw inspiration from the Islamic model and rally the masses.
2. Expand the circle of interaction with the Palestine issue, to bring together the Palestinian, Arab, Islamic, and global dimensions of solidarity in a positive and harmonious way, while developing the means conducive to achieving this.
3. Develop its organizational and advisory bodies, its leaders' competencies, and take better advantage of the nation's capabilities. In addition, it must carry out a smooth and sound process of handing over leadership to current and future generations.
4. Exhausting more efforts in rallying the support of the international community, and all people (from different religions, races and nationalities) who are peace, freedom and justice lovers.
5. Stick closer to the concerns of the masses and their suffering, and offer services and reach out to them, while turning the cause of liberating Palestine into a daily concern shared by all.
6. Keep the resistance alive, along with the voice of righteousness that would never relinquish Palestine, no matter the sacrifices.

Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims and all lovers and supporters of freedom and justice are certain that occupation and oppression will not succeed in Palestine, and that the Zionist aggression is going against the norms of life and against the movement of history.

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.

The book places particular emphasis on the first two decades of the twenty-first century, so that the reader would be able to obtain a clear picture about many of the issues related to the contemporary aspects of the Palestinian question.

The revised and updated edition of the book covers the period up to the year 2021, and contains a large collection of pictures and maps to illustrate its points.

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.

The Palestine Issue

Historical Background & Contemporary Developments



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